

## Saunderstown

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## The View From Swamptown

### The Saunderstown Parsonage

A while back, we took a look at the events that led up to a religious schism of sorts here in the southern reaches of our Fair Town. The congregation of the Narragansett Baptist Church at South Ferry was in an uproar over the fact that their fellow members, who were associated with Saunderstown Chapel of the congregation, had wrested control of the church's future and had voted to make the Chapel in Saunderstown, not the historic old Church at South Ferry, the central location for worship. And to add insult to injury, their new minister Reverend Andrew Forrest refused to lead the worship services unless the Parsonage, his Church owned home, was moved to within walking distance of the Saunderstown Chapel. In March of 1908, that was just what happened, those still committed to keeping the center of their faith in South Ferry woke up one morning to find their Parsonage making the slow 1 ½ mile journey north to Saunderstown. Why the upstarts even took the old bell out of the tower at South Ferry and installed it in the belfry of the Saunderstown Chapel. The rest of the story has been already told in the aforementioned previous column, but it is important to restate the fact that this divisive turn of events eventually spelled the death of both churches, and by 1926 even the Parsonage was no longer serving its intended use, as the congregation had dwindled to such a degree that the position of "leader of the flock" was filled on a part time basis by the pastor of the very hearty, robust, and healthy congregation at the Allenton Baptist Church.

As you can see by the accompanying photographs, one taken around the time that the Parsonage ceased to actually be a parsonage and one taken quite recently, little has changed in 78 years or so. This is probably due to the fact that one family, the Green's of Saunderstown, owned the building, for the majority of that time. The Parsonage has recently been restored and now serves as a quaint bed & breakfast run by the family of Alan Post.

As the holiday season approaches, I'm pleased to announce the availability of a new series of reprints of the best historic photographs of "Our Fair Town". Through a partnership with the good folks at the "Wilson - Scott Galleries" at 14 Main Street in "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic", Swamptown Enterprises is able to offer all, a little piece of history. Stop by the Gallery and check it out, the history nut on your gift list will thank you for it. Also, as always, "The View From Swamptown" compilation books are available at Wilson's of Wickford and Bassett's Bookstore on Post Road.

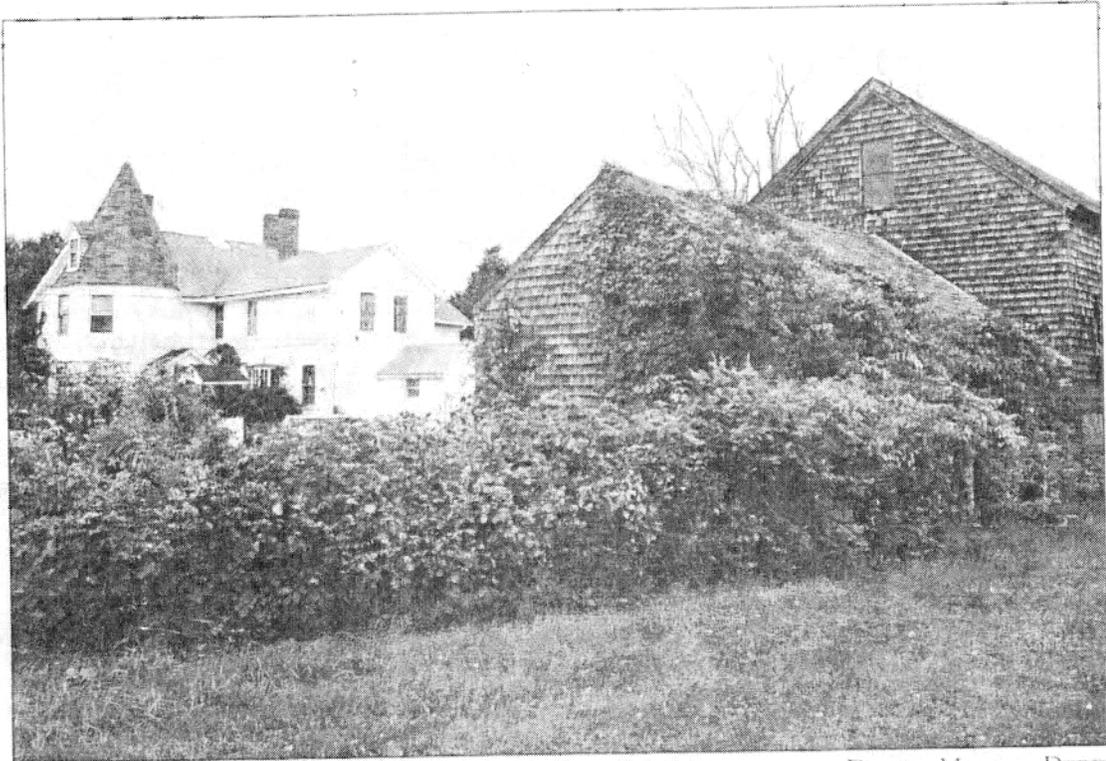


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The Jeremiah Hazard Farm on Boston Neck Road has remained in Hazard hands since its beginnings. Wilbur Hazard built most of the farmhouse (at left) seen today, though it is thought his son, Wilbur Jr., added the distinctive two-story octagonal bay with a candle-snuffer roof. Both Wilbur Hazards contributed to the completion of the farm's barns.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Wilbur Hazard Farmhouse

This week, we are going to turn our attention Saunderstown's way and take a look at the Jeremiah Hazard Farm and its extraordinary centerpiece, the Wilbur Hazard Farmhouse. This piece of land, bought by Jeremiah Hazard from Samuel Northup in 1767, holds the distinction of being the piece of North Kingstown property which has stayed in one family's hands the longest. This has been Hazard land now for 236 years, and has always been owned and occupied by a direct descendant of Jeremiah himself. That is until last Sunday, when Olive (Jordan) Hazard passed away at the grand old age of 94 years.

Stories about the land go all the way back to the time of the Revolution, well before the construction of the present farmhouse, when Old Jeremiah, an ardent Tory, like a number of his relations, nearly lost the land due to his political leanings. Back then being a long term local like a Hazard, Northup, or Cranston helped a bit. The new government was less likely to auction off the holdings of someone like that, however, if you had "shallow roots" like George Rome or Thomas Cutler, well, you could kiss your holdings goodbye. Jeremiah, was however, expected to keep a low profile, keep his opinions to himself, and would need to renounce his allegiance to the King before he could return to his homestead. He, apparently, came to his senses in 1779 as he was back home by then.

Around 1850 or so, the second Wilbur Hazard to farm the land was quite successful. He had countless acres in corn, potatoes, and feed and also had a prosperous dairy operation "churning out" tons of butter and cheese each year. It was he who built the largest part of the farmhouse, although it was his son, Wilbur Jr. whom is thought to have added the distinctive two-story octagonal bay addition with its wonderful candlesnuffer roof. The two fine barns, one a cow barn built by Wilbur Sr. in 1865, and the other a horse barn built by the son in 1893 are a perfect complement to the grand home, and an appropriate testimony to the farming legacy of this land. All totalled, they are a fitting monument to the many generations of Hazards who toiled over this land and they stand as perhaps the most complete example of a 19th century South County farm.

So now, with Olive's passing, the land and its impressive buildings have come to a crossroads. There's hope though, you see, there's another generation of Hazards waiting in the wings to take charge of this legacy. Lets hope he realizes what he has inherited and, with the help of a Town government that truly cares about heritage preservation, does right by Jeremiah, Wilbur, and all the rest.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Architect Charles Borie designed the house at 90 Willett Road in Saunderstown as a summer home for his brother, famous portrait and landscape artist Adolphe Borie, in 1902. Borie was one of several writers and artists who called the village home during summers.

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## The View From Swamptown

### The Adolphe Borie House

Those of you who are regular readers of this column are more than likely aware that, in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, summers in the seaside village of Saunderstown were an extraordinary time. An artist and writer's colony of sorts, a stroll down her shady streets and lanes could proceed like a "Who's Who" of the time. It wouldn't be impossible to pass Teddy Roosevelt and his good friend Owen Wister, the author of the penultimate western, "The Virginian", strolling down Waterway smoking good cigars and discussing world events. You most certainly would come across the LaFarge boys, Christopher and Oliver arguing about the impact of Oliver's Pulitzer prize on their ongoing brotherly competitive ways while their father, prominent NY architect Grant LaFarge chatted with his father the famous artist John LaFarge. Around the corner, the Wharton cousins, Frances and Edith would most certainly be sitting in a porch swinging wistfully dreaming of romantic moments for Edith's novel, "The Age of Innocence". And down at the big house at 90 Willett Road, the subject of today's musings, famous portrait and landscape artist Adolphe Borie would perhaps be raising a glass to his brother, Charles, a partner in Philadelphia's most prominent architectural firm, Zantzing, Borie, and Medary, to toast his recent commission for the Philadelphia Museum of Art, while their prominent financier father and their grandfather, also named Adolphe, a man who was formerly President Grant's Sec. of the Navy, discussed the problems in Europe.

Charles Borie himself had been the architect for Adolphe's impressive summer home at 90 Willett Road. He designed it in 1902 and Adolphe had it constructed in 1903 to his brother's exacting specifications, you see Charles was actually a trained engineer, however, the artistic requirements for excellence in architecture came as naturally to him as a portrait did for Adolphe. Things went along this way for more than a decade until 1916, when Adolphe worked out an arrangement with another prominent Philadelphian, Mary Hosack Biddle, the daughter of the prominent jeweler who made up one third of the firm Bailey, Banks, and Biddle, whereby she would purchase the property at a reasonable price and allow Adolphe to continue to summer in the much smaller guest cottage; thereby bringing another prominent group of artistic folks to the seaside village of Saunderstown.

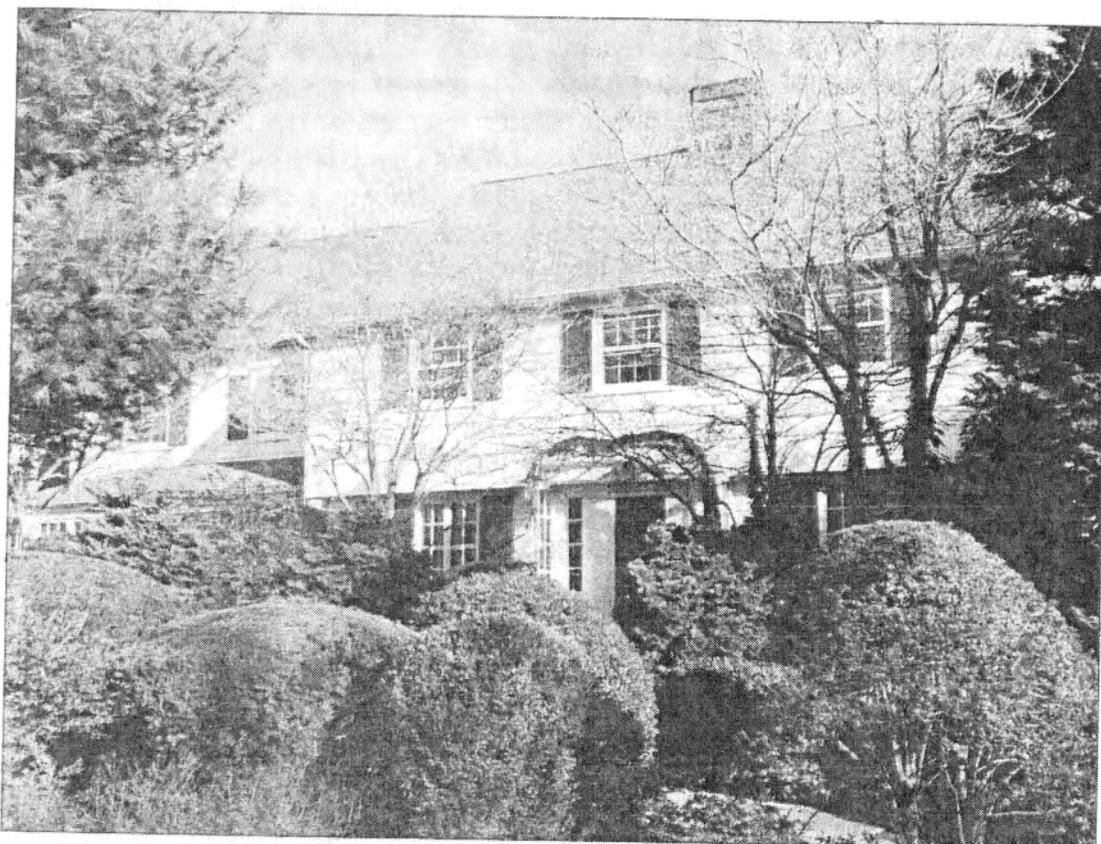


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Henry Newcombe and his wife, Susan, built the Colonial revival-style house at 2590 Boston Neck Road in the early 1920s on the site of a late 17th century home that stood for more than 200 years before being consumed by fire in the late 1800s. The original house was so prominent a landmark that it was fired upon and subsequently damaged by a British warship during the Revolutionary War.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Henry S. Newcombe House

A whole lot of history has occurred here on this venerable homesite; you've got to wonder if textile industrialist Henry Newcombe contemplated this fact when he purchased the property from the last of the spinster Carpenter sisters, Mary, in the fall of 1921. Henry, and his wife Susan, got right to it and began the construction of their "Colonial Revival" style home, designed by the prominent Providence architectural firm of Jackson, Robertson and Adams, before 1921 drew to a close. But did they then realize that the only reason the land had sat empty for decades had been the deed restriction that the tea-totaling Carpenter sisters had previously insisted be included in any bill of sale, prohibiting alcohol possession or consumption on the property. It was this insistence alone that dissuaded Owen Wister, the famed Philadelphia and Saunderstown novelist and a man that loved a good drink, from purchasing this parcel of land he held so dearly. Although, he eventually built his own home north of here, on Boston Neck Road, it was this place that he cherished most. During the summer of 1905, he came here each day and parked himself under the shade of a grove of giant sycamore trees and penned his best-selling follow-up novel to "The Virginian", "Lady Baltimore" right here on these storied grounds.

I wonder if Henry realized that the original late 17<sup>th</sup> century home stood here for more than two hundred years before being consumed by fire in the late 1800's. The house, originally constructed by Captain Andrew Willett himself, and later lived in by generations of Willetts and Carpenters was so prominent a landmark that it was fired upon and subsequently damaged by a British warship during the Revolutionary War. It also figured in the same skirmish that left the nearby Casey Farm with musket ball holes still extant to this day. The land was also home to Francis Willett's famed tree farm, the first example of silviculture (planting trees as a crop) in the new world.

Newcombe himself, added to the home's provenance while he lived there. He was a founding member of the NK Ambulance Association, active at Smith's Castle, Gilbert Stuart's Birthplace, and the South Ferry Church, and a Commodore of the Saunderstown Yacht Club. The Newcombe's were also generous benefactors of the Saunderstown Library. All this while employed at, as well as after retiring from, his position as the Director of Berkshire-Hathaway Inc., the SE Massachusetts textile giant. Now if that company name seems to ring a bell as you hear it, don't be surprised, as it exists now as the mega-conglomerate holding company of a fellow by the name of Warren Buffett, a man who seems to know a little bit about the corporate world that Henry Newcombe, who passed away in his Saunderstown home at the age of 93 in 1983, came from. And to bring this story full circle, one of the companies now under the corporate umbrella of Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway is none other than that of Henry Newcombe's contemporary, C. Prescott Knight who once resided up in Quidnessett and owned a textile empire that became "Fruit of the Loom".



The Sybil Dean sampler can be viewed at Smith's Castle in Wickford.

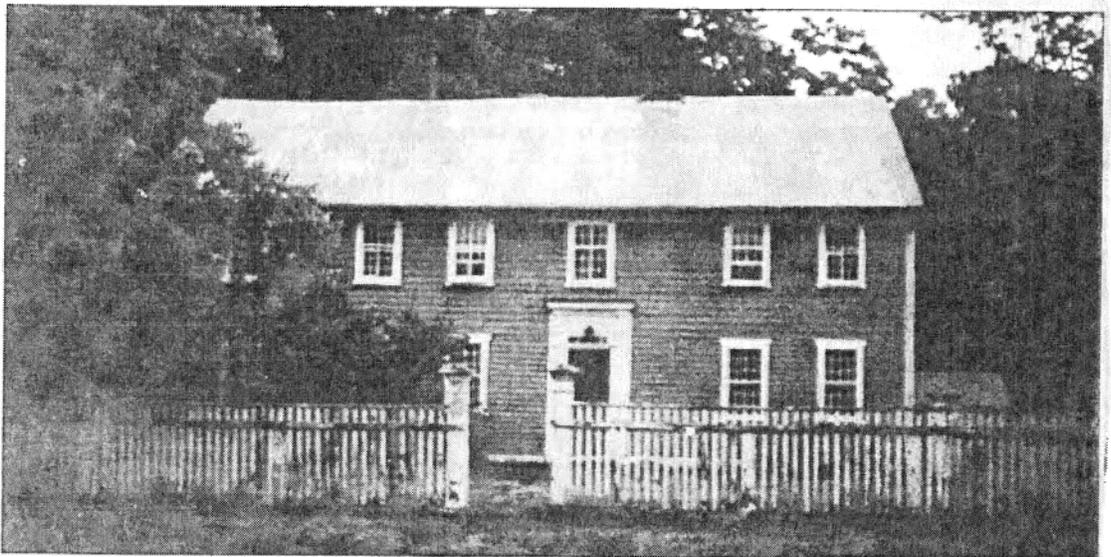
## The View from Swamptown

### The Sybil Dean Sampler

I have always had a special affinity for samplers. Not just any samplers mind you. The ones that really catch my imagination are the “rite of passage” samplers designed and stitched by the young women of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The lives of women of those time frames were so different than that of their 20<sup>th</sup>, and now, 21<sup>st</sup> century counterparts. They were, for the most part, offered little opportunity to express themselves in any fashion that would survive the march of time. Their samplers offer us a way to catch a glimpse of their personalities. Looking at these often strikingly beautiful and ornate works of folk art is like peering through a keyhole back into time. Like the view through the keyhole, you miss an awful lot of what’s really going on, what you see is just a tiny slice of their lives; a tantalizing peak at who they were. I am often driven by what I see, to learn more about the young woman who poured her self into her stichery.

Such is the case with the extraordinary work of art designed and stitched by 14-year old local girl Sybil Dean, in 1761. The sampler (shown in the accompanying photograph) can now be seen at Smith’s Castle in close proximity to the simpler stitchwork of Lucy Reynolds, another local lass, whose life we profiled a year or two ago. Our artist, Sybil, was born August 25, 1747 in Plainfield Ct, to Mr. and Mrs. Ezra Dean. Sometime after that, the Dean clan relocated to the area that is now the North Kingstown/East Greenwich border. In November of 1775 Sybil married an up-and-coming local gristmill owner and recent widower, Joshua Davis. Joshua had lost his first wife in 1769 and was raising their one daughter, Hannah, alone. Joshua and Sybil, had together, three more children, all of them sons. These boys, Ezra and Jeffery in particular, were the founders of the village of “Davis Mills”, a small farming community centered around the Hunt River location of the Davis boy’s Gristmill, the early E & J Davis textile mill, and a bog iron forge. This little hamlet eventually became known as Davisville and the rest, as I am so fond of saying, is history. So our little needlepoint artisan Sybil, was in fact, the mother of Davisville. She died in December of 1829 in her 83<sup>rd</sup> year.

The sampler itself, hung proudly on the wall of the home of Joshua and Sybil, forever known as “The Davis Homestead” still located on Davisville Rd., for nearly 200 years. In 1954, Mr. And Mrs. William Davis Miller, the then owners of the Homestead and avid early supporters of Smith’s Castle donated this important piece of folkart to the Castle where it can now be viewed. If you haven’t seen it yet, now is truly the time to go. The Smith’s Castle is now in the midst of their 325<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration and an exciting variety of events is planned for the upcoming year. Of particular interest to all history buffs is the new permanent visitor’s orientation display “Smith’s Castle: Four Centuries of Rhode Island History”. The exhibit, in text and image, covers the history of the



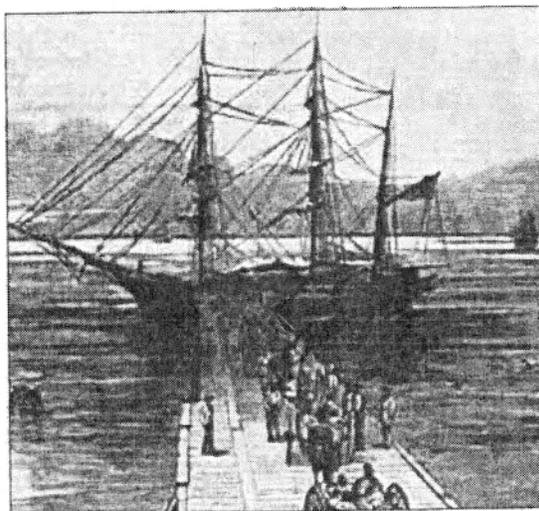
The circa 1715 Davis Homestead on Davisville Road is one of North Kingstown's oldest private homes.

plantation from its days as Richard Smith's Trading Post, right on through to the twentieth century. Three years of group effort, ably led by graphic artist and Castle member Darrell McIntire, has produced something extraordinary. I highly recommend it. Learn more about Smith's Castle's upcoming celebratory season on line at [www.smithscastle.org](http://www.smithscastle.org).



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The Updikes had to liquidate their assets, including Smith's Castle, to help Gilbert Updike, who was involved in the slave trade, out of an unspecified financial ruin.



This image taken from an 1837 abolitionist pamphlet asks, "Am I not a man and brother?" Above right is a rendition of a typical slave ship involved in the triangle trade in the 1800s.

## Gilbert Updike – Slave Trader

According to the authority on such things, Webster's Dictionary, a "black sheep" is defined as *a discreditable member of an otherwise respectable group*. This certainly is a fitting description for Gilbert Updike, Son of Lodowick Updike of Smith's Castle, Cocumscussoc. Although, he had been born into one of the most prominent and affluent families in the region, Gilbert seemed determined to latch upon a "get rich quick" scheme and ascend to a position of prominence in his own right. Sadly his questionable financial dealings would, in the end, be the undoing of his family's birthright and the cause of the loss of its ancestral home at Cocumscussoc. For it is a widely held belief by myself and my fellow historians, that Wilkins Updike, Gilbert's younger brother and the then scion of the clan, was required to liquidate most of the Updike family's assets, including the Castle, in order to extricate his wayward sibling from a fiscal disaster.

One of Gilbert's attempts at financial success involved the sordid world of slave trading. Gilbert chartered and financed a slaving expedition on the 100-ton ship *Mary* captained by George Lawton and crewed, in part, out of Wickford. Gilbert, like all the other Rhode Island slave traders, loaded up his ship with Rhode Island rum made and purchased in Newport and Providence, sent it off to the west coast of Africa, where the rum was traded or sold for slaves that would then be loaded on his ship the *Mary*. She would then be sailed to either a Caribbean or southern US port where the slaves would be sold and molasses purchased with part of the proceeds. The molasses was then brought back to RI where it was made back into rum. This is the basis for the infamous Triangle Trade of which you may or may not have heard. Each leg of the journey brought an opportunity for profit as slaves, rum, and molasses were traded like the commodities they were at that time. Sort of a colonial version of money laundering and commodity trading all rolled up into one painfully human tragedy. A tragedy that Gilbert Updike took a willing part in.

Little is known of Gilbert's life after his brother Wilkins rescued him from his final financial quagmire. As is usually the case with black sheep, he seems to have been forgotten by his contemporaries; an entry in the Updike genealogy notes that Gilbert married and settled "out west". You only need to possess a little knowledge to be able to read "between the lines" and imagine the legacy he left behind.



PHOTOS: SELENA MILLARD

An imprint shows that this bottle for Five-O, which called itself "America's Favorite Beverage," was processed at Cocumscussoc Farm in Wickford, which is pictured in the historic photo below.



## The View From Swamptown

### The Cocumcussoc Farm Bottling Plant

Early this Spring, as a part of a column on five elusive local history stories, I mentioned the Coca-Cola Bottling Plant of Wickford. You may remember that I pointed out, that, back in the 1930's and early 1940's, Austin Fox operated a soda bottling plant on the Richard Smith Blockhouse/Smith's Castle property that he then owned. It was set up primarily to serve the rapidly expanding military complex at Quonset/Davisville and employed mostly locals. Fox also sold his soda locally and served it as his Cocumcussoc Dairy Bar which was located at the intersection of Post Road and West Main Street at the site now occupied by the Wickford Appliance Store. Eventually Fox sold that enterprise to the fledgling Howard Johnson Chain, who operated one of their familiar restaurants there for decades. Also, at that time, I mentioned, I wouldn't be at all surprised to find that somewhere out there is an old Coke Bottle or two with Wickford embossed along the bottom.

Well, I still haven't come upon that Wickford Coke bottle, but, thanks to the Ladd Family out in Shore Acres, I have acquired the next best thing! As you can see by the accompanying photograph Austin Fox also bottled "Five - O" soda the self-proclaimed "Americas Favorite Beverage". Five-O soda was the original chocolate soda and although it may not have been America's favorite drink it was indeed very popular in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Based upon where this bottle was found, I suspect it was cracked open at the Cocumcussoc Dairy Bar and enjoyed by a patron of that popular establishment. I still expect someday to come across that Wickford Coke bottle, but for the time being, I'm pleased to see this fine "Five-O" bottle. Thank you so much to the Ladd clan for this little chocolate soda time capsule.



**Gabriella Hamilton  
Adams**



PHOTO: DANIEL G. DUNN

A young Gabriella Hamilton, known as Gay, took her first teaching job in North Kingstown at the one-room Slocum schoolhouse. Pictured here, the former schoolhouse is now a residence on Indian Corner Road.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Legacy of Gabriella Adams

I expect that young Miss Gay Hamilton could not have possibly imagined the implication of her decision, back in 1927, to take a position at the Slocum RI district schoolhouse here in our fair town. How could the young Fall River girl (she being just 18 at the time and only one year out of Durfee High School) know what adventures that choice would bring her. As was the case with most teachers of the time, she had but a single year at a teacher's academy, Westfield State in her case, to prepare her for her chosen career. One can only imagine what went through her mind that opening day when she closed the door of the little Slocum schoolhouse and faced her first class of students, which ran the gamut from tiny 1st grade farm girls all the way up to strapping 8th grade farmboys who probably towered over their diminutive teacher. No bother, young Gay Hamilton made out just fine.

The very next year found her teaching primary grades (1-3) at the much larger Wickford Grammar School. I expect she saw "the writing on the wall" and realized that the days of the District School System and the one-room schoolhouse were fast coming to a close. The big Grammar School with its long tradition of education extending all the way back to the early 1800's with the Washington Academy appealed to her; although I dare say she probably never imagined in her wildest dreams she still be there enriching young minds and nurturing tender souls nearly one half a century later.

I expect that September 21, 1938 began as just another day for the, by then, veteran teacher. There's no way she could have ever imagined in her wildest dreams, that, by nightfall, she'd be riding out the century's greatest hurricane with a class room of doubtlessly frightened young children counting on her, a tiny little woman, and her co-workers huddled on Academy Hill, now an island in the storm, waiting for the fury to abate.

I expect no one, not even herself, might have ever imagined back in 1927, that a tiny little Fall River girl with one year of schooling beyond high school under her belt might one day receive a Masters degree from a University and become one of her adopted hometown's most respected principals ever. Along the way, she met a man, fell in love, and married. She made more lifelong friends during her nearly one century of living life to the hilt than a person could count. Gay Adams made a difference.

To read her obituary you might come to the conclusion that Mrs. Adams (even as a man of many years myself, I respected her too highly to address her in any other way) did not have any children of her own. Well I stand here to correct that misconception. Gabriella Hamilton Adams had hundreds of children, maybe thousands. And from the hard scrabble Slocum farm boys of 1927, to the rightly scared youngsters of a terrifying 1938 hurricane, to young people who one day grew up to teach under their old teacher, to a diehard Swamp Yankee history columnist, we all fought back a tear or two, and lingered on a favorite memory of her when we heard she was gone. I needn't ask God to bless you Mrs. Adams; he already has.



This photo (above) ran in newspapers across the nation while Mabel Hayward pressed her case as the long-lost heir to John Gottlieb Wendel Jr.'s \$150 million fortune. Known as the Beriah Lawton farmhouse, the Hayward family home perfectly fit the rags-to-riches tale so popular during the Great Depression. Public acceptance of Mabel Hayward's con was, at first, unshakable. Her two children, Edna and Teddy, were identified on this newsreel still at right as the great-grandchildren of the millionaire John Gottlieb Wendel Jr.



## The View From Swamptown

## The Story of Mabel Hayward

Every once in a while as I pour through the old musty dust, ledgers, legal documents, family histories, and scrapbooks that are my stock and trade, I come across a tale relating to our Fair Town that so amazes me that I immediately begin to imagine it as a movie event that plays in my mind's eye for its captive audience of one. The stories of Thankful Union, Yeast Man and former slave Jim Chase, and the little girl who ended up owning a mill village are such stories. Now I can add the incredible tale of Mabel Hayward to this list, and even though I only know of tantalizing bits and snippets of this woman's life I am amazed by what little I have learned.

If you liked the movie "The Sting" you'll love Mabel. You see, Mabel was a con-artist and one of the best. Why, she nearly pulled off the con of the 20th century; Maybe the greatest con ever imagined, for that matter. But hey I'm rushing the tale here. Let's go back a bit and examine Mabel Hayward's roots.

She was born Mabel Davis and I know little of her early years. Only that she married Charles Hayward and that they lived in the old tumbled down Beriah Lawton farmhouse on the corner of Beach Street and Steamboat Avenue. The house, now demolished, can be seen in the accompanying photo. Charles' mother was a member of the large Lawton clan that lived all around the Poplar Point/Beach Street area and it was through her that they acquired this large but rundown home. Charles and Mabel had two children, Theodore L. (known as Teddy and named after his grandfather Theodore Lawton) and Edna. Teddy and Edna had, I expect, an unremarkable childhood until the advent of the event that changed everything in America; the Great Depression. For when the Depression arrived, it looks like Charles departed, as he does not appear in the historic record after that. This is a sad scene that, unfortunately, played out all across America. Mabel was left with two hungry children and her wits and not much else. I know "Hard Times" require folks to make choices they might never consider otherwise and perhaps that was the case here, I just don't know. What I do know is that word got around "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic" that Mabel and the kids, who often went off on unexplained trips, were suddenly a whole lot better off than they ever had been previously. Small towns being what they are and folks being nosy like folks still are today, it wasn't long before things were getting whispered across backyard fences and clotheslines about Mabel's newfound prosperity. The rumors were finally confirmed when a wire from the NYC police arrived requesting the presence of Mabel and the kid's local relations at a precinct house in the "Big Apple" to bail them out. It seems that Mabel and her children had gotten into the habit of taking a train down to the big city and setting up "shop" on a street corner where the musical Mabel would pretend to be a blind violinist and the little "moppets" would dance to her tunes and solicit donations for their efforts.

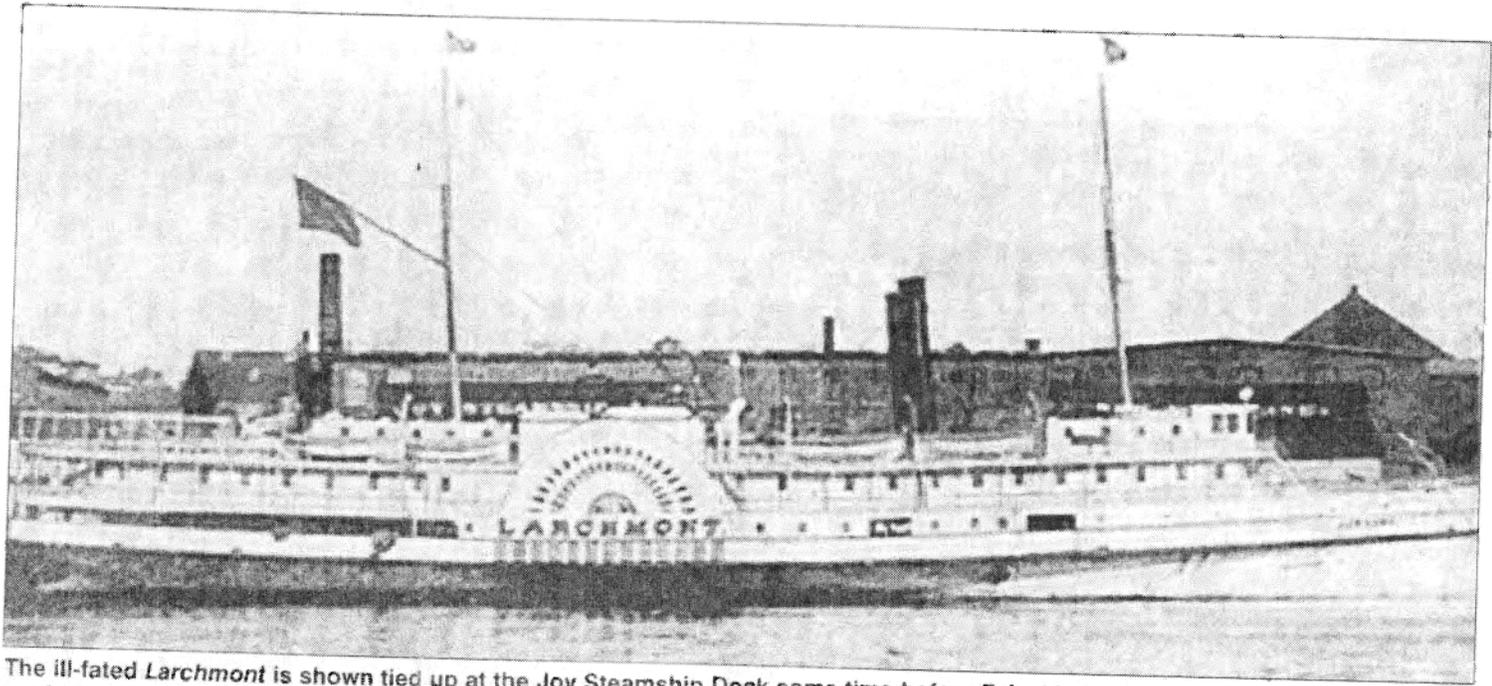
As you can imagine this caused no little bit of a local ruckus across our small town and I contemplate the repercussions of this revelation and use it to gain some perspective each time I do or say something that I imagine to be somewhat ill-advised or embarrassing. The fervor over Mabel's indiscretions subsided quickly as folks continued to deal with their own Great Depression related problems; sure there were snickers and snide comments, but that too passed. Mabel's appetite for easy money, on the other hand, did not subside so quickly and this is where "the con to end all cons" enters the picture.

Around the same time that Mabel's exploits were being whispered about here in little Wickford, the world's eyes were glued to the story of the John Gottlieb Wendel fortune, some 150 million dollars, that was being fought over in the highest courts in Mabel's old haunts New York City. John G.'s grandfather had been John Jacob Astor's business partner, and some say, the brains behind the two man team that had amassed a fortune the likes of which no one had ever imagined. Every newspaper and every newsreel of the day availed the depression-stricken masses of the story of the "Bachelor Millionaire" who had died intestate and the ensuing high powered squabble over his fortune. It would appear that Mabel Hayward was listening as well.

Before you know it, poor little Mabel Hayward, had concocted a story that grabbed the nation's imagination. She claimed that old John G. had not been a bachelor after all, why she had been secretly married, for a time, to Mabel's own grandmother Hannah Holt, whom he had met and wooed while a student at Columbia. John G. Wendel's powerful daddy would have none of it though, and had had the marriage annuled and all records of it expunged (powerful men could do such things you know) not fast enough though, to avoid the birth of Mabel's very own mom Bertha. Conveniently for Mabel, all involved in this tale of woe were now deceased, except of course for her and her two children; the great grandchildren of one of America's most powerful men, little Teddie and Edna. You know, sometimes the brashest of schemes are the ones that succeed and this one was no exception. The media of the day grabbed a hold of this story and played its tale of rags-to-riches to the hilt. Mabel performed flawlessly (I expect this was a piece of cake compared to the blind violinist gig) and for a time it looked as if it was going to work. Our little village was abuzz with reporters, why if you went to the moviehouse up in East Greenwich, you could even see the saga unfold on the screen before you during the opening newsreels. America was convinced that Mabel, Teddie, and Edna were on their way to Easy Street. As you can imagine though, folks in Wickford were a mite skeptical of this cinderella story as were the constabulary in the "big apple". It took time, but eventually Mabel's story was discounted, her "15 minutes of fame" over, she faded into the background as America's focus switched to a fanatical little Austrian with a head full of hatred and a bad mustache.

Mabel Hayward, the woman who almost became a "made" millionare is buried in an unmarked grave in one of the Lawton lots down in Elm Grove Cemetery. As the screen fades to black, queue the Scott Joplin number and conjure up an image of two ragamuffin kids dancing a jig while a "blind" woman with a cheshire cat grin plays a hearty tune.

OOPS!



The ill-fated *Larchmont* is shown tied up at the Joy Steamship Dock some time before Feb. 11, 1907, when she sank during a blizzard off the shore of Block Island. Only crewman Ben Northup and eight others survived the disaster, which took the lives of the remaining 342 passengers.

## The View From Swamptown

### Captain Ben Northup

If there was ever an archetype for the Wickford sea captain it was Captain Benjamin D Northup. He was born "a salt water man" on January 16, 1877, in a little house on Cornelius Island in Wickford Harbor. His parents were Daniel S. and Rosella (Sprague) Northup and he was one of 21 children(I kid you not - 21 children!).

As soon as he was able, young Ben took to the sea; and with twenty brothers and sisters, I expect his parents didn't complain too long and loud. He started out as a crew member on the many sailing ships that called Wickford home; and as the age of sail was replaced by the age of steam, Ben Northup changed with the times. By the turn of the century he was working for the Joy Steamship Line on the sidewheeler Larchmont.

Now if you think the name Larchmont rings a bell you're right. For this vessel's name is one that stands out in the annals of local maritime history, although it's usually paired with the word "disaster". On the night of February 11, 1907, in a furious blizzard, a fully loaded Larchmont, which was 252 feet long, was rammed by the larger schooner Harry S. Knowlton off the shore of Block Island. She sank in an instant. Of her 351 passengers and crew, only nine survived. Although frozen corpses washed up on the sandy beaches of Block Island for weeks, most of the bodies were never recovered. One of those lucky nine was thirty year old crewman Ben Northup. He was changed forever by the event and spoke of it often.

After recovering from his ordeal, Ben went back to sea with the Colonial Line on steamers that ran from Providence to New York. He crewed on the General out of Wickford for a time, and eventually got his Captain's papers while serving a thirty year stint as a skipper for the Beacon Oyster Company on Pleasant Street here in "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic". His vessel of choice was called the "Captain".

In 1942, at the age of 65, Captain Benjamin Northup retired from the sailor's life. Bored and restless, it wasn't long before he began his second career as a shellfisher; a vocation he stayed with right up until his last days. Known to all as simply "Cap'n Ben" he was a fixture and a landmark along the Wickford docks and shoreline. Eventually local artist Paule Loring immortalized the figure of "Cap'n Ben", pipe clenched in his teeth, face bravely turned into the seaspray wearing his yellow oilskins and sou-wester, by selling miniature wood carvings of the old Skipper in his studio on Pleasant Street. Although he never admitted it, old Cap'n Ben was pleased with the idea that his image graced literally countless mantelpieces all across America.

Ben Northup died in December of 1961 in his 85th year. He had left the sea behind a year or two earlier and had been filling his time as a "Bakemaster" at local clambakes where he would cook up the bounty of the sea and recant his tales of shipwrecks, sailors, and the sea. Wickford changed just a bit when he passed on. Every once in a while one of his pal Paule Loring's "Cap'n Ben" wood carvings will show up in an antique store or at auction. If you spy one, snatch it up; it's truly a symbol of Wickford at its finest.

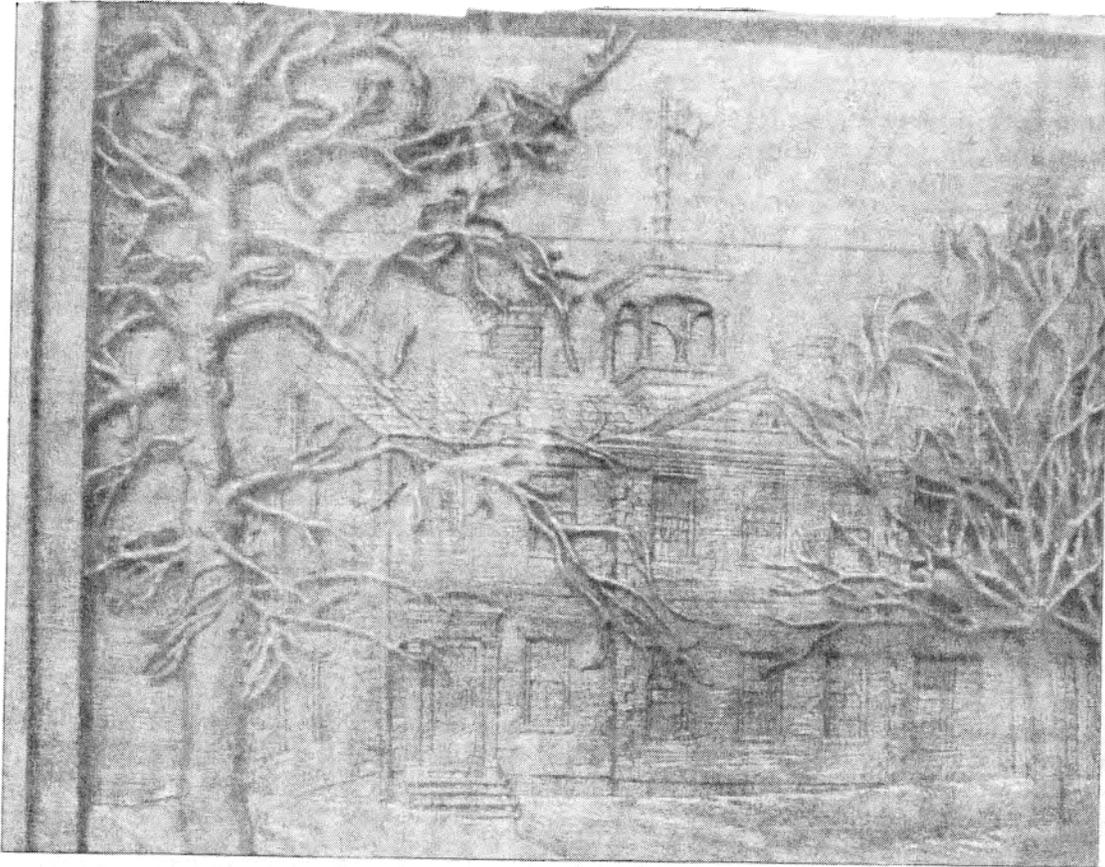


PHOTO: JAMES RUSH

Ken Rogers' 1964 carving of the old Washington Academy details each of the school's 20 windows with 24 panes of glass each. Individual bricks can be made out in the chimneys and individual shingles can be seen on the roof. It now has a place of honor in the principal's office at Wickford Middle School.



Principal Gabriella Adams (above) and Ken Rogers are pictured at the time of the unveiling of Rogers' carving of the Washington Academy.



## The View From Swamptown

### Ken Rogers and the Washington Academy Wood Carving

Ken Rogers was one heck of a dad. Lets face it every parent gets talked into a school project at one time or another. Work on a play, chaperone a field trip, bake a pan of brownies; every parent, I expect, has pitched in when asked. But imagine if you will, that the task asked of you would require the expenditure of over 1,000 hours and span nearly three years. How many of us would jump into that kind of commitment when asked by their child? Ken Rogers did!

You see, Ken Rogers, then of Plum Point Road, was a consummate whittler. His wife Betty, describes him as a "farm boy who just loved to whittle and carve". He was always carving, why he even carved furniture for his newlywed wife out of packing crates, according to Betty. He never had a lick of formal training, but he was able to take his natural abilities and with practice, transcend the gulf between craft and art. Ken Rogers was a whittler who became an artist; plain and simple.

Ken's two sons, Kenny Jr. and Jeff, like kids always have and always will, were forever bringing things in to school for "Show & Tell". As you can imagine, Dad's intricate carvings were top on their lists. These remarkable pieces of art eventually caught the eye of principal Gabriella Adams, and she, along with Kenny and Jeff, convinced the elder Ken to undertake the task of carving a replica of the Washington Academy, the very first school that sat on that site, for the school and ultimately; posterity.

Ken's first take on the project was that he would have it done by summer. Three years later, in 1964, his grand project was unveiled for Principal Adams and the world. All Ken Rogers could say was, "I guess it took a little longer than I anticipated." All in attendance felt it was worth the wait.

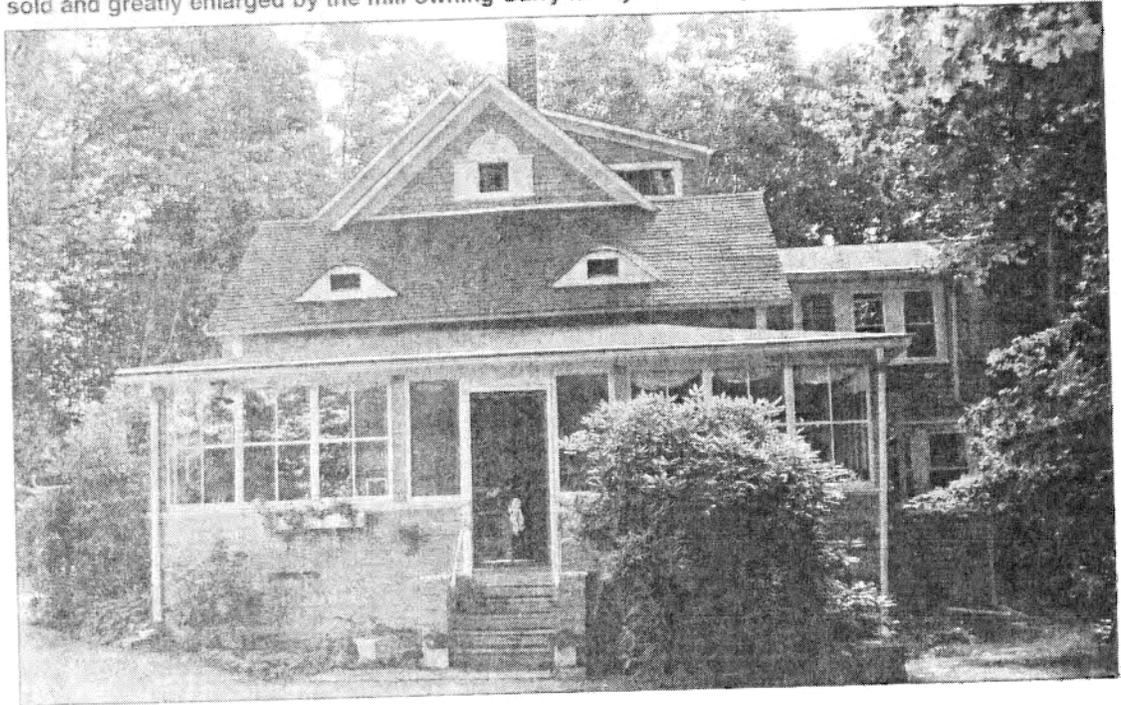
A close examination of the piece easily reveals why it took three years to complete. Each of the school's twenty windows with their twenty four panes of glass each are shown in intricate detail. Individual bricks can be made out in the chimneys and individual shingles can be seen on the roof. The detailed trees in front of the school are undercut so that they stand out nearly an inch from the school itself. Perfect in scale, depth, dimension, and composition, its hard to imagine this is the work of someone who described himself as a whittler.

I asked Betty Rogers what she remembered of those three years. "The one thing that stands out in my mind", Betty said, "was that we hauled that carving everywhere we went. Ken was always working on it, at every chance he could. We took it to family gatherings, Ken would work on it in the backyard during the summer. Neighbors would stop by and check on its progress." The carving was like a member of the family during those years. After completing it he went back to working on his carving of the Battle of Gettysburg, which he had put down in 1961.

Kenneth Rogers died in June of 1987. He was 64 and had served his country with distinction during WWII. But it's Ken's remarkable talent that he will be remembered for. His legacy, in part, hangs on the wall in the principals office of Wickford Elementary School. The remainder of his amazing carvings are in the possession of his family. Now, I've heard rumors that the NK Free Library has been toying with the idea of holding an exhibit of ken's work. This Swamp Yankee supports that idea wholeheartedly and can't wait to see it.



The intersection of Ten Rod, Scrabbletown and Old Baptist roads is shown above as it existed at the turn of the century. The foreground of the photography is dominated by the home of Sen. George T. Cranston, a deacon at Exeter Advent Church, while Elder Edwin Wood's home appears in a break between the trees in the background. After the death of Wood's wife, Abby, their home (below) was sold and greatly enlarged by the mill-owning Curry family. McCarthy Photography occupies it today.



## The View From Swamptown

### Elder Edwin Wood

This week we are going to take a Swamptown gander at the area's most famous preacher; Elder Edwin Wood. It has been said that Elder Wood preached at more funerals and married more couples than any other clergy man in Southern New England. But he was more than that; he was a celebrity of sorts. Wood was the epitome of an old fashioned Yankee preacher, a living link between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Wood was born around 1830 in one of the region's many little mill towns, Anthony, RI. At the age of 7 he was sent off by his family to work in the mills. Eight years later, the 15 year old had had enough. He ran off, made his way up to New Bedford and shipped out on a two year whaling voyage. This was the beginning of a fifteen year career at sea; somehow in the midst of it all, he met and married Abby Reynolds of Exeter. One can only imagine the life they had, voyages of two years and more were not uncommon at that time. Wood's conversion from deep sea sailor to man of God was said to have happened at sea when he was thirty years of age. After this voyage, he returned to the Exeter farm of his wife's parents never to sail again. After "much study and serious contemplation, Wood was ordained as a pastor of the Adventist Church and took the helm of the Exeter Advent Church, just west of the border between North Kingstown and Exeter (near to the present day site of Delmyra Kennel on Ten Rod Road). Wood, who later built himself a home the end of Old Baptist Road in our Fair Town, also shared preaching duties with the various pastors of the Lafayette Advent Church.

Elder Wood was man of God and a man with a presence. Over six feet tall, thinly built with a long flowing beard, he'd pace back and forth during his sermons swinging his great long arms around for emphasis. He was a sermonizer, an exhorter, a man willing to point the finger at wrong doers, cut from the same cloth as Cotton Mather or Jonathan Edwards. Wood was a preacher of the gospel, a revivalist, an evangelist known to stop in his tracks and break into a rousing chorus of "Rescue the Perishing" or "I Have Anchored My Soul in the Haven of Rest". He'd stack up well against the best Baptist Tent Revivalist. Wood was a showman with a mission, a splash of Swamp Yankee color, a genuine celebrity, with just a hint of the knock-about deep sea sailor he once was, who'd regularly take his show on the road for all who'd listen.

The word got out about Elder Wood before long. Sought after by individual souls and congregations alike, he traveled all across the countryside praying and preaching his mighty Gospel. Soon couples were literally coming out of the woodwork, knocking on his door entreating the humble preacher to marry them. Newspaper accounts exist of folks waking the good pastor from his sleep to perform marriages. He was always being called off to eulogize someone's dearly departed relation. It was said that he preached at 100's of funerals across the region. His is truly the most common name in the marriage and death records of Southern Rhode Island. Elder Edwin Wood was a phenomenon at the time when the 1800's were becoming the 1900's and the world as it was sat poised to change forever.

Elder Wood preached his last sermon on New Years Day in 1905 at his beloved Exeter Advent Church. Two weeks later, the 75 year old one time child mill worker, former sailor, and simple preacher was dead from pneumonia. The whole region mourned his loss, although I suspect that few then realized that with Wood's death an era ended in Southern Rhode Island. You can bet they all sang "I Have Anchored My Soul in the Haven of Rest" as they lowered Edwin Wood into his final resting place at the Chestnut Hill Baptist Church Cemetery.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

The University of Rhode Island's training boat, the *Cap'n Bert*, serves as a working tribute to Bert Hillier, who helped staff the School of Fishery's two-year associate's degree program. The fisherman turned assistant professor lived at 1154 Old Baptist Road (below).



## The View From Swamptown

### Cap'n Bert

From time to time, I'll spend my lunch hour walking through "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic", contemplating things both long past and recently transpired. This week I happened to set a spell down at the Town Dock at the end of Main Street. As I looked across the harbor to the pier that so long ago housed steamboats ready to take rich folks off to Newport, I spied the familiar profile of the "Cap'n Bert", the University of Rhode Island's training boat for all things "fishing-related" and it dawned on me that just too damn many people have forgotten who the real Captain Bert was. That's just the way he would have said it too, "too damn many people". I know, because I knew Captain Bert. I guess I better set this wrong right. Captain Bert Hillier ought not to be forgotten.

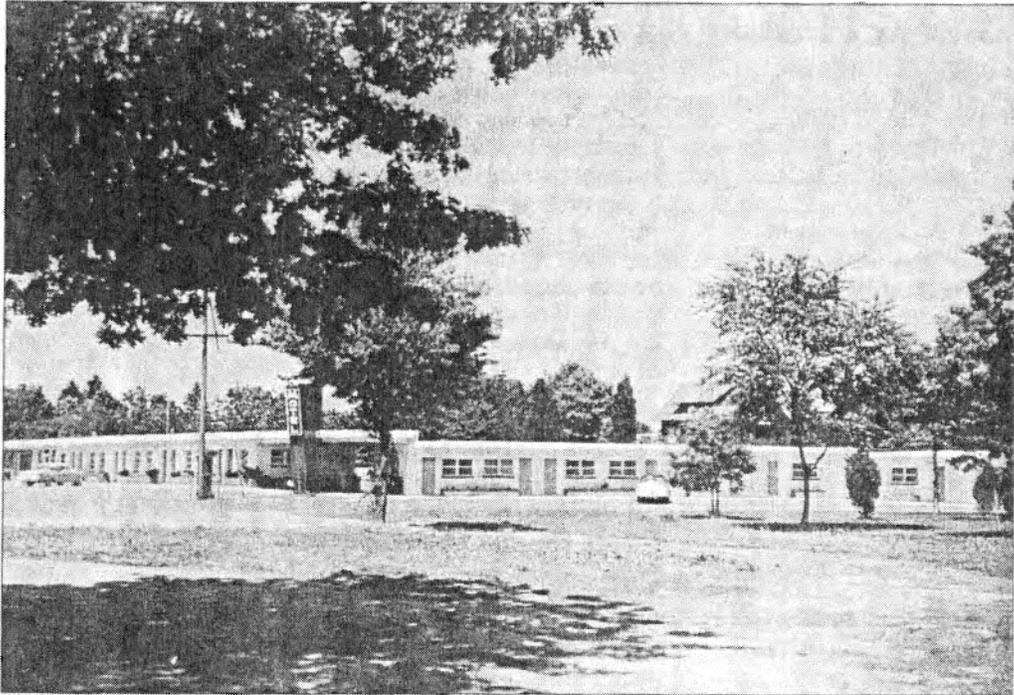
My first encounter with Mr. Hillier (I never actually called him Cap'n Bert, I'm smarter than that) occurred in 1975 at the dinner table of the Hillier home on Old Baptist Road. I was there because of his daughter, Mary. You see, Mary was my girl. No it was more than that, she was my first love and the depth of my feelings for her were of the degree that made a teenage boy brave enough to face up to a family dinner that was more of a test of my mettle than a bunch of people sharing a pot roast. Mr. Hillier was a man of substance, on the small side but possessing of an enormous presence. It was obvious from the start that this was the evening where he planned to size me up, a "make or break" event I was certain. After dinner we adjourned to the living room (one of those living rooms that no one ever used for fear of messing it up, you know the kind I mean), and at an, unbeknownst to me, appropriate interval, Mary, her sister, and her mother left the room. This left just the two of us, a nervous 17 year old and a hardboiled Newfie fisherman, to have a little chat. I won't bore you with the details of that discussion; suffice it to say that it involved me, my intentions towards Mary, and an authentic New Bedford whaling harpoon that hung on the wall behind my head. The silence after this pronouncement was broken only by the sounds of muffled sobbing from the kitchen where Mary and her Mom were supposedly "cleaning up after dinner". There was a palatable weight to the air as I attempted to mentally compose an appropriate response to our rather one-sided discussion. I finally gave up on any attempt at being clever and just went with what I felt. I told him "not to worry, I cared about his daughter nearly as much as he did, I'd never do her wrong". Looking back, I think it was the "nearly" that saved the moment, but whatever the case the tension dissolved like a St. John's fog bank on a sunny day and all was right again. Wisely I never went back on that promise, not that it was hard, Mary was just that special.

As time went on I learned a bit about Bert Hillier. First and foremost, he was a Newfie and proud of it. For the uninitiated, just let me just say that a Newfie is to Canada as a Swamp Yankee is to New England. He was born in 1922 a real life son of a sailor who made his living on the sea and never had time to get past sixth grade. He served in the Canadian Navy for six years during the big one, WWII, on a makeshift aircraft carrier hastily constructed on the hull of an old battleship. After mustering out, and moving south across the border into America, he began a long and successful career

as a commercial fisherman eventually owning two fishing vessels out of New Bedford. He was a master fisherman and the best net maker and mender in a city full of experts. His hands gnarled and calloused, told his life's story in one firm handshake. But by 1968, after nearly 25 years, Bert was more interested in his growing family and decided to secure for himself, a shore side job where he could be home each evening rather than mending nets on the George's Banks or some other similar location. He landed a job with Manpower at New Bedford Vocational Tech teaching anyone who wanted, including ex-convicts and the like, the art of commercial fishing. This move definitely put Bert Hillier on the radar screen, and, in 1969, when the University of Rhode Island's School of Fishery began to look for real live fishermen to staff their two year Associates Degree program, Albert Hillier was a natural. That's how, as Cap'n Bert loved to say, a man with a sixth grade education got to be an Assistant Professor at a big state university, and that's how the Hilliers ended up on Old Baptist Road.

Mr. Hillier's job at URI was to teach want-to-be fishermen and women what it took to do the job. His classroom was the sea and he passed on his knowledge of net construction, design, and repair and showed his students how to use the associated gear without killing themselves. He, along with key associates like Jeff Mott and Dick Wing among others, must have been doing something right because the program was a great success and would be fisherfolk and active fisherman alike flocked to it in droves. Why some even motored down in their boats and lived in Wickford harbor while taking Bert's classes. Along the way, Bert Hillier managed to obtain numerous patents for net designs, and with the able assistance of his two sons, make and mend nets in his big oversized garage, and run a virtual cottage industry making display knot boards for his friends and neighbors. The Captain was known as a man with a great sense of humor and a lover of practical jokes. When Bert Hillier laughed you knew it, he did it in a big way just like he did everything else. The man loved life and lived it to the hilt. He retired, a satisfied man, in June of 1985 vowing to keep living life at a newfie's clip. Sadly, he died five months later of a heart attack. He was only 63.

Understandably all that knew him were devastated by the loss. When I read of it in the paper (Mary and I had parted ways, broken apart by time, as most first loves are) I couldn't get the image of him furiously mending nets in his garage with his youngest son, a fire going in the wood stove and a recounting of the day's latest practical joke on his lips, off my mind. I eventually settled on the idea that that was just how I ought to remember him, it was fitting. Finally, the University of Rhode Island too, arrived at a fitting tribute to Bert Hillier when, in 1987 they received a stern trawler from the U.S. Government that had been used by drug smugglers in the Florida Keys to use for their Fisheries program. It was a virtual no brainer to decide what to call it. At a christening at the School of Oceanography Pier, with the Hillier family present, the Cap'n Bert became a part of the school's fleet and a special man was remembered in a way that would suit him just fine; although I expect he'd complain about the fact that "there were too many damned people there".



Bob Bean's motel is shown in the 1950s, prior to construction of the restaurant. The Beans lived in the house that can be seen behind the motel.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Bob Bean's former motel on Boston Neck Road has been renovated. Gone is Jo Bean's salon, but the restaurant remains.

## The View From Swamptown

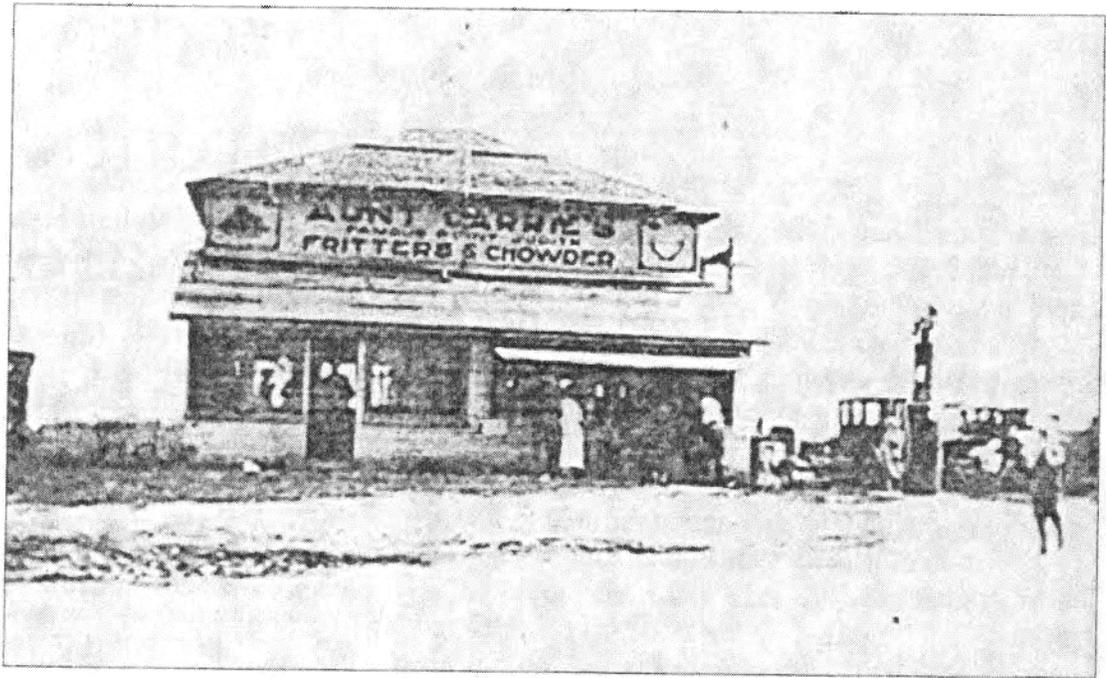
### Bob Bean and N.K.'s First Motel

Bob Bean should have been a politician. Walking through the dining room of his restaurant, shaking hands, slapping backs, telling jokes and kissing babies, he was in his element. The Laurel, Mississippi born "good-ole-boy" always seemed to fit in somehow here in the land of the "Swamp Yankee". Born in 1909, he enlisted in the Seabee's as soon as he was able, became a civil engineer, fought in the big one – WWII, did his twenty, and mustered out here in North Kingstown in 1946. He had married a Providence girl, Josephine Bassi, and they decided to stay here in our fair town after his military career was over. Still a young man, Bob needed another career. After a while, he decided to build himself a brand spanking new motor hotel, or "motel" as they were eventually called. The first one in the area as a matter of fact.

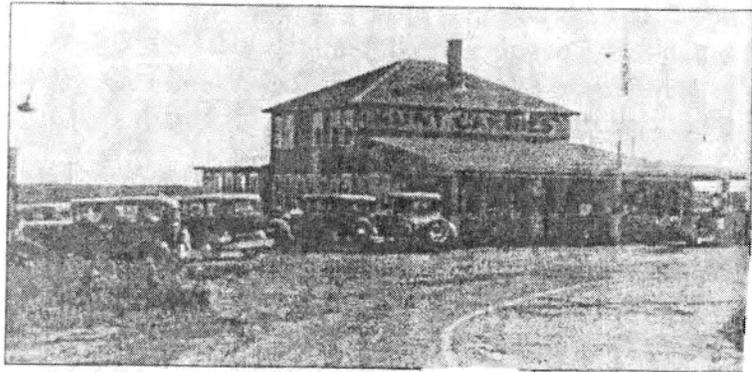
It was the early 1950's, and America's love affair with both the automobile and family travel had spawned a whole new industry. Bob Bean planned on getting in on the ground floor. You see, in the 1940's if a family wanted to get into their car and go off and see America, lodgings were spartan and few and far between. It didn't take too many nights in a campground to take the starch out of a vacation, and beyond campgrounds and a smattering of cabin based motor courts, their just weren't an awful lot of reasonably priced choices for a middle class family on the move. That's where Bob and countless other entrepreneurs like him came in. Virtually over night the motel industry was born.

Bob Bean's Motel opened up in the spring of 1953. As you can see by the accompanying photo, it was quite a nice place; built on the front of the big Boston Neck Road lot that the Bean's had acquired in 1946. Bob and Jo Bean's home can be seen in the background of the photograph. In 1962, Bob added a restaurant, with an attached hair salon for Jo to run, and his kingdom was complete. Bob held "court" each summer night in the restaurant, "pressing flesh" and jawing with locals and tourists alike. I expect, in this the land of the swamp yankee, that the way Bob fit in so well was to not be concerned about standing out. He made no effort to conceal his distinct Mississippi drawl and, rather than drive into Wickford in a common sedan, he chose a pink golf cart with a fringed roof as his regular mode of transportation. Still to this day, mention Bob Bean to a long time local, and they're bound to break out into a grin as the mental image of a stout Mississippi good ole boy riding in a pink golf cart comes immediately to mind.

Bob was a part of the scene here in North Kingstown right up until his passing in 1978. Jo Bean's hair salon stayed open for another decade, but his pride and joy - the motel, slowly fell into disrepair. Until recently that is; now with a new owner, the motel is being reborn. Bob, although he'd hardly recognize the old place, would, most certainly, heartily approve.



Above is Aunt Carrie's as it appeared in the 1930s, with its sign reading "Aunt Carrie's famous Point Judith fritters and chowder." By the 1940s, as shown at right, the restaurant's reputation may have been well known enough that only the simple "Aunt Carrie's" sign was needed.



Carrie Campbell Cooper, born and raised in Swamptown, is pictured here in 1893 at age 18.

## The View From Swamptown

### Aunt Carrie

I guess there's probably not a Rhode Islander among us who is not familiar with the name "Aunt Carrie". There are many who claim without Aunt Carrie there'd be no clamcakes. I ask you, "would southern Rhode Island still be southern Rhode Island if the clamcake had not been conceived? Is it not true that this lowly fritter has become something of an institution around these parts? Why is it that no one seems to realize that Carrie "Campbell" Cooper, Swamptown's most famous lass (yes she was born and raised in Swamptown) belongs in the Rhode Island Hall of Fame?" She not only invented the clamcake and operated one of Narragansett's most successful summer eateries, she also ran a family and raised six children. With all this in mind, I put a challenge out to Senator Sheehan, the man who represents the district within which Aunt Carrie had the most impact. Let's get this humble Swamptown girl into the Hall of Fame where she belongs!!

Carrie Campbell was born in Swamptown in a farmhouse near the Kettle Hole Pond in June of 1875 to the same James and Susanna (Northup) Campbell that also raised future postmaster Ralph Campbell. She was educated at the Swamptown district schoolhouse and at the age of 19 was married to Owen Gardiner Jr. Sadly, in a time when this was an unusual event, Carrie's marriage to Owen failed and they were divorced. Carrie Campbell was suddenly a young single mother with an uncertain future. Her luck changed though, as in the first decade of the 1900's, she met, fell in love with, and married an up and coming Connecticut lumber dealer with the impressive moniker of Ulysses Simpson Grant Cooper. After her marriage to Ulysses, Carrie and her daughter Beatrice left RI for their new home in Norwich Ct.; not for long though.

The Cooper family returned to the beaches of Narragansett each summer for an extended vacation of fishing swimming and camping. The time was around 1919 and Ulysses always complained to Carrie and anyone who might listen about the fact that there was no place in his beloved Point Judith to get a cold drink and a bite to eat. This got Carrie to thinking and before long she and her children were selling cold lemonade and corn fritters to the delight of the other fisherman and vacationing families out of a tent on their campsite. Carrie's children, like children do, enjoyed digging clams at low tide and one day as she was making her corn fritters, perhaps she ran out of corn, who knows, she decided to substitute their quahogs for the corn in her recipe and the rest, as they say, is history. Ulysses, a man with a business sense, knew Carrie was on to something and the next season, the summer of 1920, he had a stand built where the restaurant now sits. Each season Carries clamcakes, chowder and lemonade got a little bit more popular and "Aunt Carries" restaurant got a little bigger. Eventually the businesses success motivated Ulysses to give up the lumber trade and he and Carrie moved their family back to RI, settling on Narragansett Ave in Narragansett.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**Aunt Carrie's on Point Judith Road in Narragansett is still serving clam cakes and other assorted goodies to hungry beachgoers, tourists and fishermen alike.**

Four generations later, Aunt Carries restaurant is still family run and still an institution. Ulysses, who died in 1953 and Aunt Carrie, who passed on in 1964 are now resting side-by-side in Elm Grove Cemetery, just a mile or so from where Carrie Campbell was born. Her memory though, lives on in the guise of a wonderful restaurant and the satisfaction we all feel when we bite into a steamy warm clamcake, wherever we purchase it. Now if that feeling, owned by every Rhode Islander since Carrie and Ulysses, and every visitor to our little state since 1920, doesn't warrant inclusion in the Hall of Fame, well then this Swamp Yankee doesn't know what does.

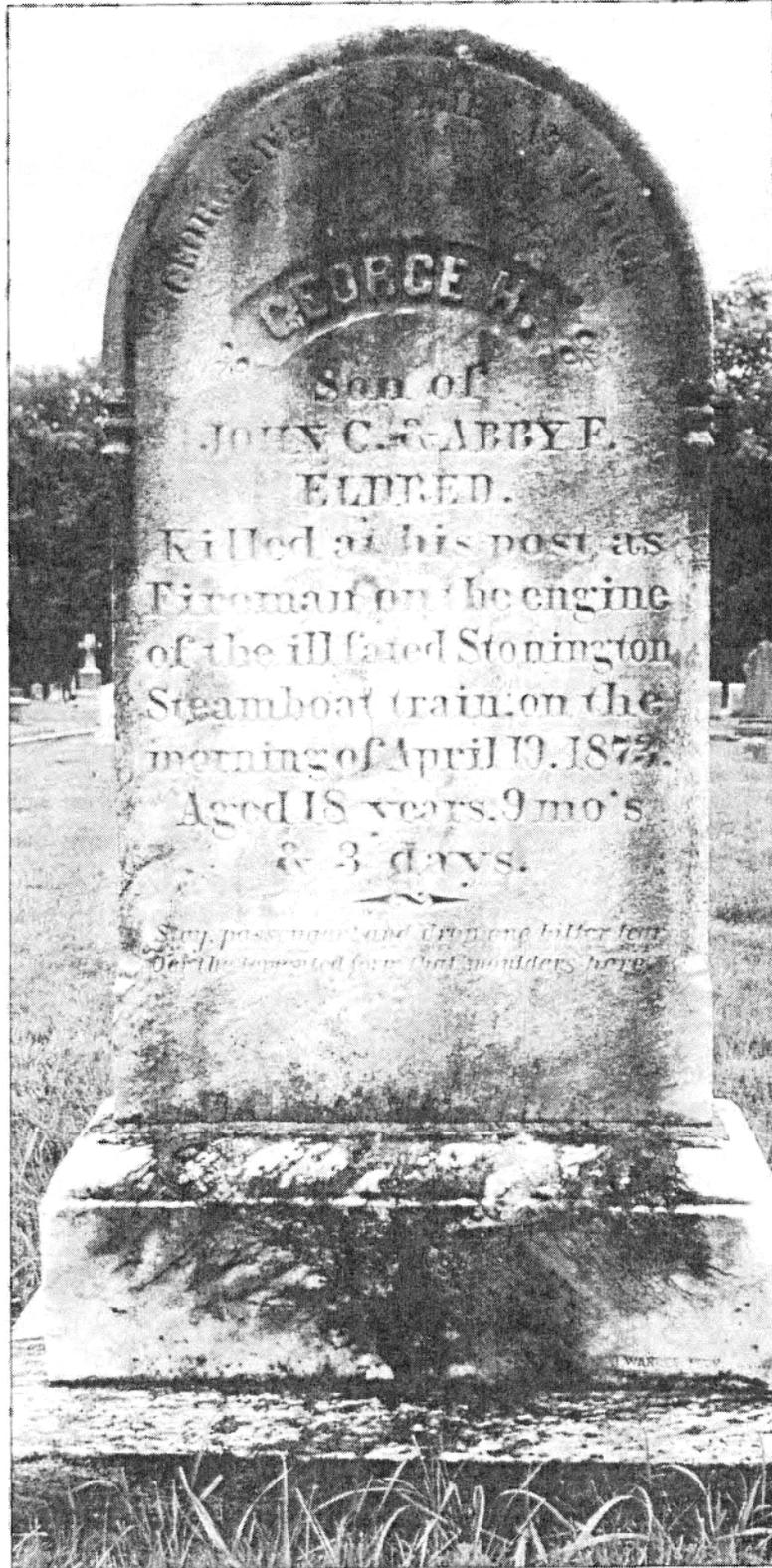


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The gravestone of George H. Eldred, who was 18 when he died in a train accident, tells the story of his death and the grief of his parents: "George we miss thee at home."

## The View From Swamptown

### George Eldred and the Wreck at the Richmond Switch

Out in Elm Grove Cemetery, in lot 18, the family plot of the John Eldred clan, stands a round-topped marble stone commemorating the short life and sudden death of 18-year-old George Eldred of Wickford. The wording on the stone gives a hint of the level of grief and loss felt by his family. Across the top is written, "George we miss thee at home" and along the bottom, under the epitaph that describes his death, is the following verse. "Stop passenger and drop one bitter tear o'er the lamented form that moulders here". Between these two solemn verses we can find that young George was the "Fireman on the engine of the ill-fated Stonington Steamboat Train". Yes, George was the young man who stoked the fires of that engine as it sped towards its date with destiny, towards Wood River Junction, towards the Wreck at the Richmond Switch.

The Stonington Steamboat Train was a regular service that ran between Stonington Ct, Wickford Junction, Providence, and Boston. It brought passengers from New York who had made the trip from the city to Stonington via a steamboat on to their ultimate destinations. Most of these folks were either, immigrants fresh off the boats in New York City headed for factory or textile mill jobs in Providence or Boston, or travelers destined for Newport via the Newport to Wickford Rail and Steamship Line that they would board at Wickford Junction. But on April 19, 1873, none of those folks would reach their connections on time, as a matter of fact; some would never get there at all. You see, unbeknownst to all involved, something was about to go terribly wrong at the dam which held back the Meadow Brook in Richmond supplying power for George Ennis' little Gristmill. Way to much rain was about to cause that dam to give way.

All this was occurring about the same time that engineer William Guile of Providence and fireman George Eldred of Wickford were climbing out of their stylish engine, the N.F. Dixon, at Stonington Junction. The boat train had stopped there because its late departure from the steamboat landing caused it to be at the main line around the same time that the passenger and mail train "The Shore Line Express" was due through. Boat Train conductor Orrin Gardiner and express train conductor Thomas Sprague were hot at it in an argument over which train ought to proceed first. Ultimately Gardiner won the shouting match, definitely to the detriment of those aboard the Boat Train, but as fate would have it, the disaster would have been all the greater had the fully loaded "Shore Line Express" gone ahead.

At 3:15 AM, the shouting match was over and a satisfied Gardiner climbed aboard and instructed Guile and Eldred to proceed full steam ahead. Just as the train crossed the Pawcatuck River and entered RI Ennis' Millpond dam let go and a 10 foot high wall of water proceeded to tear down the normally shallow channel of the Meadow Brook and slam into the tracks on the railroad bridge just 100 yards down stream. The bridge gave way just as the boat train arrived on the scene.

One moment the train was chugging along at upwards of 40 mph and the next she was careening across the 40 ft. chasm caused by the dam washout. The locomotive's headlight pointed high into the night sky as she jumped the river and crashed into the bank on the other side, a piece of track from the failed bridge driven clean through her boiler from end to end. The coal tender jackknifed and came to rest atop the engine and then it all burst into flames. Following the engine and tender, three flat cars loaded with freight and three of the four coach cars fell into the gulf. Only one coach car, the smoking car, and the caboose stayed out of the stream. Luckily for most of the passengers, the coach cars were driven atop the now sunken freight flat cars and those that survived the impact were spared immediate death by drowning. But now there were the fires to contend with, and as was most prominent upon the racing mind of Conductor Orrin Gardiner, who had survived by virtue of his need for a good cigar that had sent him to the smoking car, The Shore Line Express would be here in minutes; She had to be alerted no matter what the cost, for if she slammed into the wreck, the devastation would be unthinkable. Gardiner caught the attention of brakeman Walter Monroe and gave him a red lantern "Take the red light. Carry it down the tracks as quickly as possible. The Express must be stopped!" Monroe got around the curve in the nick of time; the squealing of metal on metal indicated to him that his message was seen; the Shore Line Express was stopped. Conductor Sprague of the Express climbed aboard his engine and ordered the cars to be dropped. He then had the Express's engine pulled up to the wreck and they towed all the remaining cars out of the inferno just as the fire began to blister up their varnish. There was no escape for those trapped in the wreckage and the screams heard on that night by the crash survivors and the Express passengers would haunt them until the end of their days.

Upon the morning light, the extent of the devastation could be seen. The cars burned until there was nothing left but ashes and glowing metal. The trapped passengers were burned beyond recognition. Women were only identified by the melted remains of their hoop skirts. Engineer Guile was found "charred beyond recognition, his hand still outstretched towards the throttle" he was identified conclusively by the partially melted pocket watch he had recently received from the railroad for his long years of service. And Wickford's own George Eldred, an 18-year-old with his whole life ahead of him, was found "burned to a crisp with the engine's brake lever clutched in his blackened hands". This fact did little to assuage the grief felt by John and Abby Eldred as they placed their son in the grave to "moulder" for all eternity.

## The View From Swamptown

In Memoriam – David S. Cranston

Out of respect for the memory of David S. Cranston, the good folks at Swamptown Enterprises have closed up shop and will spend their time reminiscing about the life of this extraordinary man. This circa 1950 photograph shows young David leaning on a column in front of the Cranston home on West Main Street. Eyes cast to the ground, he is most certainly contemplating the types of things that young boys ruminate upon, the least of which is, obviously, posing for a family Christmas photo. With him are his two sisters, Lenore and Gail, his brother Cy, and his parents, George and Marjorie. God bless you, Uncle Dave.



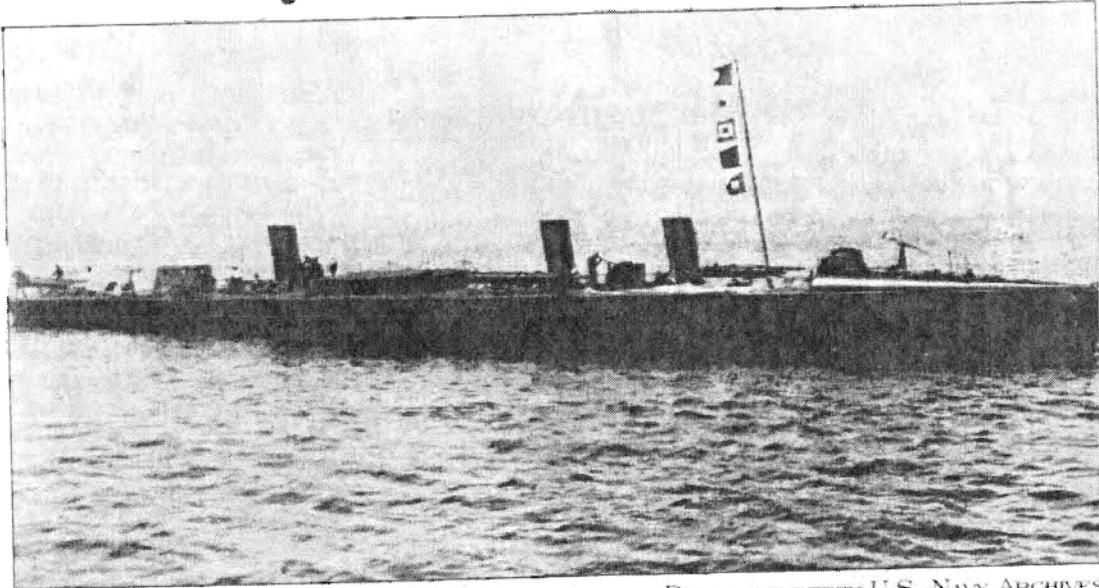


PHOTO COURTESY U.S. NAVY ARCHIVES

Teddy Roosevelt, then undersecretary of the Navy, came from Newport Naval Base aboard the experimental torpedo boat *Porter* in spring of 1897 to visit friends in Wickford and, possibly, shop for items for the missus at "Quaker Billy's" in Shermantown. The *Porter* docked at the end of Main Street in Wickford, pictured below today.



## The View From Swamptown

### Teddy Roosevelt and the USN Torpedo Boat Porter

Regular readers of this column are most certainly aware that Rough Rider and United States President Theodore Roosevelt was a frequent visitor to our fair town back around the turn of the last century. He'd stop by often in Saunderstown each summer to visit with his good friends the Owen Wisters (author of the first true Western novel "The Virginians") and the LaFarge's; Oliver and Christopher – Oliver being America's foremost expert on the American Indian. It's also known to be true that Mr. And Mrs. Teddy Roosevelt accompanied by Mr. And Mrs. Owen Wister were occasional visitors to the Shermantown shop of the famed hand-weaver Weaver Billy Rose where they would purchase "Quaker Billy's" bed coverlets; one of which eventually found its way to the Smithsonian after a long stay in the White House.

So, I expect, the arrival of that flamboyant figure at the dock at the end of Main St. in Wickford was not all that unusual one early Spring day in 1897. Although the sight of the then Under Secretary of the United States Navy may not have caused too much of a stir, I'm certain his mode of transportation most surely did. You see, Roosevelt was in nearby Bristol RI at Herreshoff Shipyard inspecting the Navy's newest edition "The Torpedo Boat Porter". In typical "Teddy" fashion he most certainly required a spin out in the familiar Narragansett Bay of the boat's young commander Lt. John Charles Fremont. Perhaps he never even mentioned Wickford Harbor to Fremont until they were well underway. But heck what was a young Lieutenant to do, this extraordinary chap was the Under-Secretary of the Navy, if he said let's run over to Wickford, what could one do but pilot the 175 ft long torpedo boat where you were requested to. You've got to wonder though, what Lt. Fremont thought as Teddy jumped off the "Porter" and climbed aboard the waiting carriage of his good friend Owen Wister. Obviously I wasn't there, but I'm willing to bet you that Roosevelt looked over at Fremont, and with that million-dollar smile planted firmly on his face, pronounced the whole affair "Bully good fun!".

## The View From Swamptown

### Susan Parr – Dark Corners’ Most Notorious Citizen

The Dark Corners section of our fair town was certainly the most remote and rural part of North Kingstown. Situated in its extreme southwest corner near the borders of Exeter and South Kingstown, in an area for centuries more associated with the Narragansett people than their “English” usurpers, Dark Corners of the early 1800’s made Swamptown feel like the big city. A few years ago, we took a look at a Dark Corners success story, that of Christiana Babcock, born in 1819 of a African-American Narragansett Indian mixed heritage, who as Madame Carteaux became famous as the owner of a chain of very successful beauty parlors in Boston and Providence. She married artist Edward Bannister and together they championed a number of important causes in the era before and after the Civil War. This week we are going to delve into the life of another Dark Corners girl, Susan Parr. Now Susan Parr, in her time, was probably just as well known as Christiana Babcock. But to say she was famous would be misleading, the words infamous or notorious would be more appropriate, for little Susan Parr of Dark Corners grew up to be Susan Parr Gardner, the most prominent Madam in the seamy world that was the Port Of Providence in the first half of the 1800’s.

Now, details on the life of Susan Parr are sketchy at best, as folks in her line of work did their best to tread lightly across the historic record, but here’s what we do know. Susan was born in 1795, the oldest child of Thomas and Mary Parr. It appears that the Parr family originally came from just across the border in South Kingstown but were living in Dark Corners at the time of Susan’s birth in 1795 and that of their other child Lyman in 1804. This was a time when the nearby seaport of Wickford was among the busiest and most prominent on the Narragansett Bay. Numerous sailing vessels with countless numbers of crewmen made port in Wickford on a regular basis loading and unloading their holds full of freight of all descriptions. Now there’s one thing you can count on in this type of situation during that timeframe. Where there’s a great concentration of merchant seamen, there’s also going to be an equally large concentration of taverns and “ladies of the evening”. You see, “the world’s oldest profession” and “men of the sea” have been found hand-in-hand (in more ways than one) since time began. It was into this world of sailors, ale, rum, women of ill repute, and the Wickford waterfront that Susan Parr most probably entered her chosen line of work during the first decade of the 1800’s.

By the 1820’s circumstances had changed and marine traffic at the Port of Wickford was on the decline. Taverns began to close and girls like Susan Parr began to move on to busier ports. Ports like Providence for instance; the place where, according to the 1820 census, Susan Parr relocated to after leaving little Wickford.

From 1820 to 1830, no record of Susan Parr can be found, although subsequent events indicate that she was still practicing her chosen line of work. You see in 1830, out of the blue, Susan Parr, now operating as Susan Parr Gardner, although no record of any marriage is extant, purchased a fine home on Benefit Street from Samuel Staples. At this point in time Susan Parr was no longer a working girl; she was a madam.

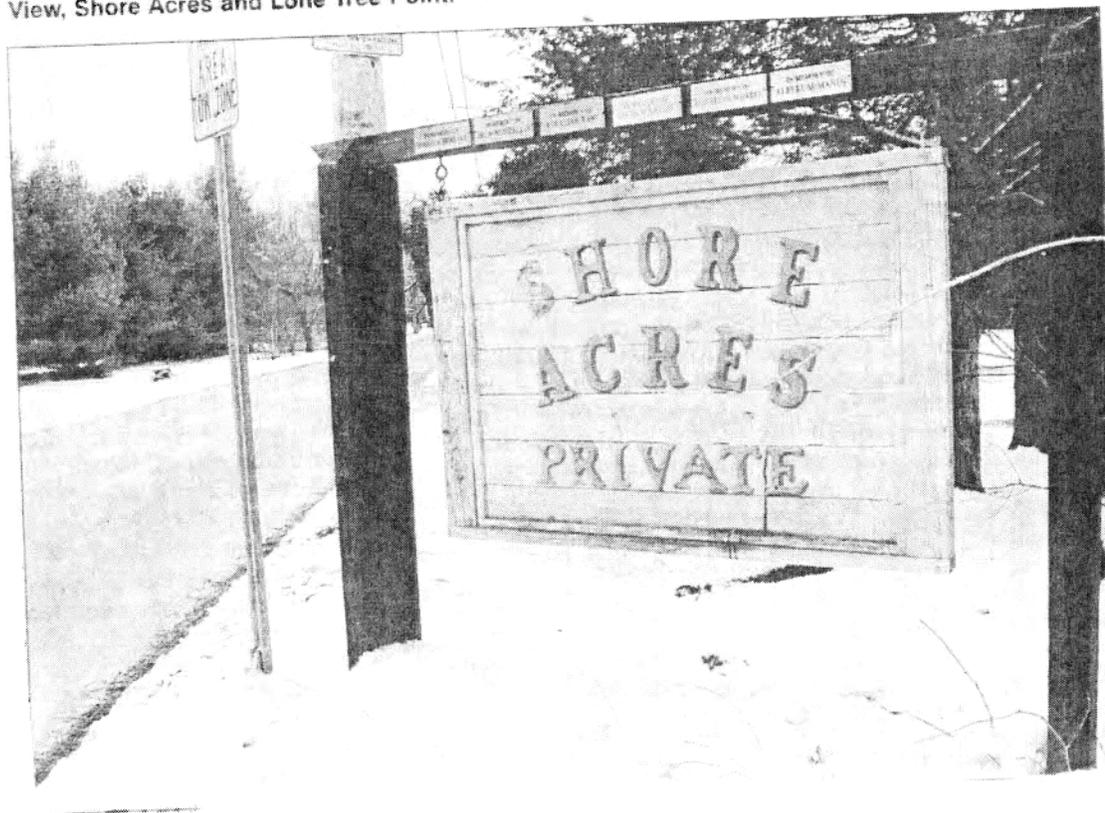
As a landowner and businessperson of sorts, Susan Parr had a more difficult time staying out of the public eye and off the permanent record during her time in Providence. She shows up in the Providence municipal courts from time to time on the very types of charges you would expect from a person in her line of business. One court case that particularly showcases the type of woman she had become was held in July of 1830 and dealt with the case of a young girl named Harriet Washburn who had been picked up as a homeless North Carolina runaway in Boston by Parr and then held in indentured servitude in place of payment for "services rendered" to the young woman. All little Harriet wanted to do was get home, but it took an order of the Providence City Council to get her released from her bondage to Susan Parr.

Easily the biggest spat of publicity, and perhaps the cause of the demise of her business soon after, came from the very high profile trial of the murder of prominent businessman Amasa Sprague in 1844. It seems that two of Susan's "girls", Susan Field and Lydia Going were star witnesses for the State in their railroading of three Irish immigrant brothers who were charged and convicted of the killing. In fact, one of the brothers, John Gordon was hanged for the crime in 1845. As you can imagine, something like this must have had an effect upon business, and soon after the hanging, and the subsequent funeral procession, which the Gordon family made certain passed by Parr's brothel, Susan Parr sold her Benefit Street home and place of business to Elisha and Harriet Baker. Less than one year later, the now 51-year-old girl from the village of Dark Corners in the Town of North Kingstown was dead and headed towards her own judgment day.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

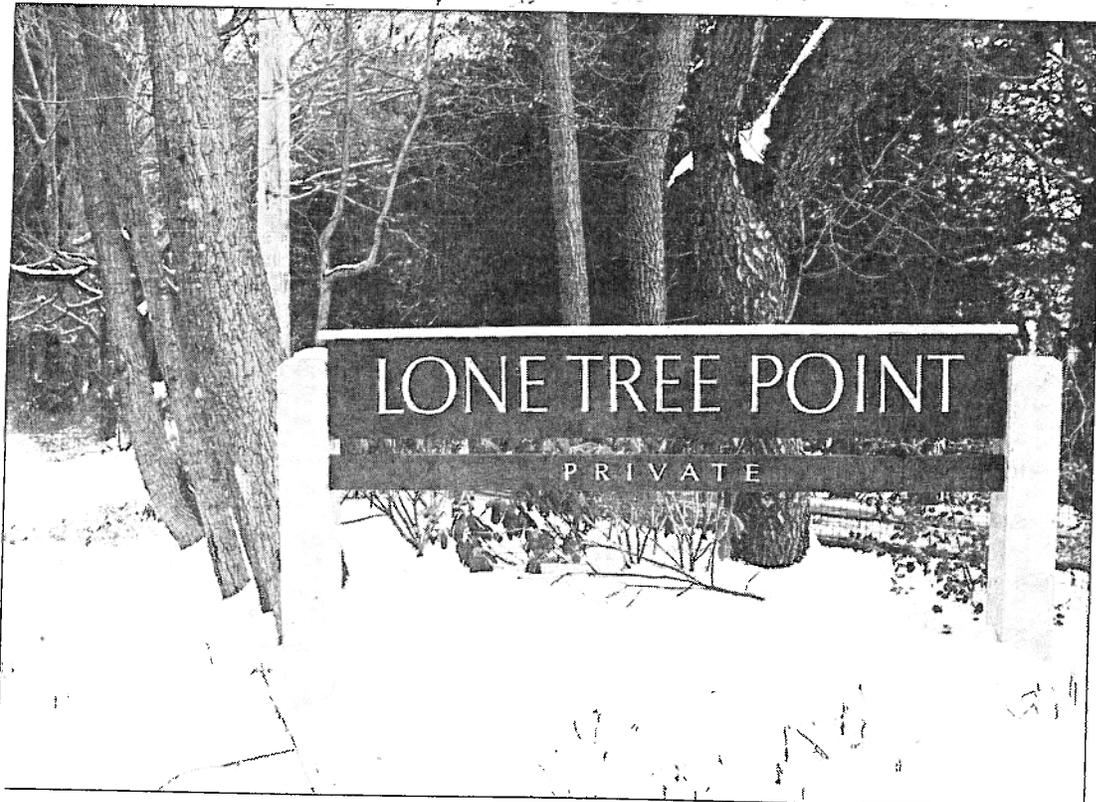
Among the neighborhoods Herbert C. Calef developed from farmland in the 1920s were Mount View, Shore Acres and Lone Tree Point.



## Herbert C. Calef

For better or for worse, real estate developers have the ability to change the character of a community. In recent times, the developments of the inter-related Lischio/Schick/Moran families have changed the face of the western half of our fair town in a major fashion. Our eastern shoreline however, was forever altered more than 70 years ago by a Providence born real estate mogul and, perhaps, the state's first modern real estate developer, Herbert C. Calef.

Herbert Calef was born in December of 1871 to a family of modest means. He spent the better part of his early life in Johnston and then as an adult moved with his family to Providence. He got into the real estate game in the same way that most folks do as a sales agent. By the middle of the roaring twenties, Calef, though, realized, well before the rest of the industry in RI, that change was in the wind. The time was right for a savvy real estate man to make a fortune in America's newest indulgence, the summer home. Calef scouted out the lay of the land and decided that North Kingstown's beautiful shoreline was ripe for the taking due to another major change in the face of America, the dying throws of the family farm. Calef bought up some of the area's bigger shoreline farm properties and away he went. When the smoke cleared some 15 years later, Calef had platted out and developed Shore Acres, Mount View, North Kingston Beach, the Salisbury Avenue Hamilton plat, the Earl Drive Lone Tree Point plat, the Plum Point Road Plat and Barber Heights. Where once eight farms existed, there now stood nearly 1000 homes. All this in only 15 years. Herbert C. Calef went from being a small time player in the real estate world to one of its kings. Along the way he also had time to serve as the President of the Providence Real Estate Exchange, the Turks Head Club, The Rhode Island Historical Society, and the RI SPCA. He died in 1947 and although he lived his life out and was buried in the city of Providence, it was North Kingstown which he, for better or for worse, left his indelible mark upon.



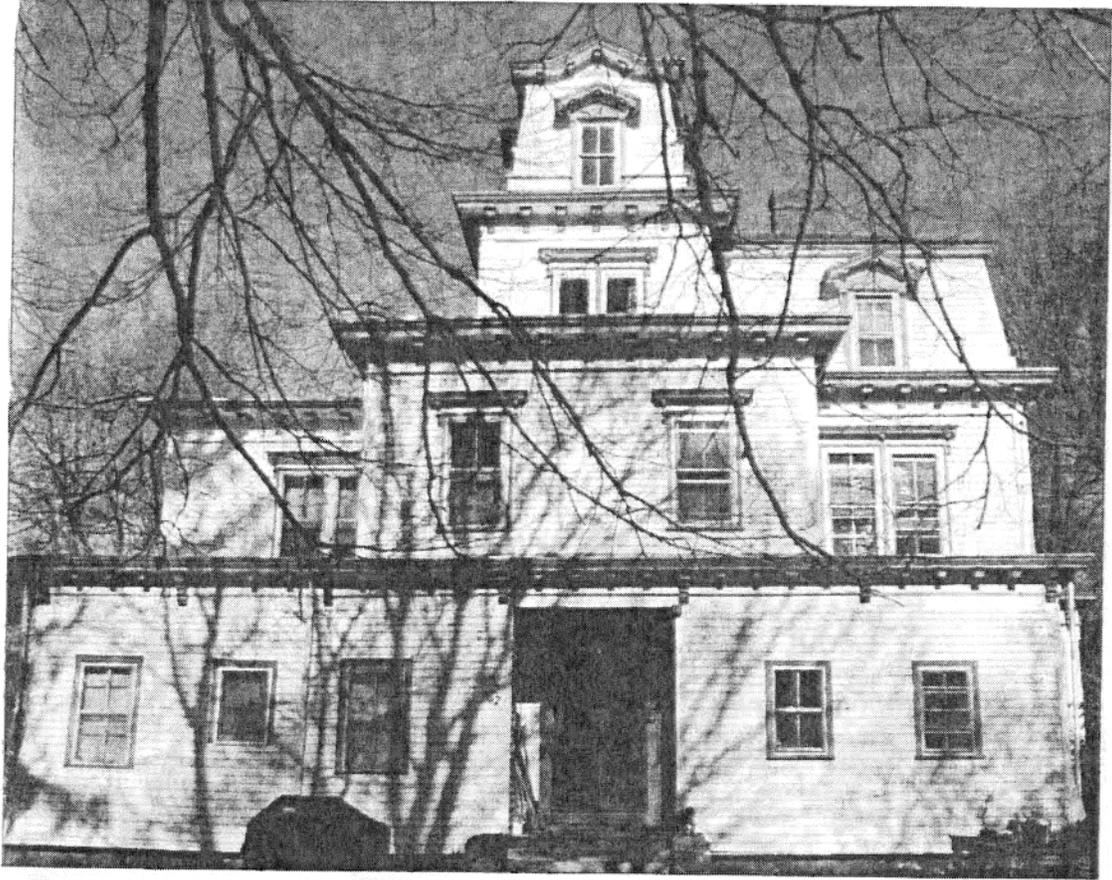


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

David Sherman Baker, who seemingly won the 1893 election for governor, summered in this estate, now an apartment house on Prospect Avenue in North Kir

## David Sherman Baker and the Stolen Election

Life, as anyone who has lived for a time can tell you, is fraught with irony. And sometimes, so it would appear, is death. A case in point is that of our fair town's own David Sherman Baker; a man who in 1893 was elected Governor of the great state of Rhode Island.

I know what's going through your mind right now. "What's that you say. I thought all you history types have always told us that William Gregory is the only North Kingstown boy ever elected Governor of Rhode Island." Well, actually the truth is that William Gregory is the only North Kingstown lad to ever serve as Governor. He was indeed, the second citizen of our fair town to be elected Governor, David Baker being the first. We'll come back to old Bill Gregory later in this tale, lets now take a Swamptown gander at the story behind Rhode Island's only purloined election; the vote of 1893.

1893, was really a turning point of sorts in the political history of little Rhody. It was the end of a time when there was some semblance of balance between the two political parties. You see, it was the beginning of the age of Perry and Aldrich; a time when these two power brokers, these two capitalists extraordinaire, began their assault upon the nation. And it all began here in Rhode Island and David Sherman Baker was the first great casualty of this conflict; an honest man up against a power he did not fully comprehend. But believe you me, Marsden Perry and Nelson Aldrich understood it all too well. Marsden Perry, the self-styled "Boss of Rhode Island" and his business partner U.S. Senator Nelson Aldrich, whom the Washington journalists dubbed "The General Manager of the United States" by then, were on their way to achieving their goal of total control. A great part of their plan required that they have complete dominion over their power base of southern New England, and this small town lawyer and Superintendent of the local school department was standing in their way.

David Baker was North Kingstown born and raised. His boyhood home was on the corner of Pleasant and Friend Streets in Wickford. But by the time he had worked his way through the public school system of North Kingstown and then the well-known East Greenwich Academy followed by a degree from Brown University in 1875, he was known state wide as a fair, honest, and intelligent man of principle. He was also both a success as a lawyer and in the game of love. His marriage to Anita Candler, daughter of Judge and former U.S. Representative John Candler of Brookline, Mass along with his personal success as a lawyer brought him his own base of wealth and power; although nothing along the scale of Perry and Aldrich. So in 1893, this man, who had been, as mentioned, the Superintendent of Schools for North Kingstown, a state Representative from here and a state senator from Providence (by then Baker had a home in that city while maintaining his wonderful summer estate on what is now Prospect Avenue in North Kingstown) was the Democratic candidate for Governor running against Perry's handpicked man the seated Governor D. Russell Brown. The campaign and election was rife with the typical political posturing and subterfuge for the time, and, I'm certain, Perry and Aldrich felt, they had it, both literally and figuratively, "in the bag". But, when

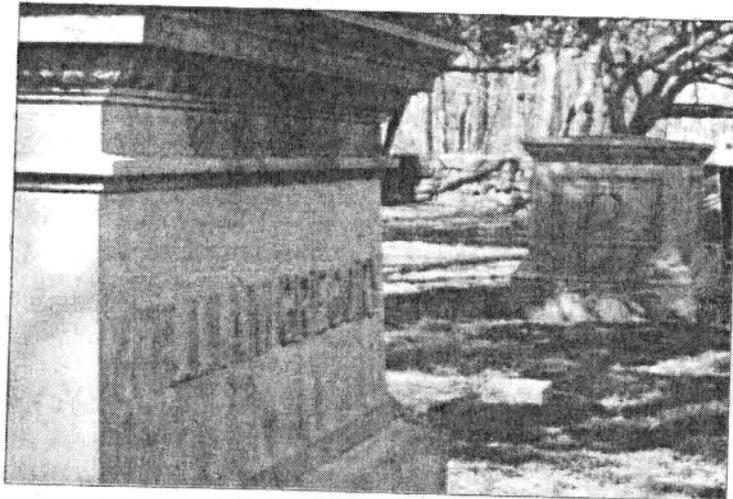


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**David Sherman Baker, the man who would have been North Kingstown's first governor, was laid to rest at Elm Grove Cemetery next to William Gregory, the only man from town to serve as governor.**

the dust cleared, things had not worked out the way “The Boss of RI” and “The General Manager of the US” had figured. The final tally was this: Prohibition candidate Henry Metcalf – 3265, Republican candidate D. Russell Brown – 21,830, and Democratic candidate David Sherman Baker – 22,015. Seemingly, Baker had done the impossible, the unthinkable – he had beaten two of the world’s most powerful movers and shakers at their own game, he was to be the Governor of Rhode Island!! Or was he?

Not so fast, said the Republicans. The constitution of the State of Rhode Island requires a majority to win, not a plurality; so since Baker did not capture more than 50% of the vote, the election would be turned over to the Grand Assembly (combined house and senate) where these learned gentlemen were supposed to examine the ballots and interpret the will of the people. This too became problematic as the Grand Assembly was deadlocked with exactly 54 votes for each party. This being an age before the Lt. Governor was allowed to vote as a tiebreaker, things remained in a state of flux. The behind the scenes machinations and political subterfuge continued until it was known to both parties that a yet unnamed Republican had done the unthinkable and was ready to switch his vote in favor of Baker. This would surely end the stalemate and he would become Rhode Island’s Governor for sure!! Or would he?

Perry and Aldrich were not about to give up so easy. Before another vote could be taken, they had their man Governor Brown step in, backed up by the full power of his office (and the state militia) and invoke the parliamentary power of proroguerie whereby he could order the deliberations of the Grand Assembly discontinued and made null and void without having to dissolve the political body, as they had deliberated for four days and not come up with a decision. This he said, allowed him to remain the Governor until the next election. Certainly Perry and Aldrich were pleased.

The Democrats though, were up in arms. They would take this to the Rhode Island Supreme Court, surely they would make this right and Baker will rightfully become the next Governor of Rhode Island!! Or would he?

Sadly, the democrats did not understand that the deal was done, the die was cast; the RI Supreme Court in 1893 was already in Perry and Aldrich’s pocket. They declared Brown’s action proper and in line with our ancient constitution based upon English law. D. Russell Brown would remain Governor and Baker and the democrats were sent home with their tails between their legs. “Better luck next year fellows. No hard feelings”

Next year Baker and the Democrats tried again. But David Baker’s moment had passed, it had been wrenched out of his grasp never to return. The Republican machine which would dominate Rhode Island politics for decades to come was firmly entrenched. Perry and Aldrich had gotten their way. Baker was soundly defeated in 1894.

Well, where’s the irony in all this you ask. You see, in 1900 Perry and Aldrich handpicked a new governor for our state. A more palatable candidate than Brown, William Gregory was a man of the people. To Perry, Gregory was the perfect choice – he seems like one of them, but he’s really one of us. He won handedly and became North

Kingstown's first seated Governor, taking the title that had rightfully belonged to Baker. Gregory did not live long after that, he died in office of complications from kidney disease and was buried with pomp and circumstance in Elm Grove Cemetery. Five years later David Baker, a man who, soured by the experience, never returned to public service, passed away from complications of his ongoing struggle with diabetes. He was laid to rest right next to, you guessed it, William Gregory. And they have laid there side by side for the last 100 years. An only in Rhode Island tale if there ever was one, eh!

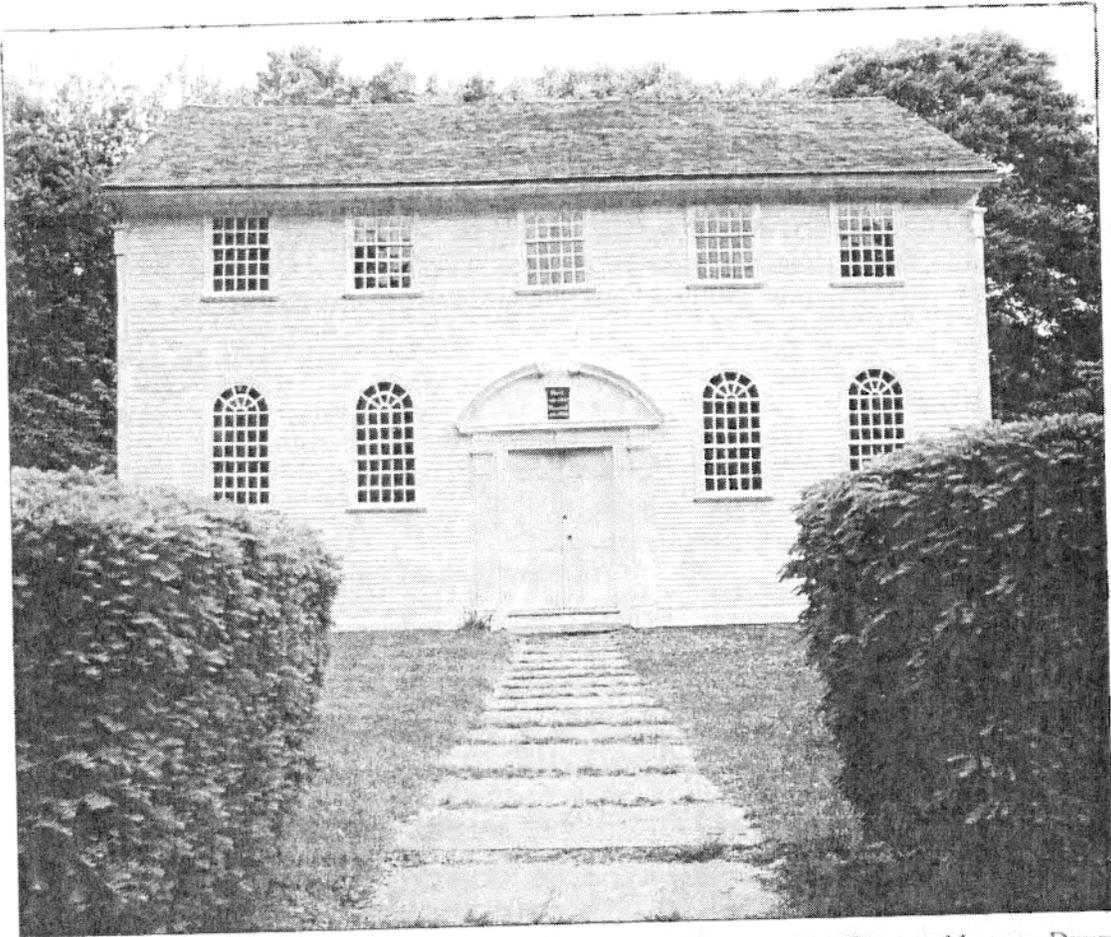
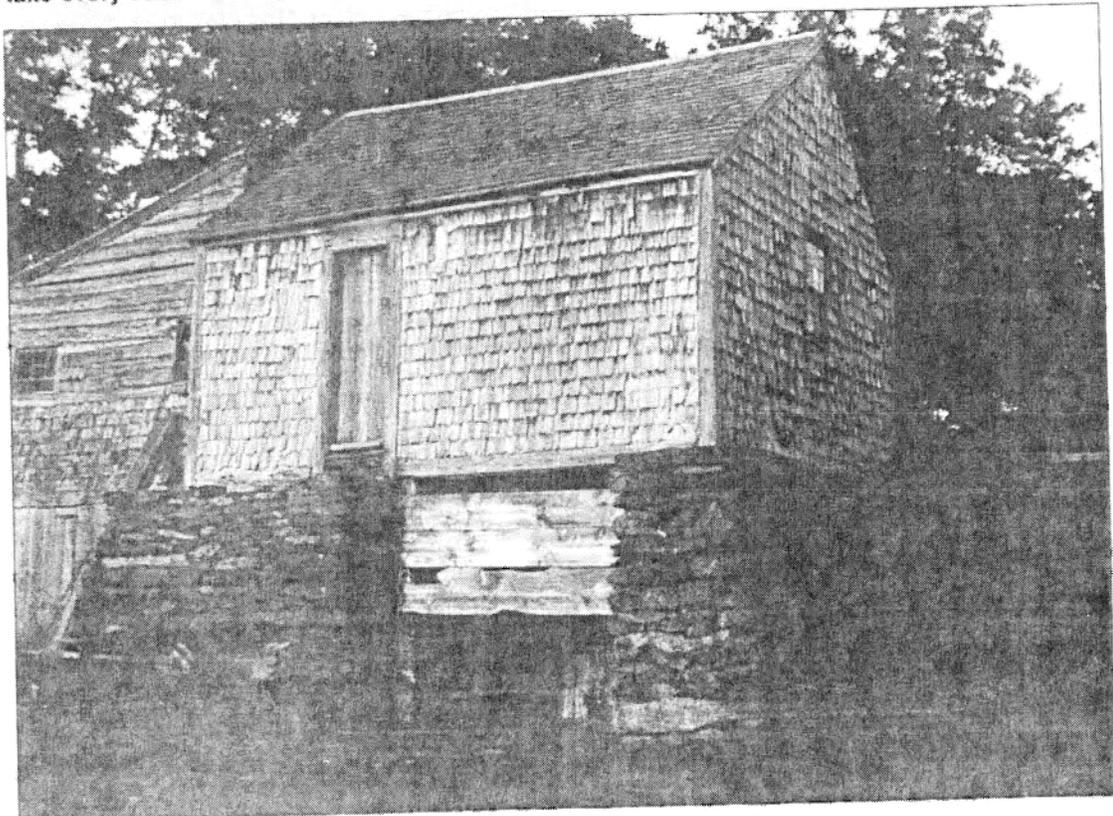


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The only building Ford coveted that still stands in town is the Old Narragansett Church. Ford offered the owner of the Camp Avenue Grist Mill, below, a handsome sum and planned to take every stick and stone.

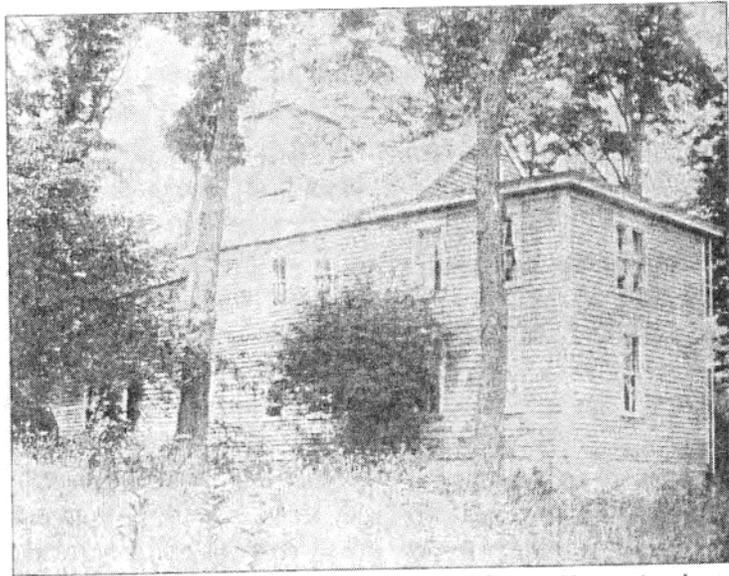


## The View From Swamptown

### Henry Ford and the Corey Homestead

Back in the 1920's and 30's, a time of short lived prosperity and then long term desperation and depression for most of America, the "average Joe" would have been happy to be able to collect a few postage stamps or a handful of coins as a hobby to fill their idle hours. Perhaps they'd look to nature and pull together a representative grouping of seashells, rocks or butterflies. But this type of collecting was not the case with all in America during that timeframe. As I've pointed out in the past, there is common misconception that everyone in the country suffered during the Great Depression. And this is just not the case; why, if you were a savvy businessman with your investments in the right place at the moment of that first great financial crash, well heck, you made out just dandy and even flourished during the period. Labor costs were at an all time low; folks would work for any wage doing anything. Any acquisitions could be made for pennies on the dollar. This is how, locally, we can explain the fact that, in 1930, industrialists the Rodman family, Charles Davol, and C. Prescott Knight could have such substantial holdings in our fair town so as to be responsible for 15% of the entire tax base of North Kingstown. Imagine that, a handful of men in a town of thousands holding such power. This financial situation, on the national level, is also how we can explain the collecting habits of the powerful elite of America, for when common men were struggling to collect a few stamps or a handful of coins, men like Henry Ford and John Rockefeller were collecting, piecemeal, entire colonial villages.

Long time readers of this column know that Mr. Ford's name has come up before in my ramblings. We spoke of how he attempted to buy first, the Old Narragansett Church in Wickford and then the Tourjee Grist Mill on Camp Avenue. Each time a representative of Mr. Ford made an offer to the owners of the structures and was turned down. You can bet your bottom dollar that, in a time before the age of mass media, Henry Ford himself had, surreptitiously, made at least one scouting visit to our fair town. His name was certainly well known to all in the nation, but few could recognize his face, so, traveling incognito, he often personally checked out structures that he coveted. Originally, Ford intended on setting up his reconstructed colonial-era village in nearby Massachusetts on the Old Boston Post Road between the town's of Sudbury and Marlboro. But perhaps after hearing of Rockefeller's grand plans for Colonial Williamsburg or Dupont's plans for Winterthur in Delaware or most likely the ambitious plans of the Wells Brothers (the founders of eyeglass giant American Optical) in Sturbridge Village, he decided to relocate his scheme of a New England Colonial Village back to Greenfield near Dearborn Michigan. That was not before he did successfully purchase two ancient North Kingstown homes in 1924 and move them up to the Olde Boston Post Road. We already mentioned one of these homes in a past column, the Sweet Homestead which once stood out on Shermantown Road near what is now Fieldstone Lane. And now finally I have been able to identify the last of the North Kingstown colonial-era structures desired by the man that put a car in every driveway. It was the Corey Homestead House; an early 18<sup>th</sup> century home that once graced the farming community of South Quidnessett. I have not yet been able to find out if these

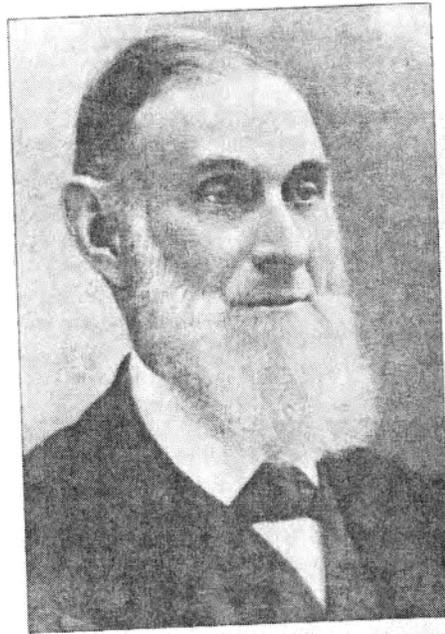


Ford was successful in purchasing the Corey Homestead, an early 18th-century Quidnessett home.

two North Kingstown homes still exist up on the Old Boston Post Road, but if you're a Sweet or Corey descendant and you've wondered where your roots may lie, you might find that they were transplanted by one of our nation's most powerful individuals as he tried to keep up with his friends growing "collections".



**Henry Ford was a collector who coveted many of North Kingstown's historic buildings.**



C. Allen Chadsey

## The View From Swamptown

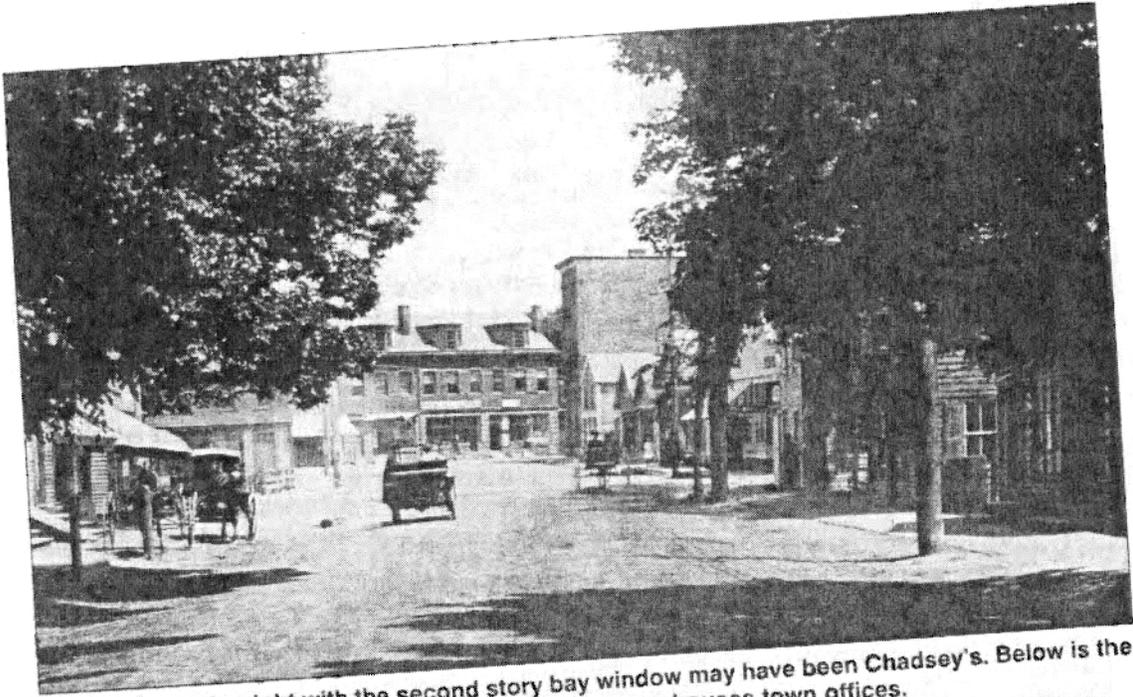
### C. Allen Chadsey's Gift to North Kingstown

Caleb Allen Chadsey was a man who believed in giving back to his community. Throughout his 72 years of life, he consistently, quietly, unselfishly contributed to the well being of North Kingstown and its citizenry. Even after his death, Chadsey continued to contribute to his beloved hometown.

Allen (his preferred name) was born in 1822 in the Davisville section of town. I know little of his youth other than the overriding fact that it was marred by tragedy, as before he reached the age of ten he was an orphan and had been apprenticed off by his relations to a cooper (barrel maker) in Newport until he reached the age of majority. He completed this indenture without incident, learning the required trade and used these skills to secure a position as a cooper on a whaling vessel shipping out of Newport, the "City by the Sea". He continued with this occupation until he, like so many young men of his time, got caught up with "Gold Rush Fever" and became a "forty-niner" sailing off to California by way of the Straits of Magellan, to strike it rich in the gold fields of the American west. And like most men so stricken, he returned a year or so later, richer only in the experiences that helped shape his generation. During that return voyage, Chadsey, who was a passenger on a Spanish-crewed vessel bound for Panama, where he intended to make the short but treacherous overland journey to the Atlantic and then board a New England bound vessel, became involved in an incident that would make him a hero of sorts. The Spanish crew of that ship mutinied and took control of the ship from her captain. The passengers, all mostly returning "forty-niners" like Chadsey eager to get home, would have none of it and overcame the mutineers and then appointed the former whaling ship barrel maker as commander of the vessel. Chadsey was obviously up to the task as he managed to bring the ship through waters completely unknown to him, into a safe harbor from which all could continue their journeys back to America.

After his adventurous youth was over, C. Allen Chadsey returned to North Kingstown, settling in Wickford where he opened a grocery store on Main Street. Through hard work and good business sense, Chadsey was a great success and eventually sold the business to a relative and began a new career as a banker. Such was his success and business acumen that he rose to become a member of the board of directors of both the Wickford National Bank and the Wickford Savings Bank. Throughout all this time he contributed to his community as well, particularly in his involvement at St. Paul's Church in the village, where he served as Treasurer for many years. He retired from business life a wealthy man and had a fine home on Brown Street. One of his last acts before his death was to donate his rights to a Chadsey inheritance to which he was entitled to the Wickford Baptist Church so they might purchase a new pipe organ. C. Allen Chadsey died in November of 1894, his place in the hearts and memories of his community already secure for eternity.

But he was not done giving. The details of his will, a document of death, continued to point out to his fellow citizens the kind of man he was in life. For Chadsey left to North Kingstown, \$10, 000, an impressive sum of money at that time, and a



The house on the right with the second story bay window may have been Chadsey's. Below is the site of the town's first library on Brown Street that now houses town offices.

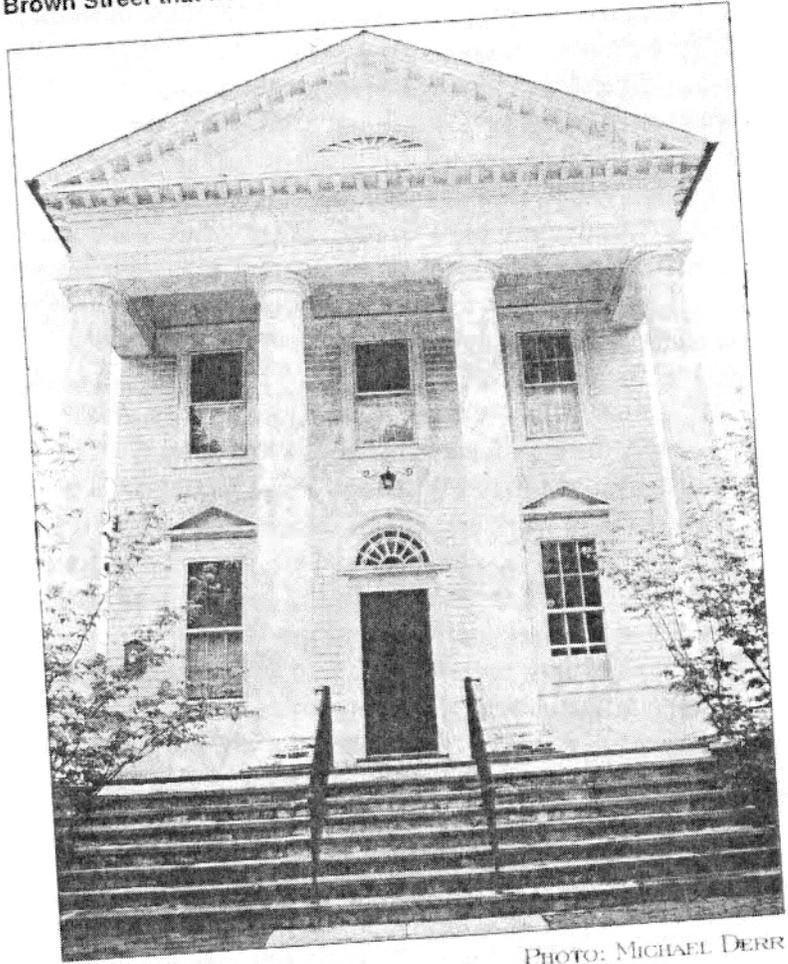


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

portion of the lot his fine home sat on, for the construction of a proper library for the citizens of his hometown. A citizen's committee consisting of James Greene, Joseph Reynolds, William Congdon, Thaddeus Hunt, Lyman Aylesworth, and Robert Rodman was formed to fulfill Chadsey's wishes and they hired Providence architect Franklin Sawtelle, who had just completed work on the grand Bates Opera House in Attleboro, to design a building befitting of Chadsey's beneficence. While the plans were being drawn up, the committee enlarged the small lot donated for the library by purchasing an additional strip of land from Michael Ryan of Ryan's Market who had purchased Chadsey's former Brown Street home. They then hired local builder James H. Bullock to construct the library from Sawtelle's Greco-Egyptian designs. The building opened to great fanfare at the end of January in 1899. The final act of the James Greene chaired building committee was to affix a plaque made of fine "quincy granite" in the vestibule of the stunning new building reminding all who entered of Caleb Allen Chadsey's wonderful gift to his community. An orphan boy who made something wonderful of his life.

Retired Police Chief Burt Moon (front row, third from the left) stands with the rest of the sworn officers in front of the department around 1950, when it was located on Brown Street. At right, the building now serves as the home of Gold Lady Jewelers.



## The View From Swamptown

### Chief Burt Moon

From time to time it's appropriate to interrupt our journey through the history of our fair town and mark the passing of one of its citizens. Particularly if that person has in fact, made his or her own mark in time; such is the case with Burt Moon, the man who brought the North Kingstown Police Department from its beginnings in the 1940's, when it was a small part time operation consisting of but a few men, into the modern and turbulent era of the 1970's.

Burt Moon was born and raised here in North Kingstown. He was educated in the school system of the town and upon graduation, enlisted in the US Army and was sent off to serve in WWII. After his discharge following the war, Moon, still in his twenties, decided he would like to be a police officer. He was hired on here in his hometown in June of 1947 his appointment brought the department up to a force of 6 men. A mere two years later Burt Moon was the Chief of Police in North Kingstown, a position he would hold until his retirement in 1973.

During his tenure, the NK Police Department saw communications technology that spanned the gamut from pens, pencils, and typewriters through "new-fangled" gadgets like two-way radios, teletypes, and computers. His collection of police cruisers began in the forties with three vehicles and expanded to the modern fleet the department possesses today. Along the way, the department and its Chief earned the respect of the community and the greater world at large, including in 1953, Chief Moon's designation as Rhode Island's top Police Chief.

Although I have a couple of photographs of the police department in its early years, I like the one that accompanies this column best. Chief Moon stands there proudly, surrounded by his department, in front of the old Police Station in the Gregory Mill Building on the corner of Brown St and Boston Neck Road. You might note that he's not the largest man in the group, but he most certainly left the biggest footprint upon the fabric of our community. Rest in Peace Chief, we here in North Kingstown already do thanks in no small part to the contributions made by you and your men, past and present



**Capt. Rollin Mason was a prolific menhaden fishermen; he once estimated that if laid end to end, the fish he caught would encircle the globe at the equator 38 times.**

## The View From Swamptown

Capt. Rollin Mason

Wickford's own Captain Rollin Mason was a man to be reckoned with. A character cut from the whole cloth of Swamp Yankee sensibilities, he had no problems with laying claim to the title of being the greatest fisherman who ever sailed the seas. As the saying goes, "no brag, just fact." Why to prove his point, he hauled out his old log books a few years after he retired and "induced" his daughter to calculate just how many individual menhaden he had caught over his career of more than 40 years of chasing after that bony little denizen of the deep. He then had her figure out just how long an unbroken chain of fish that would be, if you laid them nose to tail, using a length of 12" for each fish (he was trying to make the math easier on the gal you see, Menhaden actually average about 14"). After the smoke cleared and all this figuring and calculating was done, Rollin Mason and his daughter felt pretty comfortable saying that the good captain's theoretical unbroken chain of menhaden would circle the earth at the equator more than 38 times. Now that says a lot about both the fishing prowess of Rollin Mason and the general state of the fishing stock "back in the day", not to mention how people chose to spend their time in the age before television. This number is even more amazing when you consider the fact that it does not include the additional 800,000 barrels of mackerel and scup also landed by Mason.

Rollin Mason was born September 1, 1864 in Swansea Massachusetts, but spent nearly his entire life either at sea or in North Kingstown. Shortly after his birth, his father Alfred Mason, a fisherman as well, moved with his family to our fair town to open the infamous Cornelius Island Fish Oil Factory, settling first off of the road we now know as Camp Avenue, as evidenced by the 1870 census. By 1873, the nine-year-old "son of a sailor" was working the sea with his father, "learning to steer and making himself otherwise useful by clewing up lines" on a fishing sloop out of Cornelius. By the time he was 14 he was the skipper of his own menhaden fishing vessel, by then working out of Tiverton for the Church Brothers, the Cornelius Island enterprise having been closed down by popular demand. By the time he was 16 he was, in concert with his brother Daniel, the captain of one of the Narragansett Bay's first fishing steamers. He later got his own Church Family owned fishing steamer, "The Seven Brothers" and later still was made captain of the 160 ft long "George Humphrey" the biggest fishing vessel on the Bay by a wide margin. Along the way Rollin Mason made it a habit to win the coveted prize of "High Hook of the Fleet", an honor bestowed to the captain of the vessel with the highest yearly catch on the bay, more times than his competition would care to mention.

Rollin Mason was a storyteller in the long standing tradition of men who called the sea home. His most famous tale, and the one he was most wont to tell, was the tale of his single biggest catch ever, 3400 barrels of menhaden in a single seine. It was off the coast of New Jersey that he saw a black object off in the distance, looking surprisingly like an island, where no island should be. He steamed towards it and discovered with surprise that the black "mystery island" was in fact a half submerged hotel that had been, at one time, securely fastened to a pier in Cape May, NJ, some 12 miles to the west. Dislodged by a "big blow" it had slid off the pier and floated away. As if finding a hotel at sea was not enough, when the fishing boat drew near a tremendous school of



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**Capt. Rollin Mason had a home on Pleasant Street in Wickford as well as many other real estate holdings in town.**

menhaden issued from its windows and doors. The sea was calm; the men set their purse seine and slowly reeled in their record haul, nearly rending the nets in the process. Rollin Mason loved that story, as did most folks he told it to.

By 1922, the menhaden industry, which had its origin in Rhode Island in 1811, was moving south to the Gulf of Mexico. Rollin Mason, with a family and a fine home on Pleasant Street in Wickford, however was not, and he retired from the job that had not only made him comfortably well off, but actually defined him. Rollin Mason was not done though; partnering with fellow seafarers, Pleasant Street neighbors, and friends Henry I. Reynolds and Benjamin Smith, they had earlier began the Beacon Oyster Company and this business took over right where the menhaden industry left off, right on the cutting edge of fishing. You see, as I have often stated, Rollin, Ben, and H.I. were busy doing aquaculture before anyone even knew what it was. They were remarkably successful, so much so that this fishing boat captain eventually sat on the Board of Directors of the Wickford Savings Bank, and believe me, they didn't have him there to tell sea stories, not only was he by that time a remarkably successful businessman but also one of North Kingstown's leading citizens and top property owners.

Rollin Mason finally retired from the workaday world around 1935. He spent his time puttering around Wickford and Cornelius Island (which he by that time owned outright) telling stories to both townsfolk and reporters alike. He continued to manage his many properties in the village and the surrounding area right up to his death in 1941. Rollin Mason was the greatest fisherman to ever set a net, I have no doubt, he was larger than life but just right for Wickford. May he always have following seas.



FAITHFULL CORPORAL: DIED 1966

Corporal was buried with his uniform, seen here, as well as his favorite blanket, dish and leash.

Corporal, North Kingstown's first police dog, was a German shepherd-boxer mix. He died in 1966 of cancer.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Corporal was laid to rest in front of the North Kingstown public safety complex on Post Road.

## The View From Swamptown

### Corporal – Police Dog

You know, Corporal's gravestone sits there; quietly, unobtrusively, day in and day out just like Corporal once did. Its requirements are minimal, its needs simple; all it desires is just a little attention now and again. That's all Corporal ever asked as well. If we were to ask the men in blue who served with Corporal what he had meant to them, I expect the answers would all be just about the same. Chief Burt Moon would probably call him a fine dog; his supervising officer Capt. Ray Smith might describe him as an exceptional member of the NK Police Force, and the officers who shared a patrol car with him night after night for more than a decade; those men, among them Bill Glover, Stuart Kennett, Elisha Card, Arthur Weeden, Ron Mapes, and Frank Hennessey, well they'd probably choke up just a bit as they remembered their most loyal partner and friend. Heck, the fact that he, as a corporal, outranked all of the aforementioned patrolmen never mattered a whit to anyone involved; especially Corporal – he was always modest about his station in life as well as his life at the station.

Corporal, a German Shepard-Boxer mutt was North Kingstown's first police dog. He served our community, with honor, for nearly eleven years from 1956 through 1966. He spent his days, "lumbering around the station, yawning sleeping and scratching at himself" as all dogs are wont to do. It was the nighttime that brought him to life. While "on shift" from sundown to sunup, Corporal was as alert as any patrolman. He spent his nights "riding shotgun" in a patrol car, or tracking and holding suspects, a job he was especially skilled at. No one was better at covering his partner's back than Corporal was. No one was more brave and fearless than this loveable mutt. When he was diagnosed with cancer in early 1966 the entire law enforcement community felt the blow. At his funeral, later that year, he was sent out in the style that he deserved. Delegations from the North Kingstown Police Department, the Rhode Island State Police, the Washington County Sheriff's Office, the Quonset Shore Patrol, the Davisville Guard, as well as the Town Manager and the Police Chief were in attendance. As he was being laid to rest in a casket also containing his favorite blanket, his uniform, his dish and his leash; Chief Burton Moon proclaimed, "He was the best friend this department ever had". His gravestone was paid for by contributions from local citizens and businesses. He had touched this community and they responded in kind.

So the next time you are over at the Public Safety Complex on Post Road, stop for a minute at Corporal's grave and pay your respects. You can't miss it, its located in a sunny spot right next to the station. Exactly where Corporal would be if he had the opportunity.



Members of the Varnum Continentals march toward the grave of Capt. Thomas Cole, a Revolutionary War hero from North Kingstown, Sunday. They and other groups are trying to secure funds to restore Cole's gravestone, pictured below. The 200th anniversary of his death is tomorrow.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DEIRY

## The View From Swamptown

### Captain Thomas Cole

Two hundred years ago, almost to the day, the citizens of North Kingstown paid homage to a hero as they laid him to rest. You see, on December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1805 Captain Thomas Cole, born and raised on the family farm on Boston Neck and later a citizen of the village of Wickford passed on into the next world. Cole's heroics had occurred many decades earlier during the time of the Revolution. Thomas Cole, a commissioned officer under Colonels James Varnum, Nathanael Greene, Christopher Greene, and Stephen Olney, had served a remarkable seven long difficult years in that great struggle to establish our nation.

Thomas Cole was born in 1744, the second son of John and Ann Cole of Boston Neck. They lived on a portion of the large Cole Family landholdings centered around what we now know as Rome Point. Indeed, Thomas Cole's great-grandfather had been the very same John Cole who had ransomed back his future wife, Susannah Hutchinson, from the Swansee Indians back in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and after their marriage, brought her here to live on the 600 acre farm which had belonged to the Hutchinson family prior to its transfer to the Coles.

Thomas apparently was a trained carpenter and house builder, and evidence suggests that he carried out his trade in Wickford prior to the Revolution. All that ended though, in June of 1775, when the already trained militiaman enrolled as a Lieutenant in the 9<sup>th</sup> Company of the Varnum Continentals. As mentioned, his military career stretched across nearly eight years, during which he saw action at The Siege of Boston, and the Battles of Long Island, Harlem Heights, White Plains, Trenton, Princeton, and Red Bank. Cole was quickly made a Captain and after suffering alongside General Washington through that harsh winter at Valley Forge, he was sent back to RI with Colonel Christopher Greene to raise, train, and command a battalion of slaves who were offered freedom if they served through the duration of the war. This battalion, forever known as the "Black Regiment" went on to serve with honor at the Battle of Newport and later at the Siege at Yorktown, an operation that eventually brought about the surrender of the British. Captain Thomas Cole resigned his commission in May of 1782 and returned home to Wickford.

Just a little over a year later, Thomas Cole and his wife Nancy (Bradfield) purchased a plot of land in the village on the Grand Highway (now West Main/Main Streets) at the corner of what was then Main Street but is now known as Pleasant Street and proceeded to construct the fine home that can be seen there today. There Thomas and Nancy raised five children, George Washington, Thomas, Bradfield, Nancy, and Horatio. As mentioned, Thomas Cole died in December of 1805. His namesake, Thomas Jr. later followed in his father's footsteps and served in the War of 1812.

Now, some 200 years later, Thomas Cole is again, receiving his due. For last Sunday, December 4<sup>th</sup> 2005, members of the Varnum Continentals, The Sons of the American Revolution (SAR), and The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) held a graveside service at the historic cemetery where he rests eternal. This coalition of organizations is also in the process of applying for a grant specifically targeted towards restoring his simple but elegantly stated headstone, which reads "Capt. Thomas Cole - An Officer in the Revolution". I'll keep you informed as this story progresses.

Many thanks to Larry Ehrhardt and Michael Northup for their assistance with this story.

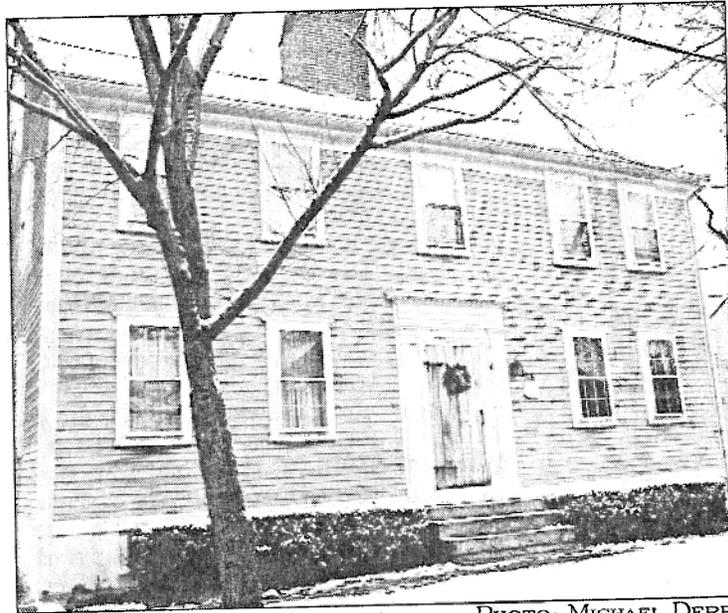


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**Capt. Thomas Cole's house still stands in Wickford.**



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

This obelisk at Elm Grove Cemetery marks the gravesite of Euclid Chadsey, his wife and two of his children.

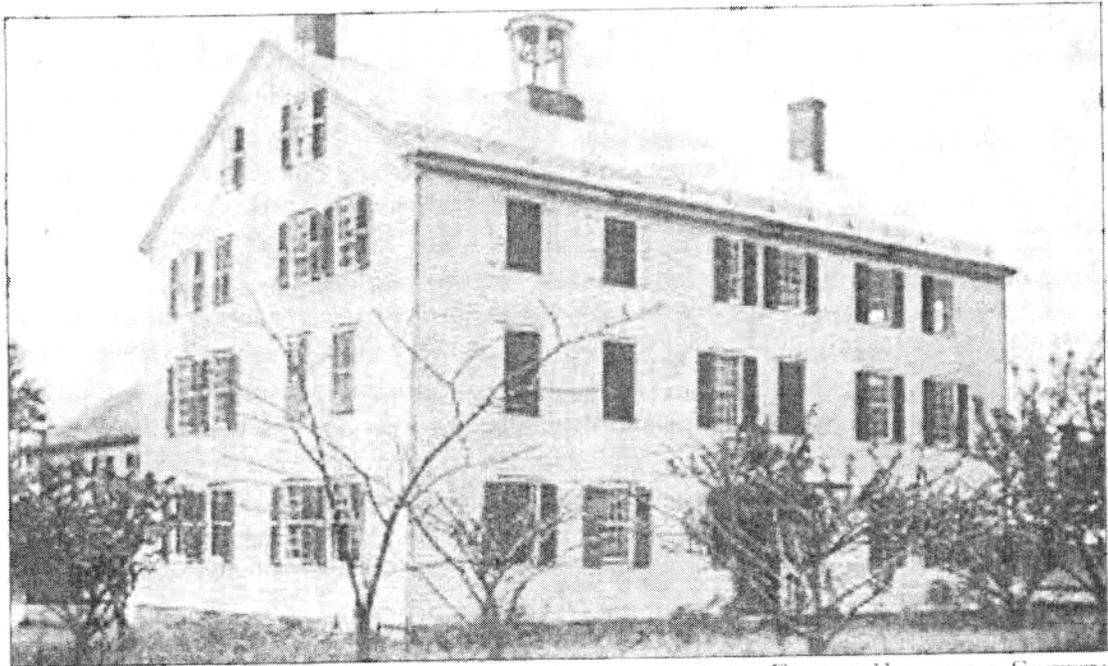
## The View From Swamptown

### Euclid Chadsey and the Shakers of Enfield Connecticut

Last week we briefly touched upon the life and times of Euclid Chadsey, the president of the Farmers Bank of Wickford, an institution closed as a direct result of the worldwide mini-depression known as the "Panic of 1857". One would imagine that this was a difficult and trying time for him, and I'm certain it was. But for Euclid Chadsey this was just one tragic tribulation in a long string of hard times. The devout Baptist certainly must have often pondered the life and times of the biblical character Job as he looked back on his own journey, for it was indeed just about that difficult. The failure of the Farmers Bank though, must have been the straw that broke the proverbial camel's back; for it was around that same time that Euclid changed the direction of his life in a dramatic way. He joined what may have been America's first cult religion, the Shakers.

Before we delve into Euclid's life as a Shaker, let's examine the events that brought him to that momentous point in time. Euclid Chadsey was born into one of North Kingstown's most prominent families. His father Jeremiah, was a successful farmer and the visionary entrepreneur behind a home weaving business in which he supplied literally dozens upon dozens of local women with a home loom that they could use for making cloth for their families. They in turn would weave an agreed upon amount cloth for him to resell on the wholesale fabric market. At its peak, Jeremiah Chadsey's business employed more than 100 local women and made him a very wealthy individual. Euclid's brother, Albert Chadsey, was a trained educator who taught for a time at the Washington Academy and then began another entrepreneurial family enterprise when he became the first local farmer to plant solely for the production of seeds. He produced tons of vegetable and grain seeds each year on his two family farms and also eventually pioneered the use of inexpensive chemical fertilizers in New England. Euclid himself was no slouch as well. Educated as an attorney, he was instrumental in the founding of not only the Farmers Bank of Wickford, but also the Narragansett Bank in the village. Prior to founding the Farmers Bank, Euclid in fact, served a number of years as the president of the Narragansett Bank. But tragedy always haunted him, dogged him relentlessly as it were. In 1827, Euclid married Frances Tillinghast and together they had two daughters; Frances Ann and Susan Caroline. Susan Caroline died in 1834 followed shortly after by Euclid's wife who passed away in 1837 at the age of 28. In 1844, Euclid was remarried to Waity Wilson. This was followed by the birth of a son William in 1846 and then the death of his adult daughter Frances Ann in 1852. Shortly after that William's mother Waity passed away as well leaving Euclid to raise his son alone. And then, with the 1857 panic, Euclid's Bank went insolvent. Shortly after that event, Euclid sold everything he owned cashed in his interest in all Chadsey family businesses and took his remaining child William off to Enfield Connecticut where he joined the Shaker community there.

The roots of the Enfield Shaker community can be traced all the way back through its founder Joseph Meacham and the founder of Shakerism in America, Mother Ann Lee to an 18<sup>th</sup> century sect called the United Society of Believers based in England and led by James and Jane Wardley. They believed in direct communication with God and would often sit in fervent prayer and meditation until they received a vision from



COURTESY OF THE ENFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**Pictured is the Shaker communal home in Enfield, Conn., that Euclid Chadsey lived in after he left North Kingstown.**

God at which time they would start to tremble shout and sing. This behavior caused them to earn the derisive nickname the “Shaking Quakers” soon shortened to “Shakers”. Eventually the Society adopted this name as their own and began to refer to themselves as Shakers too.

Eventually a young Manchester woman named Ann Lee, known by the community as Mother Ann assumed control of the group. Ann Lee’s life was hard, married to a difficult man, she lost all four of her children in infancy, and spent time in prison for her strong adherence to Shaker beliefs. During one of those imprisonments Ann had a vision regarding the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and from this came one of the basic tenets of Shaker belief “no one living in the sin of gratification of lust of the flesh could be a follower of Christ”. Shakers were expected to live a life of celibacy.

In 1774 Mother Ann Lee and a few of her followers came to America and began to preach their version of Christianity. In 1780 they met Joseph Meacham, a Baptist Laypreacher from Enfield and the seeds of the Enfield community were sewn. A permanent Shaker community was established there in 1792. By the middle 1800’s when Euclid and his son William joined, it was at its peak and numbered more than 200 souls all devoted to God, Mother Ann Lee, and living a celibate Shaker life.

Like all Shaker converts, Euclid was expected to be free of all debts and legal obligations, surrender all of his worldly goods to the Shaker community, confess all of his wrongs against humanity and sign a covenant agreeing to all the rules, regulations and beliefs of the Society, including celibacy and the by then accepted fact within the group that Mother Ann Lee was the personification of the second coming of Christ in the world. This final belief is the point at where most believe the religious sect crossed the line and became a cult.

Now I’m sure everyone is familiar with the celebrated simple but elegant furniture made in the Shaker communities as a way of fundraising for the group, but here in Enfield the Shakers also ran a very successful seed business as well, and I’m sure Euclid’s experience with his brother’s seed enterprise was a valuable asset. But that certainly wasn’t Euclid’s personal motivation for giving up everything and joining with the Shakers. I expect, after a life marked by loss, he was happy to give in to the simple structured life that the Shakers offered him. He stayed there for the rest of his days, only returning to Wickford after his death to be buried in Elm Grove next to his beloved wife Frances. His son William left the group after his father’s death and settled nearby in Connecticut and lived out his life as a farmer. He too, never returned to Wickford.

To learn more about the intriguing community of the Shakers of Enfield, check out the website of the Enfield Historical Society. I thank them for their assistance in the writing of this article.



Ken Mumford rests for a spell at the corner of Brown and West Main streets in this photo, provided courtesy Anne Hoyle.

## The View From Swamptown

Ken Mumford

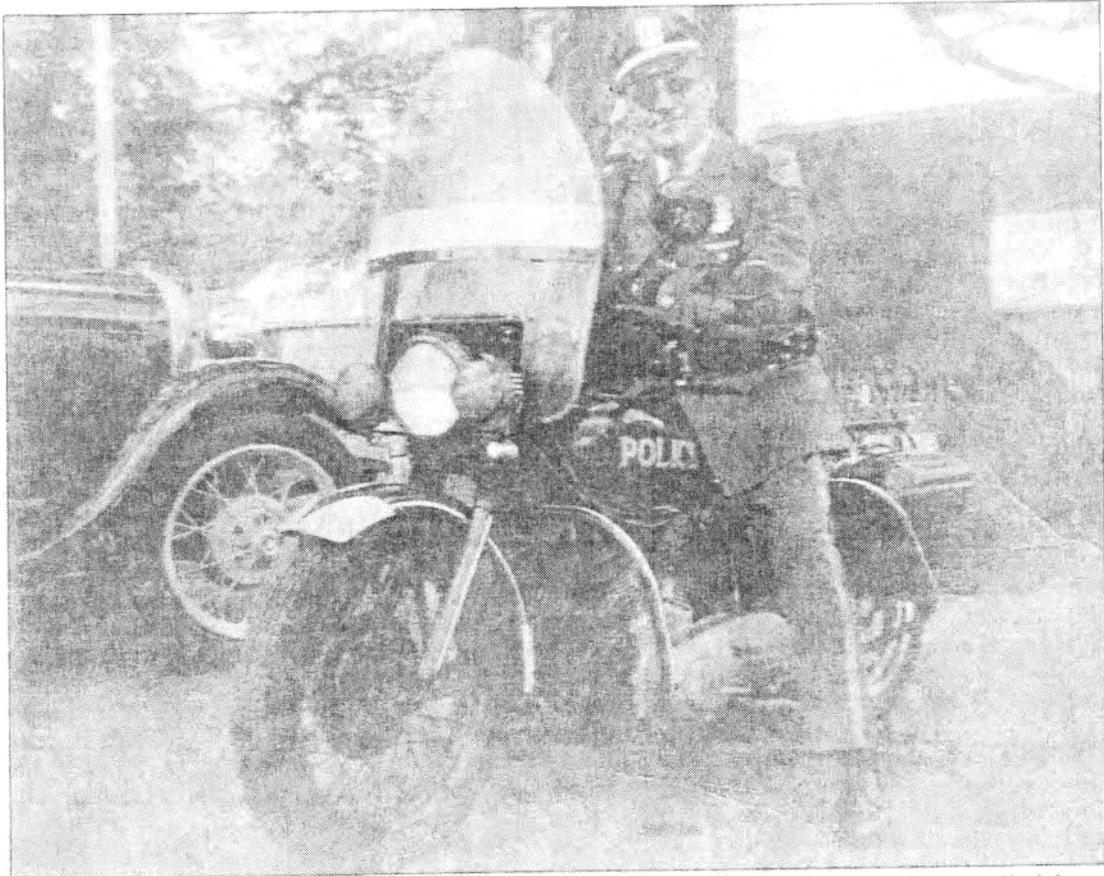
This was Ken Mumford's time of the year. After a long winter of caring for his dogs and horses, tuning up and sharpening his mowers, and tending to his wagon, hitch, harnesses, and bridles; spring would be upon him and Ken would mosey into action. Harness 'em up, hook 'em up, load the wagon, there's lawns to be mowed, gardens to be tended to, appointments to be made and kept. Long, long before landscapers were a dime a dozen, Ken Mumford was the only game in town. As a matter of fact, old Ken Mumford was more than a landscaper, he was a part of the landscape; one facet of the kaleidoscope of images that defined our fair town throughout the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Ken Mumford was born on April 24, 1914, the third child of Freeman and Eliza Bessie (Knowlton) Mumford, in Scituate RI. Freeman and Eliza operated a farm on the Plainfield Pike, and were assisted by Ken and his older brother and sister Arthur and Amelia. In June of 1926, Eliza and Freeman left Scituate and signed a long-term lease on the 140-acre Ebenezer Slocum Farm in the Slocumville section of town. The farm, leased from William Crandall for \$350 a year, was already stocked with all the equipment necessary to run a dairy operation. The Mumford's worked the Ebenezer Slocum Farm for some time and when possible, Ken and his siblings made extra for the family working at one of the nearby textile mills. All the while Freeman and Eliza Bessie bought portions of the nearby Hathaway Farm on Railroad Avenue until finally in the 1940's, they purchased the last parcel and then were the owners of their own farm, just slightly larger than the one they had leased.

Ken eventually took a position as a maintenance man at the nearby Ladd Center just across the line in Exeter, married and had a family of his own. A character in nearly every facet of his life, Ken Mumford decided he ought to name two of his three sons Ken Mumford Jr., although he did give them different middle names though so as not to be too confusing. Even though he worked many years at the Ladd Center, it was as a landscaper that he will always be remembered. And one of the reasons he remains fresh in all of the memories of those who knew him was a by-product of a practical Swamp Yankee solution to a vexing problem. As Ken got older, his eyesight slowly failed. This man, who once operated trucks, tractors, and other farm equipment, eventually lost his drivers license. Ken planned on continuing working though, so he had to come up with a solution. From that point on Ken Mumford became an anachronism; a horse drawn man in a gasoline engine powered world.

And so it was until one late spring day in May of 1992. The day began as it always did for Ken – early. The 78-year-old man hitched up his horses, loaded up his wagon, called for his favorite dog and set off on his way to tend to the lawns and gardens of his regular customers. He stopped along the way, while still on Railroad Avenue, to adjust a hitch or harness and there right next to his horses with his dog by his side, Ken's heart stopped. I expect he wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

Ken Mumford was buried in the graveyard of the Chestnut Hill Baptist Church along side his brother Arthur, who had run the family farm for more than four decades. Ken still exists in a fashion though; his image was captured countless times by numerous photographers, amateur and professional alike. The image that accompanies this piece, for instance, was taken by Wickford Art Association member Ann Hoyle. Ken's spirit was also captured by writer Michael de Guzman (profiled in an earlier column), who used Ken as the model for a character in his novel and subsequent movie screenplay, "Strangers – the Story of a Mother and Daughter", and Ken lives on in the memories of all of us who saw him as he and his horse-drawn wagon clip-clopped along the highways and byways of our fair town.



Lt. Raymond Bennett, a 10-year veteran of the North Kingstown Police Department, died from injuries he sustained in a motorcycle accident while on duty in 1961. Woonsocket officers will walk to Washington, D.C., next week in the memory of Bennett and 40 other officers who died while serving their communities.

## The View From Swamptown

Police Lt. Ray Bennett

Beginning next Monday, members of the Woonsocket RI Police Department will continue a tradition that began some six years ago. As a part of National Police Week, these hearty souls will team-walk the 475 miles between RI and Washington DC, in an effort to raise money for and awareness of a charitable organization called, appropriately enough, C.O.P.S. which stands for; Concerns Of Police Survivors. In the past a specific fallen officer, such as Steven Shaw, Cornel Young, or James Allen has been honored through these efforts. This year though, is a little different. This year, all 41 police officers that have given their lives in service to their communities will be remembered and one of those officers, Lt. Raymond Bennett, called our fair town, North Kingstown, home.

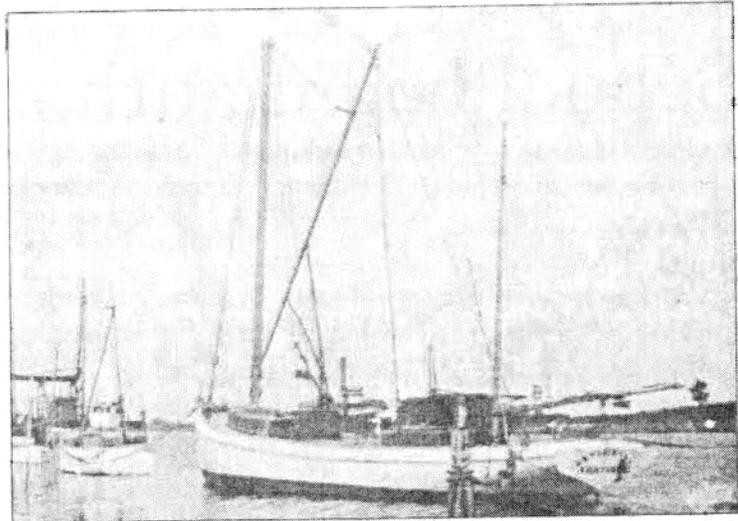
Ray Bennett was a motorcycle cop and a 10-year veteran of the NK Police Department when an unfortunate turn of events caused an accident that eventually claimed his life. On the afternoon of July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1961, Bennett was on patrol and driving down Tower Hill Road just past its intersection with Annaquatucket Road, when a rider less child's tricycle rolled down a driveway into the busy street. The trike was seen out of the corner of his eye by an off duty Quonset Point sailor driving down Tower Hill in a 1959 Mercury Station Wagon on his way south with a carload of friends. Not knowing whether a child was on or near the tricycle, he jammed on his brakes and officer Bennett, following behind on his 1957 Harley, slammed into the rear of the Mercury, careened off of the car and slid some 25 feet or so with the weight of the big bike resting fully on his left leg. He was rushed to RI Hospital.

Ray Bennett's leg was broken in numerous places and, despite all efforts to save it, had to be amputated a few months later. In the interim, his comrades at the department joined forces with the local veterans group and the fire department and held an old-fashioned firemen's muster and parade as a fundraiser for the Bennett family. Sadly though, Ray Bennett passed away at a later date, as a result of the injuries he suffered while on duty. He was 48 years old and left behind a large family.

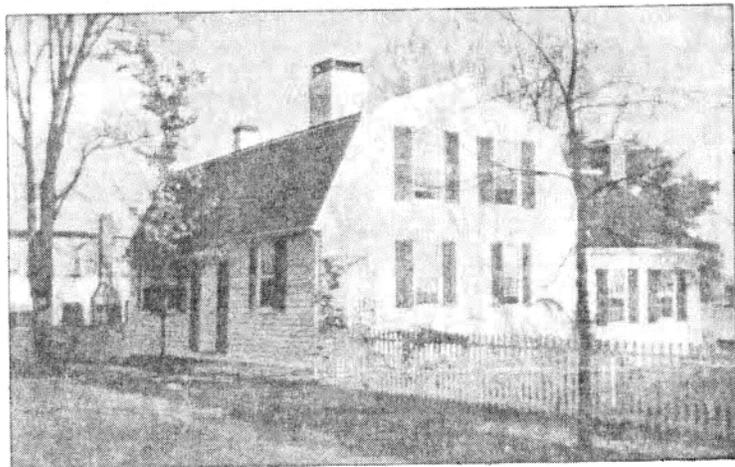
So, should you take note of a group of determined Woonsocket Police officers next Monday, as they begin their long journey to Washington DC., stop a moment and offer them a smile or a wave. Think a bit about Lt. Bennett and all his comrades, past and present, who put their life on the line for you and I each day because they know it's the right thing to do.



The Lewis brothers (from left) John, Bill, Fred and Tom haggle with Fulton Street fish wholesalers in New York City. They would bring their catch live to the market by using the water-filled hold on their boat.



The fishing smack *Lewis Brothers* is pictured moored in Wickford Harbor. It was the first gasoline- and sail-powered fishing vessel in the area.



Patriarch John Pierce Lewis and his wife, Mercy, raised their family of seven children at this house. They rented it until 1870, at which time they purchased it in Mercy's name. This photo was taken in the 1930s.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Lewis Brothers

Over the course of the last seven years or so, we have, from time to time, profiled the lives of many of the brave “men of the sea” who have called Wickford home during the course of the last few centuries or so. These tales have featured folks with monikers like Northup, Smith, Wightman, Mason, and Reynolds to name just a few. Now we are going to add the name of Lewis to that list; as no family in the history of our fair town is more tied to the sea than the fabled trap-fishing Lewis’s of Wickford.

The story of the Lewis family begins actually in Calais, France around the time of the Revolutionary War, when two young adventurous lads decided to cast fate to the wind and journey to the new world and try to make a life for themselves. These two teenaged brothers were named John and Nathaniel Lewis and family tradition to this day contends that an additional Frenchman out to make his place in the history books, happened to be on the same vessel with them for that voyage. That fellow, by the name of Rochambeau, did indeed change the course of history, but he later returned to France; the Lewis boys though, stayed on in Newport, Rhode Island.

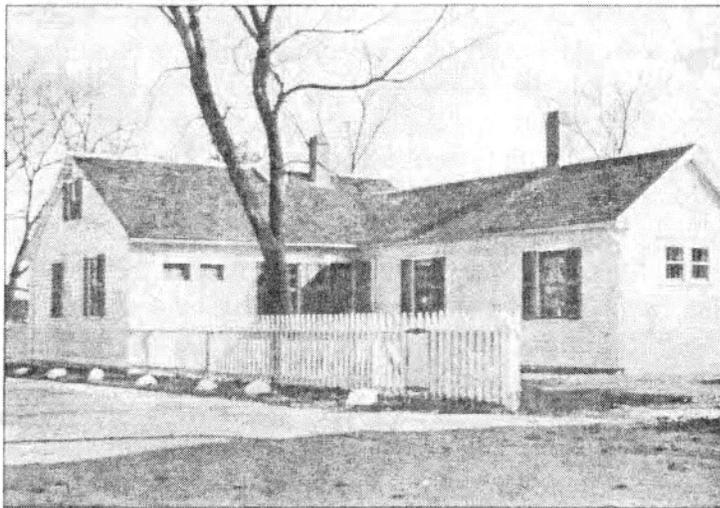
Little is known about the life of the original immigrant John Lewis beyond the bare facts that his brother Nathaniel died shortly after their arrival and that he met and married a lass a few years younger than he named Rebecca Pierce and then moved across the bay to Wickford to begin their life together. John and Rebecca had at least seven children here in Wickford – sons John Pierce, Nathaniel, and George and daughters Mary, Hannah, Betsey, and Phoebe. All of the men of the Lewis family made their living on the sea either as fishermen or merchant seamen. In particular, John Pierce Lewis and his progeny became extraordinarily successful as trap fisherman working the teeming waters of the Narragansett Bay.

John Pierce Lewis, the eldest son of the immigrant John Lewis, married Mercy Ann Willis sometime around the middle of the 1800’s and began to raise a large family of their own; eventually bringing seven sons (one who died in infancy) and one daughter into the world – sons John O., George A., William, Fredrick, Thomas, Isaac, and Howard (died young) and daughter Mary. As the boys grew to manhood, all of them joined their father in the noble profession of fishing; working traps set all over the Narragansett Bay from their home port of Wickford. Tragedy though, in form of Tuberculosis, or consumption as it was then known, reared its ugly at this time, as it would in the future, and took Mercy, the mother of this great troop of Lewis men. She was only 33 years old. Soon after, young Howard died from this scourge as well. Daughter Mary, from then on took over the role of mother to the family.

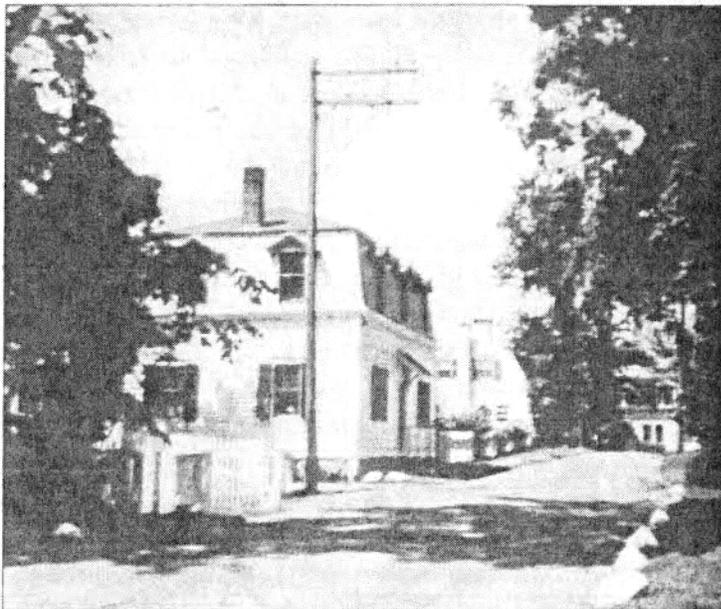
Trap fishing is hard backbreaking work. Imagine setting, pulling and emptying these giant fish traps – contraptions that resemble lobster pots on a gargantuan scale, day in and day out, week in and week out without the benefit of the modern equipment that lobster and king crab fishermen possess today and you can see the benefit of having six burly rugged sons there to help you through the long days. Eventually John P. retired from the sea and his sons, led by eldest John O. and George, minus Isaac, who had



John O. Lewis, the oldest brother, lived in this house.



George Lewis's home on Washington Street is pictured in the 1930s.



Only daughter Mary Lewis lived in this house after she completed the task of caring for her family after the death of her mother, Mercy.

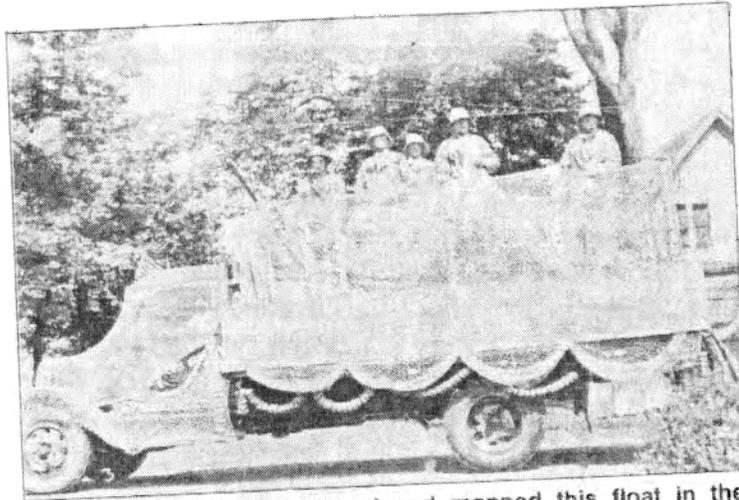
succumbed to the same "consumption" in 1897 that had taken his mother, took over the reins of this enterprise; the Lewis Brothers Fishing Company was born.

The Lewis Brothers were ambitious and enterprising souls and working together they took the fishing enterprise established by their father to new levels. They purchased the first gasoline engine/sail powered fishing vessel ever seen in Wickford Harbor, a smack which they aptly named the "Lewis Brothers" in 1899 to work the many traps they had in the bay. As a smack, this vessel possessed a large live fish hold in the center of the ship that allowed them to bring their catch each day, usually measured in the tons, to the docks still alive and flapping. This unique vessel also enabled them to haul their catch to wherever the market was paying better and the Lewis's often would arrive in Providence, Boston, and yes even New York City with a hold full of live fresh fish ready to make the best profit possible. And this amazingly enough, was only the beginning. The Lewis Brothers were also known to fish using both long lines and gill nets in addition to maintaining their profitable trap-fishing enterprise. John O. Lewis also took time off from the day-to-day operation to get in on the ground floor of the eventually successful oyster industry here in Rhode Island. Once it was up and running he sold out at a good profit and returned to his brothers sides. Another venture started by the brothers was done in concert with the Prentices of the widely known "Wickford House" in the village. On regular occasions during the summer months, the Lewis boys would take a number of Mother Prentice's tourist guests out with them on the "Lewis Brothers" for a Narragansett Bay excursion. Over the years its been said that hundreds of tourists got their first taste of the sea aboard a Lewis Brothers daytrip.

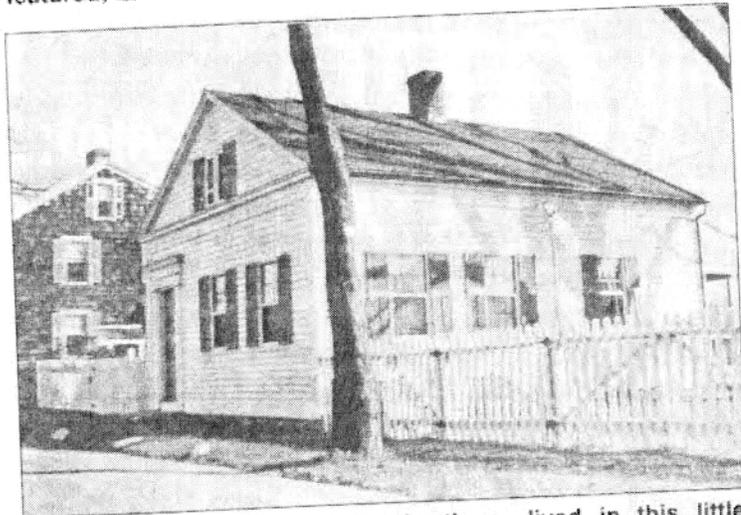
The Lewis family as a whole also placed its mark on the community as well. Family meant everything to the Lewis's and because of this and the large size of the many inter-related Lewis families, at the timeframe centered around the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nearly every house on Bay and Washington Streets were owned by Lewis's, including the original home of John P. and Mercy at 5 Washington Street. Additionally there were Lewis houses on Main and West Main Streets, too. Three of the Lewis Brothers constructed new homes in Wickford; Fred and Bill building identical but mirror-image homes across from brother John's on Bay Street and Tom building a fine home on West Main St. that is now occupied by a dentist office. William Lewis also had a fine house constructed for his father-in-law William Patterson on a parcel of land adjacent to Tom's West Main Street home.

All of the brothers married and raised families of their own. John married Mary Thomas, George married Josephine Smith, Fred married Marion Northup, William married Bessie Patterson, Tom married Sarah Gardiner, and Isaac married Mary Belle Gardiner. Needless to say, there was a time in Wickford when the schools were full of Lewis children, the Wickford Baptist Church was full of Lewis adherents, as well as the streets being full of Lewis-owned houses.

The tide began to turn in the 1930's as it is want to do. One by one, the Lewis brothers made the final journey to join their parents. George passing on in 1931, followed by William in 1938 just a few months after he and Fred had successfully rode out the Great Hurricane on their pride and joy; the "Lewis Brothers". The three remaining brothers, long in the tooth and with no one to take the helm, sold that vessel to the US Navy in 1942; it was then unceremoniously stripped down and used to transport men between the many manned islands in the Narragansett Bay during the War. Fred lived



The Lewis brothers designed and manned this float in the state's tricentennial parade in 1936. John, Tom, Bill and Fred are featured, as is Richmond Spencer, Fred's grandson.



Suzie Lewis, an aunt to the brothers, lived in this little Washington Street house.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Brothers Fred and Bill Lewis built these mirror-image houses next to each other on Bay Street.

just long enough to see the end of that War, passing on in 1945. This left only John and Tom, the oldest and the youngest, and they carried the tradition, fishing in the summers of '45 and '46 on their own, just as they had for more than half a century. John passed on later that year in his 91<sup>st</sup> season; he had worked some each and every year of his long adult life. Tom, the last of the Lewis Brothers, joined the rest in 1952; he was 86 years old at the end. All of them, along with their parents and grandparents, sister and spouses share the cool shade at Elm Grove Cemetery.

You know, it may not look like it, but Elm Grove is really quite close to the Narragansett Bay that the Lewis's and their brethren the Northups, Smiths, Wightmans, Masons, and Reynolds sailed across during the course of their many lives. A herring gull perched upon the gravestone of John Lewis can take off and be trailing a fishing boat in the Bay in a matter of minutes, and that's just as it should be.

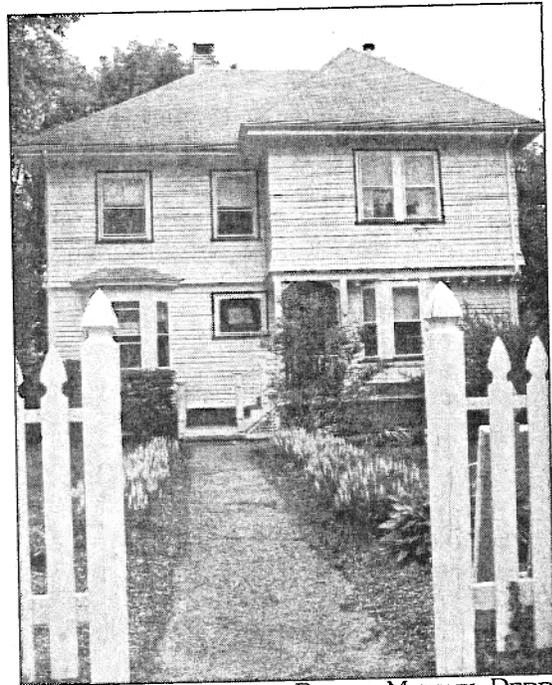


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Tom Lewis built this house (above, left) on West Main Street, now occupied by a dentist's office. His brother, William, had the house on the right built for his father-in-law, William Patterson, on a parcel of land next door.



Charles Reynolds returned from a successful time in New York City to his hometown of Wickford, where he bought 16 properties and became president of Wickford National Bank. His house, "End-O-Main," was an impressive sight in 1910 when the above photograph was taken. Below is how the house appears today.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

## The View From Swamptown

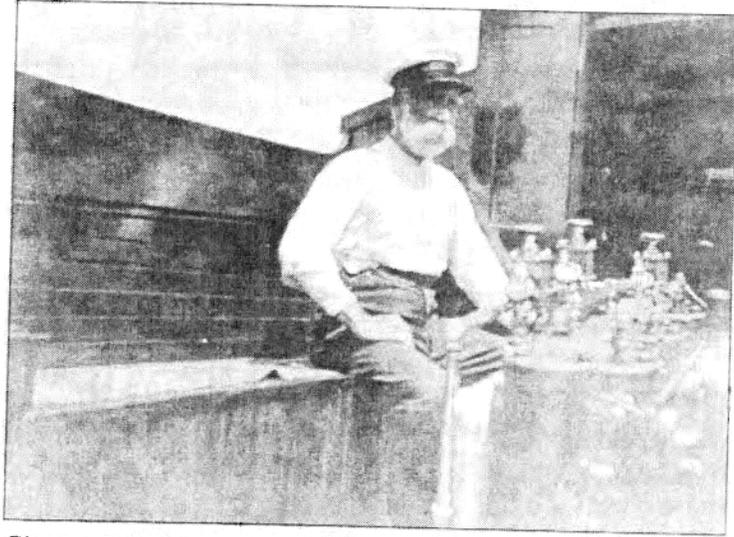
Charles Boyer Reynolds

Charles B. Reynolds was a man of superlatives. He was perhaps, the most successful member of one of the village of Wickford's most prominent families. He owned the area's first automobile, lived in one of the finest homes around and was easily, one of Wickford's most recognizable gentlemen as he strolled through the village. And, to top it all off, no one has ever owned more of Wickford's remarkable housing stock than he; you see, at his death in 1923, Charles B. Reynolds owned sixteen houses within a short amble of his own "End-O-Main" home.

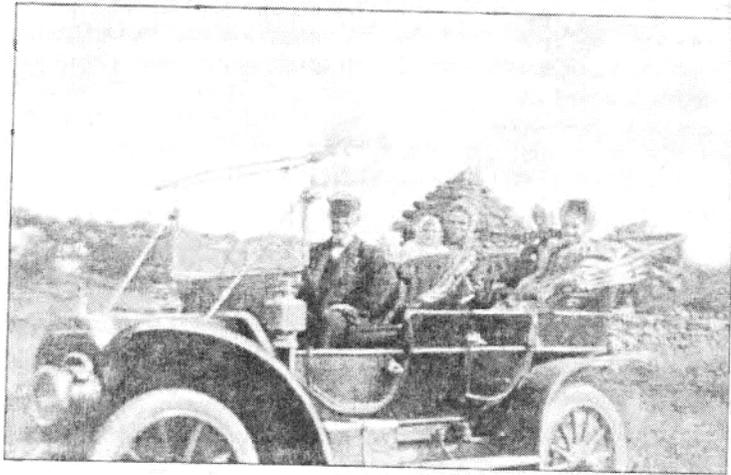
Charles Reynolds was born in Wickford in May of 1844 to Capt. Stephen B. and Harriet (Gardiner) Reynolds. His father being a seafaring man, young Charles developed a long lasting love of the sea which stayed with him throughout his life. He attended school in the village and later graduated from Eastman's Business College in Poughkeepsie NY. His first job, fresh out of college, was as the bookkeeper for those bearded entrepreneurs "The Smith Brothers", pioneers in the field of marketing cough drops (yes, they were indeed real people). He was drawn though, to New York City, and left the Smith Bros. employ after one year, to take a position at Phelps & Company Furniture Dealers one of "the Big Apple's" top furniture concerns. After five years running the bookkeeping end of things, Reynolds took over as head of the Marketing & Sales Department, a position he held until leaving the business in 1893. During his tenure in NYC he met and married Emily Wetstein, daughter of a prominent NYC shoe dealer. He had a fine home constructed for he and his bride, just on the other side of the Hudson on the Palisades in Hoboken, NJ. Charles and Emily would have seven children during their time there, but sadly only three would survive into adulthood.

In 1893, at the age of 49, Charles Reynolds retired from the furniture business and, fulfilling a lifelong dream, returned to the village of his youth, a successful man by any measure. He moved into what was to become "End-O-Main" and began the amazing transformation of what was once a simple home. When he was done a decade or so later the house appeared as it does in the accompanying photograph – one of the village's most impressive. Also during this timeframe, Reynolds began buying up the village's housing stock, some from relations for certain, but much on the open market. As mentioned earlier, he eventually possessed sixteen homes within the confines of the little village many of which he rented out. On top of all this, Charles Reynolds un-retired himself and joined the staff of the Wickford National Bank. He eventually became its President. All of this while in his fifties and sixties.

Through it all, Reynolds never lost sight of his boyhood love of the sea. He owned a boat of some kind, a steam powered launch, or a sailboat, or a gasoline powered motor launch, throughout his many years here. Ironically, the sea that he loved played a part in his demise. At the age of 76, Reynolds set out in his motor boat "braving a heavy gale . . . to the assistance of some people in a small boat who were in great danger of being blown on to a rocky shore." During this successful rescue Charles Reynolds suffered a heart attack, and although it did not then end his life, he was never able to recover from its effects. He died from another heart failure three years later, just a few months shy of his 79<sup>th</sup> birthday.



Charles Boyer Reynolds sits next to the controls of his steam-powered launch somewhere in Wickford Harbor. Below, he sits behind the wheel of the area's first automobile, parked in front of the entrance to Anawan Farm in Narragansett.



Charles B. Reynolds not only left a legacy to the many Reynolds that survived him, he also left us, North Kingstown's 21<sup>st</sup> century residents, with a tangible legacy of another sort. You see, Charles B. and his son Charles S. Reynolds loved new-fangled gadgets, not only automobiles and motor boats, but cameras as well. And through the generosity and forethought of his descendants, particularly his great-grand daughter Jean Chapman, we will now be able to get a remarkable glimpse into the world in which they lived. Thank you Jean, and get ready history buffs, because as the year progresses we will see more of Charles Reynolds world.



**John Huszer**

## The View From Swamptown

John Huszer

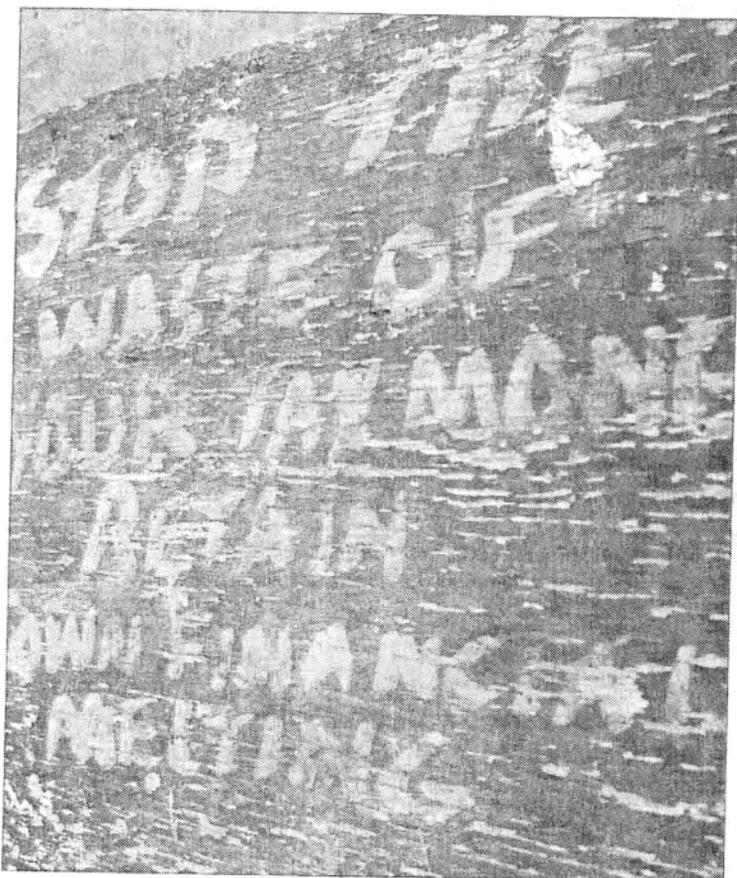
You know there was something special about John Huszer; something intangible, something you just could not quite put your finger on. Firstly, as you can plainly see by the accompanying photo, John Huszer was “James Dean” cool. You can just see it in his eyes, in his stance; why, that hint of smile spoke volumes. “This is a person who’s been somewhere and seen some things.”

### The portrait of the artist as a young man

Born in 1912 in California of Hungarian immigrants, Huszer grew up in New York City and often described himself during that timeframe, The Big Apple during the Great Depression, as a “dead-end kid”. He dropped out of high school and after a stint at a few nowhere jobs, was called by his true muse – “art”. Heeding that syren’s song, he wrangled his way into the National Academy of Design and seemed to be on his way – the right side of the tracks this time, the straight and narrow – and then along came the big one – WWII and everything was changed. He saw service in France and Germany and was transformed by the experience; war changes a man. For years his art reflected that horror. Yeah, he’s been somewhere and seen some things – moss never grew on John Huszer.

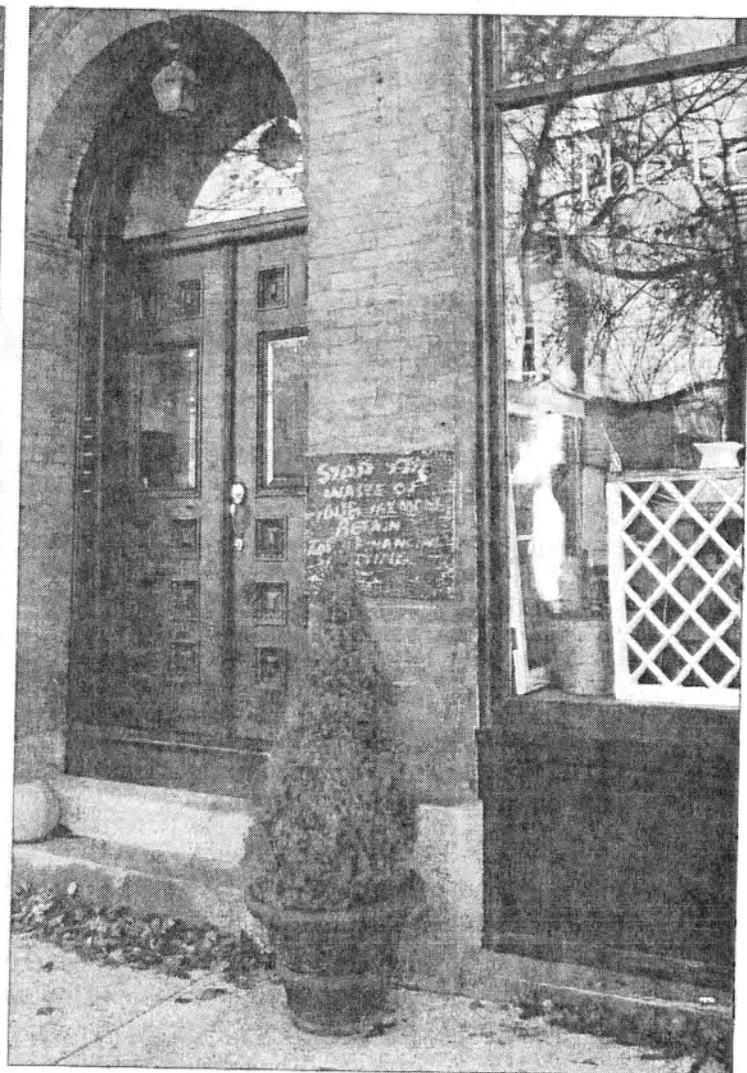
### The tortured soul of an artist

After the war, John entered the Arts Students League in New York and spent three years refining his craft. Married by now and with a young family, he ended up here in North Kingstown after a time and took a job at Quonset painting insignias on warplanes and other aircraft. He also spent time painting houses and working as a machinist. Things went good and then things went bad and before long John Huszer ended up as Wickford’s best known hermit, living alone in a small shack on Cornelius Island with nothing but a few pets and his art for comfort and companionship. He painted with abandon alone on the island, separate, but forever tied to Wickford by threads that ran back to his daughter Mimi and the small community of artists and friends here in the village. In 1962 he returned, figuratively speaking, in “a skiff loaded to the gunwales with paintings” to join with those artist friends, Bob McMeehan, Gil and Marguerite Rodman, Ronnie Loring, Pearl Marsh, Louise Cashman, Henry Brennan, Irene Selley, Olive McIver, and Bill Wentworth to found the Wickford Art Association and to father the now world famous Wickford Art Festival. Huszer was back.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

One of John Huszer's many opinions, advocating keeping the financial town meeting, is still written on this blackboard outside the Gregory building in Wickford 25 years later.



## Tilting at Windmills

Not only was John Huszer “James Dean” cool, he was also an idealist of sorts, a “tilter at windmills” a “bender of birches”. He purchased the big brick Gregory Building upon his return and set up shop there. He truly felt he was a better teacher of art than an artist and for decades he lived the life of master and student. Master to the literally hundreds of young budding artists who passed through his busy third floor studio and student of the greater world around him. He immersed himself in art, reveled in classical music, and surrounded himself with people. People- people came and went, to learn, kibitz, argue, ponder and discuss. John Huszer had an ear and an easel for anyone who was interested and had the ambition to climb the steep windy staircase. And John Huszer had opinions, opinions about politics local and worldwide. Candid and straight forward about everything including the wayward paths that his life had occasionally taken him down, John had no qualms about letting folks know how he felt, whether it be about the nuances of art or the inequities he saw in local property tax re-evaluations, he’d speak his mind or burst. He’d display his thoughts on the side of his building if could get away with it or all over the retired hearse that he drove around town. (As you can imagine, I as the son of a son of son of a son of an undertaker was taken by a man who drove a hearse). John Huszer was James Dean and Don Quixote all rolled up into one.

## Do Not Go Gentle . . . .

John Huszer was just a day or two shy of his 71<sup>st</sup> birthday when he passed away in June of 1983. Acknowledged as the father of the Wickford Art Festival, the most famous artist in a town full of artists, and the most recognizable character in village chock-a-block full of characters, he was mourned by the entire community. His friends paid to have the poem “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night” by Dylan Thomas run in the local paper to honor the man that they knew and loved. I say this; “John Huszer going off gentle into the night – fat chance of that – they needn’t worry a bit”.



The late Helen Johnson, a member of the Pettaquamscutt Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, was instrumental in creating the index for the more than 60-year-old publication "Facts & Fancies Concerning North Kingstown."

## The View From Swamptown

The D.A.R., Facts & Fancies, and Helen Johnson

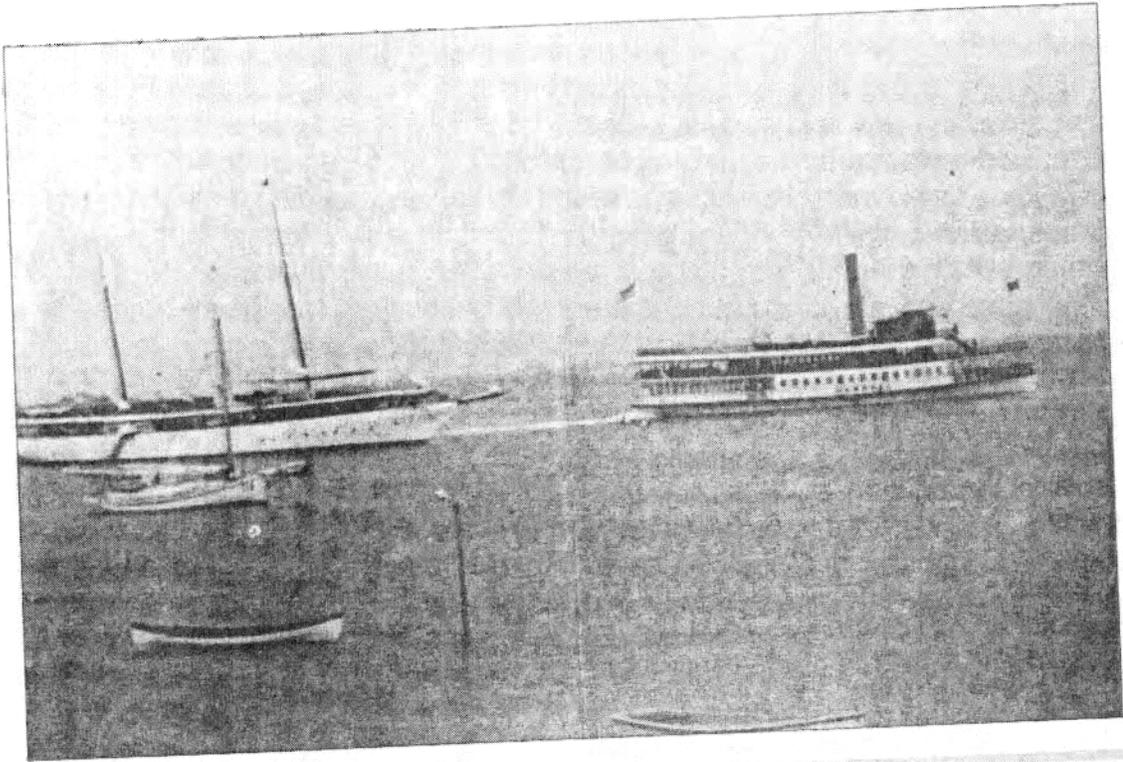
Every once and a while, I like to pause a moment and reflect upon the folks whose work my efforts owe so much to. In the past we've explored the lives and contributions of Col. Hunter White, George Gardiner, and Florence Simister. This week we are going to take a Swamptown gander at the collaborative efforts of literally generations of wonderful local ladies who have taken the time and put out the effort necessary to collect and publish the well known compendium of local lore "Facts & Fancies concerning North Kingstown".

The book was originally written, compiled, and published in the time frame of 1939-1941 and was the product of the Pettaquamscutt Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, or DAR as they were and are more commonly known. Led by an energetic team of ladies which included Edith Dawson, Mary Whitney, Abbie Gardiner, Bertha Nichols, Nellie Hamilton, Anna Nugent, and Mary Huling, the DAR ladies convinced every old timer and all the local historians to contribute a tale or two to their tome. Why they even did a little arm twisting and convinced the then famous writer and Saunderstown resident C. Grant LaFarge to contribute an original piece of historic fiction to their efforts (It's the most under-appreciated part of the book, if you ask me). This was done as the local chapter's contribution to the DAR national organization's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In the end, these "little old ladies" produced a book that was and still is one of the most important reference books that a local historian can possess. By including legends, tall tales, and lore along with a whole passel of concise facts, these ladies succeeded in accurately and completely capturing the essence of an era which is now gone. All that, without an agent, editor, ethnographer among them. You know, the book was darn near perfect; perfect that is except for the want of what every student of history craves, a really good index.

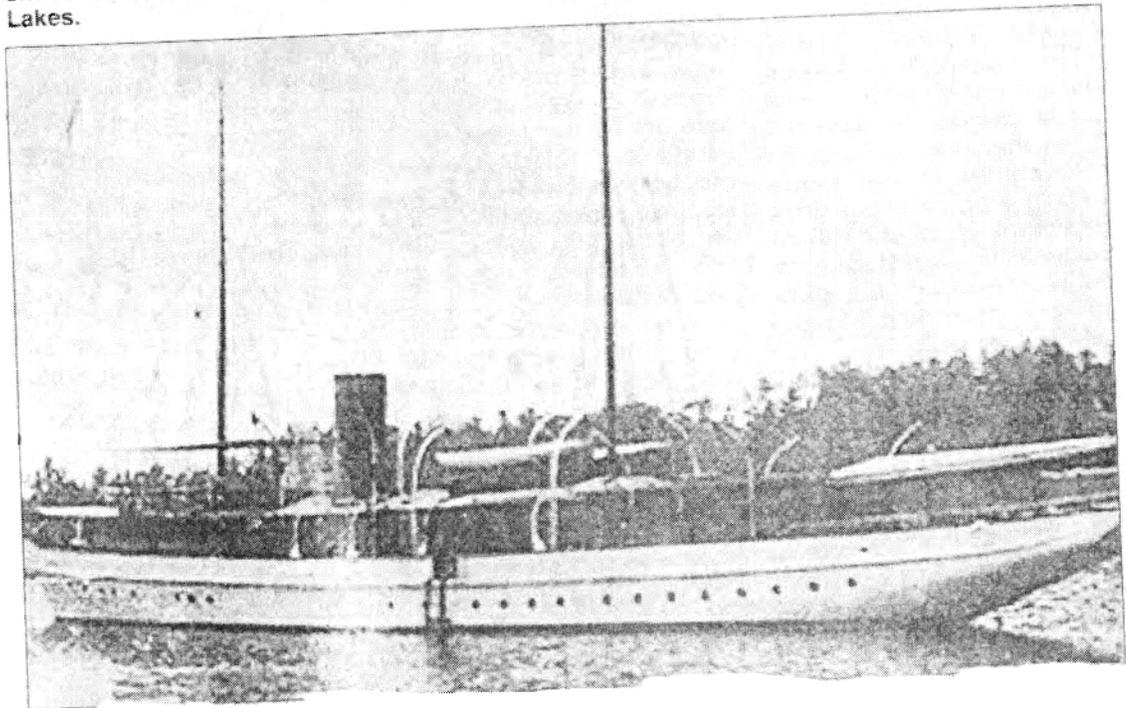
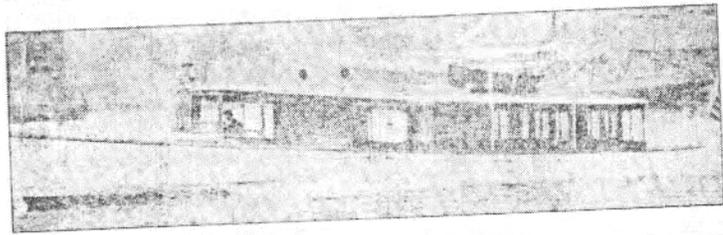
Ah, a good index!! To paraphrase another famous old dead guy, "An index, an index, my kingdom for an index." If you're an avid history buff or an amateur genealogist, you know just what I mean. Well, this is where another generation of DAR women left their mark. With the re-publication of the book at the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the DAR, a dedicated group of ladies, led by Helen Johnson, set themselves down and performed the arduous task of writing up an index to "Facts and Fancies". No fancy computer programs here, just good honest hard work performed by a group of old friends guided by the hand of Helen, a retired educator and confirmed one-woman whirlwind of energy. You see, besides this enormous task, Helen was also an avid genealogist, always ready to lend a hand to an excited novice, a "birder" from way back, with an Audubon Society of Rhode Island membership which spanned a remarkable 70 years, and certified "Grange" enthusiast with a 55 year history with that wonderful

organization. Everyone loved Helen Johnson and rightly so, she always had time for a friend and sufficient energy to contribute to the pursuit of one of the many causes which she held so dear. Helen passed away recently at the age of 91. She lived a wonderful life and will be missed by her friends, myself included. She now joins those many women who came before her and did so much for the preservation of the history and culture of our fair town. I expect they are all sitting back right now, with a cup of tea or coffee in their hands chatting about days gone by and friends remembered. The book these ladies all worked so hard on is still available by calling Vera Steere at 884-5049.

On a related note, I am pleased to announce the publication of my second collection of columns. This one, which covers the years 3 and 4 of the existence of this fine newspaper, includes the unedited text of 100 columns and runs on nearly 200 pages. It can be purchased by mail for \$23.00 (shipping costs included). Send your check to: G.T. Cranston, 156 Hideaway Lane, N.Kingstown, RI 02852. A limited number of the first collection of 105 columns is also available for the same price. Watch this column for the location of fine retail establishments where these books will also eventually be available.



The above circa 1908 photograph shows the Newport-bound *General* passing Julius Fleischmann's *Hiawatha* in Wickford Harbor. To reach the yacht at anchor in Wickford Harbor, Capt. B. Frank Smith would take the wheel of the 70-foot launch *There She Goes*, at right. Below, the *Hiawatha* is shown at anchor in the Great Lakes.



## The View From Swamptown

### Julius Fleischman and the Yacht "Hiawatha"

As anyone who is a regular reader of this column knows, Wickford, from the 1890's to the 1930's was a place where many of the the rich and famous came to spend a quiet summer away from the hustle and bustle of its nearby and much more famous "big sister" Newport. Over the years we've examined how a number of these "captain's of industry" affected "ye olde quaint and historic". This week we are going to delve into an aspect of the life of another one of these folks; Julius Fleischman, the king of yeast cakes.

Fleischman was a Cincinnati Ohio native who was, for a time, the mayor of that great city. He summered each year, here on the East Coast, shuttling between Wickford, Newport, and Long Island. His "shuttle" of choice was the 170 ft l.o.a. sailing yacht "Hiawatha". The Hiawatha was captained by Wickford born and bred Captain B. Frank Smith of Pleasant Street. The big yacht was a fixture here in the harbor as the accompanying circa 1908 photograph of the steamer General and the Hiawatha attests to. Smith worked for Fleischman for decades. He was captain of the Hiawatha from the moment Fleischman purchased it from the Charles Seabury Co. of Morris Heights NY in 1897 through many a trip down the St. Lawrence Seaway, in and out of the Great Lakes, and back to our own little Wickford; where Julius, for a time, also owned property on Pleasant Street. Fleischman, of course, needed a launch to get back and forth to his big yacht, and in flashy rich guy fashion, he had the same Charles Seabury Co. build him one. His "launch" was the 70 ft "There She Goes" which only drew 30" of water and could pull up to any dock from here to Watch Hill to Newport in style. Fleischman, eventually sold the Hiawatha in 1924 to Thomas Peters of Miami. I imagine it was a sad sort of voyage for Smith as he delivered his old charge to its new owner.

Peters didn't get to enjoy his new luxury yacht for very long. In 1926 one of America's most devastating hurricanes tore through South Florida sinking the renamed "Esmeralda" at Miami's municipal dock. For over a year Peters tried to raise his floating palace, but to no avail. Twice the derrick barge he hired sunk trying to raise her. Finally he gave up and the city of Miami spent \$10,000 to raise her just enough to tow her out into the Bay of Biscayne and sink her. With that, a piece of our Fair Town's history settled 200 feet to the bottom of what is now Biscayne National Park. I expect Captain Frank Smith of Pleasant Street in Wickford swallowed hard when he heard the news.



From Long Island and Narragansett Bay to the Great Lakes, Capt. B. Frank Smith steered the 170-foot sailing yacht *Hiawatha* wherever her owner, Julius Fleischman, desired.

← see story previous page

## The View From Swamptown

### Reflections on North Kingstown and the Great Depression

Recently, I spent some time amusing myself by looking at North Kingstown Tax Books from around the time of the Depression. I was curious to know how the citizens and the community as a whole fared during this, one of our nation's most trying times. Not to mention, it has always been my contention that, although it was indeed an extraordinarily difficult time for most, there were folks for whom the depression was not only not a problem; it was an opportunity.

So, at random, I chose the year of 1930 and figured out who was in fact supporting the community; who was paying the taxes that kept North Kingstown solvent through these lean times? The results were somewhat surprising. You see, if you take the taxes paid by the twelve wealthiest individuals and/or families and the taxes paid by the twelve biggest businesses in our fair town and add them up, they compromise 30% of the total tax income of this community of thousands of citizens and hundreds of businesses. So, in fact, far less than 1% of the community was paying nearly a third of the taxes. An amazing statistic if you ask me.

Here's the big twenty-four of our fair town in 1930:

#### Personal

- 1) Prescott Knight
- 2) Charles Davol
- 3) Rodman Family
- 4) Jenckes Family
- 5) Estate of Fred Smith
- 6) Brow Family
- 7) Henry Barber
- 8) Anita Baker
- 9) Dennis Family
- 10) Owen Wister
- 11) Casey Family
- 12) Fox Family

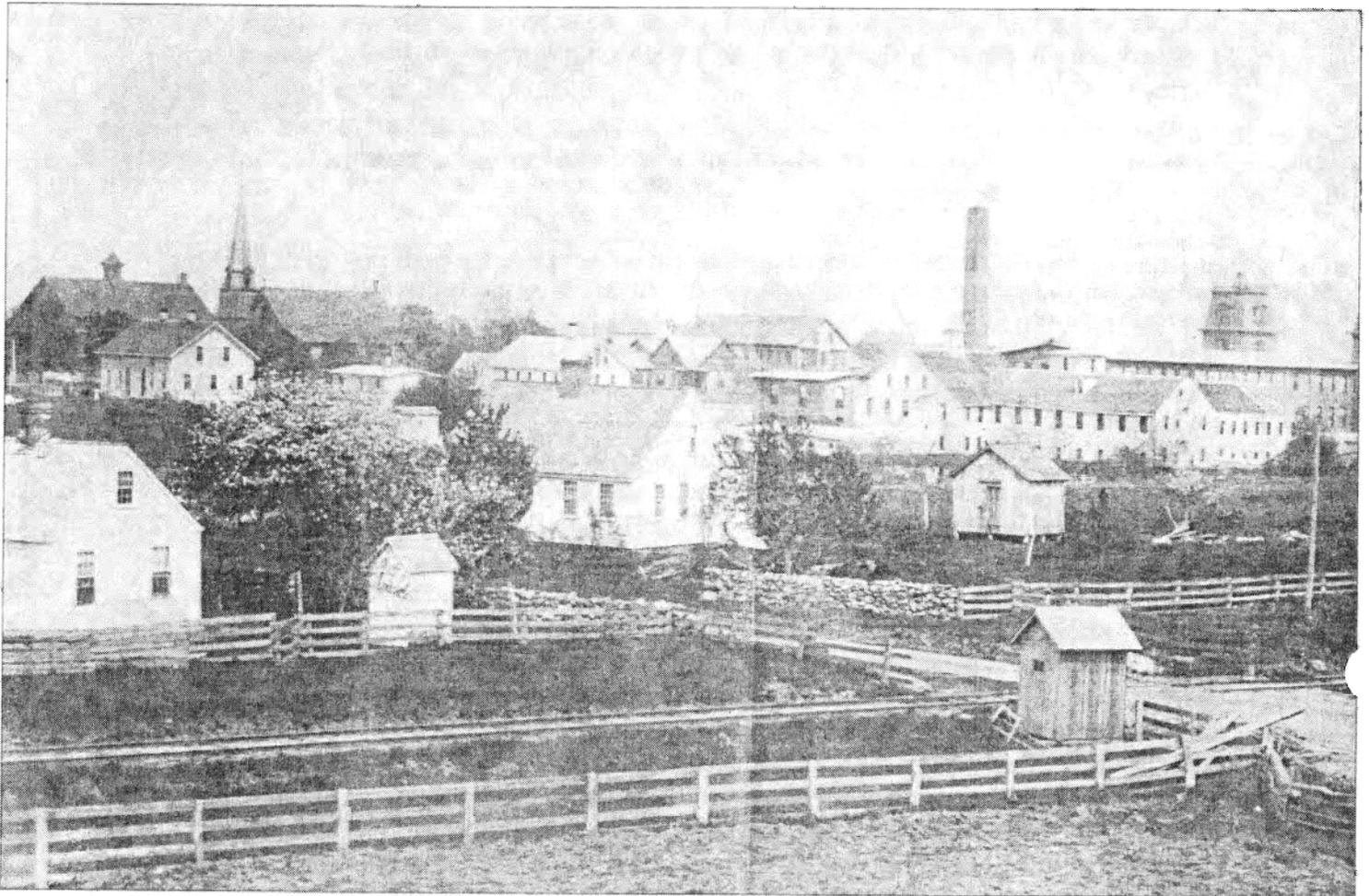
#### Business

- 1) NY, New Haven, & Hart. RR
- 2) Rodman Manufacturing
- 3) Hamilton Web Manufacturing
- 4) Belleville Woolen Mill
- 5) Mt. View Land Company
- 6) United Electric Co.
- 7) Cold Spring House
- 8) New England Telephone
- 9) Saunderstown Hotel
- 10) Standard Oil
- 11) Fearney and Sons
- 12) Cranstons of Wickford

Lets take a gander at the big daddy of them all, Prescott C. Knight for starters. His individual wealth at this time is startling. For those for whom this name does not ring a bell, let me tell you that his family business R. & BB Knight eventually became the much better known company "Fruit of the Loom" which started here in Rhode Island in the middle to late 1800's. His holdings here in North Kingstown consisted of his massive summer estate and horse farm which encompassed the better part of the entire farm community of North Quiddnessett.

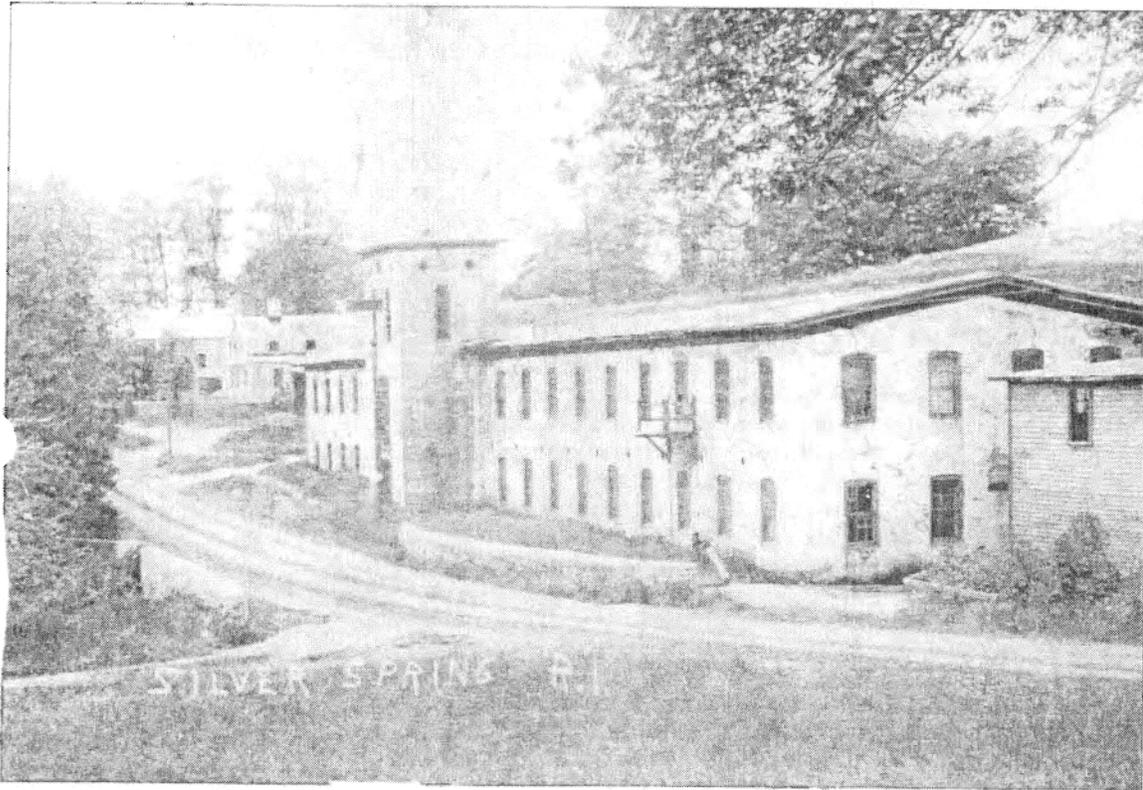
He alone, paid a whopping 3.5% of the town's entire tax bill. To put this in perspective, for someone in 2002 to account for this percentage of our taxes, he would have to own taxable real estate assets worth 49 million dollars. His contemporary Charles Davol, the then sole owner of Davol Rubber, had an equally large and impressive summer hunting and fishing estate which included most of what is now Quonset Point and South Quidnessett. Equally impressive, although spread amongst a much larger group of people, the combined assets of the Rodman families and Rodman Manufacturing accounted for nearly 5% of the town's taxes. Together, Knight, Davol, and the Rodmans paid more than 10% of the town's expenses.

So what do these tantalizing facts tell us? Were these a bunch of robber barons who prospered at other's expense? Was "Let them eat cake" their motto or was it a spirit of compassionate community involvement that motivated them? After some more research I'm able to say that the facts point to a mixed bag of truths. First, its easy to ascertain that all of these folks (my own family included to a lesser degree, to be fair) reaped the rewards of a real estate market that had bottomed out in a fashion that we can not even imagine. All of them, increased their real estate holdings to a large degree. Some of them, Henry Barber, the Dennis's and the principals of the Mount View Land Co. in particular, eventually reaped great rewards from their holdings when times got better. So in that respect, maybe they did take advantage of the times. But in their defense, they kept hundreds, maybe thousands, working. Davol and Knight employed scores of out of work and down on their luck local farmers, laborers, and horse trainers on their payrolls. The Rodmans, Greene's (Hamilton Web), and Curry's (Belleville), although they did have to curtail production occasionally, did everything in their power, sometimes to their own financial detriment, to keep the mills open and keep people employed through the hard times. No one, to my knowledge, was ever booted out, Snidely Whiplash style, from a mill-owned home or turned away empty-handed from the company store during those trying times. No bereaved family was ever turned away from my family's place of business no matter what their financial condition. North Kingstown's citizens, like those of countless communities across America, pulled together and helped each other through it all; however they could. And the community as a whole, amazingly, was able to maintain a fund from which they assisted folks in need throughout the entire Depression. Supported by the tax dollars of folks like Charles Davol and Prescott Knight, and supplemented by the private donations of folks who could afford to give, the fund of "The Overseer of the Poor" overseen for a time by my grandfather George C. Cranston Jr., was administered with regard for folk's dignity and without troublesome and humiliating paperwork. Who needed forms and paperwork when you were dealing with your friends and neighbors. It turns out that the motto of the times in North Kingstown wasn't "let them eat cake" at all, rather it was "There, but for the grace of God, go I".

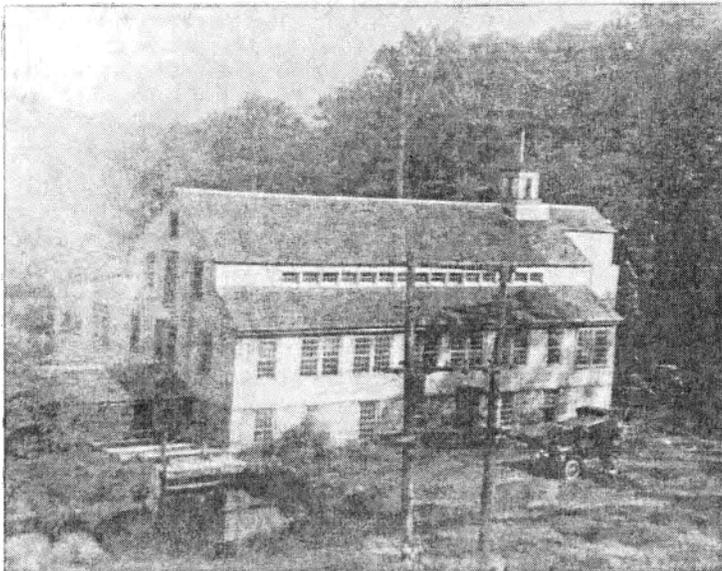


The fine photo of Lafayette above was taken from the edge of what is now Lafayette Road but then would have been referred to as Swamptown Road. The track of the Newport & Wickford Line can be seen in the foreground. Many of these homes still exist, the notable exception being the wooden Rodman mill building just right of center.

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At left, an part of Boston Neck Road, the dirt thoroughfare running in front of the Silver Spring Mill is now called Pendar Road, which was connected to Shady Lee via the smaller lane to the left. The house in the background has remained there to this day.



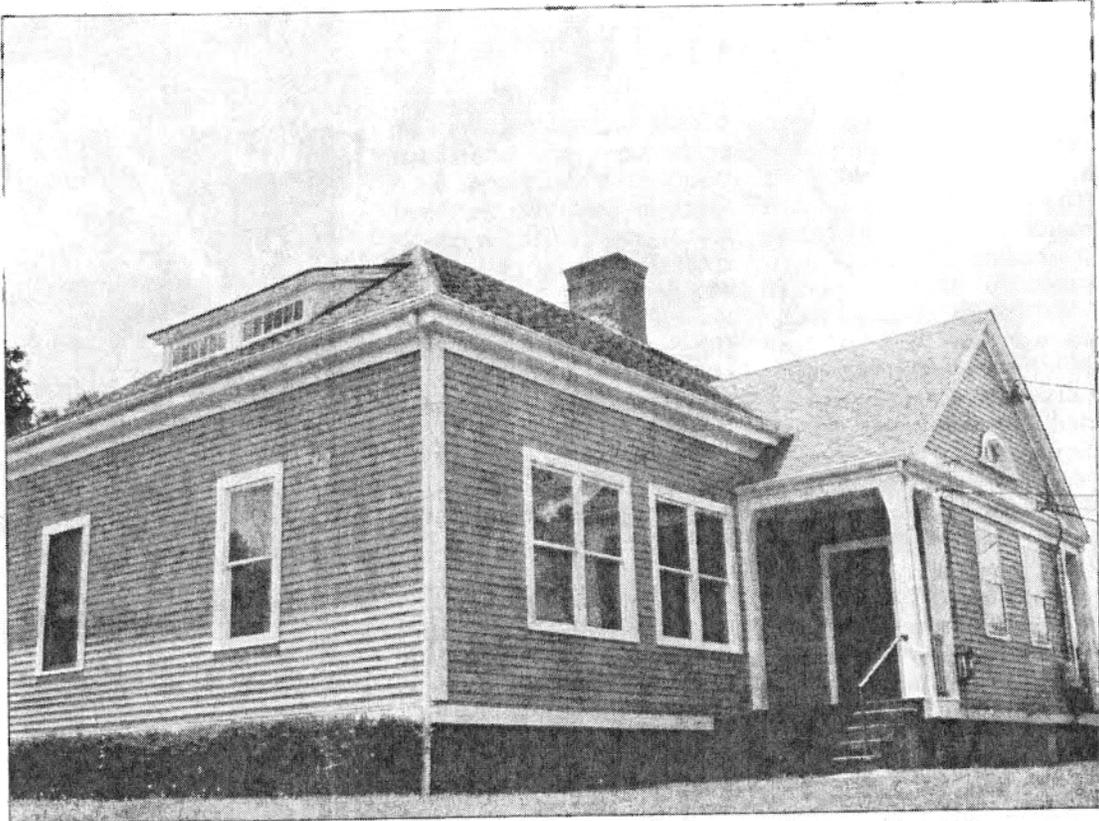
A 1940s aerial view of the village of Hamilton is seen at left. The four-story wooden mill seen at the center-right of the photograph is one of the last surviving examples of its kind. Above are a turn-of-the-century photograph (center) of the Davisville Mill along the Hunt River and (at right) Belleville Mill as it appeared in the early 1900s. The small building to the far right still stands today at the corner of Mill Pond and Oak Hill Road, along which the mill was situated.

## The View From Swamptown

### Preserving our Mill Village Heritage

Lately my mind has been occupied with thoughts of mill villages and historic photographs. Through my educational outreach entity "Swamptown Enterprises", I have, of late, been deeply involved in both. I am just finishing up teaching an N.K. Adult Education course on the history of our fair town's many mill villages and I am half way through a very satisfying experience researching and producing a photo exhibition centered around the late 19th and early 20th century photographs of village pharmacist E.E."Doc" Young of Wickford. During the course of preparing materials for the Mill Village offering I was struck by how many wonderful photographs there are that capture that era so succinctly. At the same time, I am also quite aware of the fact that most of these amazing images, a number of which I have included with this week's column, are not accessible to the average citizen. Through my experiences with the photo exhibit, I have confirmed what I already intuitively knew. People love old photos! Nothing allows folks to connect with times gone by like a photograph. Putting two and two together, I have decided to venture forth again down that "photo exhibit trail" and undertake to put together an exhibit on our "Mill Village Heritage". With that in mind, I turn to you readers, my number one resource, and ask for your help. Search your attic and your photo albums for those wonderful old mill related images and make the choice to share them with your community. In doing so you will be a part of my effort to create an archive that will benefit North Kingstown's citizens for generations to come. Your ancestors will be memorialized for eternity. I am particularly interested in images showing mill people at work and play. Although the physical structures that made up our mill villages are important and deserve remembering, its the people that made Belleville Belleville, that made Lafayette, Hamilton, Silver Spring, and Shady Lea (to name a few) the distinctly special places that they were. That's really what I want to get at. So start searching and let me know what you come up with. I'll keep all of you informed as the exhibit progresses.

I am now pleased to announce that my column compilation books are available at Wilson's of Wickford, as well as Bassett's Books and Smith's Castle. The photo exhibit "Doc Young's World" will run at the library through the month of June.



PHOTOS: JAMES RUSH

A 1906 plan to relocate students from the East Lafayette School (above) to former Schoolhouse No. 9 (below), then move the East Lafayette building to Wickford to house the town's burgeoning high school population drew ire from town parents.



## The View From Swamptown

### School Committee Troubles Then and Now

The recent ruckus over school re-districting has got me thinking. I expect most folks with school children probably figure that these have been some hard times of late in this area. And I'm sure that those poor brave souls who serve on the school committee, and have dedicated so much time and so much well-intentioned thought to the troubles at hand feel much maligned and malingered. There's truly no easy answers to questions such as these; none at least that will make everybody happy.

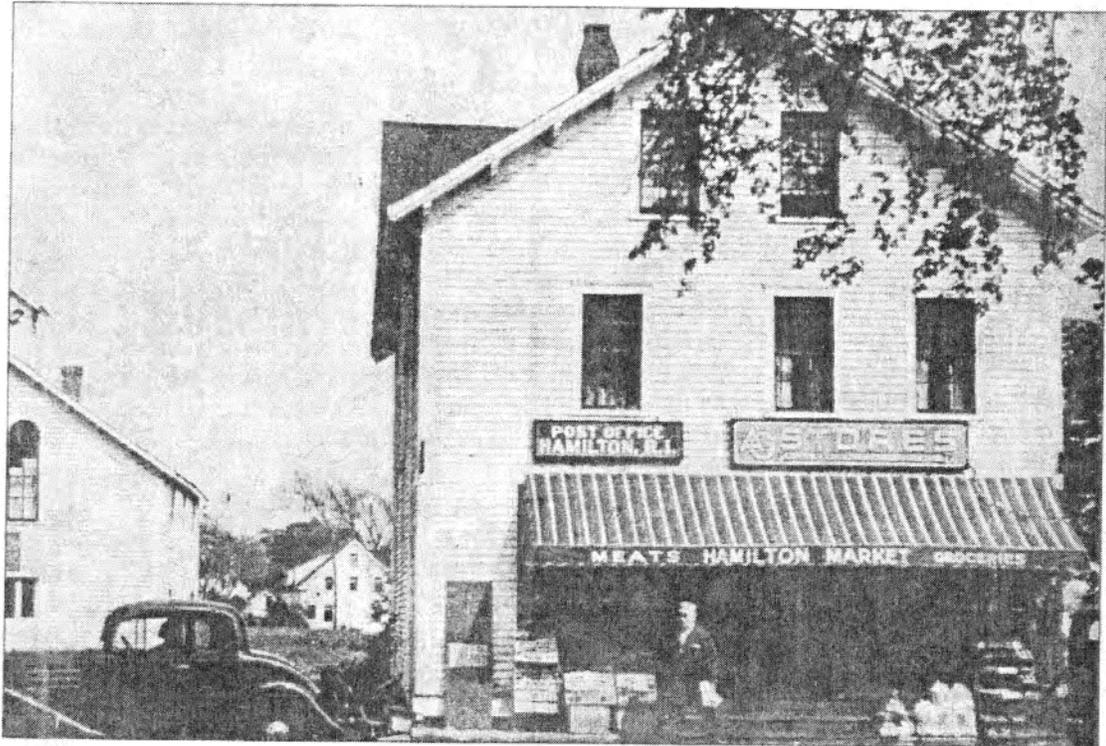
But these problems, and the ensuing ruckus, pale in comparison to the uproar that arose from the School Committee plan proposed to the public in the 1906 school year. That Committee, led by Chairman Thomas W. D. Rathbun (Rathbuns loved long impressive-sounding names back then) and including Thaddeus Hunt, James Carson, George Gardner, Frederick Cole, Michael O'Connell, and Joseph Madison, were wrestling with a similar beast; not enough space for students in one area, but excess space throughout the school system. You see, the town's fledgling high school was, by that time, spread out among three different buildings. High school classes were held in the upper floor of the Gregor, Building in downtown Wickford, as well as, in the old GAR Hall (located at the site of the present-day Ryan's Market parking lot) and at the Old Towne House on West Main Street. As you can imagine, this did not lend itself to a seamless continuity of the educational system. So, naturally, all across town, the parents of high school students were a little on the aggravated end of the spectrum. Tom Rathbun, known as "the Swamptown Lawyer" for his amazing self-taught knowledge of things legal, proper, and right versus wrong, and his committee knew full well that there was plenty of excess space up in Lafayette where they had a closed schoolhouse at their disposal (the former Schoolhouse #9, now an antique shop). He also knew that his High School would have to be located in Wickford, as there was no town-wide school bus system in place and the students of the town's High School were using the very convenient Seaview Trolley system to get back and forth to school. So what was the answer then? Well after much pondering, pontificating, and scratching of heads, the Committee came up with its answer. Their solution to the problem was "like putting out fires with gasoline" as the saying goes. Rather than lowering the general level of grumbling across the town, it only shifted it to another group of parents and turned it from a grumble into a lion's roar.

What Tom Rathbun and his fellow Committeemen proposed as a cost effective solution was to move all the Lafayette students from their recently upgraded East Lafayette Schoolhouse (now home to The Meadows Edge) into the abandoned Schoolhouse #9 just up the road a bit and physically relocate the East Lafayette school building down the Ten Rod Road into Wickford, plopping it down next to the Wickford Academy Building, and -voila-, problem solved; the town got a High School in Wickford adjacent to the Seaview Station, the empty school in Lafayette gets a new lease on life, and no taxpayers need spend a dime on constructing a new school building.

Well, you can imagine the hollering that began after that pronouncement. First, it was, "Why can't they move that old #9 schoolhouse down to Wickford, instead of the nice East Lafayette building? I expect the understandable answer was, that it's too tall and too old to be moved that far. Next came the grumbling under the collective breath of every Lafayette parent concerning the fact that those high-falutin' Wickford folks always got their way. This was probably countered in "ye olde quaint and historic" with something about Rodman's always getting what they want, the Rodman family having kicked in considerably to have a nice school for their community. The only thing the two groups agreed upon was that it was all the School Committee's fault. I expect Tom Rathbun and his cohorts had not a clue as to what particular train had run them over. "Come up with a creative idea and look at the thanks you get." I expect that sounds familiar to certain present-day groups of public servants.

In the end, it seemed that fate played its hand and all plans went out the window. For in February of 1907 the Wickford Academy building burned to the ground and the replacement schoolhouse, the Wickford Grammar School, paid for largely with insurance money, was designed with enough space to house the high school classes. Everyone was happy now, there was a new school building in Wickford, the East Lafayette School stayed put where a Rodman had sited it, the School Committee members were no longer viewed as public pariahs, and the Schoolhouse #9 eventually became a community hall. The grumbling, pretty much, ceased. Although it was noted, in whispered comments, how convenient things all worked out; maybe someone from Lafayette started that fire, or could it have been a desperate school committee member .... hmmm...I wonder....

But seriously, what lessons can be learned from all this. First, for all us parents; let's not forget that solutions that make everyone happy are rarer than a swamp yankee handing out free passes, and don't lose track of the undeniable fact that being a school committee member is truly public service at its thankless best. Our present committee is giving it their best shot, just like old Tom Rathbun and his gang did near a hundred years ago. Second, for you Committee members out there, my hats off to you; keep trying and above all keep listening. And finally to all involved; stay away from matches, insurance adjusters are a tougher bunch than any irate parent.



This circa 1940 photograph above shows Hamilton's Annaquatucket Hall to the far left where it stood before the end of the mill era doomed the building to demolition. The former company store and post office building on the right still remains and is now known as E & J's Restaurant, seen below.

## **Halls were social centers during era of mill villages**

Back before the age of the television and its more recently arrived cousins the VCR, DVD, ad personal computer, folks relied upon social events for their entertainment.

Don't get me wrong; this Swamp Yankee likes his PC just as much as the next guy and the World Wide Web is nearly as valuable a research tool as those musty dusty books and ledgers I've always got my nose in.

But, you see, the sad fact of the matter is that the Information Age within which we all now reside, really ought to be called the Isolation Age as, more times than not, the whole bunch of us can be found individually sitting in front of some sort of flickering screen lost in our thoughts (or are they that screen's thoughts?) isolated from our family, friends, and neighbors by good old technology.

It's been that way for quite a time, too, but heck, when I was a youngster most folks could only afford one "boob tube" and we at least had to interact with one another around it. Nowadays, families have one or two flickering screens per family member, further isolating us from our loved ones.

But it wasn't always like that. Throughout the 1800's and early 1900's every village worth its salt had a community hall for socializing. Why, it was a matter of village pride to have the biggest and best hall you could manage. Every event imaginable transpired in these buildings. From baptisms to weddings, receptions to funerals, the village people's lives were celebrated in their halls. Friends and neighbors gathered for strawberry socials, ham and bean dinners, traveling performers and local drama troops. Men met for cigars, cards and camaraderie and women got together to converse, quilt and share the burdens of their lives.

Our shared humanity forced us to get together, talk and laugh, and ultimately forge a cohesive community. In the past, this column has tipped its hat to a number of these halls. We've looked at Wickford's Odd Fellows Hall, the Allenton Social Club, Davisville's Pine Grove Hall, and Hazard's Hall in Lafayette, just to name a few. This week let's take a Swamptown gander at two halls that no longer grace our villages: Rodman's Hall in Lafayette and the Annaquatucket Hall in the village of Hamilton.

As I've often said, Robert Rodman was never a man to be outdone and I expect once Wickford's grand Odd Fellows Hall was constructed it bristled his feathers a bit for Lafayette to be second fiddle to any community. With that in mind, in 1890 Rodman set about to build the area's biggest and best. The hall he constructed for his mill employee "family" sat near 750 folks, boasted a full size stage with a complete set of stock scenery and an ample kitchen able to serve up a mess of good grub. At its opening, the



PHOTO: JAMES RUSH



Lafayette's villagers used their former schoolhouse (now an antique shop) as a community gathering place after a disgruntled mill worker burned Rodman Hall to the ground.

newspapers spoke of "Its interior decorations in becoming colors, a modern heating system and its lights being provided by a gas plant."

For more than 40 years Lafayette's citizens enjoyed their hall, which sat just north of the big church on Advent Street, until it was torched by a disgruntled mill worker in the early 1930's. Lafayette's citizens then moved their village social life to the former Schoolhouse No. 9 -- by then known as Hazard's Hall. Both can be seen in the accompanying photographs.

Down in Hamilton, the Greenes provided for their mill workers with the Annaquatucket Hall. Church services, social events and Hamilton Web's famed Christmas celebrations were held behind its doors for generations. It was torn down soon after the end of milling in Hamilton. The Annaquatucket hall can be seen in the accompanying photo right next to the former company store and post office (now E & J's Restaurant, formerly Rudy's Market).

I must say, I'm heartened by the recent popularity of events like the North Kingstown Art Council's ongoing concert series in Wickford. It's great to see good folks gathering together as a community again to share some good times. Maybe there's hope for us all yet.



Lafayette lass Lottie Bates is shown in front of the Rodman Hall in this photo from the early 1900s.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

The historic Immanuel Case House once known as "the pink house" at 41 Main St. had fallen into disrepair, but it is pink no longer with a fresh coat of white paint. Below, the Reynolds Homestead on Essex Road is getting a major facelift, from the restored clapboard to a new cedar shake roof.



## The View From Swamptown

### Tips of the Hat & Pats on the Back

I can't help but notice in my travels around "Our Fair Town", how much restoration and reconstruction is going on. From Quidnessett to "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic" folks are fixing up and sprucing up some of our most important historic structures. Well, I figure notice is due and thanks are in order; so, without further ado, its time for a "tip of the old broad-brimmed felt" and a pat on the back to the owners and good stewards of some of North Kingstown's most wonderful places.

First, it does a body good to see progress being made on a long-standing member of the Town's Most Endangered Sites list. Yes, that's right, the folks at EDC are holding true to their word and a much needed new roof is being installed on the Allen Madison House at this very moment. Bravo, to those in charge at Quonset/Davisville.

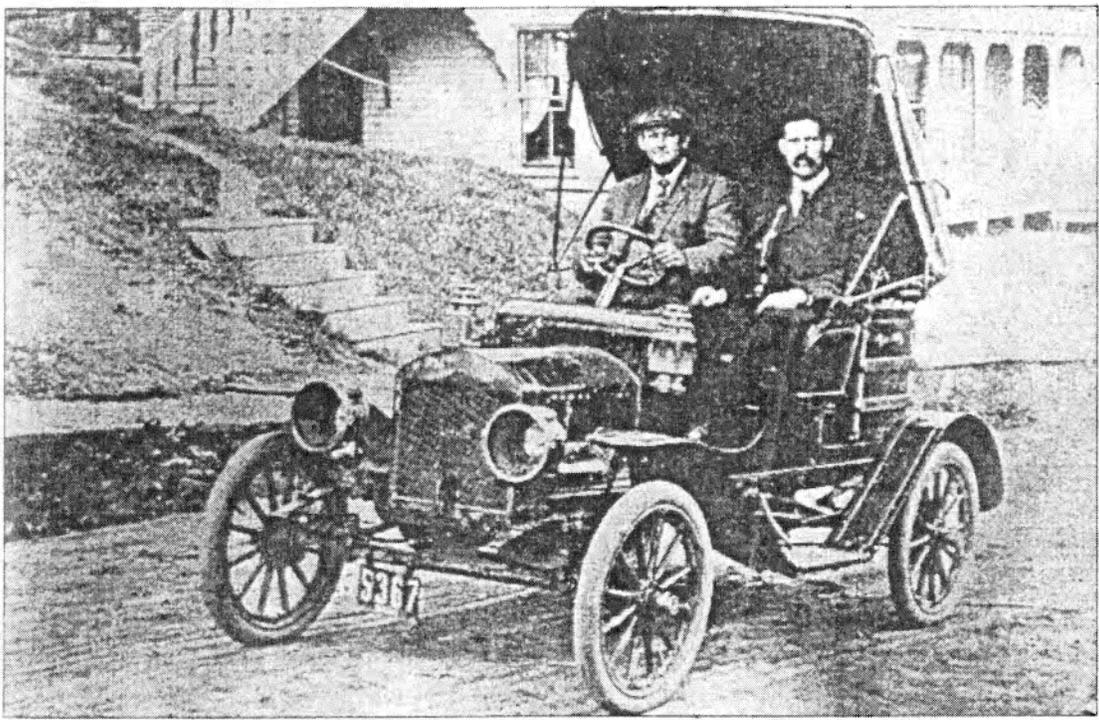
Another perennial Endangered Sites list member has also recently been provided with a new roof, a well deserved coat of paint and many general much needed repairs. A Swamptown "tip of the hat" is due to the owners of the Immanuel Case House (AKA the Pink House) on Main Street for their recent efforts towards preserving this magnificent home.

Just down the street in Wickford, repairs to St. Paul's Steeple are wrapping up. The bell tower and clock, which at one time was the village's official timepiece, is now ready for another century or two of service to its community. Thank you to the St. Paul's community.

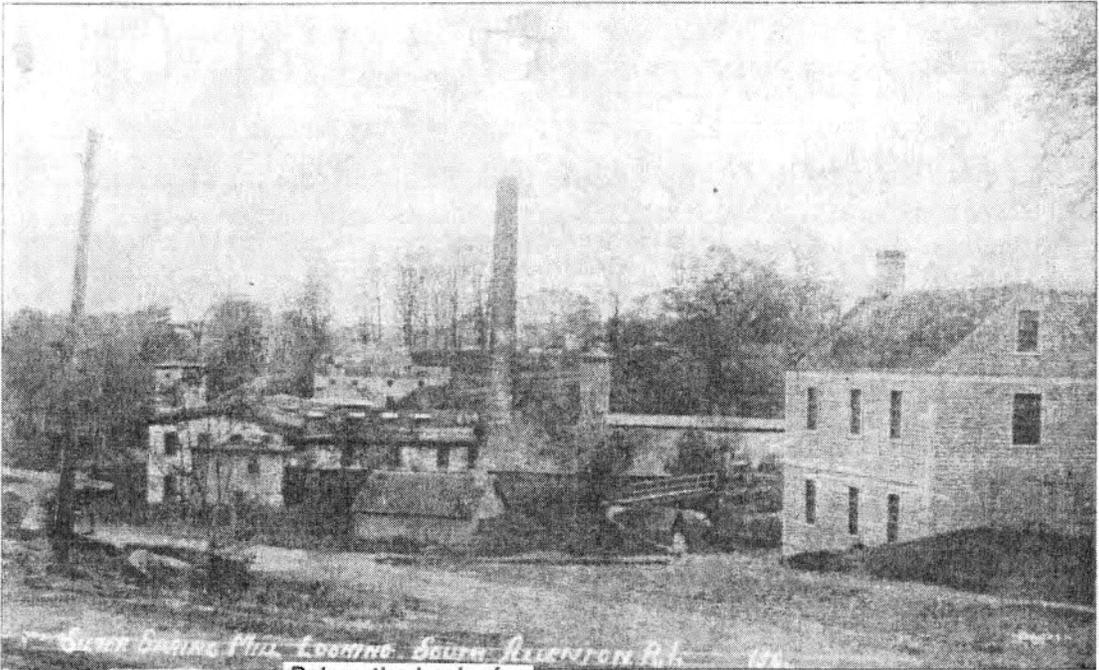
A touch farther down the way, at 11 Bay Street, the George Fowler cottage is getting a complete rehab, thanks to its new owners. Everyone who cares about Wickford thanks them as well.

Up on Essex Road in the Quidnessett section of town, the Reynolds Homestead too, is getting a major facelift, from the restored clapboard to the classy cedar shake roof, this old house is looking as good as it ever has in its previous 200 years of existence.

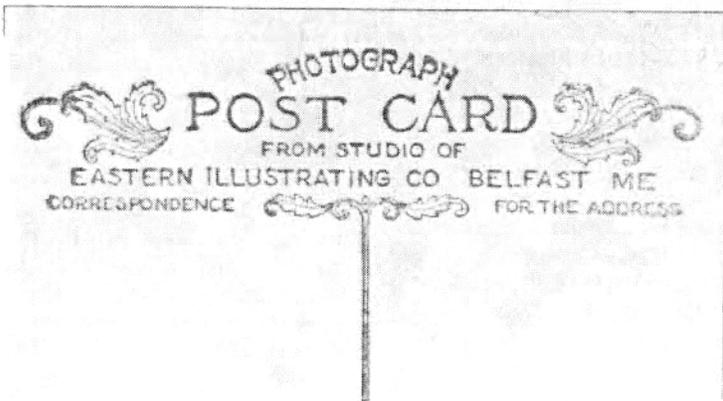
These are just the most notable goings-on in town. All over North Kingstown, I've noticed classy new paint jobs, the addition of lots of appropriate stonewalls, and repairs galore. Thanks to all involved, keep up the good work North Kingstown.



Herman Cassens (right) and his principal photographer, Horace Ellingswood, are pictured in the company car in 1909. This is the time frame in which all of the North Kingstown photo postcards were made. Below, an Eastern Illustrating Co. postcard shows a view of the Silver Spring Mill in Allenton.



Below, the back of a later postcard indicates its maker is Eastern Illustrating Co. Earlier cards had no identification and can only be identified by the labeling and numbering so typically found on the front.



Because Herman Cassens was not familiar with the area, some cards contained errors. The card above of St. Bernard's Church was printed backwards from the negative.

## The View From Swamptown

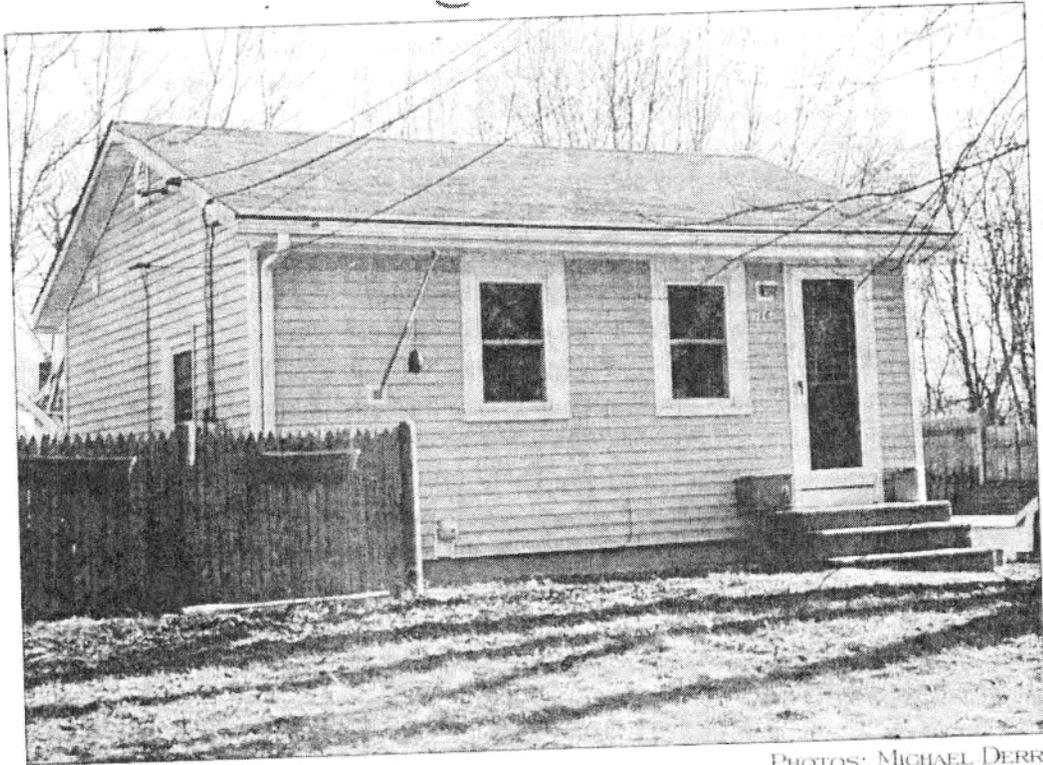
### The Eastern Illustrating & Publishing Company Postcards

Perhaps, like me, you've wondered where all those wonderful old picture postcards of "Our Fair Town" at the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century came from. As we've seen over the years, many of them were locally produced by drugstore owners like "Doc" Young and the Sealy's and Seavey's that followed him. A few were produced on a very limited basis for special events like Fairs or school graduations. But the lion's share of these wonderful little "windows" into the past were produced by a then recent German immigrant photographer and entrepreneur from Rockland and later, Belfast, Maine named Herman Cassens. Cassen's company was called Eastern Illustrating & Publishing, and throughout the first ¼ of the twentieth century Herman and his photographers, principally Horace Ellingwood, traveled across rural New England and New York and, without realizing it, compiled the most complete and compelling record of an era ever seen.

Eastern Illustrating's photo postcards of the many villages that make up North Kingstown were taken during a period of time that ran from about 1905 to about 1920. The images on these postcards can be dated by subtle differences in the card's design, both front and back. The very earliest, which can only be identified by the very typical location description and ID number handwritten on the front, were taken prior to 1910, probably by Cassens himself. The later cards, identified by the sometimes ornate trademark on the card back were taken by Ellingwood between 1913 and 1915. Finally, cards with a less ornate trademark on the reverse were done after 1915 again by Ellingwood.

As these men traveled the backroads of the region in the company car (seen in the accompanying photo) they also acted as a salesman visiting every little "Mom & Pop" corner store and market in each town selling new cards and restocking the popular older scenes as they sold out. Back in Belfast, at the company plant, the job of developing, printing, cutting, and packaging the cards fell to a small workforce made up mostly of Herman's relations. In fact, it was Herman's sister Lottie, and his two daughters Geraldine and Dorothy who hand titled and numbered each negative plate, in reverse and from right to left, so it would show properly when printed.

I'm always amazed by the clarity and composition of each of Cassens wonderful picture postcards. As I stare into them and wonder about the identity of an unknown passerby who probably lingered a bit to watch Herman or Horace set up his camera and thereby inadvertently became a part of this unique historic record, I realize that this is as close as I'll ever get to being a time traveler. Herman Cassens truly understood the old saying, "A picture is worth a thousand words". He always claimed to be "the largest manufacturer of photo postcards in the U.S.", in doing so he also, unknowingly became New England's most important preserver of history. Thank you Herman!!!



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

At 6,700 square feet, the town's largest historic house (below) still in use as a single-family dwelling is at Duck Cove Farm off Boston Neck Road. By comparison, the smallest is a 400-square-foot cottage on Mill Pond Drive in Belleville.



## The View From Swamptown

### A Tale of Two Houses

This week we are going to take a Swamptown gander at two very different homes. One built in 1876, by one of the area's premier families, is, at 6700 square feet of living space, the largest historic home in Our Fair Town still being utilized as a single family dwelling. The other, built 65 years later by a mill worker, is at just 400 square feet, the town's tiniest home, historic or otherwise.

First, let's contemplate the life of Harry E. and Alice G. Northup, the builder's of the simple little house at 16 Mill Pond Drive in the former mill village of Belleville. Harry was born in Providence in 1898 and moved down to Belleville in the early 1930's to work as a fireman at the Belleville Woolen Mill of T. Morton Curry. Now a fireman at a mill complex is not what you might initially think. It was Harry's job, day in and day out, month after month, year after year, to stoke and tend to the boilers that kept Mr. Curry's mill running. It was a tough and dirty job, tending the fires in those boilers. Not a desirable one by today's standards. But during those Depression times of the early 30's, any job was like gold and Harry probably thanked his lucky stars each day as he left his wife Alice, a local gal from the Young family, and grabbed a hold of his coal shovel. In 1948, a very happy Mr & Mrs Northup purchased a small parcel of land from their boss, Mr. Curry and built the tiny home. As the couple was never blessed with children, their house was, unlike the rest of the mill homes, never enlarged from its original 20 X 20 footprint and remains that way to this day. Both Harry and Alice lived out their days in the little cottage. It was probably the only house they ever owned.

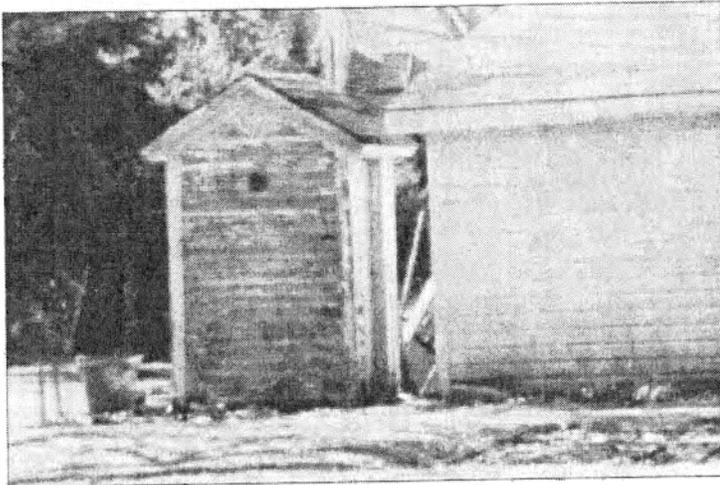
Out at Duck Cove Farm, off of Boston Neck Road, sits the Mansion House of Randall Holden Greene. Mr Greene had purchased the big sprawling Gentleman's farm, with its farmlands, fields, and cranberry bogs from Judge John Pitman of Providence in 1852. At first, he lived in a home on the property known as "The Cottage", although I expect Harry & Alice might have thought a little differently. By 1876, Greene, by then with twelve children, felt he had outgrown his home and had "The Mansion" built. The grand Victorian mansard-roofed home with twenty rooms has been in the hands of a descendant of Randall Greene ever since. Sadly, he really did not get to enjoy his home for long. By 1879 Greene had passed on; during a portion of that time he had magnanimously allowed his friends the Baker's to stay in the Mansion. A young Baker daughter grew up to become Anita Hinkley and wrote of her time in the Greene mansion fondly. For a wonderful description of what life was like then at Duck Cove Farm pick up her delightful book.

So there you have it. North Kingstown's largest historic home (it's the 5<sup>th</sup> largest home in town, historic or otherwise) and its littlest, are, as you can see by the accompanying photographs, both fairing quite well. By the way, the largest home ever in town, was owned by Walter Rodman out Lafayette way, its now been divided up into a number of condominiums and looks pretty good in its own right. And the town's littlest

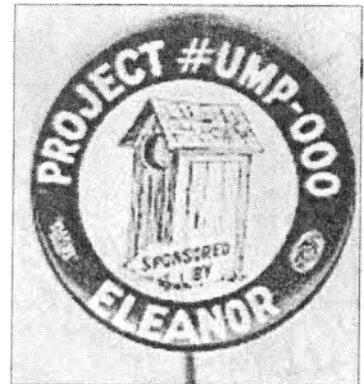
house ever, is, as we learned last year, prettily sitting as a garden shed out behind the Stephen Cooper/Samuel Brenton House in “Ye Olde Quaint & Historic”.



A rare double-door "four-holer" outhouse, the finest in North Kingstown, can be found in the Shady Lea/Silver Spring area.



A garage is built right up to this outhouse, which would have been in use at the time when its surrounding neighborhood was known as East Lafayette.



A faux Works Progress Administration outhouse button created by the Republican party of the 1930s pokes fun at one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's many New Deal projects.

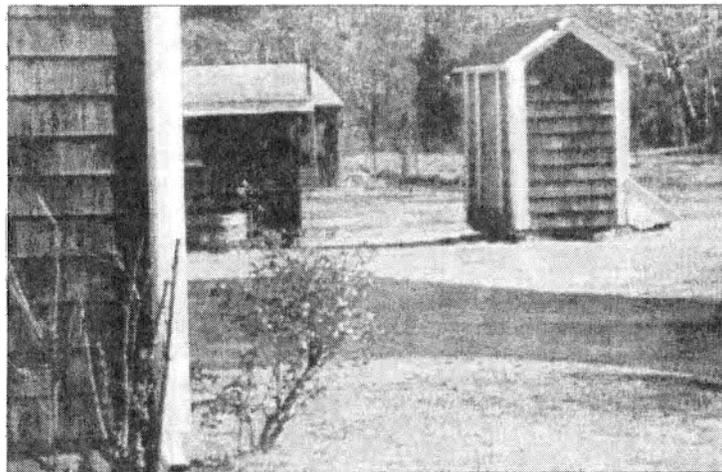
## The View From Swamptown

### Outhouses

Outhouses are as American as “Mom’s Apple Pie”. Although this may not be the best analogy, it certainly is a fact. The ubiquitous, utilitarian outhouse has been a part of the scenery for as long as there have been European settlers here in New England. Outhouses are a symbol of times long past and they are disappearing from that scene at a rapid clip. Before long they’ll be gone and few will even notice their passing. But, for a time anyway, we’re lucky here in our fair town. Many of the little “working man’s” villages that once made up North Kingstown still possess quite a number of these entertaining anachronisms. You’ve just got to know where to look.

My earliest run-in with an outhouse occurred at the Cranston family summer place on Silver Spring Pond. “Camp” as we used to call it, was, unbeknownst to me at the time, originally the home of the Pardon T. Cranston family and had passed from Pardon to his son Byron and then to my grandfather (who was Byron’s cousin). It was a grand place to a child in the 1960’s, besides the main house, it had a little beach area, a dock, a real hand pumped well, a canoe, lots of land with lots of old trails, and a three holed outhouse attached to a woodshed. As an adult I later learned that this setup, an outhouse attached to a woodshed, was the epitome of “Swamp Yankee Ingenuity”. You see, as a swamp yankee man of the house, you’d realize that womenfolk are always going to the outhouse; it seems a shame that they make those many trips back throughout the day empty handed, they might as well grab a few sticks of firewood on each return trip and fill up the woodbox in the process. You might also wonder, “What’s the deal with the half moon on the outhouse door?” Well, tradition states that the half moon was a feminine symbol in the days of yore, it stood on the doors of about half of all the outhouses back in that time when illiteracy was as common place as, well, outhouses. The other outhouses all had sun symbols on them. It seems that womenfolk took better care of their facilities than menfolk, so before long only the half moon women’s outhouses survived. An outhouse in those days was a simple thing, nothing in it really but maybe a big old Sears Catalog and a bushel basket of old corn cobs. I expect from which of these two you partook to finish up your business was a matter of masculine pride and a symbol of yankee toughness back in those days (Ouch!).

Outhouses also became a part of the political vernacular back in the 1930’s. You see, one of FDR’s WPA projects was building “modern” outhouses in outlying rural poor areas, particularly in the south and west. It was actually a pet project of Eleanor Roosevelt, as hookworm was running rampant through these areas, particularly in the population of barefoot young children who often caught the parasite in unsanitary outhouses. The WPA sanitary outhouse (now there’s an oxymoron for you) cost about \$17 and 20 man hours to build. Thousands were constructed across America by three man outhouse building teams. Of course politics being what they are, the Republicans got a hold of this project and milked it for all it was worth. The little lapel pin shown in the accompanying photo is a product of these times.



This authentic Swamptown outhouse has a clean-out on the back for easy maintenance. Below is a rustic example of an outhouse located in Lafayette.

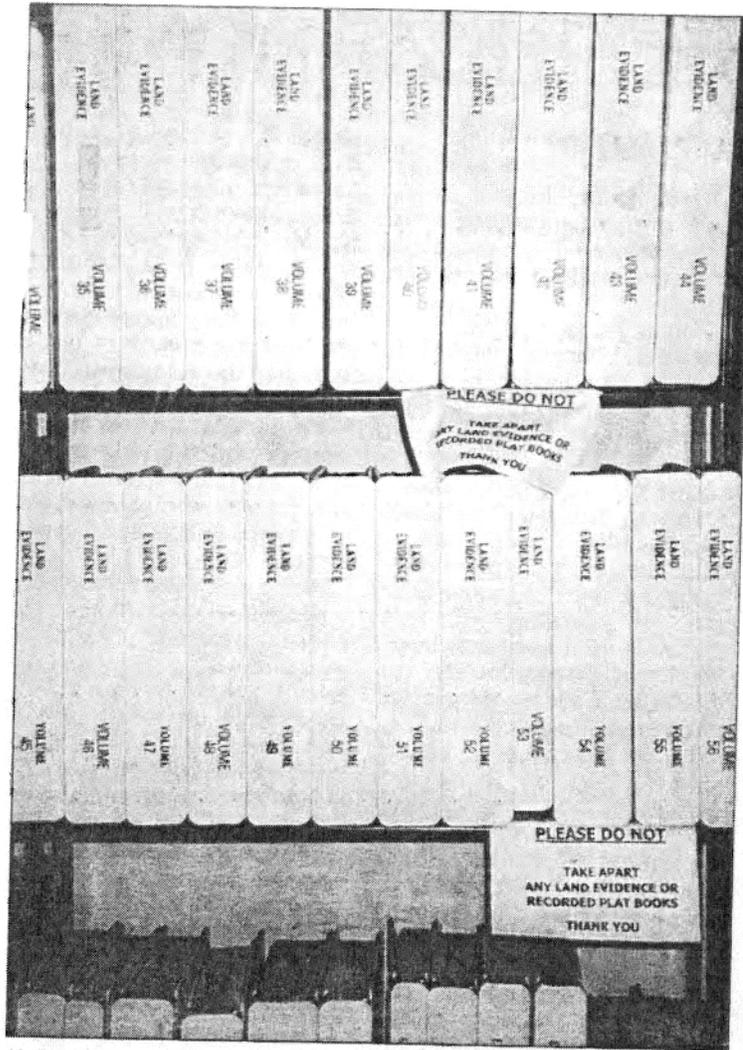


This building located in Belleville represents the most common type of outhouse.

Now, I guess outhouses exist as time capsules of sorts. Not only do they in themselves represent something simpler and bygone, they actually are the best places to find artifacts from those days. An outhouse was also a little garbage dump, and a whole class of "bottle hounds" who call themselves privy diggers are as pleased as punch to dig an old outhouse site up to get at the treasures that are to be found there. So, if you've got an old outhouse or outhouse site (usually distinguished by a small square of foundation stones) in your yard, if you can get past all the unsavory images, get out your shovel and start digging; who knows what you'll find there!



**This abandoned outhouse borders East Lafayette and West Wickford.**



Using your house's plat and lot number, you can learn which land evidence book, like these above, contains information about your property.

## Use records to research your home's history

“Where do you come up with all that information about houses and the people who lived in them? How did you find that out?” What’s the secret to learning about an old home?”

I guess these types of questions are some of the most common that I hear. It’s understandable really; if you’re lucky enough to live in a house that has had a few centuries worth of history pass through its doorway, it’s only human nature to want to know what may have happened there and who may have frequented the place that you now call home.

That’s the charm of an old house; it has a pedigree, a provenance, as they say in the antiques game. An old house is so much more than a collection of creaky boards, squeaky floors and drafty windows. It’s a mystery just waiting to unfold, a puzzle waiting to be solved and a story about real people who led real lives, just waiting to be told. In the telling we honor those folks’ memory, for an instant they become alive again.

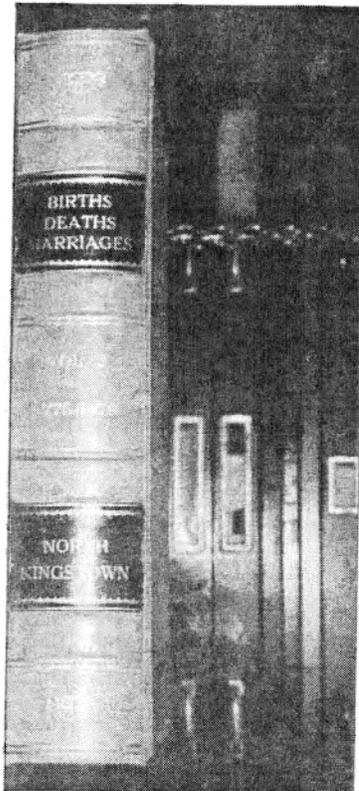
One of my favorite stories came to me while I was researching the history of the ownership of a North Kingstown textile mill. During the search I found that a 12-year-old girl, whose mill-owner father had died without a will, owned this major industrial concern for a time. Her story fired up my imagination for many weeks. Tales of former slaves owning homes in town spark newfound respect and admiration. Stories of folks overcoming odds we cannot even imagine often help place our own lives in perspective.

So where to begin, you ask? Well, pack up a pad, a pencil and a great deal of patience and head off to your local town hall and the musty, dusty world of land evidence records. It’s here that the bare bones of your house’s story reside.

To get at that story, you’ll need the plat and lot number of your home. This can be found on your tax or real estate records or hunted up on the town-wide plat and lot maps at the town hall.

With plat and lot number in hand you can begin your search. Depending on the community, take the plat/lot number and pull up the land evidence record in the card files or within a computerized record. These records will reference a land evidence book and page number. Find the property book, turn to the referenced page and you’re on your way.

As you examine the deed of transfer you find there, take a note of property descriptions, specific names for the property (like “the old Smith Farm,” for instance), other folks whose names might be mentioned (spouses, parents, neighbors, etc.) and most



**This is what a typical index of births, deaths and marriages looks like. This one is in North Kingstown Town Hall.**

## **Dig for history in your town hall**

**Charlestown Town Hall**  
4540 South County Trail  
364-1200  
[www.charlestownri.org](http://www.charlestownri.org)  
Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.,  
weekdays

**East Greenwich Town Hall**  
125 Main St.  
886-8606  
[www.eastgreenwichri.com](http://www.eastgreenwichri.com)  
Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.,  
weekdays

**Narragansett Town Hall**  
25 Fifth Ave.  
789-1044  
[www.narragansettri.org](http://www.narragansettri.org)  
Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.,  
weekdays

**North Kingstown Town Hall**  
80 Boston Neck Road  
294-3331  
[www.northkingstown.org](http://www.northkingstown.org)  
Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.,  
weekdays

**South Kingstown Town Hall**  
80 High St., Wakefield  
788-9792  
[www.southkingstownri.com](http://www.southkingstownri.com)  
Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.,  
weekdays

importantly, references to previous land evidence recordings (i.e. “as described in land evidence record book “31, page 593”).

With these previous record references, you can sometimes trace your home’s ownership back hundreds of years. But, more often than not, it’s not quite that easy. You, the sleuth on the hunt, can easily lose the trail. When that happens, you’ve got to rely upon a land evidence records index to get you back on track.

These indexes are arranged alphabetically and chronologically and track grantees (sellers) and grantors (buyers). So take the last owner’s name you are sure of, look it up in the index and get yourself back in the game. This is where your property description will come in handy. You might find that your previous owner was a true real estate wheeler-dealer and there are many transactions recorded for this individual in the time frame you are referencing. Now you know why I suggested bringing along that patience!

As you go back farther in time, take note of changes in the property description. From these you often can surmise when your home was constructed or your land parcel subdivided.

Don’t be surprised if all this takes you, the novice real estate sleuth, a couple of visits to the land evidence records room. While you’re there, pulling out your hair trying to figure this all out, stop a bit and contemplate the eternal question, “Why would anyone want to be a profession title searcher and do this every day?”

So, after this exercise in detective work is finished, you should have a nice list of names and dates that will show the history of ownership of your home. You’ll probably note that, up until recent times, folks held on to their homes for many years, sometimes keeping them in the family for generations.

Perhaps this list of facts is all that you wanted and you’ll happily move on to other pursuits. If you do, you’ll miss the really interesting and important part of your home’s story.

As I mentioned, these facts are only the bare bones of the tale. You had better head back into the land of musty, dusty ledgers and tomes and learn a little about these people who lived and died, laughed and cried, within the same walls that you reside.

Pick a person that fascinates you, perhaps the home’s first or longest resident and get to know them. Back at Town Hall, you can often learn much from the birth, death and marriage records. These too, are organized in an index arranged chronologically and alphabetically (for both brides and grooms in marriage records). Generally speaking, records of these types older than 75 years are available for public scrutiny. More recent than that and you may have to prove that you are a relation before you can see the records.

The town hall also is the repository for old tax records (often found at the library as



**When you get stuck in your history hunt, the land evidence records index can get you back on track.**

well). From these you can learn about a person's other real estate holdings or perhaps a business they owned. Again at your town hall, the probate records often are a source of a wealth of information, particularly wills and other legal documents regarding your former owner and his family. Probate records also are indexed chronologically and alphabetically.

By now you're probably tired of poring over old ledgers at the town hall, so head to our community's public library and take a gander at your subject's obituary in the local paper, which can be found there stored on microfilm or microfiche. Not all of these are indexed, so you'll need that death date you got at the town hall. Remember, most town newspapers were weeklies, so don't be surprised to find that the obituary ran one or even two weeks after the death date.

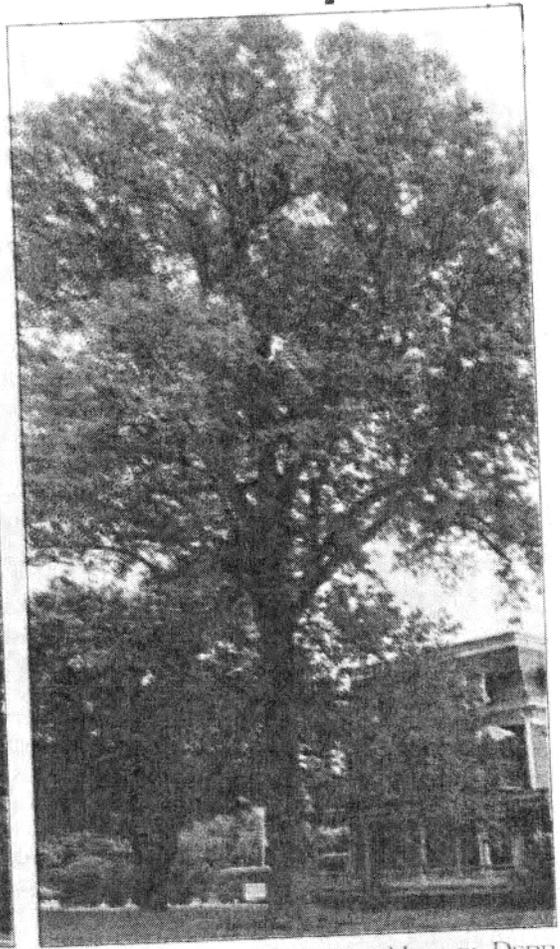
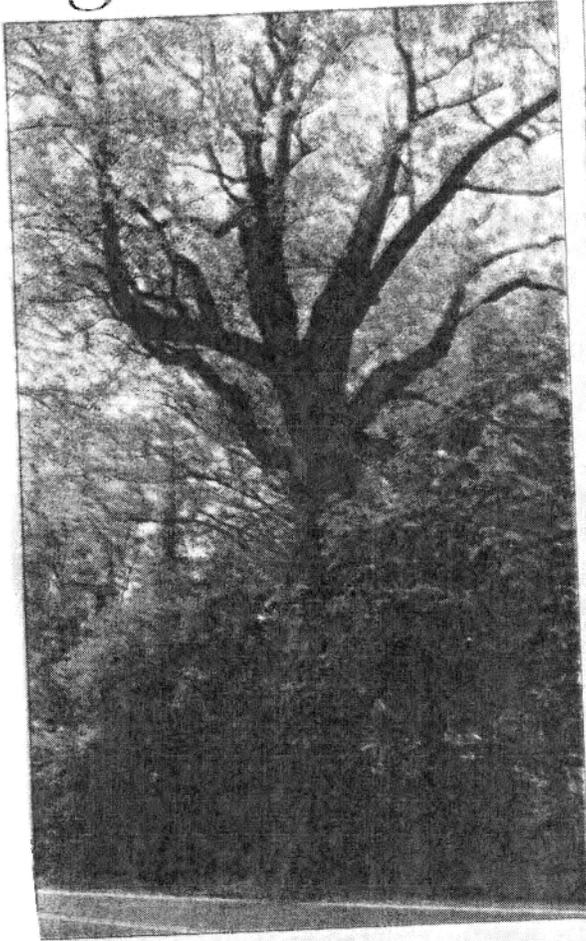
Here you can also often find where your, by now, newfound friend is buried. Ask the reference librarian about the R. I. Historic Cemetery Project and see if a compilation of cemeteries has been done for your town. Gravestone information, including who else is buried in close proximity, can often be valuable.

Don't forget to check any historic maps that may be there at the library for any references to your home and its owner. You'd be surprised what you might find.

Also available at most libraries are two subscription books of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "Cole's History of Washington and Kent County" and "R.I.'s Representative Men and their Families." These tomes were put together in the 1800s. Folks who were interested, at that time, paid a fee and were allowed to write a little bit about themselves and their families for inclusion in these books. In return they got a copy of the finished book and their names and story recorded for posterity. If you are lucky enough to find the person you are searching for in one of these books you may very well find a treasure trove of information there.

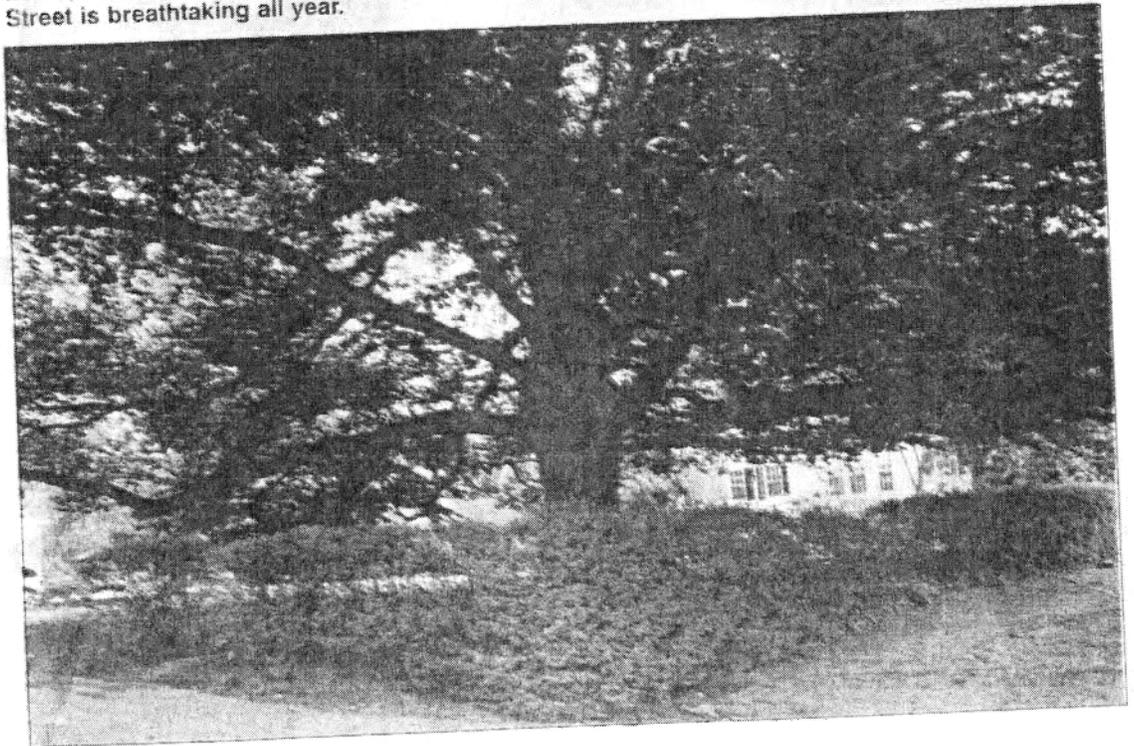
Other places where knowledge of our home's former owners can be gleaned include the R.I. Historic Society in Providence, the Pettaquamscutt Historical Society in Kingston, the East Greenwich Historical Society in East Greenwich and the New England Genealogical Society in Boston. While we are on the subject of genealogy, the North Kingstown Genealogical Society and R.I. Genealogical Society are also great sources of information.

So now that you are armed with all this information, get out there and join the hunt. You may be amazed at what you'll find.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

Above left, the Allenton poplar on Tower Hill Road is one of the grandest old trees in North Kingstown. Its circumference is more than 16 feet, and it once was taller before falling victim to a lightning strike. Above right, the Rodman poplar on Ten Rod Road, next to the Franklin Rodman home, is the tallest thing in Lafayette. Below, the Parley Mathewson copper beech on West Main Street is breathtaking all year.



## Big Trees

There's something about a really big tree that set my imagination racing. When I say big, I mean the really big ones. The lone wolf trees; the trees that have seen decade upon decade, score upon score of hard winters and gentle springs go by the wayside. The trees that are bigger and older than all things around them. These trees are our dinosaurs, our Methuselah's. These passive leviathans are nature's true time travelers, they have just sat there patiently as time and man have come and gone. The true locals, the Narragansetts, the Wampanoags, and the Shewatucks would tell us "only the rocks live longer than the spirits of these great trees". These trees have seen nearly the total history of the English and European settlers in this, their land, and they have continued to continue. No fire or hurricane has bested them. No human has chopped them down, no disease or pestilence has felled them. They have sheltered and provided for every creature that has come their way desiring aid; no questions asked, no favors required. It is no wonder I and people who feel as I do can scarce contain our desire to reach out and literally and figuratively wrap our arms around these great creatures. It's no wonder that so many are so moved by such a passive being as a great giant tree.

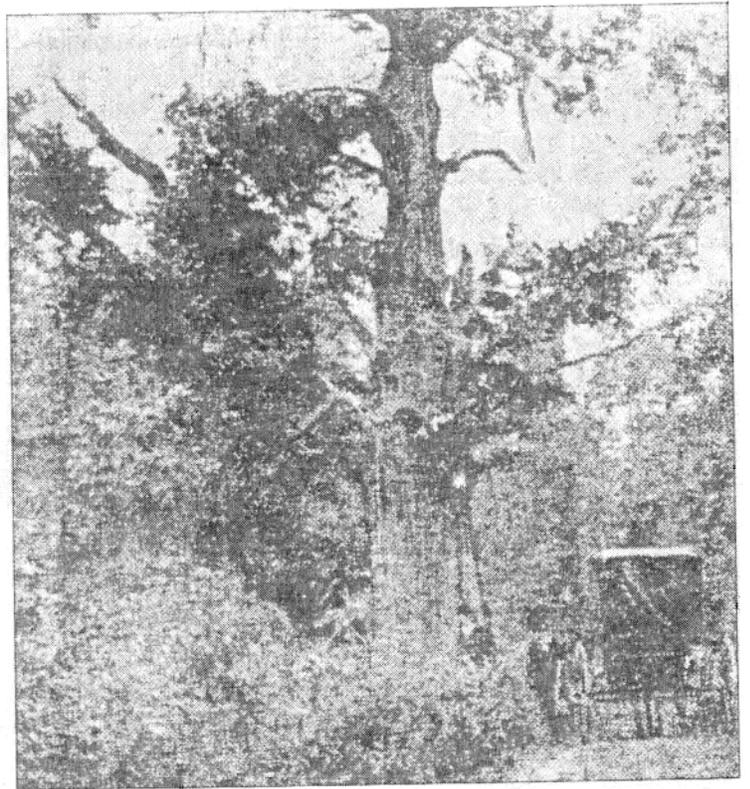
My earliest memory of such a tree involves a giant beech tree that sat stoically behind my home on Annaquatucket Road. The year was 1968 and it was a time when young boys of 11 spent more time climbing trees than staring open-mouthed at a video screen as often occurs today. The great beech was a reliable companion at a time when my world was topsy-turvy. The beech was always there; it welcomed me into its leafy world without question. No feeling in a young boy's life bested the one I felt when I finally made it to the top of this tree. My pal Jimmy shared my passion for the great beech tree. We'd climb it often, reveling in the event each and every time. More about this tree a little later, lets take a Swamptown gander at a few other great trees, past and present, before we finish this tree tale.

I guess the most famous tree in all of our fair town's history was the Swamptown Chestnut, which could be found on the edge of Swamptown (now Lafayette) Road just before its former intersection with Hatchery Road. This tree was more than just a tree, its circumference of over 17 feet and its height, purported to be well over 100 feet made it into a true landmark. The Swamptown Chestnut was mentioned in land evidence records and utilized by Native American and settler alike as a meeting place and a reference point. It was said that the Chestnut at its peak yielded bushel upon bushel of tasty nuts. The accompanying photo, taken in 1904 for a wire service newspaper article which calls it southern New England's biggest Chestnut is the only known picture of the tree. By the 1930's when Gardiner was writing his Lafayette book, The Swamptown Chestnut was no more than an enormous tree trunk laying on the side of the Swamptown Road.

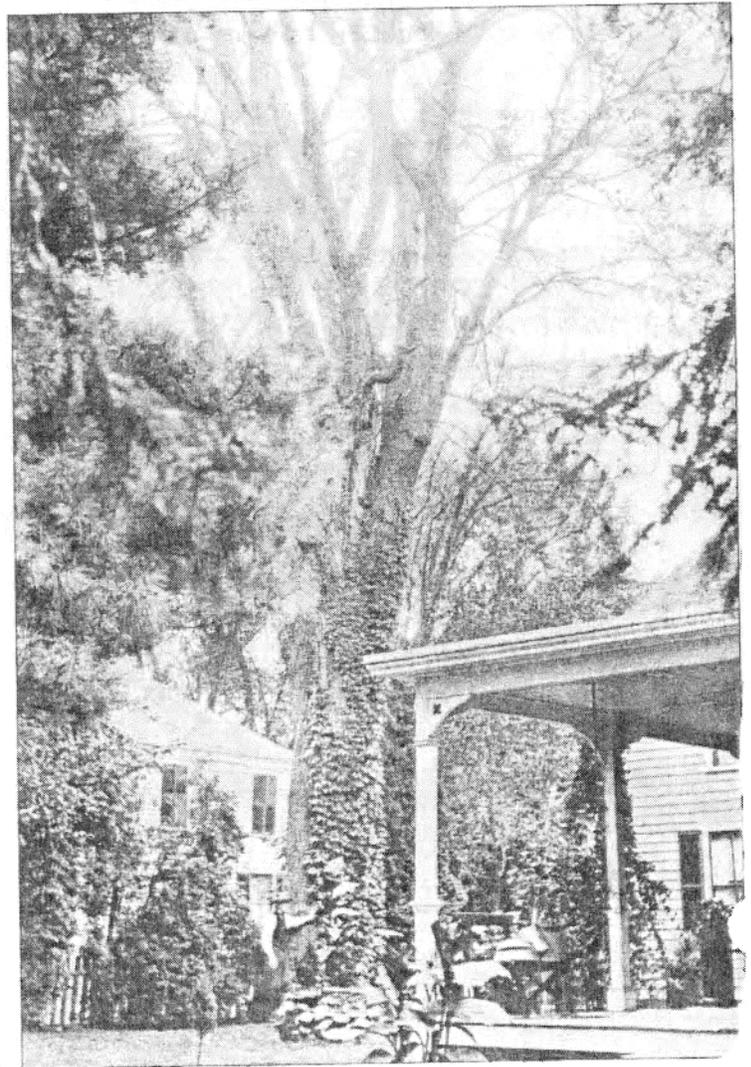
Another famous tree in local history, was the big Oak of the Smith Farm off of the Post Road. Another landmark tree, its location so near to the famous Rolling Rock off of Stony lane assured that it was a Native American meeting point. Sadly, the rock which boomed a great sound heard for miles when rocked by a Narragansett standing atop it and the Big Oak were quieted by residential development. The carcass of the Big Oak can



The twin beeches were a popular picnicking and meeting spot in the 1800s. Their exact location in town is unknown but may have been in the Prospect Avenue area.



The above photo of the fabled Swamptown chestnut accompanied a 1904 wire service story about southern New England's biggest chestnut tree. Below, Christopher Wightman stands proudly next to his impressive Wickford elm on Main and Fowler streets.



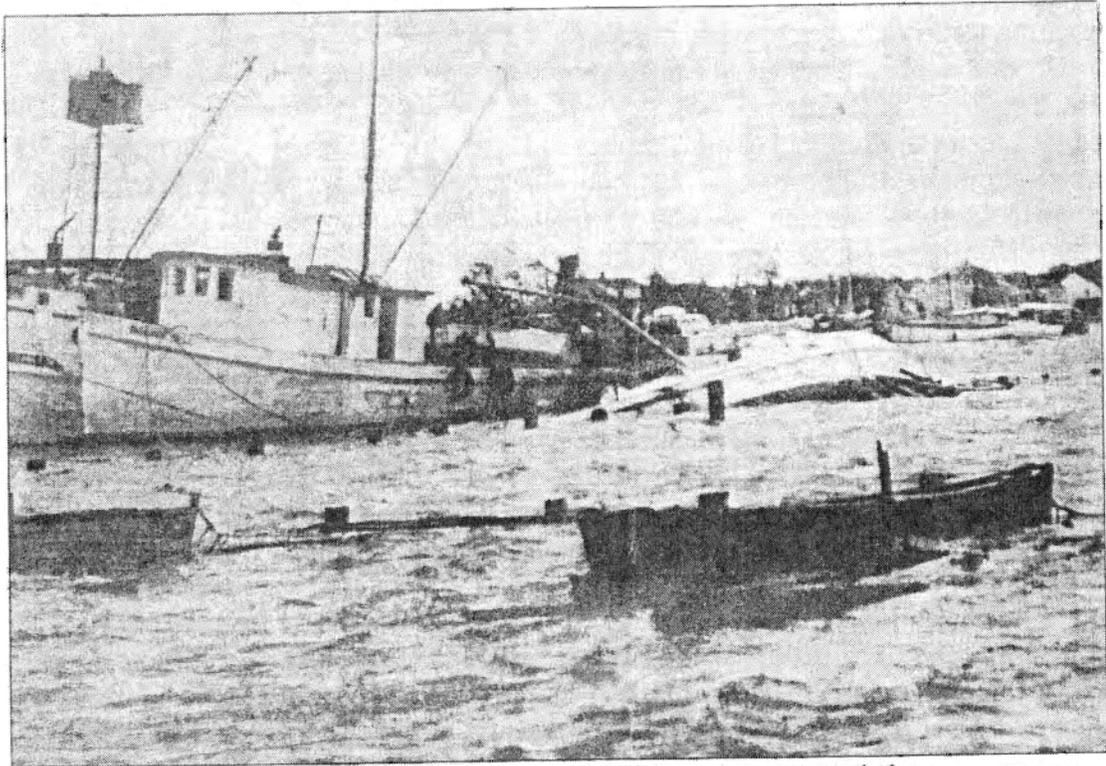
still be seen just off the side of Big Oak Drive. Only the street name and a Big Oak offspring just across the drive keep the trees memory alive.

Still another famous old pair of trees were the twin beeches. These trees were a famous picnicking location as well as a favored meeting point for romantic trysts during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They still live on in postcard views like this one and although their exact location is not known it is thought that they could be found on the Baker Estate off of Prospect Avenue near the present day Cedar Glen development.

No treatise on big trees would be complete without the mention of the Elms of Wickford. These trees were truly an important part of the village's charm. This giant was located on the corner of Main St and Fowler behind the now demolished Wightman House. Proud owner Christopher Wightman can be seen leaning against his mighty Elm.

Lets not forget some of the great trees that still exist in our fair town. With the loss of Wickford's giant elms, the local big guns of the tree world become the beeches and the Yellow Poplars (also known as tulip poplars). The greatest living local tree of all, in this swamp yankee's estimation, is the Allenton Poplar on Tower Hill Road. This tree, with its circumference of more than 16 feet and its massive height, shortened some time ago by a lightening strike, must surely have been around when Ben Franklin passed through on his mission to map out the Boston Post Road. I like to imagine old Ben leaning up against the then young sapling as he wiped his brow in the hot sun. This tree has seen more solemn processions into Elm Grove Cemetery than all the Cranston family undertakers put together. Ancient as time itself, the Allenton Poplar is in its twilight years now. I expect though, that the Rodman Poplar on Ten Rod Road, in its safe and sheltered position next to the Franklin Rodman home may someday surpass it. It is now truly the tallest thing in all of Lafayette. Finally, lets not forget the Parley Mathewson Copper Beech over on West main Street. Planted by the old carpet-bagger himself, this big beech is breathtaking all year round.

Speaking of beeches, lets get back to the story of my old friend. The depth of mine and Jimmy's joy for the tree and our relationship with it was only equaled by the emptiness we felt one day when we ran up to its familiar home only to spy an ugly stump where our friend once stood. You see, the Amy Street, Baker Way, and Ashton Avenue neighborhood was to go right where my old friend stood. Progress reigned supreme as it usually does and my friend the beech tree had to go. Jimmy and I both stood on the stump of the great tree, with plenty of room available for two young boy's envelope of personal space and tried to count the rings that marked out the life of our lost friend. Although we marveled at the final tally of 147 years, that knowledge did nothing to fill the space left by the tree's passing. It's a memory that still stings all these years later. In a final irony, some seven years later my mother purchased the house at 16 Ashton Avenue where my tree once stood. The sinkhole in the backyard over the spot where the tree's stump was buried never would fill up, no matter what we put in there.



right, boats were tossed about Wickford Harbor, pictured after the storm ended.

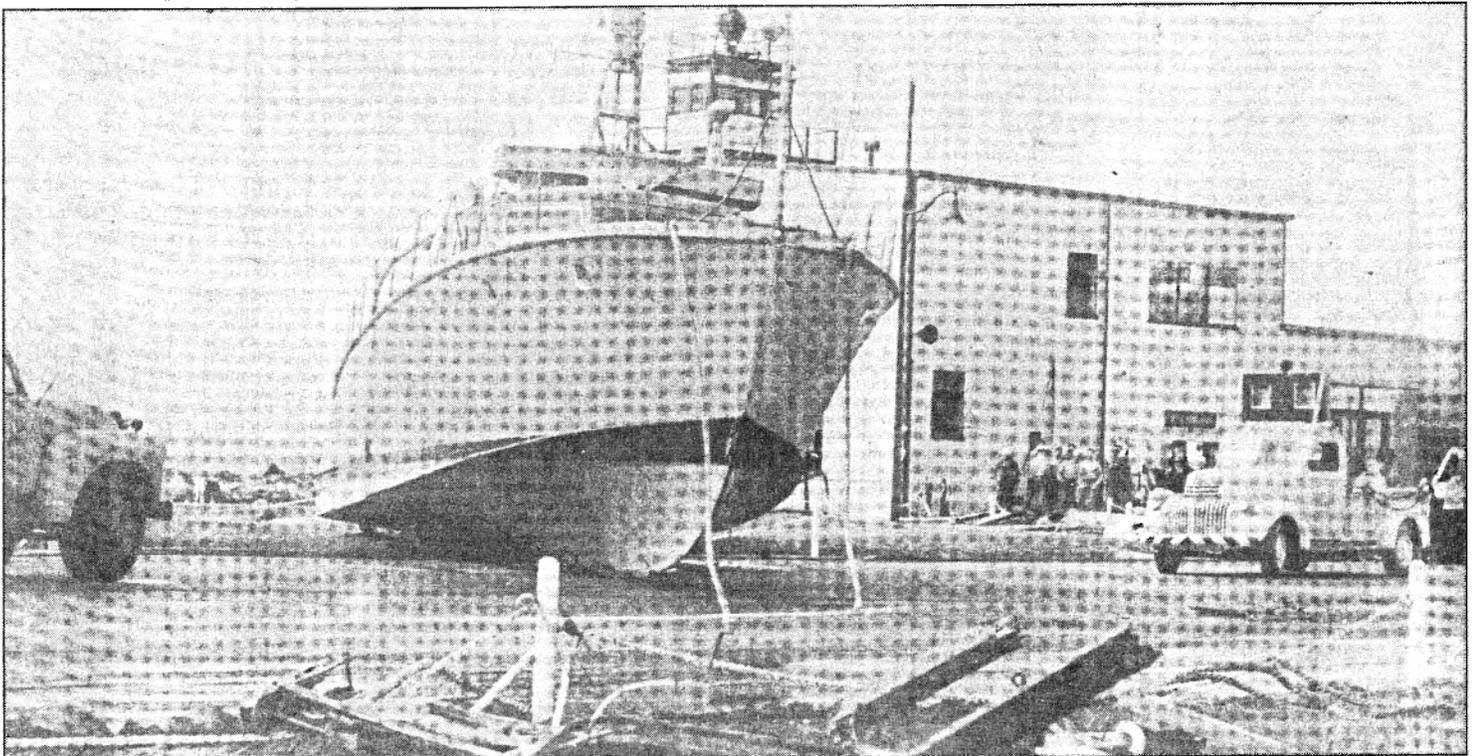


Water covers the Hussey Bridge looking toward Wickford during Hurricane Carol in 1954. Above

## The View From Swamptown

Carol visits in 1954

Fifty years ago this week, Hurricane Carol came a calling herein our fair town. The morning of August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1954 was one to remember around here, not since the great storm of 1938 had so much damage been inflicted upon the community in such a short time. Winds of 100 miles per hour and a tide 14 feet above normal left North Kingstown reeling before all was said and done. But here in town, folks pulled together and helped each other through. This was the third substantial hurricane in 16 years for some residents. Those that had lived through the “big one” in 1938 and the smaller storm of 1944 knew what had to be done. Streets were cleared, basements were pumped and “mucked” out; neighbor helped neighbor, family’s pulled together and life returned to normal. After all, hurricanes have come calling here in town for centuries. Even the Great Gale of 1815, thought to be a hurricane of tremendous force by most historians, left a permanent mark here in Wickford. For nearly a decade after that storm, many of the homes built in Wickford were constructed a few feet above ground level, as waterlogged villagers decided they might prefer to be above the reach of the rising storm surge. This accounts for the many sets of stairs at the front door of Wickford’s early 19<sup>th</sup> century homes, such as the William Brown House on Brown Street. Although these steps’ purpose now, seem to be to delight generations of youngsters (myself included) who can’t seem to resist running up and down them all as they travel down the village streets, they really stand as a reminder to us all of the hurricanes that have come and gone here in North Kingstown over the centuries. Every time I see a set of those steps I can’t help but think how lucky we’ve been these last fifty years; it would seem we are about overdue for a visitor like Carol.



Many boats came ashore, like this one at Quonset/Davisville, during Carol. The storm struck Rhode Island 50 years ago this week.

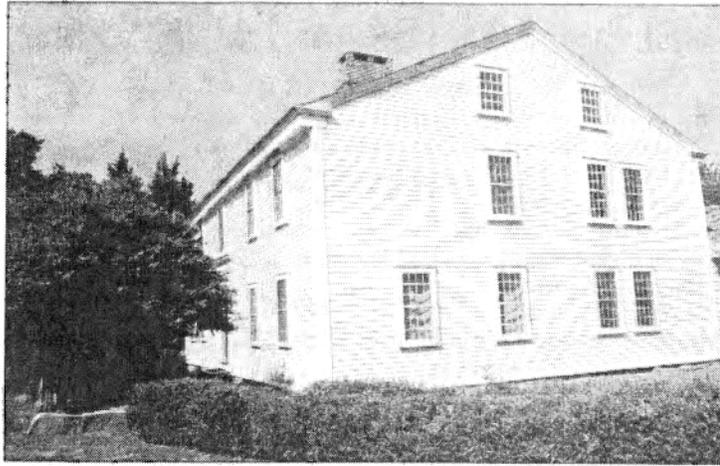


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Austin Fox, who then owned the Richard Smith Blockhouse/Castle property now known as Smith's Castle, operated a Coca-Cola bottling plant on the site.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

James Eldred of Wickford and George Sagendorph of Providence manufactured gold lockets in a factory that stood on the site of the present-day town parking lot off of Brown Street in Wickford.

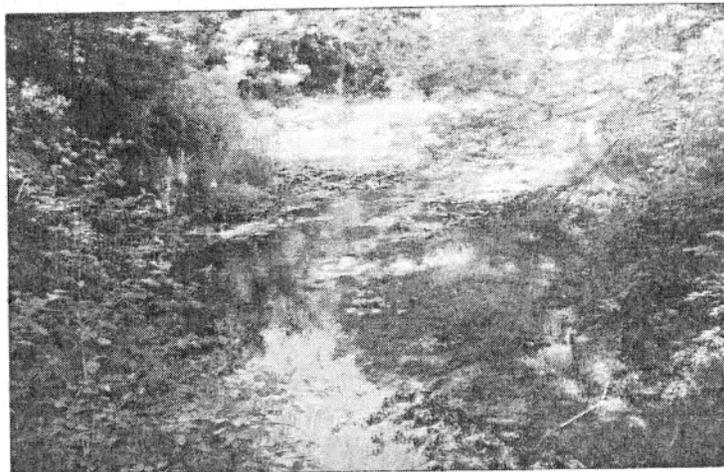


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

No photos remain of the mill buildings in villages like Sand Hill, whose pond is pictured here.

## The View From Swamptown

### Five Elusive Stories

I'm pleased to say that as I wander around our fair town, I get asked an awful lot of questions. I look at this as a good thing; folks asking me questions seem to me to mean that people here care about what has gone on before them, and who could ask for more than that. One question that comes up on a regular basis is, "How are you able to come up with a story each and every week?" Well, the answer is simple; week in and week out I am simultaneously researching a great number of different ideas and I just say my prayers, keep my fingers crossed, and hope that at least one tale of our town's long and storied history reveals itself to me before deadline. So, the truth is, that I could very well start the research on a column and then write it within the span of one week or even one year depending upon the difficulties that the research presents. This leads me to my point for this week's column. I've got five ideas that I've been ruminating on for far too long. These column concepts have been rolling around in my head for months at best and years at worst. I've been "chawing on this cud" more than I like; so its time to turn to you, my friends and fellow passengers on this journey through NK's past for assistance. Somewhere out there someone knows something about these five story lines. As my favorite philosopher and statesman Daniel Boone once said (Boone's roots can be traced right back here to "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic" you know), "Sometimes you eats the bear and sometimes the bear eats you". Well this bear has been eating at me too long, so lend a hand if you can. Here are the five stories I just can't quite finish up, in no particular order:

- 1) The Wickford Locket Factory – It's a little known fact that, in the decades before the Civil War, two businessmen, James Eldred of Wickford & George Sagendorph of Providence operated a brisk business manufacturing gold lockets in a factory that stood on the site of the present day town parking lot off of Brown Street. This manufacturing concern was one of the village's largest employers. Sagendorph's connection to Wickford was most likely through his wife who was a Greene. Someone out there must know something about these folks and this jewelry factory and also somewhere out there is an antique locket made right here in town.
- 2) The Coca-Cola Bottling Plant of Wickford – Yes, you read that right. Back in the 1930's and early 1940's a Coca-Cola plant operated on the Richard Smith Blockhouse/Castle property owned then by Austin Fox. It was set up primarily to serve Quonset/Davisville and employed mostly locals. Calls to Coca-Cola headquarters have not born fruit. Somewhere out there, someone's relations worked at this plant and can tell me this tale. Also I wouldn't be at all surprised to know that somewhere out there is an old Coke Bottle or two with Wickford embossed along the bottom.
- 3) The Duck Cove Canal – Here's another little known fact that intrigues all that hear of it. Back in the time when the Inter-Coastal Waterway



was being set up by the Army Corps of Engineers, serious consideration was given to digging a canal, along the lines of the Erie Canal, that would allow coastal vessels to bypass the treacherous waters around Point Judith. The canal would have begun in Duck Cove and run through Carr and Pettasquamscutt Pond, down the Narrow River and then through the coastal salt ponds out to the shelter of the Sound. Imagine how that would have changed things throughout southern RI! A complete survey and plan set for this enormous undertaking exist in the archives of the venerable surveying concern Easterbrooks Assoc. in Narragansett. Someone out there must know more about this ambitious undertaking.

- 4) The forgotten textile mills of North Kingstown – We all know about the textile mills in Lafayette, Belleville, Hamilton, and Davisville and have seen photos of the wonderful mill buildings that housed these industrial concerns. But little is known of the smaller mills at Oak Hill, Narragansett (present day site of Razez's Motordycles), and Sand Hill and no photos exist of the buildings associated with them. But someone's ancestor's out there worked at these places and can fill in the blanks for all of us.
- 5) The Plat of 1707 – Here it is, the "Holy Grail" of North Kingstown, no make that colonial RI, history. Historians and scholars have been searching for this, the oldest of three plat maps drawn up for the Updike clan, for literally centuries. The other two, one of the Elamsville section of what we now call Wickford and one of the West Main Street portion of town, can be found in the vault at Town Hall. But this one, which details just how Updike divvied up old Wickford, has been lost for centuries. It may have been destroyed by one of the two fires that have ravaged the official documents of our community, or it may have been absconded away in the early 1800's and still be out there somewhere hidden and forgotten. I also expect that hand drawn copies of this important Updike artifact were made in the 1700's and perhaps are in the possession of Updike descendants without their knowledge.

So there you have it loyal readers, if you can, won't you help quiet the ghosts inhabiting my head and help me tell these tales to all that care. Write, call, or e-mail me at the newspaper with any leads or clues you might have.



Two retired police officers believe this photo was taken in 1954 and helped identify the officers pictured here. They are (front row, from left) William Darnel, Paul Arnold, Chief Burton Moon, Frederick McElhaney, Francis Hennessey and Raymond Smith; (back row, from left) Robert MacKelvie Jr., Donald Algren, John "Jack" Albro, Robert Browning, James Baker, and Manton Madison. Below, two former Reynolds houses - a farmhouse on Post Road (left) and the Reynolds/Updike house on Boston Neck Road - appear to have been spared from redevelopment.

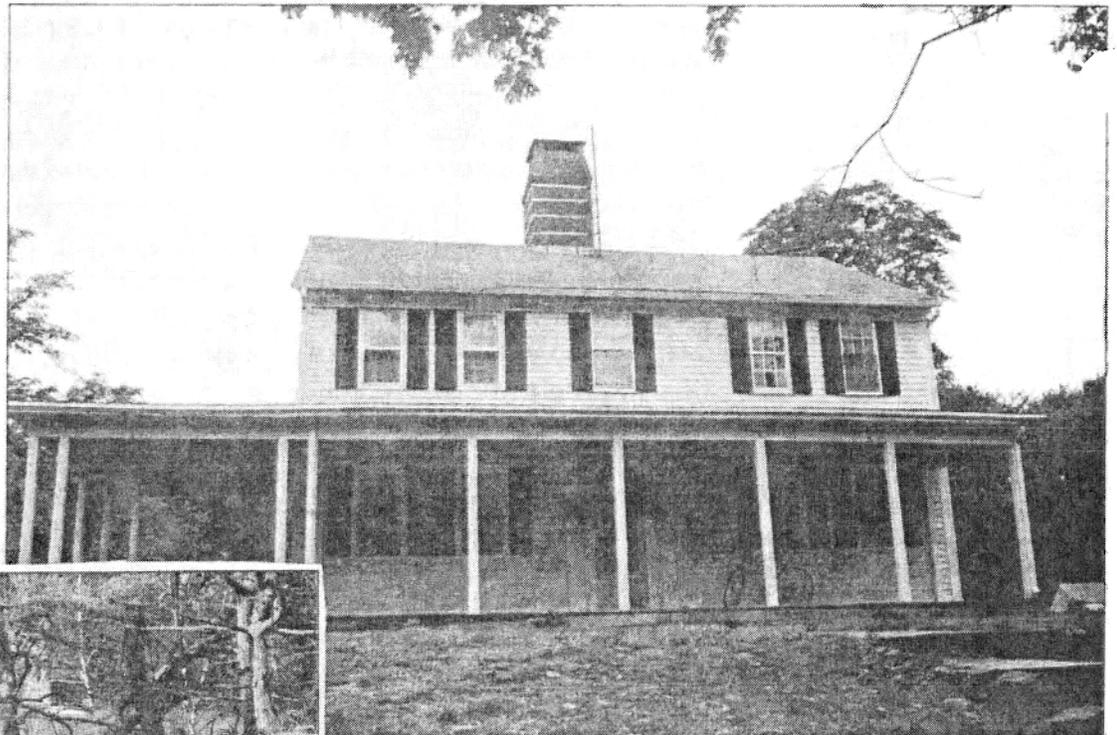


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

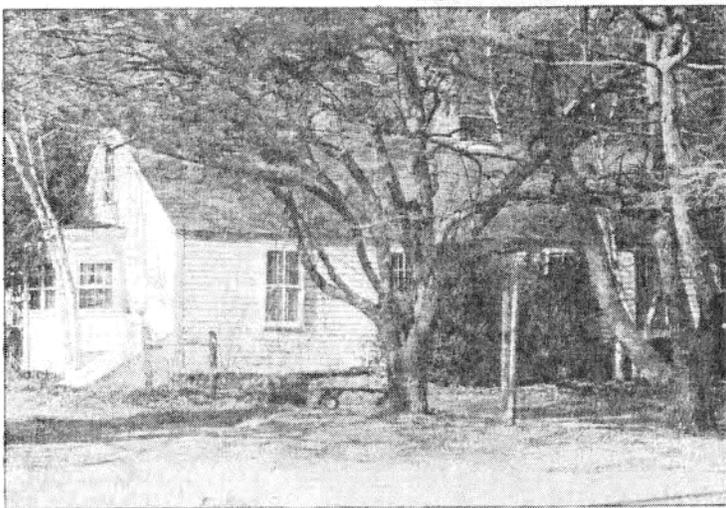


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

## The View From Swamptown

### Odds & Ends

From time to time, it seems appropriate to take a moment and tie up some of the loose ends generated out here in Swamptown. This seems as good a time as any.

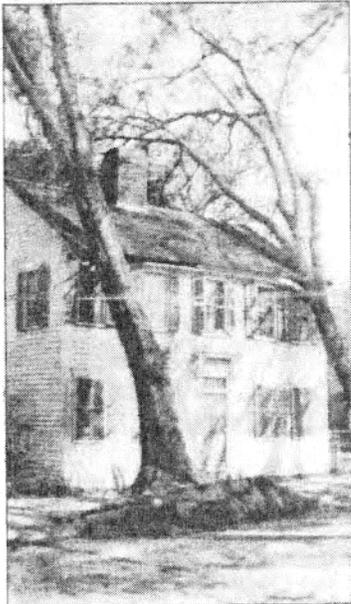
For starters, a recent column recognizing the life and contributions of Police Chief Burton Moon included a group photograph of our Police Department taken, it seems, in the early 1950's. That photo stirred up quite a bit of interest regarding the identities of the officers shown standing proudly with their Chief in front of the old Police Station at the corner of Brown Street and Boston Neck Road. Thanks to the efforts of NK Police Captain Charles Brennan, Lt. Charlie Carpenter (retired) and Special Officer Jim Baker (retired) we now can identify and properly honor these gentlemen who served our community more than a half century ago. Bravo to all involved both past and present!!

Next, I'm as pleased as can be to report that a couple of very important and ancient Reynolds family houses will not be visited by the wrecking ball anytime soon. After substantive meetings with our Town's Planning Department, the developers of the sites that include the Reynolds Farmhouse on Post Road and the recently featured Reynolds-Updike House on Boston Neck Road have pledged to preserve these vital structures in some fashion. Although the details in both cases have yet to be worked out I feel certain that a Swamptown tip-of-the-hat is due to all involved, including the developers, our Planning Department staff, the NK Town Council, and, last but not least, all you loyal readers out there that took the time to make your feelings known on where North Kingstown stands regarding its heritage.

Finally, a little more information regarding the America's Cup defender (not winner as it was erroneously labeled in the column header) Pocahontas that was featured in last week's column. According to the grandson, and namesake for that matter, of Captain Rollin Mason, Rollin Whyte of Pleasant Street, the Pocahontas was originally acquired by the locally owned Beacon Oyster Company to serve as a permanently anchored guard boat out in the oyster beds. A gun-toting guard would be stationed on the Pocahontas to keep would be oyster poachers honest. At some point in that rather ignominious portion of the once grand career of the Pocahontas she was then found to be no longer needed and subjected to the final humiliation of becoming a retaining wall meant to hold back the sands of Cornelius Island. More on the Pocahontas as it becomes available.



Caught unaware, as were most in North Kingstown, a resident of this Quonset Point home died in the initial storm surge that raced up the bay in 1938.



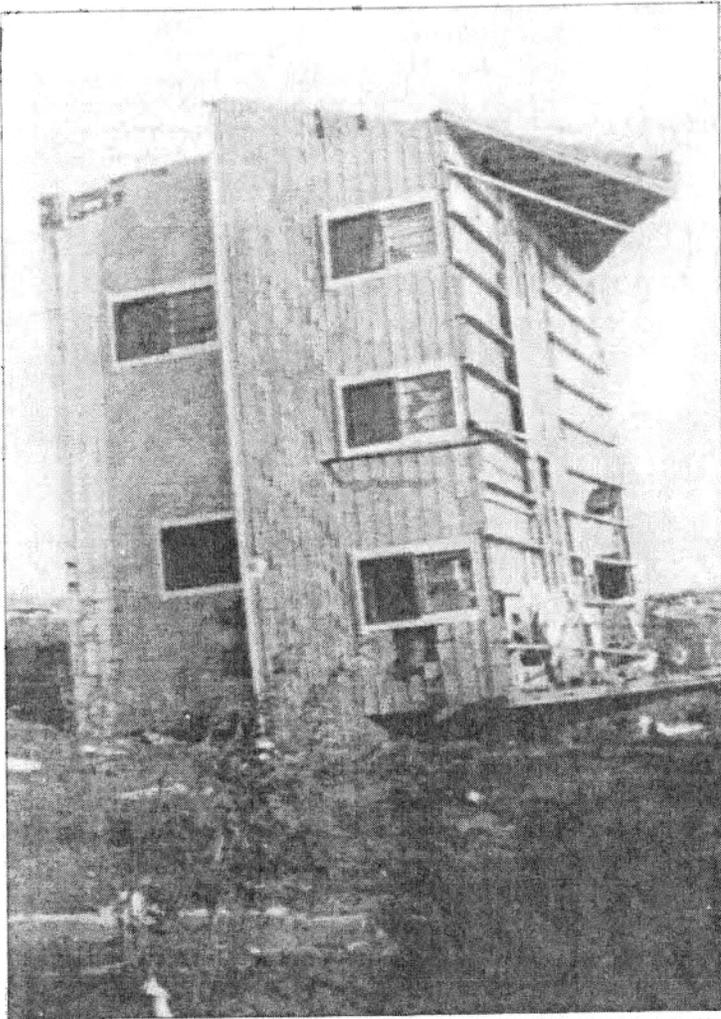
Uprooted trees damaged this Wickford home in 1938.



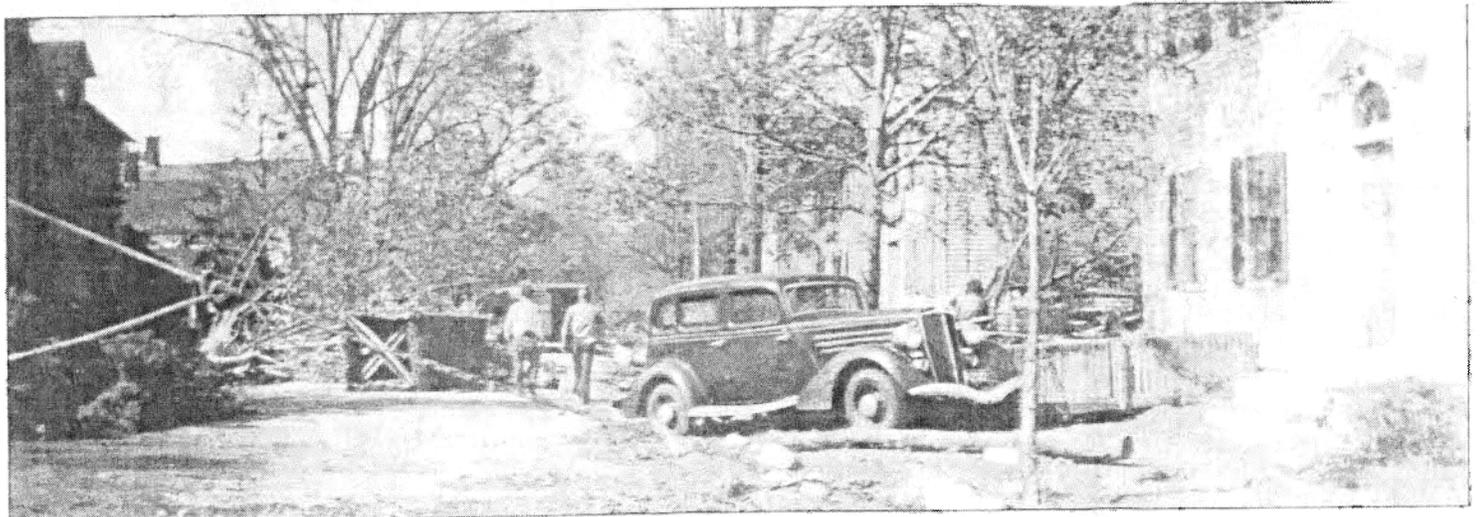
This oyster boat ended up at the intersection of Wall and Main streets after the 1938 storm. In the background is the Wickford House Annex, which stood on the site of the present-day St. Paul's Parish House.



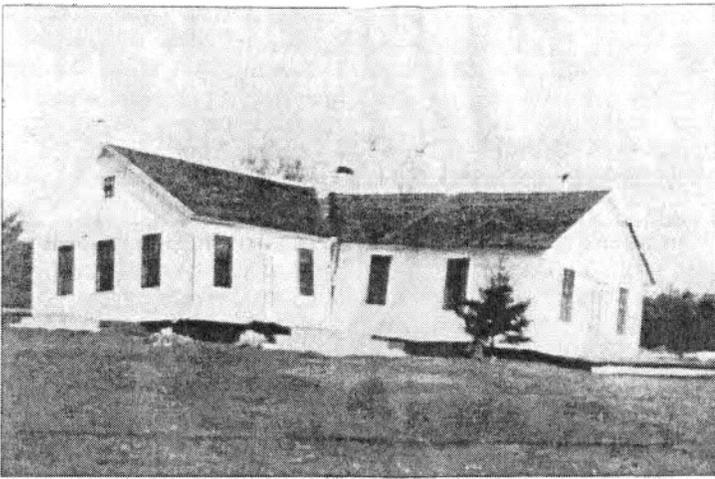
Water from Wickford Harbor cascades out the front door of Ryan's Market after the tidal surge associated with Hurricane Carol in 1954 recedes. At the A&P around the corner on Main Street, below, the tidal surge from Carol left locals wading in the street.



The sheer power of hurricane-force winds in 1938 flipped this home on its side.



A view of Main Street in Wickford shows the scope of destruction residents faced after the 1938 storm.



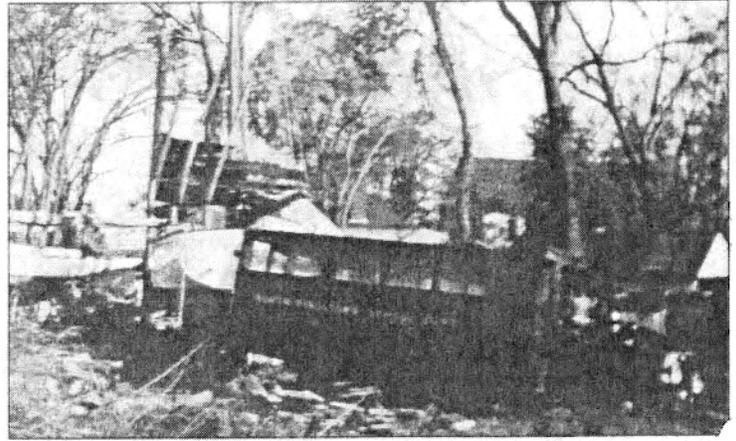
The Christian Science Church, now a dentist's office at the corner of Phillips and Boone streets, was picked up off of its foundation and spun around 90 degrees in 1938.



The oyster companies at the end of Pleasant Street were destroyed by the 1938 storm.

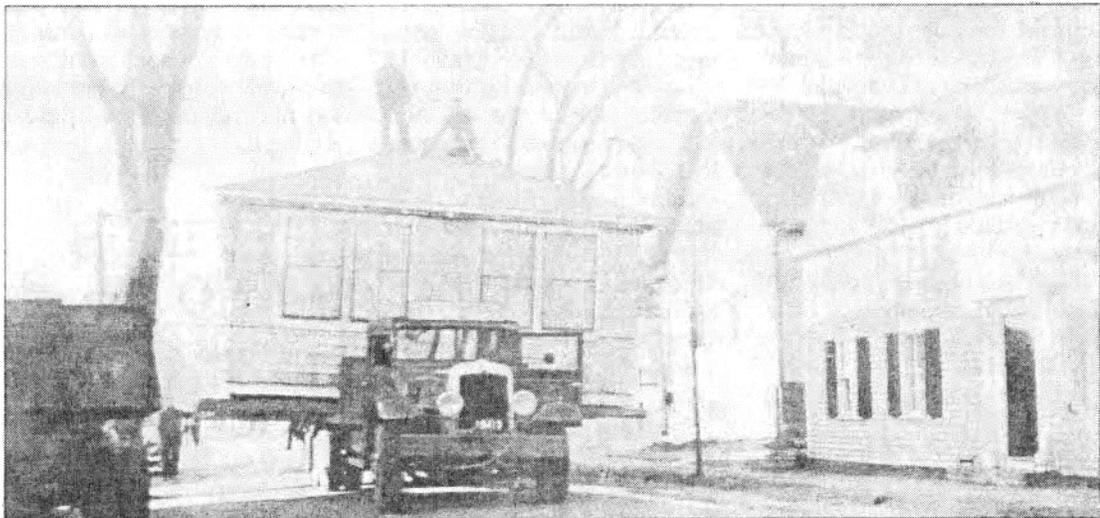


This boat ended up in the parking lot behind what is now Wilson's of Wickford after the Hurricane of 1938.



Winds from the 1938 storm disturbed boats and even this school bus in Wickford.

Smith's



The extreme high tide that accompanied the 1938 storm floated this house from its foundation in the Fowler Street neighborhood and dropped it on the shore behind Smith's Castle. In this photo, the house is being hauled back to its home.

## The View From Swamptown

### Hurricanes

Understandably, the topic of hurricanes has been on everyone's mind of late. Everywhere you go folks are talking about Katrina, Rita, and even the recent anniversary of the great hurricane of 1938. All across America people have a new found respect for the awesome potential of this particular aspect of Mother Nature's wrath. I suspect though, that many folks around here, harbor, way in the back of their mind, the unfortunate thought that, really, something like this could never happen here in our fair town; way up north like we are, so far away from these storm's tropical spawning grounds.

So then, this column is an attempt to counter that dangerous notion. For, as you can see by the accompanying montage of amazing photographs; nothing could farther from the truth. In 1938, and again to a slightly lesser degree in 1954, nature indeed extracted an awesome toll from the good folks of North Kingstown. The 1938 Hurricane was particularly devastating, in that, not only did it come with a fury not seen since 1815, no one, in an age well before satellites and Doppler radar, had any kind of advance notion of its arrival. All were caught unaware.

Nowhere in Rhode Island, or in New England for that matter, was the devastation more complete than in the south facing shorefront community of Quonset Point. Sticking out in the Narragansett Bay like an inviting target, this neighborhood of summer and year round homes was reduced largely to rubble by the great wall of water that surged up the bay as the hurricane approached. The vast majority of North Kingstown's storm related deaths occurred here. Also hard hit were the neighborhoods of Hamilton, Poplar Point, and Wickford Village.

No one in North Kingstown was unaffected by this storm and life here was forever changed as a result. The town was forced to install a drinking water system, as nearly every well within a half a mile of the coast was turned forever brackish as a result. Entire industries, such as the vital oyster and fishing concerns located along our shorelines, were destroyed, never to recover. And most importantly, no one, ever again, looked out at the sea in quite the same way.



Wind gusts of 150 mph did their worst damage in 1938 on West Main Street, above, and took down elms on Main Street in Wickford, below.

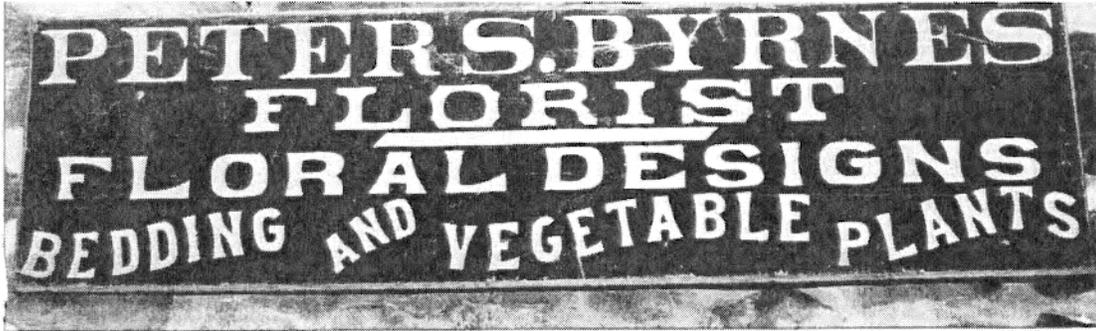


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The sign for Peter Byrne's Flower shop, now the site of Wickford Flowers on West Main Street, hangs in the Oak Hill Tavern.



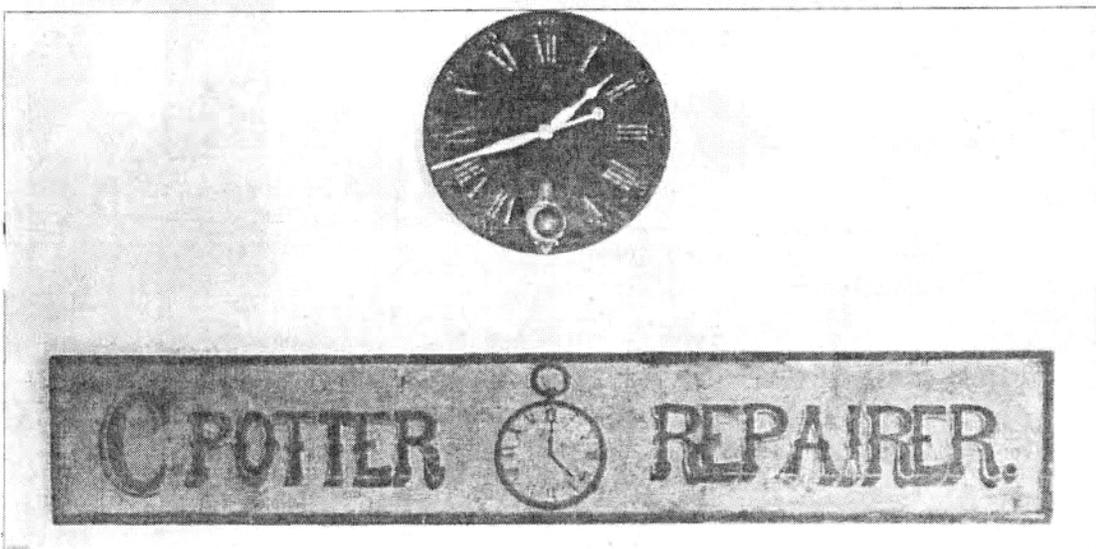
PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

This sign for surveying services might have been displayed at the Rodman mansion on Ten Rod Road that now houses McKay's Front Porch.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

It was "cash only" at Charles Straight's lumber and hardware store on Brown Street.



Some old signs, like this one for Clarke Potter's watch repair service, included artwork for those who could not read.

## The View From Swamptown

### Some Thoughts on Signs

Lately, I've been thinking about signs. Not road signs mind you, but commercial signs; signs designed specifically to attract the attention of potential customers – hung proudly to proclaim a businessperson's existence. Signs like this have decorated the streetscapes of our fair town for centuries. The earliest, those prior to the half way mark of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, often weren't signs in the sense that we know them today. They were symbols really – universally recognized images that told a largely illiterate world what type of business could be found through any given front door. Some of these symbols have survived into this, the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and grace our streetscapes still; the barber pole and the mortar & pestle come immediately to mind. Another interesting feature of these signs of yore was that many of them were three dimensional in nature; in fact a large carved wooden bunch of grapes, an ancient symbol of hospitality, hung over the door of the Narragansett House on Main St in Wickford throughout the period of time that the Congdon family kept an Inn at that address.

Signs now, in this the age of E-Bay, have become popular collectibles; and thank goodness for that, because this has allowed them to survive for us to enjoy, the signs themselves becoming symbols of a bygone era. The oldest local sign of which I am aware is this placard which once told the world, in word and symbol, that Clarke Potter was ready and willing to repair your pocket watch. It dates to the late 1800's and probably first hung on his establishment in Allenton before being relocated to his later shop on Brown St in Wickford.

A great place to observe local signs, is one that's had many of its own, the Oak Hill Tavern on Tower Hill Road near its intersection with Annaquatucket Rd. Its here that can be found a sign that once hung just a few doors down from Clarke Potters watch repairer sign, that of Charles Straight's Brown St. lumber & hardware store where he most certainly did not extend credit. Also gracing the walls of the tavern are the slightly later signs for Peter Byrnes Flower Shop, located at the site now occupied by Schartner's Wickford Flowers, and Robert F. Rodman – Surveyor. This sign may have hung at the building on Ten Rod Rd. which now houses McKay's Front Porch, as that was Rodman's home for many years.

So you might wonder what sign, hanging out there on a building still today in North Kingstown, is the oldest still in use. My estimation is that that honor belongs to the 55 year old "Theater" sign that still extant on the old Odd Fellows Hall building on Phillips St. in Wickford. But heck, I'd love to be proved wrong on this one, so won't you join me in cyberspace at Swamptown's new e-mail address (yes this old Swamp Yankee, finally has entered the electronic age) [Swamptown@msn.com](mailto:Swamptown@msn.com) and let me know about any other ancient signs that still exist relating to businesses in North Kingstown. We'll take another "Swamptown Gander" at this topic in the future.

And finally, all of us at Swamptown Enterprises want to wish a fellow NE Independent family member "Good Luck!" in his future endeavors. Charles St. Martin's career path has led him down a different trail and he will be missed. Charles was a reporter's reporter, fair and honest, who always did his best to get the story right. And he is a valued friend. Take Care, Charles!!



O.G. Gardiner's advertising card was business card-sized and advertised his ice cream parlor and candy store in the Avis Block. Below, a two-sided card for Charles Reynolds' store in Davisville advertised perfumed toothpaste and included a calendar.



George T. Cranston's general store featuring "dry and fancy goods" also had advertising cards.



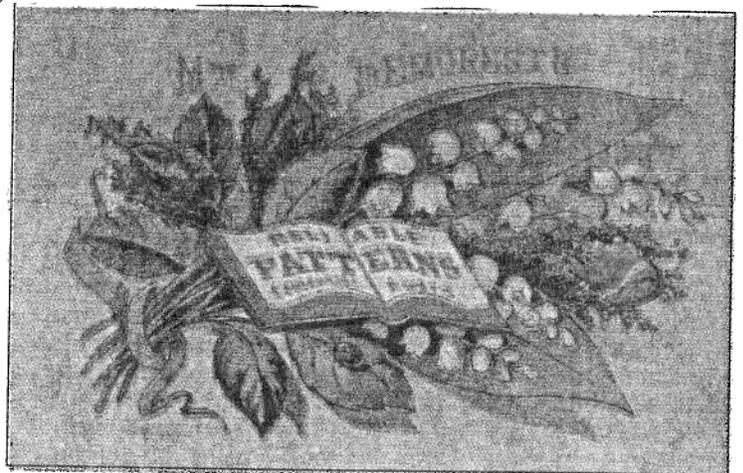
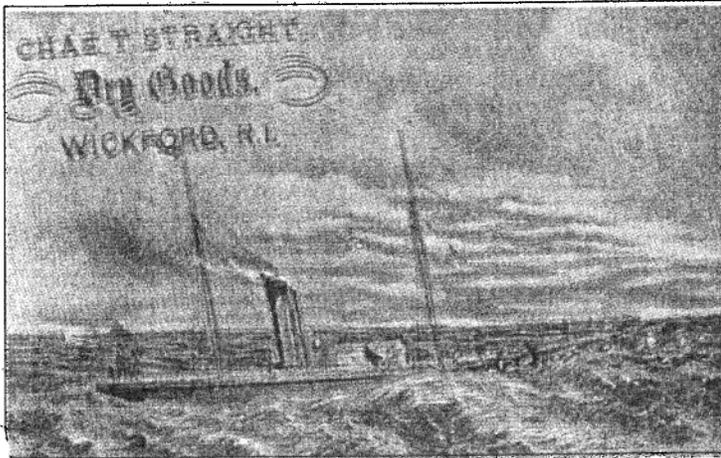
## The View From Swamptown

### A Look at Advertising Cards

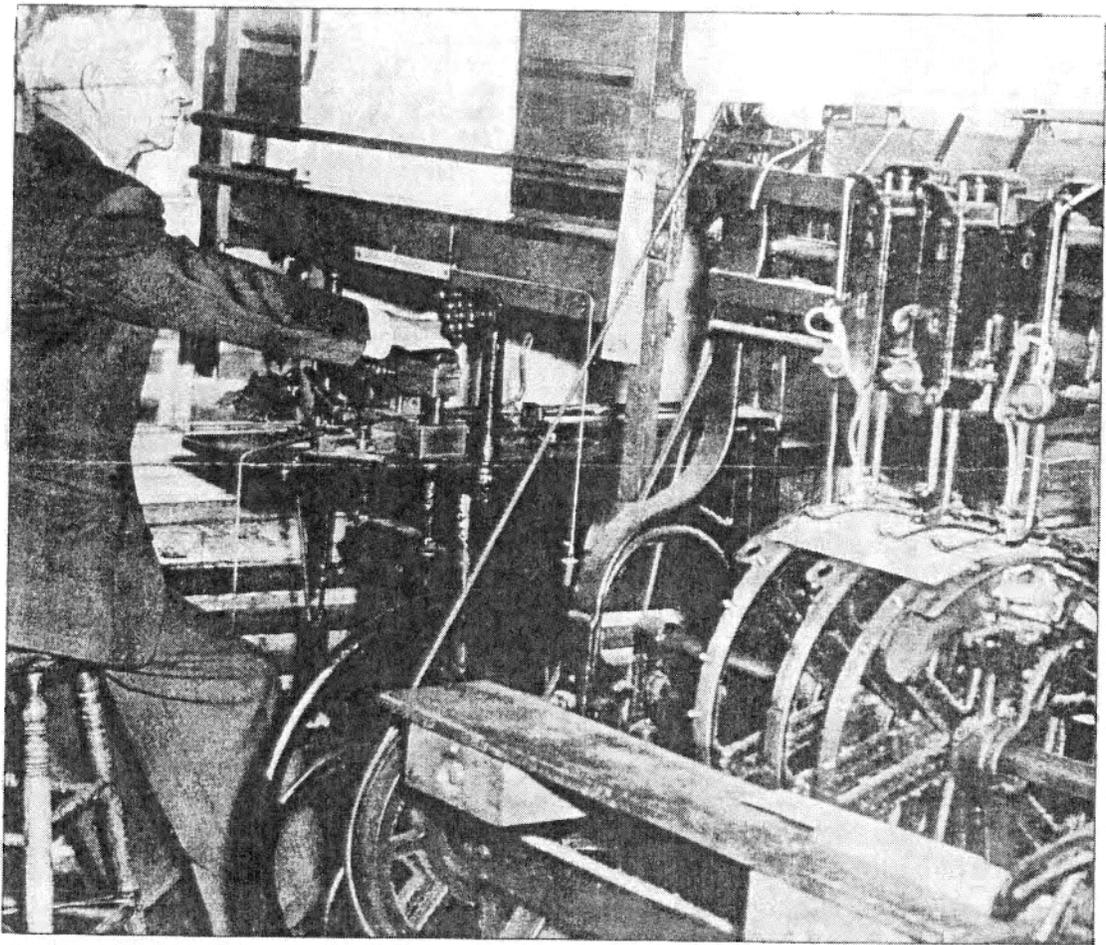
This week, we are going to take a “Swamptown Gander” at an interesting genre of collectibles, the Victorian-era advertising or trade card. These little snippets of local history were generally about the size of an index card and usually featured both a regional or nationally available product and a local business. They were generally produced through a chromo-lithographic process, as this allowed for a beautiful and colorful product that eventually became as desirable a collectible back in the Victorian era as they are today. This is indeed why so many of them have survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> century; the ladies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century having saved so many of them.

There were many different types of advertising cards produced and here are some examples of them, all with a local connection. Some cards, like our old friend Clarke Potter’s which featured a line of stoves he carried, are so attractive that they were often displayed in the home as little colorful bits of art, brightening up a drab corner in a kitchen or parlor. Another group of advertising cards were two-sided such as Charles Reynolds’ Davisville store card that advertised perfumed toothpaste and included a handy pocket calendar on the back, or Mrs. Browning’s millinery card that included text describing both her dress and millinery shop and a line of patterns that she carried. Other cards, such as G.T. Cranston’s or Chas. Straight’s locally produced cards did not include a nationally available product and only featured their shops. Some, like Horatio Reynolds trade card advertising both his store and a line of harness oil he carried, were meant to be funny and others, like builder Joseph Bullock’s or lunch room owner Daniel Smith’s were practical, down-to-business descriptions of what they had to offer. And finally, some, like O.G. Gardiner’s candy and ice cream shop card were hints of things to come in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the simple business card replaced the more elaborate and colorful trade card.

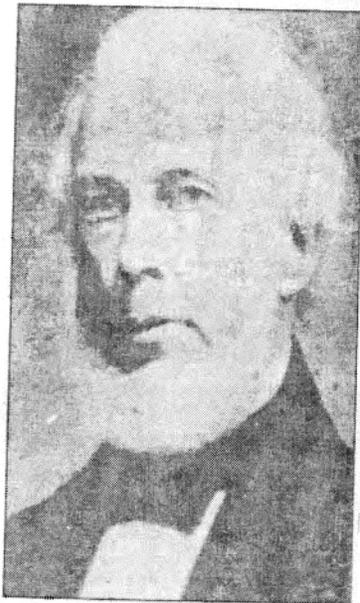
So if you’ve got a hankerin’ to begin collecting local history, and don’t want to have to break the bank to do it, take some time and consider advertising cards- colorful little windows looking back on the Victorian age here in our fair town.



Mrs. H.K. Browning’s card (above) was double-sided, with the reverse advertising her millinery goods, patterns, “ostrich tips and fancy novelties.” The card at left advertises a dry goods store Horatio Reynolds ran near where the park in Wickford is today and sold harness oil, among other things. Below, Charles Straight’s card had a marine motif.



Designer Harry Taylor operates the card-cutting machine at Hamilton Web in the 1940s. The cards dictated the design woven by the specialized jacquard looms that produced the "web," a trade name for a narrow gauge fabric.



Joseph Warren Greene was the first president of Hamilton Web mill after the Greene family took over complete control of the mill.



FLASH BOARDS are put in place by George H. Corey on his way home from work in the mill, to hold back waters of Annaquatucket and raise the level of water available for next day.

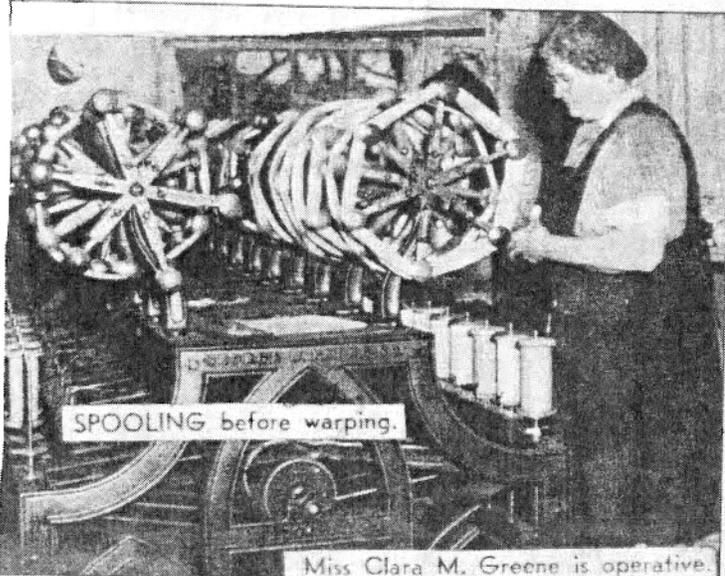
## The View From Swamptown

### The North Kingstown Textiles Project

Regardless of whether we are all aware of it or not, North Kingstown, is now poised upon the end of an era. I take note of it each week as I read the local obituaries (an almost uncontrollable habit had by both people who are beginning to feel their years and by folks brought up in the undertaker's trade – two groups to which I belong) or reach out to members of our senior citizenry for information about our fair town's past. You see, before long there will be no one left in our community that made their living surrounded by the constant clackety-clack of the fabric loom. The textile trade, long dead here in North Kingstown, has been kept alive here in the hearts and minds of those who worked in those now quiet mills. They have provided us with a living link to a time; to a way of life no less, that is part and parcel of the very fabric of our community. In an *augenblick* "the blink of an eye" the last of these good folks will be gone. That story will be over.

The last of the local mills to close was the venerable business establishment "Hamilton Web". Begun in the first half of the 1800's, it owed its name and early existence to the Vaughan family; a powerful force in the early history of textiles in Southern New England, and its longevity, its staying power, to the Greene's who ran it for more than a century. Hamilton Web outlasted all others in the local textile trade by virtue of not only the business acumen of the Vaughan's and Greene's, but also because of the unique nature of the highly specialized product they made there. Known by the trade name of "web", this narrow gauge fabric was produced here in every format imaginable; from shoelaces to guitar straps, from boot pulls to minefield marker tape, from fancy lace trim to very utilitarian labels sewn in to the back of shirts, blouses and dresses like the Macys label being designed by Harry Taylor in the accompanying photograph, all of it was designed, spun, and woven here in Hamilton. These accompanying photographs were all taken in the late 1940's, and offer us a glimpse of what once was. Another unique fact about Hamilton Web, one it shared with the Belleville Mill, a broadcloth enterprise that operated for more than a century as well out on Oak Hill Road, was that they both had a "seconds store"; a place where workers and local folks alike could purchase fabric that didn't quite "pass muster" through the mill's stringent quality control standards.

I'm betting that, stuffed in boxes in basements or sitting on shelves in storage closets or at the bottom of sewing baskets all across southern Rhode Island, there are woven testimonials to lives and times of the literally thousands of souls who lived by the clackety-clack of the loom, who set their table based upon the sound of the "potato bell" that rang an hour before shift's end, whose livelihood depended upon the feel of a piece of woolen fabric or the time-tested dependability of a woven shoelace.



SPOOLING before warping.

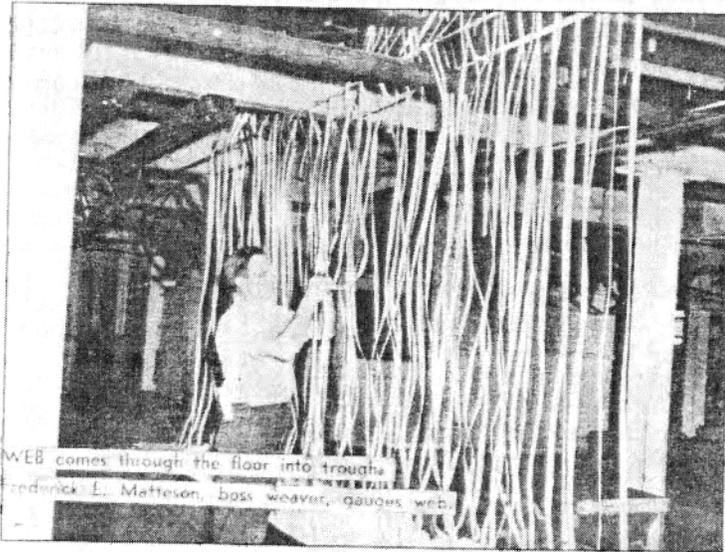
Miss Clara M. Greene is operative.

After the baled cotton was spun into yarn, it was transferred onto spools that could be utilized on the loom. Here, Clare Green spools the yarn.



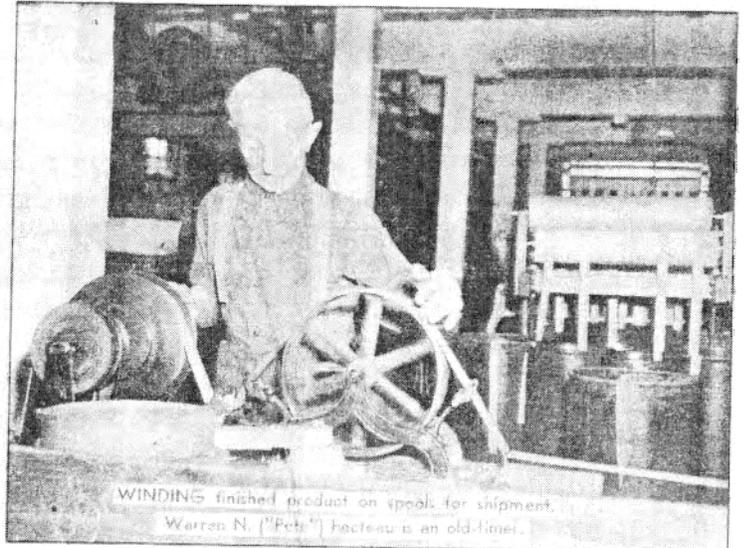
OLD bamboo reeds, examined by Harding Smith, chief engineer.

Harding Smith checks the reeds, which are used to keep the yarn separate as it feeds onto the loom.



WEB comes through the floor into troughs.  
Frederick E. Matteson, boss weaver, gauges web.

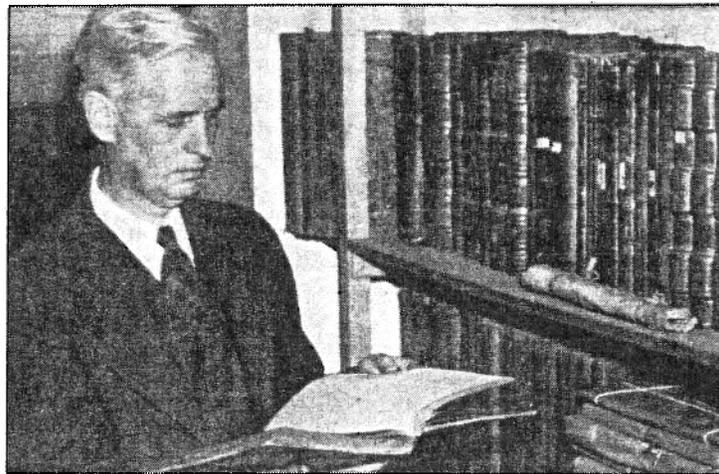
Frederick Matteson, boss weaver, gauges web as it comes through the floor into a trough.



WINDING finished product on spools for shipment.  
Warren N. ("Pete") Fecteau is an old-timer.

Longtime mill worker Warren "Pete" Fecteau winds the finished product on spools for shipment.

So, won't you join the North Kingstown Free Library, the NK Senior Center, and "Swamptown Enterprises" in our efforts to preserve a "swatch" of North Kingstown's rich history as a collection of textile mill villages? Specifically, we are looking for samples of the fabrics made in the many mills that once click-clacked away here in North Kingstown weaving broadcloth and narrow weave fabrics. So if you worked in, or shopped at, one of these mills (Hamilton Web, Belleville, Rodman Manufacturing, Davisville, Shady Lea, etc) and have samples of the fabrics woven there, won't you do your part and donate some towards a collection that will be preserved, cataloged, and archived, with the assistance of graduate students and faculty from the University of Rhode Island Textiles Department, right here in town at our fine public library for all to see and admire. If you can help, please contact Senior Services Director Kathy Carland or Susan Berman at the North Kingstown Free Library, or me at [swamptown@msn.com](mailto:swamptown@msn.com) for more information.



**Three generations separate this Joseph Warren Greene from the first president of Hamilton Web once the Greenes assumed control.**

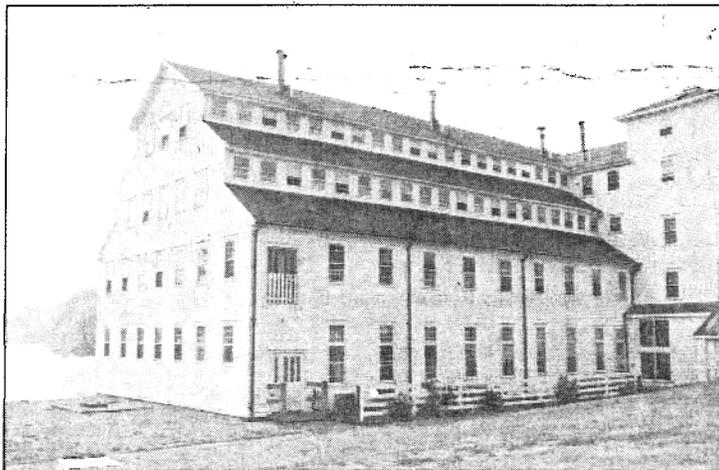


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**The former Hamilton Web Mill has been converted to condominiums.**



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Ford and Thelma Irene Stump lived at this prefabricated house at 11 Thelma Irene Drive in the south end of town.

## The View From Swamptown

### Thelma Irene and the Battle for North Kingstown's Soul

*Little boxes, little boxes  
Little boxes on the hillside  
Ant they're all made out of ticky-tacky  
And they all look just the same*

*Malvina Reynolds*

I can't imagine that Ford L. Stump and his wife, Thelma Irene ever visualized the fact that they were taking their first step into a whirling maelstrom that day in May of 1948 when they signed the purchase and sales agreement for a large vacant parcel of land on Tower Hill Road just south of its intersection with Annaquatucket Road. On the contrary, the Stump's, who at that time lived in Preston Manor just north of there, probably felt like they were on their way to a new and bright future, one that included a new home and a certain level of financial security. They did realize that ideal, but oh - - what they had to go through to get there.

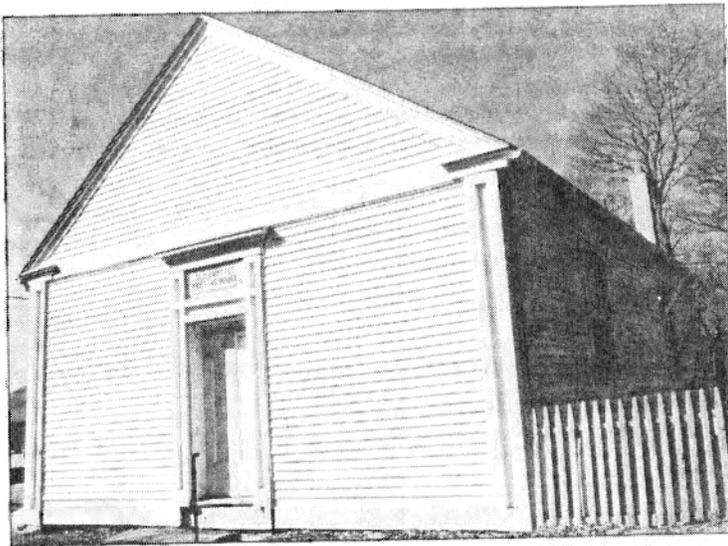
You see, Ford Stump, a civilian worker at Quonset/Davisville, a former Dairy foreman at the University of Rhode Island, and a veteran of WWI, figured he'd get in on the housing boom that was going on in our fair town as a result of the rapid expansion of the base he worked at each and every day. He bought the big parcel of land with the idea of sub-dividing it and putting up a nice little neighborhood there. He planned to name it "Jean Louise Gardens", after a daughter he and Thelma had that had, sadly, died far too young. Additionally he decided to honor his wife by naming the main road through the development, "Thelma Irene Drive". They would live in a house in this neighborhood as well; that was Ford's plan.

Things went along as planned in the beginning, although it all took longer than Ford and Thelma probably imagined it would. By 1955, the engineering and legal mumbo-jumbo was in place, the land had been surveyed, platted, and sub-divided and, by gosh, as luck would have it, Ford had managed to sign on with America's largest home builder, the undeniable kings of pre-fabricated homes, the National Homes Corporation of Lafayette, Indiana. They, along with Leavitt Builders and a couple of others, had revolutionized the way homes were constructed, and how fast a neighborhood could be completed. Things would move along quickly now, or so Ford thought anyway.

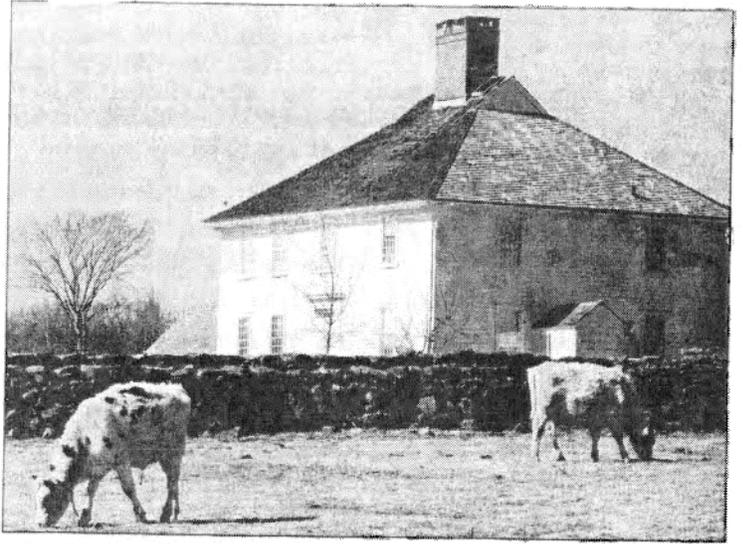
This was where everything got awfully complicated for Ford and Irene. At that point in time, National Homes, Leavitt Builders and the rest, were on the move in America. Whole communities were going up in the wink of an eye. It all began with Leavittown, a community of thousands of homes that sprung up in Long Island where farms once stood before anyone could formulate a complaint. It was happening down south, out west, and in the heartland of America. Everywhere except New England that is. And Jean Louise Gardens was to be the toehold, the foot in the door; everything moved fast alright, but Ford and Thelma were relegated to the sidelines as the National Homes Corporation and the building trade professionals of North Kingstown prepared to duke it out in the Town Council chambers of our community.

National Homes was not used to losing, but they had made a tactical error when they moved into town and began putting up their "panelized" pre-fabricated homes on Thelma Irene Drive, at a rate of one house every day or so. You see, the President of the North Kingstown Town Council at that time was no friend of pre-fabricated homes, Lloyd Lucas, a Councilman by night, but a home builder by day, was not about to stand by and let his livelihood be threatened and his community be homogenized by those "little houses made of ticky-tacky". The battle opened with a local plumber informing the town council that the National Homes Corporation was circumventing the Town's building code by among other things using 2 X 3's rather than 2 X 4's, 2 X 6's rather than 2 X 8's, and using glue where code called for nails. Construction was ordered halted and round 2 began. National Homes pulled out all the stops, as the stakes were high as far as they were concerned. Full page ads appeared in the local papers, expert witnesses were flown in to testify and anyone who was interested was flown out on junkets to view some of the Corporation's wonderful completed communities. The local building trade professionals too, particularly Paul Arnold, ran informational advertisements as well. They brought in their expert too; extraordinarily successful developer Herbert C. Calef, the man who build Mount View, Shore Acres, and the Hamilton plat among others, testified that he could successfully build a house for just a little bit more than National Homes (His were going for around \$9000 while National Homes boasted they could get a family into a new home for \$8000) and his were built by local men and were safer and would last longer besides. The experts and townsfolk alike on both sides of the issue traded facts, barbs, and even insults at Town Council and Zoning board meetings throughout the first part of the year while Ford and Thelma looked on from the sidelines. When the fighting was done, the vote taken, and the dust settled, the score was Lloyd Lucas and the building professionals - 1, National Homes - 0. The big corporation packed it up and moved on to their next project.

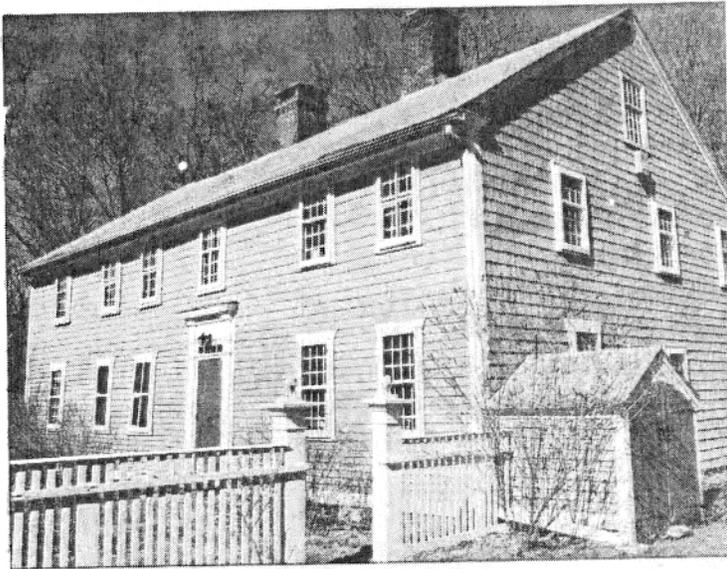
Ford and Thelma moved into one of the handful of pre-fab homes that been constructed before the battle had begun and Jean Louise Gardens was finished off with homes built the old fashioned way by local folks. They lived out their lives there; Ford eventually sitting on the very Zoning Board that helped decide the fate of his neighborhood and being a driving force behind the formation of the NK Senior Association and Thelma continuing to make her famous pies for the Wagon Shed Restaurant on Post Road. Ford passed away in 1986 and Thelma lived on in her little house on Thelma Irene Drive until just a couple of weeks ago when she joined Ford at the age of 99 years old. She was the last surviving combatant in the battle for the very soul of North Kingstown's neighborhoods.



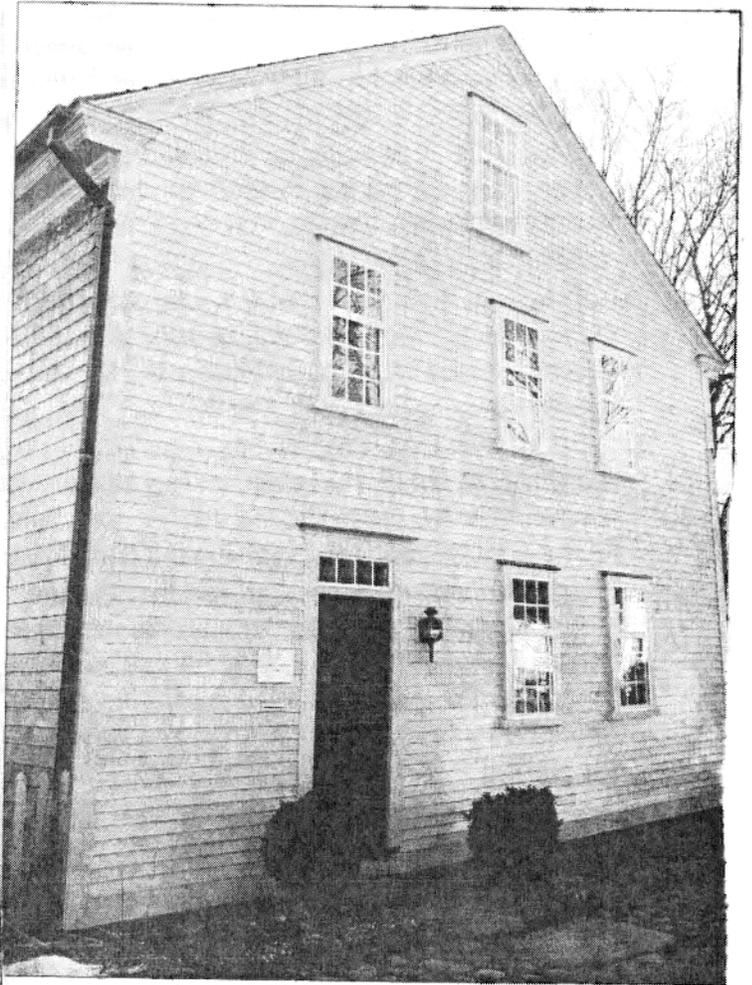
No. 8: The Stony Lane Six Principle Baptist Meetinghouse.



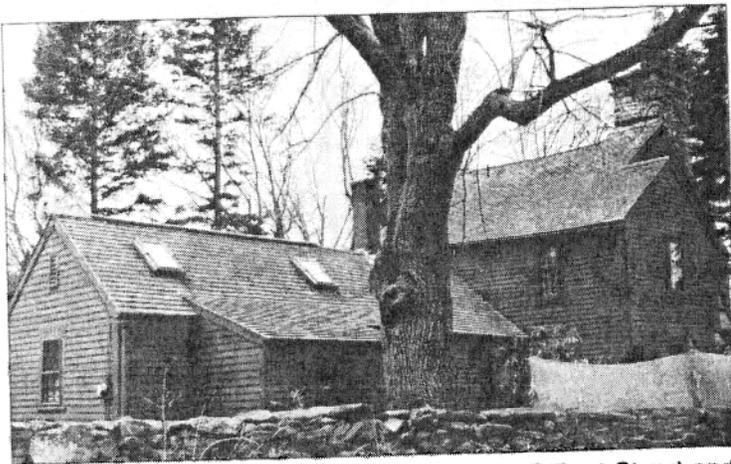
No. 12: The Silas Casey Farm on Boston Neck Road.



No. 10: The Davis Homestead on Davisville Road.



No. 14: "Old Yellow" in Wickford.



No. 15: The Douglas House at the corner of Gilbert Stuart and Tower Hill roads.