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The View From Swamptown

Blind John Warburton

John and Jane (Gerrish) Warburton were daring souls. Daring enough to take their clan of 9 children and leave their home in Trowbridge, England, climb aboard a ship and sail to America and take a chance in this, the land of opportunity. The year was 1875 and we can only imagine what was going through the collective minds of the big family.

The Warburton's wound up here in little Lafayette, RI; eventually each one of them big enough to mind a spindle or tend a loom found work at the mill of Robert Rodman. They came from across the Atlantic, made a good life for themselves, and prospered. They were truly brave and daring folks. John and Jane's lives, in and of themselves, are a story worthy of remembering. But neither John nor Jane is the hero of this week's tale. That honor belongs to their youngest son, John Jr. Only two years old when he arrived in America, his life is the one that we celebrate today.

John Jr.'s younger years were unremarkable. He and his family lived in mill housing on the Ten Rod Road within eyesight of the mill. He was most probably cared for by one of his 5 older sisters whose family duty was "to keep the home fire's burning" while the rest of the Warburton clan worked in the mill. His life changed remarkably and the measure of his very character was tested on a summer day in 1880. The 7-year-old boy went off to play, as 7 year olds still do, perhaps by himself or with a group of friends. The details of the day are unknown, however the outcome was every parent's nightmare. Somehow John lost his vision in an accident involving boys playing with sticks. The Warburtons, and the whole Lafayette community, were thunderstruck by the horrible turn of events.

As the saying goes, "This changes everything" and I'm sure the events of that day changed the lives of the whole Warburton clan. But they adjusted and persevered. Eventually John, Jane, and their children purchased their own piece of the American dream. In 1884 they bought a parcel of land from the Rodmans; a nice lot fronting the Ten Rod Road, and built a fine home (as seen in the accompanying photo). The ensuing community house-warming thrown to celebrate that proud day was remembered for decades after and even recorded in George Gardiner's book "Lafayette".

Somewhere along the line, the Warburton's learned of the famed "Perkin's Institute for the Blind" in Boston. Founded in 1832 by educator Samuel Gridley Howe (husband of Julia Ward Howe, writer of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic") and medical student Dr. John Fisher, aided by Boston businessman Thomas Perkins, it was America's first school for the blind. Perhaps Jane learned of it in

the same way another concerned mother in Alabama had heard of it; through the writings of Charles Dickens, in his American travelogue, "American Notes". That's how the mother of John Warburton Jr.'s future classmate Helen Keller heard tell of the Perkins School. Yes, John and Helen attended the school at the same time and doubtlessly were acquainted. The school's purpose was to allow their blind students to learn a trade and the basic life skills necessary to become independent adults able to take care of themselves. Music was, and still is, a large part of that education. John Warburton eventually, through his education at Perkins, became a skilled and locally renowned pianist and piano tuner. Playing in bands and orchestras and tuning piano's with a skill thought to be uncanny, John Warburton returned from The Perkins Institute an educated and independent young man able to fend for himself, read Braille, and support himself with his musical talents. His intimate knowledge of every inch of his hometown of Lafayette allowed him to roam its streets without problem or incident. The historic record includes incidents of John travelling alone around the village right up until the age of the automobile made it a dangerous proposition. You might think this was enough of an accomplishment for the young man, but you'd be wrong. John convinced his father, John Sr. to allow him to run a small "Country Store" in a building behind the family home (now replaced by a small parking lot). Gardiner in his book Lafayette writes, "He knew the proper place for everything in the store and kept it there. His trained mind and memory were keen and his handling of metal money was rarely in error." If you paid in paper money John counted on an honest accounting of what you handed him and he'd then make proper change without assistance. He lived a regular life – married a local girl (Alzadie Huling) and raised a family with her. I expect he was a marvel and inspiration to all who knew him. Blind John Warburton passed away suddenly and unexpectedly of a massive heart attack in 1933. He was 61 and had succeeded in life by all accounts. His funeral, down in Wickford, was well attended by Lafayette folks and Wickfordites alike. His wife, widowed sister-in-law, and son continued on in the Warburton house after his death. It was sold out of the family in 1968 after an ownership that spanned nearly 75 years and three generations. Through this one man we can connect the stories of immigrant textile workers, dogged determination, Lafayette RI, Helen Keller, and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"; truly a tale worth telling.

My thanks to another Perkins Institute Graduate, Educator, Musician, and good friend Carl King for his assistance with this story.

The View From Swamptown

Aunt Ann and Aunt Fannie's House

You'll never catch me saying that Robert Rodman, the founding father and heart and soul of Lafayette was not a dedicated, gifted, and hardworking businessman. After all, it was his drive and vision that allowed one business, Rodman Manufacturing, to almost completely support and employ the inhabitants of, not one, but three complete mill villages; Lafayette, Shady Lea, and Silver Spring. Even after his death in 1903, his vision and philosophy continued in the guise of his children and grandchildren's leadership. Robert Rodman was the real deal; an empire builder.

All that is said, I've got to add that his family connections, most notably through his marriage to Almira Taylor in 1841 and his father's matrimonial connections to the Hazards of South Kingstown, didn't hurt either. It was those Hazard connections that moved the Rodman clan from farmers to millowners, and it was from the Taylors that Robert leased, and eventually purchased, his first mill, Silver Springs soon after his marriage to their daughter. Then in 1847, Rodman purchased the mill properties at Lafayette from his wife's mother's family the Sanfords. So, it certainly can be said that Robert Rodman married well. And, actually, that was the reality throughout the millowner hierarchy all across southern New England. I expect they all figured that there was much less of a chance of your competitors getting too rapacious in their business practices if your son was supporting their daughter. Even the orneriest old Swamp Yankee millowner would think twice before he cut a business deal that put his grandchildren or wife's relations out in the street.

It was also understood that "one hand washes the other". This philosophy was certainly the motivation behind Rodman's decision to hire his brother-in-law, Ambrose Taylor to run his mill's company store at Lafayette, as well as his decision to build and maintain a lovely little home for his two spinster sisters-in-law Mary Ann and Frances Taylor. Aunt Ann and Aunt Fannie, as they were known by the inhabitants of Lafayette, lived in the wonderful little home on the corner of Advent Street and Ten Rod Road shown in the accompanying photograph. It's easy to imagine these two well-beloved grandmotherly ladies holding court on their ample front porch. I expect lots of milk and cookies were dispensed to the local younguns' and many a cold glass of lemonade was handed out to the hot and thirsty Rodman Manufacturing employees who maintained all the homes on "Rodman Row" a stretch of Rodman family homes that ran from the Aunt's home all the way down to the Hortense (Rodman) Allen house down on the other side of Robert's impressive mansion house. These two ladies filled their lives with things like quilting bees and sewing circles as well as any and all activities associated with their beloved Lafayette Advent Christian Church which, in the beginning, held its services in the Hornbeam Chapel and staged its Sunday School out of Aunt Ann and Aunt Fannie's home. Eventually, their beneficent brother-in-law, decided to build his community a fitting Church Building. Don't think for a minute that its eventual location, right behind Aunt Ann and Aunt Fannie's house, on the newly created Advent Street was not intentional. Robert Rodman realized he couldn't go wrong by placing his lovely new church under the watchful eyes of his two devoted sisters-in-law.

Aunt Fannie passed on in 1889 at the age of 68. Mary Ann joined her sister ten years later in 1899. She was in her 87th year. As it should be, they are buried side-by-side in the big Taylor Family Plot out at Elm Grove. I like to think that Fannie was waiting for her sister at the "pearly gates" with a cool glass of fresh squeezed lemonade in her hand.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The winter crypt behind the Robert Rodman mansion, which now houses McKay's Front Porch, held bodies of the deceased until the ground thawed enough for burial.

The View From Swamptown

A Time Capsule in Lafayette

They've opened a time capsule, of sorts, in the village of Lafayette. The good folks at McKay's Front Porch decided to have the detritus of a few decades cleared away behind the Robert Rodman mansion, the building they have restored and now use as a furniture store. After the tangle of brambles and brush was cut up and carted away, a history lesson of sorts emerged. It's a time capsule in the sense that it is truly a collection of artifacts that can take us back to a different time.

First and foremost, there's the wonderful stone retaining wall that defined the edge of Liberty Hill, the public garden that Robert Rodman built for his mill worker "family". If you squint your eyes just so, and peer up through the ancient rhododendrons and trees that still populate the hill, you can almost envision the place as it used to be; a beautiful public garden on a hill, topped by a picnic grove and a flag pole peopled by mill workers and their families having picnics on a fine autumn day.

At the northern edge of the hill sits the imposing site of the Lafayette winter crypt. This artifact heartens back to a day long before the advent of the backhoes to a time when death was more common and graves were dug the old fashion way, with a hand shovel, strong arms and a sturdy back. I've always felt that a grave meant more back then, when a man had to labor for alone for hours, to dig the final resting place of a friend, neighbor, or loved one. I'm certain the implications of the act sunk in, shovelful by lonely shovelful as the deed was being done. But when winters hard frost took hold of the earth, no man, no matter how strong, was able to even scratch the soil no less dig a six foot deep grave and the bodies of the dearly departed had to be placed somewhere to await the spring's thaw. This was the purpose of this crypt and it appears today, with the exception of its imposing iron door, just as it did those many decades ago when it awaited winter and its somber seasonal duty.

Just in front of the crypt, the foundation stones of what must have been the finest of the Rodman barns can be seen. To the knowing eye, these stones tell the tale of a massive barn built in stages over the years; ready to shelter the livestock and carriages of the area's most prominent citizen, village builder and mill owner, Robert Rodman. Sadly, I know of no photographs which depict this great barn as it must have been or for that matter, show the Rodman mansion as she looked prior to her adaptation into the Masonic Temple for the Washington Lodge of that organization.

Finally, we also see the massive capstone of the Robert Rodman mansion well. This well was sited beneath the kitchen of the mansion. No convenience was spared in the construction of Rodman's home, and no Rodman woman or servant would ever have to brave winter's wrath to get a bucket of water. Neither in fact would they be expected to trudge out to a cold outhouse, as this building was perhaps the areas first with indoor plumbing gravity-powered through the potential of a great oak tank which used to exist in



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The capstone of the Robert Rodman mansion well once was located beneath the kitchen of the mansion, saving the residents and servants from a trip outdoors in the cold to fetch water.

the attic and stored sufficient water to operate all the new fangled toilets that the mansion house had.

So in this way, these stones tell us a story about a time long past. The beauty of their craftsmanship speaks highly of the workers who toiled in their installation. And I for one, would like to thank Keith and Kerry McKay for bringing them to light. Finally, I would like to make a correction to last week's column. I was unaware of the fact that the Captain Smith home on Elam Street had been returned to its original configuration as a single family home. I am pleased to salute its owner for this fact and pleased to be able to correct my error.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

At right, a 1915 postcard view of the Sunderland House, which was built by John E. Sunderland some 26 years earlier, includes Mrs. Theodore Wolfe and her son, Richard. Above is the house as it appears today.



The View From Swamptown

The John & Clara Sunderland House

I expect everyone in town has taken notice of the “purple” house on Ten Rod Road in the Lafayette Village portion of town. Why, I expect the last time anyone paid as much attention to the classic little French mansard-roofed home was when it was constructed by its original owners John E. & Clara Sunderland way back in 1889.

Folks then, as now, probably thought the owner of that fine home must be someone of importance. Back in 1889, John Sunderland was just that. You see, John was one of the men Robert Rodman hired on when he built his massive new textile mill, powered by one of the first Corliss Steam Engines around. John was hired as he was a “new breed”; a specialist. He was one of a select group of men who were knowledgeable in the ways of this new-fangled machine. John Sunderland, born and raised in nearby Exeter, was one of engineers responsible for keeping the steam engine humming. Without him and his co-workers, the great mill at Lafayette would all but shut down. In that respect, he was nearly as vital as Mr. Rodman himself, and he was paid accordingly. Sadly, John’s world began to change less than ten years later. In an age before miracle drugs, Sunderland took up with a crippling case of Rheumatoid arthritis. His death certificate notes his long standing battle with this debilitating disease and his obituary talks of his grace and courage in dealing with his affliction. None the less, in 1900, the rheumatism took his life. He was 48.

The house though, and the mill, stood on as a testimony to John and his life. This picture, taken in 1915 when the home was owned by Theodore Wolff and family, shows us what a fine home John made for his clan and it’s a fine home still, albeit a decidedly purple one.



A young Ralph Campbell poses above in his World War I Navy dress uniform. Below, he is pictured in 1959, at the time of his retirement as North Kingstown's postmaster.



The View from Swamptown

The Ralph Campbell House

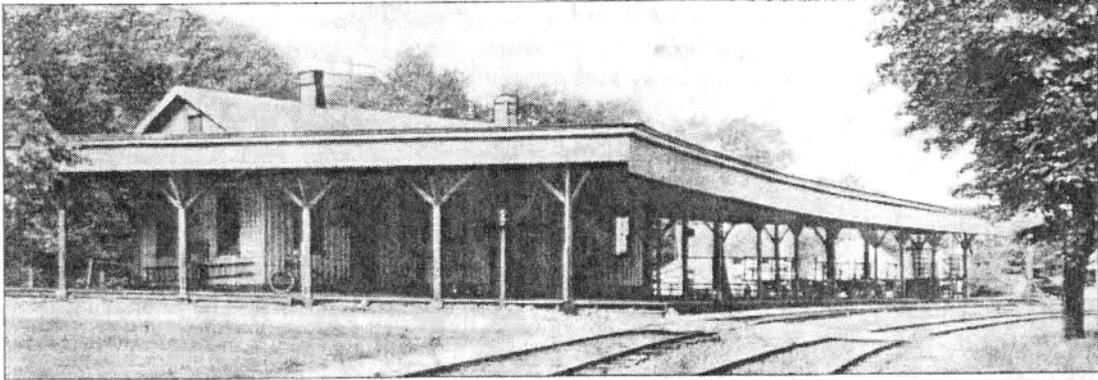
You know, it just does a body good to be able to tell the tale of a Swamptown lad whose life was a rousing success by any measure. Such a man was Ralph Campbell, born and raised in Swamptown on the Kettle Hole farm of his mother's family, he lived out the majority of his adult life in the West Wickford home (seen in the accompanying photo) he built with his own two hands on Ten Rod Road.

Ralph was born the 10th child of James and Susanna (Northup) Campbell in 1894. Educated in the local school system, and trained as a carpenter, Ralph began his adult life with a tour of duty in the Navy during World War I, where he served as a chief carpenter. Upon his return to civilian life after the Great War, Ralph studied at Bryant-Stratton Business College, now known simply as Bryant College, ran a small fish market in the village of Wickford, and continued to work actively as a carpenter. Somehow in the midst of all that he managed to meet and marry a local mill worker Cecelia Mignault, a young lady who had recently moved to Lafayette from her home town of Franklin Mass. And start a family.

In the early 1930's, two things happened that had a great effect upon the lives of the young Campbell family. First, in 1931, Ralph purchased a parcel of land on Ten Rod Road from the Tourjee family and began to construct his dream home. At about the same time he became active in politics within the local Democratic Party, a bold move in this, a staunch Republican town. Although his attempts to gain a local or General Assembly position always failed, his loyalties and hard work were noticed when Roosevelt swept into office, and Ralph was appointed Wickford Postmaster by Roosevelt's administration in 1942.

When Ralph began his career as Postmaster the post office was located in the Gregory Building and his responsibilities extended only to the area immediately surrounding Wickford. By his retirement at age 65 some 18 years later, he was ensconced in a brand new building at the top of West Main Street (recently demolished and replaced by a bank building) and was responsible for the vast majority of all the mail in North Kingstown. He had seen many changes during his time at the helm of the local postal service most of them brought about by the massive influx of people into the community by the expansion of Quonset/Davisville.

He retired to his fine Ten Rod Road home and spent his retirement years hunting, painting local landscapes scenes, and enjoying his children and grandchildren. He lived a full life and died in 1973 at the age of 79. His wife Cecelia, lived in the home, built by her husband, until her death in 1991 at the age of 94. She spent more than sixty years there, and now rests beside her husband at Elm Grove. The fine Dutch Colonial that Ralph built lives on as a testament to their lives. Truly the story of a Swamptown boy who did good.



Depot Master Edward S. Hall manned the first Wickford Junction Station, shown here in postcard view. In 1887 he moved his family to a home he had just built at Ten Rod Road and Advent Street (top right), which would later become the Lafayette Advent Christian Church's parsonage, from the small cottage at the back of the same property (below, right).



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The View From Swamptown The Hall/ Lafayette A. C. Parsonage House

The year 1887 was a banner one for Wickford Junction Depot Master Edward S. Hall. He had finally been able to move out of the tiny little house just east of the corner of Ten Rod Road and Advent Street which he had purchased just after before beginning his tour of duty during the Civil War and in which he had raised his family. Edward and Hannah (Newell) Hall's move was a short one though, for they were just moving from the little house on the back portion of their lot into the much larger and just recently constructed home on that same lot that fronted on Ten Rod Road.

The move to the big house was ironic in a way. You see, the Hall's were "empty nesters" of a sort now. Their daughter Alzada, who had worked for years with her father at the Wickford Junction Train Station as a telegraph operator, had just married Benjamin Snow of Providence and moved to that city, and their son Slocum, named after his grandfather a Swamptown farmer, who had also worked at the station with Hall, had recently died of Typhoid Fever. Oldest daughter Ann had married into the Phillips family soon after Edward's return from the war and had been out of the house for some years. So the Hall's moved into their big new home with only their daughter-in-law, the widowed Isabella (Northup) for companionship.

Life went along as normal for many years after the move into the big house; each day Edward would walk up to the station to fulfill his duties as Station Master, trudging home for lunch each day as the train arrival and departure schedules would allow. Visits from children and grandchildren brightened the elderly couple's lives for certain. But in 1901, 74-year-old Hannah suffered a major stroke and died soon after. Edward's granddaughter Frances Snow came and stayed with the elderly retired gentleman after that, caring for him until his death in 1912. In that same year Frances's mother Alzada passed away as well. All this was too much for Frances, and when the nearby Lafayette Advent Christian Church came a-calling looking for a parsonage for the minister for the busy church, Frances sold out. The Edward Hall house now began a new phase of its long life.

Before purchasing the Hall house, the preachers of the Lafayette A. C. Church lived in a Rodman owned house on the western side of the same Advent Street corner. This house was not near as large as the Hall place and the very busy parish needed all the space it could get. Edward Hall's house suited their needs perfectly. So perfectly in fact, that they continued to utilize it for the next 67 years. The parsonage finally, again became a private home in 1979 when, as a part of a larger downsizing at the Church driven by drastically declining membership, it was sold. It has been a private home now, since then.

The present owners of Stationmaster Edward Hall's old home are in the midst of a loving restoration, which fits in nicely with the overall revitalization of the entire Lafayette area. As they now contemplate the restoration of the older early 19th century cottage where Edward and Hannah raised their three children, just behind the bigger house, its only appropriate that we all stop a while and remember the old stationmaster and his family.

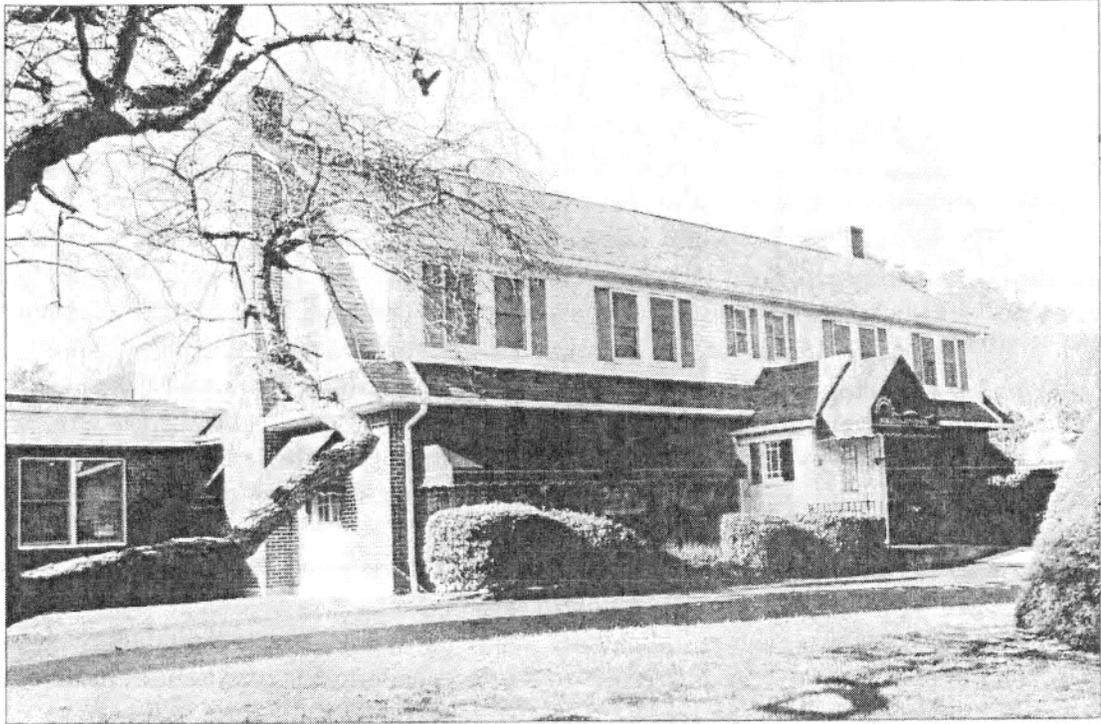
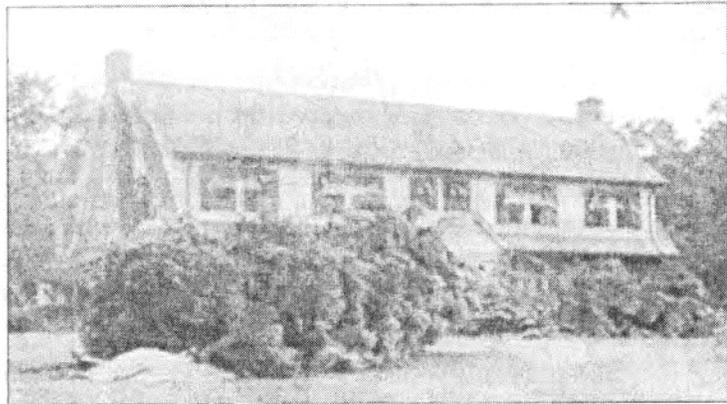


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The culture of nursing continues at the former Betty Pearce house on Ten Rod Road, which has been converted for use today as Robert's Health Centre. Pearce, who suffered from the effects of polio, lived there for many years with her nurse, Susan Belle Hendrick. The house looks much the same as it did in that era, as seen below.



The View From Swamptown

The Pearce/Hendrick House

In the past, we've taken a look at the history behind the once grand building on Ten Rod Road that began its life as a mill owner's mansion and ended its useful days as the Lafayette Nursing Home. Sadly the building's grandeur, its elegance, was forever hidden from view by a very utilitarian addition constructed front and center; this brick and mortar chancre has scarred the building, perhaps forever, and may indeed turn out to be the final nail in its coffin.

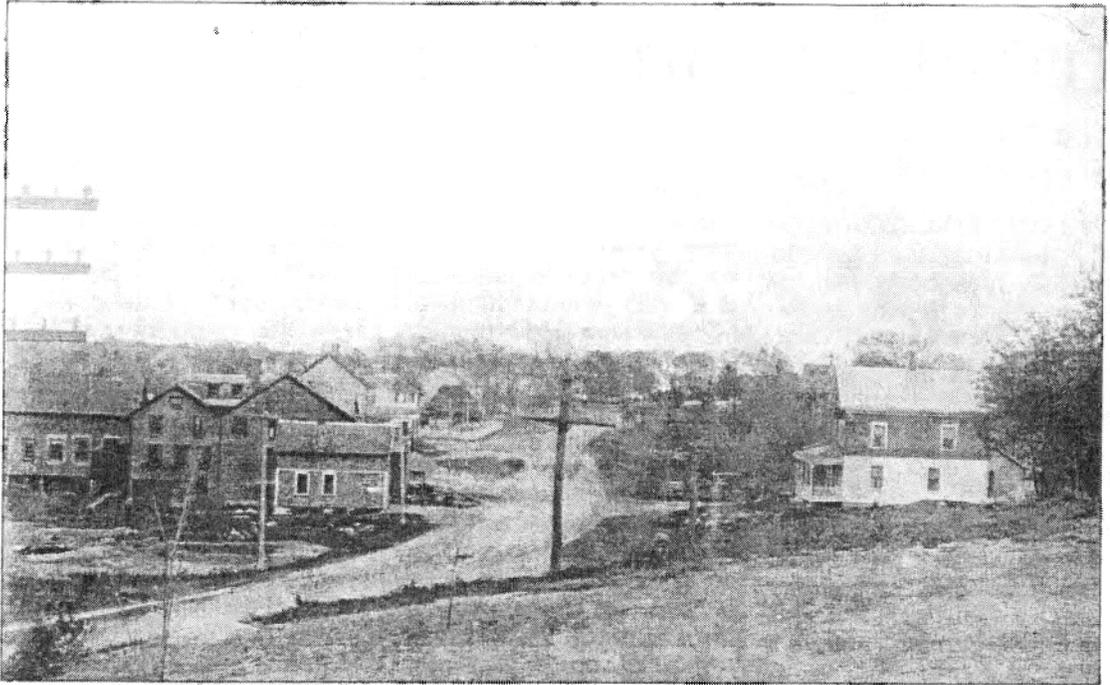
Unbeknownst to many, just up the road a piece, we have a building whose history nearly mirrors that of the Lafayette Nursing Home, and its story comes with a much happier ending. For the Roberts Healthcare Center too, began its life as the private home of a person of means and consequence. It was constructed in 1938 specifically for Mary Elizabeth Pearce, known to her friends as Betty. Betty Pearce came from a well-to-do out of town family and could probably have lived anywhere in the country. Why then, you might ask, did she decide upon the village of Lafayette as the location to construct her fine home? To ascertain the answer to that question we must look at the circumstances of Betty Pearce's life and when we do, we find that she, like so many at that time, including even the nation's president, was afflicted with polio and required specialized care. That care, for Betty Pearce, came in the form of nurse Susan Belle Hendrick, a local girl from one of Lafayette's earliest families. Betty Pearce purchased a parcel of land from the Hendrick family and built her fine home here in the village so "Suzie Belle" could be here near her relations. As a matter of fact, the house just next door was the home of her parents Frank and Helena Hendrick.

Betty Pearce's home was indeed extraordinary and befitting of her family's status in the world. It featured a grand entryway with two huge sitting rooms on either side. All the rooms were filled with the finest furniture and decorated with valuable artwork. Elevators and stairway lifts allowed Betty, who required leg braces and crutches, to move from floor to floor with greater ease. The basement included a specially designed bowling alley, an activity that Betty enjoyed and could perform in spite of her affliction. The home's grounds were immaculately maintained and included a reflecting pool and well-tended gardens. Betty Pearce's outdoor Christmas displays were the delight of the community and brought many a smile to the children of Lafayette.

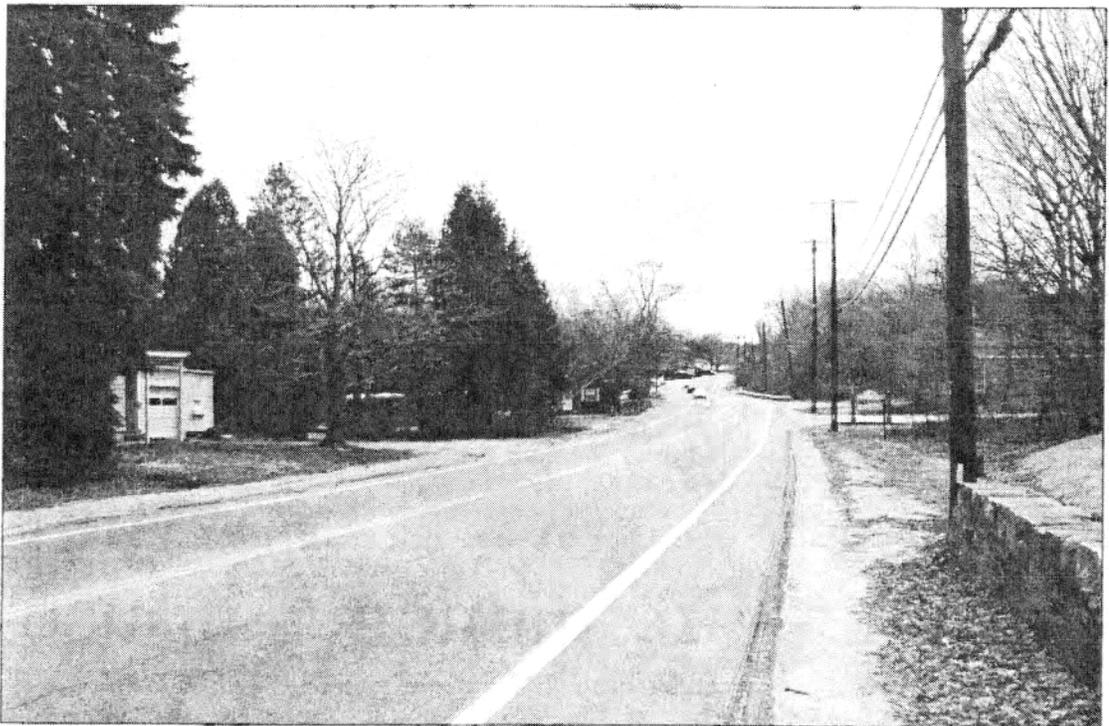
The constant throughout all of the 25 years that Betty Pearce lived here in Lafayette was her faithful nurse and good friend Susan Hendrick. To the Hendrick family, Betty Pearce the employer eventually became Aunt Betty a part of the family. As their lives came to a close, there was a role reversal of sorts when the younger Betty, took care of Susan, and as they aged the big house became too much and they both moved to a smaller place in the Love Lane section of Warwick. Susan Belle Hendrick left this world in 1965 and Betty carried on without her, still considered a part of the greater Hendrick family, for more than a decade after Susan's death.

The house, which Betty and Susan Belle sold in 1963, was, with its many accommodations for Betty's affliction, a perfect candidate for a nursing home and it

naturally became one in 1965. Thankfully all of the building's many additions have occurred in a manner that has not detracted from look of the fine home built for Betty Pearce nearly 70 years ago. She would, no doubt, be pleased, as would her nurse and lifelong friend Suzie Belle Hendrick.



The photograph above, taken at the turn of the last century, shows George Rose's home on the right. Across the street is the complex of buildings that once housed his carriage repair shop. Below is the same scene today.



The View From Swamptown

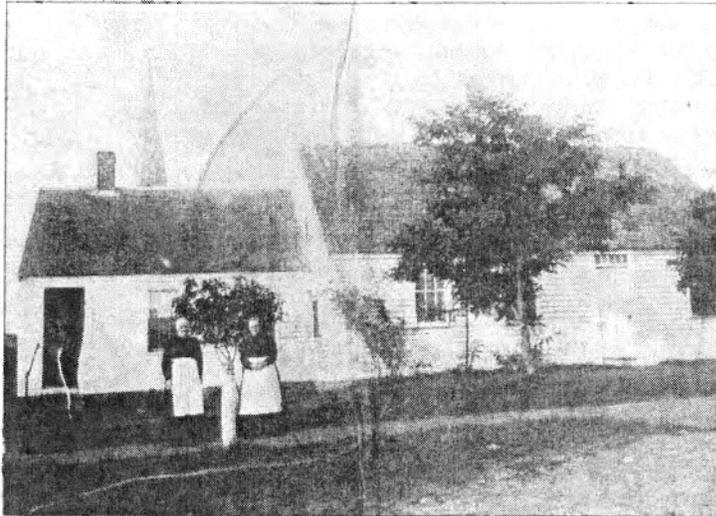
The “Village Smithy” in Lafayette

George A. Rose was perhaps, a man born to be a blacksmith. His path through life had been “forged” by adversity and he was made stronger for it. He had been born in July of 1856 to George & Harriet (Carr) Rose, but by the time he was 9 he was an orphan and living with distant relatives Thomas W. D., Martin V. B., & Lorenzo Dow Rathbun (those of you who are regular readers of this column I’m sure, remember that the Swamptown Rathbuns had a certain penchant for unusual and elaborate names) in the woods of Swamptown.

At 17, George was apprenticed to Nathan Duhamel of Exeter so he might learn the trade of blacksmith and carriage maker. Upon completion of his apprenticeship he worked for Frank Stanton in Charlestown and then William Allen in Davisville. Finally in the early 1880’s, George Rose purchased the horse-shoeing stand of Robert B. Thomas, also of Swamptown, which was located on the northern side of the Ten Rod Road just east of the Rodman Mill. It was here that Rose built his blacksmith and carriage repair shop, the forerunner to the present day mechanics garage. Eventually he let that parcel of land out to John O. Kettell who opened a livery stable and ran his teams of powerful draft horses from there. Rose moved across the street and built himself a new home on property formerly owned by Josiah Arnold and continued from there, in his chosen line of work. This is the scene we see in this turn of the century photograph of Lafayette. On the right stands the new home of George Rose and just across the street stands the complex of buildings that once housed his carriage repair shop, which at the time of this photograph, was occupied by the business of John O. Kettell and his son Earl.

Now this father and son team of Kettells set some “firsts” of their own. John Kettell, reading the writing on the wall, as it were, was one of the earliest teamsters to transition from horses to motor vehicles and, was in fact, the owner of North Kingstown’s very first big box truck, a moving van he nicknamed “The Earl C.” after his young son. And that young son, Earl Cranston Kettell (you gotta love that name, eh!) owned the town’s first school bus and eventually ran North Kingstown’s first taxi service. All out of this busy location.

As you can see by the accompanying present day photo of this site, much has changed over the years, here at the long-ago location of Bob Thomas’s horse-shoeing stand. But if you look closely you can see much the same sight viewed by those “village smithys” all those years ago.



Two historic Lafayette buildings have been undergoing some remodeling as of late. Above is the Taylor sisters' home on the corner of Ten Rod Road and Advent Street in its original condition. The home is being rehabilitated (above, right) after a fire about a year ago. At right is the former summer home of David Hartman, which is currently owned and being restored by the Ryan family.

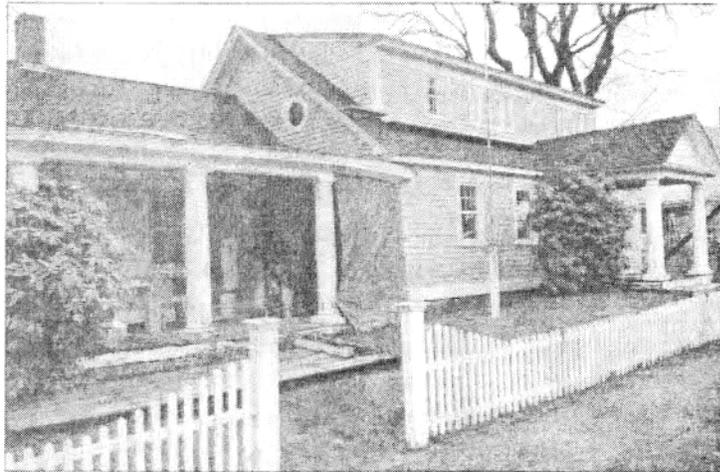


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The View From Swamptown

A Lafayette Preservation Update

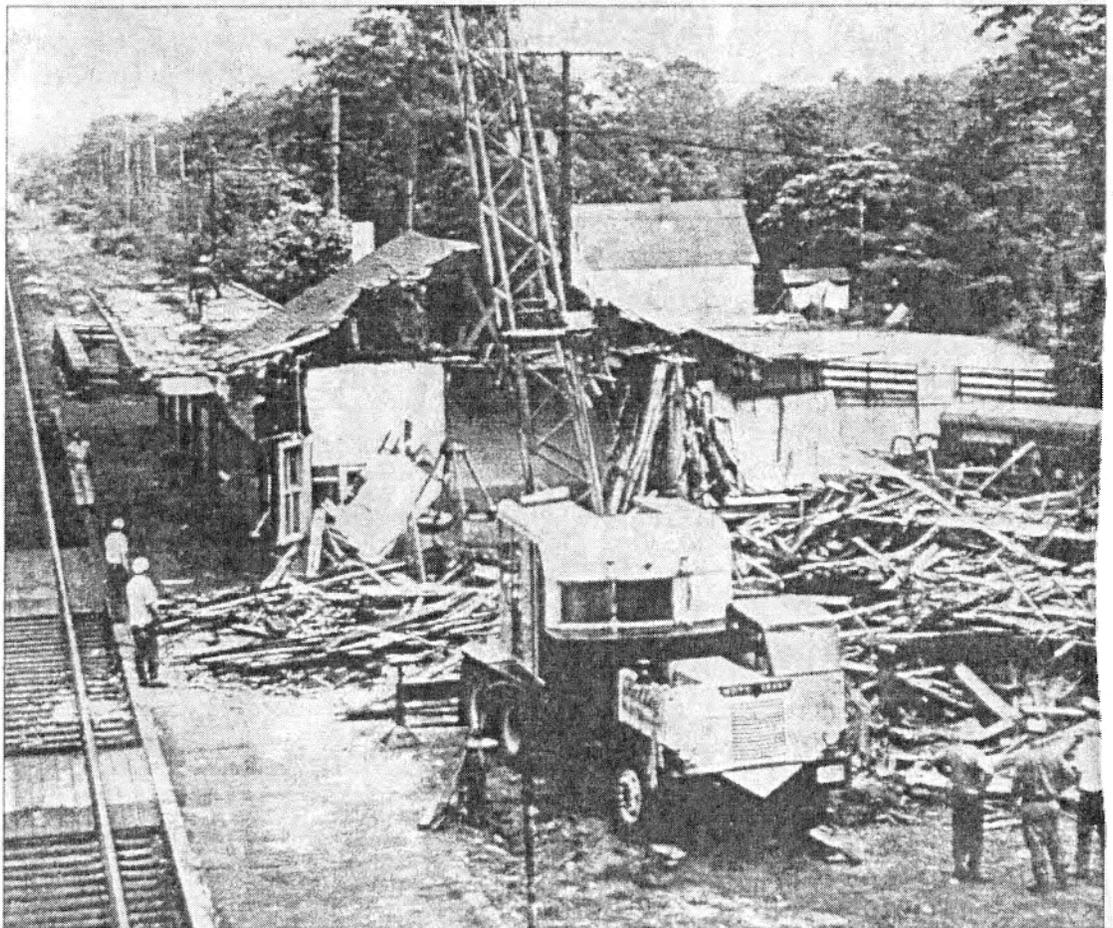
It's a real pleasure to be able pen a column like this one. As you all know, out here in Swamptown we truly enjoy being able to offer up a "tip of the hat" and a well deserved thanks to those who go out of their way to be good stewards of the historic properties to which they have been entrusted. Such is the case in the mill village of Lafayette, where just a year or so ago, the Taylor sisters home on the corner of Ten Rod Road and Advent Street suffered greatly from the effects of a serious fire and the last of the Rodman family mansions was continuing its long slow decline.

But boy, what a difference a year makes!! Rather than being demolished after the blaze, the attractive little home of Aunt Ann and Aunt Fannie Taylor, the spinster sisters-in-law of village founder Robert Rodman, looks better than ever, having been rebuilt and repainted. Accompanying this column is a sort of photo timeline showing the different iterations that this landmark little home has experienced. The earliest photo, taken in the 1880's shows the two proud Taylor gals in front of their little home just prior to the addition of its covered front porch. And speaking about a fresh coat of paint, just take a gander up the Ten Rod Road a bit and marvel at the transformation occurring at the boyhood summer home of NK's top celebrity resident David Hartman. The present owners EJ Ryan and family deserves a Swamptown "atta-boy" for the way they have transformed the beautiful old place into a vision of what it must have once been. As a descendant of all who have ever lived in the graceful old mansion, EJ Ryan has done right by those that came before him.

So, to the Ryan's and the McCrory's, thank you for taking such wonderful care of two very important Lafayette landmarks.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR



Workers mill about the wreckage after the July 1969 demolition of the Wickford Junction station.

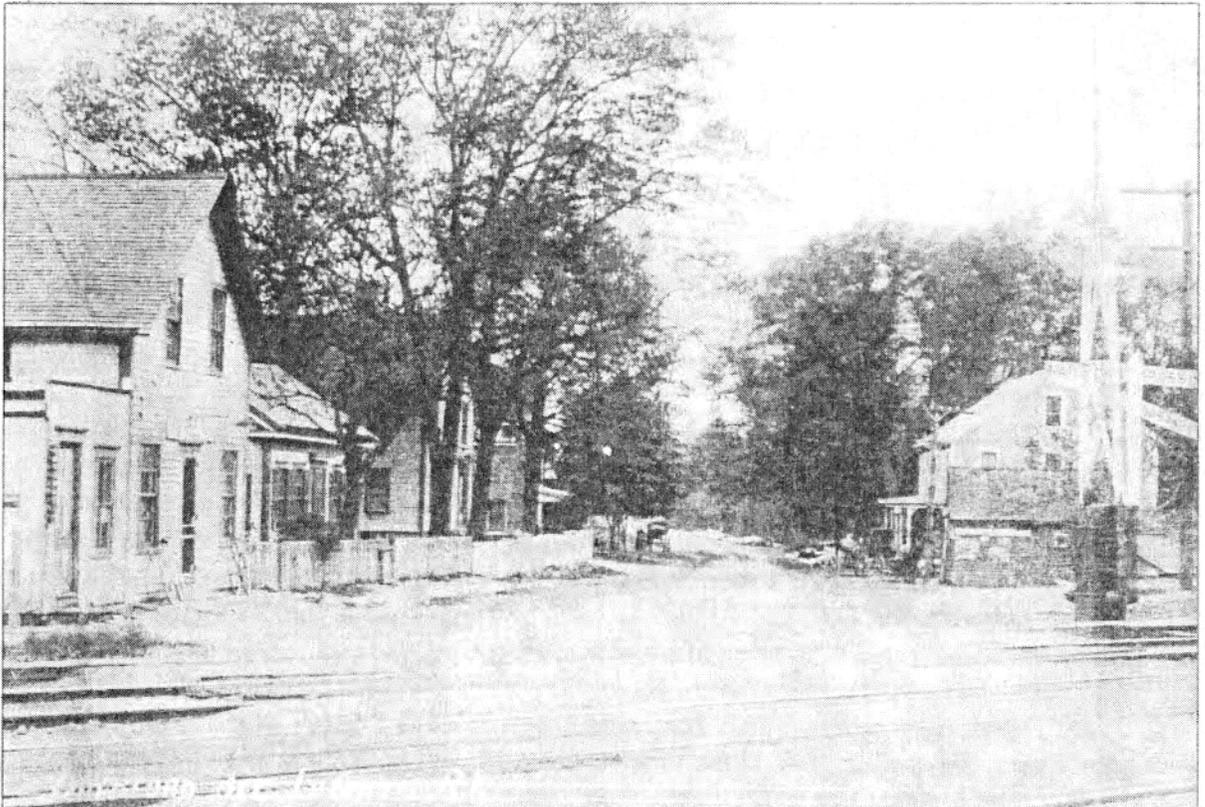
The View From Swamptown

The End of an Era – The Demolition of the Wickford Junction Train Station

On a warm July day in 1969, one of the final symbols of an age gone by ceased to exist. The station, where, for nearly 100 years, people had come and gone, where the extraordinarily rich had mingled with the everyday common folk of our fair town, was meeting its end. The railroad company demolition crew was on site and the wrecking claw was doing its worst.

The station had been constructed originally in 1873, burned in the late 1880's and was quickly rebuilt. By 1874 more than 50,000 passengers a year got off a main line train here and re-boarded on to a Newport and Wickford train on their way to the city by the sea via the little village of Wickford. An equal number got on and off the main line trains only, on their way to and from Boston, New York, or points beyond. During the station's heyday, the so-called golden age of Newport, those F. Scott Fitzgerald days, the siding tracks here and at the Poplar Point Ferry Landing were chock-a-block full of the private railcars of the upper crust of society. Left there to wait patiently while their owners spent their summers in palatial summer homes, the likes of which the world had rarely seen. All the freight and mail for Newport as well, passed through this station. During the same timeframe, textile magnate Robert Rodman shuttled every brick, every bag of mortar and each and every piece of machinery for his Lafayette Mill through this same railyard. Eventually the great Corliss Steam engine, the provider of his mill's lifeblood, passed through Wickford Junction too, on its way from the massive factory in Providence where it was created. Year after year, decade after decade, engines of all type sped through or stopped at the station. From wood powered trains all the way through the age of coal and then diesel, the trains whizzed by or chugged to an impatient halt in front of the station house.

None of that mattered in July of '69 though. The station had lived out its useful life. Vandals had stripped its innards and broken its windows. The heady days of rail travel were fast coming to an end. The station, which had once been featured on the schedules and signs of Grand Central Station along with all the other centers of rail travel along the northeast corridor, was just a blur to travelers now. No longer needed it was discarded. Only the large passenger overhead walkway was saved; carefully dismantled and reassembled at the new station along the edge of Route 128 south of Boston, an integral part of the federal interstate highway system, the innovation that had ironically brought about the end of rail travel and indirectly, the destruction of the Wickford Junction Rail Station.



Above, this historic postcard view looking east down Ten Rod Road shows the People's Supply Co. to the right with its big front porch. Now known as Buff's Mulch-Antique Store, today the building (below) stands against a backdrop of the modern Staples and Wal-Mart stores at Wickford Junction.

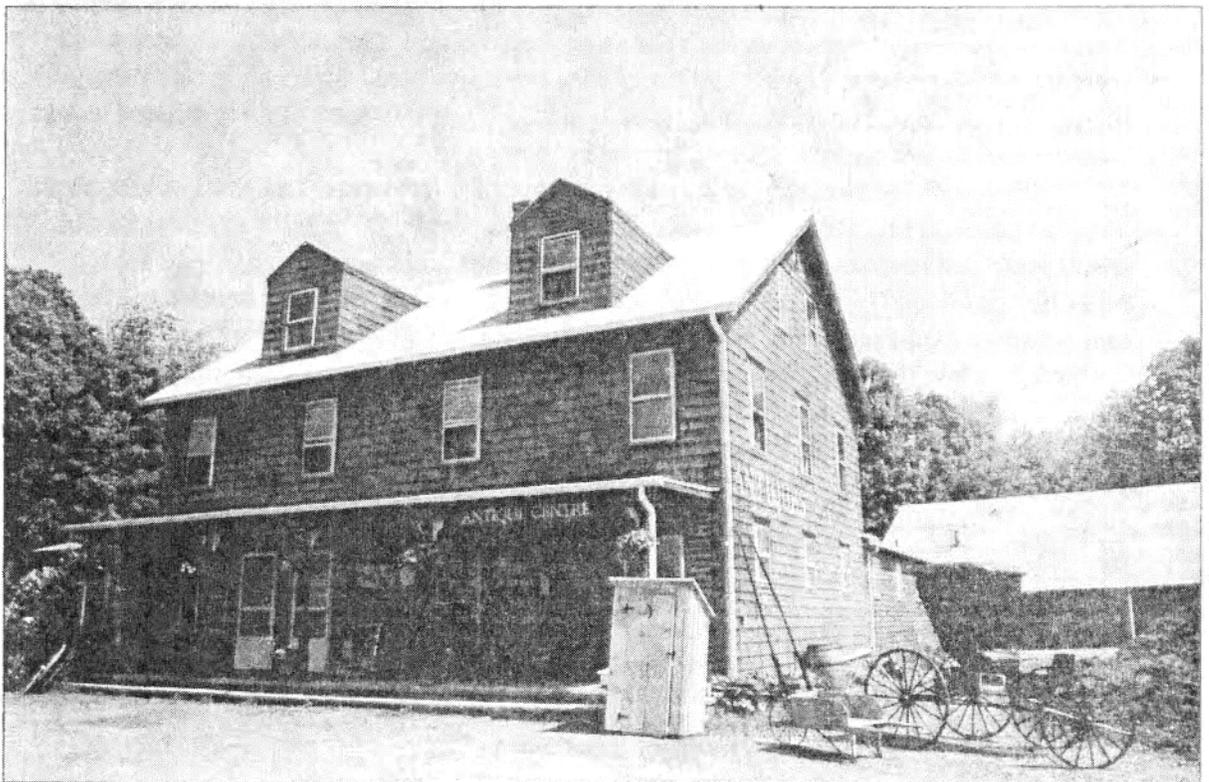


PHOTO: JAMES RUSH

The View From Swamptown

The Leonard Joslin "Traveling" General Store

I expect that during the fall and early winter of 1938, Leonard Joslin's temper would flare each and every time someone mentioned the construction of the new railroad underpass at Wickford Junction. Not that Joslin had anything against the railroad, mind you. Why he had worked for years as a railroad bridge supervisor and left the employ of the railroad with good graces. It had always been his desire to become a grocery storeowner, and he opened his own little store right next to the station in busy Wickford Junction. Joslin and his wife were so well suited to this line of work and so successful that they soon were able to buy out their nearest competitor, Charles Sweet, and move from their little store into the larger People's Supply Company which Sweet had operated.

Folks swore by the Joslin's "Peoples Supply Company". His regular customers were as loyal as they came. As far as they were concerned there was no one like Mr & Mrs Leonard Joslin and no store like People's Supply. Neither the Joslin's nor their patrons had any interest in seeing the store close for any more than the prefunctory and expected Sundays. So when the men from the State Highway Department came and told the Joslins that, not only were they going to be required to move their General Store (lock, stock, and barrel as it were) one half a mile west from its usual and expected location, they were also going to be expected to close for business for three days or more; well, that was just more than a body could stand.

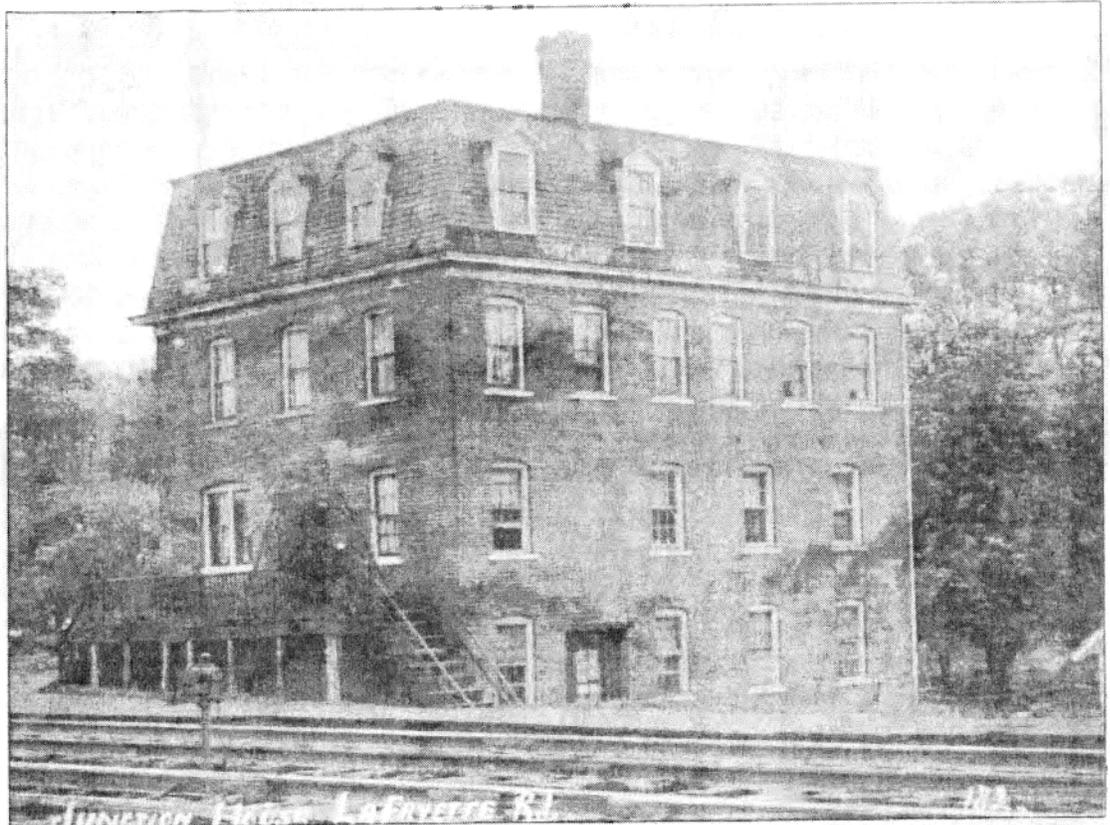
I expect when Leonard got home and told the Missus the news, she was fit to be tied. Never mind that the state was going to pay for the move; that was to be expected! Who was going to reimburse the hard working couple for shutting down the store from Tuesday December 20th through Thursday the 22nd? How would they make up for that lost income, and so close to the holidays no less? No, no that just wouldn't do! Leonard and his wife decided that night, that there was just no way they were closing their store; not even for one day!

I wish I could have been there that day when Leonard Joslin informed all the men from the State Highway Department, that he and his wife had come to the decision, that there was no way they had any intentions of closing up shop during the big move. The look on their faces must have been priceless. Why I expect that Head State engineer Colonel Robert F. Rodman himself probably tried to reason with his neighbors on the folly of this plan. Perhaps Leonard's resolve was steeled even more after the highfalutin' son of a mill owner tried to tell him what to do. Good Luck getting a hard-nosed Exeter Swamp Yankee like Leonard to back down.

Word got out about the controversy over moving Joslin's Store and when the fateful day came, even the Providence Journal had a reporter on the scene

ready to witness the action along with every local with some time on their hands. This is how that reporter described the scene; "So popular are the Joslin's in the neighborhood that when the store started moving down the street yesterday, customers got into their cars and chased it to get their staples. Rolling alongside the moving building, they shouted their orders, got their loaf of bread, pound of butter or can of peas thrown at them, threw the money to Mrs. Joslin and got their change thrown back into the car." The big building's journey down the street was slow and methodical. By dusk, they were half way there and the movers, who were quite taken by this display of customer loyalty, made certain to park the big building under a street light. Mrs. Joslin quickly got out a packing crate and set it out as an impromptu front step and then served her remaining customers. Day two of the big move proceeded as the day before and by late afternoon the "People's Supply Company" was parked on its new foundation a little east of Old Baptist Road.

Leonard Joslin passed on in 1943, but the building sits there to this day. It now houses an antique store and the locally well known "Buff's Mulch". Folks still have their favorite grocery store for sure, but I doubt any have a "following" like Leonard Joslin did.



Successful Exeter businessman Thomas G. Hunt built his Junction House Hotel, seen in this circa 1918 postcard, near the railroad tracks at Wickford Junction on Ten Rod Road.

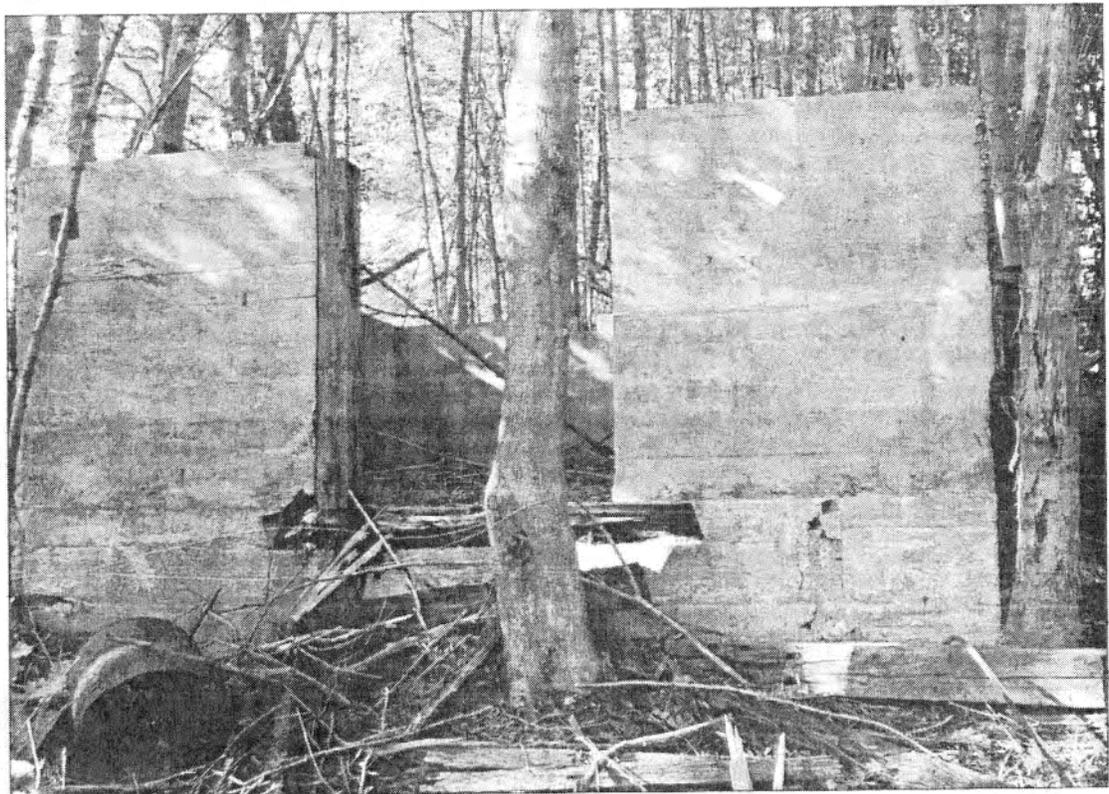


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

This foundation is one of two that remain of the former Junction House buildings. The former hotel was converted to a grain mill and elevator, which fire destroyed in 1960.

The View From Swamptown

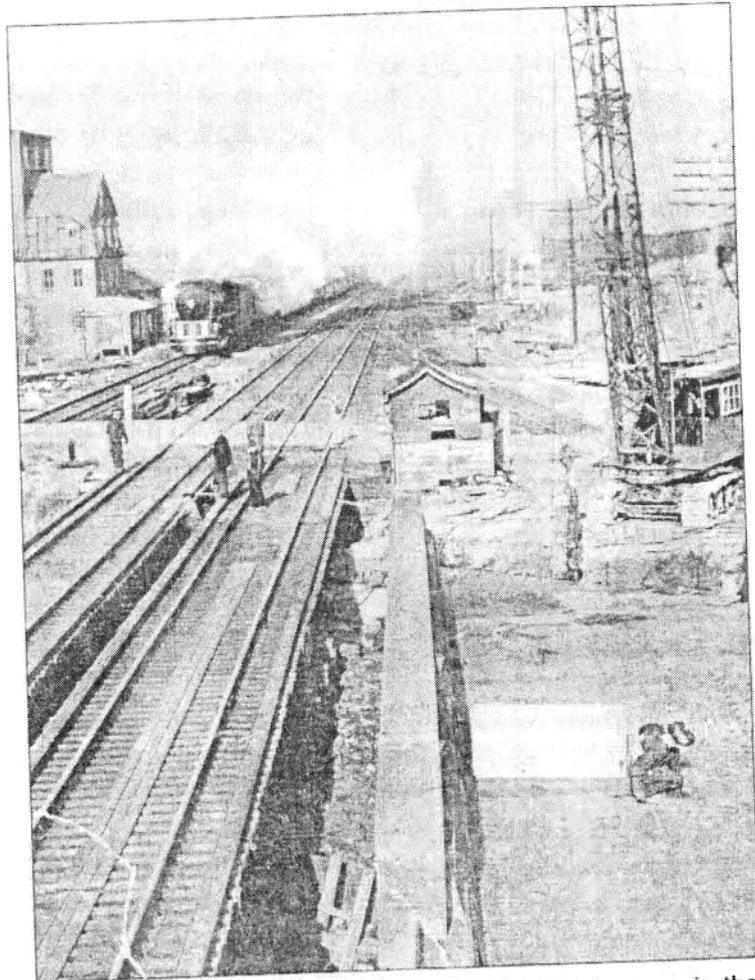
The Junction House of Thomas Hunt

The old foundations associated with the Junction House, found on the Ten Rod Road immediately after the railroad underpass, are one of those things that folks whiz by, day in and day out, without ever even noticing. The smaller one in the front can easily be seen, especially in the winter when the foliage is down, from the road going in either direction, but I expect very few take note. To see the large foundation behind it requires curiosity and a little bit of effort; effort though, that I'm afraid few expend. Like a tree or a large rock, it's been there seemingly forever, never changing; nothing ever occurring to draw ones attention to it. Those foundations are just an unnoticed part of the landscape. But like so many such things, the foundations of the old Junction House, tell a tale of a bygone age, if only we take the time to listen.

The Junction House, seen here in a photo postcard image from around 1918, was constructed around 1890 by Exeter born business man Thomas G. Hunt. Hunt had made a tidy nest egg for himself at a general store he ran out on Exeter Hill and now had grand visions of doing even better for himself at the busy little commercial hub that was quickly sprouting up around the Wickford Junction Train Station. He figured that some of the hundreds of travelers that came and went through the busy station might be looking for a nice place to stay for a night or two. With that thought in mind, he had this impressive and imposing brick hotel constructed and opened for business to no little fanfare.

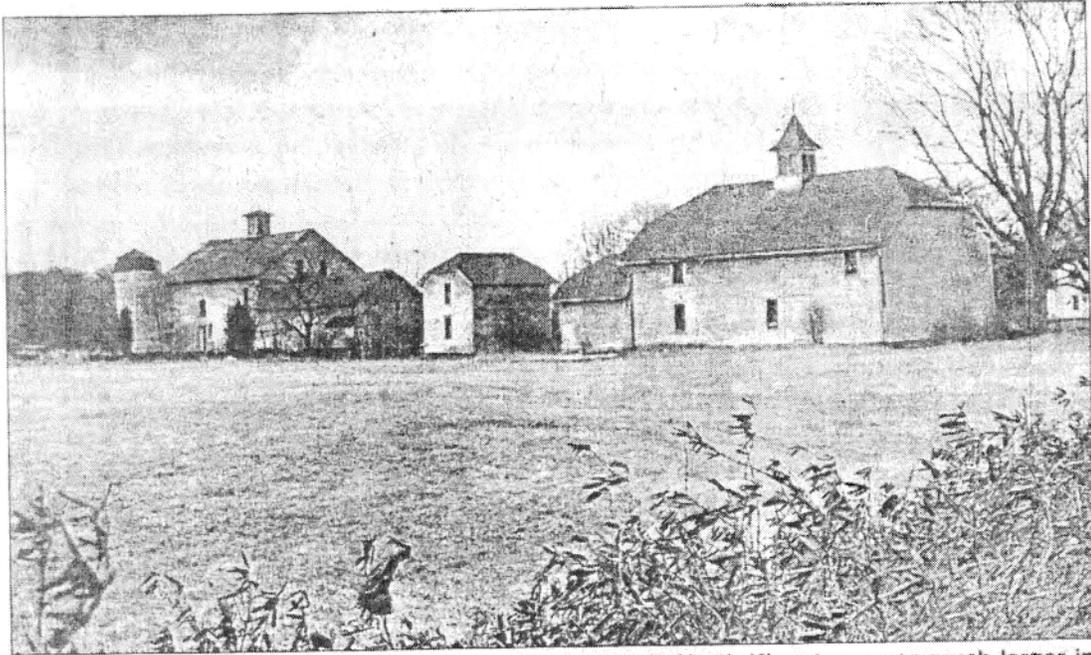
Hunt was successful with his hotel idea, so successful in fact that the Junction House was too small for his needs. He later built a larger brick block building (demolished in preparation for the rail underpass construction) across the street from the first; in this, he not only ran his hotel and lived there with his family, he also opened a store on the first floor as well. The original "Junction House" building, by no means went to waste. Hunt sold the building to recent immigrant Wasyl Fedorwicz. Fedorwicz purchased the building specifically for the reason that Hunt had to sell it – it was very close to the tracks. After serious modifications, the old Junction House Hotel reopened as the "Wickford Junction Grain Mill and Elevator" and can be seen here in the upper left corner of this circa 1939 photograph taken during the rail underpass construction period. Here Fedorwicz loaded and offloaded feed and grain from rail cars brought down the line. He also operated a grain mill in the old hotel shell where he would, for a fee, grind locally grown corn and grain into flour and meal. So even though the building no longer operated as a hotel, it was still a vital part of what went on at Wickford Junction and the surrounding area. Around 1960 the grain elevator burned in a spectacular fire. The rubble of the buildings was carted away and only the foundations remained; silently waiting for 65 years or so until their story could be told again.

You know, I'd be remiss if I didn't comment on the recent departure of Rich Kerbel as our long-serving Town Manager. A Town Manager is in reality the CEO of a community, carrying out the will of an elected Board of Directors known as the Town Council. As such, good Town Managers often become "nuts & bolts" sorts of people, involved and invested in the day-to-day minutia required to run a community in as



The former hotel, after many modifications, can be seen in the top left of this 1939 photograph, operating as a grain mill and elevator.

effective and efficient a manner as is possible. And, as a good Town Manager Rich Kerbel, indeed did end up expending a lot of time and energy on just such details; the little things that kept the “gears a-turning” in such a wonderful manner for all these years. The reason though, that Mr. Kerbel is so wonderful at what he does, is that, in spite of this never-ending and hard fought effort to keep North Kingstown’s (and now Coventry’s) wheels on the tracks, he never loses sight of two very important things that often elude your typical “nuts & bolts” sort of manager. First, Rich Kerbel, has always been able to keep one eye on “the big picture” while he spent all those years zeroing in on the little details. As I see it, the big picture consists of everything that makes North Kingstown the desirable place to live in that it is. Rich always did his utmost to preserve that very intangible concept. Secondly, he is first and foremost all about people. Rich understands that it’s humanity that makes a community – people matter; from the senior citizens at Beechwood House to the kids riding on the “Blue Bus”, from the many town employees that do all manner of things to keep NK up and running to the dedicated folks that serve as elected and appointed committee members, its people that make North Kingstown great. People like Rich Kerbel – Good Luck in Coventry Rich!



The barn complex at the intersection of routes 1 and 4 in North Kingstown was much larger in the early 1970s (above) than it is today (below). In 1977, a devastating fire in the rear buildings left only the corncrib standing, which was then moved to the main barn at roadside.

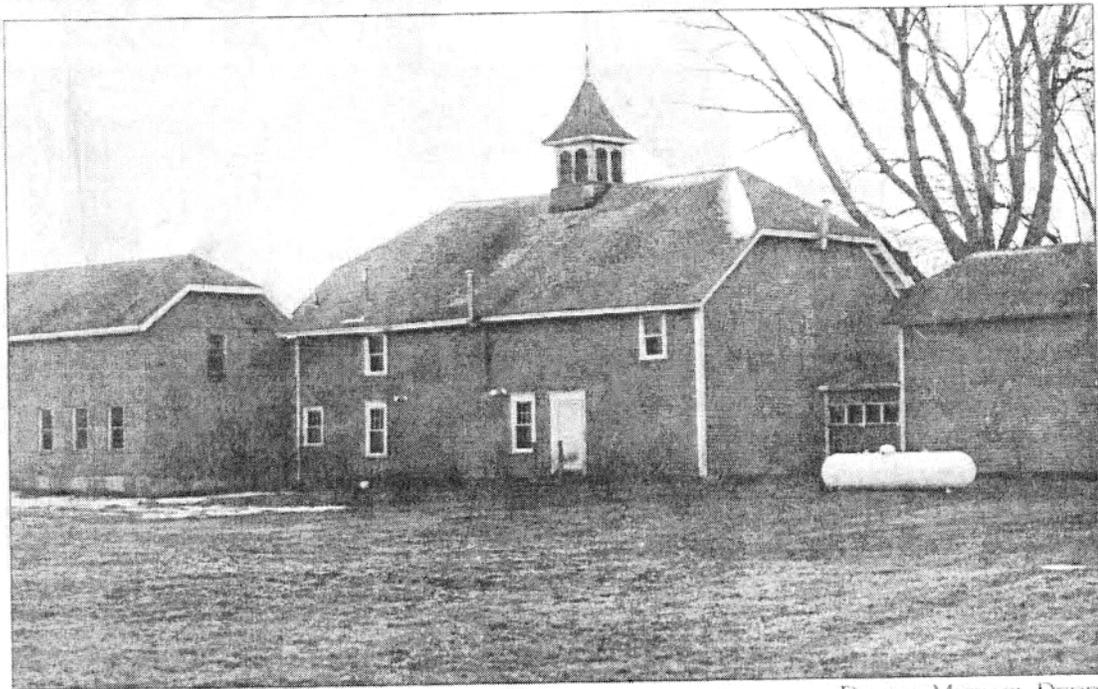


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The View From Swamptown

The Shady Lea/Silver Spring Mill Complex Barns

I expect we've all noticed these wonderful barn buildings as we head south out of "Our Fair Town" towards Wakefield, Kingston, and Narragansett. Why, it's hard not to notice them and their commanding presence. These barns have been standing there silently at this busy intersection for nearly 125 years. The changes they've seen are like a timeline that defines the changes that the whole of southern RI has undergone. But who built them and why?

As you can see by the accompanying photograph, this complex, at one time, was even larger than it is today. It was built, over time, by Charles Rodman, beginning in the early 1870's. It is thought that the barns were used to house the horses, mules, and other livestock necessary to operate the two adjacent Rodman owned mills, Shady Lea and Silver Spring. I expect that the Charles Rodman family's personal horses and livestock were also cared for here. Running this barn/stable complex was just another of the many jobs associated with operating a textile milling operation of this scale in the latter part of the 19th century.

The barns, and the nearby Charles Rodman Mansion House, were a part of the Rodman family empire from the date of their construction right up until the empire's end in 1952. They were sold at auction at that time and spent another decade or two as a part of an active farming concern. By the 1970's though, the days of the profitable small farm were quickly coming to a close. The buildings were then occupied by "Potpourri Potters" a hand made pottery concern. A devastating fire in 1977 destroyed the back barn and associated structures. After the fire damage clean-up, the large corn crib was moved to the front of the property and attached to the remaining barn.

Since then, the barn complex has also been home to a large handmade craft concern known as "Wickford Place". Now, though, these 125 year old throwbacks to a time long past sit empty. Lets hope its owners and future tenants take these barn's long history into consideration as they plan the next phase of their future. ~~Treat them with the~~ dignity they deserve.



PHOTOS: JAMES RUSH

A home-shortage for Davisville mill workers in the 1890s provided a golden opportunity for William S. Allen, who built these two identical boardinghouses on Old Baptist Road to much success.



The View From Swamptown

The William Allen Boarding Houses

Perhaps in your travels down Old Baptist Road, you've noticed these two big, and remarkably similar, houses about three-quarters of the way down towards Devil's Foot/Davisville Road. The reason they look so similar is that they, indeed, are basically the same building. They were both built by the same gentleman to serve the exact same purpose. These are the mill worker boardinghouses of William S. Allen.

William S. Allen was a man whose life revolved around wood. He was born in April of 1852, one of 14 children born to Stephen and Elizabeth (Huling) Allen, and for the greatest part of his time on this earth was known as a lumber and cordwood dealer, sawyer (sawmill owner/operator), and builder. He was the owner of a large portable sawmill, which he used to clear woodlots all around the Davisville area. He would set up his sawmill on a person's land and clear cut the area for them. Allen would make his profit by keeping a portion of the cordwood and lumber sawn from the property and reselling it on the open market. He also owned his own large woodlots where he would "set up shop" and work in between jobs. He was also a farmer and avid Davisville/Quidnessett Grange member. He was so proud of his record of attendance at Grange related events that his obituary noted the fact that he had attended 65 consecutive yearly County Fairs at the fairgrounds in nearby Kingston, RI.

Allen built the first of these two big boarding houses (more than likely out of locally grown and sawn lumber) in 1892-3 to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the growing housing shortage around the area of the recently built Reynolds Manufacturing Company Mill. By early 1896 the success of his popular boarding house was such that he decided to build another one right next door. George Loxton in his book on Davisville remarks that "these two buildings were considered to be among the most desirable places in which to live in Davisville."

Allen's contributions to his community also included the construction of the Pine Grove Hall in 1901. He built the community meeting, dance, and show hall to replace the recently destroyed by fire "Vaughn's Hall" which had served the same purpose. Something tells me that Allen also built the Hall to "one-up" his main competitor in the lumber trade, Lorenzo Vaughn who had built the previous two halls in the village; both of which eventually were destroyed by fire. The two men were among the village's elder statesman at the time and I expect there existed a friendly sense of competition between them.

William Allen lived a long and successful life entirely within the confines of the community of Davisville. Around the time that he layed his big young hands on his first two-man buck saw, the Civil War was raging. As he was lowered in a

sturdy pine box to his final resting-place at Quidnessett Cemetery in late 1937, the world was poised on the brink of World War II. In between, William Allen, like the timberman he was, left his mark on his world.

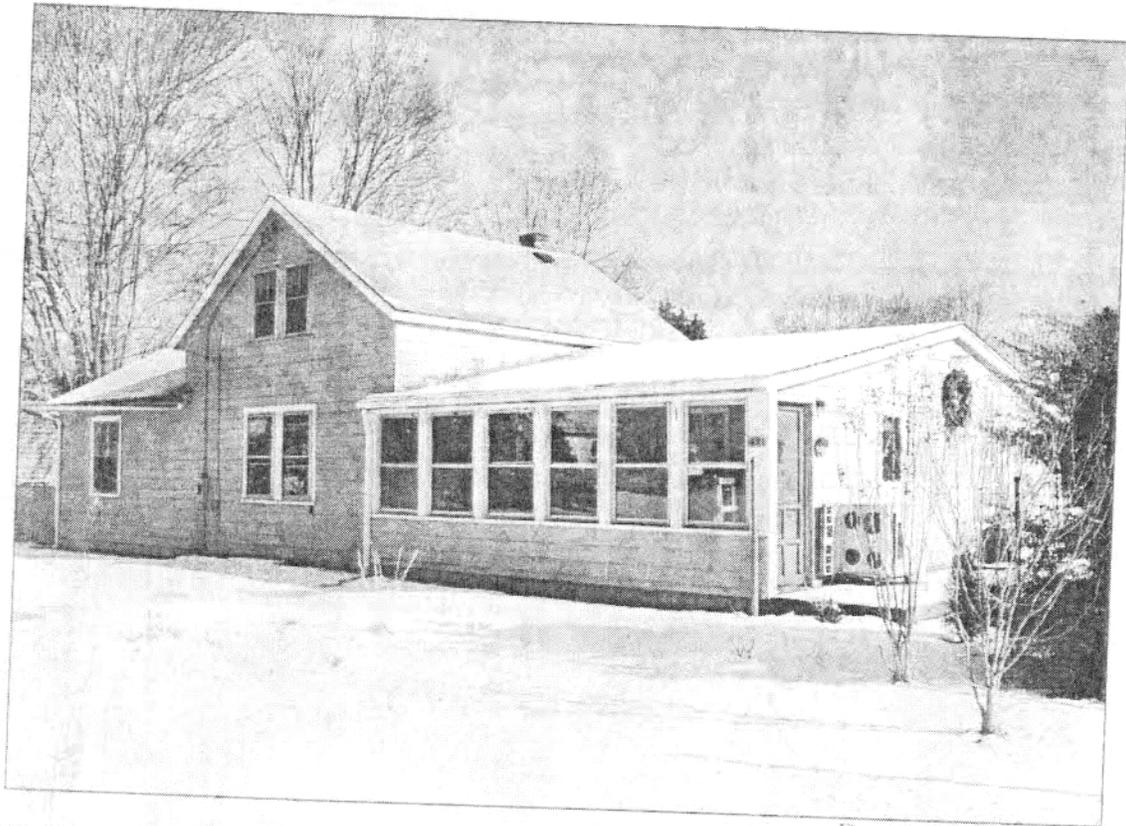


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The house at 420 School St., with its storied past, is shown as it appears today. Below, the Stevens' store is shown as it appeared in the 1970s.

Unassuming little house in Davisville has quite a past

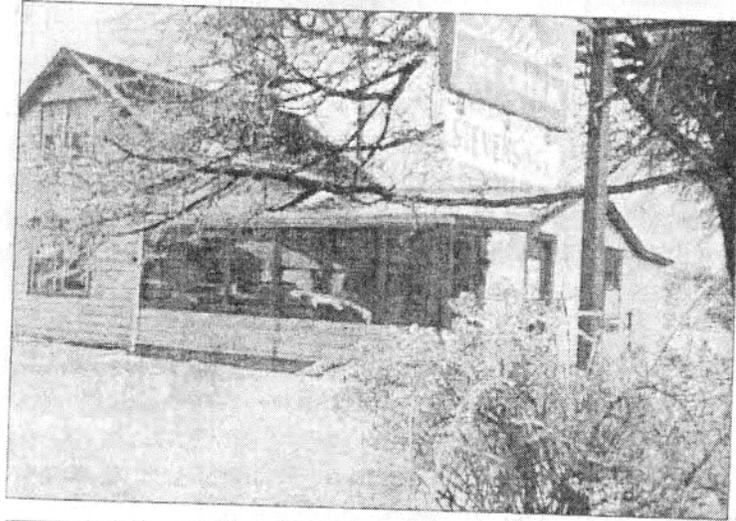
The unimposing little home at 420 School St. is certainly not a home that is ever going to turn heads as folks drive past. It's a simple building really; there are literally hundreds of these little farmhouses spread out across New England.

The design is strictly utilitarian, a practical home for a practical sort of people; yes, there was nothing fancy about a small farmer in the 19th century New England. So, driving by you might not realize the tale this home can tell us. You'd scant imagine a story of its farmers, mill workers and railroad men, or a tale of a football hero and some unlikely hometown heroes. But that's exactly the story that 420 School St. has been longing to tell us. Let's start at the beginning.

Archibald Slocum constructed the farmhouse at 420 School St. sometime during the first quarter of the 19th century. It was the centerpiece to Slocum's 37-acre farm and was very much akin to all the development that was going on in the Davis Mills (the name Davisville came much later) section of town in that time frame. Folks out there had a farm large enough to feed their family and to provide a little extra to trade down at the company mill store over at the Davis brother's mill on the Hunt River. This form of barter, where a farmer brought in the excess fruits of his labor to the mill store and exchanged it for credit from which he could purchase the other things his family might need, was the norm in small farming/mill villages across New England. These folks existed in nearly a cashless society and got along quite nicely, mind you. More than likely, the women folk of Slocum's family also performed home weaving on small looms provided the by Davis clan. This was another way of building up credit at the store for your family and, heck, you also could use the company-provided loom to weave fabric for your own clan. This home weaving cottage industry was, therefore, beneficial to all involved.

In 1861, the Slocum family sold its 37-acre farm to Daniel and Emeline Fones of the ancient Fones clan, some of the earliest settlers to the region. Daniel's family by then already had been around more than 200 years and Fones relations were scattered all across Davisville and Quidnessett.

Their life was very much like the life of the Slocums who had preceded them. Daniel Fones and his clan ran the farm and traded at the company store. When the opportunity presented itself, he and his family would work for a time at the mill. This most likely occurred at a time when the needs of the farm were small and the Davises had extra work. For you see, there were no job guarantees back then. If there was no work, you stayed home. So you took a job if and when you could. Daniel Fones also apparently started up a small side business of his own, as his death records indicate a double occupation of farmer and junk man.



The front yard of the farmhouse at 420 School St. is the setting for this circa 1930 photograph of John Nichols Jr.



Ralph "Rip" Nichols was a veteran of the Rose Bowl and an All-American Collegiate Football Selection by the time this photo was taken.

Life must have gone well for the Fones family, as before long Daniel's son Henry was able to purchase a smaller farm across the street. No doubt, father and son worked together and shared responsibilities when they could. This arrangement continued until January 1882, when Daniel Fones succumbed to a respiratory ailment. Henry took over the responsibilities of both farms until April 1900 when his mother, Emeline, passed on as well. Soon after that, Henry sold his parents' property to John and Clara Nichols and a new period in the farm's history began.

John Nichols was a painter by trade. He was born in South Kingstown in 1869 and had worked 20 years for the Rodman family at their numerous mills. His wife, Clara (Hall) Nichols was a Hopkinton lass and had met John at the mills. The turn of the century brought a whole new life for them when John was hired on by the New York New Haven Railroad as the new boss painter out of Davisville. This was a step up from millwork and, in an age before autos were commonplace, required the Nichols family to move nearer to the station at Davisville. They purchased the Fones farm, just a short walk away from the train station, and began their new life.

John worked long hours for the railroad, eventually joined by his son John Jr., and helped out on the poultry farm which they began on the old Fones place. Clara and daughter Catherine were primarily responsible for the farm (geese were their specialty) and they were assisted by John and sons John Jr. and Ralph. Clara apparently worked at the mill when times were tough, as she periodically shows up on the payroll. Like the families before them who had inhabited the old farmhouse, you did what you had to do to get by.

Now Ralph was a special one and all who knew him were aware of the fact. He excelled at school, at first just across the street at the Davisville schoolhouse and later down in Wickford where he went to high school, and was a remarkably gifted athlete. A terror on the football field, he had earned the nickname of "Rip" Nichols and soon was noticed by the coaches up at Brown University.

As his senior year drew to a close, the unthinkable occurred. Rip Nichols was offered a scholarship to play football for Brown University. All of Davisville swelled with pride over the news of a local boy who had made the big time. And boy had he ever! Ralph "Rip" Nichols became an integral part of a team that eventually went on to play in the 1916 Rose Bowl.

No longer just a local hero, Rip was to receive national attention when, in his senior, he was named a member of the 1917 Football All-American Team. He graduated a star with an engineering degree, a promising professional football career and national renown.

But all this was forever interrupted by the big one: World War I. Before the snap of another pigskin, both Ralph and John Jr. became doughboys and went off to fight the "Hun" in Europe. Thankfully, they both survived the war and came home to Clara and John Sr., but Ralph's dream of a career in football, like the dreams of so many young



Lois and Ray Stevens ran their store out of their home from 1946 to 1984. Their business venture featured a popular penny candy case, shown below around Christmas 1977, that delighted two generations of Davisville children.



men at that time, was forever ended by the war and its aftermath.

Both boys came back to work for the railroads. John joined his dad at the Davisville Station and Ralph took an engineering job with the Southern Pacific where he worked in Texas, California and Washington, D.C. He eventually made his mother's day when he accepted a new position with the Army Corps of Engineers working in New England on the damming of the Scituate reservoir and the dredging of New Bedford harbor.

Clara's pleasure at having her family reunited was sadly short-lived, however, as one by one the men in her life died. First, husband John in 1938, then Ralph in 1940 and John Jr. a while after that. After the loss of her second son in 1943, Clara sold off most of the farm to a developer who eventually built The Plantation Park housing development there to meet the housing needs of the rapidly expanding Quonset/Davisville military complex. Nichols Road, the main street through the development, was named in Clara's honor. These tragedies and losses, though, never got Clara down for long. She is remembered as a pleasant and joyous soul by all who knew her. She succumbed to complications from diabetes in 1945. She was 73 years old.

The next owners of the farmhouse were Ray and Lois Stevens. They purchased it in 1945 from the Nichols family. It was Quonset/Davisville that brought the Stevens family here from Malden, Mass. Ray had a job on the big base and Lois, responding to the dual needs of a community without a convenience store and a family needing an extra income, took their entire savings of \$200 and decided to take a chance on a new business.

The store opened on Jan. 1, 1946, and for nearly the next 40 years, the entire community of Davisville (much of it sited on the fields of the former Nichols farm) was thankful she took the risk. Back then most folks only had one car and no small market could be found between East Greenwich and Wickford. A store within walking distance was a salvation to many a young mother stranded in suburbia without a means of transportation. Lois began to notice that most of the folks who came into the store for a loaf of bread or a quart of milk arrived with children in tow. She thought she ought to have something there for these young visitors, and her penny candy showcase was born. In the end, that candy display not only delighted and enthralled two generations of children who flocked to the case and left many a little nose print on its glass front, but allowed Lois to keep the store going well beyond all the other little corner markets that dotted the streetscape of our fair town.

When the store did finally close in 1984 it was because the owners chose to close it due to their age, not because they had to. You see, by virtue of their good nature, kind disposition and joyous personalities and because of the unaccountable acts of kindness performed by Lois and Ray over the years, they were cherished members of literally hundreds of families across Davisville. Had they wished it, happy faces would still be pressed against the glass of the penny candy shelves while mothers shared the events of the day. For it is certain to me that the residents of Davisville, who have never forgotten what the Stevens have meant to the community, would never stop going there for conveniences, candy and a friendly smile.

So, the little farmhouse at 420 School St. really is as important an artifact of the village's history as the ruins of the mill or the big Navy base that absconded with its name. If you had judged this book by its cover, you'd certainly have missed a wonderful story.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The Gardiner family built Mount Maple, on the western end of Annaquatucket Road, to help solve the housing crunch caused by the influx of immigrants coming into town to work in the textile mills.

The View From Swamptown

Mount Maple – Part One

Greetings readers, this week we are going to begin a two part look at the story behind the grand old building at the western end of Annaquatucket Road known as Mount Maple. Mount Maple tells us two different, but inter-related tales about two very different and distinct waves of immigrants to the shores of America. The first wave, those who came to this country during its colonial beginnings, is represented by the Gardiner clan. The Gardiner's are one of North Kingstown's largest and most successful colonial era families, and were the original builders of Mount Maple. The second important wave of immigration to this area occurred as a direct result of a national calamity across the Atlantic. The infamous Irish Potato Famine and its resulting mass migration to America, not only helped save many a desperate and destitute family, it also filled a pressing need here in North Kingstown and elsewhere for workers in the rapidly growing textile industry.

The area where Mount Maple is presently situated was, at the middle of the 1800's, a part of the land-holdings of the Willett Gardiner family. Willett and Mary Gardiner had a large family and ran a successful farm along the southwest end of the road between the little mill villages of Annaquatucket and Belleville (now Annaquatucket Road). This area, like much of North Kingstown, was changing rapidly. North Kingstown, a community that was once primarily a farming region was quickly becoming a hot bed of activity in the burgeoning textile industry. I expect Willett had mixed emotions about the whole affair. Just like folks today, he probably didn't like the drastic changes that were occurring. But as a farmer who side lighted as a trained mason, he probably enjoyed the economic opportunities that the Civil War-driven textile centered local economy presented. One local problem that I'm certain Willett was keenly aware of, was a critical shortage of local housing to put up the many Irish and French Canadian immigrants who were moving here to North Kingstown to work in the mills. You see, most of the longtime local available workers were already employed at a mill or working a farm. Mill owners like the folks at the big Belleville Mill and the Hamilton Web mill, both just a short walk from Willett's farm, were having to look far a field for workers to keep the looms clacking and humming along. Advertising far and wide, they eventually filled their needs with these eager Irish and French Canadian workers. Problem was, there were few places to house this large and rapid influx of newcomers.

This opportunity was not lost upon Willett and his extended Gardiner clan. One of his sons, the recent widower Whiting Gardiner (his first wife from the large Rathbun family passed on quite unexpectedly), was getting remarried to a second cousin named Hannah Gardiner. Willett and Mary, put their heads together with the newlyweds and Hannah's parents, William and Louisa Gardiner (William was apparently Willett's cousin) and came up with a bold plan. A piece was carved out of the sizeable Willett Gardiner farm and deeded over to Whiting and Hannah. Upon this land these inter-related Gardiner families constructed a substantial boarding house. The location selected,

near the Belleville rail station and within walking distance of seven mills; Belleville, Hamilton, Annaquatucket, Oak Hill, Silver Spring, Shady Lea, and Narragansett, was ideal for success. In 1869 the Gardiner Boarding House was open for business. To keep a ready stream of additional monies flowing in, Whiting gave up the farming life and took a job at Belleville as a dresser tender/mechanic. Hannah stayed home, raised their children, and tended to the needs of the boarding house. By the 1870 census, the boarding house was full.

Next week we'll take a look at the family most associated with Mount Maple. For nearly seventy years, the boarding house was owned and occupied by three generations of the Edmund Cullen clan. We'll take a gander at their important role in the establishment of the local Roman Catholic Parish of St. Bernard's and their long-standing family connection to another hard-working Irish-immigrant entrepreneurial clan; the Ryan's of Ryan's Market fame.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Edmund Cullen did so well for himself after escaping potato famine in Ireland, he purchased the old boarding house at the western end of Annaquatucket Road and renamed it Mount Maple.

The View From Swamptown

Mount Maple – The Cullens

Last week, we began a journey through the tale told us by Mount Maple, the big old boarding house at the western end of Annaquatucket Road. We take up this week on the other side of the Atlantic, for to understand the rest of the story; one must begin to comprehend the catastrophe that was occurring in Ireland around the same time that “Our Fair Town’s” Gardiner clan was wrestling with the changes that were going on around them. While the Gardiner’s situation presented itself with opportunities, the precarious position that young Edmund Cullen of Ballagh in County Tipperary, found himself in can only be described as “survival of the fittest”. You see, Edmund was living through the Great Potato Famine.

Back in County Tipperary during the first half of the 19th century, like the rest of rural Ireland, life, which was by all descriptions difficult, was getting rapidly worse. The indigenous population of Irish farmers had been reduced, through a series of events too complicated to describe here, to living on English absentee-landlord owned land and living on a diet consisting almost completely of potatoes. Don’t get me wrong these small farm farmers were expert at what they did. Bountiful crops of corn, wheat, oats, as well as large quantities of beef, mutton, and poultry were produced on their farms each season. Due, though to artificial high rents and an economy that was spiraling out of control all these wonderful foodstuffs were sold and exported to England and Europe. Leaving only the lowly, but nutritious potato as Ireland’s main food staple. It was into this difficult world that Edward Cullen and his wife Mary (Ryan) Cullen brought their third son Edmund, in 1843.

By 1847, the bottom had seemingly fallen out of the already difficult life that this family lived. The year prior, a strange thing had occurred. A mysterious blight had afflicted the potato crop upon which all Irish folks depended. As a matter of fact, more than half of the country’s total crop had failed; it lay rotting in the fields, a foul and putrefied mess. The winter of 1846-47 was the harshest that any living Irish soul could remember. Sickness and disease ran rampant through the closely situated village folk, made weak by starvation. Spring finally arrived with its promise of better times, and the Irish farmers carefully tended the few seed potatoes that they had, always hopeful for better times. Their hopes, and fragile grasp on survival, were dashed, when, in the fall, the entire potato crop failed. The Irish peasant’s world was at this very moment, turned completely on its heels, death ran rampant through the already weakened populace. It was said, in the winter of 1847 the spirit of every proud Irishman who survived the blight was broken; an entire generation of hard working Irish breadwinners were either killed or emotionally broken by a tiny spore that destroyed the potato crop. This national tragedy, of a scope that we can scarcely comprehend, is the true source of every joke about “drunken Irishman” ever told; for here a nation was destroyed and the survivors left to cope with the aftermath. It is estimated, in that short two-year period of the blight, that one and a half million Irish souls succumbed to disease and starvation. In the fifteen years that followed this catastrophe, another million and a half or so left their beloved

homeland. Those that left, and those that stayed behind, kept with them and passed on to their children and grandchildren, a rightful resentment towards the English landlords that precipitated those awful times. For the facts show that throughout all this, the English did little to aid their brethren. The ships full of corn, wheat, mutton and beef continued to leave Irish ports, even as the folks growing the grain and loading the ships were slowly starving to death. As sick Irish farmers and fathers were unable to meet their exorbitant rents their families were evicted and left to die in the streets. American ships loaded with free food for the starving Irish were required to put into English ports first, where the ship's contents were forcibly transferred to English owned vessels so as to allow English shippers to make a profit upon the Irish misery. In 1849, the ultimate insult was paid to the Irish by their British oppressors. At this tragic moment a seemingly unaffected Queen Victoria decided to pay a visit to her Irish subjects. No expense was spared for her visit. At one banquet alone, more than \$5000 dollars was spent on food and wine in a country where a family of six were struggling to stay alive for a week on a dollars worth of food. The next time you wonder about the ongoing war in Northern Ireland, and its simmering hatred, mull that image over for a bit.

Needless to say, life for the Cullens was difficult. Therefore in 1864, they decided to send their son Edmund off to America to live with his uncle Morris Ryan's family and make a go of it in the land of opportunity. The Ryan's had left County Tipperary earlier in 1860 and had settled in Greenville RI, where they all worked in the textile mills. Twenty one year old Edmund made his way to Greenville by way of New York City and joined his Ryan relations at work in the mills. You can be certain that throughout all of this time, Edmund, as did nearly all Irish immigrants to the new world, was sending money back to his family in Tipperary. In 1869, Edmund married local Irish lass Cecelia Cavanaugh of North Smithfield and relocated to Belleville in North Kingstown where he began work at a mill there. He was followed shortly thereafter by his young cousin Michael J. Ryan (Morris's youngest son) who also took up work in the mill.

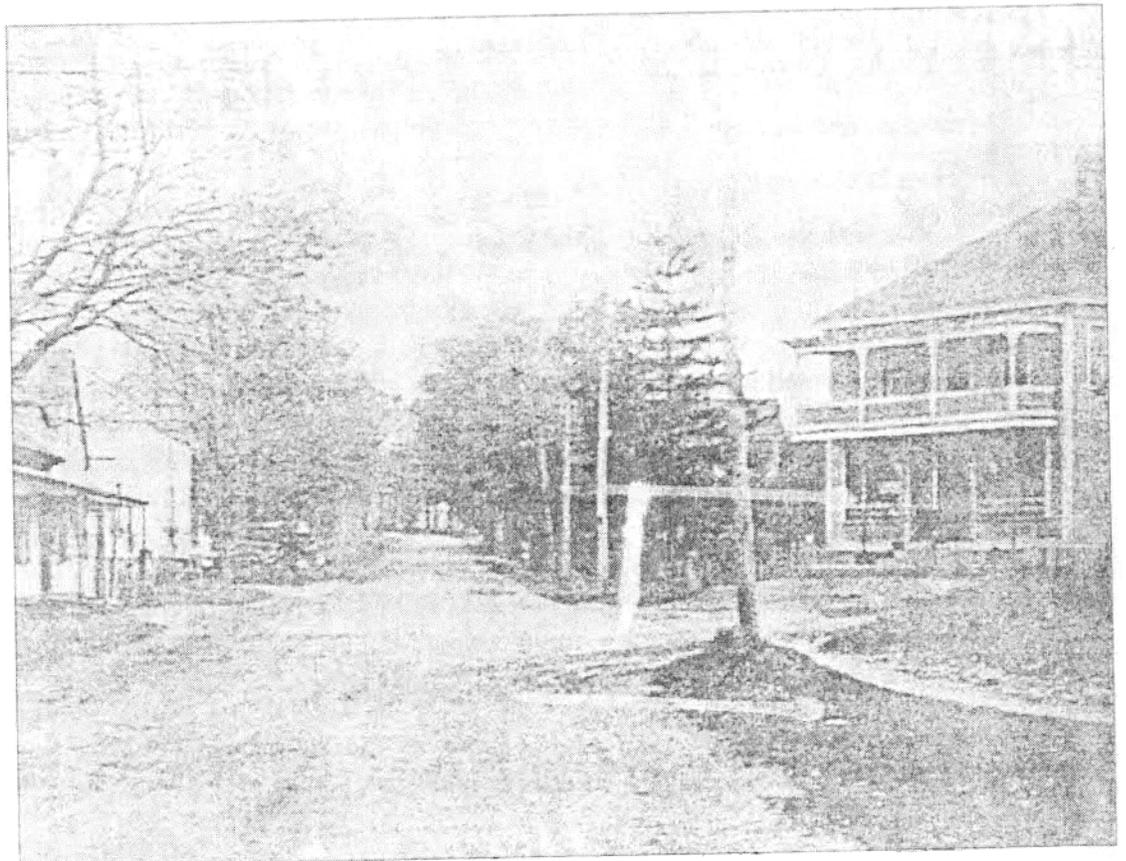
We'll leave Michael out of the tale for now as we're going to look at the story behind Ryan's Market next week. Edmund's life finally took a turn for the better at Belleville. An intelligent and hardworking man, he made his way up through the ranks until he became a wool-buyer for the Belleville Mill. His work took him all over the world and presented him with the financial wherewithal to not only raise a family of his own and support his relations back in Ireland, but to purchase for himself in August of 1894, the big Gardiner boarding house which he renamed Mount Maple. The "Clan Cullen" lived at Mount Maple; Edmund continued at the mill and Cecelia ran the boarding house.

Next week, we'll finish the tale of the Cullens and Mount Maple and take a well-deserved Swamptown gander at Edmund's young cousin Michael and the corner market that he began in 1886, as our Irish immigrants story comes to its conclusion.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

THEN AND NOW: A 1910 postcard view of busy Belleville Corners (above, left) is today more likely recognized as the intersection of Oak Hill and Tower Hill roads. From 1886 to 1895 Ryan's Market rented the large building on the right with the second-story porch until the business moved to its present-day location (above, right) on Brown Street in Wickford village.



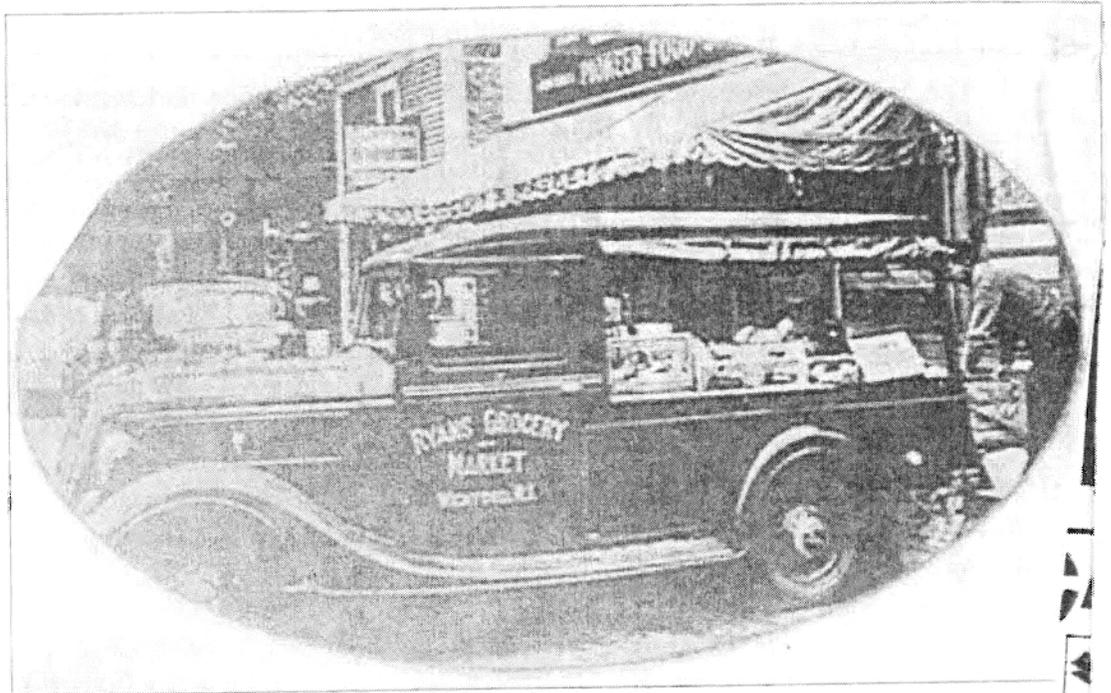
The View From Swampstown

Michael Ryan & his Corner Market

Last week, we left off in August of 1894, with the Cullen family purchasing the Gardiner Boarding House and settling into their piece of the American dream. Along the way, Edmund Cullen had returned a favor to the Morris Ryan family of Greenville, RI and had assisted their young son Michael Ryan as he started out here in Our Fair Town, working at the same Belleville Woolen Mill that he did. It appears, from census records that Ryan may have relocated to North Kingstown during the late 1870's. What we can be sure of is that in 1882, a 25 year old Michael Ryan married 23 year old Mary Cassady another Belleville Irish-American mill worker. We can also be certain that the two families remained fast friends, as St. Bernard's Catholic Church records indicate that both the Cullen and Ryan families played an active part in taking the Catholic Mission at Belleville (for that is all that the parish was at that time) and transforming it into a fully recognized member of the newly formed Catholic Diocese of Providence. Many a fundraiser was held on the lawn and big front porch of Mount Maple along the road to that important accomplishment.

Perhaps it was the success of his friend Edmund Cullen that motivated the 29 year old Irish immigrant to take a leap of faith and leave his secure job as a finisher at the mill for an uncertain future. We may never know. But, for whatever reason, in 1886 both Michael and Mary left the employ of the mill, and rented a building at the busy intersection of Oak Hill and Tower Hill Roads, known then as Belleville Corners. This building, seen in the accompanying photos, was ideal for the business they planned to undertake; in that very year Michael and Mary opened Ryan's Market and began to compete with the many other small markets which were located in this busy village.

Their fiscal survival during the nine years that followed is a testimony to their success, as there were many competitors along the way that did not fare so well. By October of 1895, the Ryan's were prepared to take another chance, for it was in then that they purchased a somewhat rundown storefront, with an apartment above, on Brown Street in the up and coming village of Wickford. The listed price in the deed of transfer, \$35 plus other considerations, spoke volumes about the condition of both the building and the village at that juncture in time. I expect though, that the Ryan's intuitively sensed then, what we historians, in retrospective, have said so often. The impact of the combination of the Sea View Electric Railway and the Newport & Wickford rail spur was going to change Wickford in a very positive way. The "Trains that saved Wickford" were going to also secure the future of the Clan Ryan for generations to come. Not that this was a sure bet, here too there were competitors. But the Clan Ryan understood then, and still do to this day, that it's not enough just to have a clean market with good food at a reasonable price. In order to get folks (especially long term dyed-in-the-wool swamp yankee folks) to come back to your store for literally generations, they've got to enjoy the experience, they've got to feel like the shop workers are glad to have them there. It makes a world of difference to know that everyone working in the store makes the effort



An early photo outside of Ryan's Market in Wickford features the company truck loaded up for business.



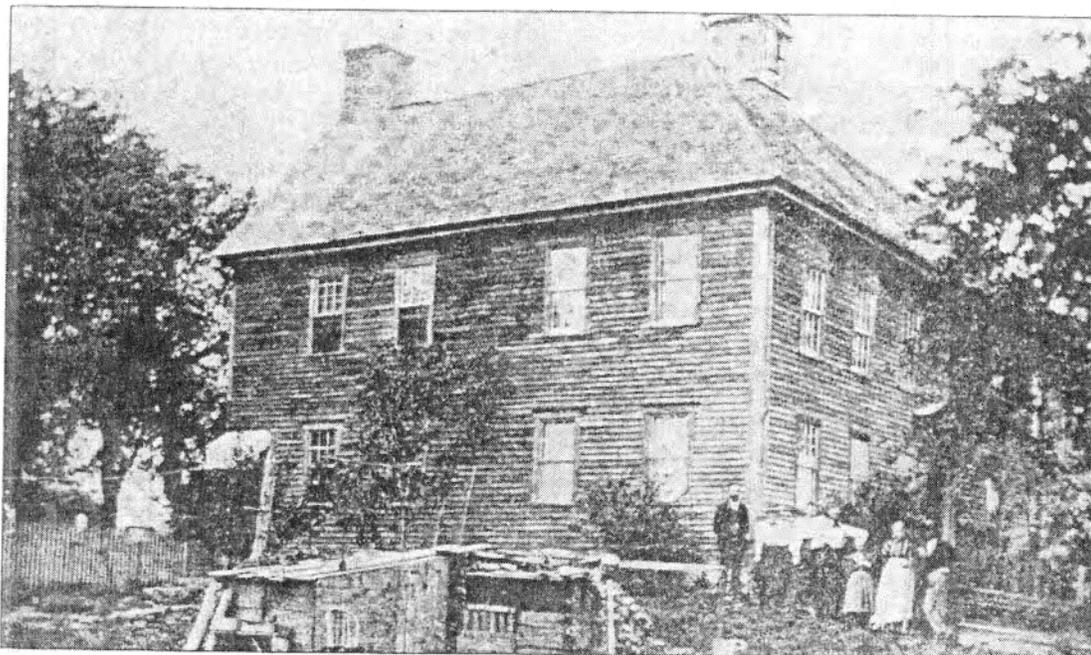
Edmund Cullen (above) looked after his young cousin and fellow immigrant, Michael Ryan, who later opened Ryan's Market with his wife in Belleville. The business later moved to Wickford, where it is today.

to know your name, to say hello, to lend a hand with those heavy bags on an icy day. That's why Ryan's Market is still in business 118 years after Michael and Mary Ryan took a leap of faith and grabbed a hold of their version of the American dream. It's a dream that brought their family from an uncertain future in a destitute Irish village to a position of prominence in another village half a world away.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

This building on the corner of Tower Hill and Oak Hill roads was home to Ryan's Market from 1886 to 1895.



This, the earliest known photo of the Phillips Castle, was taken around 1895. Note the size of the home compared to its proud owners.

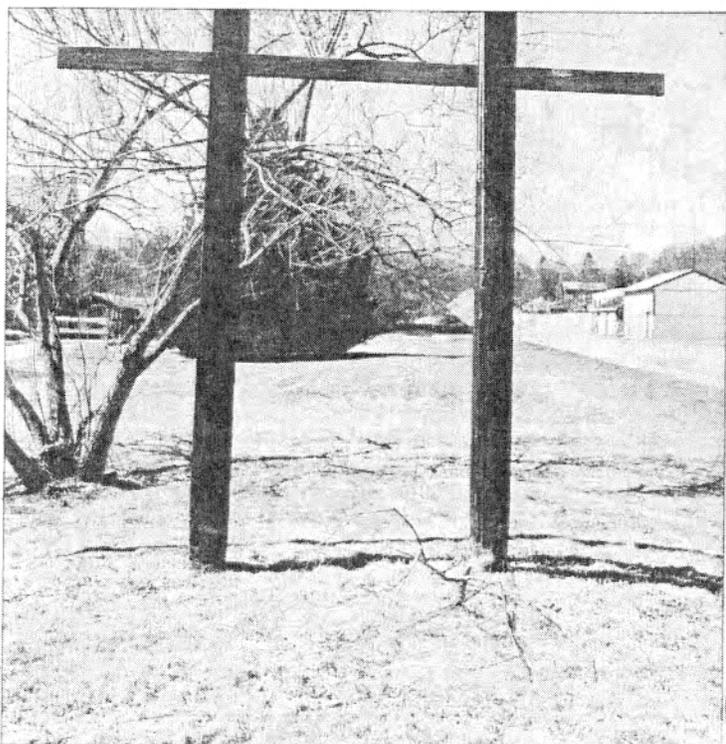
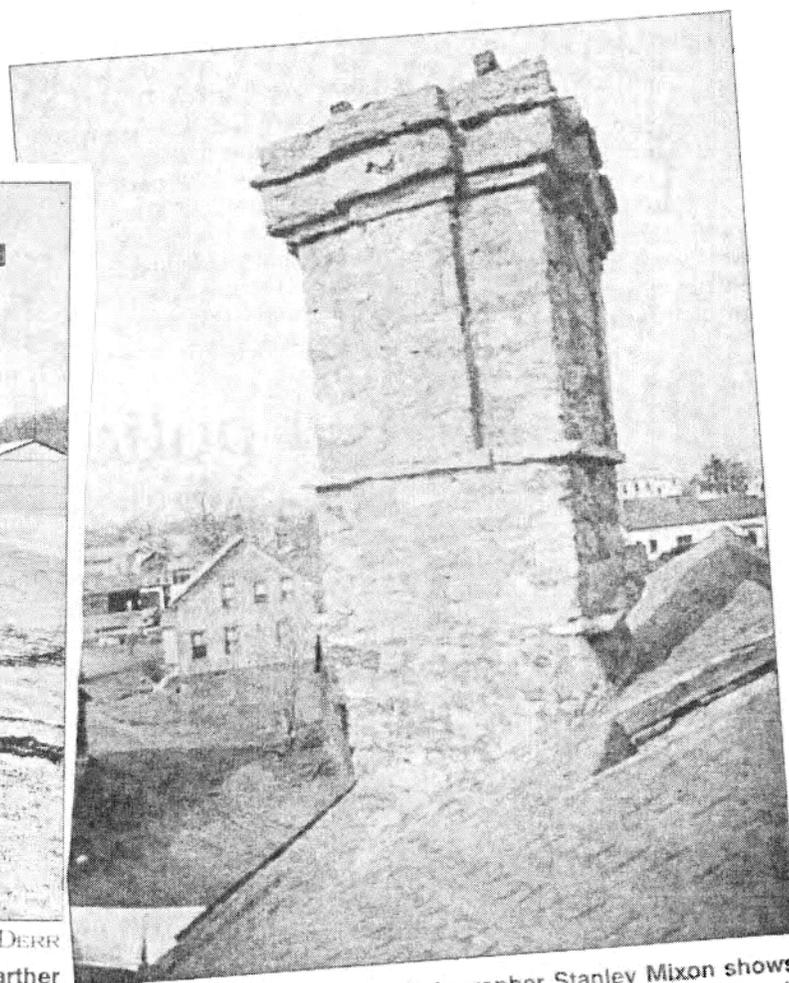


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Two mounds of earth, one at this signpost and one a bit farther back, mark the locations of the enormous stone bases for the two giant chimney stacks at the former Phillips Castle, which fell into disrepair and later burned to the ground.



This picture taken by WPA photographer Stanley Mixon shows the detail of the massive stone chimney. St. Bernard's Church can be seen off in the distance.

The View From Swamptown

The Phillips Mansion House –The Rest of the Story

It was nearly five years ago, that we took our first look at the incredible tale of the Phillips Mansion House, also known as Mowbra Castle. The Phillips clan were contemporaries, both socially and temporally, of the Updikes of Smith's Castle fame and their castle, built around 1700, was, in this Swamp Yankee's opinion, the finest home that ever graced our fair town.

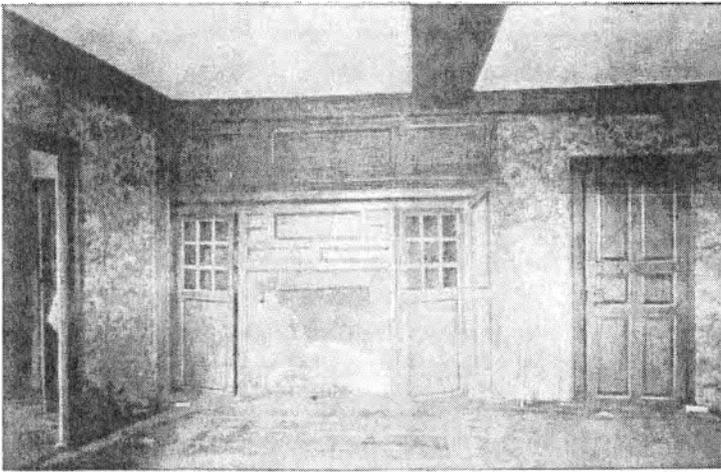
The scale of this enormous home can be easily realized by taking a look at the circa 1895 photo taken by historian E.E. Fields as he researched his 3 volume tome "The History of Rhode Island at the Turn of the Century." The proud inhabitants of the castle stand dwarfed on the corner of the earliest portion of the home. In a 1940 photograph, we can see the grand late 19th century porch attached to the more "modern" circa 1745 portion of the home. An image also taken in 1940 from the rooftop shows the unique stone chimney, which was attached to a main fireplace large enough for a full grown man to walk into without stooping. If you look carefully in the distance St. Bernard's church can be made out.

By 1940, when a team of WPA employed architects and photographers documented this remarkable home as a part of the Historic American Building Survey, the oldest portion of the Phillips Castle was abandoned. The remarkable 250 year old home was on its way to ruin with nothing to stop the process. By 1949, when a group of professional antiquarians and art dealers consisting of Ralph Carpenter, Katherine Murphy, J. Lloyd Hyde, and Joseph Downs of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York stumbled upon her while on a quest for antiques, she was truly "a battered wreck of a house"; a shadow of her former grandeur. Carpenter particularly, though, was taken by the home and spent the next five months in negotiations with the owner, attempting to purchase and remove the three most important rooms in the oldest portion of the home. He was eventually successful, and carefully disassembled his prizes. At that time, there were grumblings about the goings on at the Phillips Castle. It didn't seem right to see such important artifacts leave their rightful home. Folks thought differently though, when less than 10 years later the Phillips Castle burned to the ground. After the rubble was carted off, nothing remained of the Castle save two mounds of earth which marked the locations of the enormous stone bases for the two giant chimney stacks. Nothing that is except for the three grand colonial rooms now reassembled in Scarsdale NY.

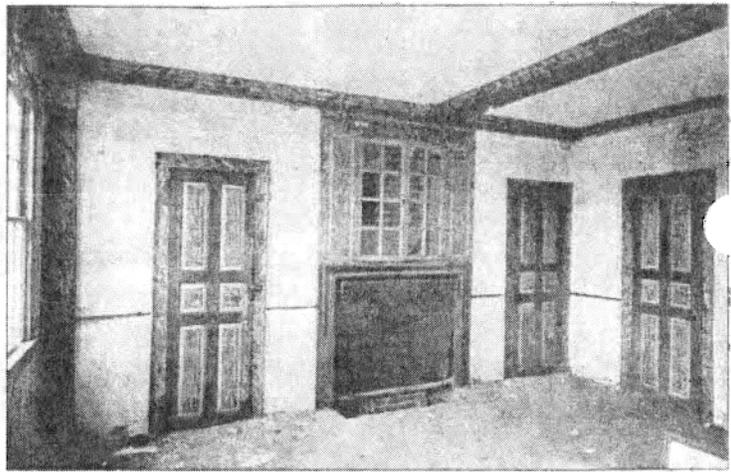
Next time, the rest of the tale of the remarkable colonial rooms of the Phillips Castle.

Works Progress Administration photographer Stanley Mixon took this picture of the Phillips Mansion House in March of 1940 as part of the Historic American Building Survey. By this time, the oldest part of the 250-year-old home had been abandoned and left for ruin.

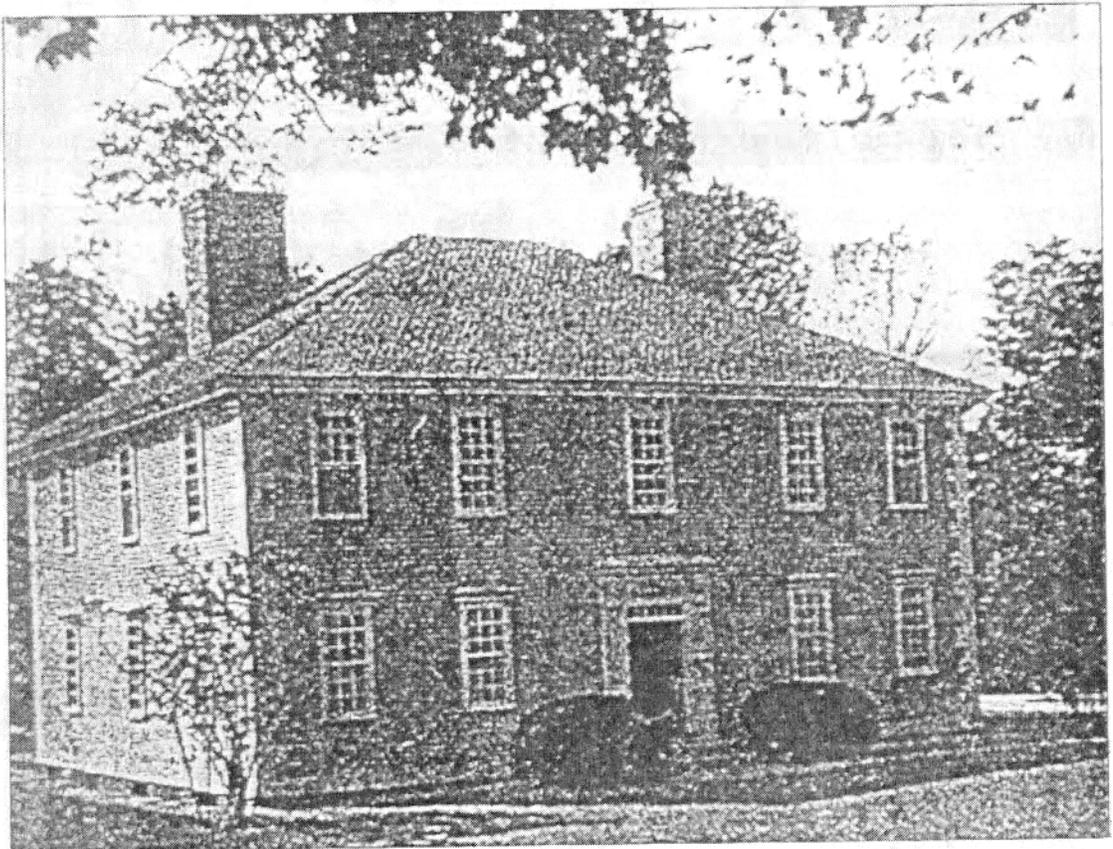
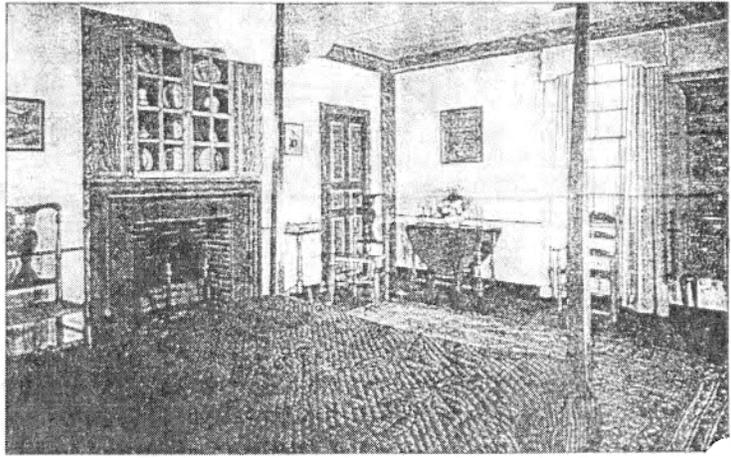
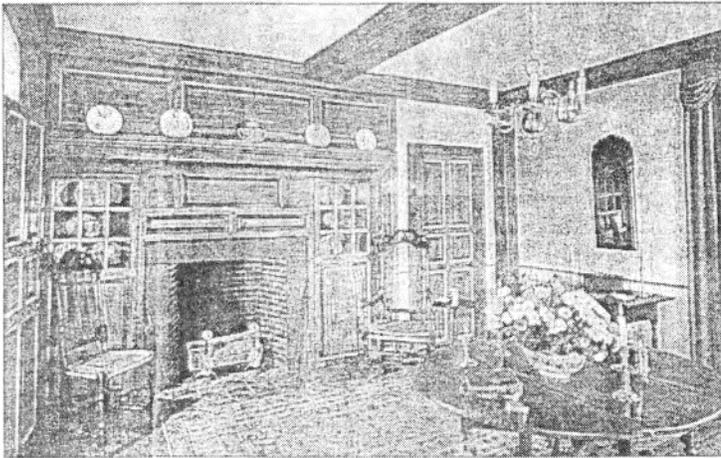




Above, the parlor is seen at the Phillips Castle in Wickford and below as it appeared once reconstructed in New York.



Above, the bedchamber is shown in its original home in Wickford in 1940 and below as reconstructed in New York.



Mowbra Hall in Scarsdale, N.Y., contains three magnificent rooms removed in the 1950s from its namesake, the Phillips/Mowbra Castle in North Kingstown.

The View From Swamptown

The Phillips Castle – Part II

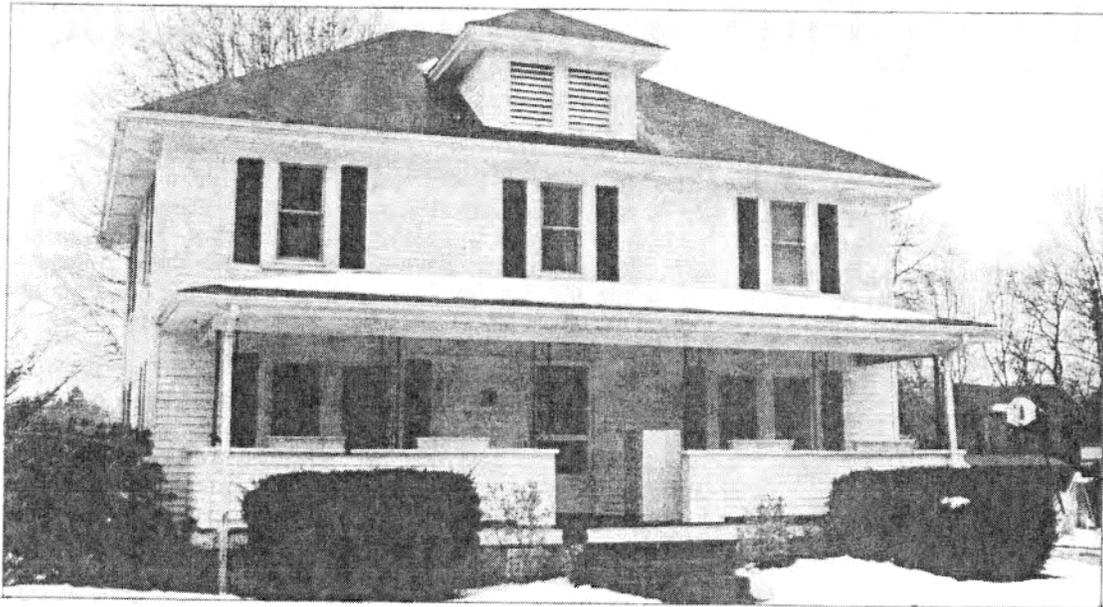
Last week, we took a look at the story of the Phillips Castle, a remarkable late 17th century home which graced our fair town for more than 250 years until it was destroyed in a fire in 1960. As was mentioned, not all of the Phillips, or Mowbra Castle as it was also known, was lost though. Three wonderful rooms from the house survive as a part of the amazing Mowbra Hall of Scarsdale, New York. Assembled by Ralph Carpenter, the home, whose exterior was built from the plans for Newport merchant Daniel Ayrault's *Good Substantial and handsome dwelling house* of 1739, was outfitted with authentic 18th century rooms from the 1740 Jonathan Mansfield House of Salem Ma., the 1795 Simeon Dogget house of Taunton Ma., the 1755 Caleb Mills house of Medford Ma., an unidentified 18th century dwelling house from New London Ct., and most importantly, the three circa 1745 rooms from the Phillips Castle in Wickford. Carpenter was so taken by the Phillips Place that he ended up calling his reconstructed antique home, Mowbra Hall.

As you can see by the accompanying photographs, one set taken in 1940 by the WPA team and one set taken by Carpenter in 1952, the rooms were recreated perfectly. These rooms are perhaps the finest example extant of a formal style of colonial painting, found only in the most important homes of the period, known as marbledizing. This rare form of embellishment was a true sign of the status of the Phillips clan during the 18th century and was never altered from the very day it was applied to these rooms. Without the efforts of Ralph Carpenter, these important artifacts of our fair town's past would have gone up in smoke with the rest of the amazing Phillips Castle.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

The house above at 100 Oak Hill Road was the John Maglone farmhouse. The Boyer family built the house below next door at 126 Oak Hill Road shortly after Jeremiah Boyer bought Maglone's Belleville Ice Co. in 1918.



The View From Swamptown The Maglone Farm Revisited

Like any respectable Swamp Yankee worth his salt, I just can't stand being wrong!! But sometimes it happens and, as I have said in the past, this column is about history and history is all about the truth. That said, I'm sorry to report that, although I got the story of the Class of 1905 Maglone sisters correct last month, I identified the wrong house as the one they grew up in. In fact this house at 100 Oak Hill Road was the Maglone farmhouse, not the one pictured in the column last month. So, as a sort of apology for steering you all astray, lets take a closer look at the goings on in this grand home in the little village of Belleville.

As mentioned in the previous column, John Maglone purchased a large lot of farmland in 1882 from William Pierce, a man who was at that time the owner of both the Belleville Mill and the Narragansett Mill (present day site of Raze's Motorcycles) and just about everything in between. Maglone built his large farmhouse shortly after this and moved in with an extended family that included his elderly mother. From here he ran his large farm, and eventually began the Belleville Ice Company business that became his local claim to fame. The Maglone family stayed in the house until 1918, at which time, John sold his ice business to take the position on the State Board of Public Roads and moved with his wife into the village of Wickford.

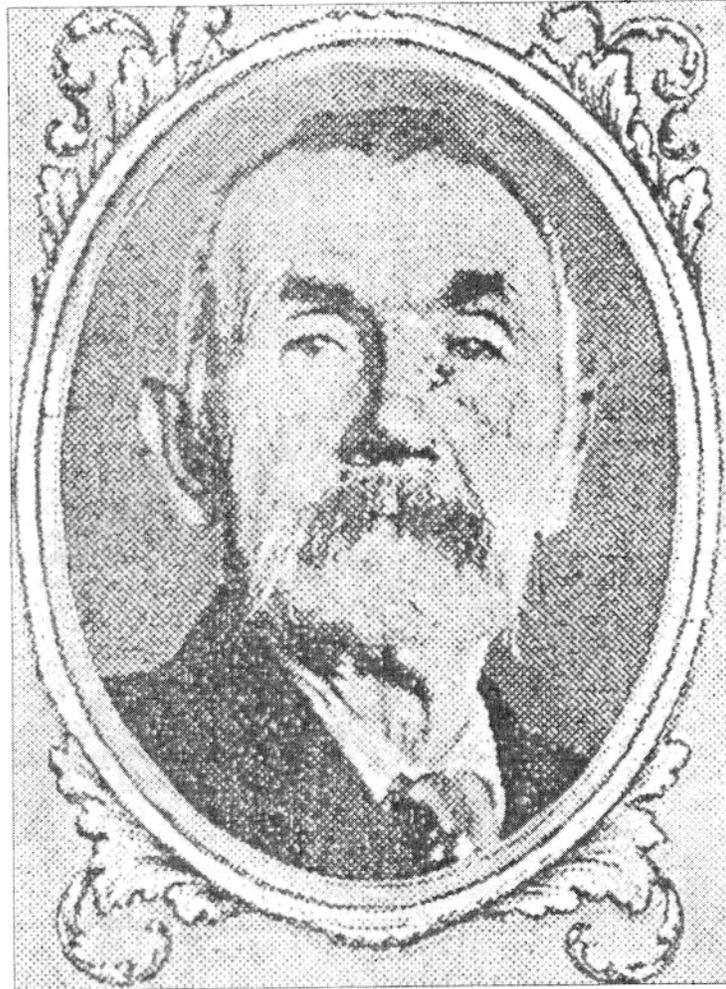
John Maglone found two hard working souls to purchase his little empire. Just a decade earlier, two young and inter-related families had shown up in Belleville with all their worldly possessions tied on the back of a wagon. They had made the long journey from Malone, NY looking for work in the rapidly expanding southern RI textile industry. Long time Belleville residents used to remark that Marshall Young and Jeremiah Boyea (the family later anglicized their name to Boyer) jumped off that wagon barefoot and went to work in the mills ready to make something of themselves. By 1918, that deed was done and the family of Marshall Young purchased the big Maglone house and farmland and the "Jerry" Boyer bought the thriving ice delivery business. The Boyer family built the big house at 126 Oak Hill Road shortly after this and the inter-related Young-Boyer-Paquin families lived in the two houses as next-door neighbors.

Young sold the Maglone farmhouse in 1926 to Gilbert Wills who quickly turned around and sold it to Ralph and Georgina Edge in 1928. The Edge's ran a successful turkey farm on the land first tilled by John Maglone some forty years earlier.

Eventually, in 1935, the Edge clan was assimilated into extended Young-Boyer-Paquin family when recent widower Jeremiah Boyer wed widow Georgina Edge. This union not only bought companionship for the two participants as they entered their golden years but also, in a way reunited all the old Maglone farmland under one ownership again.

This situation ended in 1943, when displaced South Quiddnessett resident Ralph Shippee (the Shippee's land had been condemned and incorporated into the ever expanding Quonset/Davisville complex) purchased the old Maglone farm from the Boyer family. At this time the land went from turkey farming to the latest craze in local agriculture, the potato, and stayed that way for a number of decades. In 1962, the farmhouse was sold to its present owners the Wicker family who have owned it ever since.

So, perhaps you can see how this somewhat convoluted tale of ownership got me confused. My thanks to the Youngs and Wickers who pointed out the inconsistencies to me and to the wonderful memories of John and Doris Moon the folks who helped me to set the record straight.



William Waldron, who made his career gambling in New York City, retired to Hamilton. A street in the plat is named in his honor.

The View From Swamptown

The Story Behind Waldron Avenue

Over the years, we have taken many a “look see” at the stories of various heroic folks from our fair town and the streets that were subsequently named after them. From philanthropist Samuel Elam to WWII war hero Ray Worsley to clipper ship captain Ezra Thomas to blind shopkeeper John Warburton, these tales have run the gamut of human experience and have said an awful lot about the character of the folks that lived and died here. This week we are going to talk about a different sort of fellow altogether, William F. Waldron and the Hamilton area street named after him, Waldron Avenue.

William Waldron was born in Providence in 1834 to a middle class family. The Waldron's ran a large boarding house in that city for the Atlantic & Delaine textile mill. This enormous boarding house held not only the Waldron family but 135 mill workers. By 1854, William and his older brother Nathan were off in business for themselves running an Olneyville grocery store called Nathan B. Waldron & Bro.; it was quite successful. Now if some of you loyal long time readers are getting the funny feeling that this story sounds a bit familiar, you are right. For Nathan Waldron eventually, became a mover & shaker in the grocer wholesale business, supplying the literally, hundreds of mom & pop grocery stores across southern New England with the goods they needed to operate. In short order, Nathan Waldron became a very wealthy man and the owner of a fine Quiddnessett summer estate. Brother William rode those coat tails all the way to a fortune of his own. I phrase it that way because William was not the hard-working industrious Yankee businessman that his brother was. William was a bit of a scoundrel you might say, and most certainly the “black sheep” of an otherwise proud family. You see, William had an insatiable love of the “wild side” of life. It was gambling, not groceries, that caught William Waldron's attention and in 1863 William sold his share of their profitable business to brother Nathan and took his bankroll of cash and began a whole new “career”.

He began this vocation on the streets of Providence, where he operated a roulette wheel on the street corners around Exchange Place. This operation was truly mobile in that, when one of the city's two detectives assigned to vice harassed him in one location, he'd just relocate to another corner. Eventually William moved up in the world and began to run poker, Keno, and Faro tables out of the back of a hotel on Weybosset St. near the Arcade called the Telegraph. As he became more successful and better connected in the world he chose to inhabit, Providence became “too small of a pond” and he was off to the “Big Apple” and new adventures. With his ever increasing bankroll and ever-widening web of connections, it wasn't long before William Waldron's success in the world of New York City gambling equaled that of brother Nathan's wholesale grocery business.

It was at this time that William Waldron made the jump into the truly “Big Leagues” of Big Apple gambling. He began a partnership with former boxing heavyweight champion and one time Tamanny Hall enforcer Big John Morrissey and opened supposedly the best known and most luxuriously appointed gambling house in the United States, located at 818 Broadway; John Morrissey's. Now John Morrissey was a

boxer in a time when fights were fought bare knuckled and lasted until a knockout occurred or someone “threw in the towel”. He won the title in a 37 round knockdown-dragout barnburner of a fisticuff with then champion Yankee Sullivan in 1853. He held the title until his retirement in 1860 taking on all comers and remaining undefeated. After his fighting career was over, he began his new vocation of Tamanny Hall thug and frontman for gambling operations and made himself a millionaire. I won't spend a whole lot more time going into the New York life and times of Waldron and Morrissey. If you want to know more about all that just run down to your local video outlet and rent Sorcese's “The Gangs of New York”. There you can learn all about these two fellows and their cohorts Isaiah Rynder, Bill “The Butcher” Poole, and Lew Baker.

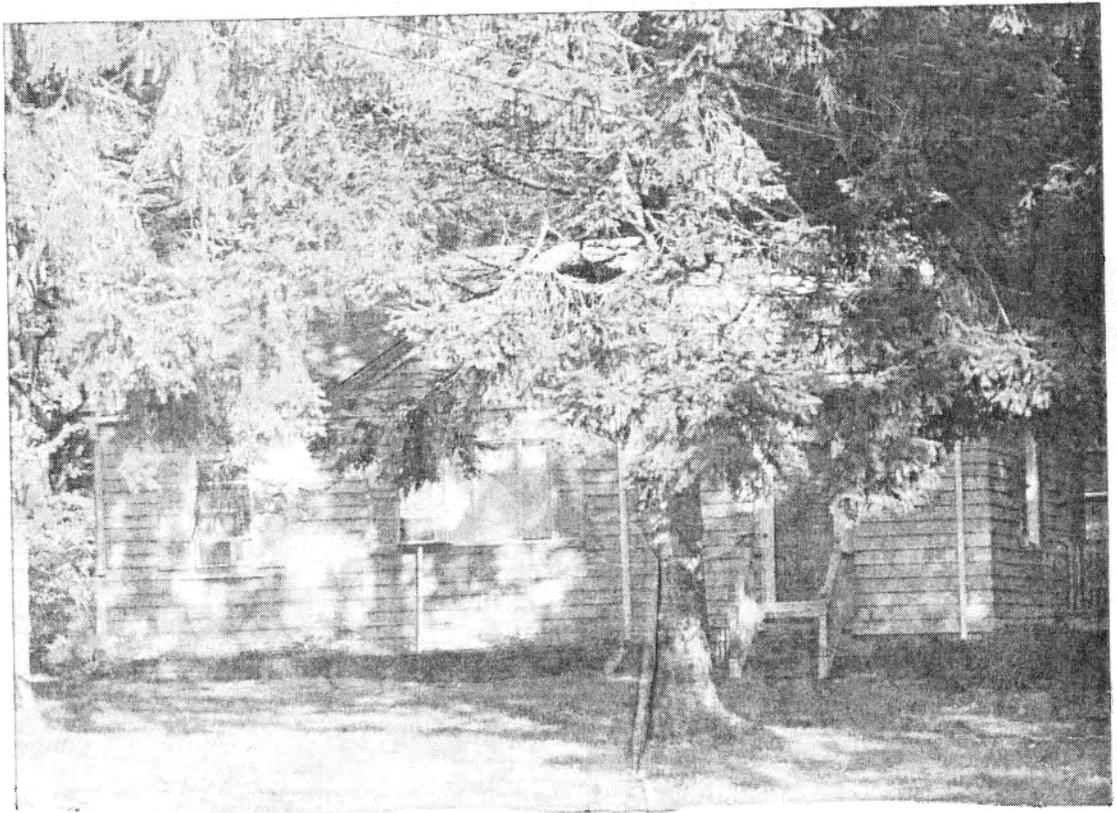
By 1872, William Waldron began to ease himself out of the life of a NYC high roller and bought a gentleman's farm in the Hamilton section of North Kingstown, just a half a dozen trolley stops south on the Sea View Line from big brother Nathan's palatial Quidnessett estate. At first he only spent weekends and vacations there, but by 1882, before he had reached the age of 50, William Waldron had amassed a fortune large enough to essentially retire and he did just that, spending the rest of his days on the farm on the bay.

I imagine William Waldron wiled away the time in Hamilton entertaining folks from near and far with stories of those glory days back in the Big Apple. Tales of fine women, high rollers, heavy hitters, and big bankrolls were certain to entertain and amuse the quiet folks from nearby little Wickford. One of the era's most infamous “bookies”, he was known to often drag those little notebooks out of their hiding place and use them to jog his memories of days gone by. He died in December of 1921, an old man who had covered all the angles and every bet offered. His estate sold the Hamilton farm to our old friend, developer Herbert Calef, who decided to name his Hamilton Plat's main street after the old gambler. Why? Maybe Calef's name was found in one of those little notebooks; who knows.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

The "U"-shaped house above served as the clubhouse at the former Annaquatucket Country Club and the one below was the maintenance building. Both are now private residences.



The View From Swamptown

The Annaquatucket Country Club

I just love looking at old aerial photographs. They can tell us a tale of times gone by in a way unlike any other. They give you a real sense of scale, an overall idea of the way things were during a time that is gone forever. Such a picture is the aerial photo that accompanies today's column. Taken in 1945, it allows us a "bird's eye" view of the area that now contains the North Kingstown High School. But there is little here that looks familiar. Only the roads are the same now, some sixty years later. Smack dab in the middle of the photograph sits the old "Annaquatucket Country Club" one of the state's first golf courses.

The Annaquatucket Country Club was organized and opened in the spring of 1922. Sited on a 40-acre leased parcel of land, the 9 hole course was one of the first in Rhode Island and certainly the earliest around here. Even the venerable old Potowomut Country Club was still 5 years in the future as the first rounds were being played at Annaquatucket. The founding members of the Club, all North Kingstown boys, were Luke Ward, John P.B. Peirce, Thomas Curry, Edwin Ryan, William Dorman, Joe Magnant, and John Burdick. Their idea was a smashing success, and soon the Annaquatucket was the place to be; tournaments, including a number of state amateur championships were played here on a regular basis.

The Club, formed at the beginning of the "Roaring 20's", survived through the Depression and beyond, closing finally around 1958 after 36 years of play. The land was purchased by the Town shortly after course's closing and its past was formally honored by the name choice, Fairway Drive, given to the access road through the property from Annaquatucket to Boston Neck Roads.

Few folks around today remember the old Annaquatucket Country Club and there is little left, save the street name, to remind us of it. The only vestiges of those times are the two buildings that once contained the clubhouse and maintenance building which have been converted to residential use and still stand at the Annaquatucket end of Fairway Drive. But if you were to walk down to the edge of the Reservoir, the little pond just behind the High School parking lot, I'll bet you could find a golf ball or two in the mud there, tangible reminders of chip shots gone awry and splendid days spent on the fairways and greens of the Annaquatucket Country Club.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

Joseph Northup, known as "Tailor Joe," built this house for his family at 170 Hamilton Allenton Road around 1728. It was near the Northup homestead, a circa 1690 home (below) constructed by his grandfather, Stephen Northup, on what is now Featherbed Lane. "Tailor Joe" lived to 103, and his house stayed in the family for at least two more generations.



The View From Swamptown

The "Tailor Joe" Northup House

Seemingly on a regular basis, the process of researching these columns yields up a surprise or two. This is one of those instances. Just when I thought I had a handle on all the really ancient homes of "Our Fair Town", I find one that has "slipped under the radar" of the historic preservation community. The "Tailor Joe" Northup House on Hamilton Allenton Road is such a home.

Joseph Northup was born in 1700, probably at the still extant, circa 1690 home constructed by his grandfather Stephen Northup, on what we now know as Featherbed Lane (shown in the accompanying photo). We really know more about Joseph Northup than we do most of his neighbors of the time, after all we can be pretty sure of his occupation, and most of his contemporaries are no more than names after more than 300 years. Tailor Joe survives in the historic record because of one extraordinary fact. At a time when 45 years old was elderly and a woman was considered an old maid at 25; Tailor Joe Northup beat the odds and survived to the incredible ripe old age of 103. He managed to see an entire century go by the wayside and then a little bit more. As a boy, folks were still telling vivid tales of the King Phillips War, and by the time he passed on in 1803, the Revolution was old news. Amazingly enough, this is not unusual for the Northup Clan. Countless Northup's lived through their eighties and nineties; and Tailor Joe is joined by another Northup, the equally famous Zebulon Northup in making it past the century mark during a timeframe where folks felt blessed to reach 50.

It is thought that Tailor Joe built his home, within walking distance of the Northup Homestead, around 1728. He and his wife, Molly Congdon from out Boston Neck way (adjacent to the present day Casey Farm), had six children and probably were happy to have the extra space the big house provided. As you can imagine, Joe outlived his wife Molly (she's buried on the Casey Farm grounds) and a number of his children besides; eventually the house passed down to his son Henry Northup. Henry served as a Private during the Revolutionary War, and eventually rose to the rank of Major in the Rhode Island Militia of the early 1800's. Henry was married to a French Huguenot girl named Hannah LaPlace. Upon his death in 1835, the home was passed on to his daughter and son-in-law Molly and Joseph Greene. From the Greene's, the house passed through the possession of the Peirce, Browning, Parkis, Tefft, and Huling families. Along the way the big house was made bigger and changed to suit the needs of its owners. Through all those centuries though, it was the centerpiece of a large farm. Even into the 20th century the family of William Huling operated a dairy farm on the land. The property is also noteworthy in that it includes one of the two unmarked horse graveyards in North Kingstown (the other being in the Davisville section of town). Also still a part of the property is the family graveyard where Tailor Joe, Henry and Hannah, and Joseph and Molly along with other unknown Northup's and Greene's pass time through eternity.

The discovery of Tailor Joe's ancient home has caused me to think about revisiting the list of North Kingstown's oldest historic places. I last took a gander at this

subject in September of 1999. Next week we'll update and expand this important "Roll of Honor" and see how old Joe's home stack's up against the town's other ancient sites.

Finally, for those of you who are counting, this marks our 250th tale about North Kingstown, its people and places. I thank all of you who have joined along with me on this journey back into our past and I look forward to many more trials, tales, and travails from my vantage point out here in Swamptown.

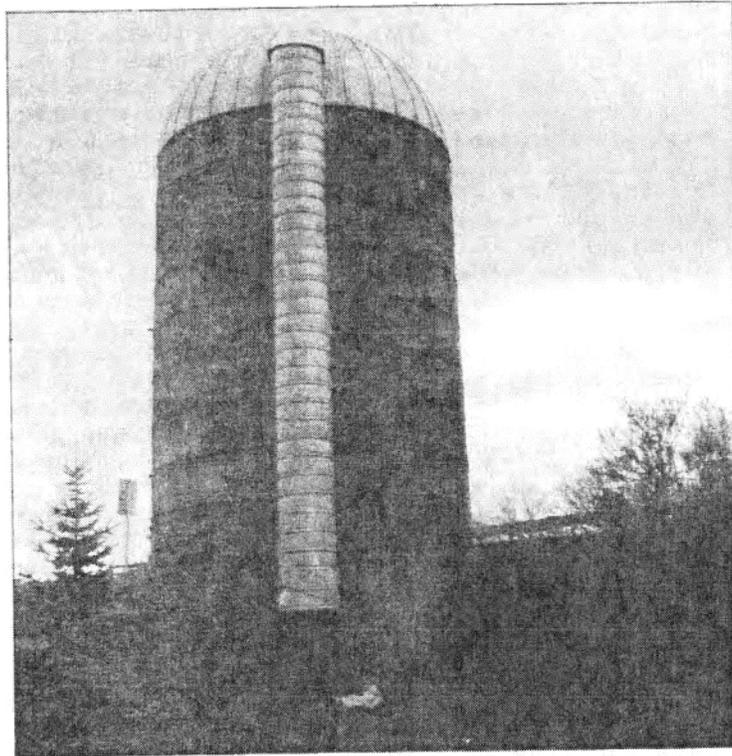


PHOTO: JAMES RUSH

Hundreds pass this old silo, a remnant of a former farming area near the present-day Fiddlesticks site, as they whiz down Route 4 each day.

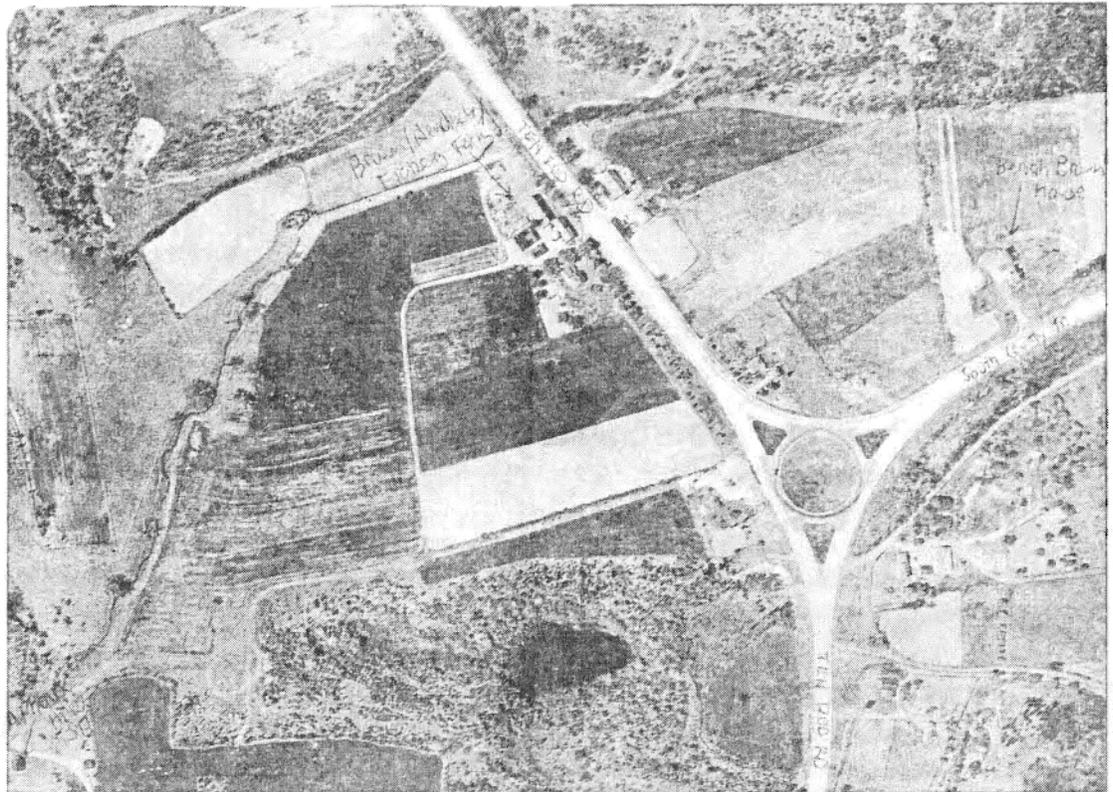
The View from Swamptown

The Brown/Hendrick/Froberg Farm

I guess by now, everyone in town is aware of the fact that the supermarket chain "Shaws" is looking to build a new store on the site now occupied by the "Fiddlesticks" golf driving range and batting cages. I also suspect that everyone is familiar with the big old farm silo that sits at the edge of the property visible from the Ten Rod Road, as well as to the occupants of each and every car that flies up and down Route 4 each day. Perhaps you have wondered what the story was behind this anachronistic landmark; this relic from a bygone time, that has quietly become a well-loved, but unintentioned, symbol of our fair town. Well that's the tale we will explore this week and next – the story of the Brown/Hendrick/Froberg Farm.

As is usually the case, the best place to start our tale is at the beginning. In this case though, the beginning is a long way back. This tale starts in the late 1600's, when the first settlers to the region arrived. Prominent among these folks was Beriah Brown, his wife, and his widowed mother-in-law Abigail Phenix. Regular readers of the column will remember that old Beriah was involved in the 792 acre Fones Purchase of 1709 whereby six families already living in the region received legal (in the Crown's eyes, anyway) title to their lands. At the same time Abigail Phenix, our fair town's first female landowner, and John Himes, with the help of Beriah, settled the 163 acre Himes purchase with the same Colonial Agents of the King. These transactions, along with the 1824 acre Huling Purchase and the 285 acre Phillips purchase, pretty much sewed up the land ownership questions for the entire town west of the equally massive Updike lands. The land that was eventually became the Brown/Hendrick/ Froberg Farm was a part of both Abigail and Beriah's land holdings. This happened in the following fashion. Beriah and his wife were sadly deceased by around 1718. Abigail took one of her grandsons, Charles Brown to live with her; his place as the second son of Beriah, left him out of the running to inherit the majority of Beriah's large landholdings, that went automatically, as was the tradition of the time, to first born son Alexander. Don't feel too bad for Charles though, for in the end, he made out OK. By combining his small portion of the Beriah Brown "real estate pie" with the large parcel left to him by his grandmother Abigail, Charles Brown became the owner of a farm totaling approximately 145 acres, nestled comfortably among numerous equal-sized farms all owned by close relations (Alexander, his brother, had truly sealed the deal by marrying a Huling daughter). Charles in turn, left his farm to his son John, upon his death.

John, had a daughter named Lydia, who had married Paul Greene Hendrick, the youngest son of the fabled "orphan-boy" James Hendrick. Upon John's death, the farm was passed down to Lydia and Paul Hendrick. I would be remiss, at this point, if I didn't stop and tell the story of "orphan-boy" James.



This 1945 aerial photograph shows the area surrounding the **Brown/Hendricks/Froberg Farm**. The **Abigail Phenix House** may be seen in the bottom left corner and the **Beriah Brown House** directly opposite at the top right. The former Cranston's Rotary joining **South County Trail** and **Ten Rod Road** lies central to all three sites.

According to Hendrick and Slocum family tradition, as related by George Gardiner in his book, "Lafayette", young James was the outcome of a love affair between Sarah Slocum and a sailor on a British man-o-war stationed in Newport. The sailor's name was James Andrick and he eventually married Sarah and took her away. Unfortunately for the infant, their romantic escape plans did not include him, and he was left to be raised by his Slocum grandparents. In the end, James' name was anglicized to Hendrick, and he grew up in the nearby farming community that eventually became named after the grandparents that raised him. James, the orphan-boy, grew up to be a respected member of the Slocum community and eventually married Hannah Greene. They raised nine children together, among them, youngest son Paul. After his marriage to Lydia Brown, Paul moved from Slocum to the now ancient farmhouse built for Abigail Phenix in 1711. He farmed the 145 acres extensively and was quite successful. He and Lydia had three children. Lydia died in 1884 and Paul continued in the old house right up until his death in 1908. The farm passed to his two sons Francis (Frank) and Charles. Charles sold his share soon after to his brother and became a Providence police officer. It was at this time, around 1917 that Frank Hendrick decided to move his family out of the old Phenix house, which was set way back on the property, and build the "modern" farmhouse and barn complex up on the edge of the Ten Rod Road. The farm, nestled among a great stand of maple trees, was eventually called "The Maple View Farm". It stayed in the Hendrick family for only a few more years. Around 1922 the Hendrick's sold the farm to a recent Swedish immigrant, Otto Froberg. The amazing thing about Otto was that, according to his daughter, Lafayette resident Thelma Remington, he didn't know a thing about farming when he made the purchase. The skilled jewelry worker had immigrated to Providence to find a future for himself in that city's burgeoning jewelry industry. We'll continue with the tale of Otto Froberg and the "Maple View Dairy Farm" next week.



The success of any farm depended on many hands pitching in. Their hard work was appreciated, and every day Emmie Froberg would bring everyone a bit of refreshment. Shown above, seated in the rear center is Otto Froberg, with son Burt to the extreme right and Emmie with young Thelma on her lap in the front left corner. They are surrounded by other family members and hired hands. The photo below of hired hands was taken sometime during the 1930s.

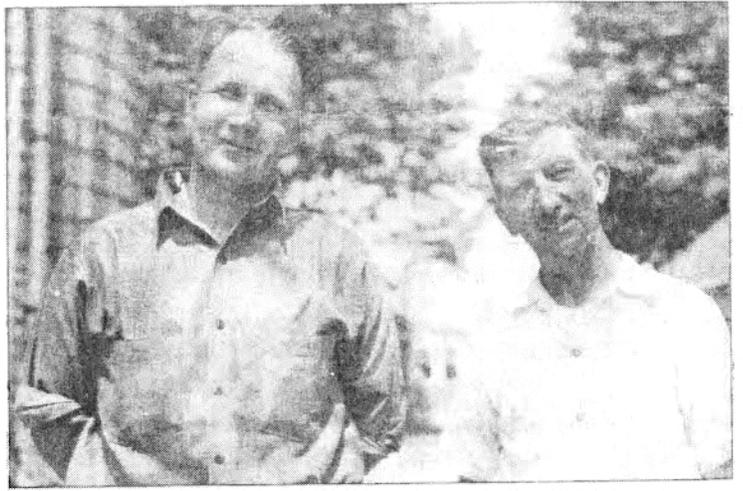


The Maple View Dairy Farm

When we left our story last week, a recent Swedish immigrant and highly trained jewelry tradesman named Otto Froberg had just done the unthinkable. This experienced diamond cutter, who had made a life for himself in the burgeoning jewelry industry in Providence, had just quit his job and taken his life savings and his young family and moved down to the Wickford Junction area and bought himself a dairy farm. Even more amazing than that, the 38 year old farmer-to-be did not know a thing about livestock or agriculture.

This was not the first brave decision that Otto had made, nor would it be his last. He was born in Skane, Sweden in 1884; the son of a gardener. When his seventeenth birthday rolled around in 1901 and he was faced with the prospect of his country's mandatory military obligation Otto decided he would risk it all and head to America to seek his future. His two sisters were already well established in Providence's fairly large Swedish community and were regularly employed as domestics. So that's where he headed. When he arrived he quickly found work in his profession and settled into life as a new member of his adopted country. He married a fellow Swedish immigrant, Emmie Johnson and began a family. But after 21 years in the jewelry trade and the big city, he apparently had had enough. With one bold move he risked it all and moved down to the country and a completely different life. His friends in the city couldn't believe it and expected him back. It wasn't long though, before those same "doubting Thomases" were singing a different tune. With the arrival of the Great Depression a short time later, those same folks were down at the Maple View Farm looking for work. Even in a Depression, folks still needed milk, although they apparently weren't buying an awful lot of expensive jewelry. Otto's big gamble had paid off.

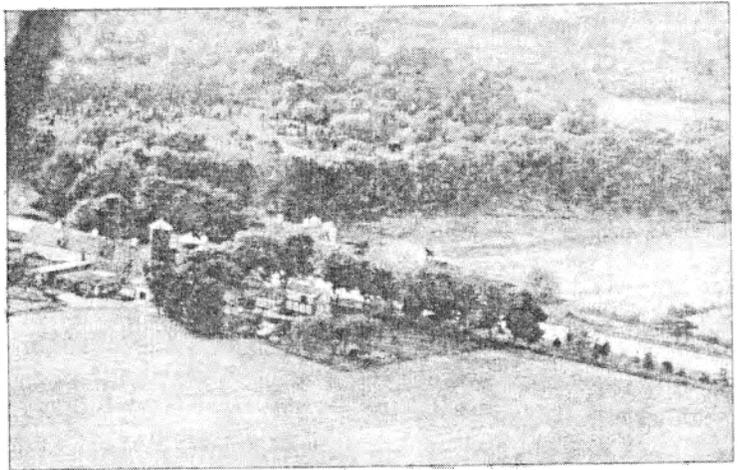
He began his venture with a herd of Herefords and Guernseys and a local milk delivery route. His daughter Thelma remembers going out on the truck with her father to ride the route each day. They covered Wickford, Hamilton, Lafayette, and every place in between. Otto Froberg, eventually had hundreds of customers spread all across our fair town and beyond. During the time of the '38 Hurricane, the busy farmer did double duty; delivering just as much clear fresh water from the farm's well to his customers as he did milk. Otto was assisted by his son Burt, who not only worked the farm along side his dad but also went to school to learn the finer points of farming and animal husbandry. Some how along the way he also managed to get himself a degree in Education as well. It was Burt who convinced his father to slowly switch his herd to the prolific milk-producing Ayreshire cows. This was just one of the countless innovative moves orchestrated by the knowledgeable younger member of the Froberg team, who eventually, not once, but twice, won the coveted Rhode Island Green Pastures Award for excellence in farming. Otto was also assisted by a pair of hired hands who lived on the farm along with the Frobergs. The "boarders" as they were called, were experienced farm hands who knew their way around a cow and



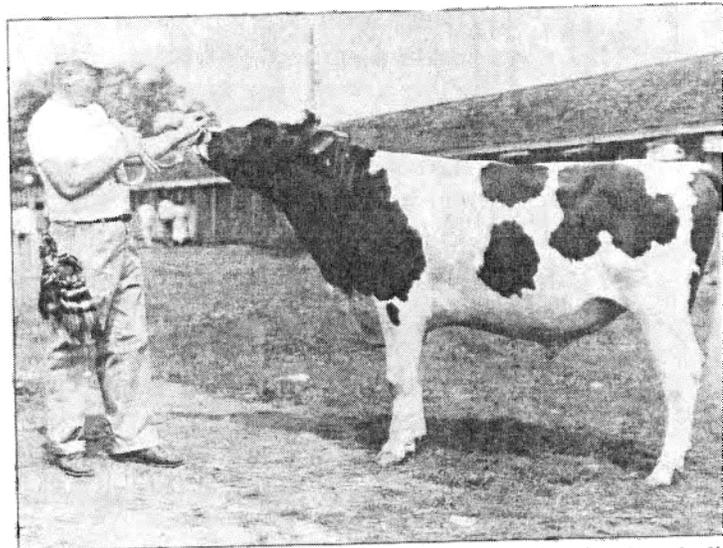
Shown above is the father-and-son dairy team of Burt and Otto Froberg. Below is a 1947 aerial view of the Frobergs' Maple View Dairy Farm.



Burt Froberg's son, David, was the third generation to work the farm.



For its time, the Froberg Farm was cutting-edge thanks to the latest techniques Burt Froberg had learned at college for reaping the most from the land. Here is one example of his "modern" farming - the cows are fed green silage cut daily in the fields rather than fending for themselves at pasture.



Burt Froberg works with one of his prize-winning Ayrshire bull

pitched in as needed. They were supplemented each summer by a passel of Froberg friends and relations from the city. The two Froberg sisters, Ingrid and Tillie, and their families, who helped Otto get established in his new country were always to be counted upon, as were Emmie's relations. These folks can be seen in the accompanying photograph of the family taking a well deserved break from their labors out in the field. As a matter of fact, Emmie's brother Karl Johnson eventually became a neighbor when he opened one of the area's first gas stations just around the corner from the farm. Local folks pitched in too. A neighbor boy, George Remington, who lived in a house just down the road at the corner of Old Baptist Road, worked the farm from time to time. It turned out he sort of took a shining to young Thelma Froberg. The two childhood sweethearts eventually married and George became an integral part of the operation. So, history repeated itself; just like the Brown's before them, the Frobergs were happily settled in their farm surrounded by family and friends.

Things went along just fine until the arrival of the thing that changed many lives in the area. The State of Rhode Island's desire to move city folks from the cities to the South County beaches brought about the forced installation of the Colonel Rodman Highway and the upgrade of the South County Trail into Route 2. Back in those days, local folk's opinions were not taken into consideration, the State Highways people came down, drew a line on a map and condemned the land for "the public good". The Colonel Rodman Highway was going smack dab through the middle of the Froberg Farm and there wasn't a thing Otto or Burt could do about it except accept it and adapt.

And that's what they did. Otto made the decision that the truncated farm would not support "business as usual". Herding his prized Ayreshires, then totalling around 150 head, across the highway each day from one part of his pastureage to the other was just not feasible or safe. Things would have to change. They sold the home delivery part of their business to Brown's Dairy and signed an agreement to become a wholesale supplier to the rapidly expanding regional powerhouse. Burt used his knowledge of cutting edge agricultural techniques to make the smaller "working" portion of the farm produce just like it had before it was split in two by the highway. He did this by using innovative pasturing and feeding techniques developed by the URI Agricultural Extension folks as well as advancements in cattle breeding. Burt Froberg's knowledge, combined with his father's determination and his extended family's hard work allowed the Froberg farm to succeed even as many of his farming brethren fell by the wayside.

In the end Burt Froberg left farming on his own terms. His son David, the third generation of Frobergs to work the farm, remembers that his Dad's decision to get out of farming was motivated more by the change in the focus of his life than it was his inability to make a living at it. Don't get me wrong, it was definitely getting harder and harder to be a farmer back in the Rhode Island of the 1960's, but Burt left because he fell in love with another avocation. As I mentioned earlier, somehow through all this, Burton Froberg had managed to bet a degree from the University of Rhode Island in Education. Although a farmer by trade,



Milk bottles from the Froberg Farm still show up from time to time.



Burt's heart was in teaching. He eventually rose to become the superintendent of schools for North Kingstown and served his community ably.

In 1965, Burt auctioned off his farm equipment and his pride herd of Ayreshires. His prizewinning bull, an animal he had acquired from the Lippitt farm in Warwick (now the site of the Rhode Island Mall) was scooped up by the University of Rhode Island and became an integral part of their dairy program. More than forty years of Froberg dairying were over. Burt held onto the land itself for a while though. The land that had fed countless head of cattle now grew acres of potatoes under a lease agreement with Albert Farms, another local family owned enterprise. He finally sold it to its present owner Mr. Lischio in 1971. In another ironic twist to this story, Mr. Lischio's plans to turn the land into a "Mystic Seaport Village" style of retail development was stymied by the same thing that Otto Froberg's plans were; another big highway to move folks to the beaches. The state's plans to build Route 4, like their earlier Colonel Rodman Highway scheme had, changed the farmland's future.

Well, all that said and done, I expect you see why I'm not keen on any plan which would not include preserving the old silo that stands there silently as an unofficial local North Kingstown landmark. To me it memorializes both an age that is sadly gone and opportunities that still abound. The day when a daring Swedish immigrant can stand proudly, hands on his hips, smack dab in the middle of the farm he built, with his college educated son at his side, with a knowing smile on his face, deserves to be remembered. It is precisely what America is all about and exactly what we need to celebrate, Let's hope Shaws sees it like that, too.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Columnist Tim Cranston demonstrates the depth of what remains of a former fake gold mine in Slocum.

The View From Swamptown

The Story of the Swamptown Gold Mine

Old P. T. Barnum would have loved this one. Heck, maybe he even heard about it prior to formulating his famous quote, "There's a sucker born every minute." For the Swamptown Gold mine was pure fool's gold - sucker's bait if you please. I'll leave out the names of the offending and offended families in deference to the feelings of any descendants that may still be around. But, names or not, the story stands on its own and I've found the proof of its veracity.

First, to understand this tale, you've got to understand the times. The end of the 1800's was the era of goldrush fever in America. People were dropping everything, leaving everything behind, to chase after that elusive "big strike" that was going to solve their problems, make them wealthy for the rest of their lives. Off they went to the Klondike, the Yukon, California, and points beyond and in between. Newspapers told tales of folks striking it rich (in reality this was a tiny percentage of all that went off after dreams of gold) further fanning the flames of goldrush fever in America. Within this context comes the brainstorm of a certain Swamptown resident with a 56-acre farm to sell and no one interested in buying it.

No one that is, until the startling news that gold had been found on that very farm. Why, the owner was busy digging his gold mine at that very moment. He had some gold nuggets to show off, and if you went out there and kicked around in the dirt, you could make out the glint of tiny flecks of gold in the tailings of the mine. But hey, he was a man of his word and he had said he would sell and by golly he'd stand by that. Sure enough, someone came along and bought up that previously unpalatable piece of farmland and kept on working that mine. It wasn't long though, before it was found that the "gold nuggets" were really made of brass, and those tiny flecks of gold turned out to be the filings from some old gold coins owned by the seller. Back in the days when "Buyer beware!" was the only protection a man had, this buyer had to take his lumps and realize that all he had was a 56-acre farm; nothing more and nothing less.

Time passed, and the "Swamptown goldrush" faded in the memories of local folks (although, you can bet it was a prominent subject at many a local tavern for some time). It became part of the rich oral history of the region until local historian George Gardiner recorded it for posterity in 1949. But that it turns out, is not the only place that a concrete record of this notorious event in Swamptown history was permanently etched. It seems that in 1899, a young surveyor named Robert F. Rodman decided to use the Swamptown goldmine as a reference point for a survey he was undertaking. Deep in the backwoods of Swamptown, the man who just one year later would receive the honorary title of Colonel when he joined the staff of Governor Wm. Gregory, took the time to survey in the location of that spurious goldmine and record it for posterity. That survey can be found in the North Kingstown Town Hall, if you only know where to look. Using that information, along with the expertise of regular reader Amy Sonder of Easterbrooks

Surveyors, I was able to stand in the 120 some odd year old remains of that mine. Stand in the spot where a deceptive seller plotted and a gullible buyer dug, a spot deep in the back woods of Swamptown, where a young surveyor recorded the evidence of this incident, and listen for the faint sounds of cars speeding along the Colonel Robert F. Rodman Highway off in the distance.

This column is dedicated to the memory of Sam Post; he always loved a “good yarn”.



A 20-year-old Levi Cahoon is hard at work picking potatoes.

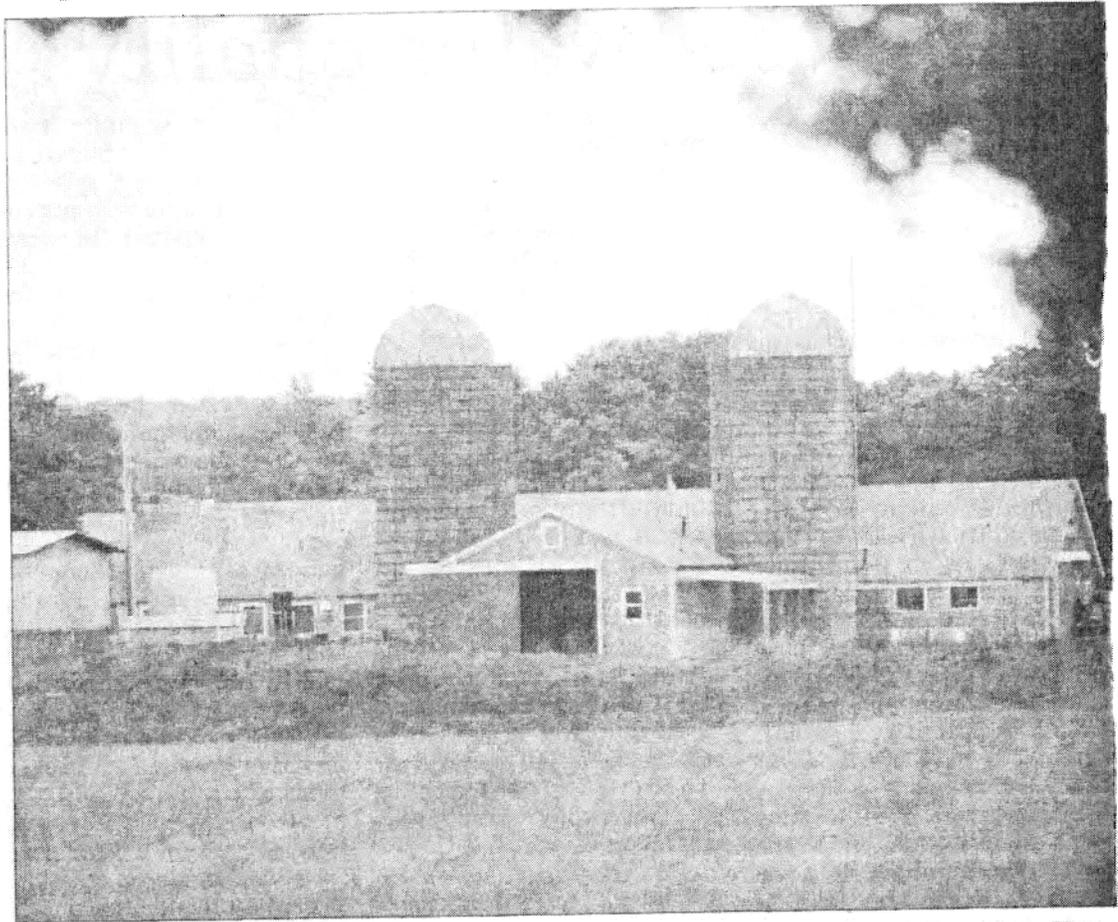


PHOTO: JAMES RUSH

The Brow Farm land in Slocum where Levi Cahoon and others once picked plentiful potatoes is now part of Winfield Tucker's turf farm.

The View From Swamptown

Levi Cahoone – Champion Potato Picker

As you've probably gathered, it's the time of year when this Swamp Yankee's thoughts are often taken up with visions of farming and the farmers of yesteryear. Being that I live within walking distance of the village of Slocum, the last area of our fair town where farming is still carried out in a big way, it seems only fitting that we take some time and examine some aspect of the local history of the lowly potato, a crop which has supported the lives of so many in our recent past. "The potato!" you say, "There's no potatoes growing around here!" Well right you are. But just a few decades ago the potato was king in Slocum and elsewhere. Consider this; take every square foot of land out in Slocum that is now planted in turf (a sizeable sum it is, I might add) and double it and that will give you an idea of how important potatoes used to be. Yes, potatoes truly reigned supreme around here in days gone by.

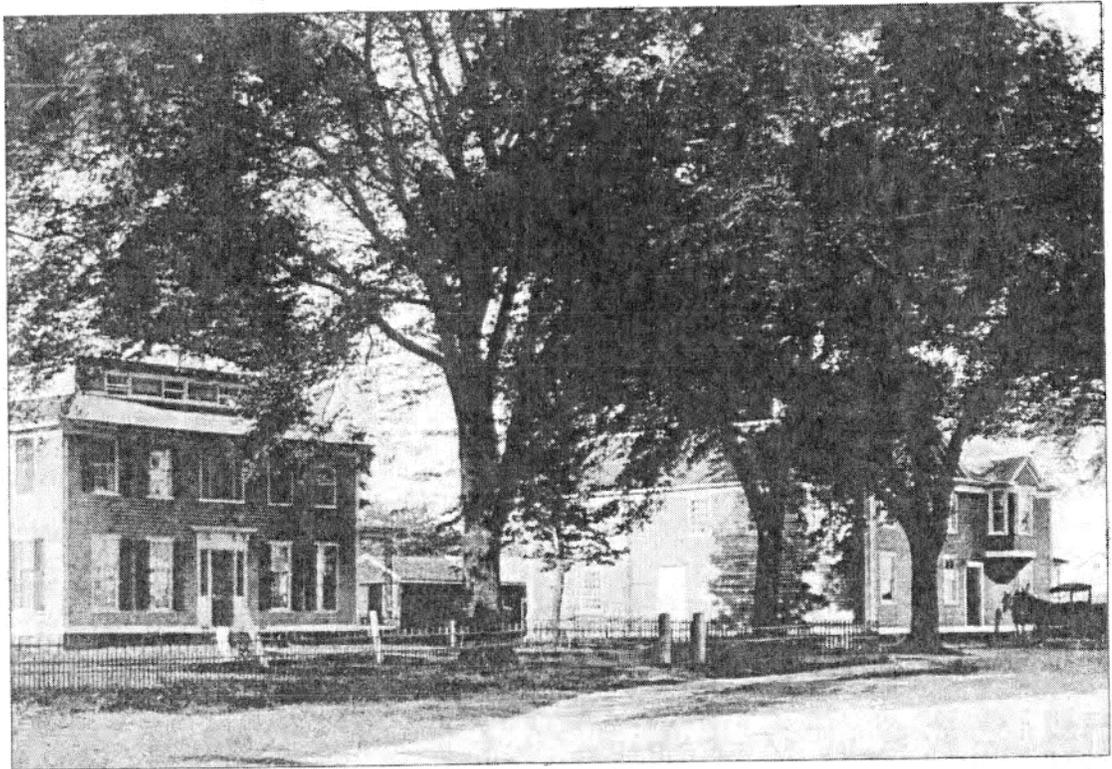
This brings us to the subject of this week's column; Levi J. Cahoone. In the land of the potato, Levi Cahoone was a champion. Levi was to potato picking what Ali was to boxing, what Ruth was to baseball, what Uitas was to football. You see no one before Levi or since him has been able to pick potatoes with such a fury. Like Paul Bunyan and John Henry, Levi Cahoone could nearly out pick the machines that eventually replaced him and his fellow pickers.

In 1938, his banner year, 20 year-old Levi regularly picked between 200 and 300 cases of potatoes every day. In one eight hour day Levi Cahoone filled a record 365 crates with good Slocum potatoes. His co-workers were happy to make the 150 crate mark. To put Levi's accomplishment in perspective, 365 crates is the equivalent of about 450 bushels of potatoes, which translates roughly into about 2700 pounds. That's a lot of spuds! When asked for the secret to his success, Levi simply said, "Keep off you knees and you work faster. I never kneel to pick potatoes." Levi's boss Ben Brow of the Brow Farm (now a part of Tucker Turf Farm) had this to say, "Some people don't believe that Levi picked up 365 crates in one day. I know he did because I had to pay him for it." Spoken like a true Swamp Yankee don't you think.

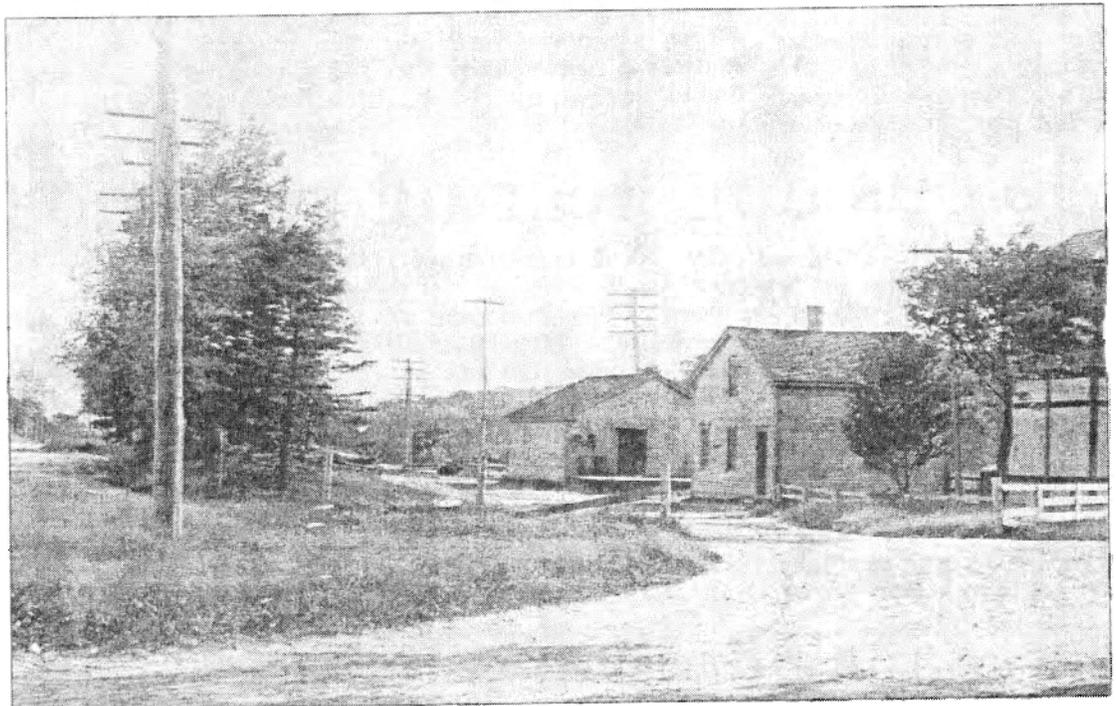
Levi Cahoone lived with his family in Allenton. When World War II came calling Levi spent his time in the Merchant Marine. Hauling potatoes, among other things, in harm's way, to supply servicemen involved in the conflict. He married a Peacedale girl, Vivian Redmand, settled there, and raised 6 daughters. He also worked for the Narragansett Pier Railroad. He died in June of 1994 at the age of 76.

Out in Slocum, there's still folks who remember the days when the potato was king. Back then if you were to tell one of those farmers that some day they'd be making a living raising turfgrass to put in rich folks' front yards, why they'd

have laughed you right off the fields. It just goes to show you how much times have changed. One of those very folks is Winfield Tucker, who now farms the old Brow fields, the site of Levi's accomplishments, with turf. Mr. Tucker and his daughter Linda are also raising up houses on some of their land and I put this challenge out to them now. You ought to recognize some of the folks who contributed to Slocum's farming history. I think Levi Cahoone Lane would be an address folks could be proud of if they only knew what he had accomplished.



Above, the Jonathon Slocum Homestead and the Slocum General Store/Post Office now exist only in postcard views like this one. The homestead burned in the early 1960s, the store in early 2002. Below is an early 20th century postcard view of the Slocum train depot located at the intersection of Indian Corner Road and Slocum Road, visible on the far left.



The View From Swamptown

Remembering Slocumville

Like many of our fair town's small villages, Slocumville, the village center of the farming region known as Slocum or "College Plain", is gone and largely forgotten. Those of you who are long time readers of this column know that this Swamp Yankee figures, that in order for a village to truly be a village, it had to have a church, a school, a general store, and a place of employment for the folks who lived in the immediate vicinity. In previous columns, we've taken a gander at Slocumville's two remaining school buildings, both on Indian Corner Road and one of her two churches, which still stands on Railroad Ave (the other being the Free Will Baptist Church formerly located on Slocum Rd.) and we've pondered the lives of largest portion of her working folk; the farmers and potato pickers of yesteryear. In these two remarkable postcard photos we can see the last pieces of the puzzle, the Slocum's Corner General Store and Post office and the home of the then patriarch of the clan the village was named after, Jonathan Slocum and the Slocum train depot, the lifeline for the little farming community. All of these buildings are sadly gone; destroyed one by one by fire. The last building to remain, the general store building burned in February of 2002. At the time it had been converted into apartments, having ended its use as a general store nearly 50 years earlier. Although these fires surely took their toll on Slocumville, they were not its ultimate downfall as a viable village. That dubious honor belongs ironically enough to the very thing that formed the village in the first place, farming. You see, as the 20th century dawned, farming changed. Small farms could no longer compete and an "economy of scale" brought about the eventual consolidation of the many small family farms of yore into the very few successful large farms of today. As farms were gobbled up by other farms, the houses and outbuildings that went along with them were demolished in order to allow for more farmable acreage. In this way the numerous Slocum, Arnold, Sherman, Green, and Gardner family homes vanished and a little village ceased to be. Slocumville lives on only in memories and photos such as these.

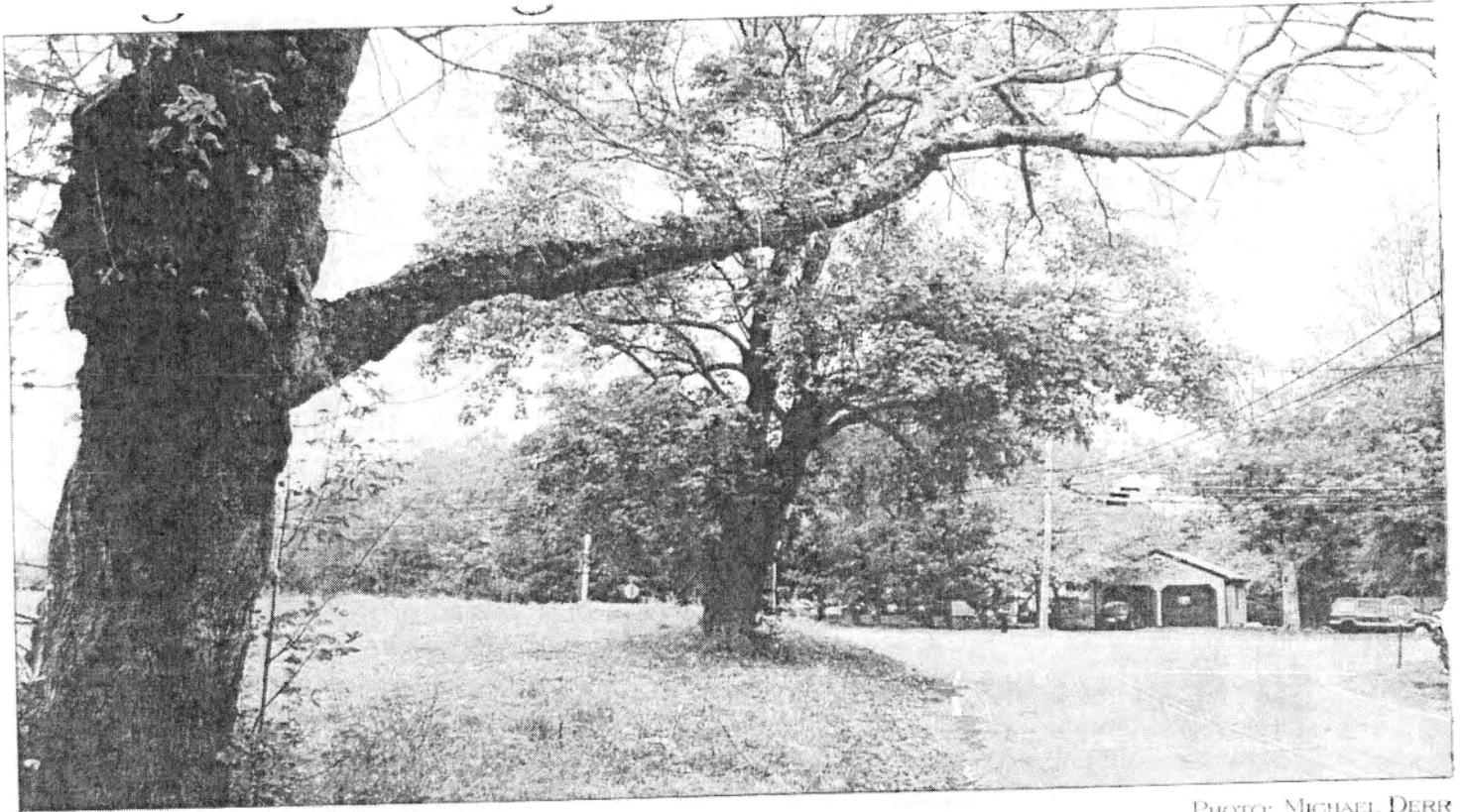


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Sure, it looks innocent enough in daylight now, but years ago old-timers said Indian Corner was haunted by a disembodied head surrounded by a halo of blue flame.

The View From Swamptown

The Story Behind Indian Corner

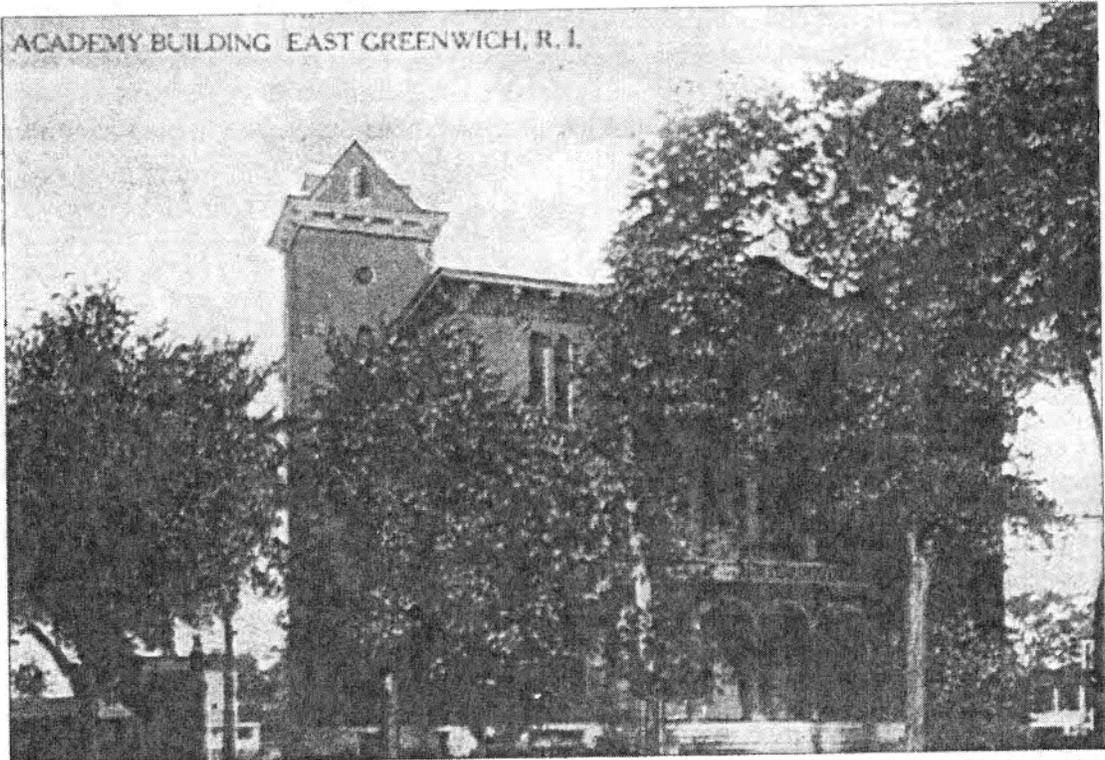
This being the time of year that it is, it's only appropriate that we take a Swamptown Gander at a tale that's just a little eerie, a little on the spooky side. At the same time we can settle a question about the name of one of our fair town's many highway and byways; that being Indian Corner Road.

To understand the story behind Indian Corner, you've got to go back a ways to the early 1800's. Back to a time when all the roads out in those parts really had no name, they were all just part of the Swamptown Road. Folks located themselves along the Swamptown Road by means of reference points; for instance, the Rathbun branch road (the lane leading off into property largely owned by the Rathbun clan – now Hatchery Road) or the Sunnyside (the only naturally open spot along the Swamptown Road where the sun would shine through the deep tangle of the woods and thickets). As you got deeper into Swamptown, heading west towards Slocumville and Dark Corners, the reference points got more ominous, Robber's Corner, a known location where "highwaymen" often lay in wait to waylay unsuspecting travelers, and Indian Corner itself would both bring a shiver to Swamptown folks should they be traveling by these spots as night approached and shadows drew near.

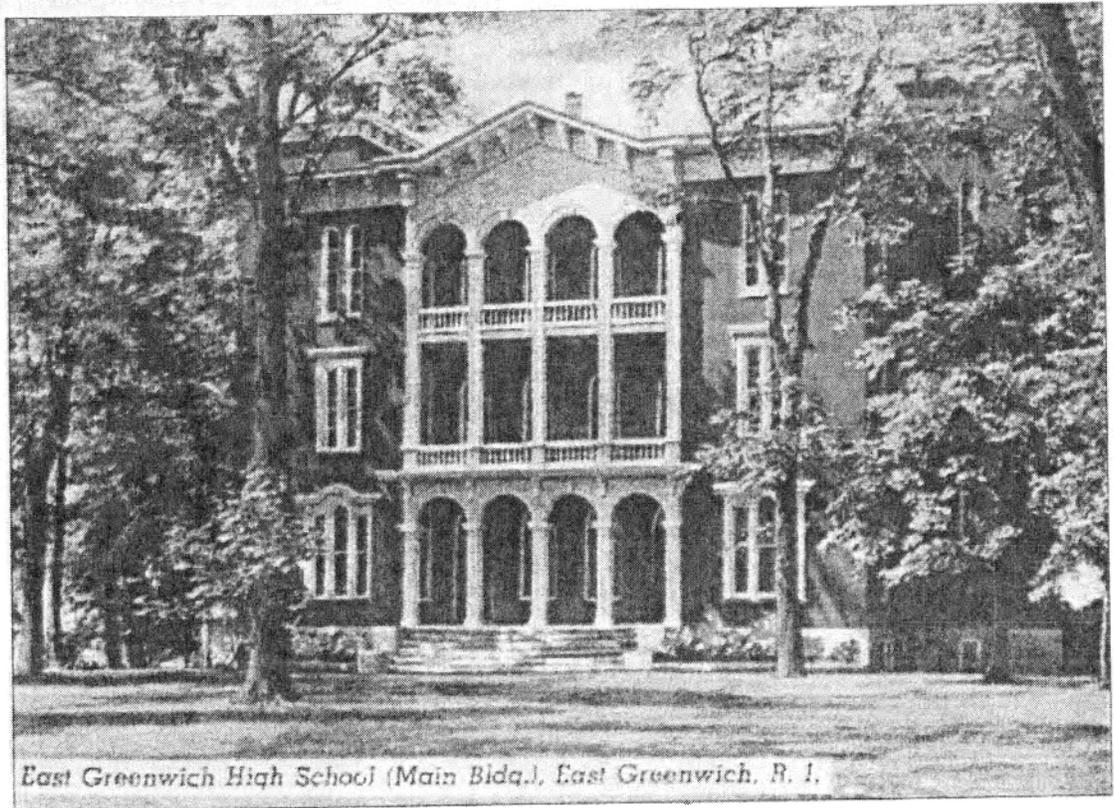
Some of the folks traveling by what became Indian Corner during that timeframe some 200 years ago began to report strange goings on at the intersection with the branch road out to Slocumville (the present day intersection of Exeter and Indian Corner Roads); you've got to remember that this was a time long before this area was cleared for farming as it is today and it, like the rest of Swamptown, was a great tangle of trees, vines, and brush. A great rock was long before placed at the corner, to mark it when the deep winter snows made the road hard to follow. On certain nights, when the moon was just a sliver in the sky and a foggy mist had settled into the ruts and hollows along the road, an apparition was said to appear in the vicinity of this rock. A disembodied head surrounded by a halo of blue flame was reported by a great number of nighttime travelers along Swamptown Road. Old-timers claimed this head belonged to a long dead member of the Shewattuck Narragansetts, the original displaced occupants of Swamptown. He was understandably upset about the loss of his ancestral home and he appeared to remind all who traveled there that this land had a history that long pre-dated the arrival of the "English" from across the sea. Swamptown, Slocumville, and Dark Corners folks began to hurry past this location nervously, especially on those dark nights when the moon provided little light and the shadows grew long and ominous along the length of this tangled murky stretch of road. That's when folks began calling it Indian Corner; Indian Corner, a place to respectfully avoid if possible. The name stuck and was carried on with the naming of Indian Corner Road nearly 100 years later.

20th century historian George W. Gardiner, the man most responsible for the preservation of the many folktales and legends that came out of Swamptown, often remarked, slyly, with a well timed wink, that there might be a connection between the legend of Indian Corner and the nearby placement of the area's only tavern. You know, Gardiner may be right, but I'm not taking any chances and on those evenings when my

afternoon walk lasts too long and I find myself at Indian Corner as the sun goes down, why I pick up the pace just a bit. You've got to admit it's a little strange that the only crop that seems to thrive at Indian Corner is an ancient member of the squash family that lends itself easily to being carved up into leering jack-o-lanterns patterned after things that go bump in the night.



Above and below are two postcard views of Daniel Allen's Kent Academy – identifying it as the Academy Building when still owned by the National Methodist Episcopal Conference (top) and later as the main building of East Greenwich High School.



The View From Swamptown

The Daniel Gould Allen House

If you could pick one man who has influenced the course of history in both of the peaceful communities that this newspaper serves, it would have to be Daniel Gould Allen. You see, although he lived his entire life on the family farm on North Quidnessett Rd. in North Kingstown, his real legacy is his influence upon the educational tradition of neighboring East Greenwich.

Daniel Allen was born December 28, 1810 to Thomas and Mary (Hill) Allen. His grandfather, familiar to regular readers of this column, was none other than old Judge John Allen himself. The marriage of the Judge's son to Mary Hill had united two of Quidnessett's most prominent and influential families. Daniel was educated at the finest schools and eventually graduated from Wesleyan University. His passion was education, and he returned from Middletown Ct., with a plan to institute all the new educational reforms he had studied at the University. Chief among these concepts was the idea that in America, everyone deserved the opportunity for a quality education. The early 1800's were a time when this idea was really blossoming. Public education was fast becoming a reality in communities across America and there were not enough qualified teachers to go around. This was the impetus behind institutions such as The Washington Academy in Wickford, founded in 1800 and the Kent Academy in East Greenwich, founded in 1802. These were not public schools at that time, as many assume, they were in fact training facilities for the vast amounts of teachers needed to staff the many small district school houses that were springing up across New England and beyond. Daniel Allen, in a manner available only to and befitting of person of his high station decided to take matters into his own hands in a hurry. In 1838, tapping into some of the substantial Allen/Hill resources, he proceeded to purchase the Kent Academy outright. This way he could run it as he saw fit and answer to no one. His programs, instituted that very year, and his school were very successful and that success allowed him to turn around and sell the academy to the National Methodist Episcopal Conference in 1844. His six-year investment as guiding light, owner, and headmaster of the Academy, allowed him to retire at the tender age of 34. The Methodist's renamed the school The East Greenwich Academy and the rest is, as they say, history.

Daniel may have retired, but he certainly stayed busy. He ran the 100-acre farm at which he had been born and which had been left to him by his parents. In addition to that, he was at one time or another, the president of the N.K. Town Council, the Superintendent of Schools, the Justice of the Peace, the Moderator of the Town Meetings, and a State Legislator. He also somehow managed to write the book "The History of the Quidnessett Country" in the midst of it all, which is, even to this day, an invaluable tool for researchers like myself.

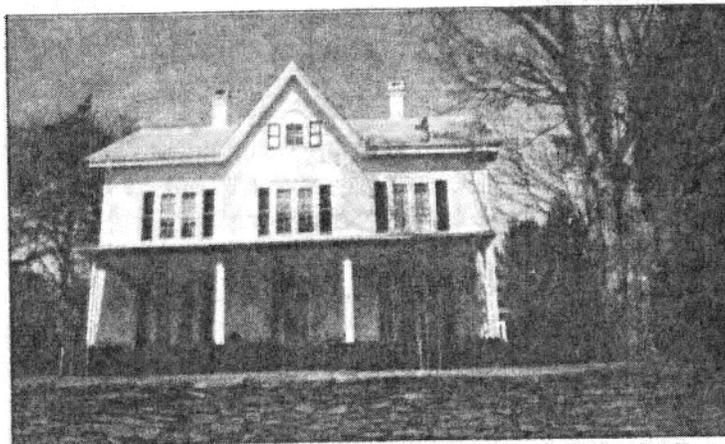


PHOTO: JAMES RUSH

The old farmhouse Daniel Allen had grown up in was demolished in 1862 and replaced by this grander building on North Quidnessett Road.

In 1862 he demolished his parents old farmhouse and had the magnificent two and a half story, 3 bay, central entranced early Victorian home built that still graces North Quidnessett Road to this day. His grand home can be seen in the accompanying photograph.

Daniel Gould Allen died in 1895 at the age of 84. He had lived his entire life on the same farm. That farm stayed in the Allen family for another couple of decades until it was purchased by RI's textile king C. Prescott Knight as a home for his son and namesake Clinton P. Knight Jr. The 100 acre parcel was divided, with the larger share, including the Allen house, being folded into the vast Knight landholdings in the area, and the smaller northern portion being sold to Katherine Welling, another local land baron who was amassing her own enormous Quidnessett Summer Estate; Pojac Point. But that's another story for another time and I expect Daniel Gould Allen would not approve of me muddying up this dissertation by over-reaching my lesson plan.

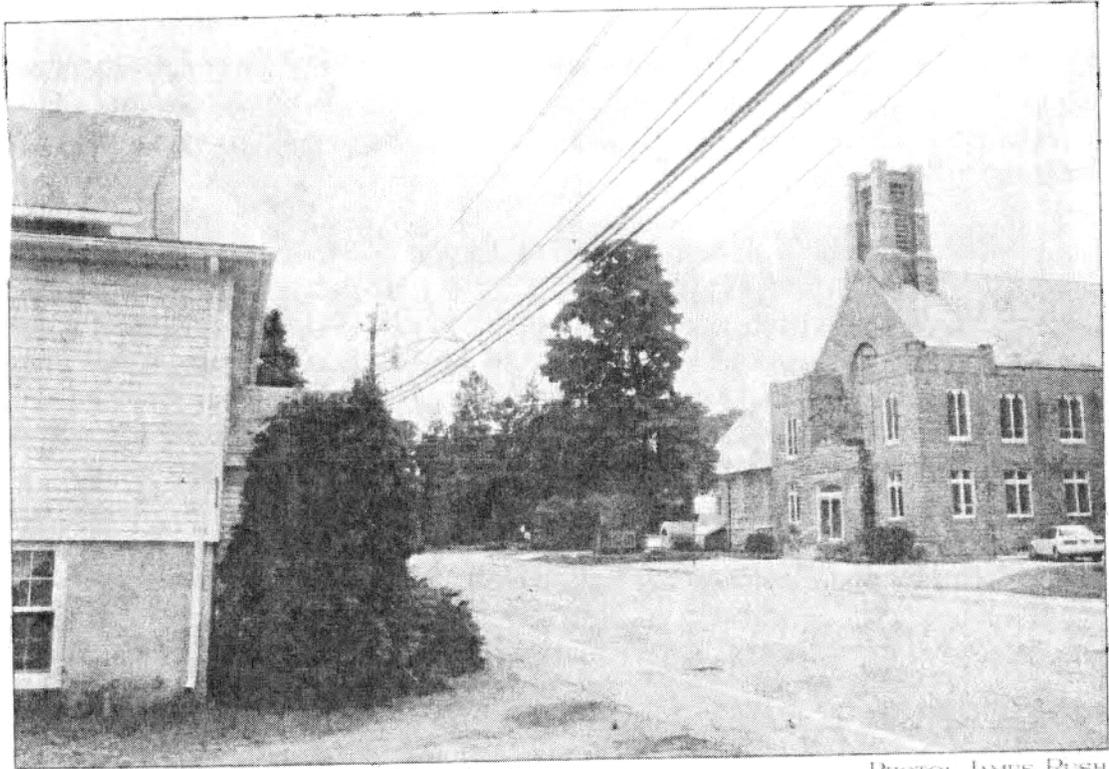


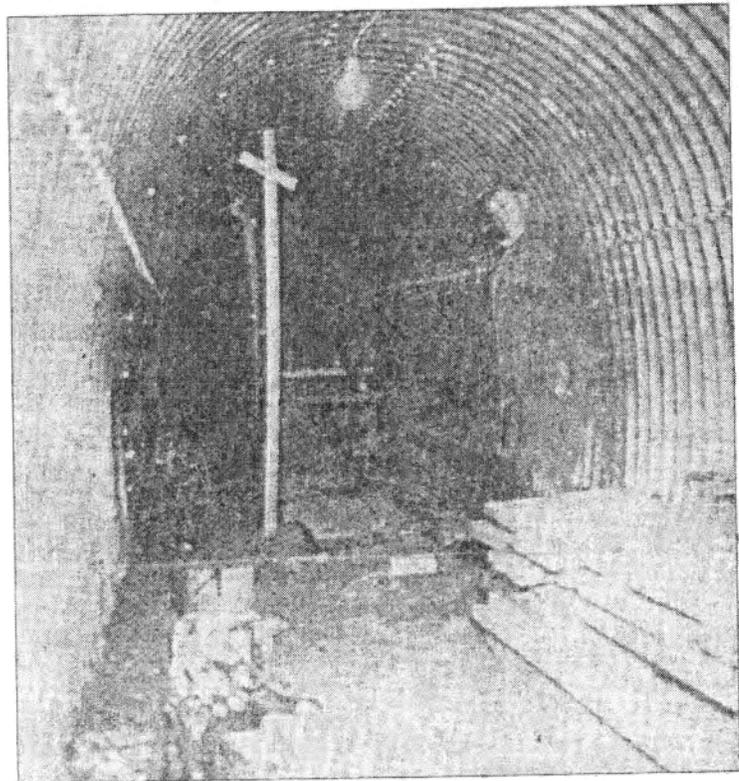
PHOTO: JAMES RUSH

A tunnel was built beneath Post Road to connect Quidnessett Baptist Church and its Sunday school building across the street in 1961 after a pedestrian was hit by a car while crossing the street.

*The View
from
Swamptown*



G.T. Cranston



This photograph from 1961, courtesy of Quidnessett Baptist Church, shows an A.E. Bragger worker standing in the nearly completed pedestrian tunnel running under Post Road.

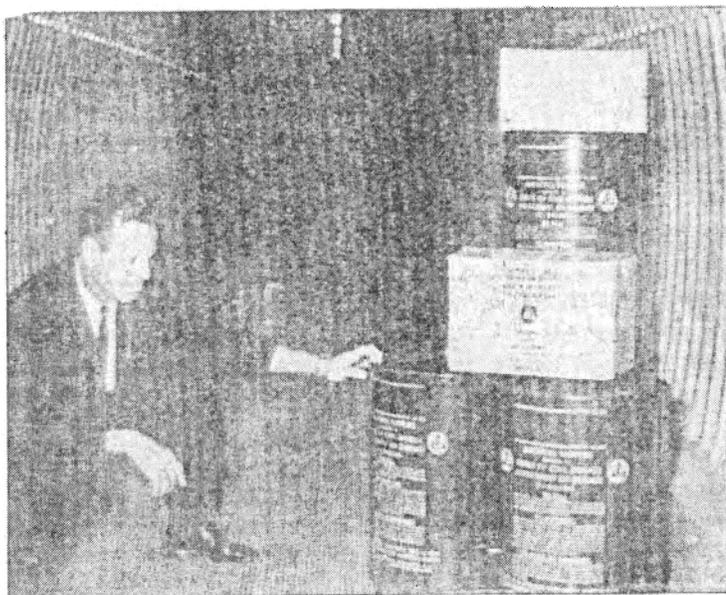
The View From Swamptown

The Quidnessett Baptist Church Pedestrian Tunnel

Yeah, its me again! That Swamptown guy has been wracking his brain trying to come up with a idea for a story to help the Quidnessett Baptist Church people celebrate their big anniversary. It seems he thought he had just about run outa stuff to say about them, seeing as he's done a whole lot of stories on them already. I told him, "Hey, you missed the most important thing of all, if you ask me and the guys. What about the tunnel? How many churches do you know that have their own tunnel?" Well, I stumped him with that one.

I remember when I first heard about it. You know, I just could hardly believe it. Who would ever guess that being a Baptist included getting your own tunnel. When I told the rest of the guys, they were amazed too. A couple of them even figured maybe we should think about changing religions or something. Then I remembered that the Wickford Baptist's don't have a tunnel and besides that, my mom said, "That's a bit drastic, don't you think?" I'm pretty sure that's another one of those grownup sayings that means "No". I figured I'd better get some information on this tunnel, so I asked my Grandpa St. Pierre, he knows about stuff like that. He's the head electrical engineer for the Electric Company and there's not too many questions he can't answer. He can get around to places most people can't also. Whenever there's some place he wants to go where they won't let you go, like up where they are building Route 95 and 295 or places like that, he just puts this sign up in the car window that says "Supervising Engineer" or something like that and they just wave us through. Sometimes I wonder who those workers think I am, some midget engineer or something, but heck we always get to the best rock hunting places long before anyone else.

Well, anyway, just like I figured he knew all about that tunnel. Grandpa said they built it in 1961 at the same time they put up their Sunday School building on the other side of Post Road. It is 120 feet long and is 12 feet deep under the road. How neat is that! They had to build it in two parts because they weren't allowed to completely block Post Road. Grandpa even said that he's sure it is the first pedestrian tunnel in the whole State of Rhode Island. It was built by some guy named A.E.Bragger, I think and the people at Quidnessett Church decided to put it in because some oldtimer (he must have been real old if my Grandpa thinks he's an oldtimer) got hit by a car and darn near killed. Grandpa also said that they've got the tunnel loaded up with fallout shelter food now. When I told one of the older kids in the neighborhood about it he said, "Yeah, that's the place to be in case we ever get nuked!" I had to ask Mom what that meant. As usual she said "You'll have to ask your Grandfather about that, young man." Grandpa said I'd get a feel for it if I happened to be around when he caught up with the kid who said it, so I guess I'll just have to wait and see.



During 1964, when fears of a Cold War nuclear attack held sway over many American communities, North Kingstown Civil Defense Director Bill Stearns supervised the loading of fallout shelter foodstuffs into the church's tunnel.

The next Sunday when I was leaving Church, right after Canon Beldon got done squeezing the life out of my hand (remember I told you about those handshakes of his) I asked him when we were going to get our own tunnel. He told me he really didn't think St. Paul's had a need for one. I explained to him all about the oldtimers getting hit by cars and the fallout shelter junk and about how Grandpa St.Pierre was going to "nuke" some kid (whatever that means) and then Mom started shushing me. He kinda laughed and said, "Oh, its alright Jean". He explained to me all about how we were blessed with other wonderful things a child could enjoy like the Old Narragansett Church for instance. He even told me Cranston's had probably been going there for hundreds of years already. I said, "Yeah, that's neat but imagine how much neater it would be if we had a tunnel going from there to the new Church." Mom, said I was impossible and we left for Sunday School. As we were crossing Main Street I couldn't help but think about that tunnel.

SHOPPELL'S
MODERN HOUSES



•1887•

The View From Swamptown

Shoppell's Modern Houses and the Nathan Waldron House

The end of the 1800's, was a time of prosperity here in "Our Fair Town" as it was all across America. It was a time when average folks began to look at their home as more than just a utilitarian, practical place to live their lives and raise their families; a home became a statement of sorts; a calling card to the rest of your immediate world. The 1880's and 1890's were the beginning of a time when your house said something about who you were and what you represented. Into this financial niche stepped the likes of Robert Shoppell, a New York architect and marketer extraordinaire. Each month Shoppell and his company "The Co-operative Building Plan Association" published a magazine devoted to the promotion of, and sale of this concept. Shoppell knew houses now meant more than just a place to live. Each month, his magazine showcased a number of unique house plans, interspersed with articles of interest to the up and coming homeowner. Where else could you get a professional debate over the pluses and minuses of that newfangled concept "indoor plumbing". Who but Shoppell and his cohorts had the expertise to advise you on how to plan an impressive garden, or build yourself a combination root cellar and ice house. Central heat was foreign to some, but not Robert Shoppell and his associates. The world was rapidly changing, houses were stepping into the modern era, and Shoppell was there to guide the upwardly mobile of the time. By the turn of the century Shoppell boasted that he possessed the world's largest architectural patronage, with nearly 10,000 Shoppell homes built across the U.S. and Canada.

Here in North Kingstown, we certainly have a number of Shoppell homes. As a matter of fact, the Shoppell magazine cover art that accompanies this column seems to suggest that perhaps even the grand Gregory Mansion on Brown Street in "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic" may be at the least, influenced, by Shoppell's architectural stylings. Out on North Quidnessett Road we have a confirmed example of Shoppell's brilliance. By the magazine's standards, this is a modest example of a Shoppell home. But it is impressive and typical of his style none-the-less. It was more than likely constructed by an up and coming Providence wholesale grocer named Nathan Waldron around 1889. Waldron, like his predecessor Parley Mathewson, who also called Providence home but summered in Wickford, made a substantial fortune supplying the, literally, hundreds of small Mom & Pop grocery stores that populated the region. He didn't stay here long though, by the late 1890's Waldron purchased a substantial Fletcher family home on nearby Fletcher Road and modified it into a veritable mansion, adding 4-story octagonal towers, a wrap-around veranda, a casino and even a private bowling alley to the old homestead. In a twist of fate the Shoppell designed home eventually fell into the substantial financial empire of the Fletcher family scion mill owner and businessman Col. Joseph Fletcher. It was also owned, as a part of a much larger gentleman's farm, by beer tycoon Walter Hanley and the father of "The Fruit of the Loom" textile dynasty C. Prescott Knight and the related Taggart family. So, you see this impressive Quidnessett home has an even more impressive "pedigree". It reminds us, too, of Shoppell and all the architectural magazines that followed him. In this way, the little L-plan, cross gabled



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

At right is the cover of an 1887 edition of "Shoppell's Modern Homes," a national publication that showcased contemporary home designs as well as new concepts like indoor plumbing and central heating. Shoppell-designed houses on Brown Street in Wickford and one on North Quidnesett Road (shown above) are an example of the influence Shoppell's magazine had on American homebuilders.

house with patterned shingles and projecting glassed porch, known to Shoppell as design #570 tells quite a tale about its time.



Front (above) and rear views of "Hillstead" were taken in the early 1930s.



The View from Swamptown

Hillstead

Back a month or so ago, we took a Swamptown gander at the oldest buildings in our fair town. You may have taken note at that time, that there were a few entries on that list of venerable ancients that we have yet to take a closer look at during our journey together through the history of North Kingstown. From time to time during the next few months we are going to rectify that problem and “fill in the blanks” on our list of North Kingstown’s 15 oldest buildings. One of the most important of those information gaps belongs to the home of Thomas Hill or “Hillstead” as it is commonly known.

Hillstead, which was number 9 on our list of the ancients, was constructed sometime around 1712 by Thomas Hill, formerly of nearby Massachusetts. Dates as early as 1680 have been attributed to the home, although these are considered suspect as the home was most certainly constructed by Thomas Hill and he was not known to have been in the Quidnessett section of the Colony of Rhode Island at that time.

Hill had as his business partner, and close friend, Jabez Greene, son of James Greene one of the region’s first settlers. Hill and his family settled on the southern side of the mouth of the Hunt or Potowomut River, right across from Greene’s home which was on the northern bank. Greene and Hill, working together, built a dam across the river and used its power to run the region’s earliest saw and grist mills. These were followed by a textile fulling mill and ultimately the famous Greene Anchor Forge; perhaps the area’s first industrial concern.

The Hill Family intermarried with both the Greene’s and the Allen’s and, in part through these unions, always remained one of the regions most influential. The graveyard associated with Hillstead, not only contains the earthly remains of Quidnessett’s most important citizens, including our old friend Judge Allen of the nearby Allen/Madison House, but also Quidnessett’s winter crypt; constructed to provide a place to keep the region’s “dearly departed” safe during those winter months when the ground is frozen too hard to dig a grave.

Later owners of Hillstead, all descendants of Thomas include the Mathewson, Reynolds, and Lawrence families. Among these folks was Anna M. M. Lawrence, perhaps the most important of North Kingstown’s 20th century amateur historians.

Hillstead, seen in the accompanying photos from the early 1930’s, is not only one of North Kingstown’s oldest and grandest homes, it is a place where a portion of the region’s history was made. Although it has been added on to and modified many times since Thomas Hill built its earliest section, he’d still recognize the place and feel at home behind its walls with the sound of the river still wafting in through an open window.



A circa 1915 postcard scene shows the North Kingston Beach community.

The View From Swamptown

The North Kingston Beach Summer Community

Well, seeing as “Old Man Winter” really laid into us this past week, I thought it might be nice to take a Swamptown Gander at a time and a place where it’s warm and sunny. The time frame for this wonderful postcard image of families enjoying themselves on a sandy beach is around 1915 and the place, is the idyllic seaside summer community of North Kingston Beach. You never heard of this place, you say. Well don’t feel too awful bad because most folks haven’t. You see, it ceased to exist in 1939 when it was swallowed up unceremoniously by the U.S. Government for incorporation into the lands of the Quonset/Davisville Navy base.

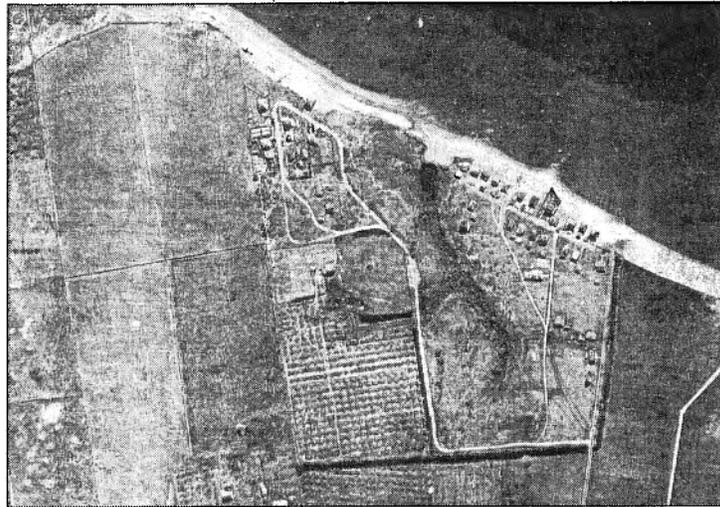
North Kingston Beach was originally platted out in 1910 from farmland owned by the Spink family. Now 1910, was the beginning of an age of plenty here in the U. S. of A. For once average folks began to have some disposable income and thought long and hard about things like automobiles and a summer place at the beach. Planned communities like Mount View, Shore Acres, the Hamilton Plat, Barbour Heights, and yes, you guessed it, North Kingston Beach sprung up along the coastline of our fair town to fill the needs of hot dusty city folk who wanted to have a place to get away to. North Kingston Beach was originally platted out with a very ambitious 279 lots in 1910. By 1924 a redesigned neighborhood was planned with about 110 lots, 21 of which were already sold and built upon. Unfortunately, along came that pesky Great Depression and by the time the U.S. Government came knocking in 1938 only about 40 homes, most of them very near to the shoreline as you can see by the 1939 aerial photo that accompanies this column, were in place along streets with names like Spink and Wickford Avenues, Ocean Terrace, and Beachwood Lane. I imagine it was a wonderfully scenic drive from Post Road out to North Kingston Beach. You’d have to pass right through the Romano Vineyards, adjacent to Route 1, then through the grand summer estate of Charles Davol with its manicured lawns and tended farmlands, then you’d begin to spy the Spink Orchards (also visible in the aerial photograph) come around a corner and you’re there, the sandy shoreline of the Narragansett Bay and your summer cottage on the sea.

All that ended in 1939, when the land was condemned and everyone was paid what the Government figured the land was worth and nothing more. A few of the houses were auctioned off to local folks, including a young George C. Cranston Jr., who moved his North Kingston Beach house to the back of his West Main Street funeral home property and allowed a trusted employee to live in it. Some of them too, were demolished by the Navy, but most were moved and reutilized for Officers Housing in an area known by all on the big base as “Dog Patch”. To the north of the once quiet community a great pair of carrier piers were constructed. Just to the south, a portion of the bay was filled in and a giant airbase rose from the former farmlands. Smack dab in the middle of all that, sat the same beach seen in this postcard view and it sits there still to this day encircled by the remains of foundations and the rubble of a once beautiful beach community.



The byways of the North Kingston Beach community, visible in the center of this circa 1939 aerial view, bore names such as Spink Avenue, Wickford Avenue, Ocean Terrace and Beachwood Lane. Visible near the upper left corner of the neighborhood are the Spink Orchards.

You know, I expect, that somewhere out there, maybe in a Florida retirement community or maybe in a senior center in Providence or Pawtucket, two elderly folks are passing the long winter afternoons sitting around wistfully dreaming of days spent decades ago on a sandy stretch of shoreline in a place called North Kingston Beach.



A 1939 aerial view shows North Kingston Beach just before it was absorbed into the Quonset/Davisville naval complex.



This portion of a 1939 survey completed by the Army Corp of Engineers shows plans for the naval base construction.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

This home on Fletcher Road, a showcase summer home to Nathan B. Waldron and later to textile mill owner Joseph Fletcher, has lost its twin octagonal towers and much of the elaborate trim along the eaves of its front gables but retains much of its "oooh" factor.

The View From Swamptown

The Waldron Fletcher House

In past columns, we've taken a look at big time gambler William Waldron and his brother, respectable businessman and wholesale grocery magnate Nathan Waldron. We've also taken a Swamptown gander at the North Quidnessett Road home built by Nathan Waldron from blueprints purchased through a popular house plans magazine of the 19th century. This week we are going to continue this look at the brothers Waldron and examine Nathan B.'s showcase second home just around the corner on Fletcher Road.

Nathan and Mary Waldron purchased the then large but simple 5-bay Greek Revival home from George and Harriet Wightman in 1868. At that time the house and surrounding lands were just a portion of the vast Wightman family holdings centered around the Wightman Homestead now accessed from Harrison Street. Nathan who, as mentioned, summered in a smaller home on North Quidnessett Rd., had grand plans for his new summer place. In no time, he added, twin front gables, twin 4-story octagonal towers with iron cresting, a wrap-around veranda with upper and lower balustrades, and an airy summer "casino" building out back complete with a private bowling alley and various accoutrements appropriate for a man of his stature.

The Waldron's entertained here at their summer estate for decades, until it was sold to textile mill owner Joseph Fletcher just after the turn of the century. Fletcher also acquired additional adjacent Wightman land and established Cedar Crest Farm, which he characterized as the only harness horsebreeding establishment in the region. He eventually constructed a full sized harness racing oval track on the property that was utilized by the many "upper crust" folks then living in the area, including the Knight Family (textile empire that eventually became "Fruit of the Loom") and the Hanley Family (brewery empire).

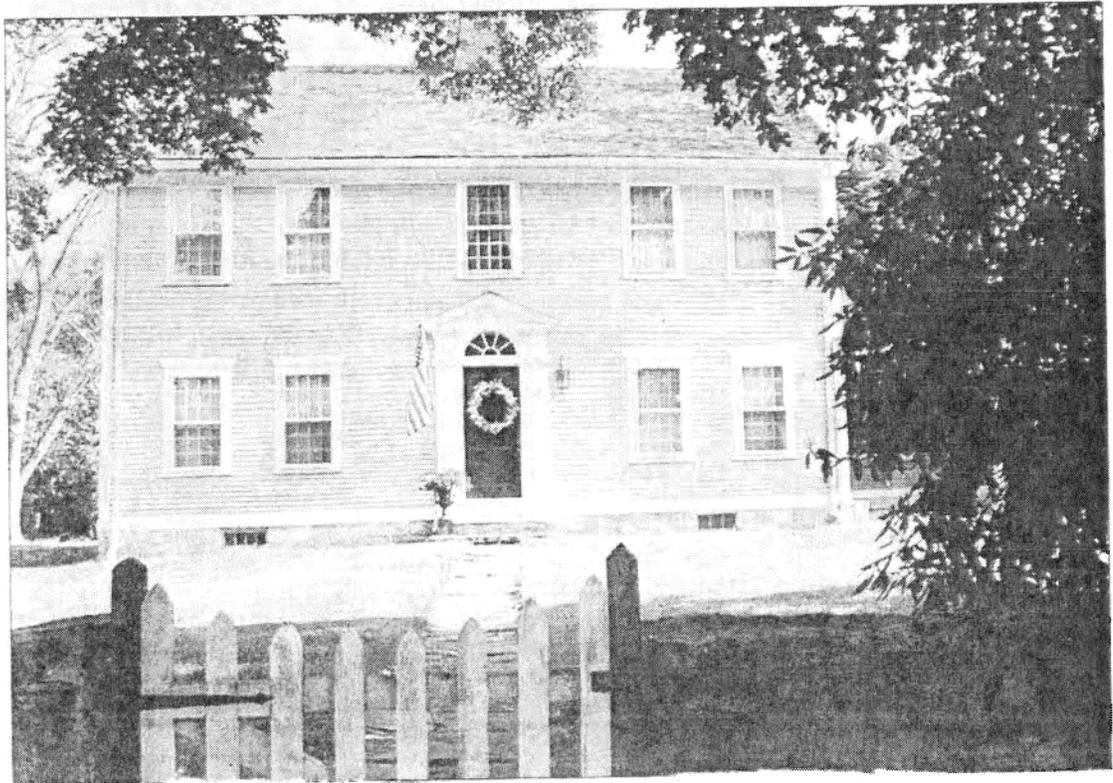
Upon Fletcher's death, the property was purchased by the Knight family and utilized by Webster Knight, who also owned the nearby grand G.W. Allen homestead, where he kept his impressive collection of antique automobiles.

In recent years the house has again changed a bit, having lost its impressive and imposing twin octagonal towers and much of the elaborate trim along the eaves of its front gables. But she still can elicit the occasional "oohs & aahs" from folks new to the area as they round the bend and see it for the first time. And oh, the tales this home could tell if only the walls could talk.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

The circa 1676 Jabez Reynolds House, shown above, was rebuilt in 1730 and later moved a short distance to Austin Road. The 1803 Reynolds House, below, is still standing on Essex Road on the site of the Jabez Reynolds House.



The View From Swamptown

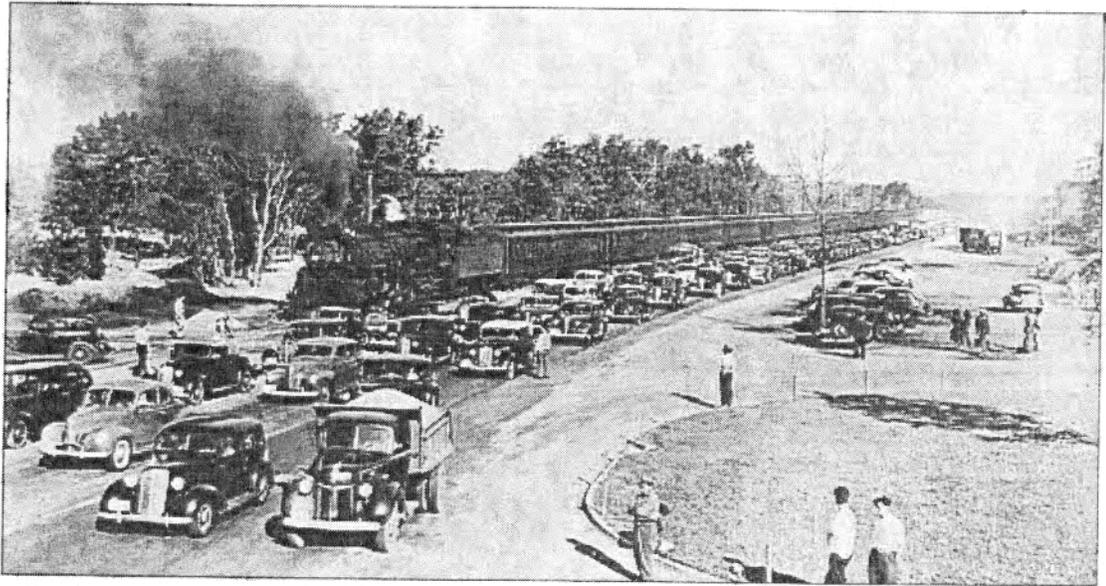
The Whole Story of the Jabez Reynolds House

Regular readers of these ramblings will recognize the house featured in this week's column as the Jabez Reynolds House on Austin Road out in the North Quidnessett section of our fair town. You might also remember that this unpretentious building is among the oldest in the entire state, with portions of it dating back to the late 1600's. The history of this house though, has always been somewhat sketchy at best; construction details and the fact that much of the main support structure shows evidence of ancient fire damage has always supported the notion that the Jabez Reynolds House was constructed prior to the King Phillips War and the subsequent destruction by fire, at the hands of the Narragansetts, of every settler's home from Warwick south on the West Bay. Also the Reynolds family, one of the region's earliest settler clans, was known to be here, in what was to become North Kingstown, as early as 1665. The state's Historic Preservation Commission, in fact, seems to have bought into this theory and supported it in their 1978 historic survey of North Kingstown. Now though, after sifting through a Reynolds Family genealogical document written in 1903 by Thomas Reynolds of East Greenwich and William Reynolds of Wilmington Delaware, I think I can tell the whole story of this venerable little domicile.

From studying this document, I can piece together the following history of this house. The Reynolds clan were indeed residents of Quidnessett in the decade prior to the King Phillip's War and the Great Swamp Massacre. James and Deborah Reynolds and their eight children lived on a fifty-acre parcel of land centered around their home which was situated on the same parcel of land, now on Essex Road, that includes the later 1803 William Reynolds House still extant, recently restored, and shown in an accompanying photograph. James and Deborah's original home was indeed destroyed completely in the period immediately after the massacre in the Great Swamp by the Narragansett warriors who were bent on revenge for the destruction and slaughter that had occurred at their remote hideaway in the Great Swamp. After the conclusion of hostilities, the Reynolds returned to their farm and constructed a completely new home probably around 1676-7. This building is the core of the Jabez Reynolds home now found on Austin Road. The house's history is then uneventful for many decades until 1730 when the Reynolds family members residing in the home, experienced an unfortunate incident, best described by William Reynolds of Delaware the author of the document, "On a Sabbath morning they were all ready to go to a Friends (Quaker) Meeting. They swept up the hearth, and leaving, as they supposed, all things safe, set out on horseback. They got out on the plain, just across the Potowomut River, on the farm where afterwards General Greene was born, and happening to look back, saw their home in flames." The Reynolds family restored their fire damaged home and continued to reside there until 1803, when the larger home was constructed on the lot by William Reynolds, the grandfather of the aforementioned author. The original 1676 constructed, 1730 rebuilt house was moved a short distance

away to provide housing for another Reynolds family and still sits there, more than 200 years later, in that same spot on what is now Austin Road.

So what does this all mean in regards to this buildings place in history? It changes little, only that the house was not built, as previously supposed, prior to the war and damaged in the resulting fires that swept across the landscape. It was newly constructed as a result of that conflagration, and although this information causes it to slip from the second oldest structure in town to the third, the Jabez Reynolds House is still firmly rooted in North Kingstown's history and is now just beginning to tell its stories.



The worker's train pulls in to Quonset Point from Providence in 1941, delivering loads of skilled and unskilled laborers to help transform acres of farms and woodlands into a thriving military base.

QDC speech

Thank you, Geoff for asking me to participate in this intriguing event. I've been asked to set the scene, to put the placement of this little time capsule and the extraordinary timeframe that it represents, into some sort of local historic perspective. So let's begin with the landscape itself. What existed here prior to the construction of this 3000 acre military complex? First and foremost in the minds of local folk back in the 1920's & 30's, out here in South Quidnessett as it was then known, was the 300-acre Romano Vineyard, a fixture here for decades, it even operated full throttle throughout prohibition, bottling fine wines for "ecclesiastical purposes". That last phrase was usually uttered with a nudge and a wink or two. Let's face it, 300 acres of grapes – that's an awful lot of Communion. I know we're talking the decadent "Roaring '20's" here but really! Next in the mindset of a contemporary North Kingstownite would have been "Wild Acres", the 1000 acre Gentleman's Farm and Sportsman's paradise owned by Charles Davol. Yes, that's right, I said 1000 acres, you see Charles Davol could have been the poster child for an elite group of folks who secretly truly did not think the Great Depression was such a bad thing. Properly positioned both literally and financially these folks lived a Great Depression that could have been called the Great Opportunity. Labor and land could be had at cut rate bargain bin prices. Davol's land, cobbled together from 9 different family farms he purchased, sported a small dairy farm, a couple of stocked ponds for fishing enthusiasts, a hunting preserve, and an enormous pier sized just right for his 120' motor yacht "Paragon". He employed between 30 and 40 locals just to run the place. Back a way, well off of the Post Road and accessed by Camp Avenue was the campgrounds of the RI State Militia, a parcel of land with a history extending back to the Spanish-American War and beyond, and the North Kingstown Town Poor Farm. Recent additions to the South Quidnessett landscape were the summer beach cottage communities of North Kingston Beach and Quonset Beach; tightly packed neighborhoods owned primarily by middle class city folk for summer use only. The remaining 1000 acres or so was occupied by quite a number of family farms, including the successful Madison farm centered around the ancient home of Judge John Allen. Quite an eclectic blend of land uses to say the least.

In 1938, with a number of strokes of the pen, including one on the desk of FDR himself, all this changed forever. All of South Quidnessett was acquired before the year was out and the transformation began. Men, machines, and material descended upon North Kingstown at unimaginable clip. The sheer scope and frantic pace of this bold project; to transform 2700 acres of sleepy woods and farmlands into not one, but two distinctly different military bases perched side-by-side within one 3000 acre complex in the space of 24 months, was heretofore unimaginable. Literally thousands of workers; skilled and unskilled laborers, tradesmen and craftsmen alike were needed. A vital rail spur was constructed straight through the center of an ancient peat bog, much to the bemusement of snickering locals who stood by and watched as the heavy equipment sank often out of sight. "Can Do" spirit prevailed and soon the trains were running around the clock loaded with all of the men and machines, steel, lumber, and concrete required. On top of all this, the Government had issued an "All Points Bulletin" of sorts; a general call for

gravel to be used as part of the fill required to create the airport area. Every farmer or landowner with a truck and a gravel source answered this call, happy for the ready source of income. An endless line of folks from North Kingstown, Exeter, Coventry, East & West Greenwich and beyond were there, day in and day out, waiting to dump their gravel and collect the welcome cash. The noise of it all must have surely been deafening. Hammers banging, pile drivers thumping, trains rumbling, diesel engines humming, dredge pumps screaming, men shouting; it was into this cacophony, this nearly non-stop construction symphony that our two thoughtful carpenters descended, riding in from their homes on the workers train from Providence each day.

Perhaps it was on a short coffee break or during one of those rare quiet moments, such as occurred during the solemn procession through the highly controlled construction madness afforded to the inhabitants of one of the dozen or so ancient family cemeteries that had to be relocated to a new final resting place, that they decided upon their plan to wall up a little bit of this history within the building they were working on. Or maybe it was a matter of discussion one day on the train, an aside from the certainly constant topic that colored their conversation each day; that angry little man across the Atlantic with the bad moustache and the head full of hate and how he most certainly was to affect their lives sooner or later. Whatever the circumstances, their efforts to leave a tangible record of their contributions here via this little time capsule, amounted to one of America's first "Kilroy was here" moments and allow us, some 65 years later, an opportunity to look over their shoulders for an instance.

When it was all said and done, when men like these laid down their hard hats and hammers and picked up a helmet and a rifle and returned for a time perhaps to this very place they had helped construct before heading across the oceans to confront those heads full of hatred, when the dust had settled and the din subsided what did it all mean to North Kingstown? The relationship between North Kingstown and Quonset/Davisville then, and now for that matter, is easily likened to the old fable about the blind men considering the elephant; a North Kingstownite's opinion on it was all a matter of perspective. To the state's earliest aquaculturists, the fabled oyster farmers of Wickford Harbor and the nearby Narragansett Bay waters, their take on the great military complex mirrored that of the Romano's, vintners of RI's first commercial wine – you destroyed our livelihood – "the great beast is evil" South Quidnessett's farmers and their kin felt the same – "the great beast destroyed our way of life". But to countless others, regular folks like these men, fathers and husbands who worried mightly about putting food on the table and roof over their family's heads, the military Complex that replaced sleepy South Quidnessett was a powerful beneficent creature; the real "New Deal" upon which southern New England rode out of "The Great Depression" into the future.



The View From Swamptown

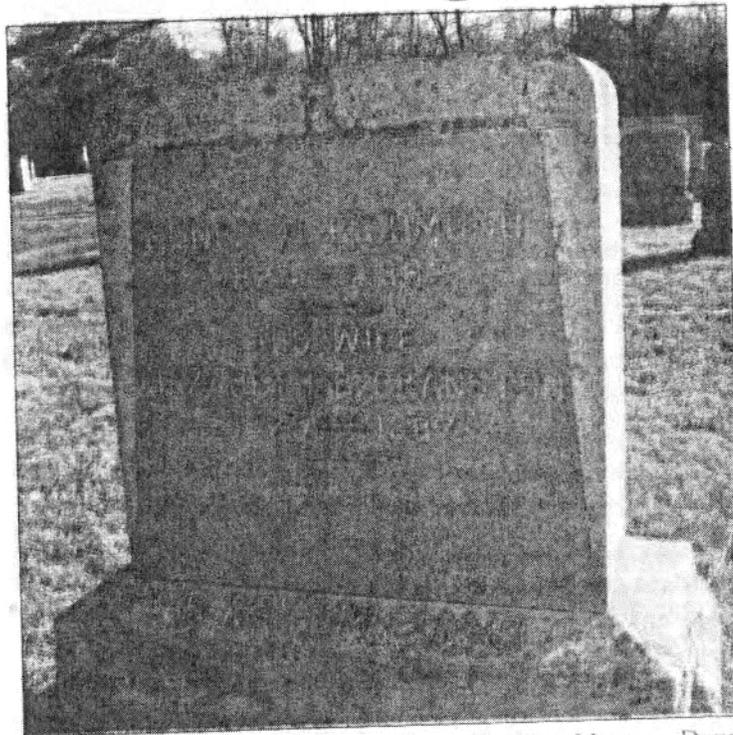
Sam Spink and the Cranston Sisters

The big farmhouse out on Newcomb Road is an anachronism if there ever was one. Directly across the street from the fence that defines the boundaries of the Quonset/Davisville industrial park and surrounded by a mish-mash of non-descript ranches, raised ranches, and capes it truly is out of place and beyond its time. But it wasn't always that way.

Built in 1835 by one of the many Sam Spinks that populated our fair town at that time, it was one of a score of farmhouses that dotted the area. Anyone familiar with local Spink genealogy knows that this is one "Gordian knot" of a family tree. The fact is that, at the time that this home was built there were four different Sam Spinks living here in North Kingstown. You might wonder, how was I able to differentiate between this gentleman, Sam Spink and his kin in S. Quidnessett, Wickford, and Shermantown, Sam A. Spink, Sam B. Spink, and Sam N. Spink? Well lucky for me this particular Samuel Spink is kin of sorts; for in November of 1837 Samuel Spink (the one with no middle name from South Quidnessett) married one Ann Cranston from Swamptown. (Small world isn't it.) They settled into the big farmhouse and began a life centered around family and the 50 acre farm that Sam's father Silas Spink, his mother Ruth (Essex) and his aunt the Widow Hannah Spink had carved out of their jointly owned land for them.

Sam and Ann raised three children on this farm; Silas and Hannah, named after the two relations that had given them their start as landowners and another daughter Eliza. They in turn, helped their son Silas, get his start in the world when he married Phebe Luther in 1862 and then marched off to fight in the Great Civil War, the war of rebellion. Hannah too, got married to Charles Wightman and Eliza to Edwin Schoolmaker and they all moved away. Life went on as it does in a farming world. Plantings and harvests, summers and winters pile up and the years pass by. It was 1875 that things began to go awry for Sam Spink. In that year his son-in-law Charles Wightman died and a year later he and Ann lost their daughter Hannah as well. Then in 1878, Sam suffered another terrible loss when his wife of 40 years died of "dropsy", a condition we now know, as edema or swelling of the extremities due to congestive heart failure. It had been a difficult few years for Sam Spink to be sure. It had also been a heartbreaking decade for Sam's sister-in-law, Elizabeth (Cranston) Richmond. In that same year Elizabeth, already a widow after her husband Henry Richmond had died in 1862 lost her only son Lewis, who had been looking out for her. At the end of 1878 the widow Elizabeth Richmond and the widower Sam Spink joined forces to combat their grief and loneliness, Sam Spink married his dead wife's sister.

In a time before retirement plans and Social Security, in a time when life was hard and gender roles were carved virtually in stone, this practice was not all that unusual. Sam and Elizabeth were certainly old friends by then, they were both alone and each required a partner to get by without becoming a burden to their respective surviving children. In the world of the 19th century this was a practical solution to a series of difficult situations. It happened more times than you might imagine. Life settled down back into its normal routine again; plantings and harvests, wet years and droughts,



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

The graves of Samuel and Ann Spink, pictured at right, are neighbors at Elm Grove Cemetery with the grave of Ann's sister, Elizabeth (Cranston) Richmond, whom Samuel married in 1878 after Ann died. All lived in the Spink farmhouse, pictured below right, on Newcomb Road.



winters and summers passes until 1887 rolled around and tragedy struck again when one of Elizabeth's daughters Laura passed on and then the unthinkable again for Sam as he lost his second wife in a freak accidental drowning. Sam was now 71 and a widower again. He buried Elizabeth next to her first husband Henry who could be found in Elm Grove just behind Ann. The family plot Sam tended there welcomed more of his relations when Sam's son Silas and his wife Phebe passed away in 1891. Sam Spink was slowly outliving all his kin. But the farm and the big farmhouse remained like Sam, a constant, his grand-daughter Hattie Spink and his step-daughter Hattie Richmond took turns minding after Sam and the house, as the routines of plantings and harvests, the rhythm of Sam Spink's life returned again.

Sam Spink, at more than 85 years of age, was one of the area's oldest citizens when he joined the rest of his clan at Elm Grove in 1901. He divided his estate between the two Hatties that tended to him towards the end. The 50 acre farm given to him by his father so many years before, he left to his grand-daughter Hattie Sawyer wife of dairy farmer and local milk man Wesley Sawyer, everything else he left to Hattie Richmond daughter of his second wife Elizabeth. After a time, Wesley and Hattie sold the farm. It passed through the hands of Richard Allen, Nicholas Littlefield, John Menzies, and Arthur Yardley. By the time Yardley owned it, the age of the small family farm was nearly over. Before long it was broken up and developed into house lots. Another Spink farm, another piece of what the region once was, was gone. But the big farmhouse still lives on and through it the lives of Sam Spink and the Cranston sisters. I try to imagine one of them offering up Sam a cool glass of lemonade after a long day in the fields each time I pass by.

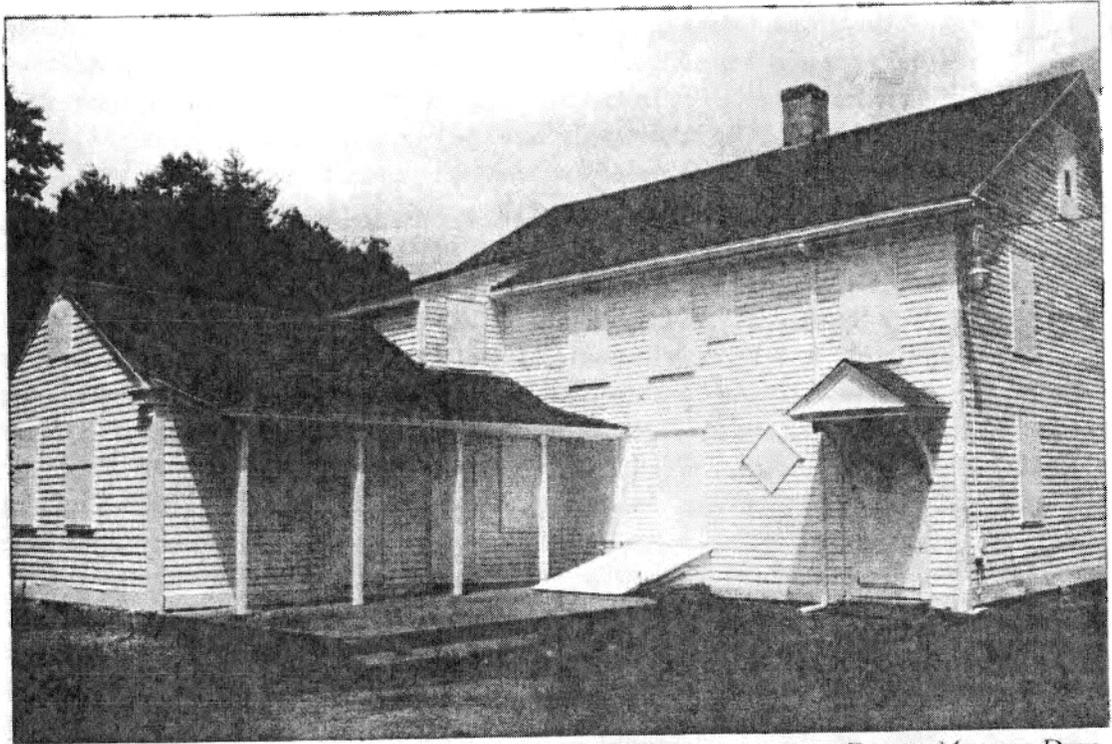


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERBY

Pictured above is the Allen/Madison House in the Quonset Business Park as it appears today, of demolition.



The View From Swamptown

Allen/Madison House Update

You know from time to time, I feel compelled to interrupt our journey through the history of our fair town to offer up a “Swamptown Tip-of-the Hat” to a deserving organization or individual that has made a significant contribution to historic preservation here in our community. This is one of those times, and I’m pleased to be able to offer up some well-deserved “atta-boys” to everyone involved in the ongoing preservation of the circa 1800 Allen/Madison House located within the confines of the Quonset/Davisville Industrial Park.

As is evidenced by the accompanying pairs of before and after photographs, the first set taken in 1999 shortly after I began this weekly tome, and the second taken just this week, much has changed at the former home of our old friend State Supreme Court Justice and stone mason John Allen of Quidnessett.

Credit for this extraordinary transformation belongs in large part to an ongoing partnership between the advocacy group, *The Friends of the Allen/Madison House* and what is now known as the Quonset Development Corporation. The Friends, led across the years by the dedicated team of Russell Greene and John Lukens assisted by a core group of committed members have been able to work with the changing management of Quonset/Davisville largely due to the continuity provided by QDC Team member Jack Sprengel. Assisted by the impetus provided by the RI Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission, PreserveRI, and the Town of North Kingstown these gentlemen and their constituents, have been able to surmount every obstacle that has come across their bows and have steered the venerable structure towards a future of promise. Not bad for a building that was once just a few moments away from feeling the bite of the wrecker’s ball!

The last piece of the puzzle for this, the site of a major Revolutionary War skirmish, is to identify a viable “raison d’etre” for the structure. I’m certain, working together as they have; this group can go the last mile and insure that the Allen/Madison House, with its kitchen el, consisting of what was one of the oldest schoolhouses in New England, has an appropriate purpose to carry it into the 21st century and beyond. Bravo – Russell, John, Jack and everyone else involved in this triumph of cooperation between concerned private citizens and a government-based group that took the time to listen.

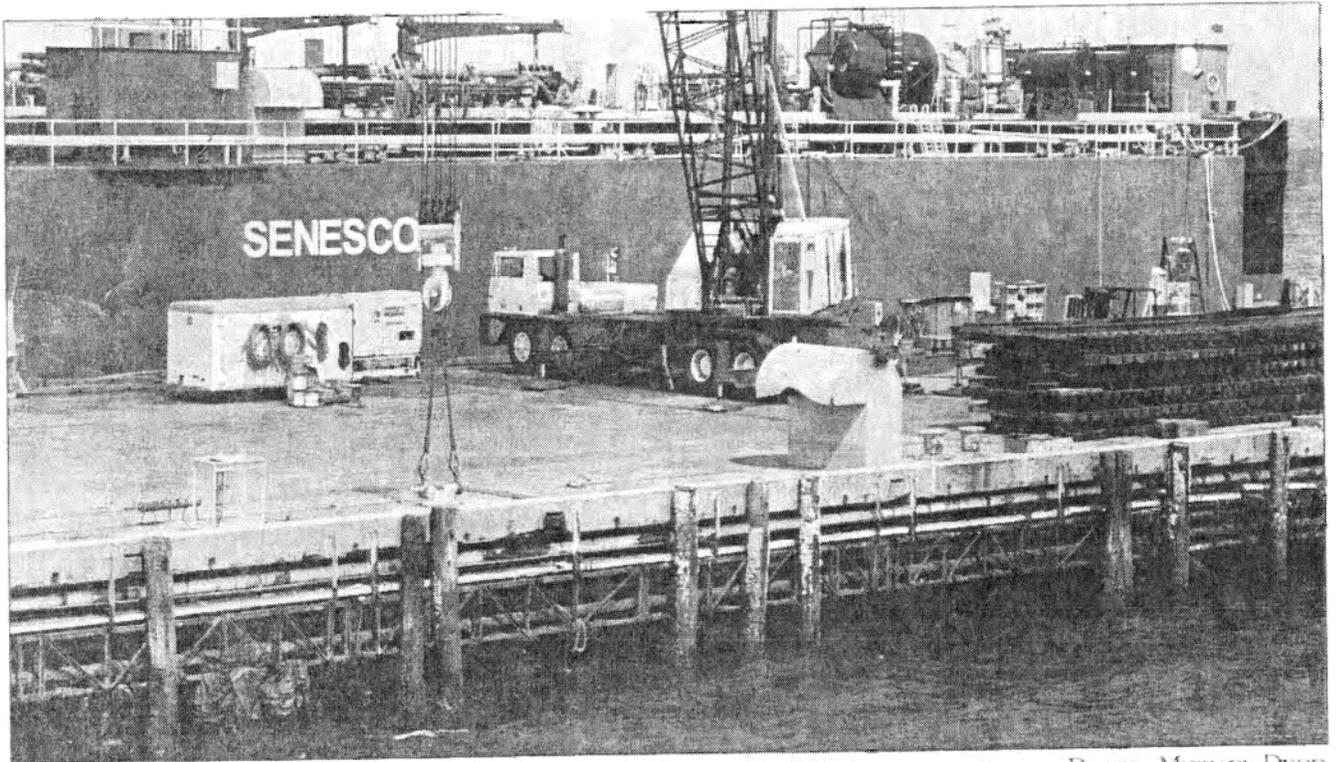
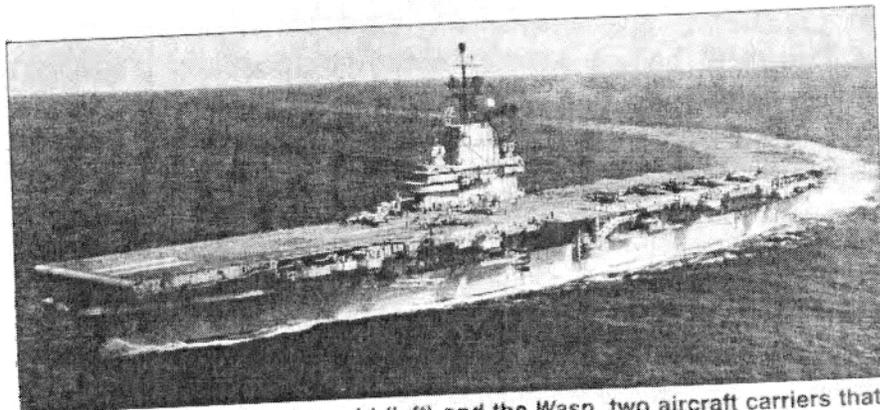
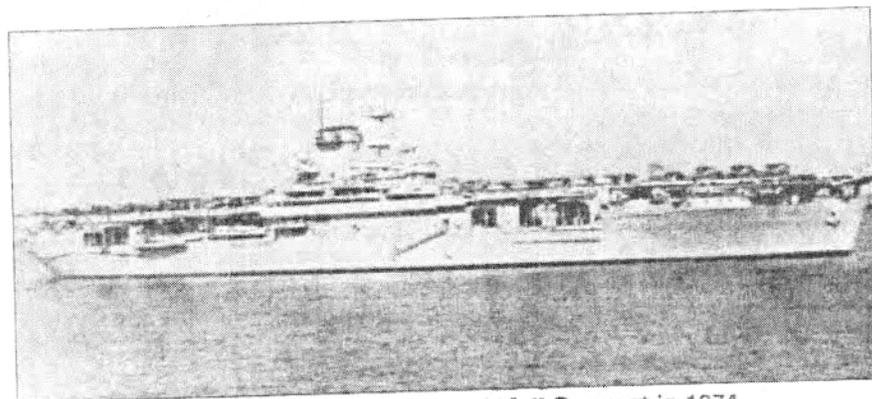


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The former carrier pier at Quonset Point is now home to operations at Senesco Marine. Above, it is seen from the water.



Pictured above are the *Intrepid* (left) and the *Wasp*, two aircraft carriers that



once graced the pier at Quonset. The *Intrepid* left Quonset in 1974.

The View From Swamptown

Aircraft Carriers

March 15, 1974 marked the end of an era here in our fair town. For on that day Quonset/Davisville's last aircraft carrier, the Intrepid was decommissioned at the Quonset Point aircraft carrier pier. The Intrepid, a major player in the Pacific theatre of WWII, one of the heroes of the Battles for Leyte Gulf and Okinawa, the recovery vessel for Scott Carpenter and his Mercury space capsule, and John Young and Gus Grissom's Gemini flight was to be mothballed. With that, the age of the aircraft here in North Kingstown, an age that had begun more than 34 years earlier was over. No one present at that somber ceremony knew, for certain, what was to become of this particular warship or the very pier she was made fast to for that matter.

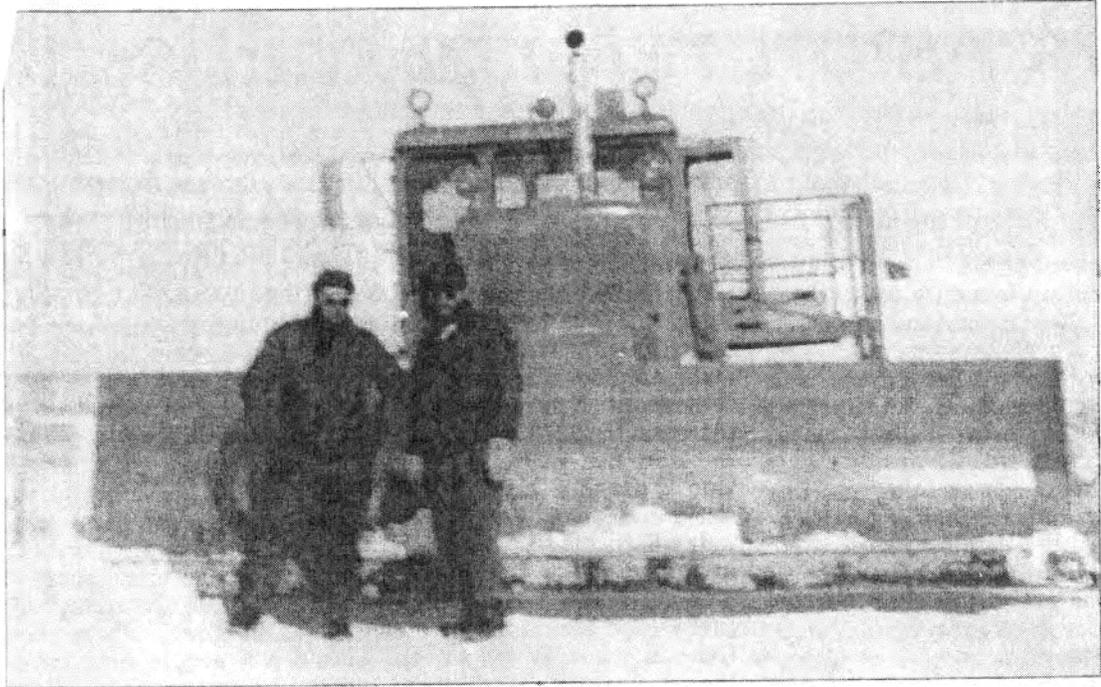
Prior to the Intrepid, some 37 other aircraft carriers had called North Kingstown home. Like the Intrepid, some of them were assigned here for years. These include, other WWII stars like the Essex and the Wasp that were assigned here after the Great War as a part of the Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) that operated from here and Norfolk and kept the Soviet submarine fleet honest throughout the Cold War. The Wasp, too, was involved in the space program, recovering the Gemini 6 capsule and its astronauts. Other long term North Kingstown residents were the Tarawa, another ASW era carrier, and the Lake Champlain, a Korean War era vessel that also picked up Alan Shepard and Freedom 7 as America entered the manned space race. The Lake Champlain was also involved in those tense days of the Cuban blockade.

A number of other aircraft carriers were only here for a month or two. Among these were dozens of WWII era aircraft carriers and escort aircraft carriers. These vessels, among them the Cabot, the Core, the Bogue, the Croatan, the Block Island, the first Saratoga, and the Langley, to name just a few, stopped here for just 30 days to allow repair and replenishment, as well as crew R & R, to occur before heading back to the great conflict at hand. While here, the carriers were utilized to allow newly trained pilots, pilots who were earning their wings in vast numbers on both sides of the Narragansett Bay, to qualify for carrier landing. Even the Guadalcanal, the aircraft carrier that eventually captured the U-505, spent time at Quonset. One of Quonset's earliest carrier visitors was the Ranger, while here, she loaded an additional complement of 68 P-40's and the men of the 33rd Army pursuit Squadron and hauled them to their eventual base in North Africa. One of Quonset/Davisville's saddest days occurred at the end of May in 1954, when the carrier Bennington tied up and offloaded 105 dead and 201 men injured in a tragic explosion involving her launch catapults. This event shook the local military community like no wartime tragedy ever had.

My aircraft carrier memories center around two of these 37 vessels. First is the Leyte, the aircraft carrier my father was assigned to while he served in the US Navy as a photographer. He brought home with him a number of photographs, which I and my boyhood friends spent many a rainy afternoon pouring over. They make up a part of the picture of my father that I carry with me always. The other vessel was the

aforementioned Wasp, perhaps the most storied flat top to ever grace the aircraft carrier pier. My Boy Scout troop, led by scoutmaster, WWII veteran and Quonset/Davisville civilian worker Alan French (Frenchie to every adult in Wickford, but Mr. French to us boy scouts) took us on a tour of the Wasp on one sunny fall day oh so many decades ago. What a treat that was for a band of twelve-year-old boys. The Wasp, by the way, was the carrier that preceeded the Intrepid.

That vessel, the Intrepid, is now a floating museum of sorts in New York City. Day in and day out, visitors, both young and old alike, get to feel that same thrill that I did when I walked aboard the Wasp back in 1969. In visiting the Intrepid they not only learn about the history of these extraordinary extensions of America's military power, they honor the men, and now women, who served aboard them. We now here in RI have an opportunity to do the same. The second aircraft carrier Saratoga would like to join her predecessor and become the 38th aircraft carrier to tie up here in North Kingstown. Out here in Swampstown, we relish the opportunity to see the gleam in the eye of more young children as they climb aboard one of our country's greatest accomplishments, a floating airport that sailed the seven seas, and placed itself and its crew in harm's way to protect us. To support the Saratoga Project logon to Saratogamuseum.org.



Above, Max Kiel and a fellow Seabee pose with his bulldozer in Antarctica, where he died after the dozer plunged into a 300-foot crevasse. A gymnasium, seen below and at bottom, named in his memory at Quonset Davisville was razed last year. The remaining rubble is pictured at right.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

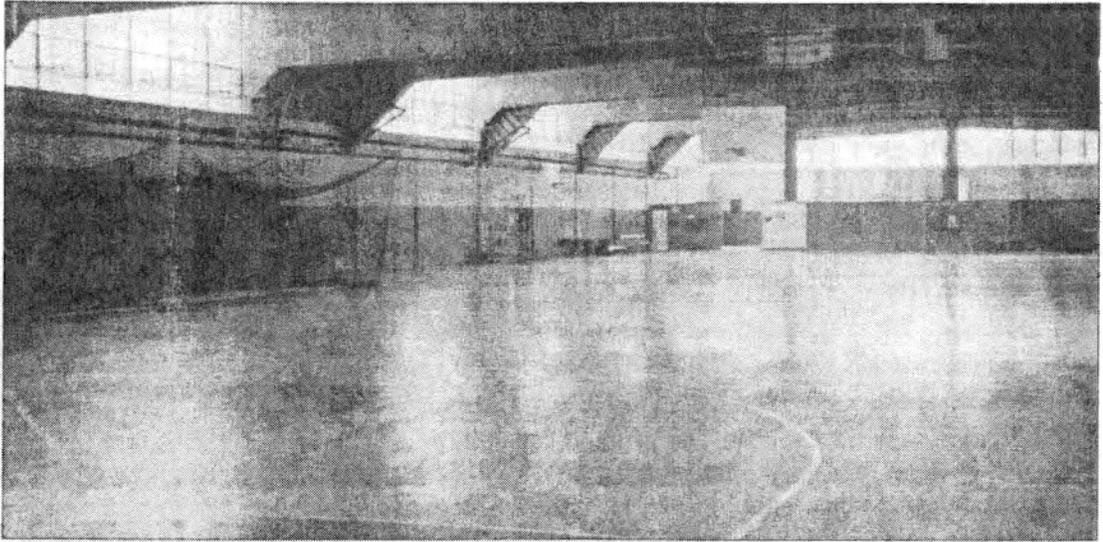
The View From Swamptown

The Story Behind the Max Kiel Gymnasium

You know, I bet that barely a soul here in our fair town took notice when the Max Kiel Gymnasium was demolished last year. Well sure, the folks who work hard running the North Kingstown Recreation Department regretted the loss of its cavernous space and yes, its destruction most probably was viewed as a positive step by many of the folks who are in charge over at the big former military complex of Quonset/Davisville. But no one here in North Kingstown mourned its demolition like the good people of tiny Joseph, Oregon (population 800 or so). They felt every jackhammer blow hit home like a gunshot. And no one here in NK was as angry over the building's demise as were the men and women who risk life and limb at the very bottom of the world. That's right, down in Antarctica, the levels of righteous indignation were raised many a notch when word came of the end of the Max Kiel Gym. You see, these were the three homes of the real Max Kiel; he was born and raised in the logging town of Joseph, Oregon, trained as a proud member of the Seabees here in Davisville, and lost and forever entombed at the age of 22 in the glacial ice of Antarctica. Lets take a look back at the remarkable life and tragic death of Max Ray Kiel.

Max Kiel was born in September of 1933 in a logging town in Oregon called Wallowa. Max's father Oscar was a boss logger in the forests around Wallowa and his mom Roma, worked as a cook at the logging camps where the young Kiel family spent most of their days, with the exception of the harshest portion of the winter months. During those snowy winter periods each year, the Kiel clan moved in with Max's grandmother Jennie Watson, in the little hamlet of Joseph just down out of the mountains. Logging in the 1930's was a hard way to make a living, but hey, it was the time of the Great Depression and Oscar Kiel was glad for the work. This was the world that Max Kiel grew up in; a world of strong men and able women, the land that brought us the legends of Paul Bunyan, a place where hunting, fishing, ranching, and horseback riding were as normal as taking a long deep breath of clear Oregon air. Max, along with his two sisters Norma and Erma, went to school in Joseph and stayed at their grandmother's home during the school year. In the summers it was working at a local ranch or logging in the deep woods of Oregon with his father. Max Kiel too, grew up to be a strong man like his father, big as the Oregon sky over the mountains around Joseph. After graduation from High School, Max did the natural thing; he joined his dad working in the logging camps. Sadly, he was on the job that day in October of 1952 when the unthinkable occurred. Oscar Kiel was moving lumber with his massive Caterpillar log skidder in a steep canyon near Wallowa, he was thrown from the machine and run over by its steel tracks in front of his son's eyes. Life as the Kiel family knew it changed on that day, they moved into Joseph permanently and Roma took a job six days a week at the local grocery store. Max, understandably, left the logging life behind and got work in a sawmill in town. He hated every minute of it.

By the summer of 1953, Max had had it with the life of a saw mill hand and, also fearing the loss of choice which the military draft portended, decided to join up as a Seabee. He trained in San Diego and Davisville and then was sent off to the Philippines to work on the construction of the giant Subic Bay Naval Station. Sitting atop a piece of



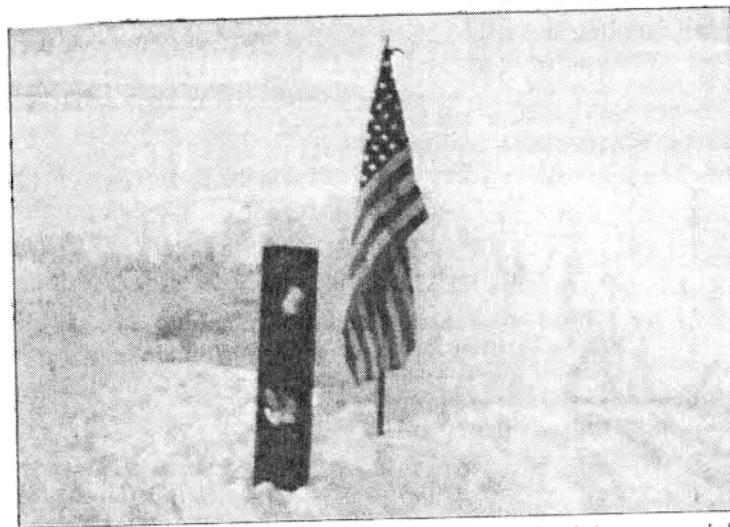
heavy equipment (he trained as a heavy equipment operator) he felt at home again. Those days at the sawmill were behind him and Max Kiel (known by his mates as "Fat Max") was just as happy as he was back in the logging camps outside of Wallowa. He sent money back home religiously, both to help out his family and to purchase cattle and horses to fulfill his dream of retiring from the Seabees to a cattle ranch in Oregon. After 18 months working in the Philippines, Max heard of a volunteer call for experienced Seabees to assist in the construction of a scientific community on the continent of Antarctica. Only the best would be selected and it was certainly viewed as the adventure of a lifetime. Going to Antarctica in 1955 was akin to going to the moon a few decades later. Of course, Max was one of the over three thousand that volunteered and he was one of the only one hundred that were selected.

Max was sent back to Davisville for more training and after a final 30-day leave he was off to Antarctica. They landed there on the ice shelf at Kainan Bay on Christmas Day 1955. Max Kiel along with the rest of his mates, climbed ashore that day, one of only a very small number of men to set foot on the continent up to that time, and began the arduous task of unloading hundreds upon hundreds of tons of equipment and supplies; enough stuff to house the men for the winter and to build six separate bases for the scientists to live in for one year. After the stores were off loaded it became Fat Max's primary duty to keep the make shift road from the edge of the ice pack to the spot where they would construct "Little America" open so that equipment could be continuously hauled inland. It was, as you can imagine, an endless battle of Max and his "Cat D8" versus the Antarctica snowfall, and Max usually won.

In February, Max got a new job hauling supplies inland to set up caches for future excursions into the Marie Byrd Land, where they were to eventually build additional outposts for scientific research. It was on one such mission on March 5, 1956 that the unthinkable again occurred to the Kiel clan, as well as the greater family of Seabees across the world. Max Kiel was running lead dozer on a supply train that was hauling prefab living units inland for another scientific outpost when Max and his Cat D8 plunged into an undetected 300 ft deep crevasse. His giant machine was wedged in the crevasse some 80 foot down. His buddies "Tex the dirty bearded Texan" Gardner and Big Ed Edwards descended down on ropes to check on "Fat Max" but he was gone. Antarctica had opened up her icy maw and swallowed him up. Ironically Max, like his father before him, died at the controls of a massive Caterpillar. But unlike his Dad, Max remains there in Antarctica frozen forever at those controls. You see, it was just too dangerous a situation and the Seabees never recovered Max's body. His grave is in Antarctica, not Oregon.

Max's commanding officer reported back to Admiral Dufek, commander U.S. Naval Support Force Antarctica thusly, "*Tractor train lost tractor in crevasse at cache number two. Max R. Kiel killed. Body not recovered. Admiral, we felt so bad about it we just sat down next to that 300 foot hole and cried.*" Navy Chaplain Peter Bol was hauled out to the site later and held a memorial service. Max's friends, his fellow Seabees set a flag there and a marker to identify the grave, but in a week or so, it was buried; swallowed up by the never ending snowfall at the bottom of the world. No one now, is certain just where Max and his Cat are buried.

But they always were certain how he was remembered. Just a few years later, the new Gymnasium at Davisville was completed and dedicated to the memory of fellow



One of Max Kiel's friends took this photograph of the memorial, lost under the snow a few months later, marking the site of the accident. The image was on film inside Kiel's camera when it was returned to his family.

Seabee, fellow comrade, brave son and loving brother, Max Ray Kiel. It made all who saw it proud, proud to be a Seabee and proud of what Max Kiel had represented. You see, Max Kiel was not only an individual person, he was also very typical of the Seabees of his time. Max was at the same time one man and every man, every man that ever donned the uniform of a Seabee that is.

In researching this column, I had the pleasure of spending some time talking with folks who knew Max; particularly his younger sister Erma Kiel-Stanton. They all seemed at peace with Max's passing; as at peace as anyone can be over a tragedy such as that. They all focused on the remarkable piece of living that Max had crammed into his 22 years. Knowing what Max had made of his short life made his death easier to take. But one thing that they are unanimously not at peace with is the destruction of the wonderful building dedicated to his memory. Throughout my entire conversation with Erma she was calm and composed. Until we began talking about the Gym that is. I could hear the tears in her voice through the phone lines across thousands of miles as we spoke of it. She could hardly continue as she told me how glad she was that her mother Roma had not lived to see that day. Now I don't know everything, that's for sure. But I do know, that what was done here just wasn't right. Max Kiel deserved better. Max's family deserved better. And finally, the entire legion of Seabees past and present deserve better. Something ought to be done to make this right. I plan to send a copy of this column in to the folks who run Quonset/Davisville and tell them so. I hope you will too. If every caring soul who reads this column, every proud Seabee past and present, every mother and every sister, cuts this column out and mails it in to Quonset Development Corporation, 30 Enterprise Drive, N. Kingstown RI 02852, Attn: Michael McMahon, maybe something will be done. I don't know about you, but Max Kiel Blvd. Sounds like a pretty fine name for the main road through the new Gateway area of the park, don't you think?

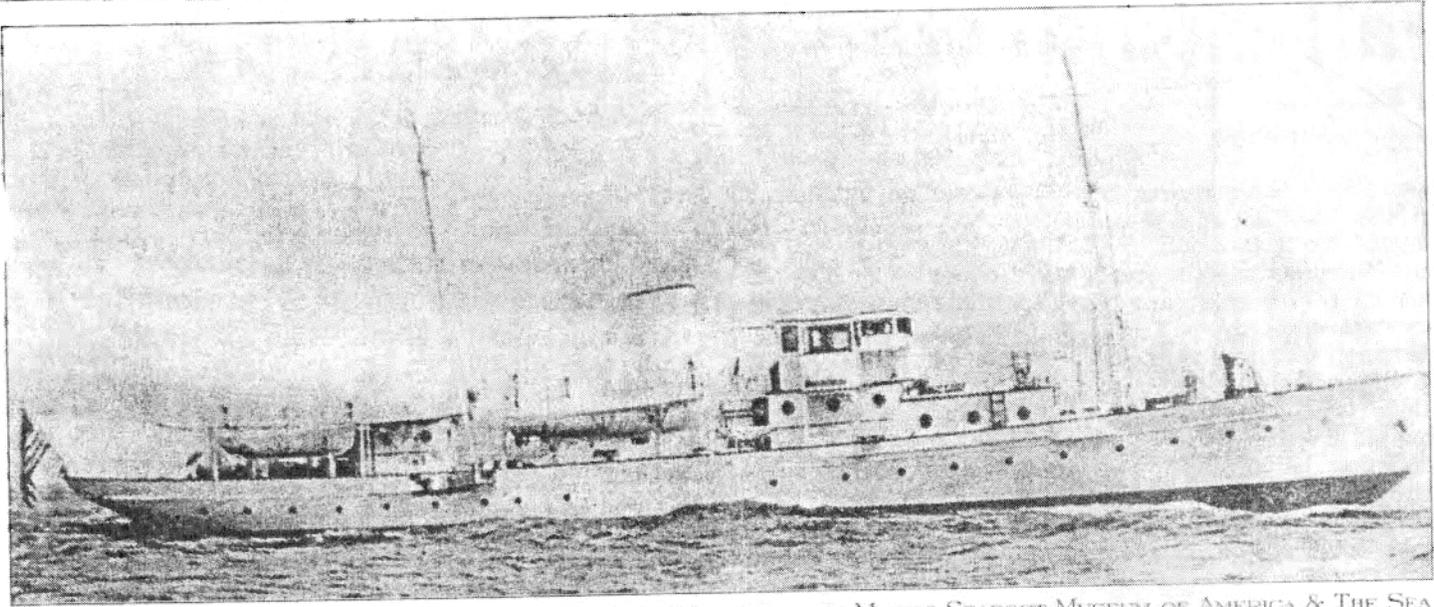
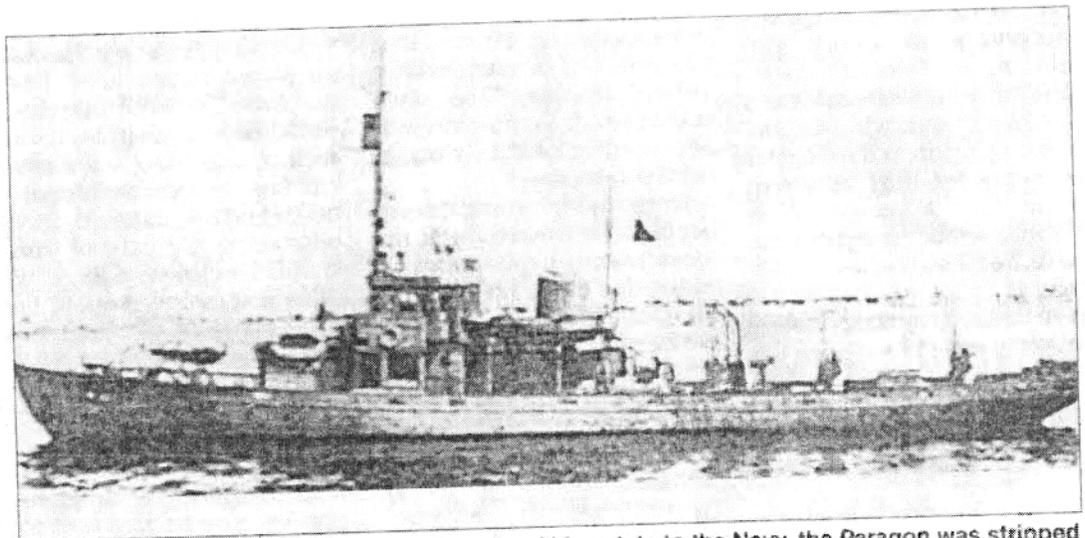


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MYSTIC SEAPORT MUSEUM OF AMERICA & THE SEA

Charles Davol's pleasure yacht *Paragon* cruises the waters of Narragansett Bay during the 1930s.



Following Charles Davol's death and the sale of his estate to the Navy, the *Paragon* was stripped down and re-outfitted for patrol duty along the coast of Los Angeles during World War II.

The View From Swamptown

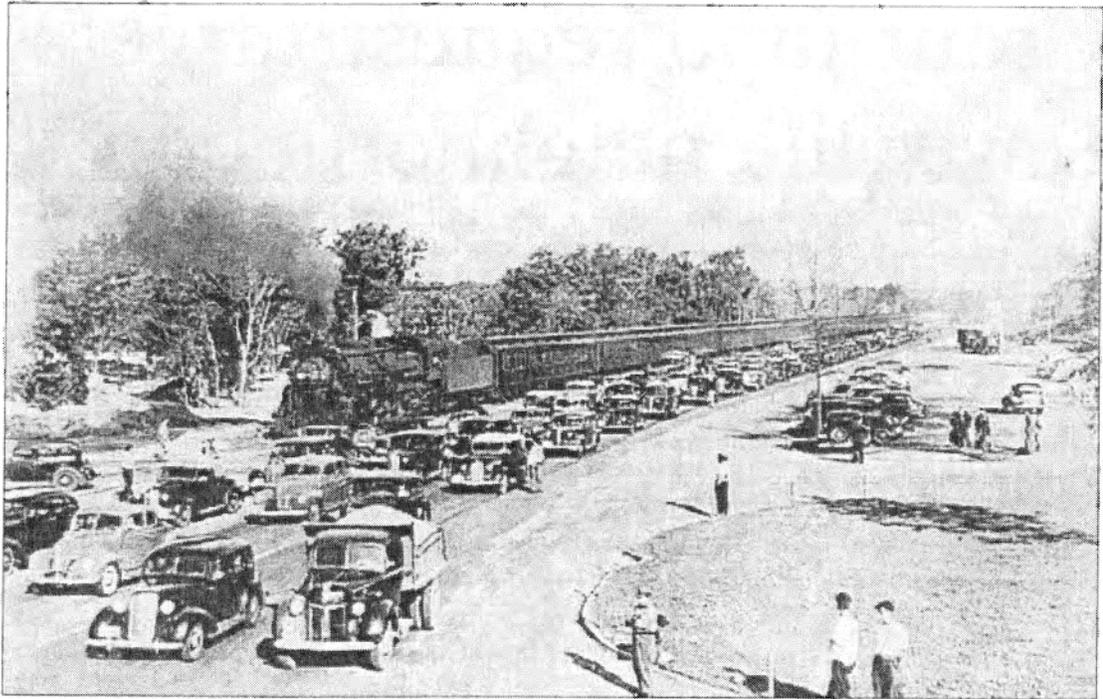
Charles Davol's Yacht "Paragon"

Those of you who read this column on a regular basis are certainly familiar with the name of Charles Davol, the Providence industrialist and President of Davol Rubber Company. Davol's 1000-acre summer estate was called "Wildacres" and consisted of most of what we now know as Quonset Point. From 1929 until Davol's unexpected death in 1937, Davol's magnificent yacht "Paragon" was a fixture at "Wildacres" as well.

Davol's business may have been medical rubber goods, however his passion, as it was for many of the nation's elite at the time, was yachting. I expect, that after he had acquired for himself the biggest and best summer estate in all of Rhode Island (although his next door neighbor C. Prescott Knight's North Quidnessett gentleman's farm was nothing to sneeze at either) he then set out to get himself the biggest and best yacht on the bay. The result was the "Paragon" seen in the accompanying photographs.

The "Paragon" was designed by the famed marine architectural firm of Burgess, Swasey, & Paine and constructed at Bath Iron Works in Maine. B, S, & P. was, at the time, the premiere design firm in the nation (as a matter of fact, a young fellow named Hereshoff worked there for a time), working on everything from private yachts to enormous naval vessels. The Paragon was a steel-hulled twin screw, diesel powered yacht measuring 140 ft l.o.a. She was fitted out with teak decks and trim, electric lighting throughout and a new-fangled short-wave radio with which Davol could keep in touch with his empire. Big enough to motor through the Panama Canal but shallow enough at a draft of 9 feet to pull into Newport, Davol's yacht was everything a Captain of Industry could desire. I expect he was the envy of his peers.

Sadly, Charles did not get to enjoy his yacht for very long. Upon his death in 1937, the yacht was sold at auction like the rest of his incredible personal holdings. The yacht, like Wildacres itself, eventually ended up in service to the nation during WWII. The Paragon's last known assignment was as a Coastal Patrol Boat "PYc-36 Paragon". She cruised the coast between San Pedro and Los Angeles California, on the lookout for Japanese invaders, until the war's end in 1945. I must say, I wonder if the young "swabbies" that served on her during the war realized what type of life she led in the decade before the war to end all wars.



This rush hour picture shows the view down Roger Williams Way to the Post Road rail overpass, which can be seen in the background. It was taken soon after the Quonset/Davisville base was in full swing. The train would have been full of workers traveling to the area from Providence and other points north. Below is a view of the park entrance intersection today, with a view toward Roger Williams Way.

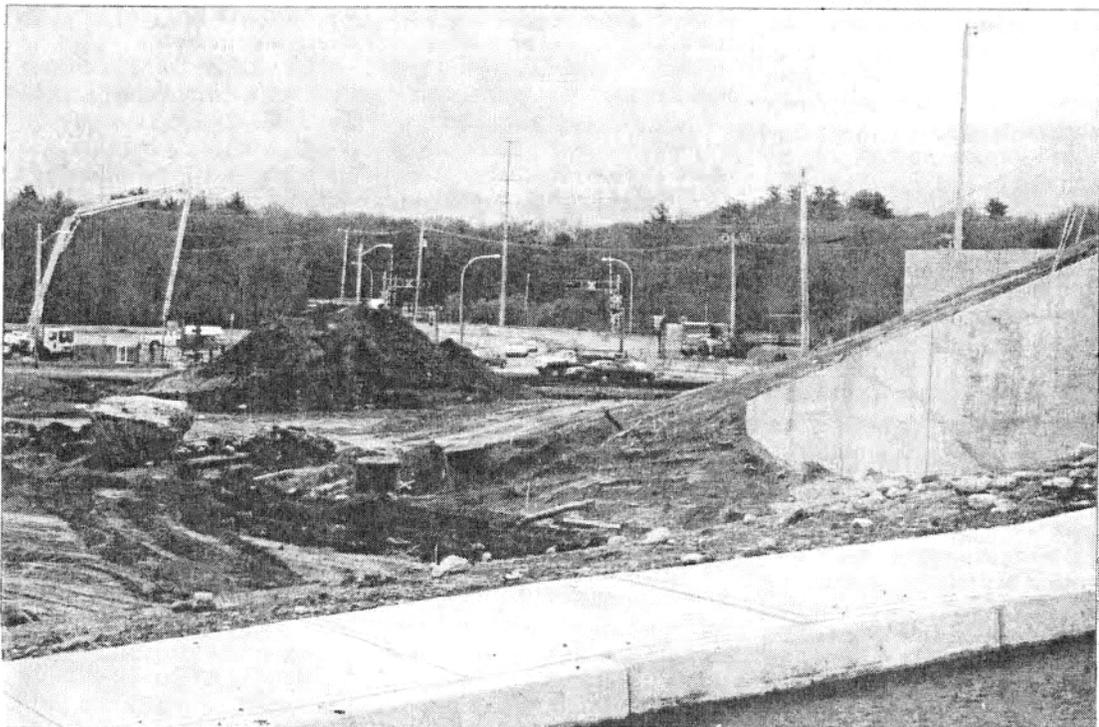


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The View From Swamptown

Quonset/Davisville Entrance Road

As it seems that the entrance to what was once called South Quidnessett is about to change for the third time, it seems a timely opportunity to take a Swamptown gander at the way this vital thoroughfare appeared nearly 65 years ago when this sleepy farming community with its associated beachfront section of summer cottages was transformed nearly overnight into a major military installation.

It's plain to see from the accompanying photograph, taken soon after Quonset/Davisville began chugging along full bore, that big time traffic jams are not a recent phenomenon. Imagine if all those workers riding on that special non-stop train from Providence were in automobiles as well; well heck, you'd have a traffic tie-up that would rival the best Electric Boat ever offered up during her heyday in the late 1970's. Believe you me, constructing the road and rail corridor shown in the picture was one of the most monumental tasks undertaken by those who built the base. Supervising engineers, some of whom were reassigned due to failures here, experienced many a sleepless night over this seemingly simple stretch of road & rail bed. Why you ask? Well, you see, the Navy planners in their infinite wisdom, just drew a line from point A, the Post Road, to point B, the shoreline near Charles Davol's steam yacht pier without much concern for what lie between. Never mind that the locals all knew that the old adage "The shortest distance between two points is a straight line" did not apply here: they had, for decades, been taking the much more circuitous route to the shore by way of Camp Avenue. Reason being that that straight line drawn by the Navy's planners just happened to pass straight through the biggest swampiest peat bog in these parts. That bog didn't only "bog" the Navy's construction crews down, it seemingly bewitched them. Tales were told of dozers and steam shovels sinking into the morass, of ancient tree stumps so massive that they could scarcely be pulled from the grip of the bog's primordial ooze. Delays here were causing backups elsewhere on the base as much of the materials needed for the massive undertaking were slated to be shipped to Quonset/Davisville by rail. As you might imagine, folks back in D.C. were not pleased. Eventually though, the work crews slowly got the upper hand. With the addition of yards upon yards upon yards of good South County sand and gravel the battle was eventually won; the Quonset bog was tamed and trains, like the one seen here brought men, machinery, and materials into the base complex.

So the next time you take a ride down Roger Williams Way after a big storm, keep an eye out. Who knows, maybe the rain will wash the soil away enough to see the top of a long buried steam shovel poking out of the old bog site. At that very instant, somewhere, a long time retired Navy Engineer, will feel a chill settle in his bones and wonder why.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

A row of headstones at Quidnessett Memorial Cemetery marks remains of those exhumed from small, family burial plots in South Quidnessett in 1940 and moved to the cemetery to make way for the U.S. government's construction of the Naval Air Station at Quonset Point.

The View From Swamptown

Reburying the Dead of South Quidnessett

My grandfather, George C. Cranston Jr., was certainly no stranger to the solemn task of burying the dead. Perhaps, no man in North Kingstown's history has attended more funerals than he. But I expect, even he, was taken aback a bit, as a result of a visit he received from a representative of the U.S. Navy in early 1940. By the time that meeting was concluded, George Cranston had agreed to oversee the excavation and reburial of all of the dearly departed whose remains lay in the many small family graveyards that dotted the farming region then known as South Quidnessett or Quidnessett Neck. You see, war was in the winds, and the Navy had just "acquired" what amounted to an entire community and were in an awful hurry to construct the mammoth Naval Base that one day would be known as Quonset/Davisville. The many cemeteries, along with everything else, were in the way and had to be moved.

I must say, as I began to look into this story, I wondered if he knew what he was getting himself into. On the day of that visit with the Navy representative, could he have imagined that he would be charged with carrying out, with requisite dignity and solemnity, 265 separate exhumations and the subsequent 265 reburials. Did he realize that he'd be required to procure 265 ¼-sized hand made wooden coffins from a local member of the Allen clan, a carpenter who ended up making up some of the undersized coffins for the bones of his very own ancestors as a part of this task. Other local folks were involved in this "undertaking" as well. Ms. Anna Lawrence, the most important local historian and genealogist of the time, was charged by the Navy with the task of writing a history of the region and its people, for eventual placement in a time capsule of sorts at the cemetery. Speaking of the cemetery, the hard working fellows over at Quidnessett Cemetery, the logical choice for re-interment, had to dig 265 undersized graves and carefully set more than 100 ancient headstones. Through it all, all involved were constantly aware of the dignity that these, some of the earliest settlers of southern New England, not only required but, deserved for life's well led.

The job was completed in late 1942. Two additional stones were commissioned and set to memorialize those who were reburied without being identified. Anna Lawrence's History of Quidnessett was buried along with these nameless souls in a sealed bronze container. Before long, the lush green grass of Quidnessett Cemetery, just like the lush farmlands of their former resting places, closed over them and rejoined them to the greater community of souls. Life went on in South Quidnessett and their community was erased for all eternity and replaced with, as Ms. Lawrence put it, "a bulwark of defense against the bitter war that ravages two continents". If these folks were to come to life they would scarcely recognize their old homesteads.

Section 29 of Quidnessett Cemetery, the final resting place of South Quidnessett's people, contains some of North Kingstown's oldest and most remarkable headstones. If one of your ancestors hailed from there, they are now here side-by-side with all the other



A map of South Quidnessett shows locations of land held by families like the Spinks and Dyers, whose members were moved from their not-quite-final resting places in small burial lots in 1940 to make way for the naval base turned industrial park that stands there now.

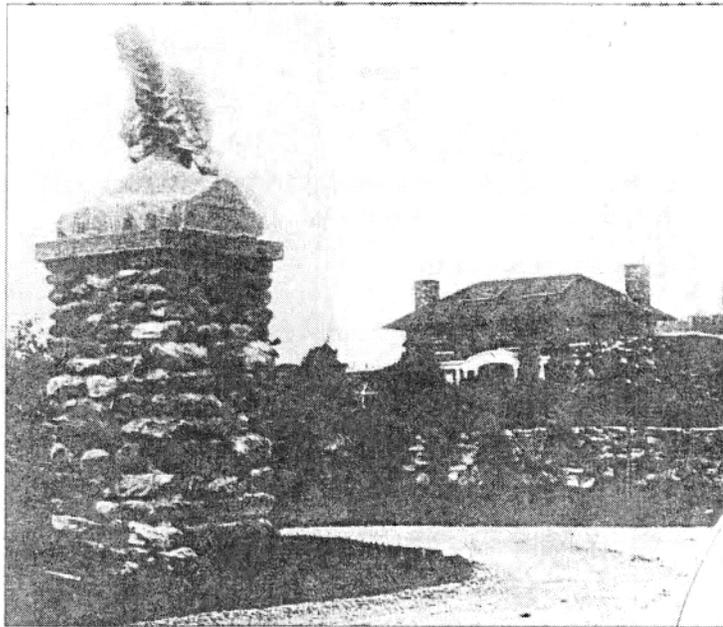
Allen's, Spink's, Dyer's, Westcott's, Greene's, Clarke's, Corey's, and Eldred's that once called South Quidnessett home. As Anna Lawrence put it these folks have "completed life's appointed tasks and have now joined the bivouac of the dead".

I am pleased to announce that hardbound copies of the first four years of these columns, pictures included, are now available for your perusal at the North Kingstown, Davisville, East Greenwich, and NKHS libraries. The main library in North Kingstown even has circulating copies. So, if you missed an issue or two and want to see the pictures head to your local library.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

This stone, erected in 1941 at Quidnessett Memorial Cemetery, marks the grave of 54 unidentified bodies moved from old burial plots on land in South Quidnessett acquired by the U.S. government to build the Navy base at Quonset Davisville.



The entrance to Charles Davol's 1,000-acre estate at Quonset Point featured the bust of a Native American upon a pillar, above. Upon his death in 1937 the property was purchased by the state and most of Davol's possessions were sold, including the bust, which today is displayed in the front yard of an East Greenwich home, at right.



The View From Swamptown

The Charles Davol Indian Head Sculpture

Back a couple of years ago, we took a gander at Providence industrialist and avid sportsman Charles Davol's sprawling 1000 acre country estate "Wildacres". It covered most of what we now know as Quonset Point, running from the eastern edge of the Pine River (just on the western edge of Newcomb Rd.) all the way to the shoreline. He amassed this estate by purchasing nine separate farms and numerous small parcels of land. At his death in 1937, Wildacres was purchased by the state and added to its existing State Militia training grounds. All of this was eventually taken by the Federal government and formed the nucleus of the Quonset/Davisville complex. At the time of Davol's death much of his possessions were auctioned off at Wildacres.

Among those many extraordinary possessions was a grand and enormous bust of a Native American which sat atop the stone pillar of the main gateway of Wildacres looking west over Davol's main house, across his private fishing and duck hunting lake ultimately towards the setting sun. It can be seen in the accompanying photo taken in 1921. I have always wondered what might have happened to this giant granite bust, but I never really figured I'd see it again. Funny thing is though; I apparently have been driving past it for a number of years. If this giant Indian bust, easily seen on the side of First Avenue in neighboring East Greenwich is not one and the same, well I'll eat my hat. So now the more interesting question is, How did this nearly 100 year old former possession of one of Rhode Island's giant's of the early 20th century end up in the front yard of an East Greenwich home? Unfortunately, I don't know the what's, why's, how's and where's of that just yet. But someone out there must. If they come forward and tell the tale of this roving Indian I'll be certain to pass it on.

From time to time, I feel the urge to editorialize a bit and since you folks are a captive audience of sorts you'll have to bear with me. As I sit here composing this latest installment of my column, the long awaited sidewalk project in "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic" is underway. I lingered a bit today at lunch and watched the goings on. I admit, we Swamp Yankees don't cotton to change all that well, so I expect that colors my feelings a bit, but I began to wonder if this wasn't a case of "Be careful of what you wish for". You see, my memories of Wickford, from childhood on, are colored by the dapple shady greens and warm reds and browns of her trees. They afforded a place for a barefoot boy to "cool his heels" on many a hot summer day, shaded my head as I walked home from school, dazzled me with their brilliance throughout the colorful autumns of my youth, and amazed me as they stood up to all that winter through at them. Sadly we lost most of those wonderful trees to an Elm blight and progress. But you know, there's still a handful of those same trees that delighted me forty years ago shading my children's summers and I hate to see them go. It's not just this Swamp Yankee that thinks this way, lets not forget that "The Main Street Association", the very architects of Wickford's historic district zoning was originally formed back in the 1930's to save Wickford's tree

lined streets, not her homes. I guess I can live with a treeless business district, (I know what you're thinking, they're going to replace the trees aren't they? Well yes, but you know today's street tree varieties just never reach the majesty of their predecessor's. Not to mention some of them just don't make sense; imagine trying to explain the concept of an ornamental pear to a farmer of the 1800's - "What do you mean they're guaranteed not to bear fruit?") but I'm not so sure I'll ever feel quite right about a walk down Main Street without at least some of those wonderful trees. I plan to savor them while I can and I recommend a walk down the tree lined streets of the village to all.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

Above left, a stone fireplace built by Works Progress Administration workers in the 1930s still stands at this overgrown picnic grove southeast of the intersection of Route 2 and Stony Lane. Above right, a highway overpass is sited on the spot of a grove on the northwest corner of Route 2 and Stony Lane.

The View From Swamptown

The Stony Lane/Route 2 Picnic Groves

I can't help but notice them about this time each year. As the leaves drop from the trees and the underbrush falls away, they emerge from the woods along Route 2 looking exactly as they did the year before, and the decade before that, and even fifty years prior to then. They stand there waiting for a day that will never come again, for their time is sadly over; the world moves much too fast now, time is at too much of a premium. They wait now only for the inevitable day when the forces of nature, when old man winter, will win out and they will collapse into a pile of stones. That day though is a long way off; for the stone fireplaces of Route 2, a highway known now and then as either Quaker Lane or the South County Trail, depending upon where you are along its length, were built to last by men given a chance to retain their dignity through employment in FDR's WPA programs in the 1930's.

Those stone fireplaces were the centerpieces of a system of picnic groves built along the sides of Route 2 nearly 75 years ago. At that time, the age of the automobile was in full swing and folks from the urban core of southern New England were quite fond of hopping in the Hudson or Olds and traveling down the South County Trail for a day in the country or an excursion to the beach. At a time long before the interstate highway was ever even dreamed of, this truly was an all day affair and nothing capped the experience like a picnic lunch or supper at one of the many well-maintained picnic groves along the way. Every family had their favorite; perhaps it was one in East Greenwich or Warwick, or the one still extant to a degree, at the intersection of the South County Trail and the Ten Rod Road. For lots of folks, the two groves at the intersection of Quaker Lane and Stony Lane, were the picnicking places of choice. There was one on the northbound side just before Stony Lane and one on the southbound side that was situated right between Stony Lane and the Scrabbletown Brook. Here not only could one utilize the fine sturdy picnic tables and those wonderful fireplaces, you could also cool your toes in the running brook, explore a few short trails through the woods and hike up to the falls at the mill pond on Pleasant Valley Road.

These were the very attributes that drew local folks as well, including my family, to these two picnic groves. Even in the early 1960's this was an adventure to be relished. The sixties though, was the beginning of the end for the Route 2 picnic groves. The decades long construction of Route 4, the successor to Route 2, had begun and although everyone in South County warmed up to the idea of less through traffic on the local roads, no one realized the full extent of the changes that the interstate style highway would bring with it to the region. Nothing would ever be the same after Route 4 was opened; what was once very rural and quite special, slowly, inexorably became quite suburban and very much more common. In its final stages of construction Route 4 eventually gobbled up the picnic grove on the northbound side of Quaker Lane. Where fireplaces and picnic tables once existed, there now stands a highway overpass populated only by pigeons and litter.

Progress and time marches on, they wait for no man, or so the saying goes. The stone fireplaces of the old picnic groves do wait though. They sit there in the woods along Route 2, in Exeter, in North Kingstown, in East Greenwich, and in Warwick waiting. All we can do, those that remember what they represent, the memories that they hold for us, is notice them there along the way and think of them as they used to be; a station wagon parked in front, a mom spreading a checkered cloth on a nearby table, while a dad gilled dogs and burgers to perfection, all the while a passel of children run willy-nilly stopping only to cool their hot tired feet in the brook racing nearby.

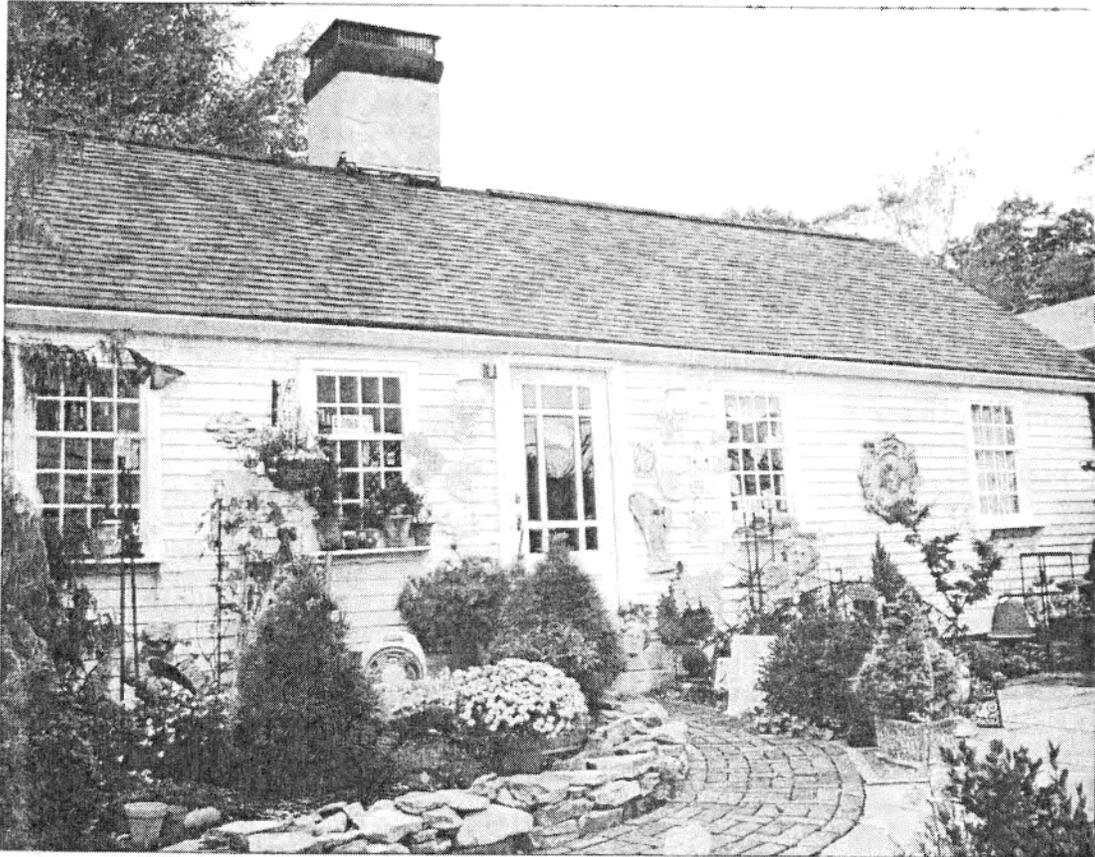


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The 1750 Cape on Post Road built by Nathaniel Carpenter Sr. served for many years as a farmhouse but later was used for a shoemaker's shop, a Texas barbecue restaurant and, its current use, an antique store.

The View From Swamptown

The Nathaniel Carpenter Sr. House

The little off-center full cape with the integral lean-to addition off the back, found at 7535 Post Road is a survivor in the finest sense of the word. Built around 1750 by Nathaniel Carpenter Sr., it has sat there quietly and inconspicuously beside the Boston Post Road and born witness to the amazing range of changes that have occurred around it. It has seen changes wrought upon the region by wars ranging from the American Revolution through the Vietnam War and beyond. When it was constructed transportation down the Post Road consisted of horse drawn stages, wagons, and buckboards; across the centuries the little cape has experienced those, plus the clickety-clack of Sea View electric trolley cars and the present day rush of cars and trucks that whiz by her day in and day out without even a glance in her direction by the occupants therein. She began her life, more than 250 years ago, as a farmhouse and spent much of that time so inclined; but along the way, across the years, this place has also been a shoemaker's shop, a Texas Barbeque restaurant, and an antique store as well.

Nathaniel Carpenter left this farm to his son Oliver in 1772. Oliver's brother Nathaniel Jr. was willed another farm just across the Post Road; sadly the only thing that remains of it is the forgotten and neglected graveyard, located just off the YMCA parking lot, where Nathaniel Jr. and his descendants rest eternal, the house having been long ago swallowed up by the commercial development of the area. Nathaniel Sr., Oliver, and their families are most likely buried in unmarked graves just down the road a piece, at the big Reynolds/Carpenter burying ground located on land now about to be swallowed up by development as well.

Carpenters and their descendants owned this farm for about 100 years of its long existence. Other families that have put down roots in the little cape include the Browns and Bakers. All of them, the Carpenters, Browns, Bakers, and Reynolds, as well as the Smiths and Halls were all bound by marriages and their shared determination to scratch a living out of the farmlands that stretched, long ago, along either side of the Post Road. Lets hope that the Nathaniel Carpenter Sr. house, with its three original cut stone fireplaces, one with a bake oven, hand hewn pegged frame and wide floorboards, survives another 250 years or so. We still need it to remind us of what once was and the people that once populated a very different Boston Post Road as it wound through our fair town.



Teacher Clara Rathbun and the students of the 1893-94 school year pose in front of the **Stony Lane District Schoolhouse**. The students ranged in years from Grade 1 to Grade 8.



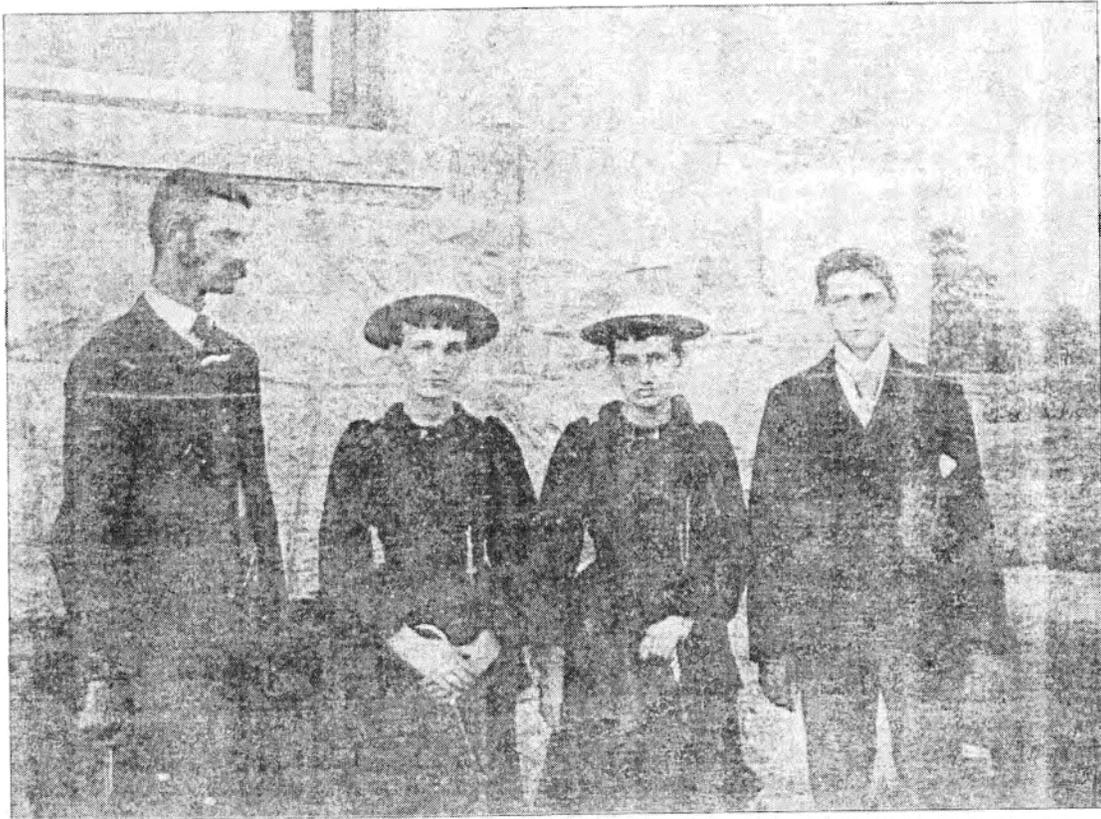
The View From Swamptown

The Stony Lane District Schoolhouse Rediscovered

I don't expect there's a historic scenario that fires up the imagination more than that of a simple one-room schoolhouse set on a country lane in early 19th century America. It's a part of our national heritage, an aspect of our collective pioneer spirit, one of the countless pieces of the complicated puzzle that we identify as our country's history. Over the years we've identified and examined a number of these little connections to our past. From North Quiddnessett to Swamptown and places in between, we've stopped and paid homage to our fair town's remaining one-room schoolhouses and what they indeed represent. It's now time to take another Swamptown gander at an old "one-roomer". So sit up straight in your chair, face front, eyes forward, pencils at their ready while we look into the history of the Stony Lane District Schoolhouse.

You may recall that here in North Kingstown, the citizens of the community responded to the state's mandate of a public education for all, by instituting a district school system in 1828. The district system was a by-product of a time when local government was quite a bit less organized and formal than it is today. What this system did was to divide the community into geographic districts and require the property owners within each area to get together, plan and build a school, raise funds, hire a teacher or two, and get a grade 1-8 school system up and running. So, essentially what you had, was, in North Kingstown's case, 15 separate school districts with 15 separate "school committees" all working towards the common goal of educating the young people of their community. And you thought things were complicated now!! As you can imagine, some districts did a real fine job with this task, all things considered, and some, well, some just had a real hard time with this very difficult undertaking.

Luckily for the children of District #12, identified first as the Smith District, after the most prominent family in the area (and the one that donated the land for the schoolhouse), and then by 1873 as the Stony Lane District, the folks in their area seemed to do a fine job of running a school system. By 1836, they had a fine little schoolhouse built, a teacher hired and boarding with a local family (a very common practice and one way a family in a district could contribute to the running of a school) and classes of between 15 and 20 students in regular attendance. Things went on well like that for literally decades, with no negative notations given by inspections undertaken by town or state officials. Each year 17 or 18 children of various grade levels would show up in September and attend classes run by a competent and caring teacher. This is a list of the teachers that I have been able to identify as having taught in the Stony Lane Schoolhouse between 1870 and 1901: Hannah Baton, Susan Greene, Lucy Rathbun, Susie Pierce, Mary Brown, Grace Smith, Marion Sayles, Clara Rathbun, Eva Rathbun, Sarah Barton, Grace Spink, Annie Kilroy, and Myra Spink. Two of these teachers, Clara and Eva Rathbun were sisters who graduated together from RI Normal School (later known as RI College) and followed each other here at Stony Lane School. The accompanying picture



Sisters Clara and Eva Rathbun are pictured upon their graduation from R.I. Normal School in 1893. Both women eventually taught at the Stony Lane District Schoolhouse.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The former Stony Lane District Schoolhouse has been a private home since around the turn of the last century. It is pictured above as it appears today and at left as it appeared in the 1930s. The porch visible in the school picture from the 1893-94 year above has been closed and is used as a kitchen.

shows Clara Rathbun standing rather somberly with the students of the 1893-94 school year.

In the year 1901, the Stony Lane Schoolhouse was officially closed and its students given Sea View Trolley passes that allowed them passage on the trolley daily into and out of Wickford where they then attended school at the Wickford Academy and later after the 1907 fire, the Wickford Grammar School. Their school was closed, not due to its own failures, on the contrary as previously stated, the Stony Lane School was well run for its entire 65 years of existence, but due to the overall failure of the district system to provide equitable education for all children who needed it. From 1901 onward, that responsibility was placed upon the town government and the newly formed and elected town school committee decided that many of the old "one-roomers" had to go.

The Town held on to the old school house until 1910, when it was sold to a private party that converted it into the small home seen in this circa 1930's photograph. That home has had many owners since then, although it was owned by the Dawley family for some time, and has been altered many times until it scarcely resembles the old one-room schoolhouse it once was. But somewhere deep inside the walls of this storied little building, there still echoes the sounds of children learning their lessons and sneaking a little fun when Miss Rathbun or Miss Brown wasn't looking until a rap on a desk with a wooden ruler and the sounds of "Children face front, eyes forward, pencils to the ready" brought them back to the important task at hand.

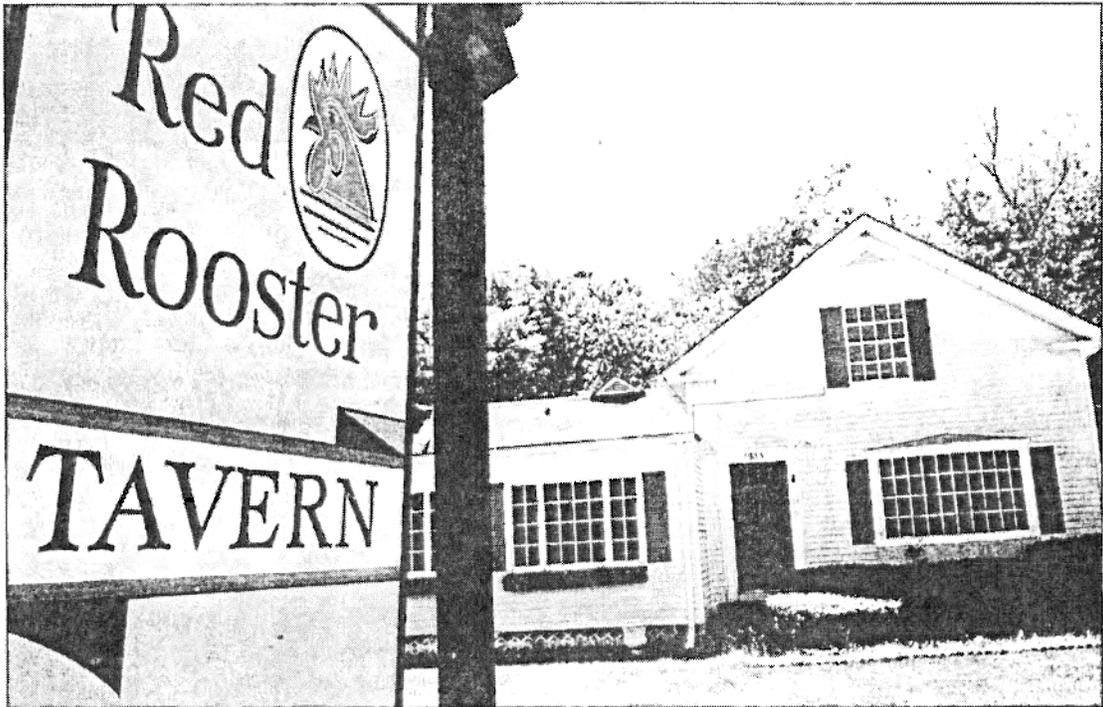


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERG

Samuel Carpenter built the farmhouse that most recently was home to the now-closed Red Rooster Tavern in the 1870s.

The View From Swamptown

The Red Rooster Tavern

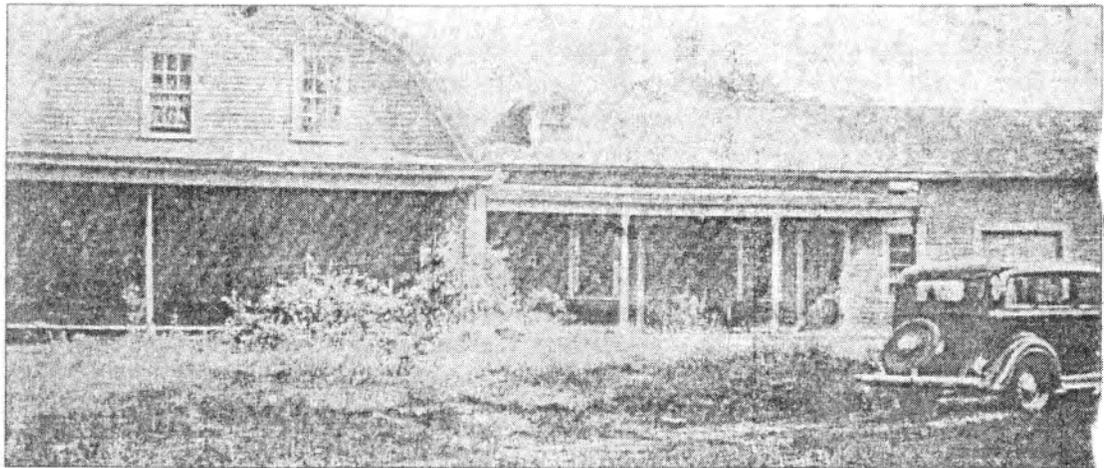
I guess just about everyone in town is acquainted with the familiar sight of the Red Rooster Tavern. I also expect that most of you have also taken note of the fact that the building which houses North Kingstown's second most famous restaurant ever (the now demolished Custy's being the first) looks an awful lot like someone's home. The fact of the matter is that this indeed was a home long before it was a place to dine on some of the best fancy vittles this side of the big city. Plenty has been said and written on the story of Red Rooster Tavern and its owner Norman LeClair, but that only covers about 35 years worth of the history of the circa 1875 home. Let's take a Swamptown gander at the rest of the story behind the little house at 7385 Post Road.

Back in the 1870's, when this very typical little farmhouse was constructed, the land it sat upon was a part of the larger Carpenter family farm that existed largely on the eastern side of the Post Road. Just ten years earlier, Samuel Carpenter had purchased this piece of land on the west side of the road from the family of another North Kingstown farmer Daniel Brown, whose farmhouse still exists and is now occupied by the "Once in a Blue Moon" antique shop. The Carpenters, Browns, Harts, Reynolds, and yes, even a branch of the Cranston's farmed this area for many years, long before anyone had ever imagined the concept of shopping plazas and strip malls. Indeed, this section of Post Road was as rural, at that time, as anything that exists today out on the back roads of Exeter or West Greenwich. There was nothing between Wickford to the south and Sand Hill Village (centered on present day Chadsey Road) to the north, but farms and forests. I'm not certain why Samuel built the little farmhouse; more than likely it was for the family of one of his children or perhaps for a tenant farmer, who worked the land owned by Carpenter and paid him out of the proceeds of the crop. But whatever the case, this house was an integral part of a working family farm.

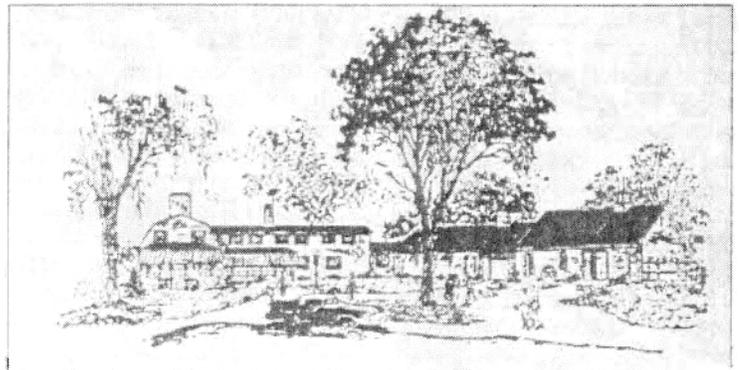
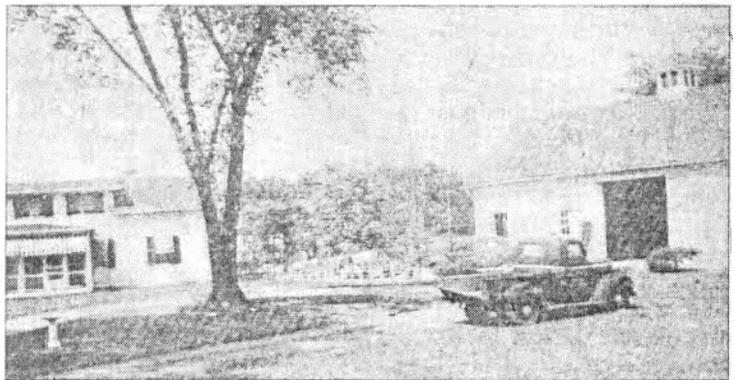
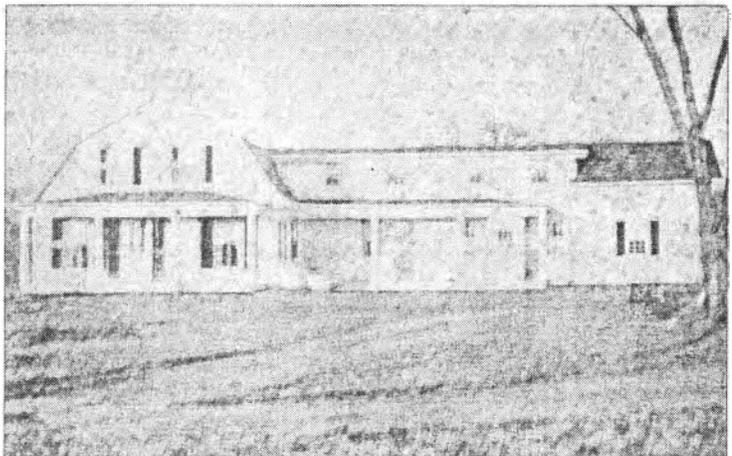
For reasons unknown, although I suspect it probably had something to do with cash flow, as, then and now, farming is a difficult business, Samuel Carpenter carved out a two acre parcel of land centered around the house and sold it to Wickford fisherman and businessman Rollin Mason in 1896. Mason was a man of substance and owned a number of properties during that timeframe. He, more than likely, viewed this purchase as an investment and rented the house out. He held on to it until 1903 when he sold it to William Wilcox. The home subsequently changed hands a number of times until 1922 when a local man by the name of George A. Gardiner Jr. purchased it as a home for himself, his wife Annie (Stanton), and their growing family. George Gardiner worked as a road crew foreman at the state highway garage in Belleville; still located in the same location as it was when George reported to work there each day for some forty years. In this home, George and Annie raised three children; Wallace, Ruth, and Lillian. George Gardiner died of heat exhaustion on the job, running a work crew along the edge of Route 102 in Exeter. He was 65 at the time and most certainly contemplating retirement on that

hot August day in 1949, when he picked up a shovel with his men for the last time. His sudden death shocked and saddened the close-knit community.

Lillian, one of George's daughters, eventually ended up with the house. This was most appropriate, as she had spent her entire childhood there. Lillian Gardiner eventually married and became Lillian Hackett, a much beloved and long-standing employee of the Town of North Kingstown. As a matter of fact, in 1969, Lillian became the town's first non-elected Town Clerk, a position she held until 1986 when she retired after a 35-year career. Later, after she sold the house to Norman LeClair, an already established restaurateur and owner of the Chick-n-Pick Restaurant that was located across the street from the Red Rooster, Lillian was known to joke with local folks who frequented the place, saying that they were having dinner in her old bedroom. Well, this old Swamp Yankee's heard that soon we'll all be able to enjoy a wonderful repast in Lillian bedroom again soon. I look forward to the day when the doors of Samuel Carpenter and George Gardiner's old home open again as the latest version of the Red Rooster Tavern.



A photo of the Vaughan house (above) shows its appearance prior to its renovation by Wendell Smith. The photo at right shows the house a few years later, after the Smith renovations. New shutters and a second floor to the home's left wing are the most noticeable exterior changes. Below right, Smith Manor is shown in 1948, before the house and barn were connected. Post Road can be seen in the background. At bottom, a Smith Manor advertisement from the 1950s shows the house and barn and their various additions.



The View From Swamptown

The Fones/Vaughan/Smith House

Perhaps, one day, as you were leaving our local Burger King, you noticed the little cemetery that sits there facing Namcook Road. Now you regular readers know that Namcook, along with Chadsey and Huling Roads, were actually once part of Post Road itself; prior to its widening and straightening in the 1930's. So the little cemetery, at one time, was right on the main thoroughfare through town. It's inhabitants are all Vaughans and Vaughan relations, and this, the Royal Vaughan family plot, is all that's left of a once large farm which included land on both sides of the Boston Post Road and was originally settled by one of our Fair Town's first families; that of Jeremiah Fones.

Jeremiah built himself a large center-chimneyed gambrel-roofed farmhouse sometime around the beginning of the 1700's. It can be seen in the accompanying photos, albeit in a much altered state. Jeremiah's most prominent offspring, Captain Daniel Fones, Master of the colony's first warship, the Tartar was born in this home and eventually settled in Wickford. (Daniel Fones and his home were featured in a previous column.) Fones family members held on to the homestead for nearly 100 years, when it passed into the ownership of Royal Vaughan in 1784. Ironically, and sadly, enough, what remains of the Fones family graveyard is situated behind a Taco Bell across the street from the Burger King which fronts the Vaughan graveyard. As many identifiable remains as possible were moved to an Exeter Fones plot in 1973 when Kings Grant was constructed.

Now Colonel Royal Vaughan was a prominent man in his own right. A commander in the RI State Militia and a Justice of the Peace for Washington County, he was the sire of a family that would eventually play an important part in the textile industry here in North Kingstown and beyond. It was he who constructed the large addition to the Fones Homestead to house his South Carolina born wife, Jane Adelaide Anthony, and their large family. Vaughan was also prominent in bringing education to the community, as he hired one Daniel Havens to teach school for the locals of the "Devil's Foot" area out of his home in 1807. The Vaughan family, through three generations, held on to the house for another 100 years or so, until the house and farm passed into the hands of William G. Madison, a member of another prominent local clan.

The home disappears from the historic record for a short time, until it shows up again when it was purchased by Wendell C. Smith in the early 1930's. Smith realized the potential bonanza that his old rundown farmhouse held soon after the Navy announced the construction of the big base, literally, just across the street from his home. He decided to renovate the place and open up a fine restaurant. He called it "Smith Manor" and it was quite the success. It served up a sumptuous fare for decades and was known across the region. The establishment was owned by the Peterson's and Delsanto's as well over the years.

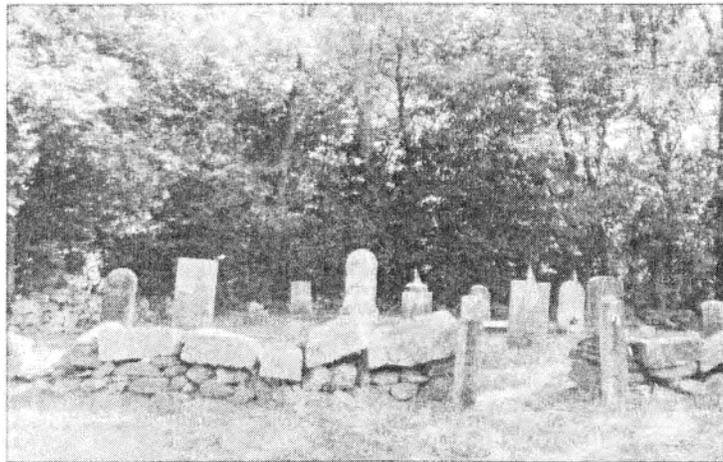


PHOTO: DANIEL G. DUNN

The Royal Vaughan family plot is a historic cemetery on Namcook Road. Vaughan's gravestone is on the far left.

By the late 1960's, the 275 year old home had fallen on hard times. It was now little more than another Post Road watering hole and was called Johnny Allen's Barn. No longer the preferred restaurant of North Kingstown's citizenry, it was visited by the Shore Patrol and the local police more often than by a discerning restaurant critic. In 1970 the oldest portion of the home was demolished. A few years later, with the looming closing of Quonset/Davisville, the lounge was closed and a short time later the barn addition that had housed it was also demolished. It was 1973 and a newfangled burger joint soon replaced the old Colonial-era dwelling. Few, at that time, realized the impact of the loss.

Now, thirty years later, folks understand. As we all contemplate what Post Road has become and wish it was something different, I like to remember the places like Smith Manor and others like it that are gone forever. I also cherish the few reminders of Post Road's past that still exist (like the now threatened Reynolds Farmhouse) and hope that we as a community can do right by our heritage and get Post Road's future on the right track.



PHOTO: JAMES RUSH

This house on Shermantown Road in North Kingstown stands near the old Sweet homestead, which was purchased by Henry Ford and carted off to Sudbury, Mass., for a Colonial village he created there. All that remains of the Sweets is the family burying ground.

The View From Swamptown

The Bonesetter Sweets

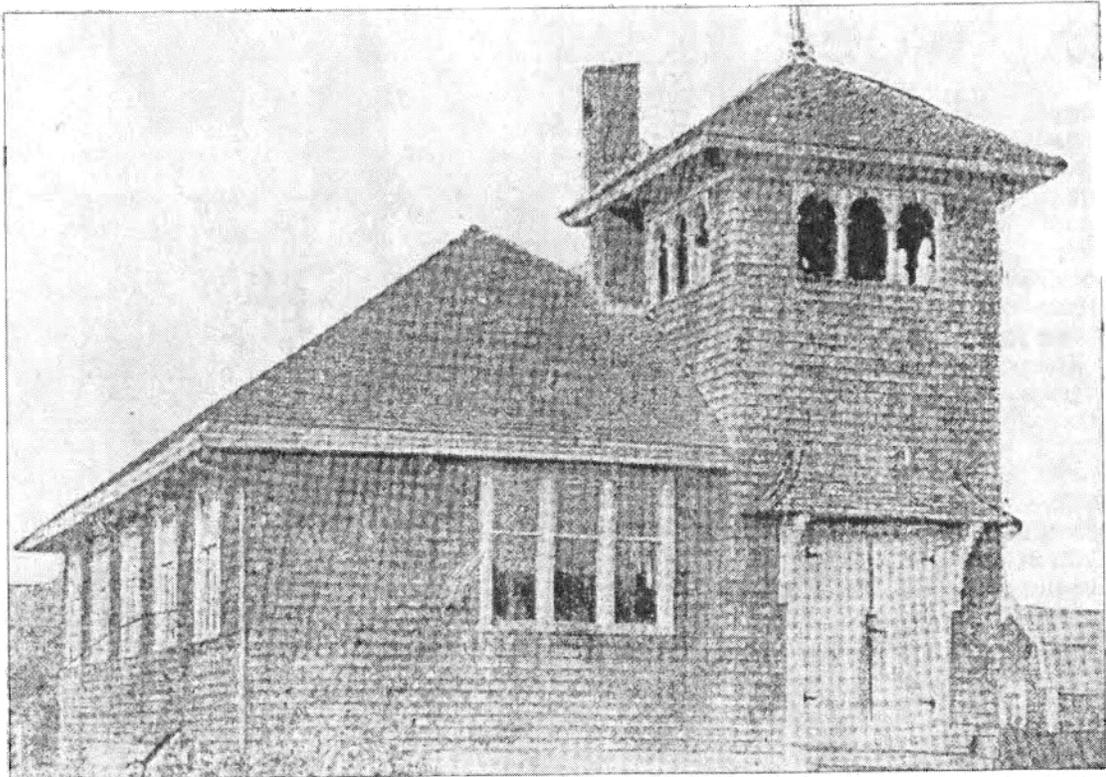
I guess its been over the last thirty years or so that a certain phenomena has seemingly snuck its way into the medical profession. Why, I remember back when I was a boy most doctors seemed to be just doctors. You'd have to go all the way to Providence or Boston to find a "Specialist". Now it seems that there's more specialists than there are regular doctors. The way things are going, eventually, you'll have to travel far and wide to find a plain old doctor. Once you're lucky enough to track down one of these rare beasts, he or she will then refer you back to the teeming cauldron of specialists for further consultation. I wonder how long it will take before the plain old "G.P." will become so scarce that he or she will become the new "specialist"; a reliable shining beacon in a foggy sea of specialized physicians.

Back in the 18th century, there were not only not nearly enough doctors to go around, there were virtually no specialists. None except for the bonesetters; men and women with no formal medical training, but with an almost unnatural and uncanny knack for setting broken bones and restoring dislocated joints. The vast majority of these "natural bone setters" as they were known, were members of one clan, the Sweet family, and all of these Sweets traced their roots back to one James Sweet who came from Wales in the 1630's and settled in the Shermantown section of Our Fair Town.

When James Sweet and his son and grandson (both named Benoni) lived there, Shermantown was known as Ridge Hill, and the Sweets lived side-by-side with the other farmers of the region, Gardiners, Spinks, Smiths and the like. Everyone around knew of the Sweets natural bonesetting abilities, and when the need would arise a Sweet would be called upon to reduce a fracture or reset a dislocated hip or shoulder. Even though they had no formal training, out of respect, folks would call the eldest Sweet around Doc Sweet and just like a regular doctor, Doc Sweet (who ever he might be at that time) would never turn his back on a neighbor in need.

As time passed, and Sweets begat Sweets, their clan spread across New England and New York and their family fame spread across the region. At the time of the Revolution, Job Sweet was employed to set the bones of French Officers stationed in Newport. After the war Job was called to New York City to set the dislocated hip of Aaron Burr's daughter Theodosia. The poor girl had to wait patiently in pain while he sailed down from Newport. In minutes he had her walking and was on his way back to Newport before her normal Doctors were able to question him. During the War of 1812 a Benoni Sweet of Ridge Hill was summoned to New London Connecticut to set the dislocated hip of a British officer. The simple blacksmith (that was his normal profession) succeeded where a raft of British Surgeons had failed, and had the officer on his feet in short order. The British experts had the poor sufferer hooked up to a contraption consisting of numerous ropes, weights, and pulleys to no avail. Doc Sweet walked in, set a pine board against the outside of the ailing hip joint and with one "smart blow" against the board reset the joint. He was a mite agitated at being dragged all the way to New London and told the Royal Surgeons, in his best Swamp Yankee vernacular, that if they were only smarter he would have been saved the long arduous trip for a few minutes work.

All Sweets, whether they hailed from New Bedford, New Haven, or Utica, or anywhere in between called Ridge Hill home. The ancestral Homestead, known as the Benoni Sweet House, existed on Shermantown Road for nearly three centuries until it was bought up by a familiar name to regular readers of this column; Henry Ford. Yes that's right, Henry's wealthy hand comes into play again here in N. Kingstown. Rebuffed by the owners of the Old Narragansett Church in Wickford and the old grist mill on Camp Avenue, Henry settled on the Sweet Homestead, among other things, and hauled it off to Sudbury Mass. as a part of one of his contrived colonial villages. All that remains here in North Kingstown is the ancient Sweet burying ground behind the home that was built on the site of the old Sweet Homestead. In it lie the remains of generations of Bonesetter Sweets.



The Saunderstown chapel is shown above as it appeared in 1926. Today the building houses the village's post office.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR



Eighteen years after the parsonage (above) was moved from South Ferry to Saunderstown, the church's congregation became too small to support a full-time pastor and the building fell into disuse. It was eventually sold to the Green family of Saunderstown, who maintained possession of it during most of the last 78 years. The recently restored property (below) now serves as a bed-and-breakfast under its new owners.