


■ Do our students really know so little about history?

American History



Why was life so hard for the Pilgrims?

A Thanksgiving story

■ **John Brown's raid**
Can terrorism ever be justified?

■ **Mae West's secret**
The model for female celebs?

■ **Abe Lincoln's value**
A lost speech worth millions

■ **James Madison's legacy**
Inventor of modern politics

**RICHARD
BROOKHISER** →

Why House
members
don't get to
be president

Rhode Island Puts Murder Case to Rest

Rhode Island recently ended a 166-year-old case of executioner's remorse by pardoning a man convicted of murder in a trial riddled with irregularities and anti-Irish bias. Irish immigrant John Gordon was hanged on Valentine's Day 1845, and seven years later the state banned capital punishment, many historians believe, because of controversy over the trial. (Although the death penalty was

reinstated in 1872 before it was abolished again in 1984, Gordon remains the last person executed by the state.) A new play, *The Murder Trial of John Gordon*, by Ken Dooley, brought attention to the case, spurring state legislator Peter Martin to introduce the bill that led to Governor Lincoln Chafee's pardon. "Justice," says Martin, "has no statute of limitations."



Governor Chafee pardons the man he says was wrongfully executed.

Yosemite Clears Scenic Vistas

Yosemite National Park is naturally beautiful, but what if nature itself gets in the way of the view? After decades of inconsistent efforts to deal with the problem, the National Park Service has developed a holistic approach to prettiness known as the Scenic Vista Management Plan—think of a stylist who offers a touch-up rather than an extreme makeover. That still means thousands of trees are on the chopping block, but only if they lack aesthetic, ecological, cultural or historical importance. Essentially, the Park Service is

Wrong!

A 1936 plaque on the building at 82 Jane Street in Manhattan claims that Alexander Hamilton died there in 1804. But the building didn't come into existence until 1886, and a 1767 map of the area shows that the house owned by William Bayard, where Hamilton died from wounds sustained in a duel with Aaron Burr, was at least a block away.



The owner of 82 Jane Street in 1936 didn't let the facts get in the way of a good story.

Lexicon •

Ward Eight (noun)—A libation (2 ounces rye whiskey, 3/4 ounce lemon juice, 3/4 ounce orange juice, 1 teaspoon grenadine, 1/2 ounce simple syrup—all shaken over ice and strained into a cocktail glass) named for the Boston political precinct dominated by Martin "The Mahatma" Lomasney from the 1880s till the 1920s. Named at a victory party for an election so controlled by The Mahatma that it was thrown before the voting began.

curating the popular vistas, and because Yosemite's development started about 130 years ago, no trees older than that will be taken. Wear and tear on the park might actually be reduced because the plan channels folks who come to gaze—about 80 percent of visitors—to places already set up for traffic. "In many ways," says historical landscape architect Kevin McCordle, "what we are trying to do is manage people."

Trees threaten to obscure views of El Capitan.

