

G. Timothy Cranston 's

The View From Swamptown

Volumes I and II

April 1999 to March 2001

The View From Swamptown Local Folks, Schools, Etc.

Library Note

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The Nazi's Come To Saunderstown and Jamestown

By March of 1944, nearly 370,000 German prisoners of war were interned in 378 P.O.W. camps across the United States. It is a little known fact that the group of a little more than 1,000 who were imprisoned at the three P.O.W. camps here in Rhode Island, two in Jamestown and one at Fort Kearney located on the shore of sleepy little Saunderstown, had an enormous impact on the war effort as it was winding down.

Fort Kearney, plus her sister installations on either side of Jamestown, Forts Getty and Wetherill, were ideal locations for internment camps at that time; as it was obvious that the German's ability to strike at the east coast of the U.S. by early 1944 was negligible. These three, along with many other harbor defense posts, were rapidly being disbanded and their personnel reassigned to other theatres of operation where they could make more of a contribution to the war effort. It was these facts which allowed the newly created "Special Projects Division" of the POW branch of the Provost Marshall General's Office to quickly occupy the three nearly empty Coast Artillery installations. Read between the lines of the phrase "Special Projects Division" and you get "clandestine" or "secret" and that was exactly what was going on at Forts Kearney, Getty, and Wetherill in 1944-5; secret stuff.

In Jamestown, the "special projects" people were training hand-selected, highly educated, Anti-Nazi leaning Germans to aid the Allies in the inevitable occupation of Germany. At Fort Wetherill a prescreened group of officers and enlisted men from the elite Afrika Korps of Field Marshall Rommell were trained as special aides and translators for the many military government and police officials who would eventually run the day-to-day operations of post-war Germany. At Fort Getty an equally elite and handpicked group of Germans was being trained to hold the many administrative and civil service positions that would be required in war ravaged Germany after the eventual surrender of the Nazi's. All of these literally hundreds

of men were also schooled in the principles of American style democracy and government. The two installations were collectively known by the "special projects" people as the "Barbed Wire College".

Across the bay in Saunderstown was the operation at Fort Kearney; it too, had a clever knickname, it was known, in Army circles, as "The Factory". The Factory's main product was propaganda. I know, when you think of that word, it's the "bad guys" who immediately come to mind . But believe me, the Allies had their hand in this common weapon of war as well. Fort Kearney was the home of a newspaper known as "Der Ruf" (The Call), a biweekly newspaper written by eighty-five specially selected POW's for distribution in all 378 P.O.W. camps across the United States. At its peak, "Der Ruf" had a circulation of over 75,000 copies. Every article in the paper was written in a fashion to aid in the "re-education" of the POW population. In addition to writing the paper the prisoners at Fort Kearney translated into English approximately eighty underground POW camp newsletters; allowing the "special project" folks to be able to keep their finger on the pulse of the German POW population. Even after the end of the war, when many of their countrymen had been repatriated to German soil, the staff of "Der Ruf" continued to publish their paper. The last issue was printed on April 1, 1946, and when the editorial staff of "Der Ruf" put their paper "to bed" they also closed a chapter in the amazing history of quaint little Saunderstown.



The final issue of "Der Ruf."

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

The Saunderstown Writers' Colony

I am sure that when you think of "writer's colonies" it is not Saunderstown, RI that first comes to mind. But, the truth of the matter is that in the time period of the late 1800's to the middle 1900's it was just that.

Saunderstown was first settled sometime around 1680 by the Willett family of New York. The first owner of the area was Thomas Willett, the first mayor of New York in 1664. His son, Captain Andrew Willet was the region's first resident from 1680 to his death in 1712. The land then fell into the Carpenter family's hands, by inheritance, in 1776. Until the late 1800's the area was known as Willettsville. The name change to Saunderstown was done to honor the Saunders family, a famous family of shipwrights and marine entrepreneurs who ran the Saunders shipyard.

The seeds of Saunderstown's literary reputation were planted in 1875, when Benoni Lockwood, a Providence trader and merchant forsook the busy social life of Narragansett and decided to summer in this quiet seaside village. His daughter was Francis W. Wharton, a well-known writer of her time, who along with her coal-magnate husband Henry Wharton of Philadelphia, summered down the street from her father on Waterway. A frequent guest of the Whartons was their famous cousin, Edith Wharton author of "The Age of Innocence" among other things. Across the street from the Whartons lived Owen Wister the author of America's first and one of its most famous western novels, "The Virginian." One of Owen's best friends was none other than Teddy Roosevelt who visited occasionally. Wister's biography of his friend was written largely in Saunderstown. President Roosevelt was also a frequent guest of the LaFarge family who, at the time, lived just down the street from the

Whartons and Wisters. The Lafarges, Christopher and Oliver, grandsons of Benoni Lockwood, were famous novelists and poets of their time. The Pulitzer Prize winning Oliver is also considered America's foremost American Indian ethnologist. Although the LaFarges eventually moved to a magnificent estate on Tower Hill Road and the Wisters relocated to an equally wonderful home on the Boston Neck Road, they still called Saunderstown home.



PHOTOS: LISIDA GRANSTON

The Wharton house (above) was occupied by writer Francis W. Wharton and her husband, Henry, cousin of the more famous Edith Wharton. Francis' father, Benoni Lockwood, a Providence trader and merchant, forsook the busy social life of Narragansett and decided to summer in this Saunderstown house (below).



The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

The Lucy Reynolds Sampler

This story started out as a mystery, a challenging piece of detective work which I decided to undertake. It ended up as a revealing glimpse into the life of a fairly typical woman born in the early 1800's. Lucy, initially, was an enigma, another faceless name amongst hundreds of thousands of people who faced the challenges of life in early Rhode Island. She ended up like an old friend; she revealed to me the trials and tribulations of her life through the clues she left behind. Lucy is unusual in that, not only did she leave in her wake a paper trail buried in the dusty ledgers of archives and town halls across the state, she also left a tangible legacy in the form of the crowning achievement of her typically short childhood, a sampler. This brings us, in a roundabout way, to the start of this bit of sleuthing - the sampler; for Lucy Wall Reynolds' sampler, sewed in its meticulous detail when she was but eleven years old, hangs, all but unnoticed, on the wall in our own Smith's Castle. How it got there is a mystery in itself, hopefully there is someone out there who can shed some light on the "provenance" of this remarkable piece of folk art; but Lucy herself can now be brought out of the shadows and be remembered as the remarkable woman she must have been.

Lucy Wall Reynolds was born to Thomas and Elizabeth (Howland) Reynolds in 1816. The Reynolds family lived in East Greenwich, somewhere near the North Kingstown border. The East Greenwich Reynolds into which she was born were a fairly affluent family of builders and Lucy's early years were probably good ones. She more than likely received some sort of education, although it was surely the abbreviated type deemed appropriate for a woman at that time. Both Lucy's mother and father came from families which had already had a long history in Rhode Island. The particular branches of these two families had their start in the new world during the middle of the 1600's. Little evidence remains of her early years, as a matter of fact, only the sampler itself lends

testimony to that time; but what a testimony it is. The intricate piece shows Lucy to have been a serious student in the study of the "womanly" skills which were taught to young ladies at that time. There has been some suggestion that Lucy made the sampler while attending "The Wickford Young Ladies School", but I was unable to positively confirm that intriguing possibility. All we know is what Lucy, thankfully, told us in her creation, that it was done in 1827.

She next shows up in the records as being married to Albert Clark Gardiner of North Kingstown. The details of their marriage are unusual in that Albert is ten years younger than Lucy. From this we can surmise that she was somewhere around thirty years old when she accepted Albert's proposal of marriage. This is an advanced age for a first marriage back in the first half of the 1800's. It is quite possible that her mother died young and Lucy was left to assist her father in raising her siblings. There is also an unconfirmed possibility that this was Albert's second marriage. Although, he was the younger of the two, this is still quite possible as many husbands lost their wives to the rigors of childbirth in that day and age.

Lucy's union with Albert brought them two children. The first was a son whom they named John Albert; they later had a daughter which they named Sarah Adeline. Albert was a machinist by trade, he worked in the burgeoning fabric industry which flourished in North Kingstown at the time. He eventually left the mills of North Kingstown for a, presumably, better opportunity at a mill in Providence. Real estate records show that he was successful enough to purchase his own home at 31 Wilson Street in the city, no small accomplishment for that time frame.

I'm sure by then, although their life was probably a hard one, Lucy felt she was doing pretty good for herself; a happy family and a home to call her own. But fate, as it often does, dealt Lucy a bad turn and, on April 18, 1874, Albert succumbed to a tuberculosis-like condition brought on by nearly thirty years of

breathing in cotton and wool dust at the mills which had sustained his family and brought him his modicum of success; he was 48 at the time. Fifty-seven year old Lucy sold her Providence home and eventually moved back to North Kingstown. Lucy fades into the background in the permanent record during this part of her life. She most certainly lived with a relative, most probably one of her children, and I'm sure she spent her days helping out with grandchildren and day-to-day housekeeping responsibilities. She outlived her young husband by some twenty-one years; she succumbed to heart failure brought on by a long bout with uterine cancer on April 4, 1895; she was nearly eighty years old at the time. Lucy's will was recorded and probated in North Kingstown. She evidently had very little, as her will only states that her personal effects should be divided equally between her two children. John, her eldest, was listed as the executor of her will. The one thing that we can be sure of, is among those meager possessions was an almost seventy year old sampler which, I'm sure, John and Sarah cherished above all else. The road which led that little swatch of history to the wall of Smith's Castle some 100 years later is a mystery which I intend to continue to pursue.

So, the next time you're in the Castle (and if you haven't been there yet, shame on you.) stop and examine Lucy's handiwork and think of her and her life. In doing so, you bring her back to life, her and all the other hardworking women who helped shape their world and, in turn, our future.



The Lucy Reynolds sampler, sewn in 1827, now hangs in Smith's Castle in North Kingstown.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

The Great Swamp Fight and the Grave of the Forty Men

Back in the northeast corner of the Smith's Castle property lies the mass grave of forty men who died as a result, directly or indirectly, of the Great Swamp Fight of December 19, 1675. This grave stands as a silent sentinel testifying to one of the darkest hours of colonial history; for the Great Swamp Fight's impressive moniker is a misnomer; it should rightly be called the Great Swamp Massacre.

The Narragansett Indians and the settlers of the Rhode Island colony were unwilling participants in King Philip's War. The war was actually between the Wampanoag Indians headed by their Sachem, Philip, and the colonies of Massachusetts and Connecticut. The colony of Rhode Island, known even then for its religious freedom and tolerance, as well as the fairly peaceful relationship it had with the Narragansetts, was viewed with suspicion by the leaders of Massachusetts and Connecticut, and not invited to join this colonial union of war. The Narragansetts were drawn into the fray because of their refusal to turn over the women and children of the Wampanoags to the English, who they were sheltering while the warriors fought with the colonists. Canonchet, the Narragansett Sachem's response to this request was said to have been "Not a Wampanoag nor the paring of a Wampanoag's nail shall be delivered to the English." The English of Connecticut and Massachusetts, therefore, considered the Wampanoags and the Narragansetts as one enemy, to be exterminated.

So, in the early part of December 1675, the Colonial troops began to gather at Smith's Blockhouse. There were eight companies from Massachusetts and five from Connecticut, totaling more than 1000 men, all under the command of Governor Winslow of Connecticut, who was made a General for the campaign. Captain Benjamin Church, a career military man, accompanied General Winslow as his advisor. On the morning of December 19th, a Sunday, the troops set out on the fifteen mile march to the Narragansett stronghold deep in the tangles of the Great Swamp. There was more than

two feet of snow on the ground and the march was grueling at best and some of the men complained of frostbite. The Narragansett's encampment was on a few acres of dry ground encircled by swamp. On this island were gathered about 3500 Indians, the old men, women, and children of the tribe as well as the women and children of the Wampanoag. They were protected by a small contingent of Narragansett warriors. The stronghold consisted of a natural ring of large trees with the spaces between filled with wooden logs driven into the ground. The only way to enter this fortress was across a large log which lay across the water. The Indians knew of the force's arrival and were prepared to defend this "bridge" into their sanctuary. They knew what they were doing, and after the first volley of arrows half of the captains which commanded each company were dead. During the three hours of confusion which ensued, more than two hundred colonists were killed or wounded and more than one thousand Narragansetts and Wampanoags lay dead. Countless others died hiding out in the swamps over the next few nights. After the killing was done, the colonists, much to the chagrin and against the orders of Captain Church, began to torch every wigwam and structure in sight. Church, the experienced soldier, knew that the frigid cold of night was approaching and the food and shelter the wigwams afforded would save many lives. Without shelter, the only option open to the victorious English was to gather up their dead and wounded and begin the fifteen mile march back to the Blockhouse. Twenty-two wounded men, who might have lived if they could have availed themselves of the shelter provided by the now destroyed wigwams, died on route back to Smith's Castle. The survivors staggered back to Cocumscussoc at 2:00AM on December 20. The forty bodies which they had brought back with them were buried in the mass grave over the course of the next few days.

The names of the forty men will never fully be known, as their identities were never officially recorded. Only two things are certain, the bodies of all the dead Captains are probably there, as they *were* all men of stature in their respective communities, and none of the men were Rhode Islanders as these religious heretics were considered too friendly with the Narragansetts to be trusted.

Down in the Great Swamp is another monument which stands, symbolically, hand in hand with the forty men stone. It memorializes the event and remembers the brave warriors who died, as well as the women and children who fell in the blood-stained snow hearing as their last sound the cries of the old ones as they burned in the wigwams. All this so the colonists of Connecticut and Massachusetts could “Restore the peace which, through the blessing of God, we have so long enjoyed”.



TOP PHOTO: DAVID GOLDMAN

Above, the memorial to 40 men still stands at Smith's Castle. Below, an artist's depiction of the Great Swamp Fight.



Top photo provided by the [North East Independent](#)

North Kingstown's One-Room Schoolhouses

This week's column ought to interest all of our local students and teachers as the school year winds down to its inevitable close. Formal education as we know it, began in North Kingstown at the Washington Academy in 1802 at the site of the present day Wickford Elementary. Shortly after that, in 1806 the first of the town's one-room schoolhouses was built in Quidnesset. It was followed by a school in Davisville in 1810. In 1828 Rhode Island initiated partial state funding of public education. In response to this North Kingstown, in that same year, created its first school committee and divided the town into school districts. These numerous districts remained in place until 1901 when a consolidated district system was implemented which, by and large, mirrors that which exists today. It is during this time frame, from 1828 to 1901, that one-room schoolhouses reigned supreme and that all the schools pictured in this article were in use.

This schoolhouse, on North Quidnessett Rd. built in the middle 1800's, sits on the



The schoolhouse on North Quidnessett Road.

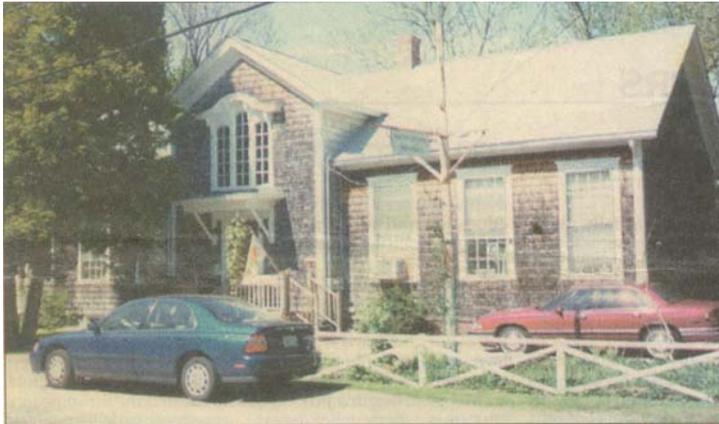
site of the town's first one-room school. The window on the front was once a door, as this school had separate entrances for boys and girls. It is now a private home.



The Belleville district schoolhouse on Oak Hill Road.

The Belleville district schoolhouse, on Oak Hill Rd., was built around 1840 and later served as an office for the Belleville Mill complex. It is now a private home.

The teachers and students of Hamilton Elementary will be interested in this, the



The Hamilton district school now serves as a pediatrician's office on Weaver Road.

Hamilton district school built in 1860. It now serves, appropriately enough, as a pediatrician's office on Weaver Rd. almost directly across from the school that eventually replaced it.

All the folks at Davisville Elementary are certainly aware of their predecessor - The



The Little Red Schoolhouse on School Street.

Little Red Schoolhouse on School St. Portions of the building date to the time of the Civil War and it is now used as a community and recreation center.



The Allenton district schoolhouse, now occupied by the Montessori School, is on Tower Hill Road.

The Allenton district schoolhouse, built in 1884, is now occupied by the Montessori School. It is on Tower Hill Road.

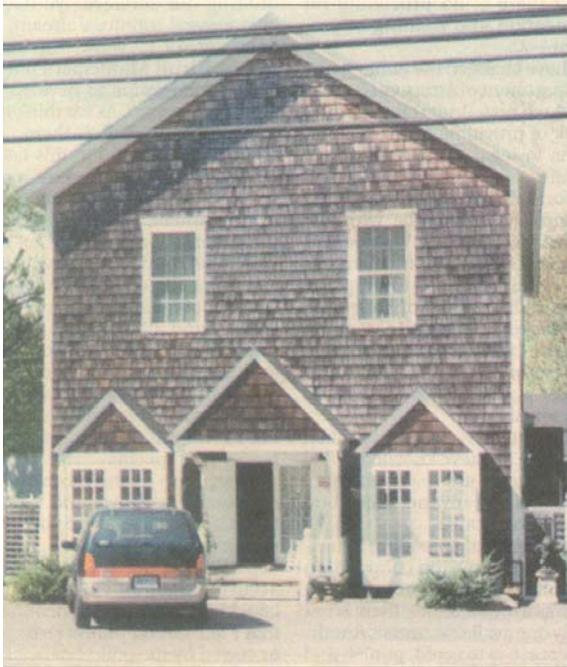
The East Lafayette district schoolhouse, built in 1891, is now a business incubator



The East Lafayette district schoolhouse.

located on Ten Rod Road. The school originally stood near the tracks between Warburton and Dillon Streets. It was moved and enlarged in 1911 to fit into the consolidated school district system which had been implemented.

The District #9 (Swamptown/Lafayette) schoolhouse was built in 1866 as a one



The District No. 9 (Swamptown/Lafayette) schoolhouse.

story building across the street from where it is presently located. In 1882, in response to an increase in enrollment, the building was jacked up and a new first floor was built underneath. In 1901, as a result of district consolidation the students of this school were moved to East Lafayette. The building was then purchased by Andrew Hazard, moved across the street, and operated successfully as a movie theatre and dance hall. It is now an antique store at its home on Ten Rod Road.

The Lost Schools

Last year, we took a look at the schoolhouses which still survive from the days of the district school system; a system which was in place here, as well as all over the country, from the middle 1800s until the first part of the twentieth century. By the 1840s the town of North Kingstown was divided up into sixteen districts which loosely adhered to the areas of influence of the many mill villages and farming hamlets which were scattered across the town at that time. When we last delved into this subject we took a look at the schoolhouses that still survived (although largely with different uses) in District 1 - Quidnessett, District 5 - Belleville, District 9 - Lafayette, District 11 – Davisville, District 14 - Allenton, District 15 - Slocum, and District 16 - Hamilton. We have also taken a close look at the District schoolhouse which is still in use within the school system; that being the Wickford Grammar School, which was leased from the defunct Washington Academy by Districts 3 and 4 - Wickford and West Wickford to be used as their schoolhouse. This week we will dig into the archives to try to locate, as precisely as possible, the spots where the remaining seven district schoolhouses stood. I located these sites using old school records, an outline of school district history written by the town's first superintendent, and town maps from 1870 and 1894.

The first target of my search, the South Quidnessett District 2 schoolhouse, was also my only failure. Owing to the school's former location, dead center in what is now the Quonset/Davisville Industrial Park, it is nearly impossible to pinpoint the building's exact location. As best as I can tell, the one-room building designed to seat 33 scholars was located somewhere near the end of Callahan Road and ran from 1837 to 1904.

The District 6 schoolhouse, which was first known as the Boston Neck District and then as the Saunderstown School, was located somewhere between this house at the end of Snuff Mill Road and the nearby water tower. It was a two room schoolhouse which was designed to seat 34. The exact dates of its occupation are unclear but it was open throughout the district system timeframe.

The schoolhouse in District 7 had, in my opinion, short of Swamptown, the most colorful name of all the schools. The school at "Dark Corner" was opened in 1898 and closed in 1913. It was one of the smallest one room schools in town as it was designed to seat only 20 students. It was located in this wooded lot on Shermantown Road just west of a small dog kennel.

The Swamptown District 8 schoolhouse was located on Swamptown Road (now, Lafayette Road) at the site of the former King of Club's bar. This one room school, designed to seat 30 students, opened at the very beginning of the district system in the early 1840s. The building was replaced at the same site in 1875 and was in use until 1909 when the school was consolidated with the students at West Lafayette. This particular Swamp Yankee feels that this location would again make an ideal location for a school and since it is now up for sale as a part of the Pond Realty land deal, which has been in the news of late, I urge my loyal readers to contact everyone they know in town government and express their views on this idea.

The District 10 schoolhouse was first known as the Scrabbletown school until around the turn of the century when it was changed to a name which seems to be the antithesis of the Dark Corners school to the south - Pleasant Valley. The Scrabbletown\Pleasant Valley School was located in this stone-walled lot at the corner of Scrabbletown Road and Stony Lane. This one room building was designed to hold 24 students and operated from 1879 to 1920. Its closing signed the death warrant of the farming village of Scrabbletown.

The Stony Lane District 12 schoolhouse was located in this stone-walled treed lot near the intersection of Stony Lane and Huling Road just behind the Taylor Rental parking lot. It was open from 1836 until 1901 and was also a small one-roomer.

Our final stop on the tour is to the District 13 Rock Hill schoolhouse, which was located about one half mile south of the intersection of Shermantown Road and Tower Hill Road

near this house. This was a small one room building designed for 20 students who lived in the nearby Rock Hill\Hammond Hill area. The dates of its usage are unclear. The end of the district system after the start of the twentieth century was brought on by a number of factors; cost control, the consolidation of the N.K. community into a smaller number of villages, and the desire to standardize the education of the students are just a few, but the clear fact is that it was made possible by the same thing which doomed so much of what made the village communities the close-knit units that they were - the dawn of the age of automobiles and buses.



The "King of Clubs" building stands on the site of the Swamptown District 8 school.



This house on Tower Hill Road sits on the approximate site of Rock Hill School.



This Snuff Mill Road house is located on the site of the District 6, Boston Neck School.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

The Mysterious Case of the Missing Frieze

Back in 1907, when the new Wickford Grammar School was completed, a group of prominent local men, lead by Daniel Berkeley Updike, decided to endow the school with a collection of art and artifacts which would serve to inspire and motivate the children who would soon be filling its classrooms and hallways. They chose quite an eclectic selection of paintings, sculpture, and the like. There was a group of Audubon paintings which now hang in the new town library, there were life-size busts of all the classic characters: Homer, Milton, Caesar, Washington, and Jefferson among others, there were fine art prints gracing the hallways and Renaissance period reliefs and Roman Architectural engravings displayed on the classroom walls. But the crowning glory of this collection was found in the school assembly hall. The sheer magnitude of this piece of art caused the others to shrink in comparison. For on the walls of the assembly hall was an exact museum-quality reproduction of the Parthenon Frieze. It consisted of 14 four foot by three foot plaster panels, showing classic battle scenes from the great Parthenon in Athens, Greece. In total, the piece was three feet high by fifty six feet long and covered the upper part of both the front and back walls of the assembly hall. It was crafted by the famed Caproni Brothers Company of Boston, whose work was showcased in many of the best schools and public spaces of the day.

It was truly a wonder to behold, and must have made Mr. Updike feel understandably proud when he gazed upon it and pondered upon the contributions his ancestors had made to the earlier Washington Academy which stood on the same spot as the school he was now championing. For forty years or so, it remained there, and awed and inspired the countless young scholars who sat in its presence listening to the headmaster or principal expound upon the virtues which were expressed by the quote which was chosen to stand underneath the Frieze, "Nothing makes the soul so religious and pure as the endeavor to create something perfect; for

God is perfection and whoever strives after it, is striving after something divine."

Some time around 1947, the school's administration, as a part of a larger addition to and remodeling of the building, took down the Parthenon Frieze and turned the assembly hall into two more urgently needed classrooms; post WWII Wickford being a booming place at that time. The Frieze was disassembled and stored under the stage at the recently built North Kingstown Jr./Sr. High School. For a time the Parthenon Frieze was largely forgotten, it lay there under the stage, unbeknownst to most, gathering dust. At some point, probably during a remodeling of the now Wickford Middle School, it was moved and mothballed again under a school stage, although this time it was back at its former home - Wickford Elementary School.

Now, this is where the story takes a strange twist, an odd turn and a sad one at that. You see, sometime around 1985, give or take a year or two, a truck pulled up to Wickford Elementary and an official sort of person told everyone present that he was taking the Parthenon Frieze somewhere else; to an undisclosed location, for "safe keeping". Now I know that Swamp Yankees are all born cynics, but, this kind of reminds this particular Swamp Yankee of a discussion that the Grinch had with little Cindy Lou Who over a certain missing Christmas tree. The sad part is that I don't think anyone's going to come riding down Academy Hill and put the Frieze back up at the end of the story. When I questioned them about the Frieze, most of the present day members of the school department didn't even know what I was talking about, and the ones that did just don't know what happened to it. It is almost as if a thing that is 3 ft X 56 ft and weighs in in the tons just disappeared. Well, North Kingstown, the whole thing makes me mad and I expect many of you will feel the same. This is one time where I'd love to be wrong; it would please me to no end to be able to write a column concerning a recent display of the Wickford Grammar School's Parthenon Frieze at the library or some similar site, but -- I don't think it's a column I'll get to write.

In 1961 a young third grader named Douglas Scott wrote a school report on the frieze. He proclaimed it "The finest Frieze in the whole world." His report is now a part of the "South County Room" collection at the NK Library. I bet as Doug Scott, wherever he may be, now approaches his fiftieth birthday, he would love to be able to show his children or grandchildren that remarkable piece of art. But, he can't.



A view of the Wickford Grammar School assembly hall, showing the Parthenon frieze.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

Lt. Gov. John Jonathan Reynolds

Quite a while back in this long journey through the history of our fair town, we took a look at the life and times of North Kingstown's only contribution to that noble (and in some cases, not so noble) group of men who have held the office of Governor of this, the Ocean State, Gov. William Gregory. It was noted that Gregory also held the office of Lt. Governor, but he was not the first man from N. Kingstown to do so, that honor goes to a man who, unlike Wm. Gregory, was born and raised here in town, John Jonathan Reynolds.

John J. Reynolds was born on December 7, 1812 in the house of his father, notable local merchant and banker, Jonathan Reynolds. The Reynolds Homestead had been built some eight years prior to the birth of young John J., in 1804. It stood at 12 Main Street and was the future Lt. Governor's only home for his entire 96 years of life. John Reynolds was educated at schools in both his home town of Wickford, as well as a fairly, exclusive school for its time in Plainfield, Connecticut. He joined his father in his business and banking enterprises immediately after completing that education and by his twenty-fourth birthday was elected a director of the North Kingstown Bank. Fifteen years later, upon the death of his father, Reynolds assumed the position of Bank President, a position he held until 1865 when the bank merged with the area's other bank, The Narragansett Bank and became The Wickford National Bank. At that point he was named president of this new and larger bank, a position he held until his retirement, at the age of 74, in 1886.

During all that Reynolds found the time to father five children with his wife Hannah (Congdon), serve terms as both the town's state representative and senator, serve as a delegate to the 1864 Republican Convention, hold a position as a trustee of the Washington Academy and following its closure, oversee the creation of the Wickford District School, serve as a trustee of the State Normal School (the predecessor to the state's college and university system), and serve a term as the Lt.

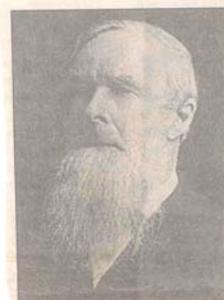
Governor from 1854 to 1855. In short, he was a busy man.

After his term as Lt. Governor, Reynolds retired from political life and devoted his time to his other passions, banking and education. For the remainder of his long life, he was known fondly by his Wickford neighbors, friends, and business associates as Governor Reynolds, and his home's name went from the Reynolds Homestead to the Gov. Reynolds House. He died in 1908, having lived a life long enough to bury two of his children; he is buried in his family plot in Elm Grove Cemetery.

Sadly, and ironically, in 1954 ,almost exactly one hundred years after he was sworn in as Lt. Governor, his beloved home of 96 years was demolished. It had fallen into disrepair and had suffered greatly at the hands of the great hurricanes of 1936 and 1954. It had been in the hands of Reynolds descendants for the vast majority of its 150 years of existence. We are lucky, however, in the fact that little bits and pieces of the "Governor's home are still with us, locals around at the time remember parts of the house being carted away and incorporated into some of the villages other old houses. The most important of these parts being the magnificent front door which Lt. Governor Reynolds walked through each day after a long day at the bank or the State House, it can now be seen gracing the entryway to the Wickford House, just a few doors down from where it once stood (site of the present day Canvasworks Store).. So, as you walk through Wickford take another look at Mother Prentice's old stomping grounds and give the old Governor his due.



PHOTO: JAMES RUSH
Though the Reynolds Homestead, home to Lt. Gov. John Reynolds, was taken down, at least one piece of it remains in Wickford – its doorway. The intricately designed entryway now graces the Wickford House at 68 Main St.



Lt. Governor John J. Reynolds

Top photo provided by the [North East Independent](#)

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston
The History Behind Some Local Historians

I thought it only fitting and proper that we take some time to look at three of the many chroniclers of North Kingstown history who have preceded me. I like to think of them as the "big three" of local history. Without their work, and the efforts of many others, my job would be all the more difficult. We all owe them a debt of gratitude. So without any further to-do, here they are in order of their births.

George W. Gardiner - George Gardiner was born in May of 1868 in nearby Wakefield RI. He was a banker by trade, having worked for The Union Trust and Industrial National Banks; he retired from Industrial National as a Vice President. Although his career was in banking, his passion was local history and he had many articles published in the Providence and Boston newspapers. In 1949, he published the culmination of his life's work, a book simply titled "Lafayette, Rhode Island". This book is important, not only as an accurate accounting of the history of Lafayette and its surrounding villages, but also as a unique opportunity to take a surreptitious glimpse into the lives of the people who populated them. For the most part, it reads like a novel, not a textbook, and that is the beauty of it. It fleshes out our bare-bones understanding of life in a one-mill town. The tragic loss of both his wife and only son in 1956 had to have hit him hard, but Gardiner continued at his passion right up until his death in 1964. He was 95 years old.

Col. Hunter C. White - Col. White was born in Providence in 1880. His father, General Hunter White, was the High Sheriff of Providence while young Hunter was a boy and eventually a student at Brown University. He graduated from Brown in 1901 and he continued his education at Harvard. He worked at the RI Superior Court, in addition to other positions in state government. He enlisted in the Coast Artillery Corps of the National Guard in 1910 and continued in the Guard Reserve until his retirement in 1948 as a Colonel. White moved to Wickford in 1934 and was involved in every conceivable historic organization. White's masterpiece was titled "Wickford and Its Old Houses" and it was first published in 1937. The book was revised and enlarged three more times; in 1945, 1947, and 1960. With each revision his work became more comprehensive and detailed,

eventually including a section on N. Kingstown itself. "Wickford and Its Old Houses" is the "bible" for any one interested in local history. As someone who understands what is involved in doing research of this kind, I am constantly amazed by the sheer volume of work this undertaking must have entailed. It is required reading if you care about Wickford. White's work was also the scholarly basis for the creation of the Wickford Historic District in 1959, only the second in Rhode Island. It is a well established fact that without Hunter White, there would be no Historic Wickford. He died in 1959 in the same year that the Wickford Historic District was established. He was 78 years old. His work was continued by his wife, Katherine, and his daughter, Virginia.

Florence Simister - Mrs. Simister was born Florence Parker, in Providence in 1913. She was the wife of Robert Simister. Her fame was already well established by the time North Kingstown became a part of her life in 1971. She was a prolific author of RI history, having written numerous books on the subject for both adults and children, as well as the creator and narrator of the longest running locally produced radio show in RI history, "The Streets of the City" which ran on WEAN radio from 1952 to 1972. The Simisters opened a bookshop in Wickford in 1971 and were two of the finest and most patient people that this historian (albeit a much younger version) ever had the opportunity to know. Mrs. Simister's most famous local work was called "Streets of the City; an Anecdotal History of North Kingstown", it was part of a series of "Streets of the City" books. Her crowning achievement was "The Fire's Center" which was a book about RI's contribution to the Revolutionary War. Like all of her writings it's a great read and can be found in the library. Mrs. Simister died in 1981. She was 67 years old.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston
The Story of Thankful Union

Greetings, loyal readers; this week, as promised, I will tell you the story, as I have come to know it, of Thankful Union. To backtrack a little for those who don't remember this woman and her wonderful name, Thankful Union is a departed soul who is buried in the "potter's field" section of Elm Grove Cemetery. As detailed in Althea McAleer's recent book on the cemetery, all that is known about her is that she was "a colored mute" who died in 1881 at the age of 95 years old. Thankful's name and circumstances have intrigued me; and I have felt compelled to find out what she, and her life, was all about. I must say though, that this was a difficult task. Few records were kept concerning the births, lives, and deaths of African Americans in the 18th and 19th centuries; in this regard, they lived in a shadow world, leaving little concrete evidence of their very existence behind. This is truly frustrating for the historical researcher, but in a larger sense it is a sad statement about America and the times. But Thankful and her extended family were different, and through, what I can only consider an act of divine providence, I have been able to piece together something of her life. I must add here, that as the facts are few, only the long dead players in this fascinating tale know for certain if I have got it 100% correct. But I do feel confident that I have got the gist of her story right.

To understand the journey which brought Thankful to her inevitable end in the pauper's section of our fair town's major burial ground, you have to go back two generations, and you must know that Thankful Union was not her given name, she was born with the same slave name as the man with whom we begin this tale, her grandfather Johnny Onion. John Onyun (he spelled it in this phonetic fashion) first shows up in the permanent record on a tattered and burned piece of paper in the vault in the N.K. town hall proclaiming his marriage to a woman of color from Jamestown known as Jemima. Let me pause here in our story to let you know that all references to African Americans in the permanent record from this time frame are tagged with either the phrase "a man (woman)

of color" or as a negro man or woman. No other reference to John and Jemima Onion seem to have been recorded and the story now continues with their children and their children's families. It would appear that John and Jemima had at least four and perhaps five children. The record shows two sons named Cezar and Frazee, and a daughter named Margaret, as well as a daughter or daughter-in law named Sarah. They may have had another daughter named Freelove, as there is a fleeting reference to a Freelove Onion during this same timeframe, but I am unable to be certain. Cezar and Frazee, upon reaching adulthood moved to Exeter and married, respectively, Jane and Eunica (surnames unrecorded). They lived long lives in Exeter and were active members of the Exeter Baptist Church. Cezar's wife Jane, died in 1827 and he remarried a woman from the church named Nancy. Nancy was known as Nannie Onion and was probably a long-serving nannie to the family of James Sheldon, as she is mentioned in his will. But our story is about John and Jemima's daughters, so we will leave Frazee and Cezar for now, although not for good.

Margaret and Sarah Onion must have been remarkable women. They lived in a fairly affluent village, as Wickford was at the time, and probably held domestic positions in some of the prominent homes. The facts seem to support, as you will soon see, that Margaret worked for the Gardiner family, but there is no way of knowing for whom Sarah worked. It appears that they raised families as single mothers, the records clearly and undeniably show that Margaret's two sons were fathered by a man named Richard Gardiner (he is not referenced as a man of color or a negro man) and no mention of a husband can be found for Sarah, although considering the condition of N. K.'s records there is a small chance that she was married. I tend to doubt this though, as three separate references to Sarah and her three children; Nathaniel, Ishmael, and Thankful can be found with no corresponding mention of a husband/father. The only birth date I have for Sarah's children is for her youngest, Thankful, and I can only infer a year from her death information, 1786. Sadly, in August of 1803, Sarah Onion

died, leaving her three children, all under the age of 21, parentless. The North Kingstown probate court appointed a guardian for them, one Benjamin Davis, but his job was only to see that they got placed in an appropriate home; and the records indicate that Margaret's family was where they ended up. Where Margaret housed this large family of one woman and five children prior to 1817 is unknown. But, in 1817, a remarkable turn of events changed the lives of Margaret and her, by then, mostly adult children forever. First Richard Gardiner, the father of Margaret's two sons, died without a will, and secondly, Margaret Onion, an African American domestic, of little consequence in the world of 19th century Wickford, put up a bid of \$21.00 on a piece of property being auctioned off from Gardiner's estate to settle his debts, and, against all odds, won the bid. Margaret Onion, a single black woman in a decidedly white man's world, was the lawful owner of a house on one sixteenth of an acre on an unnamed side street in Wickford. One can only imagine the wonderment and celebration which must have reigned across the extended Onion family in both Wickford and Exeter on that day. Nearly two hundred years later I swear I could still feel the pride as I read the real estate record in the dusty ledgers of the town hall.

Time marched on for the Onion Family, but it did so in such a fashion as to not have left a single footprint in the permanent record, that is until the spring of 1860. By now, Margaret has apparently joined her sister, brothers, and parents in the next world, as the house now seems to belong to Thankful. There is no official deed of transfer, and perhaps that was part of her undoing, as the probate court of the town of North Kingstown was, in May of 1860 appointing a committee of three prominent citizens, Gideon Freeborn, Samuel Pierce, and William Cozzens to inventory and seize her assets. The deed was done in no time flat, and all that Thankful Onion owned, including the little house on one sixteenth of an acre that Margaret had paid so dearly for, was taken away from her. No where in the minutes of the town council or probate court records can I find a concrete reason for this action; so, call me a

cynic or a pragmatist as you wish, I expect that it was done in service of less than noble causes; although I'd be pleased to find out differently. Thankful was appointed a legal guardian, another prominent Wickford resident, Allen Thomas, and shipped out to the town poor farm. Which is where, it seems, she spent the rest of her days. Some time during her stay there she changed her last name from Onion to Union, more than likely in celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation. I have no idea when and why she became a mute, although no one could ever blame her if she just chose never to speak again, but that is, until now, the only thing we knew of her. That was her epitaph for more than 100 years - Thankful Union, a colored mute. The irony of her name and her last years continues to haunt me. I can think of only two things I can do to make it up to her; one, I have done by telling her story, and the other, well, somewhere out there under the thick grass which covers the potter's field at Elm Grove, sadly she was not even buried with all her family out in the graveyard on Cezar's land in Exeter, is a small marble stone erected by the town in 1881 to mark yet another of the grave's of one of the folks who lived their lives out at the poor farm. It may take me a while but I plan to find it this spring and stand it up to face the sun.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

The Turck Family

Greetings, fellow travelers through the many centuries which make up the fabric of our fair town. Before we begin our look at times past this week, I wanted to make an announcement to all the naysayers and "doubting Thomas's" out there who figured this column would crawl quickly to its inevitable and ignominious end. This marks the one-hundredth column within which we have explored the real stories of the people, places, and things which have made North Kingstown what it is today. I have learned much along the way and hope it has been as educational and enjoyable for all of you as it has for me. So without further fanfare let's take a gander into the lives of the Turcks, a family of hard working German immigrant businesspeople who graced the landscape in Wickford for nearly three quarters of a century.

Recent widower, 44 year old Jacob Turck stepped off the proverbial boat in Providence in 1854. We know nothing of his life back in Wallstein, Germany, other than that it was lacking something, something which drove him to risk it all in the land of opportunity, America. He was a shoemaker by trade and I expect he took in the lay of the land for a while and tried to find a village where he felt confident he could make a new start. That place ended up being Wickford, where he put down roots for good in 1855. By 1856, he had met and married another recent German immigrant, Anna Ossman and they settled down and began a life and a family. At approximately two year intervals, they had five children; Frank, Margaret, Cornelia, Anne, and William. During that time they also managed to save up enough money to buy for themselves, in 1859, a home/shop where they could both live and make their living. The building, still existent today (it houses "The Place" a pizza restaurant, and the mysterious Wickford Club) was located near the channel from Wickford Harbor to Academy Cove on a street then known as Bridge St (now Brown St). Jacob's shop was on the street level, and the Turck family lived upstairs. Jacob not only hand made custom fit shoes for

the wealthy folks in Wickford, he also sold factory made shoes for the average guy as well. These shoes were quite a bit different than the ones you buy in the stores today. If you weren't fortunate enough to have a pair especially made for you then you purchased a pair where the major difference between the right one and the left one was how it wore down as you used it; and believe me there were not a myriad of sizes and widths like there are now. But, if you could afford a hand made pair of shoes from a master shoemaker like Herr Turck, they fit you like a second skin and were the most comfortable thing available. Jacob was not only a great shoemaker, he was, as evidenced by the commentary in his obituary of 1896, a well loved friend and neighbor to all in the village. Jacob, by the way, continued to work each day, bent over the shoemaker's bench into his eighty-fourth year.



Jacob Turck and his family lived above his shoe shop on what is now Brown Street.

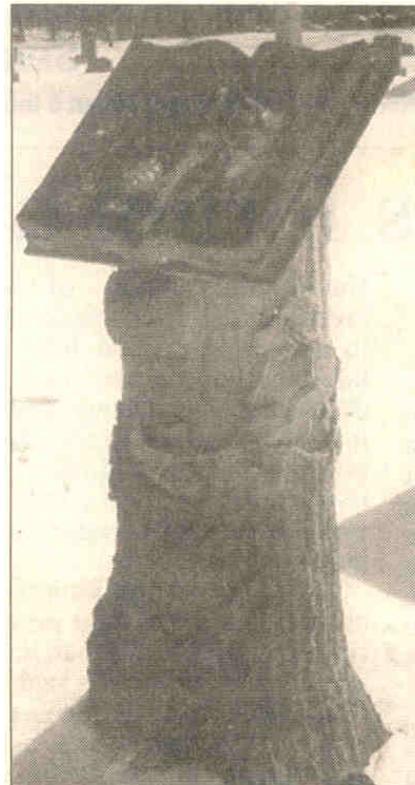
In the later part of the 1800's the Turck's second oldest daughter, Cornelia, married another recent immigrant to America, East Greenwich's Valentin Glass, who settled there and followed his trade as a baker. This marriage brought with it a new facet to the story of the Turck's of Wickford, as it seems apparent that Cornelia's two brothers, Frank and William became taken with the baking trade, as a short while after their sister's marriage they broke from the family business and (seemingly with their father's blessing) opened the Turck's Brothers Bakery in the street level of a building which once stood a few doors down from their father's shoemaker's shop (now the Earnshaw's drugstore portion of the Wickford Parking lot). So, the newly renamed Brown Street now hosted two Turck-run businesses.

Things went well for the Turcks for a time. But the death of their patriarch, Jacob, in 1896, brought about the end of the family's association with the shoemaker's trade, and the death of youngest son, William, just one year later,

when he was only 31, surely took some of the spark out of the family. They held out until 1912 when what was left of the family (mother, Anna, having died by then as well) sold the old shoe shop that was their home for so long to the founding members of the Wickford Club. Unmarried siblings Frank and Anne then moved up to East Greenwich where they lived and worked with the Glass family in their bakery. Frank and Valentin, always the savvy visionaries, got in on the ground floor of a new and growing business, heating oil delivery, when they became partners in this new industry. Like all the many immigrants before them, they did what they had to do to make their mark in this, their new home.

All the Turcks and Glass' are buried together in one large family plot out at Elm Grove Cemetery; husbands and wives, parents and children, sisters and brothers, friends and comrades, they are no more parted in death than they were in life. I guess that speaks volumes about why they all took the chance and left the comfort of what they knew to risk it all in America.

In an interesting footnote to this story, the gravestone that the grieving Turck and Glass families purchased for young William is unique, as far as I am aware, to this area. It is a cast cement tree trunk covered in vines and flowers, upon which rests an open book. The facts of William's life are carved into the pages of the book. Well, loyal readers, on to the next one hundred vignettes of days gone by.



William Turck's gravestone is among the more unique stones at Elm Grove Cemetery.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

Daniel Updike - Attorney General

Last week we took a look at the first gentleman from our fair town to ever hold the office of Lt. Governor John J. Reynolds. In light of this and in deference to the fact that this is the season for things political, it seems only right that, this week, we take a look at the first local lad to ever hold state wide office - Col. Daniel Updike.

Daniel Updike was born in 1694 to Lodowick and Abigail (Newton) Updike. He lived the greater part of his life in the home which his family had inherited from his Great Grandfather Richard Smith. We now know his home as Smith's Castle, at that time it was also known as Richard Smith's Blockhouse; by rights (my opinion, anyway) it ought to be called the Updike Plantation House, as that is what it was for the largest part of its history.

As a boy, Daniel got the best that was available in the colonies at the time. He and his siblings had two live-in tutors, one, who was known to be Daniel Vernon, to teach him the basics needed to excel in the 18th century world, and another, imported from France, to teach the children French, Latin, and Greek. Upon reaching the appropriate age Lodowick sent his eldest son off with a business associate on an extended maritime adventure to the Barbados; when he returned "his mind was much improved and his manners polished." He set right out on his chosen course of studies, Law, and, after his admission to the profession, set up an office in Newport. Around that same time, 1716, he married Sarah Arnold, the daughter of Gov. Benedict Arnold. Sadly, Sarah died two years after their marriage. Daniel married again, in 1722 to wealthy Newporter Anstis Jenkins; in this same year, he also first took the office which he would hold for the better part of the rest of his life, Attorney General for the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

Daniel Updike held that office for a total of twenty-six years, longer than anyone since. During his tenure he handled the prosecution for an infamous murder trial,

the murder of William Jackson by Thomas Carter in nearby South Kingstown. Carter was convicted, and hanged in irons at Tower Hill, before an enormous throng of people. His bones remained there, hanging by the roadside for years, creaking out a warning to anyone who was considering such a heinous crime here in colonial RI. He also prosecuted the thirty-six pirates captured in 1723 by the British Navy. As a testimony to both the seriousness of the crime and Updike's zeal in his prosecution, twenty-six of the pirates were hanged in Newport. Beyond criminal prosecution, Updike has been credited with settling the long standing border dispute with Massachusetts over the eastern boundary between the two states. Trial Judge Lightfoot was heard to say after, that it was Updike's eloquence which played a part in his securing the decision for RI. As a personally interesting footnote the Governor that Daniel Updike, the longest serving A.G. in RI history, worked with was none other than Samuel Cranston, who at twenty-nine years may have been the only man to hold elective office in the state longer than Updike did.

Beyond his legal legacy, Daniel Updike was also a founding member of both the Rhode Island bar and the famed Redwood Library in Newport. A close friend of Rev. McSparran and Dean Berkeley, as well as the vast majority of all the "movers and shakers" in colonial Rhode Island and Massachusetts; Updike divided his time between his home in Newport and his Gentleman's Farm at Smith's Castle. He died, still in office, on May 15, 1757 and was buried near his wife and parents in the Updike family burial ground here in town. He was truly among the handful of individuals who literally and figuratively shaped Rhode Island and her destiny.

The Whole Story on Charles Crombe



Charles Crombe is seen at the start of his teaching career, around 1900.

A few weeks back, as a part of a column of reader contributions, we were all introduced to a gentleman named Charles Crombe. As it turns out there are many loyal readers out there who were already well acquainted with Mr. Crombe; these folks being his former students at the Lafayette Grammar School. Right now you are probably saying to yourself, "Lafayette, I thought you said he taught at Allenton school?", and so I did. But after some gentle corrections from former students in the know, I decided to go back and take a longer look at Mr. Crombe and here's what I found. -

Charles Crombe was born on September 19, 1868 in nearby Stonington Ct. to Edwin and Jennie (Harrison) Crombe. The Crombe (or Crumb, as they were originally known) family has been a fixture in Rhode Island and southeastern Connecticut since 1630 when the original immigrant, Daniel Crumb, put down roots in what is now Westerly, RI. In the first part of the 1800's his grandfather married into the Hiscox family of North Kingstown and so the Crombe's moved from the Westerly/Stonington area into our fair town. As a child young Charles spent most of his life in a house on Champlin Street -(now Elam street) in the village of Wickford, but his parents saw something special in him and sent him off, in 1891, to the Worcester Academy in Worcester Massachusetts to be educated as a teacher. He graduated from the Academy in 1895 and shortly thereafter returned to his hometown to begin his long and successful career as an educator. His first and most enduring assignment was as one of two teachers at the Allenton School. Some twenty-three years later, in 1922, now Principal Crombe was transferred from the ever-shrinking Allenton School to the rapidly growing Lafayette Grammar School. He finished his career, as a teacher there, twelve years later in 1934. He was 65 years old when he retired from teaching.

As a testimony to the old adage that "Some things never change", Charlie, as he was known to the adults in the community, had never been able to make ends meet on only his teacher's salary, which averaged about \$800 a year and peaked at just under \$1000

upon his retirement. So Charlie, who had a wife, Edith (Nichols) and two sons to support learned the pharmacy trade under the watchful eye of local legend and sometimes curmudgeon E. E. "Doc" Young, who had a very successful drugstore in Wickford. Charlie worked afternoons and weekends for years, learning the pharmacy trade as he went, for Doc Young, until 1927 when he set out on his own and opened a drugstore on Brown Street in what is now the Harborside Grill. From 1927 until 1934, Mr. Crombe the teacher was also Charlie Crombe the pharmacist. He was assisted in this endeavor by his eldest son, David, who eventually went on to make his own mark on the greater world of Pharmacology as the eventual Dean of the URI School of Pharmacology. With his retirement in 1934, Charlie and David, who now had a Masters Degree in Pharmacology from the Univ. of So. California, worked in the store full time. David also began his second career as a pharmacology professor at the college. It is interesting to note how the son's career was a near mirror image of the father's. By this time the Crombe family had a home on Poplar Point and Charlie's days were filled with his family, his drugstore, and his comrades at the Odd Fellows Hall where he was a very active member. Charles Crombe died in his home at the end of April 1942. His rapidly failing health had forced him to close his drugstore just a few short weeks earlier. He was nearly 76 years old. His funeral was a well attended one, for Charlie Crombe had touched the lives of almost every living soul in Allenton, Lafayette, and Wickford. The old schoolmaster had lived well.

So, the next time you are in the Harborside having breakfast or maybe one of those great mushroom burgers, tip your hat to the memory of Charlie Crombe, but mind your manners as I have it on good authority that he wouldn't accept anything but proper behavior from his young charges.

Photo provided by the [North East Independent](#)



PHOTO: DAVID GOLF

This building, which now houses the Harborside Grill, once was the of a drugstore operated by schoolteacher Charles Crombe.

Alfred Chadsey - North Kingstown's Top Farmer

Back in 1815, when Alfred Chadsey was born, most farmers, in North Kingstown as well as the rest of the U.S., used fertilizers consisting of processed animal products (i.e. - fish or bone meal, and manure); they also retained a portion of their crop each year as seed for the next year's sowing. By the time of his death, some eighty-seven years later, in 1902, these two, as well as many other facets of farming had changed drastically and Chadsey, a man trained at the Washington Academy (present day site of Wickford Elementary) as a school teacher, had played an important part in the modernization of agriculture in America.

Alfred Chadsey was born into a family deeply rooted in North Kingstown history. The first Chadsey to settle here had come from Wales, via Newport, and settled into a farm on the old section of the Boston Post Road we now know as Chadsey Road, as early as 1716. Little did William Chadsey know that some day, the very road he lived upon would be renamed after his illustrious descendant, in honor of his contributions to the very livelihood he was undertaking. Alfred's father, Jeremiah Chadsey was, a number of generations later, carrying on in the family tradition as a farmer, but at a different location, just up the hill from Wickford on the south side of the Grand Highway (West Main Street). Jeremiah, however, was a man of ambition and industry; in addition to his farm, he also ran a store in Wickford, as well as a home hand loom weaving business which at its peak involved 600 families spread out over all of the adjoining communities. In 1835, as his father's enterprises expanded, Alfred resigned from his teaching position at one of the town's district schools and entered into a partnership with him. He struck out on his own in 1844, entering into a partnership with acquaintances, Stephen Draper and John Brown, for the purpose of starting a scythe manufacturing plant in Leicester, Mass. In 1852, homesick for the familiar environs of Wickford, he sold his share to his partners and moved back to North Kingstown where he took over the

management of the family farm. This move was as important for the future of agriculture in the region as it was for Alfred and his family.

Alfred was more than likely aware of the fact that in order to be a success in a rather run-of-the-mill occupation like farming it was important to find a niche in which one could stand head and shoulders above the rest. He decided to make the raising of crops specifically for seed production not food his specialty and he entered into this area of expertise with the benefit of his education and scientific background. This was a relatively new way to farm and not without risk. In order to stack the deck in his favor he decided to experiment with another relatively new advance in farming, chemical fertilizers. He had success with them but found them to be too expensive; with that in mind, he set out to concoct his own fertilizer compounds. After some trial and error he was able to produce a chemical fertilizer which was both effective and affordable. As a member of the executive committees of both the state and Washington County Agricultural Societies, he was able to publish his findings and pass on his success to the agricultural community across the state as well as the region. Back on the farm, Alfred was bringing in record crops of seeds. His onion, beet, carrot, and turnip seeds were harvested by the ton, no small accomplishment if you have ever seen the size of one of these seeds, and sold to wholesalers all over the nation. Chadsey was considered a man of merit in the local community and held many positions of importance; he was a state representative, town council president, and superintendent of schools for N.K.. He also sat on the boards of trustees of two banks in town. During the Civil War, Chadsey was the Provost Marshal for RI's second district. Finally, after the war, he was an unsuccessful candidate for Lt. Governor. A devout Baptist, his fervent support of prohibition probably cost him the election. In spite of this, at his life's end, Alfred Chadsey was a man who had contributed much to his community, his state, and most importantly his vocation- farming. Sadly, he is remembered by too few, and only the road which was renamed after him stands in testimony to his outstanding life.

The Chadsey farm on West Main Street in Wickford, extended all the way south to Boone street and east to Academy Hill and cove. His grand home is now occupied by "The Cranston's of Wickford" funeral home.



PHOTO: DERITH LUTZ

The grand home at the former spot of Alfred Chadsey's farm on West Main Street in Wickford is now occupied by Cranstons of Wickford Funeral Home.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

The Parley Mathewson Estate

Parley Mason Mathewson was born, raised, and educated in the village of East Killingly, Ct. He lived there from his birth on August 31, 1813 until shortly after his fifteenth birthday. It was then and there that he began his business career, at a store of the Scituate Company which was owned by Philip Allen, a member of the rich and influential Allen family of Providence, RI. Parley was a bookkeeper, and obviously a good one, because it wasn't long before he was transferred to the Allen's main office in the heart of Providence. Before long he was the Allen's head bookkeeper and it was said that he set up a systematic method of bookkeeping for them that increased the efficiency of their many businesses and in turn their profits. His rapid ascension through the ranks of the Allen's businesses gave him the confidence to set out on his own, so he left their employ and opened up a grocery business on the corner of North Main and Waterman. Again, his business talents served him well, and before too much time had passed Mathewson's small grocery store was transformed into a successful grocery wholesale operation. His business was so good, in fact, that by the early 1860's he was able to sell his business and effectively retire before he had reached his forty-fifth birthday; a remarkable achievement for the middle of the nineteenth century.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Parley Mathewson was living the life of leisure, travelling throughout the south seeking "health and pleasure." It would seem that Mathewson's incredible business sense was at work as well, because by the close of the war his knowledge of the land "Where cotton is King" served him in good stead as he then began his second, and even more successful, career as a cotton broker. By war's end the infrastructure of the Deep South was in a shambles; golden opportunities awaited any businessman with the acumen necessary to seize them. Parley Mathewson was just such a man. The emerging south had plenty of cotton and the industrial north (The Rhode Island area included) had

many fabric mills just waiting to churn out cloth, all that was needed was the financing and infrastructure to bring the two together. Parley Mathewson was one of the many savvy businessmen who jumped in to fill that gap. Before long, big-time cotton broker Parley Mathewson became a mill owner as well; he owned one mill outright and had a financial interest in many others. Along the way, he acquired a fine home in Providence at 69 Angell Street, a wife Lucy, of the Capron family of the city, and three children. As the last quarter of the nineteenth century began, Parley was living the American dream, he was a huge success, a man of means; a man, who by this time was also the President of the "Third National Bank", a City Councilor, and, quite frankly, a person with a substantial disposable income.



The J. Adams House, above, served as the guest house for the Parley Mathewson Estate. The Rufus Sweet House, on an adjacent property, below, served as the main house.



This is where North Kingstown comes into the story. Like many influential people of his time, Parley had become acquainted with and enamored of Wickford through its wonderful train and steamship connection to Newport. As so many did, he fell in love with the place while passing through it. When he was looking for an appropriate location for a "summer estate" for his immediate and extended family, Wickford was his choice. He purchased, not one, but two of "Quality Hill's" finest homes. They were situated on adjacent lots and the two houses, along with the land and outbuildings associated

with them, became the Parley Mathewson Estate.

The big house was the Rufus Sweet House. It was built in 1843 and had been, prior to its purchase by Mathewson, the home of a man he was surely acquainted with, local mill magnate S. H. Vaughan. Vaughan owned it about the same time his partners in the Hamilton Web Company, the Greenes, purchased the beautiful Captain Gardner House across the street at 90 West Main. The smaller house was the J. Adams House, it had been more recently constructed, sometime after the middle of the 1800's. The estate also included a large carriage house which has, in recent times, been remodeled into a home. Parley Mathewson's remarkable life ended on January 4, 1890 in his Angell Street home after a short illness. Although his family continued to visit the summer estate after his death, it must not have been the same without his powerful presence.



This carriage house, on the Parley Mathewson Estate, has been converted to a residence.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

The Real Story of Gilbert Stuart

I guess everyone in North Kingstown knows a little bit about our most famous citizen, Gilbert Stuart. We all know about the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace (Although many in the area may have neglected to visit this wonderful living museum.) and the famous dollar bill portrait; but how many of us know anything at all about the man himself? With this in mind, it seems wise to shed a little light on the man; a man who not only painted the portraits of America's first six presidents, but her last king, George III, as well.

Gilbert Stuart Jr. was born on December 3, 1755 in the northeast bedroom of the familiar local landmark. His father had come to America some five years earlier from Perth, Scotland to take an assignment as a snuff millwright for Doctor Thomas Moffatt, who along with Edward Cole had built and owned the miller's house and snuff mill on the peaceful Mettatuxet River which we now call Gilbert Stuart's Birthplace. This site on the river had, already by this time, accumulated quite a history having been settled in 1686 by Thomas Mumford as the location of the area's first sawmill. Before settling into his life as a miller, Gilbert Sr. met and married the beautiful daughter of prominent Newporter Albro Anthony; the Anthony's lived at an estate known as Whitehall, which they later sold to Bishop Berkeley, the famous colonial theologian (and a man with North Kingstown connections as well, as regular readers will remember.) Gilbert Sr. and Elizabeth settled in at the mill and had three children: James (who died young), Anne, and finally Gilbert Jr.

Gilbert's penchant for art, as well as his precociousness, showed itself at an early age. By the age of six, as the story goes, he was taking charcoal out of the fireplace and sketching his surroundings, much to his parent's chagrin, on the furnishings in the miller's house (which, one must remember, belonged to Moffatt and Cole at the time.). Sadly, for the Stuart family, the snuff business turned out to be a bust, as a matter of fact, if it weren't for the generosity of Elizabeth's well-to-do parents the family would not have made it. Therefore, when Gilbert was twelve years old, the Stuart's moved to Newport to be

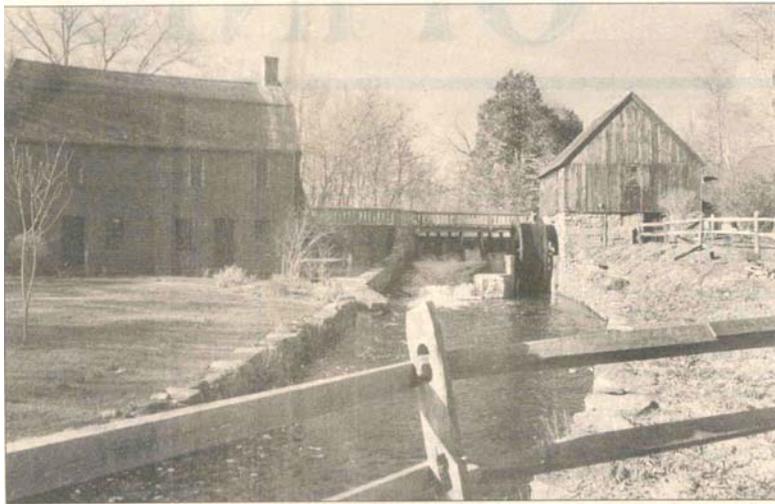
closer to Elizabeth's family and to allow young master Stuart to receive a proper education. This in truth was the end of Gilbert Stuart's North Kingstown connection, but certainly not the end of the story.

Gilbert's parents enrolled him in a school run by Rev. George Bissett and it was here that the talent which made him famous was discovered and first nurtured. By the age of fourteen Gilbert was painting portraits on commission; his first, of Mr. and Mrs. John Bannister, were at one time, in possession of the Redwood Library in Newport. At the age of fifteen, Gilbert travelled to Scotland with his instructor, Cosmos Alexander for further training. He returned two years later, after Alexander's unexpected death, in a state which would characterize his early years; hungry, ragged, and forlorn. You see, Gilbert was a bit of a rogue and a scalawag, as they would say in those days, and went through money as if there was an endless supply of it. This fact explains the prodigious volume of his work, he has been estimated to have painted in excess of eight hundred portraits. If you want to get a feel for the life of Gilbert Stuart the young man, just watch the movie "Amadeus" for, like the young Mr. Mozart in the movie, young Mr. Stuart lived life to the hilt, and then some.

Gilbert stayed in the colonies just long enough to earn sufficient monies to finance a return to England. During those years he painted portraits of many of Newport's wealthy and socially elite. Finally, one day prior to the Battle of Bunker Hill, he set sail for England in hopes of studying under the famous painter Sir Benjamin West. The timing of his departure was purely coincidental, as Stuart was as apolitical as they come; he was neither a Tory nor a Patriot, he was a painter. He arrived in London after an uneventful voyage, but did not immediately seek out West, as he had spent all his money on the London high life he loved so well. He now had to earn a new nest egg before he could proceed with his plan. With that in mind he took a position as an organist at St. Vedast's Church there in the city (he was also an accomplished musician.) He was paid one year's salary up front, but true to form, he spent it all nearly

before the ink was dry on the contract. Luck, which was usually with him, saved the day, as Gilbert ran into a wealthy acquaintance and admirer, Dr. Waterhouse, who set him up in comfortable quarters and introduced him to the London elite, who could afford to hire him to paint their portraits. His big break came in 1777, when his portrait of a wealthy Scotchman, William Grant, was hung in the Royal Academy in London. Stuart, who by now was finally studying under West, had hit the big time. He was "THE" portrait painter on both sides of the Atlantic and in great demand.

In early 1794, after fifteen years in London and three more in Ireland, Gilbert Stuart and his London-born wife returned to the land of his birth, setting up shop in Boston. Stuart was anxious to paint a portrait of George Washington, and in the winter of 1794 he met with Washington in Philadelphia to arrange for sittings. In all, Stuart painted three likenesses of the father of our country, but he was so dissatisfied with his first attempt that he destroyed it. He went on to paint nearly every famous figure of his day, including Jefferson, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Revere, Mr. and Mrs. John Adams, Madame Bonaparte, John J. Astor and a score of others. Gilbert Stuart Jr. died of cancer in July of 1828 and is buried in a cemetery on



The Gilbert Stuart Birthplace is where the portraitist got his start in the world.

PHOTO: DAVID GOLDMAN

Boston Common. In his seventy-three years of life he, through the gift of his incredible talent, was able to meet nearly every important person in the English speaking world. He would want nothing more than for us to raise a glass of wine and offer up a toast to his remarkable life.

Photo provided by the [North East Independent](#)

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

A Local Hero

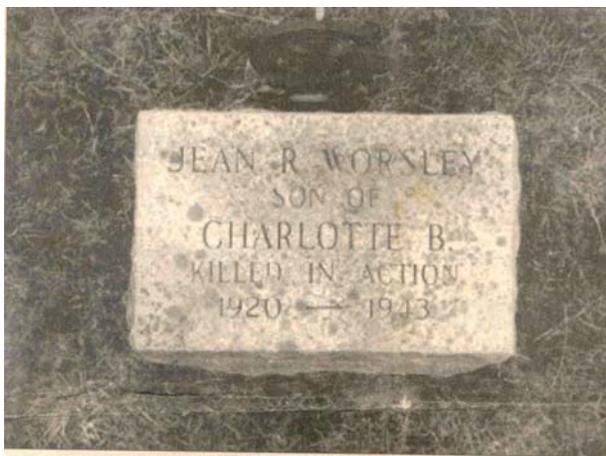
It must have seemed that Ray Worsley was born to be a hero. He was born in Providence in April of 1920. Shortly after that he and his family moved to the Hamilton section of North Kingstown and settled on Bissell Avenue. His childhood was, I am sure, quite typical for the time. He went to school at the Hamilton District Elementary School; played with his friends in the fields, woods, and beaches of Bissell Cove and nearby Rome Point. He was proud to be a member of the Wickford Troop of the Boy Scouts of America and studied diligently to learn what it takes to "Be Prepared".

His life changed dramatically one summer day in 1932 when twelve year old Ray Worsley heard a cry for help while he was playing along the shores of Bissell Cove. Any local child, and especially a Boy Scout, knows that the tides change dramatically in the area of the cove adjacent to Rome Point. The ocean comes in and out with a vengeance and people and automobiles are stranded and caught unaware even to this day. On that particular day, at least one woman was unaware of this well known fact and got caught up in the rapidly receding tides and was carried out into Narragansett Bay and was on her way to becoming another drowning victim. It was her cries that Ray heard and, wasting no time, he set out to save her. His Boy Scout training and strong swimming ability held him in good stead, as his rescue attempt was a complete success and the local paper hailed the boy as a hero. There was even talk of a Carnegie Medal for Heroism for young Ray, everyone thought he was a shoe-in for that, but sadly, the damsel-in-distress was unable to get beyond her embarrassment over the whole affair and refused to fill out the necessary paperwork testifying to Raymond's bravery.

Ray's life settled back into its normal routine after that. He went back to school at Hamilton and then moved on to the High School. In 1937, things changed again; the Great Depression was winding down and there was talk of war in Europe. Seventeen year old J. Raymond Worsley, received permission from his mother to enlist in the U.S. Army and he did in short order. After basic training, Ray was sent to the Panama Canal

Zone where he was part of an artillery unit. When it was time to re-up, Ray did and in September of 1942 he was off to England as an M.P. Soon after the "Day of Infamy" Ray was transferred to an infantry unit and sent off to fight Rommel, "The Desert Fox" in North Africa. It was there, in the arid deserts of Africa that North Kingstown's young hero made the ultimate sacrifice, for on April 26, 1943, ironically Ray's twenty-third birthday, he was killed in action.

The news hit the local folks back in North Kingstown hard. You see, not only was one of their own coming home to be buried, Ray Worsley was the first North Kingstown boy to die in World War II; this made the war seem even more real and ominous, for everyone knew he wouldn't be the last. Soon after Ray's mother Charlotte, received her telegram from the War Department, the people of North Kingstown, and Hamilton in particular, decided to do something special for the boy who not only risked his life to save a drowning woman but gave that life to help save the entire free world. It was the father of one of Ray's boyhood friends, Quentin Walsh, who came up with the idea. Let everyone know who Ray was and what he stood for by changing the name of the street that Ray and Quentin spent their childhood on from Bissell Avenue to Worsley Avenue and that's just what was done. So the next time you drive down Waldron Ave. towards Bissell's Cove, when you turn onto Worsley Avenue, think of Ray and all the thousands of Heroes like him, who did whatever it took to save a drowning world. Photo and story idea courtesy of Quentin Walsh.



J. Raymond Worsley's gravestone.



J. Raymond Worsley, killed in action in Africa.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

Governor William Gregory

One of North Kingstown's forgotten citizens is Governor William Gregory. Serving only a little more than one term, he is the only member of the select group of men who served as Chief Executive of the state to come from our fair town. William Gregory was born to a family of little means in Astoria, New York on August 3, 1849, one of 13 children. At the age of ten he went to work in a mill; from that day on his life would be forever connected with mills.

By the time the Civil War was underway the Gregory family was living in Westerly RI and William was moving up through the ranks of mill workers. By the age of sixteen he was a superintendent and a few years later a mill manager for the A. T. Stewart Co. At some point during that time William Gregory invented a method of blending wool and cotton to create a low cost worsted fabric. He took this idea to his in-laws, the Vaughan family of Wickford; the owners of, among other mills, the predecessor to Hamilton Web. With their help he purchased the Chapin Bobbin Company at the corner of what is now Brown Street and Boston Neck Road and turned it into a mill manufacturing his unique cotton worsted fabric. By 1887 he was employing seventy-five mill hands, a large amount for that time.

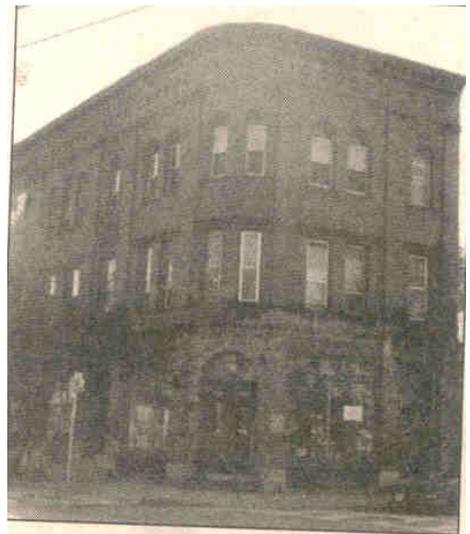
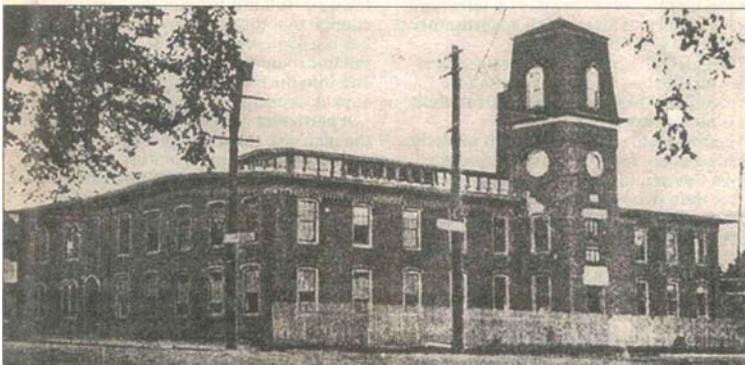
In 1883 William and Harriet Gregory and their son and daughter moved into their new two-and-a-half story Queen Anne style home at 38 Brown Street just down the street from his mill. Later, in 1891, he had the building which bears his name constructed at the other side of Wickford on the corner of Brown and Main Streets. The Gregory building served as Wickford's Post Office from 1893 to 1943 and the first high school classes met on its upper floors. It was at that time, and still is, Wickford's grandest commercial building. Gregory was also instrumental in the construction of the town hall in Wickford. In 1895 the Gregory Family moved out of Wickford proper and settled in

"The Oaklands" on what is now Oakland Avenue. They purchased the house from James Eldred, a local jewelry manufacturer; at the time the house had three stories, the third floor was removed in 1916 following a fire.

Soon after his move to "The Oaklands" then State Senator Gregory was elected Lt. Governor, a position he held for two terms. Then in 1900, with a plurality of votes William Gregory became the forty-second Governor of the state of Rhode Island. During his term the RI State House was completed and he became the first Chief Executive to preside therein. He was re-elected in a landslide to another term in 1901, which was sadly cut short by his death from a kidney ailment on December 16, 1901. He was buried in grand fashion in Elmgrove Cemetery down the road in the village of Allenton. Although William Gregory will rightly be remembered for being Governor of Rhode Island it is also important to note that he left an architectural legacy here in North Kingstown. He changed the face of Wickford village as much as any man.



The Gregory Mill building today (above) and as the Gregory Worsted Mills, in this early 20th century post-card view (below).



The Gregory Building.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

Major Samuel Phillips

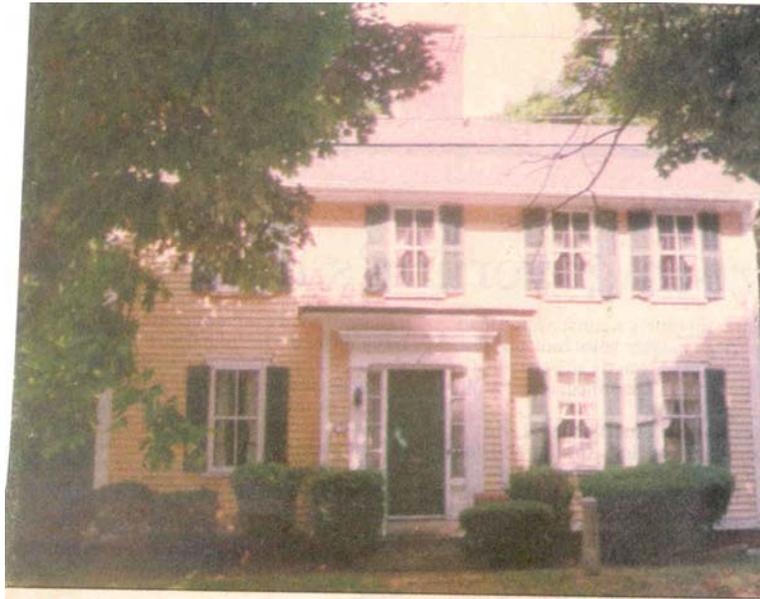
In honor of the impending Fourth of July holiday, this week's column concerns a man who is perhaps North Kingstown's most celebrated Revolutionary War hero, Major Samuel Phillips.

Samuel Phillips, who was the great grandson of the first Phillips to settle in the area, was commissioned as a Captain of a company in the First Rhode Island Regiment in 1776, which was part of the Continental Army of the fledgling United States of America. He was later transferred to Colonel Stanton's regiment of the Rhode Island infantry in which he also served as a Captain of a company. On the night of July 9, 1777, the regiment's second in command, Colonel Barton, led a volunteer expedition of forty men in five whaleboats to row across the bay in the dead of night, and surprise and capture General Prescott, the commander of the British forces operating in the area at the time. One of the five boats was commanded by North Kingstown's own - Captain Samuel Phillips. The surprise raid was a complete success. Prescott, easily the most despised man in Rhode Island for his penchant for allowing his troops to raid, despoil, and demoralize its citizens, was captured without incident. It is said that his troops were, at the time of his capture, sleeping-off a night of revelry after seizing a cargo of wine and spirits, pirate-like, at the mouth of Narragansett Bay. Prescott was rowed over to Warwick, landed, and taken overland to Providence. He was eventually exchanged for an American General, General Lee, who had been captured earlier by the British. The abduction of Prescott was a great moral victory for the Americans and a blow to the vaunted British war effort, and Captain Phillips had an important part in it.

Phillips went on to finish his second year in the army, and then, surprisingly enough, served four more years as a Lieutenant in the American Navy, serving on the warships "Mifflin", "Tartar", and "Assurance". He completed his service in 1783.

Samuel Phillips lived both in the Phillips Castle on present day Tower Hill Road and at a home at 34 Pleasant Street, which he had built in 1773. The house was grand for its time and still is.

Major Samuel Phillips died in 1808 and is buried in his family burial ground on the Phillips farm. The cemetery is located in the Haverhill development off of Tower Hill Road.



The Samuel Phillips Home at 34 Pleasant St. (above) and Phillips' grave stone (right).



The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

In Honor of Mothers' Day

In honor of the impending Mother's Day holiday, this week's column concerns mothers who have made a significant impact on local history.

If you were to pick a woman as the "matriarch" of North Kingstown, that honor would have to belong to Abigail Phenix. Abigail was born in the middle 1600's in Springfield Ma. to the family of Thomas Sewall. She married Alexander Phenix and they moved to the Quidnesset section of North Kingstown soon after. Unfortunately for Abigail, (but typical for the times.) Alexander left her a widow sometime around 1687. Eventually she sold her husband's holdings in Quidnesset and moved in with her daughter and son-in-law Beriah Brown (More about Beriah in a future column) who was one of the "founding fathers" of the town. In 1709 she took the proceeds from the sale of her Quidnesset holdings and purchased 163 acres of land which extended from Wickford Junction all the way down Ten Rod Road to the land of Samuel Phillips, the land extended south to the Annaquatucket River. Abigail lived there with her grandson until her death in 1718. She is buried in an unmarked grave in the Phenix-Brown-Hendrick burial ground, which is now located in the lower parking lot of "The Meadows" office complex. Abigail was the first major female land owner in North Kingstown, beating the more famous Updike sisters by almost thirty years. This alone is enough to make her the historical matriarch of N.K.

One of the great things about being a writer of a column like this is that you, my readers, have to occasionally indulge me the privilege of rambling on about my ancestors. This brings me to our next Mother's Day honoree Margaret Cranston. Margaret was born in 1881 in North Adams, Massachusetts to the family of Daniel Blanchard. The Blanchard's were a very religious family and included many ordained ministers and missionaries. In 1899, at the age of eighteen she married George Cyrus Cranston, the son of local politician, shopkeeper, mortician, and war hero George T. Cranston. She probably thought that her future was bright but, fate played its hand and in 1914 she

became a widow with four children and a thriving family business with no one to run it; her eldest son being only nine years old at the time. A lesser person might have just given up faced with these odds, but she had a family and her children's future to protect. So Margaret, six years before she would even get the right to vote and many decades before the advent of the women's liberation movement, entered the male dominated world of business and was extraordinarily successful. But, in her eyes, she did nothing out of the ordinary. She was only doing what any mother would do; taking care of her children. When she was reunited with her husband in 1955 she went knowing she had done her job, her family she was safe and their business successful. That business, "The Cranstons of Wickford" the oldest operating family business in North Kingstown, is a testimony to a mother's devotion.



Margaret (Blanchard) Cranston

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

The Who, What, and Where For April

Greetings, Readers! This week's installment of local history comes in the form of a "who", "what", and a "where".

WHO

In my opinion, the most intriguing name in all of Elmgrove Cemetery belongs to Cinderella Hoxsie. Cinderella was born on October 23, 1843 and lived here in the area until her death on March 31, 1925. She was the wife of Clark Hoxsie and before her marriage was known as Cinderella Knight. The story goes that Clark, like many of his relatives, worked on the railroad and met Cinderella somewhere south of here. Unfortunately, this storybook tale



Cinderella Hoxie's tombstone in Elmgrove Cemetery.

of a young man who goes off to make his fortune on the railroads and comes home with a real-life Cinderella includes a cruel twist of fate. The same railroad which brought home a wife and daughter-in-law for the Hoxsie family also took a son, when Crawford Hoxsie was killed in a freak railroad accident. According to his headstone, in the same Elmgrove family plot as Cinderella's and Clark's, Crawford hit a bridge while hanging on to the train.

WHAT

Our "what" concerns the enterprises of the brothers Earnshaw and their fine drugstores. These were old-fashioned shops with soda fountains and roasted



Earnshaw's Drug Store on Main Street in East Greenwich (above) and on Brown Street in Wickford.



peanuts, as well as every item a well-stocked pharmacy ought to have. Every child within walking distance was very familiar with the contents of the comic book rack as well as the menu at the soda fountain. (I even conned my mother out of a cherry Coke and a Lime Rickey in both stores during the course of a single day.) Sadly, the East Greenwich store eventually closed, but they both live on in memory and on these two promotional postcards. Look closely at the Wickford card and you can see the penny scale that still sits in the corner of Earnshaw's today.

WHERE

Our "where" today is really the solution to a mystery. You may have noticed as you drive to Wal-Mart or McKay's Furniture that this area, historically known as Lafayette, Scrabbletown, and Swamptown, is literally pockmarked with the remains of many abandoned sandpits and gravel banks. I had always wondered, even as a boy, where did all that sand and gravel go to? Well, according to George Gardiner's wonderful book on Lafayette it went to fill in what is now Quonset/Davisville. It seems that the U.S. government had a big hole to fill and a sizeable sum of money to spend and the enterprising inhabitants of the aforementioned areas had an awful lot of fill to sell. As a consequence we all ended up with a big empty place to put a Wal-Mart. Just something to contemplate as we debate spending a lot of money to fill up another big hole in the same location.

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.

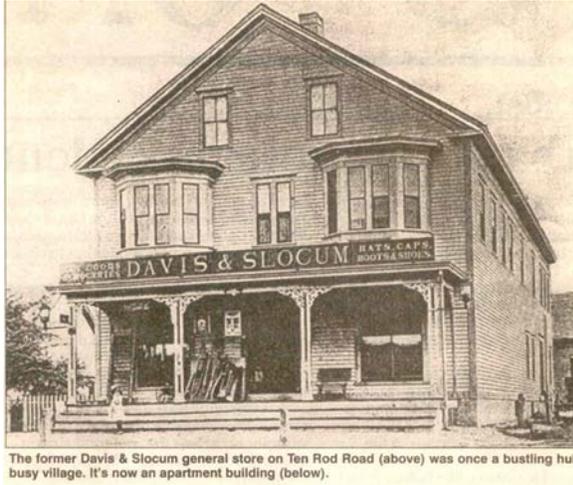
ton packet sloop the "Resolution" was constructed. The "Resolution" ran between Wickford and Newport for fifty-five years with Captain Holloway at the helm for much of that time.

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.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

The Who, What, and Where for June

This week's column is our monthly installment of the who, what, and where of local history; sort of a catch-all for interesting tidbits of local lore not large enough to warrant a full write-up. This time we learn of an empire-building home wrecker, a monument to the men who fought in the great war, and

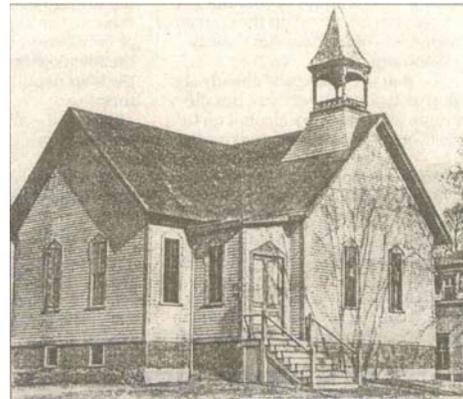
Our featured empire-building "who" is none other than Henry Ford. It seems that other than mass-producing reasonably priced automobiles his real love was preserving America's historic buildings. As a matter of fact in the early 1920's he attempted to set up a re-creation of a New England village on the Boston Post Road between Marlboro and Sudbury Massachusetts. Sort of an early Sturbridge Village as it were. So, in 1924 he purchased two ancient North Kingstown homes, loaded them on to trucks, and set off on his way to their new location in our neighboring state. Unfortunately, they were destroyed in transit. His museum village never really got off the ground either; although some of the buildings he successfully moved are there to this day.

Our "what" for this month is the Grand Army of the Republic monument in Elmgrove Cemetery. It was constructed in Westerly, RI in 1898, of light grey Westerly granite and was dedicated in a grand ceremony on Memorial Day of that same year. It stands over 25 feet tall and is composed of a base and 26 separate blocks of granite each engraved with the name of one of G.A.R. posts in the state. The highly polished black granite globe at the summit of the monument is said to weigh almost half a ton. The local G.A.R. is also responsible for the wonderful Civil War statue in front of the town hall. The final meeting of the G.A.R. occurred in August 1949 in



Indiana. The seventeen remaining members of an organization which once numbered nearly one half million gathered one last time more than eighty years after the war had ended.

Our "where" for the month is the former Methodist Church building at 31 West Main Street in Wickford. It was built in 1885 by the Sherman Brothers of Wickford and, as you can see by the postcard view, possessed at that time a small bell turret and steeple. For a time this building was the home of the North Kingstown Ambulance Association and then a museum housing firefighting memorabilia including the "Fearless and Faithful Washington #1", an antique fire engine which many times was a winner in her class at the New England Firemen's Muster. Its former home, the old Methodist Church, has now been converted into small shops.



Methodist Church building today (above) and circa 1900 (below).

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

The Who, What, and Where for July

This week's column is our monthly installment of the who, what, and where of local history; sort of a catch-all for interesting tidbits of local lore not large enough to warrant a full write-up. This time we learn of a local doctor who forgot that horses, although not the intellectual giants of the animal kingdom, are smarter than those newfangled automobiles, a 165 year old mill with a storied history, and a North Kingstown to Scarsdale, NY connection.

Our "who" of the month is Dr. Harold Metcalf, a beloved local physician, who practiced in and around Wickford from the late 1800's through the early 1900's. After selling Governor William Gregory's former home on Brown Street, he followed many of the town's elite south over the predecessor to the Hussey Bridge to build a stately home on Boston Neck Rd. The house still stands today on the southern corner of Boston Neck Road and Beach Street. Shortly after moving into his new home, he purchased one of the town's first automobiles; presumably to make his rounds of house calls easier. All went well until he returned home and drove through the back wall of his barn. When asked about the problem, tradition has it that he replied that "The horses always knew when to stop."

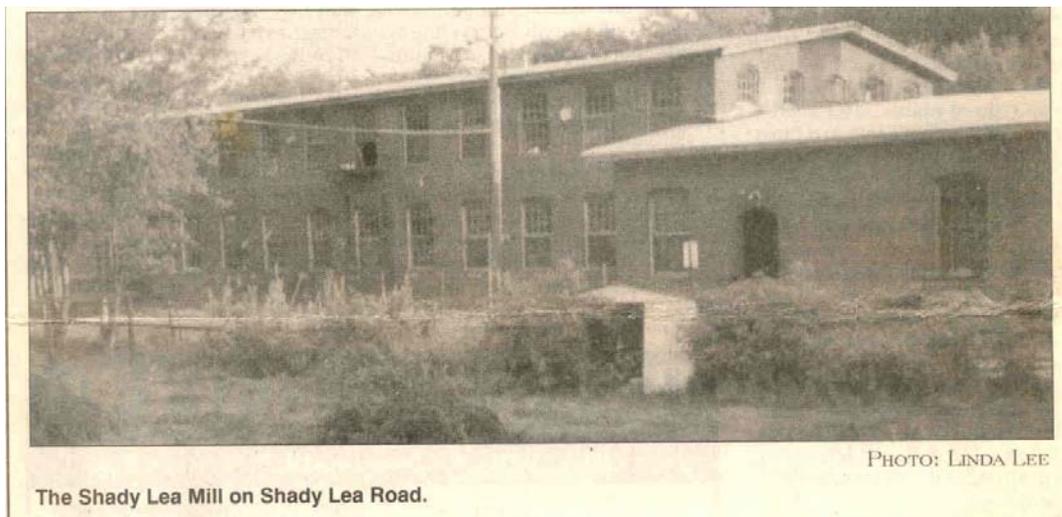


PHOTO: DAVID GOLDMAN
This house on the corner of Boston Neck Road and Beach Street once belonged to Dr. Harold Metcalf, a beloved local physician.

Photos provided by the [North East Independent](#)

Our "what" for the month is the Shady Lea Mill on Shady Lea Road. The mill was originally built by Esbon Sanford in the late 1820's. Various cotton and woolen fabrics were made there up until the time of the Civil

War when the then owner, Walter Chapin, had the mill going full tilt making blankets for the Union Army. After the war, Chapin sold the mill to Robert Rodman; who used it to manufacture fabric for the latest fad in men's work wear; jeans. The mill stayed in the Rodman empire until the early 1950's. It has since been used for the manufacture of metal staples and now houses a variety of businesses. It still stands as a testimony to the durability of these marvelous old mill buildings.



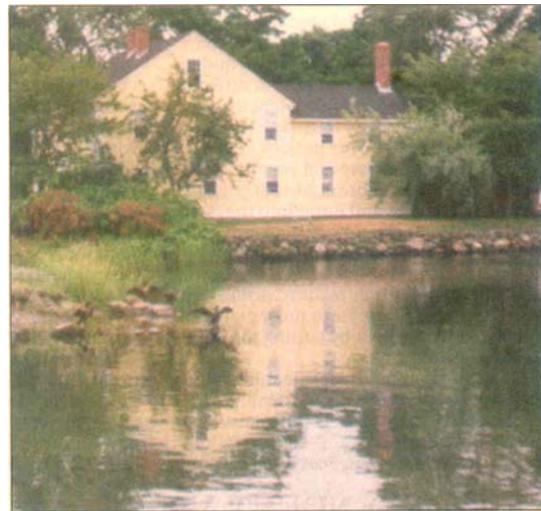
Finally, our "where" for July is Scarsdale, NY, which is where the 250 year old marbled, rose cedar-grained interior wall panels from the famed "Phillips Castle" (see the April 22nd column for more information on the Phillips Castle) now reside. It seems in the late 1940's a gentleman named Ralph Carpenter purchased all of the beautiful interior paneling from three rooms, which were added to the house in the middle 1700's by the Phillips family, and then had them installed in his colonial reproduction home being built in Scarsdale. The walls were of such distinctive quality that they were featured in an article in "Antiques" magazine which ran in June of 1952. The rooms are presumably still there to this day; a little bit of historic Wickford transplanted to New York.

The Who, What, and Where for August

This week's column is our monthly installment of the who, what, and where of local history; sort of a catch-all for interesting tidbits of local lore not large enough to warrant a full write-up. Today we learn about a legendary hostess, a forgotten bridge, and a house with a disputed history.

Our "Who" for the month is none other than the famed hostess Mother Prentice. Ellen D. Prentice was born on February 29, 1856 to the family of Anton Lucas of Provincetown Mass, being a leap-year baby was just the first event of a remarkable life. She married quite young to George Prentice and in 1870 the Prentice's moved into the Wickford House on Main Street. In 1882 "Dad" and "Mother" Prentice opened up a small country hotel and restaurant which eventually became renowned throughout the country. Her cooking skills were such that members of the Vanderbilt and Astor families tried to hire her to no avail. The Prentices retired in 1921. "Mother" Prentice died on December 1, 1930.

Our "What" for the month is the long forgotten Elamsville bridge. The bridge, which predates the Brown Street bridge by four years, was built in 1808 and connected Elam Street (then known as Champlin Street) with West Main Street (then known as the Grand Highway). The hurricane of 1815 was probably responsible for the bridge's ultimate demise. For years the remnants of this bridge was known as "The Broken Bridge".



The site of the former "Champlin Street Bridge."

Our "Where" for this month is 15 West Main Street. This is the location of, depending on what you believe, the Stephen Cooper or the Samuel Brenton House. You see, in 1728 Stephen Cooper built a house on this lot; the problem is that the vast majority of historical architects do not feel that the present house is indeed that house. Most attribute a date of 1779 to the building, making this still one of Wickford's oldest homes, but if the 1728 date could ever be conclusively proven it would move ahead of "Old Yellow" and become the granddaddy of them all.



15 West Main St.

The Who, What, and Where for September

This week's column is our monthly installment of the who, what, and where of local history; sort of a catch-all for interesting tidbits of local lore not large enough to warrant a full write-up. Today we learn about the founding father of the First Baptist movement in North Kingstown, another one-room schoolhouse, and a local village that exists only in the memories of a few.

Our "Who" for the month is "Elder" William Northup, the founder of the North Kingstown Baptist Church (formerly known as the Allenton Baptist Church). In turn, the Wickford and Quidnessett Baptist Churches are offshoots of Elder Northup's Allenton Church; therefore he is truly the father of the First Baptist movement here in North Kingstown. William Northup was born July 23, 1760. As a young man he learned of the Baptist faith from a slave of his grandfather's known as Benjamin Bump. After serving in the Revolutionary War and having a moment of heavenly conversion while atop the yard-arm of a ship at sea, William heeded the call and became a preacher of the Gospel. In 1782 William and a group of followers constituted the First Baptist Church at Allenton and the rest is, as they say, history. Elder William died in June of 1839 and is buried, within sight of his beloved church, in Elmgrove Cemetery. This swamp-yankee finds it interesting that, without the love, devotion, and schooling imparted by a kindly black slave, the Baptist faith in North Kingstown would have had a different history. Anyone interested in more information about the Allenton Baptist church, including a list of its founders can contact me at the paper.

Our "What" for this month is the second Belleville schoolhouse built in 1888. It is appropriate that we take a look at this old one-room school, not only because it is the beginning of a new school year, but also

because it had a second life as the North Kingstown town garage. As N.K. takes a hard look at replacing it, it is befitting that we remind the powers-that-be of this building's unique history.



Our "Where" for September is a mill village that nearly rivals my beloved Swamptown for being a forgotten community. Sand Hill Village, or what little remains of it, is located along Chadsey Road (once a portion of Post Road before it was straightened) adjacent to Sand Hill Pond. Manufacturing existed at this site from 1815 until the early part of the twentieth century. A wool carding plant, as well as a sash and blind factory operated there in the early 1800's. Later the Reynolds family of Davisville fame operated a fabric and rug mill at the same site. By the late 1800's two woolen mills were running full tilt. As is so often the case, major fires in the mill buildings brought about the end of the fabric industry and ultimately the village itself. It was said that the social life of Sand Hill was so attractive that the young people of Wickford would often walk there for a night of entertainment. Little remains of the village except a half dozen homes, the most significant being the Albert Reynolds house on Chadsey Road, and the remnants of the dam which formed the pond that powered the old mills. Also of interest is the magnificent stone bridge over the spillway at the east end of the pond, upon which the youth of the area walked on their way to a night of revelry so long ago.



The Who, What, and Where for October

This week's column is our monthly installment of the who, what, and where of local history; sort of a catch-all for interesting tidbits of local lore not large enough to warrant a full write-up. Today we learn about a mystery man who may have had a hand in the beheading of King Charles I, a what's-it in the village of Davisville, and a little background information on the buildings in Wickford which house the village's two remaining banks, which will soon become involved in a great merger and divestiture.

Our "Who" for the month has, for as many years as can be remembered, been known as "The Regicide", a little used word which means "one involved in the killing of a king. His name was Theophilus Whaley and he came to North Kingstown around 1680. He settled on the east bank of the Narrow River, just south of the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace - a place which has since been known as "The Regicide's Hideout". It became obvious to the local populace that Whaley was a man of considerable wealth; a man who often entertained other wealthy colonists from places as far away as Boston. His visitors came and went quietly and stealthily as if they had something to hide. Eventually his name was connected, through local gossip, to Cromwell's revolution in England; it was said he was one of the judges who had sentenced Charles to death. Whaley, himself, was silent on the subject; he neither confirmed nor denied it. He took his secret to the grave, in 1720, when he died at the amazing age of 103. He left many descendants but no answers.

Our "What" for October can best be described as a chimney or smokestack and can be found in a yard on the corner of Center Street and Old Baptist Road. According to local-born George Loxton, now living in Wisconsin, and acknowledged by all as the authority on Davisville lore, this is all that remains of entrepreneur Lorenzo Vaughn's farm store and grain mill that existed on this

site around the turn of the century. The chimney was a part of the engine which powered the mill stones.

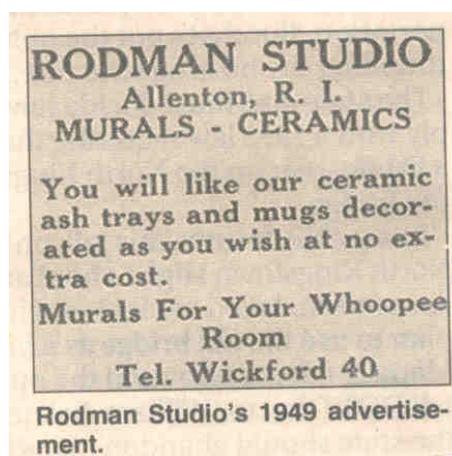
Our "Where" is actually two places this month, 30 Phillips Street and 27 Brown Street, the homes of, Fleet Bank and (for now) Bank Boston. The Fleet Bank building began its life in 1916 as the home of Bell Telephone's local office. It housed the operators and equipment necessary to run the telephone system in the area until 1959 when more modern equipment and more local phones necessitated a move up the street to 266 Phillips St. Soon after that, Fleet's predecessor, Industrial National Bank, took up residency and has remained ever since. The Wickford Savings Bank opened its doors at 27 Brown Street in June of 1855. It served the residents of Wickford and surrounding villages for nearly 110 years, at which point it was absorbed by the Rhode Island Hospital Trust National Bank which in turn became part of Bank Boston and now is poised to become the local branch of Sovereign Bank.

The Who, What, and Where for November

This week's column is our monthly installment of the who, what, and where of local history; sort of a catch-all for interesting tidbits of local lore not large enough to warrant a full write-up. Today we learn about a famous man who keeps popping up in local history, a forgotten local arts and crafts establishment with a humorous twist, and a Wickford home which once housed, among other things, one of the village's first banks.

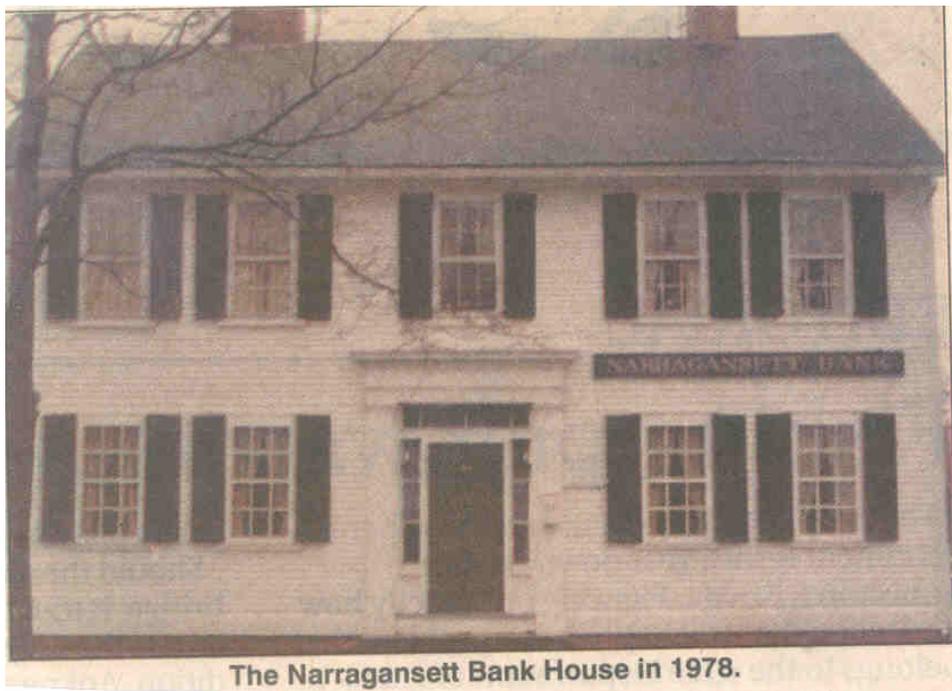
Our "Who" for the month has been featured in this column once before, but due to his voracious appetite for colonial structures he keeps turning up in my research. In the early 1930's two mysterious strangers turned up at the door of Canon Piper, the then rector of St. Paul's Wickford. It turned out that they were representatives of Henry Ford, who was interested in buying the Old Narragansett Church, disassembling it, and transporting it back to Michigan; where he intended to set it up in a colonial village recreation he had envisioned. Thankfully, he turned them down.

Our "What" for the month is the art and ceramic studio in Allenton known as "The Rodman Studio". As you can see by their advertisement from a 1949 paper, not only did they sell ceramic creations, they also painted murals on the walls of "Whoopee Rooms" all over town. The Walter Rodman home in nearby Lafayette was one of the only private homes in the region which had a commercial ceramic kiln in its basement.



Our "Where" for November is the "Olde Narragansett Bank House" on Main Street in Wickford. In 1768 Samuel Bissell built his home on this property

on the corner of Main and Fountain Streets. A portion of his original home is incorporated into the house that you see today. A subsequent owner, Deborah Whitford, ran a bakery there. In 1805, Benjamin Fowler, the president of the Narragansett Bank, built a combination banking house and private home on the lot using the 1768 house as the ell of his new home/bank. In 1837 Peleg Weeden purchased the living quarters section of the building for his daughter, Hannah. After the bank relocated the Weeden's took over the entire building. In 1853, Nicholas Spink, purchased the home and remodelled into its present configuration. This was also the home of local historian Col. Hunter C. White.



The "Who", "What", and "Where" for January

This week's column is the January 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 literary efforts of a Scrabbletown resident, and revisit, briefly, a mill and a mode of transportation from long ago.

Our "Who" for this month is Jamie Carter, a former "Scrabbletown" who has not forgotten her roots. Ms. Carter has recently written and published a wonderful new pictorial history of our fair town called, simply enough, "North Kingstown". It is organized, not unlike North Kingstown itself, into sections centered around villages; and pictorially documents what went on in them. Some of the photographs would not have seen the light of day without Ms. Carter's effort to search them out and organize them in such a delightful manner. The book's layout is thoroughly enjoyable and the text is accurate and (Bravo, Jamie!) well indexed. The bibliography, alone, is worth the purchase price. "North Kingstown" by Jamie Carter gets the Swamptown seal of approval and can be found locally in stores such as Ryan's Market and Earnshaw's Drug to name just a few.

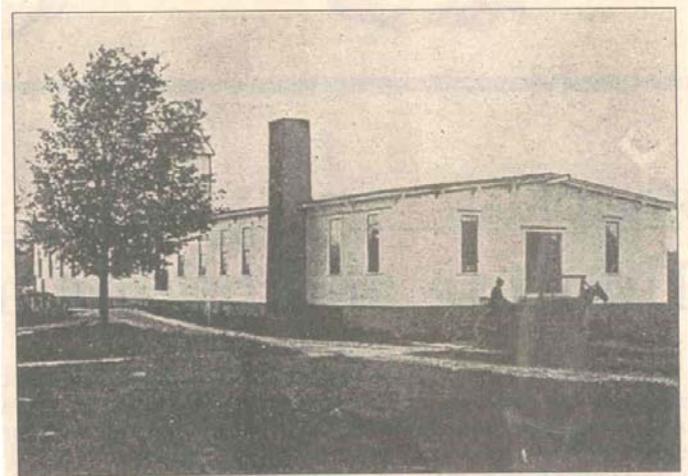
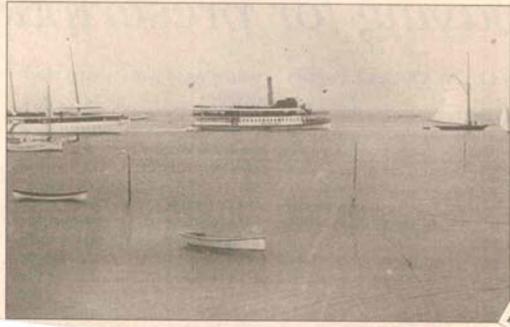
Our "What" this week is again the steamships which plied the waters of Wickford Harbor and the adjacent Narragansett Bay. The two photos shown here, of our old friend "The General" and the here-to-fore unseen "Lewiston" are courtesy of Howard Ericson, who manned the back counter of Earnshaw's Drug for many years. If I had a dime for every time Mr. Ericson assisted a worried mother with a sick child over these many years I'd be able to retire and write about RI history full time. Thank you, Mr. Ericson!

Our "What" for January is the Annaquatucket Mill formerly located off of Featherbed Lane. This rare photo of the mill, which was the center of life for the mill village of Annaquatucket, was taken from the vicinity of the "Stephen Northup

House". The outline of the elevated section of Featherbed Lane can just be made out in the background.



Above is the steamer *Lewiston*. Below, the steamer *General* exits Wickford Harbor.



Hamilton Web Co.'s Annaquatucket Mill.

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.

Historic Gardens

With a tip of the hat to spring this week's column concerns some historically significant gardens in our fair town.

The only appropriate starting point for a discussion of this nature is the vast estate of Henry Collins and subsequently, George Rome. This country villa of 700 acres extended from the site of the present-day Hamilton Elementary School to the location of the Jamestown Bridge. Collins, a wealthy Newport merchant, purchased the land and built his luxurious home sometime in the middle 1700's. He lost it in a foreclosure to Rome in 1766. Little is known about the main house, which was approached by an avenue lined with buttonwood trees and surrounded by beautiful gardens filled with rare native and imported plants; we can only look at the country villa of their neighbor and contemporary Daniel Coggeshall, another wealthy Newporter, who built what we now know as Casey Farm at around the same time, for a glimpse of what it might have been like. In 1774, Rome, a notorious Tory sympathizer, high-tailed it out of North Kingstown and landed on a British man-of-war in Newport Harbor, he subsequently returned to England and exists now as the forgotten man for whom Rome Point is named. ...Something to think about the next time you're down there staring at seals.

The next stop on our garden tour occurs some 100 years later at a spot off of Ten Rod Road known as Liberty Hill. Liberty Hill was the public park and gardens constructed in 1864 by Robert Rodman behind his magnificent home. (Now known as McKay's Front Porch) He constructed and maintained the park for the local population of Lafayette, most of which worked for him at the mill and its associated businesses. Gardens were laid out at the foot of the hill, the trees were thinned out and brush removed along its sides, and a beautiful grove with benches and picnicking areas was provided at the top. The vestiges of Liberty Hill can still be seen behind the old mansion.

Last and certainly not least is my favorite, Ramblewood, designed and developed, starting in 1927, by the famed English-born local horticulturist Edgar L. Nock. Over the course of three decades Mr. Nock turned his twenty acre parcel of land into one of the most beautiful and extensive private gardens ever seen. He amassed a collection that included hundreds of varieties of azaleas and rhododendrons as well as literally thousands of Japanese lilies. The garden also contained countless varieties of Wisteria, lilacs, Iris, Japanese flowering cherries, and Oriental cut-leaf Maples. He watered this imposing garden with an even more imposing underground irrigation system consisting of miles of piping and several electric turbines. The centerpiece of the Nock estate was, surprisingly enough, his tool shed; known as the Depression Castle, it was built from the thousands of stones dug up while the gardens were being planted. Sadly, as too often is the case, this one-of-a-kind Eden was broken up into house lots in the 1950's. A portion of these majestic gardens, as well as the Depression Castle, still remain for us to enjoy to this day.



This swamp-yankee's vote for best present day garden goes to the one on the corner of Main and Fowler in Wickford. (Even this empty lot has a history. It was the site of the Benjamin Fowler house built in 1769 and demolished around 1950) It's a natural free-form type of garden and it offers up something different every time I see it. I'm sure that Edgar, Robert, and even old Tory George would approve.

General Stores

This week's column concerns another fixture in the small villages which, at one time, made up North Kingstown. The "General Store", like the one-room schoolhouse, was a focal point of village life. Everything a person could possibly need, from a sack of flour to a casket, could be purchased there. It was where a villager would get his mail and catch up on local news and gossip. It was more than just a store; it was a community center, for these villages of old were communities in the purest sense of the word. So let's take a look at some of the surviving general store buildings in our fair town.

This building on The Ten Rod Road once housed the company store for the Rodman Mill. It was run by Ambrose Taylor the brother-in-law of mill founder Robert Rodman. It was in operation from around 1865 until 1882, when Taylor relocated to a larger building across the street. (featured in the May 27th edition) The Taylor family lived upstairs on the second floor. Beginning in 1873 this store was also the Lafayette Post Office.



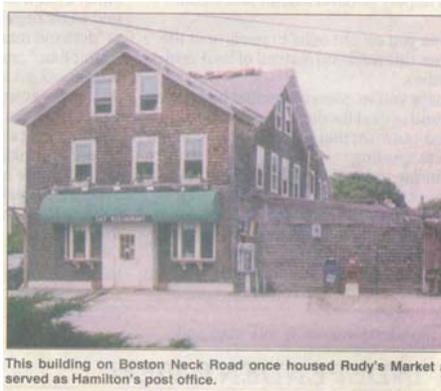
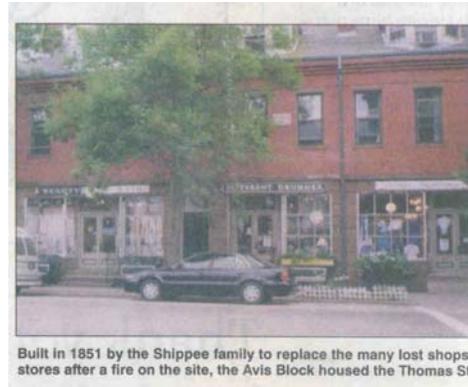
PHOTOS: LINDA
This building on Ten Rod Road once housed the company store for Rodman Mill.

This building on Main Street in Wickford was the home of the Thomas store in the early 1800's. The store was located in the lower level of the western half of the building, the Thomas family lived above the store. At some time in the middle 1800's the store was relocated up the street to a building located where the Avis Block stands today. This building was destroyed in the great New Year's Eve fire of 1850.



This building, on Main Street in Wickford, was the home of the Thor Store in the early 1800s.

The Avis Block rose Phoenix-like from the ashes of the 1850 fire. Built in 1851 by the Shippee family to replace the many lost shops and stores, it housed the Thomas Store, which in 1898 became Peckham's Dry Goods until it eventually closed in the early 1960's.



This building on Boston Neck Road is still known to most locals as "Rudy's Market". There has been a store on this site to serve the villagers of Hamilton since 1862. This building dates from approximately 1877. This store also served as the Hamilton Post Office.

The Allenton and Belleville villagers had a number of choices for general stores and the Lafreniere Store was one of them. It operated from around the turn of the century until fairly recently.



Another store in the Allenton-Belleville area was The Lafreniere General Store also located on Tower Hill Road. It operated from around the turn of the century until fairly recently.

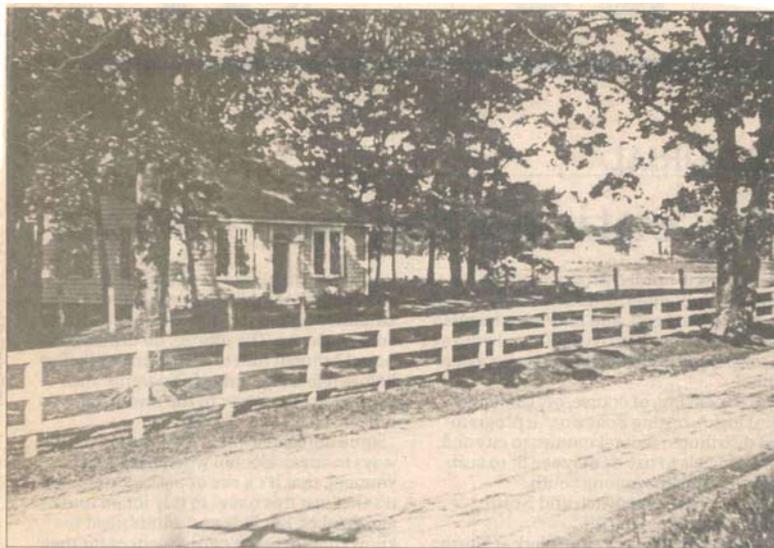
North Kingstown's Other Libraries

Mention the word "library" to a North Kingstown resident and they will, more than likely, automatically think of the big wonderful library on the hill in Wickford. Rightly so, I might add, because it is one of the finest libraries in the state. But some of us perceptive locals are aware of two other smaller but equally valuable repositories of knowledge which are located, conveniently enough, on either end of town: The Willett Free Library on Ferry Road in Saunderstown and The Davisville Free Library on Davisville Road in (naturally) Davisville. These two libraries are not only beautiful to behold, staffed by wonderfully patient and helpful (these talents are a prerequisite for entrance into the field of Library Science) people, and up-to-date technologically, but are chock-full of great books. They are peaceful places; little oases in our busy world. They definitely rate a Swamp Yankee seal of approval.

The Willett Free Library, the older of the two, had its beginnings in November of 1885 when Stillman Saunders formed "The Circle for Mutual Improvement", an organization of forty Saunderstown residents who met periodically for "the improvement of literary and musical tastes and such light industries". At their December 21st meeting in the same year it was voted to attempt to raise money to establish a free library. This was accomplished by giving suppers and putting on shows. In May of 1886 their financial goals were met and the library opened in the home of Ruth Arnold, who also served as its first librarian. In 1902, land was donated by Laura and Mary Carpenter for the construction of a permanent library building. Funds were raised and the library opened on July 2, 1904. It has remained a viable and vital part of the local community for these last 114 years. In an amazing footnote, from its inception in 1886 until 1976 there were only two librarians, Ruth Arnold (1886-1925) and Susan Carpenter (1925-1976).

The Davisville Free Library began in March of 1918 when a group of local women

decided to form an association organized "for the purpose of promoting the moral, intellectual, and social improvement of the inhabitants of Davisville and the vicinity". The driving force behind its inception was a local school teacher named Isabelle Gillespie. The library's collection was initially housed on the bottom floor of Pine Grove Hall on Grove Avenue. Its first books were two farm manuals purchased for \$2.18. In June of 1921 the Dyer family donated land to the Library Association for the construction of its permanent home. The \$4000 needed for construction was raised by holding food sales, suppers, and putting on shows, as well as large donations from Hettie, Mary, and Jeffrey Davis in memory of James



Above, the Davisville Free Library in the 1920s – note the "busy" Davisville Road in the foreground. Below, a postcard view of the Willett Free Library around the time of its opening.



Davis. The Library opened at a dedication in 1924 when it was officially presented to the village residents by the Davis and Dyer families. This library, too, has been an integral part of its local community for more than 80 years. As was the case in Saunderstown this library has also had only two librarians for the better part of its existence, Lottie Straight (1919-1950) and Marion Barber (1951-1997).

These two libraries require the support of local people to survive.

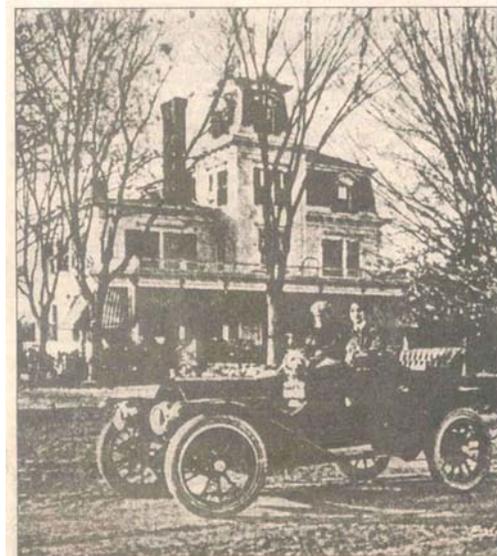
The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

The Readers Respond

This week's column is written by you, the readers; as some recent columns have elicited some interesting responses which just cry out to be shared with all. Many thanks go out to all who take the time to drop me a line or an E-mail. A number of column ideas have been a direct result of suggestions sent in by my knowledgeable and curious readers. At the risk of sounding cliché - "Keep those cards and letters (and E-mails) coming!"

The August 17th story about the Baker Estate on Prospect Street brought back a rush of memories to long time North Kingstown resident William Fuesz. Mr. Fuesz purchased the "Big House" in 1949 from the estate of a man named Mr. Hurley. This would seem perfectly normal except for the fact that Mr. Hurley had hanged himself in the house. So this adds another tragic death to the long list of losses associated with "Cedar Spring Farm".

Another loyal reader brought to my attention the wonderful picture of the Baker house which you see here. The occupants of that wonderful car in front of the house are the newly wed Hinkley's; Anita Hinkley eventually wrote the book "Wickford Memories" about her life on "Cedar Spring Farm". Thanks again Karen, for the great tip as well as all of your help.



The "Big House" on Cedar Spring Farm on the Baker Estate is seen in the early 1900s.

The September 14th article on the "Westgate Watson" house at the end of Elam Street caused its present owner to contact me and pass on some interesting information about Wickford's most paintable landmark. It seems around the

middle of the 1800's the house was used as the town poor house and insane asylum. It was known in those pre-politically and socially correct times as "The Batty House". Quite a moniker if you ask this particular swamp yankee. Just as a point of information the town also, at one time or another, had a "town farm", as those sorts of places were called at the time, out at Indian Corner and at a later date on Quonset Point; but that's another story for another time

Finally, North Kingstown's premiere genealogist, Doris Moon, sent me this wonderful photograph of the Allenton School's (now the Montessori School) class photo of approximately 1900. I have been able to confirm that the teacher, at the top center, is Charles A. Crombe, a man who spent his life educating the young people of Allenton. The mischievous looking young lad with his arms folded in the front row has been identified as Arthur Cole, and the young man in the third row, third from the wall is known to be John Campbell; but the identity of the rest of these children is a mystery, so lend me a hand loyal readers and help me identify the rest of these exceptional students.



Allenton School class photo of approximately 1900 includes teacher Charles A. Crombe at top center. Can anyone out there identify any of the students?

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston
The History of Boston Post Road

As a younger man, I had always wondered why the Old Narragansett Church had been located, for nearly one hundred years, way out in the proverbial boondocks on Shermantown Road. This nagging question led me into an exploration of the history of Route 1 as it winds its way through our fair town. The present day highway consists of what we now call Post Road and Tower Hill Road, but it wasn't always that way. But before we get into the details of our specific stretch of America's first highway let's take a look into the story of the Boston Post Road on the whole.

The name, Post Road, tells you the story if you just stop and think about it for a while. The Post in Post Road is the same as the Post in Post Office; it refers to the mail, and the Post Road was as much an integral part of the fledgling postal service as the post offices were. The concept of Post roads has been largely attributed to the father of America's postal system - Benjamin Franklin. Franklin felt that the only way that a system of mail could be begun in such a vast frontier area as the thirteen colonies was to devise a system of specific routes down which the mail would travel and situate all the initial post offices along these roads. The roads would obviously have to pass through all the major areas of settlement and be easily marked to aid the mail carriers in finding their way. The Philadelphia - New York - Boston Post Road (later shortened to the Boston Post Road and finally just Post Road) was the backbone of this system. The story goes that old Ben Franklin himself picked out the route for the road. This may explain his visit to the burgeoning village of Wickford back near the end of the 1700s. The route was marked by a series of granite mileposts, set in strategic spots chosen by Franklin and his assistants. Some of these mileposts still exist along the route as it winds its way down the eastern seaboard. Obviously, the mail system has expanded greatly since those early days, but back then if you wanted to post or pick up a letter you had to get to the Post Road to do it, or pay someone to fetch it for you.

Now, lets get back to North Kingstown's portion of this marvelous invention of Ben Franklin. As in most cases, Franklin did not have to blaze any trails through

town to complete his grand plan. He simply followed the path of the existing main road which had been plotted out through the Kings County (as the area was known before it was split up into the two towns of North and South Kingstown.) as early as 1706. This road largely followed one of the main Native American thoroughfares known as the Pequot Trail by the early settlers. This was, not only the main route through town, but also the preferred path of the early stagecoaches as they carried people, freight, and mail from one community to another in colonial New England. The route of the Post Road has changed over time; when it was originally laid out some three hundred years ago, it meandered stream-like around boulders, brooks, and even large trees which were used as reference points due to their prominence amongst the rolling farmlands and pasturelands of the area. At the dawn of the twentieth century, engineers and highwaymen came and straightened out the meanders, dug up the boulders, bridged the brooks, and cut down the great marker trees in the name of progress and in preparation for the age of the automobile. At first glance, this may seem a bit sad, but it has in reality been a godsend for local history all along the great length of the Post Road; for where the road still follows its original path all of its history has been obliterated by the march of progress and the commercialization of this ancient thoroughfare. But along those forgotten meanders, which still exist as roads which parallel Route 1, are little oases of history. This is where you still find the 18th century tavern or the 17th century home, and it's like that all up and down the eastern seaboard.



Fort Wetherill - Jamestown

Like the "Queen's Fort" on the Exeter/North Kingstown line, Fort Wetherill on the southeast side of Jamestown is a magical place that is sure to stir the imagination of anyone who visits it, young and old alike. The site was originally known as Fort Dumplings after the nearby island group and has a history which goes back to the Revolutionary War. The significance of this strategic spot was recognized by the Rhode Island colonists who built an earthen fort atop the seventy foot high cliffs overlooking the East Passage and installed a number of cannon to aid in protecting Newport from the British. In 1799, the fledgling government of the United States purchased the site with the idea of creating a permanent fortification. Additional lands were added by condemnation until it reached its final size of some sixty-one acres. In 1900, the reservation was renamed Fort Wetherill in honor of Capt. Alexander Wetherill who was killed in action in Cuba in July of 1898. Permanent concrete fortifications were constructed here in 1905-1906. Fort Wetherill commands an unobstructed view from Newport on the east to Block Island and then to Point Judith on the west. Until the advent of the submarine, no vessel could enter the bay undetected from this location. Although the fort was manned from the early 1900's on, its heyday was during the years just prior to and throughout WWII, when Wetherill, along with its sister across the bay, Fort Adams, and the many West passage fortifications protected these Rhode Island waters, and the war related military bases and industries within, from Axis aggression. Not only did Wetherill's eight large guns, ranging in size from twelve to six inches present an imposing deterrence to enemy shipping, she was also home to the mine planting ship the "General Absalom Baird" as well as the western-most anchor for a submarine net which spanned the deeper East Passage and successfully kept marauding German U-boats out of Narragansett Bay. Throughout this period the fort was manned by members of the 243rd Coast Artillery Regiment.

Fort Wetherill is quiet now, the big guns are long gone, but their massive concrete emplacements and associated underground bunkers and barracks remain, along with the breathtaking view of Newport Harbor and the whole of the lower bay which brought them here in the first place. It is a place of peace now, but if you stand there and close your eyes you can imagine the tension that existed here almost sixty years ago when all eyes were trained on the horizon searching for that German Man-of-War.

Fort Wetherill is located in Jamestown off of Ocean Street.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

The Queen's Fort - North Kingstown/Exeter

This week I am going to go out on a limb and give a "Five Star" swamp yankee endorsement to the Queen's Fort just over the line in Exeter, as the best historic site to take your children to. With no offense to and with a nod of the head to Smith's Castle and Gilbert Stuart's Birthplace, The Queen's Fort has all the attributes that a swamp yankee appreciates: It is open year-round, It has a few hundred more years of history going in its favor, There is nothing at all there that a child can break, Running and climbing are encouraged, and, last but not least, it is free (Now don't say it! We swamp yankees are offended by the word cheap; we like frugal). Seriously though, the Queen's Fort is easily the most underappreciated historic site in these parts and is ideal for stirring a child's imagination and expending a portion of their boundless energy. Before I give you directions to this great place let me fill you in a little on its history.

The Queen's Fort is located on perhaps the rockiest hill in all of southern Rhode Island. It was the defensive fortification for the winter home of the ancient Narragansett people who lived in this region long before the advent of the European and English Settlers. The tribe took advantage of the great stones left on the hill by the retreating glaciers of the last ice age by laying rough stone walls between the huge boulders to form an almost impenetrable defensive position. The fort is unapproachable from all sides due to the lay of the land and the immense jumble of huge boulders which surround it. When you are at the site it is easy to imagine yourself as an Indian brave, bow in hand, ready to defend your family and friends against any interloper. Many boulders lie within the walls of the fort, beneath and between some exists sufficient space to shelter one or two people. But these are nothing in comparison to (this is where the story gets interesting) the Queens Chamber which was said to have existed a hundred feet or so west of the fortification. It consisted of an open space beneath a huge mass of boulders; the tallest man was said to be able to stand upright within it. The

floor consists of fine white sand brought in specifically for the Queen. The entrance was so hidden that it could not be detected even when you were right next to it. Hidden it is, as no modern man has yet found it although it has been searched for for centuries. Some say it never existed at all, but, it has shown up independently in so many writings of the late 1600's and early 1700's that it is difficult to believe that it does not have some basis in fact.

The Queen of the Queen's Fort was Quaiapen. She was the wife of Mexanno who was the eldest son of the great leader of the Narragansetts, Canonicus. Quaiapen was a princess in her own right, she was the sister of Ninigret the great Sachem of the Niantic Tribe and her marriage to Mexanno joined together the two peoples and contributed to the peace that existed between them. She was related in some fashion to all the great Sachems of both tribes, the aforementioned, as well as, Mianitinomi and his wife Wawaloam, Canonachet, Quequaganet and Scuttape; but by the middle 1670's all of them were dead, most by the hand of the settlers, and Quaiapen, now the sole leader; the great Squaw-Sachem, took her people, or what remained of them after the great swamp fight, home, here to the Queen's Fort where they passed their last days until they were ambushed and massacred by a band of marauding Connecticut soldiers led by Major Talcott, on the southern bank of the Pawtuxet River in what is now Warwick.

The Fort is said to be the only existing structure built by these ancient people and it is still, so many hundreds of years later, a marvel to observe. So take your loyal swamp yankee's advice and bring your family there and let your imagination take its own course. Perhaps your child can be the one to finally find Quaiapen's chamber. But even if it remains a wonderful mystery, take the time to tell them Quaiapen's story; because in the telling of it she and her tribe will live on forever.

The Queen's Fort is located on Stony Lane approximately one and a half miles past its intersection with Route 2. There is a small dirt road on the left hand side which is the beginning of the trail up to the fort. You must park on the side of the

road as there is no parking lot at the site. Sensible shoes are a must as the area is rugged. As a final word remember the Backpacker's Creed and "Leave nothing behind but footprints and take nothing away but memories."



PHOTO: RYAN GRANSTON

Stone "bastion," a part of the fortifications at the Queen's Fort.

The 225th Anniversary of the Kentish Guards

On this, the 225th anniversary of the incorporation of the Kentish Guards, this swamp yankee feels it is appropriate to turn our attention northward to East Greenwich and take a look at this august institution which has played such an important part in the history of both of our towns, as well as the entire state.

The Kentish Guard is the second oldest militia in continuous service in the state of Rhode Island. Second only to the Newport Artillery, it can also lay claim to being the fifth oldest active militia group in the entire United States. It was formed in response to the British blockade of Boston in 1774. Sensing what was to come, and also reacting to a near riot in the streets of downtown East Greenwich over outspoken Tory sympathizers, a group of prominent men in the community met on September 24, 1774 in the tavern of William Arnold on Main Street and organized what would become the Kentish Guard. The colonial government of Rhode Island granted the group a charter of incorporation on October 29, 1774 authorizing the formation of an independent company of militia. The membership, soon after, elected as their first officers the following: James Varnum, Richard Fry, Christopher Greene, and Hopkins Cooke.

Around that same time; then Private Nathanael Greene was on a business trip to Boston. The frugal Quaker was not one to waste an opportunity, so he made time during his visit to observe the local British troops in their exercises. He also, surreptitiously, purchased a number of muskets for the Guard and, in his crowning achievement, convinced a British drill-sergeant named Daniel Box to desert the British Army (this swamp yankee feels certain he can surmise that a pub must have been involved in this part of the story) and return with him to East Greenwich to train the officers and men of the fledgling unit. Greene and Box smuggled their prize muskets out of Boston under a load of well-used hay swept up from the floor of some anonymous barn in the city. They correctly assumed that no prim and proper British soldier would ever lower himself to search through a cartload of soiled hay and got out of the city undetected. It is easy to see how the

resourceful Private Greene rose so quickly through the ranks.

That very next spring, on the 20th of April 1775, in response to the news which later would be called the "shot heard 'round the world", the Kentish Guard set out to assist in the Battle of Lexington and Concord. But they were halted at the border in Pawtucket by then Deputy Governor Sessions who refused to give the Guard permission to join their Massachusetts brethren in the fray against the British. A group of members, led by Nathanael Greene, disobeyed the order and pushed on towards Lexington only to arrive just after the British had been pushed back into their stronghold in Boston. Soon after Lexington and Concord the Kentish Guard erected, with their own labor and at their own expense, a fort with nine cannons at the entrance to East Greenwich harbor. This became their home base and was known as Fort Daniel. Incidentally, some of these very cannons can now be found at West Point.

In 1776, the Guard saw action on Prudence Island, at Warwick Neck, Warren, Bristol, and Tiverton. They fought in the Battle of Rhode Island as part of the ill-fated Sullivan Expedition. In 1779 they captured a British Battery on Jamestown. They were also called upon to drive off detachments of British troops sent across the bay as raiding parties all up and down the coast from Warwick to North Kingstown. One of these raiding parties was the one which captured John Allen of Quidnessett and burned his house to the ground. After the hostilities in Rhode Island ended the Kentish Guard were sent to assist the friendly French troops which were now stationed in Newport.

The Kentish Guard furnished many key officers of importance to General Washington's Continental Army. First and foremost was young Private Nathanael Greene, who went on to become Major General Greene in charge of Washington's entire southern armies and, some say, his most effective general. Also, Brigadier General James Varnum, Colonels Comstock, Crary, and Christopher Greene; and last, but not least, among the many other distinguished officers, former British Sergeant and future patriot Major Daniel Box.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

Mary Healey

This week I decided to take a hiatus from the usual fare of local history; you see, out here in Swamptown we lost one of our own last week, and this little forgotten farming village, as well as the whole of North Kingstown is diminished by her departure.

Mary Healey was the epitome of a New England farming wife. She worked hard at a vocation that she loved. She raised a family, as well, as she toiled alongside her inexhaustible husband tending the fields and caring for their crops. When the need arose, she took a job out in the world to help ends meet. She did it all with a sense of boundless optimism and an unspoken, but obvious, deep rooted sense of faith.

Don't misunderstand me, I am, sadly, not a close personal friend of the Healey's. I, and my family, knew Mrs. Healey from the many visits we would take to her farm stand. Off and on, for about half of each year, for the many years I've lived out here, we would take the short ride up the hill to buy vegetables and eggs and pumpkins and gourds, and we would stop for a while, like many people did, and chat with her about the goings on of the season. Her love for her life and her family became apparent as time went by. She never lost hold of that optimism, whether she was discussing the fickleness of New England weather, the never ending plague of hungry deer, or the lives of her daughters. Her patience with the unrelenting stream of questions which came from the many children (mine included) that stopped by with their parents was indefatigable. Mary Healey was content and happy with her life and it showed in the way she lived it.

She may be gone now, but she left a part of her behind. Her grace and good nature is apparent in the children and grandchildren she left here on earth; and there's the farm, the farm where she toiled, the earth that she invested her time and energies in. She worked at the most noble of professions and did it well. We can honor and remember her by supporting that farm, I believe that it was her greatest hope that the farm would live on as a testimony to all that she and John, her husband, put into it. So next summer

as you pick up an ear of corn inside of a giant faceless supermarket, or at Halloween when you go to buy a pumpkin for your children or grandchildren, think about Mary Healey and instead, take that short ride up the Lafayette Road Hill out here in Swamptown, and visit the Healey Farm just like I will still be doing.



PHOTO: JAMES RUSH

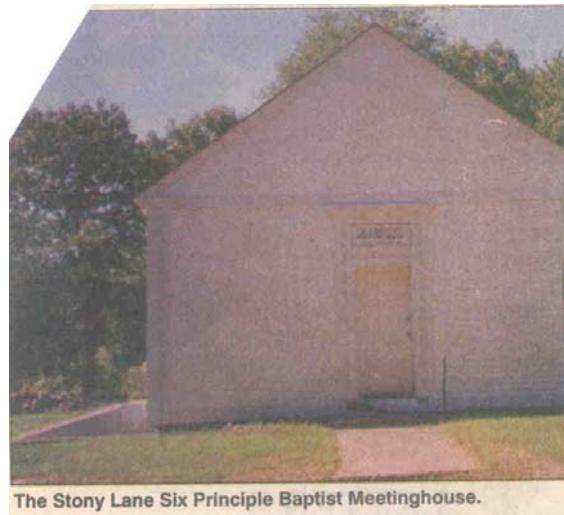
A blanket of snow covers the Healey Farm on Lafayette Road. The family's matriarch, Mary Healey, died this month after a battle with cancer.

Photo provided by the [North East Independent](#)

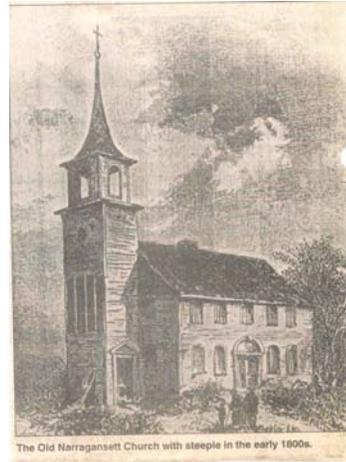
North Kingstown's Top Ten List

In this week's column your faithful swamp yankee will attempt to pass on to his loyal readers a list of the ten oldest structures in our fair town. Please keep in mind that, due to a lack of concise documentation, this is not an exact science. In other words, I may be wrong; if you think I am feel free to drop me a line and fill me in. So here we go in reverse order:

- 10) The George Thomas House on Bay Street in Wickford (1735) - Old Yellow, Wickford's oldest home, only comes in tenth when measured against the ancients of the entire town.
- 9) The Ezekial Gardner Farmhouse on Pendar Road (1730) - This gambrel-roofed central-chimneyed farmhouse once had a lace factory operating out of the barn.
- 8) Silas Casey Farm on Boston Neck Road (1725) - Everyone in town is familiar with Casey Farm, although many do not realize that among its many charms are actual bullet holes from a Revolutionary War skirmish fought on its grounds.
- 7) The Davis Homestead on Davisville Road (1715) - The ancestral home of the Davis family, the founders of Davisville, still has the original hand forged hardware on its front door.
- 6) The Stony Lane Six Principle Baptist Church (1710) - This Baptist meetinghouse was built on land donated by Alexander Huling by a group of descendants of some followers of Roger Williams.



- 5) The Old Narragansett Church on Church Lane in Wickford (1707) - This Anglican meetinghouse, the oldest in Rhode Island, was once located on Shermantown Road.



- 4) The Stephen Northup House on Featherbed Lane (1690's) - Stephen Northup was the patriarch of one of North Kingstown's most historically significant families.
- 3) Smith's Castle on Post Road (1678) - Some may be surprised that this well known structure is not number one on the list. The most probable reason is that it was more completely destroyed by the Indians in the aftermath of King Philips War than the two homes that precede it, and took longer to rebuild.
- 1) (tie) The Jabez Reynolds House on Austin Road and The Palmer-Hall - Northup House on Post Road (1676) - Portions of both of these oft-added-to homes are thought to date back to 1676. The Reynolds house was originally on Essex Road and was moved to its present site in 1802. During a 1977 restoration, portions of the original beams were found to be fire damaged perhaps from the King Phillips War. As far as the Palmer-Hall-Northup House goes, it has been said that the house was somehow spared from the angry retaliation of the Indians who, as the story goes, burned every settlers home from



Warwick south, and actually dates back to 1638. If this were ever proven true it would make this home to be among the handful of the oldest buildings in New England. Imagine that!

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

A Look Back at the "Five Most Endangered Historic Sites" List

Just about one year ago I introduced you to my list of the five most endangered historic sites in our fair town. As another year begins I thought it was a worthwhile venture to take a look back and see how these sites have fared over the last twelve months.

Number one on the list was the Allen/Madison house located in Quonset Davisville Industrial Park. This 200 year old gentleman's farmhouse, still owned by RI Economic Development Corporation, has fared well over the year. A concerned core of committed citizens from N.K. and the surrounding communities have worked in concert with RIEDC and are well on the way to saving this venerable structure and charting a course for the house which would make "Old Judge Allen" proud. I will continue to update you as warranted. Check this one off as a victory for history.

Number two on the list was the Ezekial Gardiner House. The Gardiner House, which, by the way, also shows up on the list of the ten oldest structures in town, is now disassembled and packed into a trailer. Sadly, no way was found to leave the 270 year old farmhouse on the land which it had occupied for the better part of three centuries: progress won, and the house, which had been the center of the Gardiner Dairy empire, had to go. Thankfully, through the efforts of Councilman Robin Porter, the gambrel-roofed section of the building has been saved. Now, the trick is to find an appropriate place to rebuild it and a person or family with the vision and where-with-all to undertake it. Let's give this one a tentative cautionary check as another victory for history, keeping in mind that there is still much to be done.

Number three on the list is a site which I have mentioned in a number of articles, but one which I have not officially identified as belonging to this group in deference to some sensitive negotiations which were being undertaken in its behalf. But now

that the deal is done I can safely place it here where it belongs. The site is the Kettle Hole, or Pond Realty property which we have all read about in the papers over the course of the last year. This site is one of the last few truly wild places left within the borders of North Kingstown. Taken in conjunction with its adjoining parcels of already protected land, land which will remain wild as the open space for a number of cluster developments, as well as the undeveloped portion of the nearby Healy Farm and a number of wetlands and wellhead protection areas, the Pond Realty property presented the town of North Kingstown with a unique once in a lifetime opportunity to protect a sizeable piece of wildlife habitat. The property also includes the historic Kettle Hole Mill site, one of our town's hidden beautiful vistas. Sadly though, the powers-that-be have committed all the open space money which you, the voters authorized, to protect the town's infrastructure, not its open spaces. I may be a pig-headed old swamp yankee, but it is my opinion that the Kettle Hole Land, with its deer, wild turkeys, foxes, raccoons, vultures, raptors, and creatures of every description as well as rare wetland plants such as lady slippers and giant trees which have seen the passing of the ages is exactly the type of land that the average voter considered when he/she cast their vote in favor of open space protection. What you got instead was a vast open expanse of grass; a giant lawn permanently protected; as the dozers, at this very instance, roll through the complex ecosystem that is a forest and wetlands environment. Where's the outrage North Kingstown! Wait a minute you say, the town considers the Pond Realty deal a great victory for open space. Well you are right, they do feel all warm and fuzzy about limiting the number of houses which could have theoretically been built there. But I say even one house is too many when you are talking about our wild spaces. But its too late North Kingstown, the proverbial gates have clanged shut on the Kettle Hole and the big money houses are being built as we speak. Chalk this one up as a big loss for history and open space.

Number four on the list is a site which I never even got a chance to tell you about. You see, just as I was working on an article describing the history of the Davol summer mansion within what is now Quonset/Davisville Industrial Park, just as I was about to praise an almost certain deal which was going to have

the Saratoga Foundation reuse this great home as its headquarters, the unthinkable happened and the home fell victim to an act of arson perpetrated by one of the many thoughtless vandals who seem to think that they have a right to deprive the community of whatever they see fit. Shame on you, whoever did this! I won't say much more about The Davol House, as I do plan on giving it the send off it deserves later in this upcoming year; but, needless to say, chalk this one up as another loss for history.

Number five on the list was our old friend "Old Yellow", the house on Bay street in Wickford which is the village's oldest. This home has fared well over the past year, a new owner has been found, historically appropriate renovations are nearing completion, and the house will soon be ready to become a home again. Thanks for this go to the folks of the Old Yellow Corporation, a non-profit created specifically to save the home. Bravo to you all. This too can be chalked up as a victory for history.

So as you can see the year has been a mixed bag in the mission to save the history of our fair town. Two big losses out of five, combined with the stealth destruction of the Huling/Cranston house in Scrabbletown point out that we must be ever vigilant if we wish to succeed. I'll continue to keep you informed and I hope you will contact me if you feel any historic site or structure is threatened. Together we will do our part to preserve our collective history.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

How I Spent My Summer Vacation - 1967



My name is Tim Cranston and I am a fifth grade student in Mrs. Benson's class at Hamilton School. This is my story of how I spent my summer vacation.

My summer started after I got done with fourth grade at Wickford Grammar School. My teacher's name was Mrs. Weiner. You got to admit, it is a funny name, but she was a great teacher and I was almost sad to see the school year end. I was also a little nervous because my mom told me we were going to move up to Annaquatucket Road to one of the new houses being built out there and I would have to go to Hamilton. Mom said "Don't worry, you've got a new bike and two good legs;

Wickford isn't far, so you will still see your friends." It's not that I'm a baby or anything, it's just that I've lived in Wickford almost my whole life; it's what I'm used to. So, anyway, I now live at 445 Annaquatucket Road but I still spend most of my time downtown.

I guess I could say I spent my summer doing three different things: 1) playing with my friends, 2) trying to figure out ways to make some money, and 3) doing cool things with my grandfather.

(1) Most of my friends still live down in Wickford and that's where we hang around. One of the things we did was build an underground fort up on the hill behind the Grammar School, right near the old haunted house. Jimmy and me did most of the work but Doug and Dennis (who are brothers), and Paul and Rolf helped some, not to mention a bunch of other guys who I can't remember just now. Some times I go over to Paul's house and we sneak into the Cold Spring House and

look around or we check out his brother Larry's circus model, you know it is the biggest one in the whole state. Pete, my friend from Sunday school, is having a new house built on West Main Street and they are moving there from Exeter, my grandfather says it's the first new house on the street in a real long time. Jimmy and I also got hold of a boat and rowed it around anywhere we could. One time we were in the cove next to Loop Drive and some guy came out of his house and was yelling and screaming at us, we didn't pay any attention to him until he came out with a shotgun. We got out of there fast! Jim said he probably had it loaded with rock salt or something like that. We didn't get in trouble much at all all summer; except one time when it was low tide and all of us decided to climb down the wall near Ryan's and go under the Brown Street Bridge. People started hollering and we all left in a-hurry. I headed home and figured I was all set, but when I got there my mom already knew about it. I figure one of the ladies that work at Ryan's called her and told her. That's the way it is in Wickford, everyone knows everybody and someone's always keeping an eye on you. My mom says I should be thankful for that, but I just don't know. At least it wasn't as bad as the story that Dennis told us about some friends of his. They decided they wanted to see what it was like inside the Salvation Army box in front of the market and then couldn't get out. The police had to come with a key and let them loose, we didn't see them for days. We also like to go into some of the stores and look around, not the clothes stores, but the neat stores like Barber Hardware and Agway and the Drug stores. That guy in Barber Hardware who always has a cigar in his mouth did get mad at me once. I just can't seem to stop myself from jamming my hands down into the big bins of seeds and feed and cracked corn that they always have there. I guess he doesn't like kids to do that, come to think of it, the guy at Agway doesn't like it either. I guess mostly we all just hang around and have whatever fun we can.

(2) It seems like all of us are trying to find ways to earn some money, I mean a guy has things he needs to buy, comic books, models, and stuff from Earnshaw's soda fountain just to name a few. I have been pretty successful at it I must say. I make

25 or 50 cents every day selling minnows from my two minnow pots to my uncle Bobby who runs the bait shop down by the arch bridge, and I have the paper route that I got from Marty when his dad was transferred from Davisville; that happens a lot, you make a friend whose dad is in the Navy and then, before you know it, he's gone. Oh well, at least I got the paper route. I met Marty at Boy Scouts. We meet over at the community center in the housing project. My scout master's name is Mr. French; the grown-ups all call him Frenchie, he's a super leader and knows an awful lot about what it takes to be a good scout. My two sisters and I also take our wagon once a week or so and go up and down the roadsides picking up bottles that people throw from their cars, my mom says it's a disgrace but Julie and I are glad that people are such slobes because it puts money in our pockets. We take the bottles to Ryan's and get the money. Mr. Ryan won't take the dirty ones though, so we have to walk up to Rudy's Market, they aren't so fussy there.

(3) The best part of my summer has to be the cool stuff I do with my grandfather, Paul St. Pierre. You probably know him, it seems that everyone does. Even other kids know who he is on account of the fact that he does assemblies at all the schools where he tells kids about the Narragansett Indians. He even puts war paint on a few kids at each assembly after he makes it out of berries and rocks and stuff. My mom says that my grandfather is trying to teach me what's important, that's his job now that my dad has died, that's what she says. I guess what's important is old stuff and stuff that is in the woods because that is what he shows me. We go on archaeology digs in the woods near Rome Point. We look for arrowheads in the fields after the farmer plows them, we even go all the way to Bristol to look for fossils. Lately though we have been hunting for old bottles; every Saturday we get down in the mud behind Seavey's at low tide and dig for them. We find a lot and when we find one he tells me what it was for and even who might have used it. We have found some from as far back as the late 1700's. We also found a few from a drugstore in Wickford, "Doc Young's" is what he calls it (my grandfather is so old that he even remembers this old guy.) While we dig we talk about whatever either one of us thinks of. He tells me stories about the

hurricane of 1938 or else some crazy story that his friend John Ward told him. (he is a newspaperman.) My grandfather answers all the questions I ask him as best as he can. Why, he's the only one who would tell us kids what a "damn Dworman" was, we heard people in town talking about them and didn't know what they were; sounds like some kind of troll or something doesn't it. I'm still not sure I understand. I think that my grandfather knows a little bit about everything; Mr. Ward says "He's just a stubborn Yankee and that explains a lot." whatever that means.

Well, I guess that's about all I did this summer, other than our yearly trip to New Hampshire to visit my mom's Aunt Mildred and Uncle Willis. We had fun there just like we always do, but it wasn't quite the same. My mom's youngest cousin, Tommy, is in Vietnam and Mildred and Willis are worried, I could tell. Uncle Willis did say though, just like he does every year, "How's that stubborn old goat of a grandfather doing anyway?" That always makes us all laugh. That's the end of my report, I hope you like it, Mrs. Benson.

The End

P.S. Mrs. Benson, could you stop hugging me and calling me your serious young man, at least in front of the other guys anyway.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

Editorial – Development Control

This week's column is an open letter to the North Kingstown Town Council on behalf of swamp yankees of every ilk.

I guess I first heard it whispered in the trees at my grandfather's grave at Quidnessett Cemetery. I don't know why it surprised me; Paul St. Pierre's love of the land was almost a religion, it was physically impossible for him to pass an open hole in the ground without peering in. He knew how to entice the earth to give up its secrets and he passed this love and respect on to me.

I heard it again as I drove down Stony Lane. Stony Lane - the most ancient road; a road whose history extends back before the advent of the written word, back to a time when the travelers on this trail cared not a bit about north, south, east, and west; the road took them from their winter home near the "Queen's Fort", from the shelter of the deep woods to the fertile fishing grounds at the shoreline. It was no coincidence that the Englishmen Roger Williams and Richard Smith settled where they did. Those travelers, the Narragansetts and the Shewatucks reach out from their slumber in anonymous graves and whisper the same message.

The message was clearer still as I drove down Boston Neck Road past the fields that were once a part of the great plantations of long ago. These fields were worked by slaves; men, women, and children who were brought here against their will, sold like livestock on the block in Newport. They didn't have much, but they possessed a pride in the work they did on the land and they, too, call out from the unmarked, unremembered graves in which they rest, graves located in the same fields which were the focus of their lives.

As I stood in the center of Elmgrove Cemetery staring at the great stone obelisk erected in memory of all who died in the war between the states the message

arose like a great cacophony from the combined lives of two hundred and fifty years worth of North Kingstown residents. The message was clear now - "What have you done to our land?" Whether it was uttered in English or the forgotten tongues of ancient Indians or captive West-Africans the message was the same. It is a message of stewardship of the land, not over-development. This town, with its rich history, deserves and demands respect and protection and I think its residents and taxpayers demand it as well. So I feel confident when I say that, speaking for the living as well as the dead, this swamp yankee thinks it's time for our town council members to stand up for the land and enact some type of development control. Do it now before it is too late.