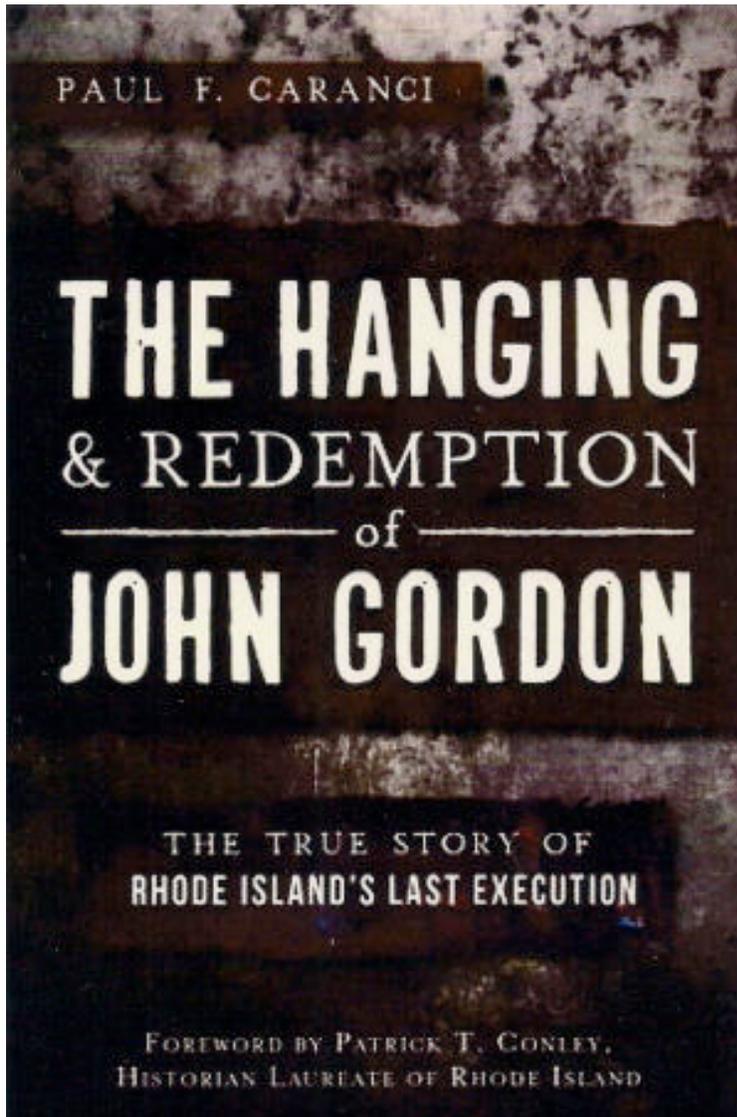


# RI history course at NKHS using new book in curriculum

By Daren Defrank Intern | Posted: Thursday, November 28, 2013 8:15 am



“The Hanging & Redemption of John Gordon” by Rhode Island historian Paul F. Caranci, which recounts the state’s last hanging execution in 1845, is now part of the R.I. history course curriculum at North Kingstown High School. Kingstown High School is adding another chapter to its Rhode Island history course with a new book, written by author and historian Paul F. Caranci, about the grisly murder of a wealthy Cranston industrialist and the wrongful hanging of an innocent man in what would be Rhode Island’s last execution.

[http://www.independentri.com/front/article\\_15b8494d-b613-553e-8321-7235e10c94eb.html](http://www.independentri.com/front/article_15b8494d-b613-553e-8321-7235e10c94eb.html)

North Kingstown High School is adding another chapter to its Rhode Island history course with a new book, written by author and historian **Paul F. Caranci**, about the grisly murder of a wealthy Cranston industrialist and the wrongful hanging of an innocent man in what would be Rhode Island's last execution.

Caranci spoke to high school students Nov. 18 about his book, "*The Hanging and Redemption of John Gordon: The True Story of Rhode Island's Last Execution.*" He gave a reading of the book to history students who will be using it for the first time this year as a text in their course of study. The history course focuses on the history of Rhode Island and is taught under the direction of teacher Chris Carty.

Carty incorporated the book into the course as the class is learning about the state's economic history and the role that immigrant labor played. The book will help the students understand several dynamics of life in mill villages in the mid-19th century.

"We are trying emphasize different time periods and the Industrial Revolution was a big part of Rhode Island history," Carty said. "This story blends a lot of different parts of Rhode Island history. It combines the mill villages, racial tensions, immigration and the justice system. Paul reached out to us and the book seemed like a perfect fit. The goal of this class is really to preserve local heritage."

North Kingstown High School is one of two high schools in the state to include the book in its state history curriculum.

Caranci, who serves as deputy secretary of state, has also served as a town councilor and is a life-long resident of North Providence. He has been researching and writing about state history for years.

The North Kingstown School Department received Caranci's book at no cost thanks to The Municipal Heritage Group, a Rhode Island nonprofit dedicated to the preservation of local history.

The book focuses on the events leading up to the murder of Amasa Sprague, a wealthy industrialist whose family held a lot of power financially and politically in Rhode Island. A day after Sprague's body was found, two Irish Catholic immigrants were arrested and charged with murder. Within three days, nearly the entire Gordon family was arrested. Three of the Gordon brothers were formally charged but only one – John Gordon – was found guilty.

The 29-year-old Gordon was sentenced to death and hanged on Feb. 14, 1845, in what would be the last hanging in Rhode Island.

Caranci said the book brings the case to life in dramatic fashion as it chronicles the hopes and dreams of one Irish Catholic immigrant family and explains the socio-political mood that led to the demise of nearly the entire Gordon family.

“You get the true sense of sitting in the courtroom as witness after witness gives perjured testimony amounting to only circumstantial evidence against the Gordons,” Caranci said. “And, you stand witness to the emotional final hours of John Gordon's life.”

In June 2011, John Gordon was pardoned by **Governor Chafee** due in large part to the efforts of playwright **Ken Dooley**, who wrote a play on the trial of John Gordon, and state **Rep. Peter Martin** of Newport, who sponsored a resolution requesting the pardon.

During last week's reading, North Kingstown students listened and asked questions, engaged in the thrilling murder story while also learning about the time period. Carty said he was happy that Caranci accepted his invitation to speak to the students, who will be required, as part of the course, to complete an analysis of the time period in the form of an essay, using the text to address four themes: Political influence and power, immigrant experiences, ethnic tensions and imperfect judicial systems.

“The Hanging and Redemption of John Gordon: The True Story of Rhode Island's Last Execution” is published by The History Press and is available on [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com), [historypress.net](http://historypress.net) and in bookstores throughout the state.