

G. Timothy Cranston 's

# **The View From Swamptown**

Volumes I and II

April 1999 to March 2001

# The View From Swamptown

## The Farming Villages

### Library Note

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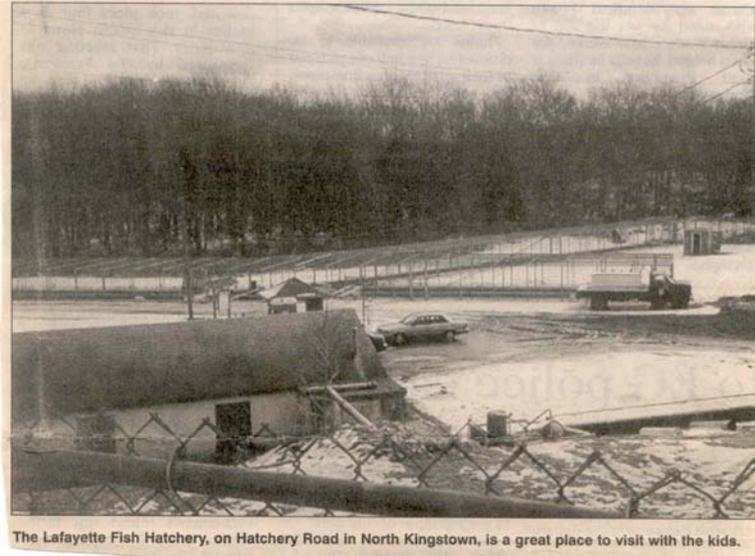
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## The Lafayette Fish Hatchery



Well, moms and dads, it's that time again - February vacation. Yes, February vacation, and that same nagging concern is raising its ugly head; just like last year and the year before, that question is gnawing at you, giving you an uneasy feeling in the pit of your very being - "What am I going to

do to keep these children occupied during this, the dead of winter; how can I both amuse and educate them while keeping my sanity and financial stability intact? Well, your loyal columnist is here with his yearly choice for the best historic site to take your children to. Last year's five star Swamp Yankee endorsement went to the Queen's Fort just over the town line in Exeter, this year's seal of approval is stamped upon the Lafayette Fish Hatchery on Hatchery Road. It, like the Queen's Fort, has all the attributes appreciated by a Swamp Yankee; it is open year round, there is nothing here a child can break, running, climbing, and general energy expenditure are perfectly OK, and the price (free) is right. Take all that and add to it the marvelous fact that you and your children get to get up close and personal with hundreds, no thousands, of fish and you have the makings of a stress-free and exciting afternoon.

The Goose Nest Spring, the site of the fish hatchery, is unique, in that it has only had three different inhabitants; the first were the Shewatuck (or Showattuck) Indians, a branch of the Narragansetts, who called this part of Swamptown home since time

began, after that the land was home to countless generations of Rathbuns, one of the first colonial families to settle in the region, and finally the land is now the domain of the trout; hundreds of thousands of trout have called the Goose Nest Spring home since the hatchery opened eighty years ago. The name, Goose Nest Spring, refers to a local legend which states that the spring gushed forth from a goose nest immediately after the goslings left it, the affected goslings, then happily, jumped into the spring and paddled away. This tale may very well have "sprung" from the mind of a Rathbun character; whatever its origin is, the name stuck.

The state acquired the land in 1921 and immediately began the construction of the fish hatchery. The Rathbun property had everything you could desire if you were looking to build a hatchery; plenty of space and a seemingly endless supply of crystal clear water which bubbled up out of the ground as springs, at 25 locations on the site. Tradition holds that the water temperature stays around 47 degrees even in the heat of August, and trout love cool clear water. The early 1920's version of the hatchery was enlarged and rebuilt in the "New Deal" 1930's as a WPA/CCC project. The facility then remained virtually unchanged for decades until a more recent modernization and rehabilitation. Today the site contains vestiges of its Rathbun past, (a small bank barn, featured in a recent column) as well as the hatchery structures of the twenties, thirties, and modern vintages.

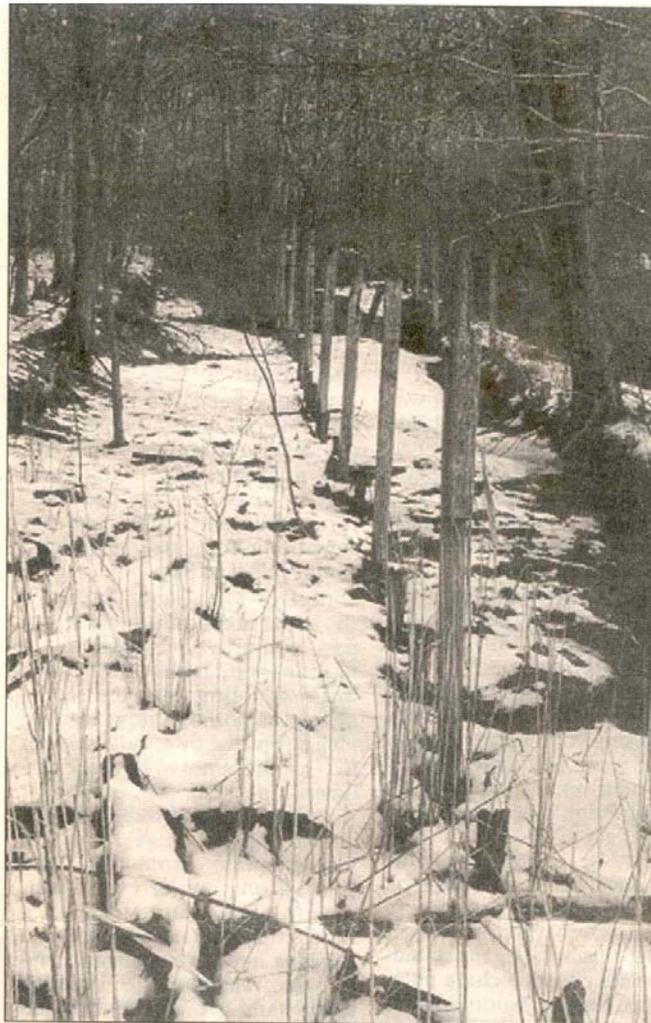
The staff at the Lafayette Fish Hatchery, headed by Peter Angelone, is knowledgeable and friendly. They welcome visitors from 8:00 to 3:00 - Monday through Friday. This is actually one of the best times of the year to visit, as the staff (and the trout) are getting ready for the spring stockings and there is much to see. For an additional treat stop by your local library or bookstore and pick up a book on animal and bird footprints. There is NO



PHOTO: JAMES RUSH  
The 1930s-era well house at the Lafayette Fish Hatchery is made of stones mortared together with a wooden roof.

better place in the area to find interesting and rare footprints to identify. The hatchery is like a wildlife smorgasbord to the local otters, mink, fishers, raccoons, fox, herons and birds of every stripe. Their incessant attention to the inhabitants of the holding pens and ponds was one of the driving forces behind the recent modernization project.

So, mom and dad, don't say I didn't try to help and by the way, if you see a wild-haired swamp yankee with two jabberjaw sons in tow while you're there, it is probably me trying desperately to retain my sanity as the wonderful February vacation winds down.



The remains of some of the 1920s-era fish holding troughs are here.

**The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston**

## **The Oldest House In Swamptown**

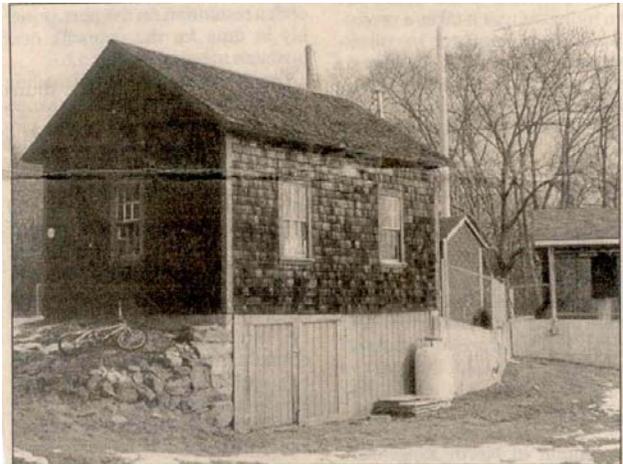
"Where's the oldest house in Swamptown?" If you are anything like me, this is the type of question that can keep you up at night wracking your brain. Of course, my wife says that these types of things don't bother average folk; but what the heck, just in case there's a few more like me out there, I'll give you the answer - It's just a few yards up Beacon Drive just north of its intersection with Hatchery Road. It has always been known as the Rathbun Farmhouse and is the last of four ancient homes within which this old Swamptown family resided throughout most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The house was constructed sometime around the middle of the 1700's -it has survived all that it has faced for all these 250 years or so. It is obviously a tough and cantankerous old home, just like the colorful characters who built and lived in it, but it owes its survival into the twenty-first century to the right-thinking folks at Heritage Homes, a local developer. They realized, back in the late 1970's, something which many other developers still haven't to this day figured out; a properly restored colonial home is a benefit to a well thought out housing development, not a detraction. The Beacon Drive development, which now sits astride the old Rathbun farm property is a wonderful testimonial to that fact.

As late as the end of the 1800's, three of the four old homesteads were still occupied by three Rathbun brothers; Thomas W.D. Rathbun, Lorenzo D. Rathbun, and Martin Van Buren Rathbun. (The Rathbuns on the whole had a great love of long colorful names.) One of the homes burned down in 1946, another was demolished by the state in 1923 when it built the Lafayette fish hatchery on the home's property, although a Rathbun barn still remains there to this day and the fate of the third is unknown to this writer. That leaves only the center-chimneyed farmhouse on Beacon Drive to remind us all of the days when the woods of Swamptown were full of colorfully-named Rathbun's and their kin. The story goes that the Rathbun property also sported one of the biggest cider presses in the area. The

mill and press was operated by "horse" power. The apples were ground into pomace and the resulting mash was layered into the press with clean straw. The press was then turned with a giant screw contraption to squeeze the cider out of the pomace into troughs around the press. From September to Thanksgiving-time, Rathbun's were out there pressing apples for every farmer from miles around. All the young ones were allowed to suck cider direct from the troughs through a straw and it was generally a time for celebration and merriment. So the next time you're "sucking cider through a straw" let your mind wander back to a time when this was a big deal to younguns who went by hefty monikers like Martin Van Buren.



The Rathbun family cemetery is in the woods off of Hatchery Road.



A Rathbun barn still stands on the property of the state-run Lafayette Fish Hatchery.



The Rathbun Farmhouse still stands on Beacon Drive.

## The Kettle Hole

This week's column takes us back to home base - Swamptown. The Kettle hole is an almost legendary place in Swamptown lore. Created by the great glaciers many eons ago, tradition has it that it is bottomless. The pond is supplied by three springs from which water roils and boils up at a constant rate. The fishing too, has been described in legendary terms. Tales of giant pickerel and perch abound. One fact that no one has ever disagreed upon is the incredible natural beauty of the place. It is a tranquil spot; disturbed only by the sounds of nature. Unfortunately for all who wish to experience this place (although its probably been good for the Kettle Hole) all the land surrounding this natural Eden in Swamptown is now in private hands and the pond is all but invisible from nearby Col. Rodman Highway and West Allenton Road.

Inexorably tied to the Kettle Hole in fact and legend is the name of Charles Henry Rose and his grist mill. Charles Rose was born in Swamptown on November 7, 1826 to Charles Rose and Lydia Congdon; after a distinguished career as a nurse during the Civil War, he purchased the Kettle Hole property and opened a grist mill in the existing building which had formerly been a small cotton mill. Charles Rose's specialty was grinding the local grown corn into johnnycake meal and, although well known as a miller, his local fame grew out of his eccentric personality and quick wit. He was known as a poet and a philosopher and he always had time to entertain his customers with Swamptown legend and lore. A descendant of the Campbell/Northup family, who were Mr. Rose's closest neighbors, remembers her father reciting the following Charles Rose ditty taught to him as a boy by Charles Rose himself:

Tobacco is a filthy weed  
From which the devil sows his seed

It fills your pockets -scents your clothes  
And makes a chimney of your nose.

Charles Henry Rose died in March of 1901 on the job milling corn as always; he lived his life, as the old saying goes "nose to the grindstone" and died that way as well. He is buried in the Congdon family cemetery on Congdon Hill Road next to his parents. The grist mill was run for a time afterwards by others, but without the presence of Charles Rose it inevitably closed. Eventually the property was purchased by the Rodman family and loaned out to the RI Boy Scouts to be used as their state camp grounds - the predecessor to Yawgoo scout camp. This phase of the Kettle Hole's existence soon ended as well and the property eventually was sold by the Rodmans and fell into private hands where it remains to this day.

Oh, by the way, the official word on the Kettle Hole is that it is not really bottomless; as a matter of fact, they say, it is not even that extraordinarily deep. But, you know, I choose to believe the legends - sometimes they are just a lot more palatable than the official truth.

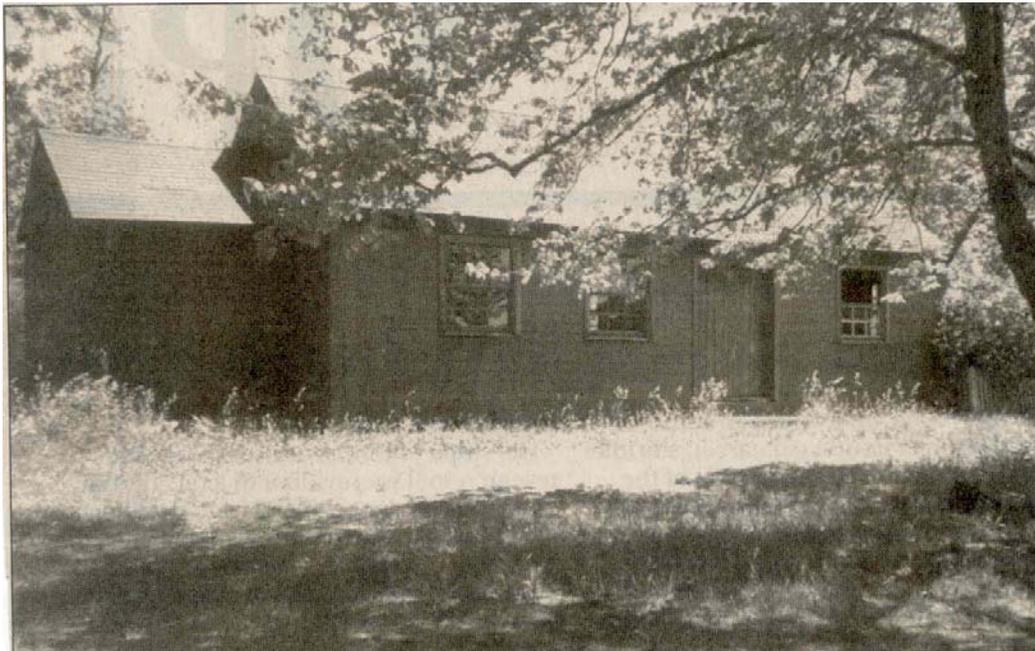


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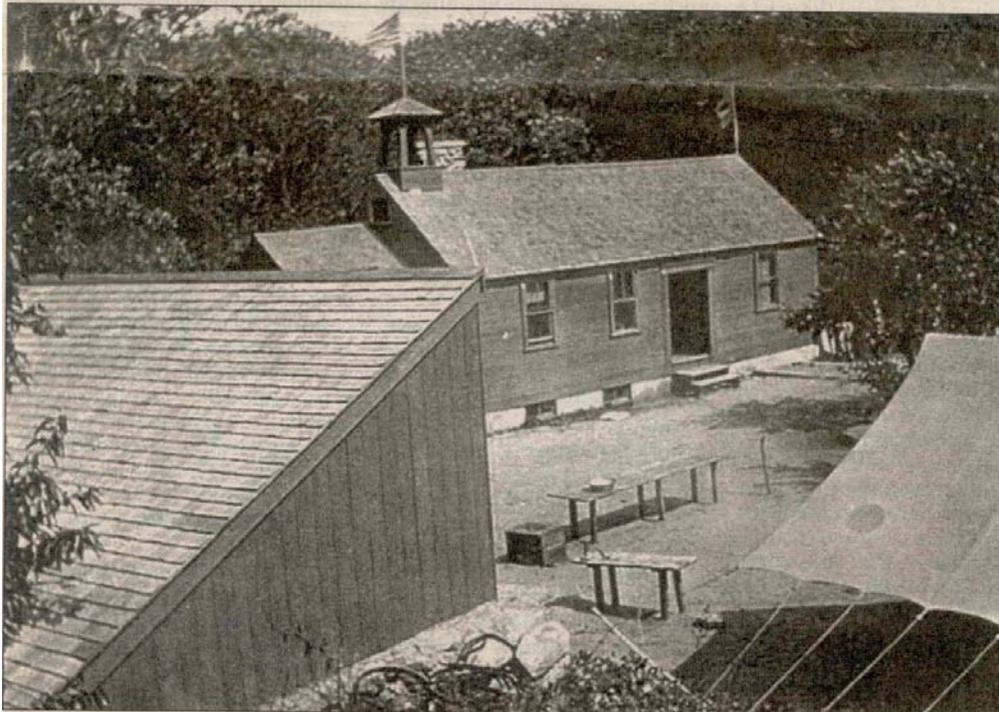
The Kettle Hole Grist Mill building as it looks today.

Postscript: Many thanks to Mrs. Doris Moon And Mrs. Esther Vale for their assistance in preparing this column.



COURTESY: DORIS M

The Kettle Hole Grist Mill as it looked around the turn of the century (above) and as a Boy Scout camp, c. 1914 (below).



The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

## The Scrabbletown Grist Mill

If Swamptown were to have a twin sister, it would have to be Scrabbletown; another almost forgotten village located through the tangled swamps and forests just three miles or so as the crow flies, to the *NNW*. The residents of both hamlets were truly kindred spirits, who struggled to scratch a living out of the hard rocky soil of the area. As a matter of fact, Scrabbletown's colorful name reflects just that sentiment. The story goes that sometime in the early 1800's "Old Man Mawney", one of the elder statesmen of the area, upon realizing that the little cluster of homes centered around a grist mill on a tributary of the Hunt's River was significant enough to warrant a name, decided, after consulting with a jug of rum, that "Scrabbletown" was just about perfect as all the people living there had to scrabble to make a living. His ruminations were obviously held in high esteem as the name stuck and is still used to this day. Little remains of Scrabbletown now, which was centered at the present day intersection of Stony Lane, Scrabbletown Road, and the western section of the bisected Pleasant Valley Road. There are only a handful of homes left standing, although the roadsides and woods are full of the foundations and cellar holes of many others that exist now only in the memory of a few. Perhaps the most visible and remarkable monuments to the village are the remains of the mill, the mill pond dam, and the simple sturdy stone sluiceways which have survived through almost two hundred years.

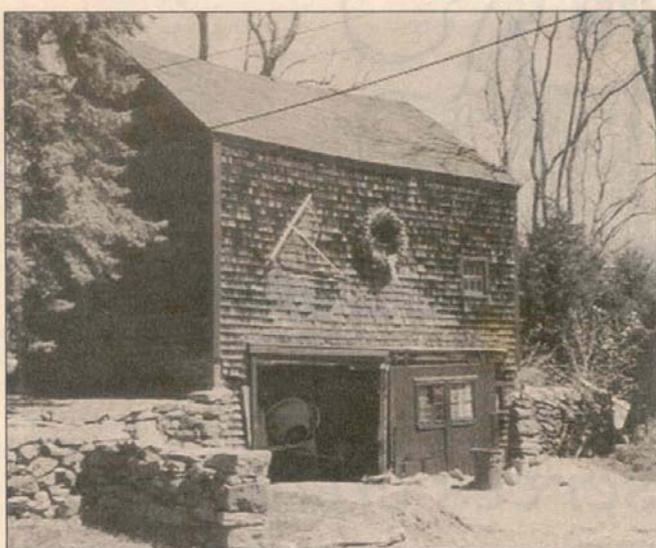
The grist mill was built in 1824, more than likely by someone named Young, as the area around it was referred to as "Young's Mill" prior to receiving its more colorful moniker. By 1833, the mill was run by Gorton Nichols who in that year built himself and his family a home nearby. The mill then passed into the Arnold family, when Mercy Nichols married George Arnold. Subsequently, the mill and mill pond area were owned separately by members of the Lawton, Whitford, Gardiner, Cranston, and Rodman families.

In all instances, the family that owned the mill pond land was bound by the terms of the deed of transfer to allow the mill owners to access the pond and maintain the dam and sluiceways. As the miller's house went with the mill pond land, the mill operator always lived at another location nearby. This unique symbiotic arrangement continued on for many years until the eventual demise of the mill sometime around the turn of the century. As is usually the case with a small village such as this, the end of the mill meant the end of the village, and with the closing of the Scrabbletown schoolhouse around 1920, the village, which at its peak consisted of a school, a tavern, a Baptist meetinghouse, the gristmill, and twelve to fifteen houses and farms, for all intents and purposes, ceased to exist.

Scrabbletown, was largely forgotten and stayed out of the limelight for some fifty years, until 1976 when it was nominated as an archetype for the area's rural past to the National Register of Historic Places. The driving forces behind the nomination were the board of trustees of the South County Museum; the museum being, at that time, a long time resident of the area and the people who called Scrabbletown home. Motivating this coalition of concerned Scrabbletowners was the ominous and onerous shadow of the long-discussed Route 4 extension, which was targeted to barrel right through the heart of Scrabbletown. Thankfully the wheels of RIDOT turn more slowly than the cogs of the Department of the Interior, as the registration process took nearly nine years. It did, however, achieve its goal as, although the highway came through no matter what (as they often seem to do) it did have to avoid the protected portion of the historic district. The protectors of Scrabbletown, unfortunately, paid a high price for their efforts. The rerouted highway caused the relocation of the museum from its longtime home to Canonchet Farm in Narragansett and some of the property owners lost their homes to its new path; including the site of the 1833 Gorton Nichols home.

So now, Scrabbletown again shares something with Swamptown to its south. The new Route 4 extension slices through it and we hundreds of thousands of

motorists speed by on our way to the Col. Rodman highway section of the road, which cuts through the heart of Swamptown with equal abandon. Most of us have no idea of the history which happened to the right and to the left of our cars. But if you'll just slow down a little right before you cross Stony Lane on your way home from the city and look to your right, you'll catch a glimpse of the Scrabbletown Brook as it flows over the millpond dam. It harkens back to a time long ago and I often wonder what "Old Man Mawney" would think about the way we modern folk have to "scrabble" away just to make a living.



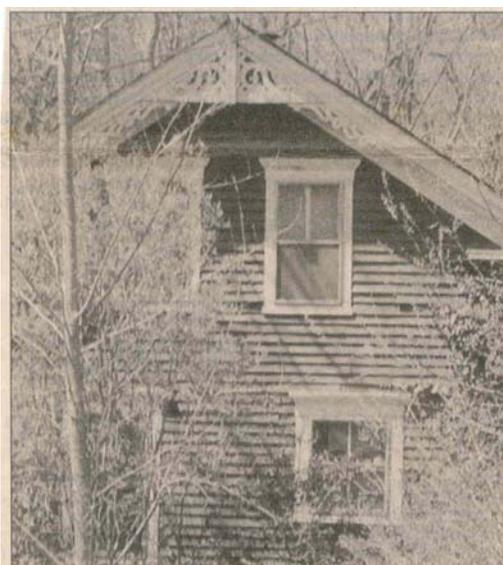
The Kendrick bank barn.



The Gardiner-Arnold early 19th-century bank barn.



The Scrabbletown Brook flows over the falls at the mill pond and down the stone sluiceways to the gristmill site.



The Alfred Jones house.

## The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

### Scrabbletown - Part II

Last week we took a look at the history of Scrabbletown and the Grist Mill which anchored the community. Now let's take a gander at some of the other Scrabbletown-era structures that still exist in the historic district.

The Gardiner-Arnold farm, located on Scrabbletown Road, was built in the middle 1800's and is probably one of the best examples of a farm of this era located in North Kingstown. It was the original home of the South County Museum from the 1930s until 1977. It is easy to understand why the museum founders chose this site for their first home. The farm complex (now broken up into two separate pieces of property) includes two barns, a milk house, a large corn crib, a wash house, two farm-related sheds, and the family cemeteries of both the Gardiner Family and the Case Family (The colonial-era family that first settled on the land at the dawn of the 1700s.) The older barn, which is located adjacent to the farmhouse, is known as a bank barn; a typical style of that era, it was built into the side of a hill (or bank) and the lower level was largely underground, this afforded some insulation from the bitter cold of winter to the livestock which were housed therein. The larger barn, which is located across Scrabbletown Road, is a magnificent example of a late 19th century gambrel-roofed barn and is a picture-postcard example of what we all think of when we conjure up an image of an old fashioned farm in our mind's eye. The scene is completed by sight and sound of a small tributary to the Scrabbletown Brook which flows through the farm and provided water for many an 18th and 19th century cow in its day.

Across the street from the Scrabbletown Road - Stony Lane intersection sits the bank barn of the Charles Kendrick farmhouse. This barn, built around 1890, has been wonderfully restored by its present owners.

Just down the hill from the Scrabbletown Road - Stony Lane intersection is the western

part of Pleasant Valley Road, which was cut off from its eastern part by the interloper we call Route 4. Dug into the hill on the corner of the road is a cellar hole, which is all that remains of the Spencer Tavern. The tavern was one of the places where the stagecoach stopped on its way



Remains of the Scrabbletown gristmill.

to New York from Providence and Boston. I'm sure many a farmer also wet his dusty whistle here during its many decades of service to the Scrabbletown community. Also found on Pleasant Valley Road is the remains of the heart of Scrabbletown, the grist mill; it is located just behind the Alfred Jones House, a handsome gable-roofed home built in 1880.



The late 19th century Gardiner-Arnold main barn.



The Gardiner-Arnold farmhouse.

With that, we have come full-circle; our tour of Historic Scrabbletown begins and ends with the mill, which is only appropriate as that is also how the community lived, prospered, and perished, the fate of the mill was the fate of its village, and so it was all over New England at the beginning of the age of machines.

## The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

### Beriah Brown

This week's column concerns Beriah Brown, another of the founders of North Kingstown, a man who has been unfortunately forgotten and, some might say, disrespected.

Beriah Brown was born in Rowley Massachusetts in 1648. At the age of thirty five he married the daughter of Abigail and Alexander Phenix of the Quidnesset section of North Kingstown. They settled nearby and built a home around the time of the turn of the century. In 1709, Beriah along with neighbors John Fones, Francis West, and others purchased a large parcel of land measuring nearly 800 acres upon which, according to the deed, they were already living. Beriah's home, known as the Beriah Manor existed at this location, the site of the present day Narragansett Electric complex on Route 2, for nearly 275 years until it was dismantled to make way for an indoor tennis court in the late 1960's.

Beriah Manor's age alone was enough to make it a historically significant home. But there is more to this ancient gambrel roofed structure's story than just sheer longevity. You see, Beriah's grandson and namesake Beriah Brown II, who lived in the manor after the death of his grandfather, was the law in these parts during the 1700's; and "The High Sheriff of King's County" Beriah Brown, built the area's first jail in the cellar of his home. One can only imagine what it must have been like having a county jail in your basement! At the time of its dismantlement indications of the jail cells and barred windows were still evident.

I say dismantlement because; although the manor's significance was obviously missed by the powers-that-be in North Kingstown at the time, they were not lost upon the good citizens of our neighbor across the bay, Newport; for in 1972, the Beriah Manor was purchased by the Vanderbilt family (yes, those Vanderbilts!) and reassembled in downtown Newport where it sits today. North

Kingstown's loss was Newport's gain.

Beriah Brown I died in 1718 and was buried in his family graveyard, which is located between what is now Gregg's Restaurant and a small daycare facility. This is where the disrespect comes into play; it seems that the Brown family graveyard, now, belongs to no one. According to the plat maps and the tax assessor's office the rather large cemetery is not part of any lot and is not owned by the town or the state. Its existence in this limbo-like state has assured that it is only visited by vandals and windblown trash and only cared for by nature

and time. With this in mind I issue a challenge to the learned readers of this column. There must be a civic organization out there that could "adopt" this neglected spot. What a great Eagle scout project it would be or maybe the local F.O.P. could take it up in honor of Sheriff Beriah. Perhaps, Gregg's restaurant could add it to their landscaping budget as a gesture to the extensive history that their location possesses. If anyone is interested contact me at the paper.



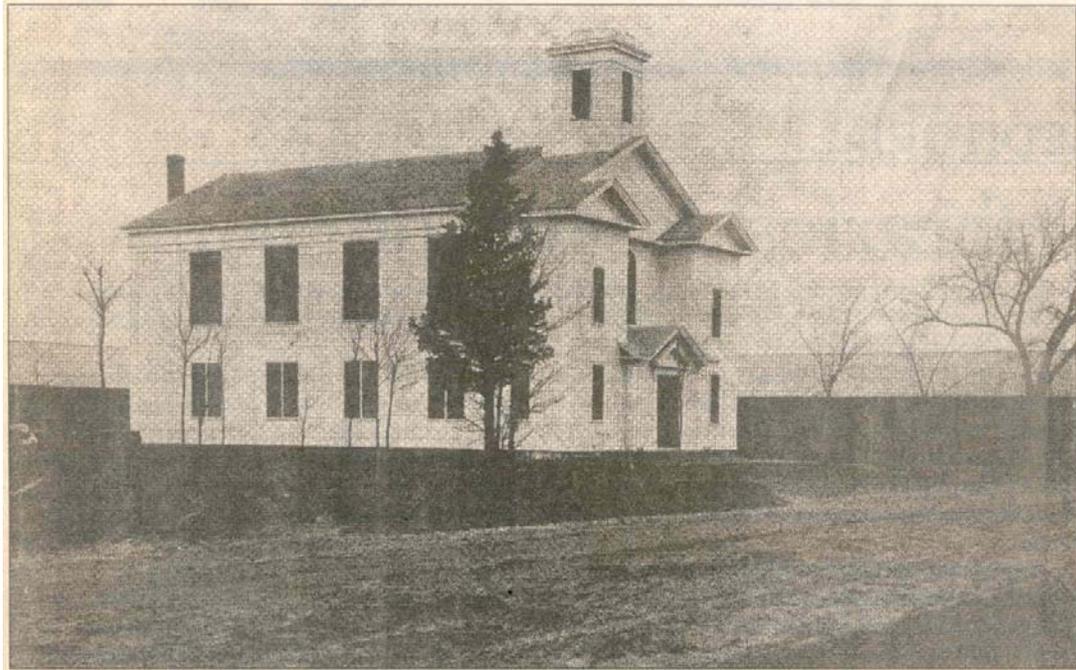
Beriah Manor in North Kingstown.



Beriah Manor in Newport.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

## The Quidnessett Baptist Church



The Quidnessett Baptist Church on Post Road, seen here in the late 1800s, was destroyed by fire in 1905 and a new church, which stands today, was built in its place.

Along about 1828, a group of prominent farmers and landowners in the northern portion of town decided that the eight mile "commute" down to their chosen house of worship, the Allenton Baptist Church, was just a little too far to go, especially in the winter months. With that in mind, and with the recent ordination of one of their own, Elder Joseph Allen, they approached the leadership of the church and asked if they could form a branch church with Brother Allen in charge. They met like that until 1839 when it was decided that the group was large enough to stand as an independent body. They had been meeting in a small church building located on Fletcher Road built on land donated by Deacon George Allen. But by 1841 this church was deemed to be too small for the needs of the growing congregation and plans were made to construct a new and larger building. A generous donation of a piece of land on the Post Road, by Samuel Austin, a member of the Frenchtown Baptist congregation along with a very successful fund raising campaign allowed the new church to open,

debt free, on May 30, 1842. The church, shown in the accompanying photograph, (note the lack of hustle and bustle along the then unpaved Post Road) was a handsome and traditional wooden structure with an attached steeple. Things went well for the congregation at Quidnessett, in 1860 the now well known Sunday School program was begun. The year 1868 brought a changing of the guard as Elder Allen retired after 37 years of service and was replaced by Rev. Burrows. Soon after that, prominent church member, James Davis, of the Davis mills, donated a parsonage to the church. The home was located in nearby Davisville and is still in use to this day. Sadly, on May 27, 1905, the church building was completely engulfed and destroyed by fire. Only the pulpit and a few church furnishings were spared. The cornerstone for the new (and present) church building was laid in 1906 and the final dedication ceremonies were held upon its completion in 1912. Since then the church has been expanded a number of times and stands as a vibrant and integral part of the community which exists in the northern half of our fair town.

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## The Devil's Footprint

This week's article concerns one of the topics that I get the largest volume of questions about - Devil's Foot Rock. This ancient location was first mentioned in the colonial record in 1671, so it has obviously been fascinating the locals around here for many centuries.

The rock's history extends many eons previous to its 1671 mention as a major delineating landmark in the Fones Purchase, where it formed one of the corners of this large tract of land purchased from the Narragansetts. Indeed, the Narragansetts recognize its long standing significance as a meeting place of note, although not as important as Pettasquamscutt Rock to the south. It is from the Narragansetts, with embellishments from the early colonists, that the legends associated with the footprint-like formations on the rock have arisen. It is these legends which make Devil's Foot Rock a truly fascinating piece of Early American folklore.

The various Devil legends associated with the rock range from the simple version which has the devil (called Hobomoko by the Indians) landing here briefly with his dog on his way to Connecticut (this definitely says something about the Narragansetts relationship with the Ct. tribes as well as the local colonists feelings about their neighbors to the west.) to the more elaborate and well-known version which has Hobokomo chasing an Indian woman all the way from somewhere in Massachusetts to the rock where he captures her and in the process leaves the impressions of his cloven hooves in the stone. It is said that he then landed with her at Purgatory Chasm in Middletown, where similar indentations can be found, and killed her. Other similar legends have the woman as a colonial maiden or an Indian maiden who practiced devil worship at the rock and had her dreams come true in a most horrible fashion. Whatever legend you subscribe to, the rock remains as a site which fascinates us as much as it did the area's earliest inhabitants.

The rock's more recent history has been one where it has been in peril, not an Indian or colonial maiden. The first major impact upon the rock came in the 1890s, when it was purchased by John D. Johnson who was a stone mason, contractor, and architect. Johnson quarried out large quantities of building stone from the Devil's Foot rock, which he used to construct Newport City Hall and the seawall at Narragansett Pier. The major footprint formations were untouched during this process, but piles of rock slabs which were never

removed from the site testify to the level of activity which once occurred here. Man's next impact on the rock was just as intrusive, when in the early 1930's more of the rock was removed during a Route 1 road improvement project. Again in the early 1940s the construction of a railroad spur into Quonset-Davisville which required both blasting and rock removal imperiled the devil's footprints again. But in both cases, public outcry against destruction of the most important footprints saved them from a fate similar to the maidens of the rock's legends. In fact, a low semicircular retaining wall was constructed around the two most notable footprints during this time frame and Johnson, who still retained ownership of the site, decided to donate the rock itself to the Rhode Island Historical Society who still own it to this day.

Since the hustle and bustle of the 1940s, the area around Devil's Foot Rock has remained quiet. An occasional visit from a father and his children, accompanied by the retelling of the oft-retold stories are all that has transpired - until now that is. For in the last six years or so the rock has been bracing itself for the latest onslaught upon it by its human neighbors. The age of the Quonset-Davisville Access Road has come and the rock is in harms way. But all is not lost for Hobokomo's fabled footprints, because, as a by-product of the required Federal Impact Statement for the road project, the Devil's Foot Rock was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. This required a rerouting of the highway so as to avoid having any impact on the site. So the rock will do what it has done for countless centuries, continue on; for as the Indians of old used to say, "Only the rocks last forever", and now, parents, you all possess the legends of the rock, so take your children up there and show them the footprints, tell them the stories so that the legends will last as long as the rock itself.



The Devil's Foot Rock, located off a gravel path in the woods across Post Road from Quonset Auto Body, bears the imprint of the devil's hooves, according to local legend, and gave the nearby road, Devil's Foot Road, its name.



A closeup of the Devil's Foot Rock shows the cloven-shaped imprints that gave the rock its legend.

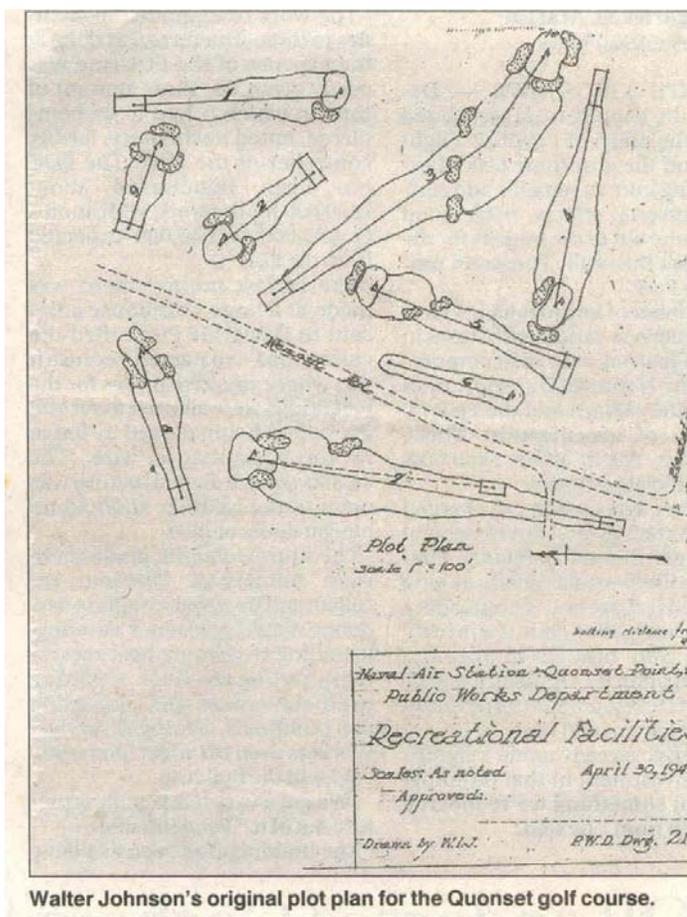
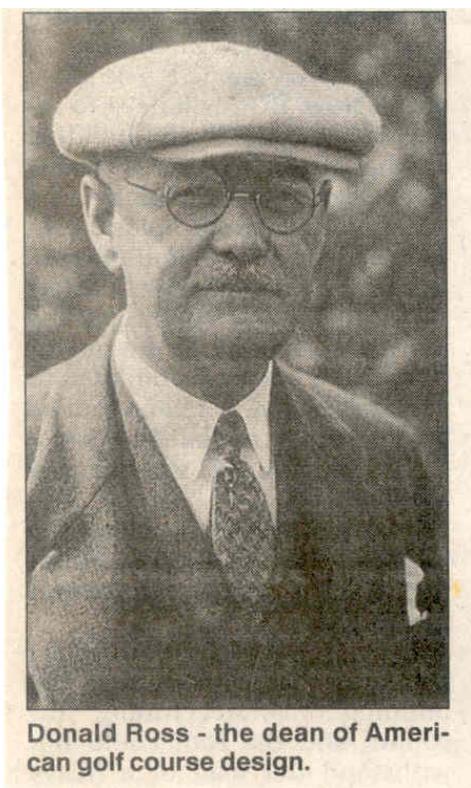
## **The View Frow Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston**

# **The North Kingstown Municipal Golf Course**

Like everything else at the Quonset/Davisville complex, the golf course was designed and built quickly; there was a war waiting in the wings, and everyone involved in the massive military build-up that was occurring all across the country knew that time was both our ally and enemy. But the government did, by and large, attempt to get the best that they could, within the time constraints presented, for each facet of the huge base's design and construction. The architectural design work for many of the base's numerous buildings was done by the internationally famous architect Albert Kahn, and for the design work of the officer's nine hole golf course they chose Walter I. Johnson. Now, Johnson, in and of himself, is certainly not a household name in the world of golf course design; but his boss and mentor, Donald Ross certainly is. Donald Ross is the Frank Lloyd Wright of golf course architecture. Ross, born in Dornoch, Scotland in 1872 learned golf and golf course design as the apprentice to the granddaddy of all that is golf, Old Tom Morris at St. Andrews, the birthplace of golf as we know it today. He emigrated to the U.S. near the turn of the century to take a job as golf pro and greens keeper at Oakley Country Club near Boston. His first big design job was three golf courses at Pinehurst, North Carolina. His Pinehurst 12 is considered his masterpiece and is listed as one of the great courses in the world. In the thirty six years following Pinehurst he is credited with developing several hundred golf courses across the eastern U.S. and Canada. These courses include Seminole in Fla., Beverly in Chicago, Oakland Hills in Michigan, and Scioto in Ohio.

It was during this time frame that Walter Johnson came into the picture. Johnson was primarily Ross construction superintendent, although he also dabbled in golf course design. He worked with Donald Ross right up until Ross' death in 1948. After that Walter Johnson set out on his own as a full time designer. His first experience in Rhode Island was in 1928, when as an employee of Ross he designed an additional nine holes at Potowomut Country Club on the N.K.- Warwick- E. Greenwich border. In 1942, Johnson was back in R.I. again as a Ross employee, working

under contract to the government to design and oversee the construction of the officer's golf course at Quonset Point. The course he designed was typical Ross and harkens back to the design of the links back in bonny Scotland. The course, finished in 1944, was a success and so well thought of that it was Johnson, now working on his own, that the Navy called upon in the early 1960s to design an additional nine holes to bring the course, now tentatively named "The Quonsebee Course" up to its full complement of 18 holes. It is that eighteen hole course which our fair town now operates as the North Kingstown Municipal Golf Course, having received it from the Navy in the 1970s as a by-product of the base closure. The golf course blueprints may have the signature of Walter I. Johnson on them, but the rolling course with its wide fairways, numerous sand traps, and elevated amoeba-like greens has Donald Ross' name all over it.



**The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston**

## **The William Peter Maxwell House**

It's a little known fact that everyone's favorite Chinese restaurant is also one of Post Road's oldest buildings. Even more amazing is the fact that it is also the site of North Kingstown's first tavern - Haven's Tavern.

Let's start out with the tavern. Haven's Tavern dates back to the late 1600s. It, like Richard Smith's blockhouse and Roger William's Trading Post just to the south, was built along the Pequot Trail; (now Post Road) the Native American's major thoroughfare through the area. The Tavern was the primary place for colonial travelers who were making the long arduous journey from Boston to New York to spend a night off the road and get a warm meal and a bed to sleep in. What little we know of this ancient "bed and breakfast" comes from America's first travelogue written in 1704 by the prolific diarist Madame Sarah Knight as she made the perilous Boston - New York journey in that same year. Probably the most profound impression that Madame Knight took away from her visit to the region was that the locals, who were imbibing in the tavern's main room while she tried to sleep upstairs, were a loud argumentative bunch who stayed up much too late. It's nice to know that some things don't change even after 300 years. The date of the eventual demise of the tavern is unknown. What is known, is that it was located a few rods due west of the colonial home which was built on that same piece of land - The William Peter Maxwell House.

Maxwell built his two story central-chimney home in 1803. It has been said that, he too, took advantage of the house's prime location, along the Post Road and ran a tavern out of it for a time as well. The house was originally fronted by wonderful stone walls, but they were lost to an ever-widening Post Road some time ago. For the lion's share of this fine building's existence it was a private home. But the house's location again prevailed when, around 1940, a restaurant called "The Carriage House" was opened under its stately roof, and so it has been for more than sixty years, as "The Carriage House"

seamlessly became "The Pagoda Inn", which, several owners later, still exists today.

So the next time you are enjoying a Pu-Pu Platter and a drink with a little paper umbrella in it at your (and mine, by the way) favorite Chinese eatery, try to be a little quiet. Who knows, the spirit of Madame Knight may be upstairs trying to sleep after a long day on the road to New York. We wouldn't want her to think we are a bunch of noisy know-it-alls now do we?



The William Peter Maxwell House, built circa 1803, now houses the Pagoda Inn restaurant.

## The Verry/Darling Barn

April 8, 1872 was, no doubt, a red letter day in the life of Henry Verry and his wife Alice. On that day, the thirty-two year old farmer signed the paperwork which made him the proud owner of his own farm, a medium-sized parcel of land on the Boston Post Road, carved out of the vast land holdings of John and Sarah Essex, for whom Essex Road is now named. Henry, himself, came from a farming family, his father, Elijah Verry, already owned a sizeable farm on present-day Essex Road and you can rest assured that Henry and Alice were ready and well aware of all that lay ahead of them. The land that the Verry's had purchased was prize farmland, with one exception, it had no farmhouse, barn, or outbuildings of any kind on it. But that was soon remedied and by, approximately, 1875 the Verry family not only had their own farmland, but a house, barn and all the other accoutrements that allow a farm to run smoothly. The Verry's longevity on their farm is a testimony to their success, as they held on to the land for thirty-seven years, until 1909, when they sold it to Howard and Mercy Bateman.

The Bateman's too, were successful farmers and made a good life for themselves on the little Post Road farm. They worked the land by themselves until 1919, when daughter Ida married her beau Edward Darling. Darling worked alongside with his in-laws and eventually the farm was passed down to daughter and son-in-law and became known as the Darling farm. It remained as the Darling Farm for forty more years, until it was purchased in May of 1959 by the rapidly expanding Quidnessett Baptist Church, which stood directly across from the farm on the other side of Post Road. Some eighty-seven years after Henry Verry first tilled the land, its days as a farm were over.

But by no means, did the land stand idle. It was to play a big part in the plans of the church that had purchased it. The house that the Verry's had built and which had sheltered them, as well as the Batemans and Darlings, was moved to the southern part of the parcel, along Post Road and is a viable home to this day. The land which had once brought forth the bounty of the earth and provided for three different families and their livestock would now nurture the children of the growing church, as it became the site of the congregation's new Sunday School. But the barn, well, it never did really fit in

to the plans of the church and it sat there, nearly forgotten, at the back of the large parking lot waiting for its opportunity to serve a family again.

Well, that time has come, and that brings us to the whole point of this story. The good people of the Quidnessett Baptist Church would like to sell the Verry/Darling barn and use the land it sits on for something else. They, like your loyal columnist, are ever-mindful of history and are unwilling to take the expedient and easy way out; that is demolish the structure. What they (and I) would like to see, is for someone within the circulation area of this fine newspaper to come forward and purchase the 125 year old barn, move it and then reuse it in some fashion. It is in wonderful condition and could easily be converted into a home that a person could be proud of, or it would, as you would expect, make a great barn ready to shelter a whole new host of farm animals. If you are interested, contact Allen Moores at the church or, as always, me in care of the paper.

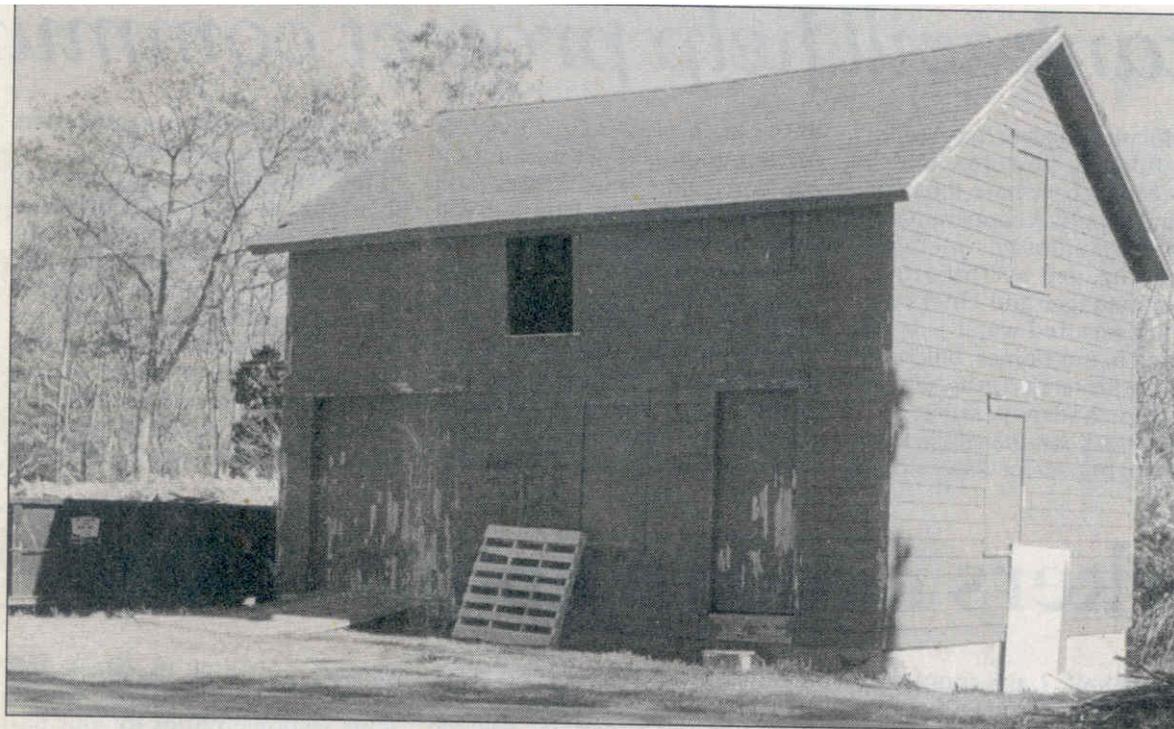


PHOTO: DAVID GOLD

Rather than demolish this historic barn to use the land for something else, Quidnessett Baptist Church is hoping someone will purchase it and move it to another location.

Photo courtesy of [North East Independent](#)

## The Tourgee Grist Mill

Sadly enough, some of our fair town's most important historic sites exist only on old postcards and in the memories of a very few of our elder statesmen and women. The Tourgee Grist Mill or Tourgee Tide Mill, as it was also known, formerly located about one mile down Camp Avenue where it crosses the Mill Creek is one of those places. The name Tide Mill is a misnomer as the mill received its power from the water of a nearby mill pond, a high tide actually shut the mill down as the water from the bay backed up the Mill Creek. The mill itself dated back to the beginning of the 1700's and, although grinding operations ceased around 1915, it survived for almost two hundred and forty years; only to be wiped off the face of the earth by the great hurricane of 1938.

The first recorded owner of the mill was John Tennant who purchased the property from an unknown previous proprietor soon after he arrived here from England at the beginning of the eighteenth century. It was he who built the still standing gristmill cottage (located diagonally across the street from the mill site) and perhaps the mill itself, although local tradition suggests that the mill may have predated Tennant's purchase. Tennant ran the mill for only a short while and it changed hands a few times until it was purchased by the Pierce family around the middle of the 1700's. It was the Pierce's who ground the grist corn of the Updike Family who were operating the great plantation centered around Smith's Blockhouse at Cocumscussoc. About a century later the mill was acquired by George Washington Tourgee; whose ancestry could be traced back to the failed Huguenot settlement at nearby Frenchtown, and after whom the mill came to be named. Tourgee ran the mill the same way it had been for the one hundred and fifty years prior to his purchase; two quarts were taken from each bushel ground as the miller's fee. Tourgee used a portion of his take to feed the livestock on his nearby small farm and sold the rest to the Morse Feed Store which operated in nearby Wickford. He also ran a mill powered wood shop in a lean-to shed attached to the mill building. Its water-powered lathe, saw, and sander were used to fashion many a table leg or replacement gunstock. Most of the corn ground by Tourgee, and later by his son George A. was ground coarse for

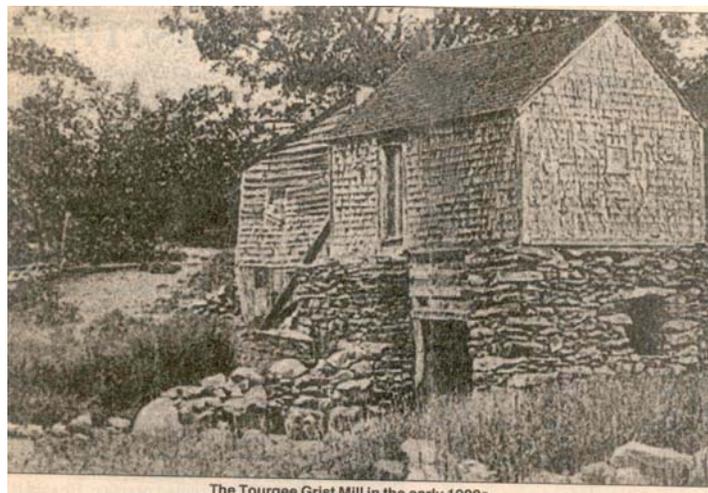


George A. Tourgee, the mill's last miller.

animal feed, only one out of ten bushels was ground into corn meal for family use. At its peak, the mill could process forty bushels of corn a day and averaged more than two thousand bushels in a year. Prior to 1863, this output was obtained by using a mill wheel constructed of a series of large buckets arranged around its frame, after 1863 a more traditional mill wheel similar to the one at Gilbert Stuart's Birthplace was installed.

The milling business fell off rapidly around 1915, but it was at this time that the old mill began the second, and final, phase of its life; it became a tourist attraction. Drawn by the nostalgic love of all things ancient and made accessible to the population of all of Rhode Island by its proximity to a Seaview Trolley Station, the mill became a bonafide tourist destination as early as 1911. Thanks to this popularity we now have the many postcards of the mill which circulate today. The mill was still a popular tourist destination in the late 1930s when old friend (to regular readers of this column, anyway) Henry Ford offered the then owner William Anthony, a well-to-do Providence coal dealer, \$1000.00 for the mill and its machinery. He intended to disassemble it and move it to his reproduction Colonial Village near Dearborn Michigan. One thousand dollars was a lot of money in the 1930's, but Anthony turned him down. Sadly, it wasn't long after that that the great hurricane of 1938 disassembled the mill and moved it to parts unknown, leaving North Kingstown with only a pile of foundation stones and a few picture postcards to remember it by.

As a final stroke against the mill's memory the Navy, who by the 1940's had purchased the mill property as a part of the Quonset Point buildup, used the mill pond as a training area for the newly formed Seabee's, their lesson was to learn how to rapidly fill a pond and make it stable enough to build an airstrip on. So, the mill too, sacrificed much for the war effort in Europe and Asia. The site of the mill pond is occupied by the ASQAH housing project. But the mill, run by the Pierce family and the father/son team of George W. and George A. Tourgee live on in our memories and on the many postcards found in antique shops all across Southern New England.



The Tourgee Grist Mill in the early 1900s.

## **The Judge John Allen House North Kingstown's Most Endangered Historic Site**

One of the wonderful things about being a history lover like myself and living in North Kingstown, is that one can go to bed each night secure in the knowledge that the vast majority of the remaining historically significant sites and structures are safely in the hands of people who truly care about them. One notable exception to this comforting rule of thumb is the home of Judge John Allen, the patriarch of the branch of this notable family for whom Allen's Harbor is named. It is not that the home is in the hands of an uncaring entity; the problem is that it is, for all intents and purposes, in no one's hands - like so much of Quonset Pt./ Davisville it resides in limbo; in a purgatory between the U.S. Government and the party to whom it will eventually belong.

First, a little background information on the site itself. The land the Allen House rests upon has been inhabited, literally, for thousands of years. The feature on the cove now known as Allen's Rock has played a part in the lives of the local Native Americans for centuries. Its prominent position on the bay and the view its location affords guaranteed its importance to the Narragansetts. The sheltered harbor was as important then as it is now. The white man entered the picture in the year 1671, in the form of Robert Westcott and his family, who had left neighboring Massachusetts, like so many others, for the many freedoms that Roger William's recently settled colony afforded. Sadly, Westcott's decision cost him his life, as he was killed in the aftermath of The King Philip's War less than a decade later. After the hostilities ceased the remaining Westcotts returned undeterred and continued to farm the land for decades to come, until they sold it, in 1769, to John and Mary (Gould) Allen.

The Allen family lived and prospered here for nearly a decade until the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. John was a stone mason by trade, and a successful one at that, his sturdy ships plied the waters of Narragansett Bay carrying building stone back and forth between the settlements on the east bay and his own secure harbor. John Allen was also a patriot who was zealously involved in the cause of the fledgling nation, his

ships also carried supplies to the American Troops stationed in Tiverton. Unfortunately for him, his family, like so many others, was torn asunder by the times. There were as many Allens who supported the English Crown as were on the side of the colonies. The most ardent of them all was John's cousin - Mansfield Allen. Mansfield knew there was money to be made hauling supplies and confiscated livestock for the British in Newport. He approached his cousin about using his ships for this purpose but John would have none of it. Words flew and Mansfield left vowing revenge. He held true to his vow, and returned on the night of June 9th, 1779 with a detachment of British soldiers. It was 4:00 AM when the Redcoats dragged the Allen family out of their beds with nothing but the clothes on their back. Before Mary knew it her husband was in chains being hauled away to a prison in Newport and the home they purchased from the Westcotts was in flames with all their worldly goods inside. The Kentish Guard arrived from East Greenwich to drive the British off before they could steal all of the Allen's livestock and foodstuffs, but it was too late to rescue John, he was already aboard a British man-of-war on his way to their stronghold in Newport.

John Allen remained incarcerated across the bay for four long months. Mary led her five children through the woods and fields to her husband's uncle's home, Christopher Allen of Quidnessett. There she stayed until his release. The Allen's did not return to their land until 1800. At that time John built the house which stands there today, a magnificent Federal style farmhouse. Sadly, John's wife, Mary, never saw the new home; she died in 1784 and John moved into the home with his second bride Martha. Understandably, John remained bitter about the incident with his cousin, who had vanished after the British defeat. When asked about it later in his life he responded "If I could catch him in North Kingstown I would shoot him as quick as I would a blacksnake."

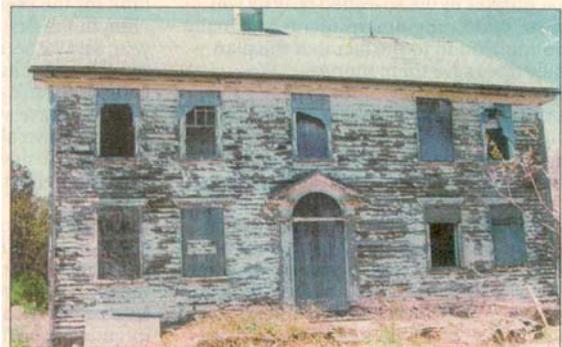
After the war, John held many positions of trust in the town. He was a state representative and senator and eventually a Justice of the State Supreme Court. He died on July 14, 1813 after being gored by a rampaging bull. After his death, John's son and his family lived on the land until about 1830. The farm then passed into the hands of the Madison family who in turn sold it to J.E. White in 1909. The White's owned the land until the time when it was taken by the government for the establishment of a military base.

For the next forty or so years the Allen House was the home of the family of the commanding officer of CBC Davisville. This phase of the old house's life ended in the early 1970's when the family of Commander Lucas locked the doors of this fine building for the last time. The house has remained empty and fallow for more than twenty five years. It sits there hidden and undisturbed, like a time capsule imbued with the secrets of eons of history. The house is largely the same as it was in John Allen's time, it sports a large central cooking fireplace with an attached beehive oven. In the basement, built into the foundation of the large fireplace is a secure hiding place installed by an understandably cautious John Allen which has been rumored to have been a stop on the famed "Underground Railway" which spirited runaway slaves to freedom. The original house was augmented by the attachment of a former schoolhouse as a kitchen ell in the latter part of the nineteenth century. All in all, it is a startlingly well-preserved example of an eighteenth century farmhouse. But it is now truly, at an important crossroad in its life. Without immediate action and attention its deterioration will become too severe and it will taste the bulldozer's blade. With this in mind, I implore all of you loyal readers; if you care even a whit about the history of this fair town you'll pick up your phones and call the town council members and your state senators and representatives and tell them to stand up for old Judge John Allen, a man who put it all on the line for his principles.

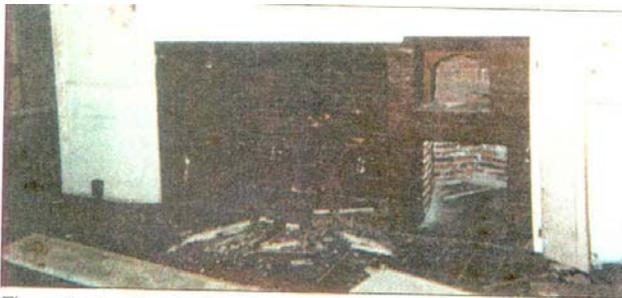


COURTESY: DAN URISH

The John Allen house in its glory in August, 1969.



The John Allen home as it stands today. The above view is the front of the home as it appeared in Colonial times, the view below is the front of the home as it appeared during its use by the Navy.



The main fireplace in the John Allen House.



## The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

### The Rose Cottage Tea Room

Tucked way down in the southeast corner of our fair town, literally a stone's throw away from its border with neighboring South Kingstown, sits a small picturesque, but empty, farmhouse known as the Rose Cottage. Yes, it sits empty now, but for more than 130 years it was the centerpiece of a vibrant and successful farm, and like so many other buildings, which we in the twenty-first century whiz by during our hectic day, it has a story to tell us; there's a lesson to be learned if only we take the time to search it out. You see, the Rose Cottage, located as it is on the busy thoroughfare now known as Tower Hill Road, played a part in helping a family survive one of our country's most trying times, the Great Depression.

The farmhouse itself, was constructed shortly after another of our nation's most difficult eras, the Civil War. The approximately 80 acre farm was carved out of a larger farm somewhere around 1865 and the house was built sometime shortly after that by members of the Barber family. Life on the farm was apparently unremarkable as little about it is mentioned in the historic record other than its chain of ownership, which includes the Barbers, as well as members of the Cuff, Northup, and Rose families. It is from the family of George Rose, who owned the farm from around the turn of the century until March of 1931 that the farmhouse received its name, the Rose Cottage.

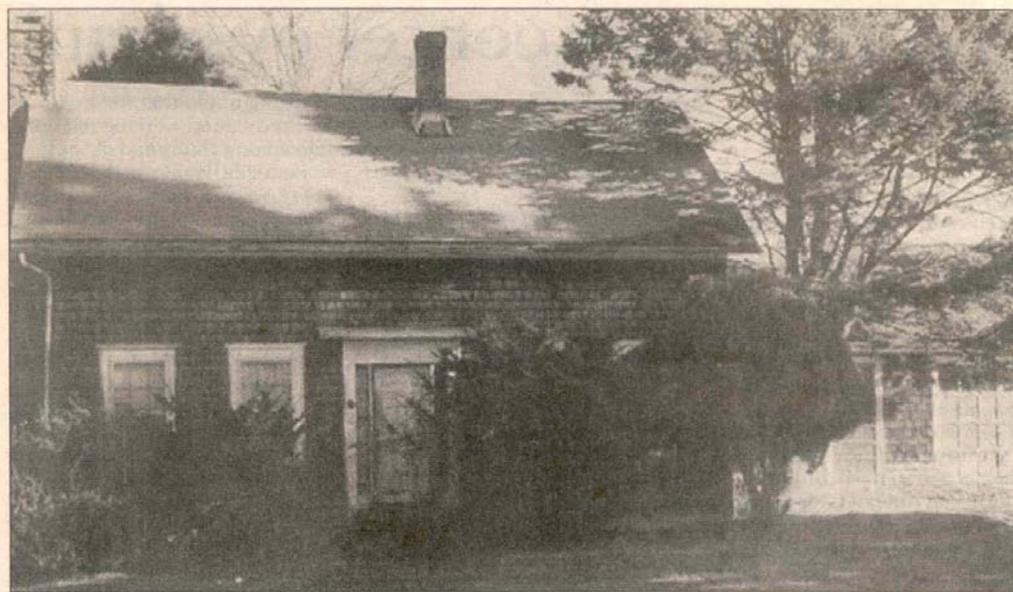
In March of 1931, the Rose farm was purchased by the Rollins family. The Rollins came from Providence and were apparently a tight knit extended family. The matriarch of the clan was Elsie Rollins, and Elsie had come up with a plan to help her family make it through the hard times that the Rollins, and the nation, were experiencing at the time. She purchased the farm and had her eldest son Russell run it; nothing unusual about that part of her plan, the interesting part of Elsie's game plan was that she and her older sister, a locally renowned baker complete with a cache of secret family recipes, would take over the first floor of the farm each summer and run a tea room out

of it. Tea rooms were the 1920s' & 30's equivalent of the present-day coffee boutiques; nothing at that time was more fashionable than to go to a tea room and sip tea and eat delicate and scrumptious baked goods. Numerous tea rooms dotted the countryside here in southern Rhode Island and elsewhere during that time frame. I'm sure Elsie figured it was a good bet that the wealthy folk (contrary to popular opinion, not everyone was destitute during the depression.) who travelled Tower Hill Road between the fairly affluent communities of Wickford and Narragansett, might like to stop for a while and enjoy some tea and pastry while sampling the bucolic and pastoral views afforded by son Russell's authentic New England farm. Whatever Elsie's logic was, it was a successful vision according to longtime Wickford resident Louise Gardiner, who, along with friend Sally Barolet, served as waitresses at the Rose Cottage Tea Room during the summer of 1935, while attending college. The house's main room was set up to sit about twenty patrons at a time and besides serving tea and pastries it was also the waitresses job to pick a bouquet of flowers for each table from the flower gardens which fronted the cottage.

It is not known to this columnist, how long the Rollins family ran the tea room out of Rose Cottage, all I can say for certain is that in April of 1946 the farm was purchased by the family which still owns it to this day, the family of Warren and Frances Pearce. The Pearce's weren't interested in the property because of its tea room pedigree, they were farmers and they ran it solely as a farm, just as Russell Rollins, as well as the Roses, Northups, and Barbers had before them. The farm is now in the hands of two of the daughters of Warren and Frances Pearce; their farming years are behind them and they now reside in Florida, hundreds of miles away from the Rose/Rollins/Pearce farm and its interesting legacy.

The farm property itself is now about to enter a new phase in its long and storied existence; and thankfully it is not *going* down the same path that the vast majority of southern RI family farms have, that is to say, it does not appear that the farm will become yet another housing subdivision. You see, the daughters of Warren and Frances Pearce come from a family of farmers; and like the farmers of old, the

farmers of Swamptown, Scrabbletown, Hammond Hill, and Slocum, they hold the land in a state of reverence. With that in mind, they are negotiating with the Narrow River Preservation Group to sell the land to them, so it may be preserved in its natural state. There is no greater legacy which they can leave, no greater tribute can be paid to their parents and all the farmers that worked the land before them. I salute the Pearce sisters and wish them luck in what they are undertaking. We all owe them a debt of gratitude.



The Rose Cottage is seen as it looks today, located on Tower Hill Road at the North Kingstown and South Kingstown border.



Seen here is the abandoned barn at the Rose/Rollins/Pearce farm.

## The View From Swamptown with G. Timothy Cranston

### The Glebe

One of the sad things about becoming intimate with the long and intriguing history of this area, is that you eventually come to the inevitable realization that so much that is irreplaceable has been unnecessarily lost over the passing years. In my never ending effort to organize all that I have learned I have developed the habit of making lists. Lists like "The 10 oldest structures in town" or "N.K.'s most endangered sites" are ones that you, the loyal reader, are already familiar with. Now, add to that, the list of "If only someone could have done something before it was too late". I guess you could say that one of the primary focuses of my work is to not allow an historic site to be added to this ignominious list during my watch. Last year we took a look at my number one entry on this list - "The Philips Castle", now let's take a gander at the second entry on this somber ledger - "The Glebe".

The word "Glebe" is an old English word which means "a house and its associated land set aside for the use of a Church" in other words - a rectory, and that is just what The Glebe" was, the first rectory for St. Paul's Anglican Church while it was located out on present-day Shermantown Road. The Glebe itself was located about a mile or so east of the church on what is now the N.Kingstown/S.Kingstown line near the west bank of the Narrow River. The Glebe was originally the farmhouse of John Gardiner and was thought to have been constructed in 1690. John Gardiner's sister, Hannah, was married to the rector of the Church, the Rev. James MacSparran. MacSparran, like many of the literate people of the time, was a devoted diarist, his daily record, of which the entries for the years 1743-45 and 1751 have survived, provide a rare glimpse into the day-to-day doings of the time. When John's father, the elder statesman of the extensive Gardiner clan, William died in 1732, John inherited and moved into the Gardiner "mansion" house on Boston Neck Road. This cleared the way for sister Hannah and her husband the good Dr. MacSparran (as he was known) to make the farm their home. Brother John was paid 207 pounds, 10 shillings for the 100 acre gentleman's farm. MacSparran, sent over to the colonies in 1721 by the "English Society for the

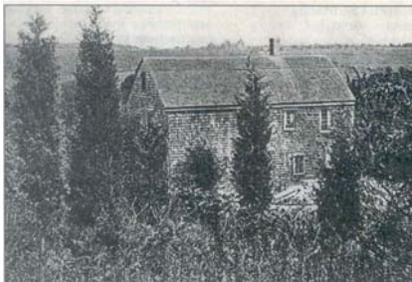
Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts", was, perhaps, the most educated man in all of the Narragansett County at the time. As such, he and his wife entertained anyone of substance who passed through the region. It was to the MacSparran household that Bishop Berkeley came on his unplanned visit to the colony. MacSparran, too, was behind the Bishop's unfulfilled plans to build a great school of learning on nearby Hammond Hill. Although his life was undoubtedly full with his preaching of the Gospel, administering the Sacraments, and tending to the sick (thus the Dr. designation) he also found time to, with the help of a few slaves and hired servants, run a self sufficient farm from which he was able to provide for his household. The MacSparran's lived out their lives at the Glebe, Hannah passing on first, followed by the good Doctor in 1757.

The Rev. Samuel Fayerweather and his family followed the MacSparran's in service to the Church and residency at the Glebe. Fayerweather lived there until his death in 1781. In an interesting side bar, Fayerweather freed the Glebes slaves and one of them took his former master's name and settled in nearby Little Rest (now known as Kingston) and became the scion of a family of blacksmiths who lived in the house now known as the Fayerweather Craft Guild. Rev. Fayerweather was followed, in succession, by the Rectors Smith, Gardiner, Warren, Pierce, Bowers, and Burge, all of whom, it is thought, resided at the Glebe. It was the Rev. Warren who was at the helm of the Church when it took its fabled trip to Wickford, but it was Lemuel Burge who decided to move the rectory from the Glebe into Wickford so to be closer to the new heart of his parish. No longer having any use for the property, the church elders decided, in 1842, to put the Glebe up for sale at auction, and 110 years after acquiring it, it was sold, in three pieces, to William Watson (who bought the house itself), Sylvester Gardiner, and John Sherman for \$1510 total. Over the course of the next few decades the farm changed hands a number of times, until in 1908 it was purchased by the family of Willard and Charlotte Kent. The Kent's were mindful of the farm's historic past and, after Mr. Kent's death in 1940, his widow, in an attempt to preserve the farm, conveyed it and one acre of land back to the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island at no cost. Sadly, this was long before anyone even thought of historic preservation and the diocese took no measures to save this noble structure, by the way, the oldest relic of the Anglican Church still

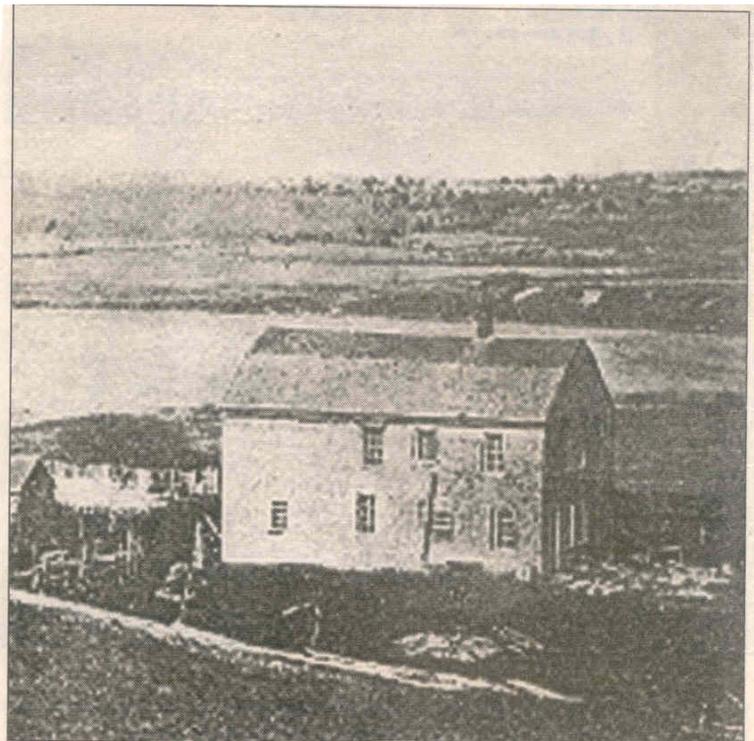
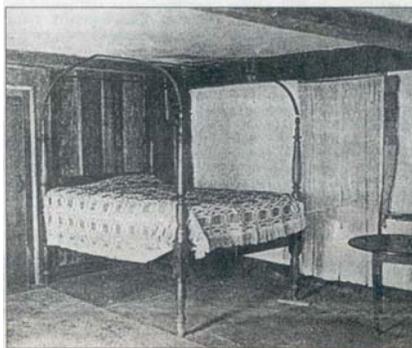
standing at the time, and it fell into such a state of decay that in 1957, it faced its sad fate and fell to the bulldozer's blade.

The Glebe now exists only in the few photographs which you see accompanying this article. If it had been saved, back in the 1940s when the opportunity arose, it would now be the oldest building in all of N.K., one of the oldest in all the state. Its loss, in 1957, is ironic to this columnist as it was bulldozed at nearly the same time I was born. Perhaps, its spirit is what drives me to try to preserve what remains of our fair town's history.

As always, if there is anyone out there with more information or photo documentation of this subject I would love to hear from you.



Above is a mid-20th century photo of The Glebe. At right is a detail of the building's wonderful main doorway. Below is a bed chamber in The Glebe.



The Glebe, which was the first rectory for St. Paul's Anglican Church when it was located out on present-day Shermantown Road, is seen here in an early photograph.

## The Ezekiel Gardner House

Welcome readers, to the new millenium! As is the case with most columnists, the new year has inspired me to share with you another one of those accursed lists. But being a swamp yankee I've decided to be different and present it to you after the holiday rather than before, unlike all the other writers who plunge lemming-like into the list-making abyss every December. I have found lists to be quite useful and have come to the conclusion that there are two basic types; one that is carved out of factual information and is concise and readily agreed upon by all who read it, and one that is based more on opinion and feelings, they are capricious and subject to change as the experience and opinions of the listmaker evolve. The list of the town's oldest structures, which I presented to you this past fall is an example of the former; it is based on dates and facts as we know them. This new list is an example of the latter, it is based solely on my opinion and it changes as circumstances change as I see them. The list is my five most endangered historic sites in our fair town. We have already explored site number one, the John Allen House, at length in a previous article. (Let me pause here and say that the publicity and concern generated by all of you is paying off in this case. The Allen House's caretakers, the Economic Development Council, have reaffirmed their commitment to appropriate stewardship of this priceless site and are now in the process of selecting an acceptable future for the house. More on this as it develops.) I am also pleased to say that number five on my list can now be safely removed, as "Old Yellow" now has new owners who appreciate its importance to the community. Congratulations and thanks to Robin Porter and his group of community heroes who made this possible. This brings us to number two on the "Endangered Sites List", The Ezekial Gardiner House, located in Shermantown in the southern part of town.

The Ezekial Gardiner house is actually named in honor of three generations of Ezekials that, at one time or another, lived in the house. The first and probable builder of the house, Ezekial Sr., was born in nearby Kingston in 1712. He built his gambrel-roofed

farmhouse in Shermantown somewhere around 1730. A few years after that, his third child Ezekial Jr. (also known as Judge Ezekial Gardiner) was born in 1738. The good judge farmed the land until the late 1700's, when he purchased the Rome Farm (of Rome Point fame) and left his son, Ezekiel III born in 1768, to work the land of their ancestral home. The Gardiners were primarily dairy farmers and ran an enormous operation for their time. One existent bill of sale from 1779 refers to a sale of 5,639 pounds of cheese to George Irish of Newport and guarantees its manufacture in the Gardiner dairy. Between the two farms, the Gardiners had hundreds of acres in either dairy cow service or cultivated for food or feed. Ezekial Jr. was a superior court assistant judge from 1790 to 1800 and both he and his father were upstanding and important men in the community.

The circa 1730 gambrel-roofed central-chimneyed farmhouse has been empty for some years. The weather, the vandals, and the professional "antique architectural detail thieves" have taken their toll. But even this trio of enemies has not been able to rob the home of its dignity and mystique.

Upon entering the Gardiner Homestead, one is struck by conflicting emotions. There is a great sense of sadness over what has happened to this remarkable home over the last few years, but the sadness is tempered by a feeling of awe that arises from the knowledge that this home has survived 270 years in, as the R.I. Historic Preservation Commission puts it, a relatively unchanged state.

It is a wonderful example of what an 18th century farmhouse was like. In a perfect world it would be restored and parked next to our 17th century farmhouse, Smith's Castle, for all to see and learn from. But it is not a perfect world and the Gardiner House is poised on the edge of a precipice.

The house is now standing in the way of progress. The land that the house sits upon is slated to become a part of the upscale neighborhood Quail Hollow and the developer feels that it is in the development's best interest if the old house goes and for some

inexplicable reason the town, during the approval process for this stage of the development, made no provisions to protect it. Don't get me wrong, he's not contemplating bulldozing it down; not yet anyway.

The Gardiner House has time, but, the clock is ticking and progress marches on no matter what the cost. The developer has already fielded requests from interested parties who wish to disassemble the house and move it out of town, but the right thing is to keep it where it belongs, in North Kingstown, although any alternative is preferable to the demolition of this venerable time capsule.

Although it is far from perfect, the house is basically structurally sound and can be restored, but the window of opportunity is quickly closing and time is short. So rise up all you Gardiners, Watsons, Congdons, and Tillinghasts; rise up all you who care about preserving and cherishing the past; rise up North Kingstown and tell your elected and appointed officials that you're not going to stand for it. We care about our past, don't destroy it or sell it to the highest bidder. As always, all interested parties can contact me in care of the paper.



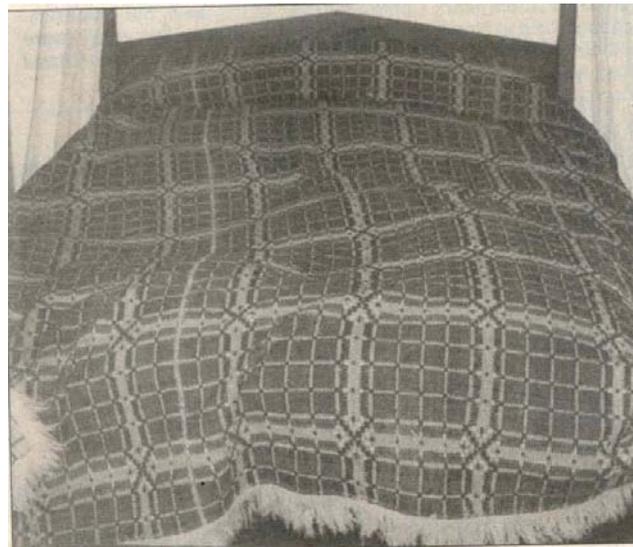
Photo courtesy of the [North East Independent](#)

## The View From Swamptown with G. Timothy Cranston

### Weaver Billy Rose

Sometime in the last quarter of the 19th century Mr. and Mrs. Teddy Roosevelt and their Saunderstown friends, the Wisters and the LaFarges, took a leisurely ride down the country lanes between the Saunderstown seashore and the deep woods of Shermantown to visit the famous local weaver Quaker Billy Rose. This particular branch of the Rose family was renowned for their weaving ability and William was the best of them. The Roosevelt's were so impressed by his talents and the complex designs of his bed coverlets that they immediately purchased one. This was, undoubtedly, his most famous sale, but it was far from his only one. Examples of his work can be found at, among other places; the Smithsonian and, locally, Smith's Castle.

William Rose died on November 8, 1913 and is buried in a family plot near the intersection of Slocum and Shermantown Roads. As is the tradition with many Quakers, there are no headstones to mark the graves of the Weaver and his sisters. Even more unconventionally, William Rose's final request was that he not be buried below ground. His grave site, therefore, consists of a three to four foot high stone wall built in a 30 X 20 rectangle, within which Weaver Rose was laid. The enclosed area was filled with sand leaving Quaker Billy slumbering in his final repose at ground level.



Smith's Castle's Weaver Rose bed coverlet.

## The "Who", "What", and "Where" for February

This week's column is the latest installment of the "Who", "What", and "Where" of local history, a collection of interesting facts which are too small to warrant a full write up. Today we will touch on the life of a real live war hero memorialized by a location in Quonset/Davisville, take a look at one of Swamptown's first businesses, and pay a visit to a forgotten landmark of long ago.

Our "Who" for this month is "Dixie" Keifer, the man for whom the Keifer Park section of Quonset/Davisville Industrial Park is named. Keifer, an Annapolis graduate, was the commanding officer of the aircraft carrier "Ticonderoga". The Ticonderoga, and Keifer, saw plenty of action in the Pacific during WWII. As a matter of fact, during one engagement the ship took a direct hit from one of Japan's most potent weapons, the Kamikaze



COURTESY: THE SEAN PAUL MULLIGAN COLLECTION  
Keifer announces the surrender of Japan over the Quonset Naval public address system on Aug. 14, 1945. He is still wearing a cast injuries suffered in a kamikaze attack on his former command, the Ticonderoga.

plane; these planes, piloted by young men who were martyrs the very moment they donned the traditional white silk scarf which signified the finality of their mission, were not even equipped to land on a traditional landing field, they were nothing more than a manned guided missile. When Keifer's command was hit, he was one of the casualties; he suffered in excess of one hundred shrapnel wounds and a broken arm. After a short convalescence, Keifer assumed command of Quonset Point Naval Air Station, where he remained through the end of the war. The accompanying photo shows him, still suffering from the effects of that Kamikaze attack, announcing the surrender of the Japanese war machine. In one of life's most bitter ironies, Keifer, a man who had stood up to everything the enemy could throw at him and survived, died in a small plane crash on November 10, 1945, returning from that year's Army-Navy football game. His life was forever remembered from then on when the Navy renamed a portion of the air base in his honor.

Our "What" for this month is probably Swamptown's first non-agricultural business, the Star Laundry, located on what is now known as Hatchery Road. The business, which dates back to before the turn of the century, was, like the mills in nearby Lafayette, Hamilton, and Belleville, located on the bank of the Shewatuck/Annaquatucket River system. It was there for the same obvious reason that the mills were, the need for a plentiful water supply.

The Star Laundry itself survived well into the middle of the 1900s, and the building still exists, in a somewhat altered form, as a private home, directly across from the new Hatchery Road extension, right on the bank of the Shewatuck just as it always was.

Our "Where" for February is a local landmark which has all but disappeared from the lexicon of local place names here in our fair town. But from a time beginning in the early 1800s and lasting through the first half of the twentieth century, just about every resident of Lafayette worth his salt could tell you where the "Vale of Pero" was located. Pero, a man who left only a faint mark on the permanent record of this world, was thought to be one of the region's first freed black men. The story goes that he was formerly the slave of the family of the author of the book "Old Wickford, the Venice of America". Having been freed by Mrs. Griswold's father he settled on a less than desirable piece of land along the Ten Rod Road. The swampy little valley or "vale" that this stableman's shack was located in has forever been known as the "Vale of Pero" and can now be found (in a much altered form) between the East Lafayette schoolhouse and what was until recently the Pickled Penguin antique shop. Griswold described Pero, who was thought to have died in the first half of the 1800's, as "short, square, grizzly-haired, and thoroughly African in appearance." This columnist would be very grateful if anyone out there could shed some more light on this intriguing character and his life.



COURTESY: DORIS M  
The Star Laundry is seen in the  
1900s.

## The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

Today's column is our monthly installment of the "who", "what", and "where" of local history. This time it comes in the form of a murder mystery, a missed opportunity, and a building with a forgotten past.

### WHO

#### A Murder Mystery - The Eldred Holloway Story

Eldred Holloway was born on May 9, 1803 to William and Mary Holloway of Wickford. The Holloways were a seafaring family and a successful one at that. Captain William Holloway had his grand "Quality Hill" home (The name of the area we know as West Main St. at the time) built right around the time of Eldred's birth. Across the street was the shipyard where, in 1816, the Captain's famous 30-



Holloway's grand "Quality Hill" home.

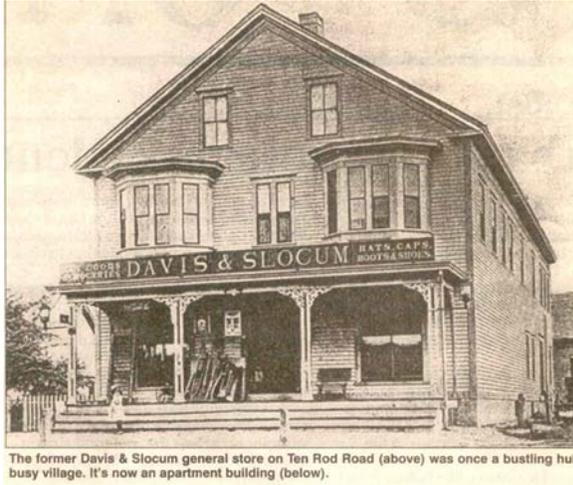
ton packet sloop the "Resolution" was constructed. The "Resolution" ran between Wickford and Newport for fifty-five years with Captain Holloway at the helm for much of that time.

The Providence-registered brigantine "Crawford" set sail from its home port on April 3, 1827 bound for Havana, Cuba; on board was Eldred Holloway. When the ship returned to Providence on July the seventh, amongst its cargo was his body.

Little is known about the details of Eldred's demise other than what is etched on his gravestone in Elmgrove Cemetery - Fell a victim to the assassin on board the Brigantine "Crawford" near the island of Cuba June 1, 1827. If there is anyone out there with any information about the Holloway family please drop me a line at the paper.

## WHAT

Our "what" this week concerns a very unassuming apartment building on Ten Rod Road. As you can see by the postcard photo this building was once Lafayette's general store and post office. Although it doesn't look like much now, it was once the hub of a busy little village.



The former Davis & Slocum general store on Ten Rod Road (above) was once a bustling hub busy village. It's now an apartment building (below).



## WHERE

### **A Missed Opportunity - The University of North Kingstown?**

Around 1730 the renowned Anglican theologian from Ireland, Dean (later Bishop) George Berkeley arrived in Newport to attempt to raise additional funds for a college he was authorized to found in Bermuda. He was so taken with Rhode Island that he stayed here for several years hobnobbing with local religious and intellectual leaders like Rev. Dr. MacSparran and Colonel Daniel Updike of St. Paul's Anglican Church in Kingstowne. With the aforementioned gentlemen as guides Berkeley toured the area and decided to abandon his plan for a Bermuda college and instead build one here. He chose the area known as Hammond Hill (at the intersection of the present day Gilbert Stuart and Tower Hill Roads). Unfortunately for Berkeley (and North Kingstown) his detractors and enemies in Parliament used his vacillation over a site for his college to get his charter and funding rescinded. So, but for a disagreement in the House of Lords, North Kingstown almost had its own version of Harvard or Yale.