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RI Senate pushes votes on gun bills

Circumvents panel's rebuff of big-clip ban

Katherine Gregg
Providence Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

PROVIDENCE — In a stunning turn of events on Tuesday, Senate leaders derailed an attempt by pro-gun legislators to scuttle a proposed large-capacity

magazine ban and called for immediate, final and previously unscheduled votes on that and two other gun-control bills.

Senate Democrats — on a series of 24-to-11 votes — beat back one proposed amendment after another aimed at carving out exemptions to the large-capacity magazine ban.

The Senate was on its way to approving the House-passed version of the magazine capacity limit and sending it to Gov. Dan McKee to sign it into law,

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along with bills to raise the age limit to buy firearms and ammunition from 18 to 21 and ban open-carry of loaded shotguns in public.

The day had its twists and turns.

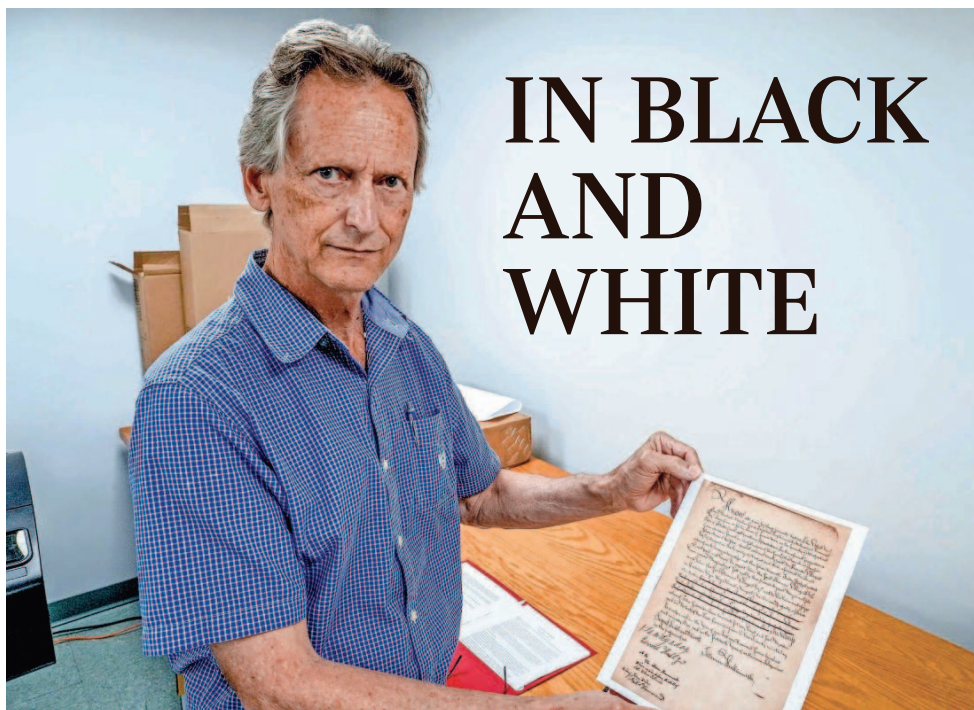
The proposed on large-capacity mag-

azines was defeated on a 6-to-6 vote in a Senate committee earlier in the day, eliciting cheers of triumph from the gun-rights demonstrators just beyond the entryway.

But the battle was far from over.

By nightfall, the full Senate was debating — and on its way to approving and sending to the governor — the separate House-passed version of the bill to ban

See GUNS, Page 11A



Jamestown resident exploring Town Hall records finds proof the Town Council sold slaves in 1790s.

Today's council will 'acknowledge a wrong' and honor the memory of those enslaved people in words, deeds.

Antonia Noori Farzan Providence Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

When Peter Fay moved to Jamestown 20 years ago, he set out to learn whatever he could about the town's history.

One fact stood out: In the middle of the 18th century, Black and indigenous people made up 32% of the town's population.

That was a higher percentage than any other town in Rhode Island — or anywhere else in New England.

How had that come to pass?

See JAMESTOWN, Page 14A

Jamestown resident Peter Fay in Town Hall with historical documents showing the prominent place of slavery in Jamestown's growth and prosperity in the late 18th century. DAVID DELPOIO/THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL

Soccer project priorities doubted

Commerce Board: Why fund only stadium now?

Patrick Anderson
Providence Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

The future of Pawtucket's professional-soccer-anchored mega project remains in doubt after a financial rescue plan for the stadium at the heart of the proposed development came under scrutiny Tuesday.

Gov. Dan McKee, Pawtucket Mayor Donald Grebien and developer Fortuitous Partners want to shift most of the public financing for infrastructure, shops and housing around the stadium to the soccer ground itself.

But they need approval from the Commerce Corporation Board of Directors, and after nearly three hours of discussing the plan Tuesday, the board members, all appointed by prior governors, had reservations.

They took no action on the proposal to put more money into the stadium and asked the deal's proponents to answer numerous questions about the finances of the project.

"We are kicking that can down the road," said Commerce board member Michael McNally, referring to the non-stadium elements of the project. "I am all for this project. It needs to happen.... But we need to know how big the issue is. I am afraid we will end up

See STADIUM, Page 14A

14A | WEDNESDAY, JUNE 15, 2022 | PROVIDENCE JOURNAL

Jamestown

Continued from Page 1A

"I asked around," Fay recalled in a recent interview, "and no one seemed to know anything here."

So, he said, "I decided to go to Town Hall and open up the books. And there it was, staring me in the face."

Records from more than 200 years ago made clear that "slavery was a huge factor in the establishment and growth of this town," Fay said. And they revealed that the Jamestown Town Council itself had been selling slaves.

On Monday, council members voted to "acknowledge a wrong" and take steps to honor Betty Martin and her family, whom their predecessors sold or "bound out" into indentured service in the 1790s.

Fay, a retired software engineer who serves on the board of the Jamestown Historical Society and is involved with the Newport Middle Passage Project, says he's found records of slavery taking place in every Rhode Island town. He hasn't come across any other instances where the town itself was selling slaves — but he wouldn't be surprised.

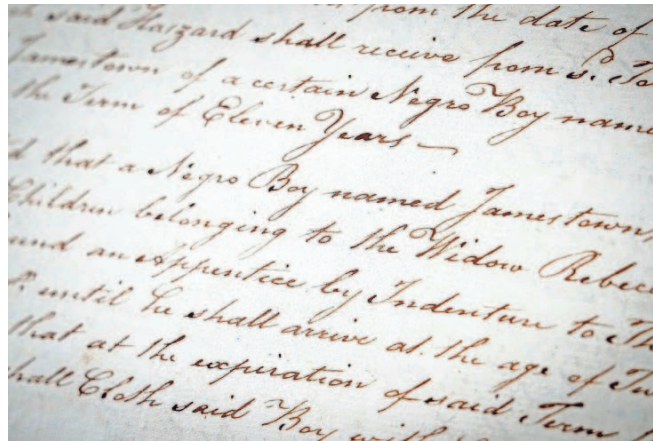
The records that he found in Jamestown reveal that in the 1780s, a widow named Rebecca Carr Martin, who came from a prominent local family, was unable to pay her debts. The town seized her property, including more than a half-dozen slaves that she had inherited.

A 7-year-old slave named Newport Martin

Among them was 7-year-old Newport Martin, whom the Town Council soon indentured to a local farmer named Thomas Fowler — meaning that the young boy was effectively rented out to work on Fowler's farm.

In 1791, Jamestown's overseer of the poor warned that Newport Martin and the rest of his family had no source of financial support. Concerned they would become a burden on the town's taxpayers, the Town Council sold the 9-year-old boy to Thomas G. Hazard, a wealthy landowner in North Kingstown and assistant to the governor, for the equivalent of \$30.

"It doesn't make sense to us today," Fay acknowledged. But in the 1700s, he said, towns like Jamestown were obli-



Near the center of this image, the phrase "a Negro Boy named Jamestown" refers to Jamestown Martin, part of the family of Betty Martin, some of whom had been owned by a local widow, Rebecca Carr Martin, who came from a prominent local family and ended up destitute. The town seized her property, including more than a half-dozen slaves that she had inherited. DAVID DELPOIO/THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL

gated to care for anyone who became indigent, whether they were free or a slave.

Newport Martin's mother, Betty Martin, was sold for \$43. His 10-year-old brother, Jamestown, was sold into indentured servitude with the promise that he would be freed at age 21 with "some clothes" in return for his labor.

An enslaved man named Mintus Martin was indentured to a Providence merchant. Another, Abraham Martin, was sold for "forty-five silver dollars" to a wealthy Newporter named William R. Robinson.

The records don't indicate how Mintus and Abraham Martin were related to Betty Martin and her children, but it's a "good guess" that they were all family, Fay said.

Three of Betty Martin's young children — Peggy, Jude and Jacob Martin — were also indentured. There is no further record of what happened to them.

"Their names have never been mentioned in this town in 250 years," Fay said.

The history of the Martin family was finally brought to light last year, when a Rhode Island Slave History Medallion was installed at East Ferry in Jamestown. It's a somber reminder that the bustling harbor front — which today is

packed with dinghy sailors, kayakers, kiteboarders and tourists lining up for ice cream and lobster rolls — was once a place where people arrived in bondage.

"When Peter told that story — as a town councilor, it just rocked me," recalled Mary E. Meagher, who serves as vice president of the Jamestown Town Council.

She was particularly shaken by one detail: Jamestown and Newport Martin were sold on Christmas Eve. As Fay explained, most slaveholders in Jamestown were Quakers — and Quakers, during that era, didn't celebrate Christmas. (A simplified version of history teaches that Quakers were abolitionists, but in reality, plenty of wealthy Rhode Island Quakers owned slaves or directly profited from the slave trade.)

Here's what the Jamestown Town Council is doing about its history

This year, Meagher proposed that the Jamestown Town Council "acknowledge a wrong" from more than two centuries ago.

"We note this history to remind ourselves, future Town Councils, and all those who hold positions of authority in our town and our state, that the authority we hold and express is a public trust,

vested in us by the citizens and residents of our community, and must never again be so abused as it was on Christmas Eve 1791," states a resolution that the council passed on Monday.

The council voted to fly the June-twelfth flag between June 19, which commemorates the end of slavery in the United States, and July 5th. It will do so every year in order to honor the memory of Betty Martin and her family, Abraham and Mintus Martin, and "all who suffered the brutalities and injustice in our community," the resolution states.

Additionally, the council agreed to set up a Betty Martin Family Scholarship, which will be awarded every year to one or two graduates of the "high schools of record" for Jamestown. (Currently, those schools are North Kingstown High School and Narragansett High School.)

Some details — such as where funding will come from — are still being worked out. Meagher said she intends to get the fund started with a donation of her own, and it's possible that the town could end up contributing money from one of its miscellaneous funds. Private donors will be able to pitch in.

The scholarships will be awarded to students who "make evident either by their skill in civics or history or their acts of service to the community, or 'the content of their character' that they will be good citizens in a just and democratic society," the resolution states. They do not necessarily have to live in Jamestown.

"We'll open it up, because we're a tiny town," Meagher said.

So far, there's been no talk about reparations. It's not known whether any of Betty Martin's descendants are alive today.

"I have not been able to trace them farther than the early 1800s," Fay said.

But he did discover something remarkable: In 1806, years after they were sold to different owners, Newport and Abraham Martin were listed as seamen on the same ship.

"We do not know whether these two men, 17 years after they left this shore enslaved, were free or enslaved crewmen bound for the Mediterranean," Fay said at the Slave History Medallion dedication last May. "But we do know they had found each other, and they were together for a reason. They were sold to different owners, but they were still family and they survived."