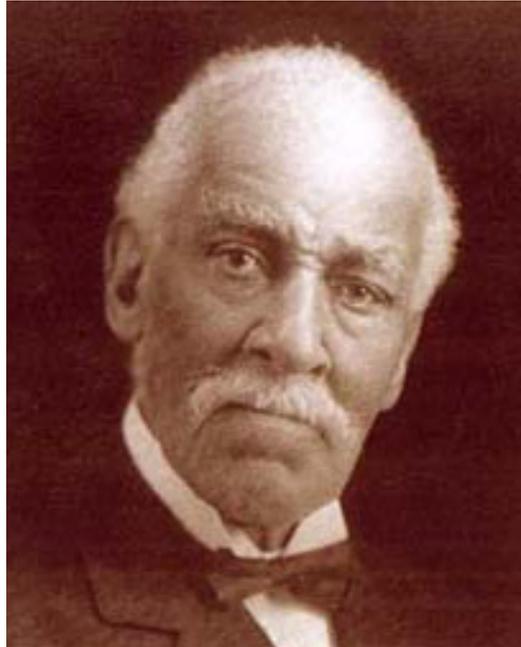


GEORGE THOMAS DOWNING



1819



December 30, Thursday: [George Thomas Downing](#) was born in New-York.

Friend [Stephen Wanton Gould](#) wrote in his journal:

5th day 30th of 12 M 1819 / I am this Day 38 Years of Age. -Took Chaise & with Sister Ruth rode to [Portsmouth](#) to attend the Moy [Monthly] Meeting, sitoped at Uncle Thurstons to warm ourselves, being exceedingly Cold - Meeting was silent excepting a short but unsavory offring. - In the last we had but little buisness, or rather we did but little - After the meeting it was a severe Snow Storm. - We Dined at R Mitchells & rode home in an increasing Snow Storm, but did not suffer so much as we did with the cold in going out. -

Times & seasons are not at our command of ourselves we can not raise our hearts in prayer for help or scarcely think a good thought - for several weeks past when looking forward to this day as my Birth Day I have felt much under an humbling sense of my short comings & desired that the feelings might be renew'd, but it has been a day of leaness & Poverty & with a few short intervals of tenderness, how dry & barran. - May the circumstances prove an incentive to renew'd labor

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

While a young man, [George Thomas Downing](#) worked as an agent of the Underground Railroad; he would be arrested for helping "Little Henry," a slave who had escaped from a jail in New-York.



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1838

September 5, Wednesday: After sleeping on the wharves for a number of nights to evade detection by the sort of slave-catchers who routinely watched the black boarding houses in hope of obtaining rewards, Frederick Douglass was rescued from the only relative security¹ of the streets of New-York:

... I kept my secret to myself as long as I could, but I was compelled at last to seek some one who would befriend me without taking advantage of my destitution to betray me. Such a person I found in a sailor named Stuart, a warm-hearted and generous fellow, who, from his humble home on Centre street, saw me standing on the opposite sidewalk, near the Tombs prison. As he approached me, I ventured a remark to him which at once enlisted his interest in me. He took me to his home to spend the night, and in the morning went with me to Mr. David Ruggles, the secretary of the New York Vigilance Committee, a co-worker with Isaac T. Hopper, Lewis and Arthur Tappan, Theodore S. Wright, Samuel Cornish, Thomas Downing, Philip A. Bell, and other true men of their time. All these (save Mr. Bell, who still lives, and is editor and publisher of a paper called the "Elevator," in San Francisco) have finished their work on earth. Once in the hands of these brave and wise men, I felt comparatively safe....

NARRATIVE
LEWIS TAPPAN
DAVID RUGGLES
GEORGE THOMAS DOWNING
ISAAC T. HOPPER

Before the Civil War, [George Thomas Downing](#) was a vocal opponent of an old schoolmate, the Reverend Henry Highland Garnet, who was advocating open revolt as the way to end [slavery](#).

1. The Hortons say, on their page 227, "with the help of a free black woman named Anna and contacts in the underground railroad...." Had Douglass had any such contacts in the Underground Railroad organization he would not have wound up sleeping on the streets in New-York, ridiculously vulnerable to recapture.

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

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1841

November 24, Wednesday: [George Thomas Downing](#) married Serena Leanora de Grasse, the daughter of George de Grasse, a prosperous landowner from Calcutta, India who was considered to be the protégé of Aaron Burr. After his marriage Downing, who had learned the restaurant business from his father, the proprietor of a restaurant and oyster house frequented by the more prominent citizens of New-York, would begin his own catering business, initially in New-York and later in [Newport, Rhode Island](#).

Lieutenant Eyre would report that by this point, in Afghanistan, the British troops and officers had lost all confidence, while the locals were growing more and more confident. “Never were troops exposed to greater hardships and dangers; yet, sad to say, never did soldiers shed their blood with less beneficial result than during the investment of the British lines at Cabul.”





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Captain Conolly wrote from the Bala Hissar, urging an immediate retreat thither; “but the old objections were still urged against the measure by Brigadier Shelton and others,” though several of the chief military, and all the political officers, approved of it. Shah Shoojah was impatient to receive them. The door to negotiation was opened by a letter to the Envoy from Osman Khan Barukzye, a near relation of the new king, Nuwab Mahomed Zuman Khan, who had sheltered Captain Drummond in his own house since the first day of the outbreak. He took credit to himself for having checked the ardour of his followers on the preceding day, and having thus saved the British force from destruction; he declared that the chiefs only desired we should quietly evacuate the country, leaving them to govern it according to their own rules, and with a king of their own choosing. The General, on being referred to, was of opinion that the cantonments could not be defended throughout the winter, and approved of opening a negotiation on the basis of the evacuation of the country.²

AFGHANISTAN

1845

It was at approximately this point that [George Thomas Downing](#), the black New-York restaurateur, arrived in [Newport, Rhode Island](#). There, along with his business activities, he would be the operator of the local [Underground Railroad](#) station. In this year Ocean House, the 1st lavish accommodation in Newport for rich summer visitors, opened its doors (there wasn't as yet a line of Gilded-Age “cottages” to provide at-home services for the visiting snobs and swells).

1850

[George Thomas Downing](#)'s business in [Newport, Rhode Island](#) expanded to include an establishment on Mathewson Street in [Providence](#). The success of this Providence venture would provide the operating capital for construction of the luxurious Sea Girt House fronting on Bellevue Avenue in Newport. This 5-story building had large stores on its 1st floor and accommodations over them. Amenities included restaurant meals, game suppers in private parlors, and accommodations not only for gentlemen boarders but also for entire families. The complex included the Downing family residence. The family operated a confectionery and catering business, supplying the Newport “cottages” — their services included the providing of music. (Evidently they were too successful, for eventually they would be burned out.)

2. Lieut. V. Eyre (Sir Vincent Eyre, 1811-1881). THE MILITARY OPERATIONS AT CABUL: WHICH ENDED IN THE RETREAT AND DESTRUCTION OF THE BRITISH ARMY, JANUARY 1842, WITH A JOURNAL OF IMPRISONMENT IN [AFGHANISTAN](#). Philadelphia PA: Carey and Hart, 1843; London: J. Murray, 1843 (three editions); Lieut. V. Eyre (Sir Vincent Eyre, 1811-1881). PRISON SKETCHES: COMPRISING PORTRAITS OF THE CABUL PRISONERS AND OTHER SUBJECTS; ADAPTED FOR BINDING UP WITH THE JOURNALS OF LIEUT. V. EYRE, AND LADY SALE; LITHOGRAPHED BY LOWES DICKINSON. London: Dickinson and Son, [1843?]



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1854

May 27, Saturday: In the afternoon [Henry Thoreau](#) went to Saw Mill Brook.

In London, the [Athenaeum](#) reported that although [Thoreau](#) was a graduate of Harvard College and therefore qualified as a minister, instead he had chosen to manufacture pencils and had moved into a hut on the shore of a pond in order to live in a primitive manner and write. The article described WEEK as “a curious mixture of dull and prolix dissertation, with some of the most faithful and animated descriptions of external nature which has [*sic??*] ever appeared.”

In Worcester, Bronson Alcott succeeded in persuading the Reverend Thomas Wentworth Higginson to take charge of the Boston vigilantes, and the two took the train into Boston. Martin Stowell of Worcester came also. When they reached Boston, however, they found that the Committee was unable to agree upon a plan of action, and it appears that the Reverend took matters into his own hands. He went out and purchased a dozen axes with which to attack the door of the courthouse. That night, at the mass rally at Faneuil Hall at which the committee intended to instigate the sort of howling mob which would be needed in order to cover their purposive activity and distract the guards, the committee members slipped out early and took up their positions at the courthouse and waited for the mob to be marshalled. When Martin Stowell gave the signal, a black man ran to the west door and hammered it open with a 12-foot beam and leaped inside, with the Reverend Higginson close behind him. The people who managed to get inside the courthouse were immediately, however, repulsed by a group of policemen with clubs. The Reverend Higginson was badly beaten on the head and face, and one of the policemen was killed either by knife or gunshot to the midriff. The police began arresting individual rioters, and the mob began to pull back, but the Reverend Higginson, and a lawyer named Seth Webb who had been one of his classmates in college, held firm. Then they were joined by Alcott, cane in hand, who walked right up to the door of the courthouse and looked in. A shot was fired inside the building, or was not fired (although some claimed this, Alcott himself never made any mention of having heard such a

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sound), as Alcott turned around and came back away from the courthouse.



A little-known fact is that [Newport, Rhode Island](#) businessman [George Thomas Downing](#) was one of those involved in this attack on the Boston courthouse.

One of the onlookers to these events, who would take no part in them but would suffer in his home town for having so much as been present, was [Moncure Daniel Conway](#). Word that he had been present would circulate in Virginia, so that when he attempted to return to visit his father and mother, a crowd of young men would confront him and order him to leave the town immediately or suffer the consequences.

The Boston mayor, Dr. Jerome Van Crowninshield Smith, a local-politics weathervane, issued the following declaration:

Under the excitement that now pervades the city, you are respectfully requested to cooperate with the Municipal authorities in the maintenance of peace and good order. The law must be obeyed, let the consequences be what they may.

Of course, just as the courthouse officials could agree with peace with quiet, the abolitionists could agree with peace with justice. —They could agree that the ideal of peace and good order was utterly incompatible with kidnapping, and with human enslavement. They could agree that the higher law, which was the law of righteousness, and the law of nature and of God, must be obeyed — whatever the consequences.

RESISTING THE FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW

HIGHER LAW

A jury, meeting in the building in which Anthony Burns was being held and judged, rendered a verdict of guilty



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at 10:15 PM — James Wilson was to [hang](#).

Because there had been an alert that Peter Dunbar's³ truckmen were planning to attack the home of Wendell Phillips, Phillips being elsewhere but his family being in the home, Bronson Alcott, Henry Kemp, Francis Jackson, and the Reverend Samuel Joseph May each armed themselves with a pistol, to sit out the night in the Phillips parlor. They would sit out this night with their pistols in their laps, however, without incident.

Because there were fears that the slavemaster, Mr. Charles Francis Suttle, and his attorney at law, William Brent, might be attacked at their lodgings on the 1st floor of the Revere House, an honor guard of southern students was recruited from Harvard College.⁴ Suttle and Brent then relocated to a room in the hotel's garret, for greater security inside their cordon of armed students.

Knowing that during the attack on the courthouse he had discharged his pistol toward Watson Freeman but that Freeman had been unharmed, [Lewis Hayden](#) considered it entirely possible that it had been his bullet that had

3. What relation would this Peter Dunbar, a member of the management team at the Customs House on the waterfront, and his son Peter Dunbar, Jr., the captain of the guard at the courthouse guarding Anthony Burns, have been to Concord's [Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau](#)?

4. [Moncure Daniel Conway](#), as a Harvard student from the South, was recruited to take part in this armed guard at the hotel. The two visitors to Boston were not unknown to him, but rather, they were close neighbors or distant relatives. Nevertheless, he declined to get involved in the affair.

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struck the deputy James Batchelder in the major vein of his leg, causing him to bleed out and promptly killing him. Therefore in the evening some activist friends got Hayden into a carriage and conveyed him to the home of Dr. Henry Ingersoll Bowditch in Brookline. (In that period, no-one would have imagined that a person of



color could have been permitted to ride inside such a horse-and-carriage. Thus, drawing the carriage's window curtains was in and of itself adequate to provide complete concealment.) Hayden was met at his destination by a group of black men resolved to prevent the re-enslavement of Burns.



The Reverend Thomas Wentworth Higginson in a note to his wife in Worcester, written in haste from a home in Boston in which he had sought refuge after the attempted rescue of Anthony Burns: "There has been an attempt at rescue, and failed. I am not hurt, except for a scratch on the face which will probably prevent me from doing anything more about it, lest I be recognized."

1857

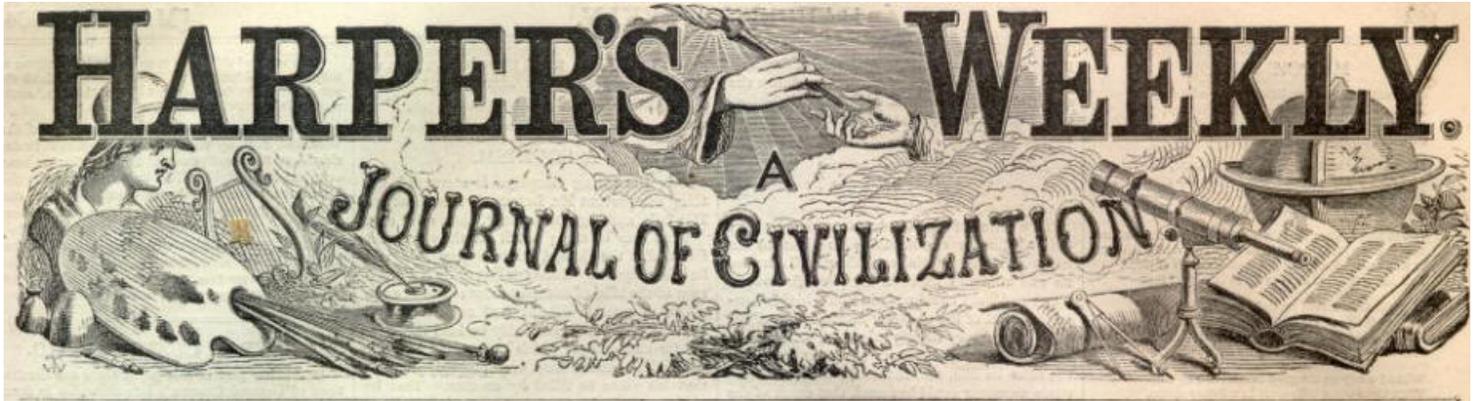
From this year into 1866, [George Thomas Downing](#) would be leading in a campaign that would eventuate in the closure of separate and unequal black public schools in [Providence, Rhode Island](#).

GEORGE THOMAS DOWNING

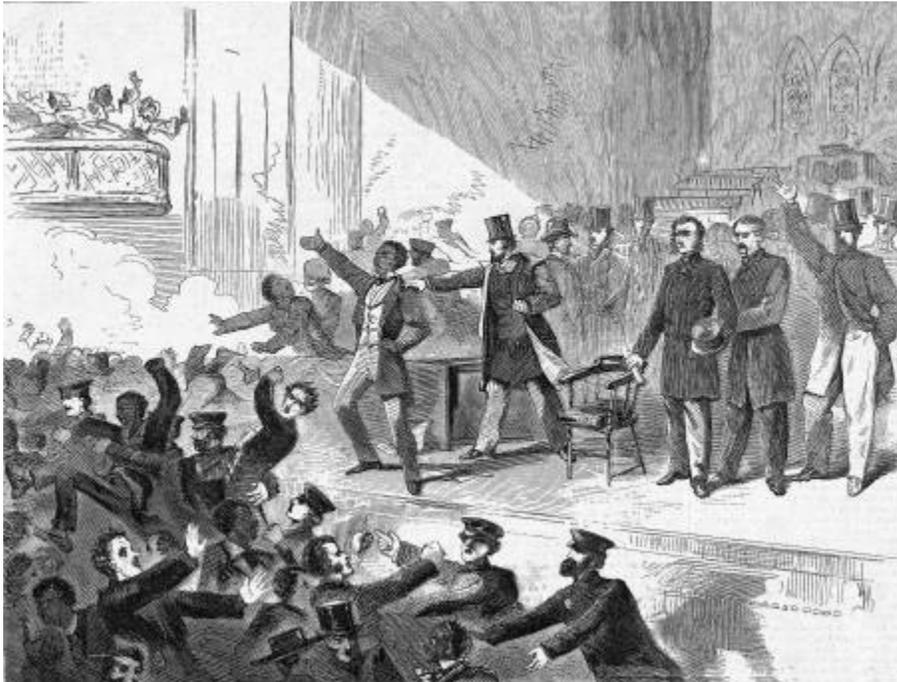
GEORGE THOMAS DOWNING

1860

December 15, Saturday: [George Thomas Downing](#)'s luxurious Sea Girt House in [Newport, Rhode Island](#), along with the entire city block bordered by Bellevue Avenue, Liberty Street, and Downing Street, was torched by an arsonist.



There appeared in [Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization](#) of New-York in this issue, the famous illustration of the breaking up of the meeting of Boston abolitionists on December 3rd, entitled: "EXPULSION OF NEGROES AND ABOLITIONISTS FROM TREMONT TEMPLE, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS ON DECEMBER 3, 1860." Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison and others were attempting to celebrate the first anniversary of the hanging of John Brown for leading his famous raid on Harper's Ferry. After Douglass's speech, a Bostonian mob had expelled the abolitionists by force.

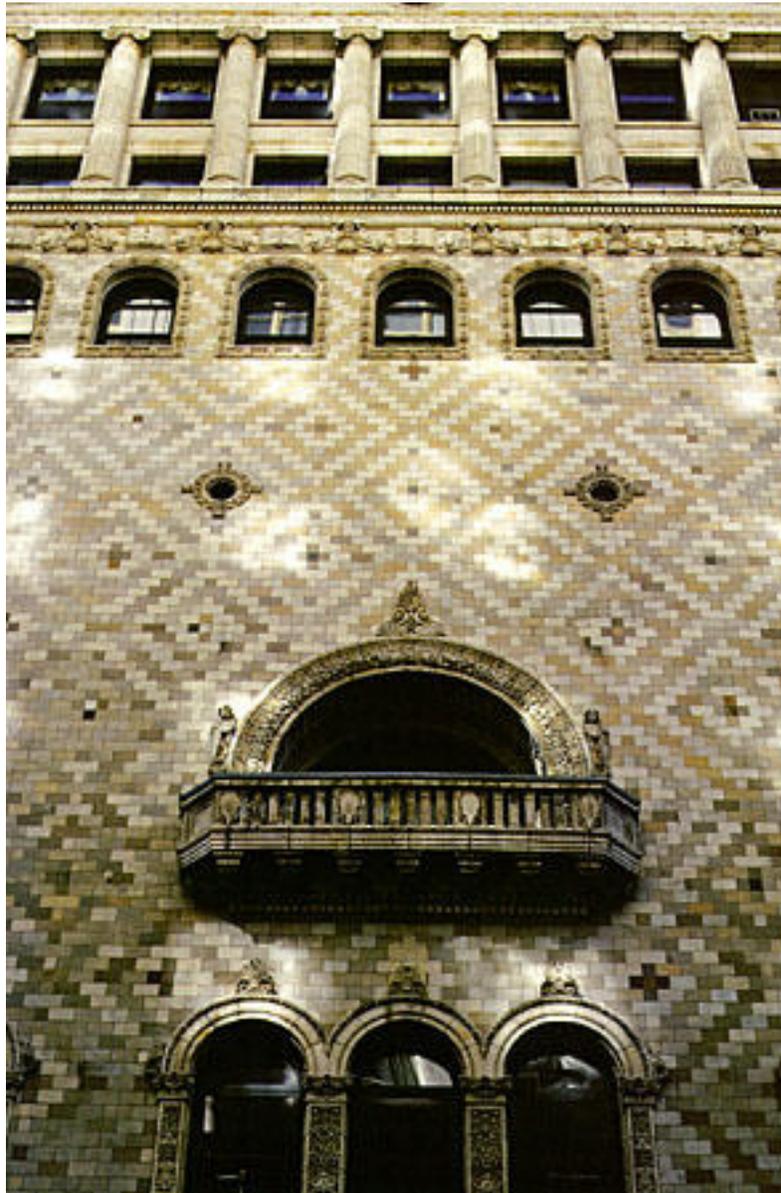


So, you tell me, does the torching of this prominent black businessman's opulent home and productive business establishment in Newport on December the 15th have anything to do with the fact that this

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inflammatory notice of goings-on in Boston had appeared in the public media? At first blush, there is no indication of a connection — unless one has retained the information, that once upon a time Frederick Douglass had stayed at this home, and that this businessman was a Douglass financial supporter.



Meanwhile, in free Canada, at the Court of Queen's Bench in Toronto, there was a jam of onlookers, some of them black. Could America's neighbor to the north actually be forced to remand an escaped American slave to the tender justice of American slavemasters, who had been publicly pledging that once back in Arkansas he was to be roasted alive over a slow fire? The Canadian police stacked their muskets in front of the hall as a visible warning that no disruption was going to be tolerated. The prisoner in the dock, a stout-built man of a



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deep yellow countenance, with a high forehead, could be heard occasionally to sigh. As the clock struck



twelve, the Chief Justice, Robinson, produced his paper and began to read the decision of the three-member court. Two of the members, Chief Justice Robinson and Mr. Justice Burns, had refused the application for [John Anderson](#)'s discharge. He would need to be extradited, and stand trial for murder in Missouri, a place where no black man had any rights whatever, and then be executed. Mr. Justice McLean had dissented. After the court's majority decision had been read, this lone dissenter read out his dissent:

Looking, then, at all the testimony taken before the justice of the peace, and rejecting such portion as is unnecessary and inadmissible, there is not a witness who connects the prisoner with the stabbing of Diggs, unless it be Thomas Diggs, in his statement of the death-bed declarations of his father to him, and these only shew that the negro by whom Diggs was stabbed made certain declarations as to himself and his identity, which would be true if made by the prisoner; but rejecting the deposition of the slave Phil there is no testimony which establishes satisfactorily that the prisoner is the person who caused the death of Diggs. On the grounds, therefore, that the prisoner was arrested in the first instance on an insufficient complaint, and that he is now detained in custody on a warrant of commitment until discharged by due course of law for an offence committed in a foreign country; and on the further grounds, that the offence stated in the warrant of commitment is not one for which the prisoner is liable to be detained under the provincial act for carrying out the treaty with the United States for the surrender of certain fugitive criminals, and that the evidence, as given before the justice of the peace, is of too vague a character to establish the offence of murder against the prisoner according to the laws of this province, I am of opinion that the prisoner is now entitled to be discharged from custody.

In other words, were there sufficient evidence to proceed, we would of course need to sell this man down the river, but fortunately, we can construe that there seems not to be this sufficient evidence — which is, by any measure, not a strong peg on which to be forced to hang one's legal hat! Here is the conclusion of Mr. Justice McLean's dissent:

Can it then be a matter of surprise that the prisoner should endeavour to escape from so degrading a position; or rather,



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would it not be a cause of surprise if the attempt were not made? Diggs – though he could have had no other interest in it but that which binds slaveholders for their common interest to prevent the escape of their slaves – interfered to prevent the prisoner getting beyond the bounds of his bondage, and, with his slaves, pursued and hunted him with a spirit and determination which might well drive him to desperation; and when at length the prisoner appeared within reach of capture, he, with a stick in his hand, crossed over a fence, and advanced to intercept and seize him. The prisoner was anxious to escape, and, in order to do so, made every effort to avoid his pursuers. Diggs, as their leader, on the contrary, was most anxious to overtake and come in contact with the prisoner, for the unholy purpose of rivetting his chains more securely. Could it be expected from any man indulging the desire to be free, which nature has implanted in his breast, that he should quietly submit to be returned to bondage and to stripes, if by any effort of his strength or any means within his reach, he could emancipate himself? Such an expectation, it appears to me, would be most unreasonable; and I must say that, in my judgment, the prisoner was justified in using any necessary degree of force to prevent what, to him, must inevitably have proved a most fearful evil. He was committing no crime in endeavouring to escape and to better his own condition; and the fact of his being a slave cannot, in my humble judgment, make that a crime which would not be so if he were a white man. If in this country any number of persons were to pursue a coloured man with an avowed determination to return him into slavery, it cannot, I think, be doubted that the man pursued would be justified in using, in the same circumstances as the prisoner, the same means of relieving himself from so dreadful a result. Can, then, or must the law of slavery in Missouri be recognized by us to such an extent as to make it murder in Missouri, while it is justifiable in this province to do precisely the same act? I confess that I feel it too repugnant to every sense of religion and every feeling of justice, to recognize a rule, designated as a *law*, passed by the strong for enslaving and tyrannizing over the weak – a law which would not be tolerated a moment, if those who are reduced to the condition of slaves, and deprived of all human rights, were possessed of white instead of black or dark complexions. The [Declaration of Independence](#) of the present United States proclaimed to the world, that all men are born equal and possessed of certain inalienable rights, amongst which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; but the first of these is the only one accorded to the unfortunate slaves; the others of these inalienable rights are denied, because the white population have found themselves strong enough to deprive the blacks of them. A love of liberty is inherent in the human breast, whatever may be the complexion of the skin. 'Its taste is grateful, and ever will be so till nature herself shall change.' And in administering the laws of a British province, I never can feel bound to recognize as law any enactment which can convert into chattels a very large number of the human race. *I think that, on every ground, the prisoner is entitled to be discharged.*



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In other words, there is a higher law, which even a judge may hear and obey!

The order made by the court was therefore:

That the said John Anderson be recommitted to the custody of the keeper of the gaol of the county of Brant, under which he had been detained, until a warrant should issue, upon the requisition of the proper authorities of the United States of America, or of the state of Missouri, for his surrender; or until discharged according to law.

Only one possibility remained — Canada’s Court of Error and Appeal. Could this decision be reversed? When [John Anderson](#)’s counsel stated that an appeal was intended, counsel for the Crown pledged that it would throw no obstruction in the way of such appeal.

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1865

Thomas Wentworth Higginson issued a translation of the works of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus.

As the chairman of the [Newport](#) School Committee, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, in collaboration with [George Thomas Downing](#), a local black hotel owner who was concerned for the proper education of his children, argued successfully to eliminate the system of a separate set of unequal schools there for black Americans.



During this year [George Thomas Downing](#) was one of 26 citizens of [Newport, Rhode Island](#) who made donations for the purchase of the land that would come to be known as Touro Park.

(At that time in [Newport](#), one could still go down to the waterfront and, across from the abandoned distillery with slave quarters in its upper story, you could still see the “Long Wharf” on which slaves from Africa had been offloaded. Over near Fort Adams, one could inspect the rotting hulk of an actual slave ship, the *Jem*. The everyday presence of such a wreck must have made local issues, such as school integration, seem especially urgent and topical!)



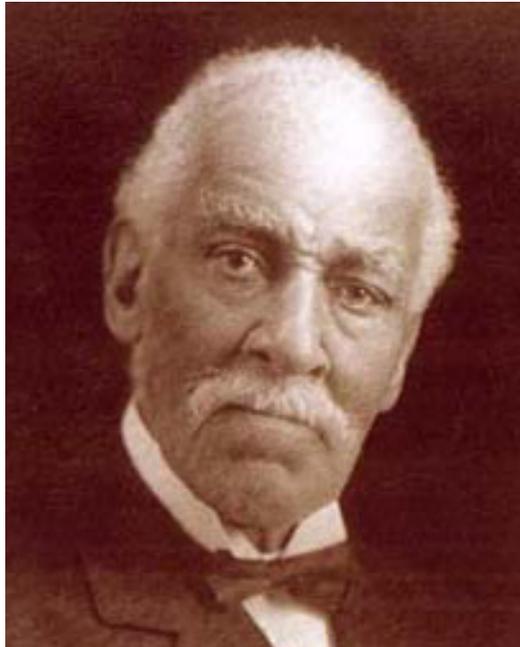
GEORGE THOMAS DOWNING

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Succeeding in this effort at school integration despite the most intense opposition, Chairman Thomas Wentworth Higginson would of course not be appointed to serve on that committee in the following term (but when the community began to elect rather than appoint the Committee members, he would win election in 1874-1876).

1866

[George Thomas Downing](#) had strong political connections through his friendships with Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts and with Frederick Douglass. Among his other business enterprises, until 1878 he would be running the cafe/dining room of the US House of Representatives in Washington DC.



March: The [Rhode Island](#) legislature confirmed the de facto racial desegregation of the state's public school system by abandonment of its black schools. [George Thomas Downing](#) had one heck of a lot to do with this. Black Rhode Islanders of property were granted the privilege of the ballot.

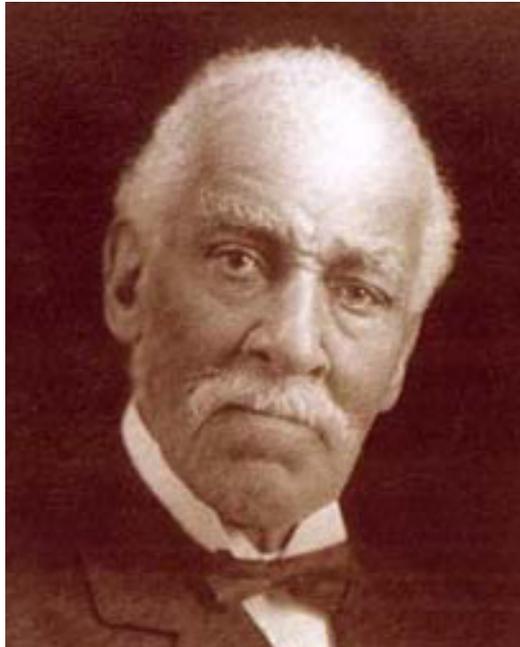


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1879

By this point [George Thomas Downing](#), whose Sea Girt Hotel in [Newport, Rhode Island](#) had burned in 1860, had come to own a structure that had housed the US Naval Academy during the Civil War, and had transformed this into an establishment known as the Atlantic House.



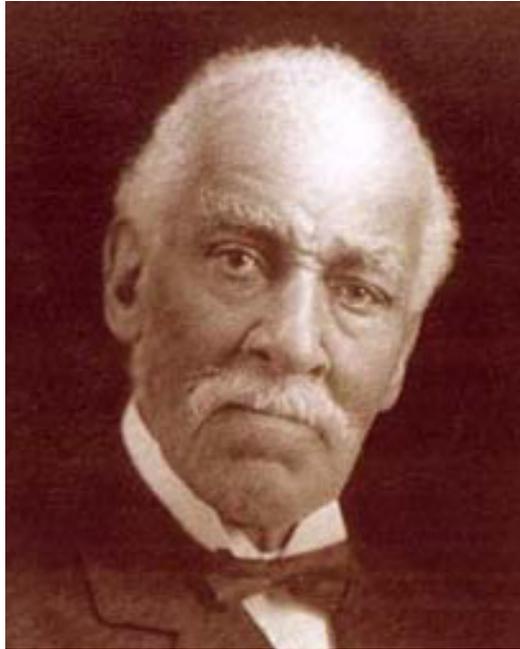


GEORGE THOMAS DOWNING

GEORGE THOMAS DOWNING

1883

Though much of the time [George Thomas Downing](#) had been favoring Republican politicians, at this point he began to support instead the Northern Democrats.



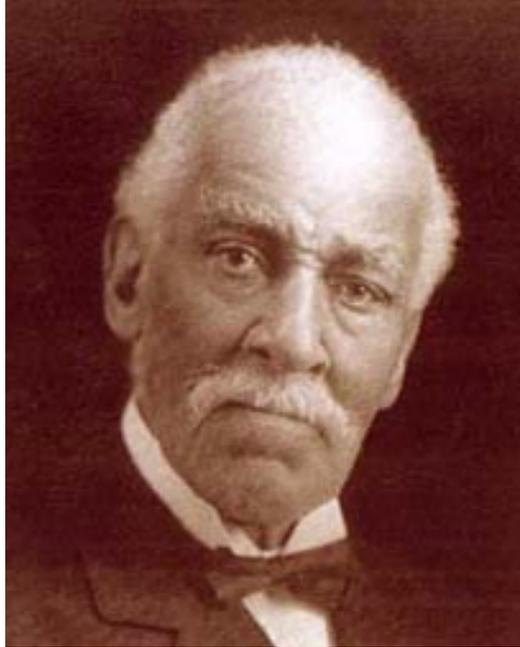


GEORGE THOMAS DOWNING

GEORGE THOMAS DOWNING

1889

By this point [George Thomas Downing](#) had become a major real estate owner, a “rentier,” on [Newport, Rhode Island](#)’s Bellevue Avenue.



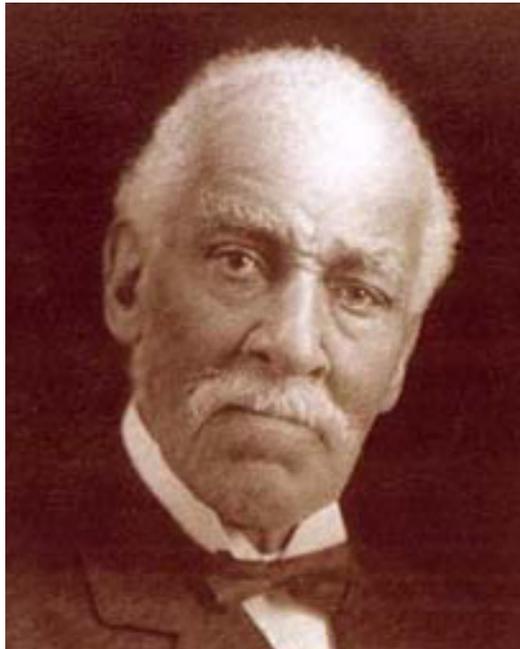


GEORGE THOMAS DOWNING

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1891

[George Thomas Downing](#) began to recommend that the Colored National Labor Convention attempt to create a more neutral stance, by more selectively supporting candidates without considering themselves bound to unswerving loyalty to any one party.



In [Newport](#), [George Thomas Downing](#) was a parishioner of the Union Congregational Church, and provided the financial backing that made it possible for its minister, the Reverend Mahlon Van Horne –another strong advocate of integrated public schools– to run successfully for a seat on the Newport School Committee, and then to become the [Rhode Island](#) General Assembly’s first black legislator.

[George Thomas Downing](#) helped repeal the New York state law that required blacks to own \$250 worth of property before they could vote — and helped to strike down a similar law that the legislators of [Rhode Island](#) had aimed at the Irish immigrants.

[George Thomas Downing](#) helped abolish “Jim Crow” cars on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad.

[George Thomas Downing](#) helped open the gallery of the US Senate to blacks.



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[George Thomas Downing](#) helped abolish the 9PM curfew in Washington DC.

[George Thomas Downing](#) helped pass a public accommodations law in Washington DC.

[George Thomas Downing](#) was a member of the [Newport, Rhode Island](#) committee responsible for the extension of Bellevue Avenue all the way to Bailey's Beach.

1903

July 21, Tuesday: [George Thomas Downing](#) died after a long illness in his Bellevue Avenue home in [Newport, Rhode Island](#) (the funeral would be held at the Emmanuel Church on Dearborn Street).



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"It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago."

– Remark by character "Garin Stevens"
in William Faulkner's INTRUDER IN THE DUST



Prepared: December 16, 2013

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ARRGH AUTOMATED RESearch REPORT

GENERATION HOTLINE



This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, someone has requested that we pull it out of the hat of a pirate who has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot "Laura" (as above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture (this is data mining). To respond to such a request for information we merely push a button.



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Commonly, the first output of the algorithm has obvious deficiencies and we need to go back into the modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and recompile the chronology – but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary “writerly” process you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

First come first serve. There is no charge.
Place requests with <Kouroo@kouroo.info>. Arrgh.