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Dorr Rebellion Project Selected Bibliography

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Chaput, Erik J. and DeSimone, Russell J., "Dorr Rebellion Project Selected Bibliography" (2014). *Dorr Scholarship*. 3.

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In writing [The Dorr Rebellion](#) short documentary the authors drew from Christian Fritz and Ronald Formisano's engaging and thoroughly researched chapters on the Dorr Rebellion in their most recent works. See Fritz, *American Sovereigns: The People and America's Constitutional Tradition Before the Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Formisano, *For the People: American Populist Movements from the Revolution through the 1850s* (University of North Carolina Press, 2007). Also helpful in elucidating Dorr's constitutional world is Christian Fritz, "America's Unknown Constitutional World," October 2008 (to read the article [click here](#)).

Since the Dorr Rebellion was the most illustrated event in the antebellum world, the images compiled by Daniel Schofield and Russell DeSimone in *The Broadsides of the Dorr Rebellion* (Rhode Island Supreme Court Historical Society Publications, 1992) proved indispensable.

The most thorough analysis of the origins of the Dorr Rebellion remains Patrick T. Conley's magisterial *Democracy in Decline: Rhode Island Constitutional Development, 1776-1841* (Rhode Island Historical Society Publications, 1977) and Erik J. Chaput's *The People's Martyr – Thomas Wilson Dorr and His 1842 Rhode Island Rebellion* (University Press of Kansas, 2013). For those interested in the Dorr Rebellion and national politics, consult these two articles by Conley: "No Tempest in a Teapot: The Dorr Rebellion in National Perspective." *Rhode Island History* 50 (1992): 67-100 and "Popular Sovereignty or Public Anarchy: America Debates the Dorr Rebellion" *Rhode Island History* 60 (2002): 71-91. Both articles are available for download at the Rhode Island History Society website. ([1](#), [2](#)) Mark Schantz's discussion of the rebellion in his insightful work, *Piety in Providence: Class Dimensions of Religious Experience in Antebellum Providence* (Cornell University Press, 2000) should also be consulted.

The influence of race at the 1841 People's Convention is detailed in Erik Chaput's and Russell DeSimone's "Strange Bedfellows: The Politics of Race in Antebellum Rhode Island," January 2010 (to read the article [click here](#)). For an older but still valuable discussion see, J. Stanley Lemons and Michael McKenna, "Reenfranchisement of Rhode Island Negroes," *Rhode Island History* 30 (1971): 2-13. This article is also available for download at the [RIHS website](#).

For issues of gender during the rebellion see Ronald P. Formisano, "The Role of Women in the Dorr Rebellion," *Rhode Island History* 51 (1993): 89-104 (read [here](#)). See also Susan H. Graham, "'Call Me a Female Politician, I Glory in the Name!': Women Dorrites and Rhode Island's 1842 Suffrage Crisis" (Ph.D., diss., University of Minnesota, 2006).

Dorr's life both before and after the rebellion has been thoroughly chronicled in Erik J. Chaput's 2011 doctoral dissertation, directed by historian James Roger Sharp, at Syracuse University: "Thomas Wilson Dorr and the Rhode Island Question: The Competing Politics of the People's Sovereignty in Jacksonian America." Chaput's dissertation expands upon earlier examinations of the Dorr Rebellion written in the 1970s by historians Marvin Gettleman and George Dennison.

The reference to Providence resident Susan Backus in the documentary comes from a letter written by Backus to her cousin Almira White on May 30, 1842. The letter is contained in the James W. Ely Family Papers at the Rhode Island Historical Society Library. For specific information on other primary source material used in the film please email Dr. Erik Chaput at echaput@providence.edu.

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Newspaper Reminiscences of the Dorr Rebellion

The following links will take students and researchers to newspaper accounts and reminiscences of the Dorr Rebellion. Unlike contemporary pamphlets, scholarly monographs and other articles listed in the bibliography, these newspaper accounts are less readily accessible.

Other than for one article published in two parts by staunch Dorrite, William Balch, all accounts were authored by men who were either members of the Law & Order Party at the time of the rebellion or, at the very least, non-Dorrites. Though the authors' rationale for writing these late-19th century accounts are not completely known, it is clear that the authors wanted to commit to paper their take on the rebellion for posterity and to explain their actions in the spring of 1842. Only Balch's account was intended to rebut the narrative of another writer. Whatever the reason for writing these accounts it must be kept in mind that they were written thirty or more years after the rebellion and, as such, their accounts are subject to facts clouded by the passage of time.

These accounts are presented in chronological order:

1. Henry B. Anthony contributed an article titled "[The Dorr War in Rhode Island](#)" to the *New York Ledger* on August 6, 1870 as part of a series of twelve articles by distinguished senators of the United States.
2. Zachariah Allen was an uncle of Thomas W. Dorr; his account, "[The Dorr War](#)" was published in the *Providence Press* on May 7, 1881 (page 6).
3. A series of five articles titled "Reminiscences of the Dorr War" appeared in the *Manufacturers and Farmer's Journal* in January 1885. These articles are signed "H" and are ascribed to Edward H. Hazard ([January 15, 1885 – page 1](#), [January 19, 1885 – page 2](#), [January 22, 1885 – pages 2 and 8](#), and [January 26, 1885 – page 8](#)).
4. Arnold Greene presented his "Constitutional History of Rhode Island" as a series of three

public lectures, the accounts of which appeared in three newspaper issues of which only the first and last have been located ([March 12, 1885 – page 2](#), and [March 19, 1885 – page 2](#)) for the *Manufacturers and Farmers Journal*.

5. William S. Balch, a staunch Dorrite, in response to Edward H. Hazard's articles "Reminiscences of the Dorr War" published in the *Providence Daily Journal* in January 1885 sent a lengthy article in two parts ([March 16, 1885 – page 9](#) and [March 30, 1885 – page 9](#)) to the *Manufacturers and Farmers Journal*.
6. Abraham Payne's series "Some Other Reminiscences" appeared in a series of nine articles in the *Manufacturer and Farmers' Journal* in the fall of 1885. ([October 8, 1885 – page 2](#), [October 15, 1885 – page 2](#), [October 22, 1885 – page 2](#), [October 29, 1885 – page 2](#), [November 5, 1885 – page 2](#), [November 19, 1885 – page 2](#), [November 26, 1885 – page 2](#), [December 3, 1885 – page 2](#), and [December 10, 1885 – page 2](#)).