

*G. Timothy Cranston's*

*The View From Swamptown*

*Volumes III and IV*

*April 2001 to March 2003*

## Library Note

The North Kingstown Free Library is pleased to present “The View From Swamptown Volumes III and IV” in this electronic format and thus make it available to a larger audience. The articles that make up this publication are in their original unedited form. They appeared in an edited form in “The North East Independent” between April 2001 and March 2003. Tim Cranston then published the articles in a bound volume that is no longer in print.

The historic photos are from Tim Cranston’s collection of images. Newer photos are courtesy of the [North East Independent](#). You can use the Find feature on your web browser to search by a word or phrase. This first installment contains the articles in the section titled “Wickford.” More installments will be added in the near future. Please contact the library if you have any questions or comments.

The North Kingstown Free Library and Tim Cranston would like to thank David and Petra Laurie and the North Kingstown Arts Council for their generous support of this project.

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In this online version “The View From Swamptown Volumes III and IV” has been divided into three sections:

[Wickford](#)

[The Villages- Mill and Farming](#)

Miscellaneous

The View From Swamptown

Volumes III and IV

April 2001 to March 2003

Written By

G. Timothy Cranston

Published By

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## Author's Note

So here we are again! This volume includes the unedited text of the 100 articles which I wrote during years three and four of the existence of the North East Independent. I am sad to say there are still no pictures included with this compilation. (Web editor's note: Photos have been included in this online version, reproduced with the permission of the North East Independent)

I am forever indebted to so many people for their able assistance over the last two years. My thanks to the staff of the North Kingstown Free Library, particularly Susan Berman; and my good friends at the N.K. Genealogy Society, especially Doris Moon, Louise Gardiner, Sally Hilton, and Althea MacAleer. Also, fellow history buffs Karen Lou LaPolice and Bev Wood at the Town Hall. Henry Beckwith, as always, has come to my aid whenever I've asked, and without the contributions and friendship of Thomas Peirce, this column wouldn't be half of what it is. Thanks Tom, for everything. And again, as before, I thank all my loyal readers for their aid and encouragement. It still means the world to me. Lastly, and still most importantly, I thank my family; Linda, Ryan, and Eric for their continued support and understanding as I pursue this; my passion.

This book of stories is dedicated to the memory of my parents. Although they both left this world much too soon, they, like their parents before them, managed to leave an indelible mark behind. This is a part of my attempt to live up to that legacy.

The View from Swamptown Volumes III and IV

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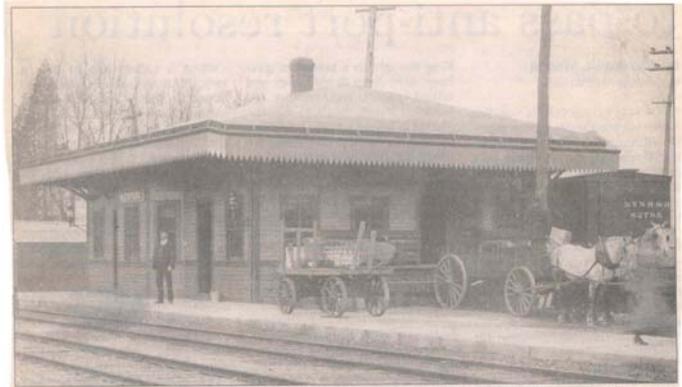
**The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston**

## **The Mystery of the Missing Railcar**

This week's column is one of those detective tales that I so enjoy. You see, it seems that just about forty years ago, a crane and a flat bed truck pulled into the yard behind the old Agway grain store right near the intersection of Updike and Prospect Streets (now a dentist office) and picked up a dilapidated run-down old railcar that had been sitting there on the Newport and Wickford Line's siding for as long as just about anyone could remember. The old car was hauled away to points unknown and largely forgotten. That is until a certain nosy history columnist heard about it about a year ago. Now the railcar's tale can be told and its mysterious destination revealed. But first let's take a gander back another forty years and see just how that old car ended up abandoned on an unused track in "The Olde Quaint and Historic".

The story of this "1908 Osgood-Bradley Combination Car" begins in September of 1940, when the powers that be in the ever-burgeoning war machine decided that the fifty-year-old Wickford Station (seen in the accompanying photo) was in the way of progress. That particular progress was the unloading of supplies needed to quickly construct the massive naval base being built just up the road a piece at Quonset/Davisville. The largely abandoned rail station, once the hub of the busy Newport and Wickford line, was impeding the ability of workers to quickly unload the railcars that were being brought down the line with material for the base. With the station gone, trucks could pull up right beside the railcars and the freight could be transferred from one to the other in the quickest manner possible. The problem was what to do with the station agent, local lass Rose L. Weaver and her office, which was, at that time, the last legitimate use for the building. The problem was solved by bringing in the combination car and parking it on an unused siding just up the tracks from where the station once stood. The configuration of the combination car, three quarters passenger and one quarter freight was ideal, giving Mrs. Weaver a secure portion as well as an area where the sunlight could stream in through the many windows. The red plush seats were removed; desks,

file cabinets, and a potbellied stove were installed and phone and telegraph lines were hooked up. Rose Weaver was back in business in her "Private Rail Car" as the papers called it, in an attempt to assuage the anger of local folks who were alarmed at the old station house's quick and largely unannounced demolition. Things went along without incident until the demise of the station agent's position. The combination car was then used as extra storage by the grain company, which was by then using the old freight building to



Above, Newport and Wickford Railway's Wickford Station was shared by the Sea View Railway. This photo was taken circa 1915. Below, the 1908 Osgood-Bradley Combination car taken from the site of the old Wickford Station in 1961 more recently was used as a gift shop at the Connecticut Trolley Museum.



house their business. This same grain business was also the last customer to use the tracks of the Wickford and Newport Line. Once a week, Engine #597 would pull a single boxcar down the tracks from the mainline at Wickford Junction and drop off a load of grain and merchandise at the store. The "end of the line" came around 1961, when the last of the little engine's runs were made. This sad but auspicious event was noted by my honored predecessor in the local history business, ProJo columnist and local character John Ward. The old Osgood-Bradley Combo-car sat abandoned until the day when the crane and the flatbed truck came and hauled her away.

I expect most folks at the time just assumed that the railcar was being hauled off to be scrapped, but that was not the case. A little sleuthing around by yours truly revealed that the car was destined for "some kind of railroad museum", although the haze of nearly forty years caused the identity of this museum to remain a mystery. After a number of months and a few phone bills that threatened to raise the ire of my understanding wife, I finally located the car. As you can see by the picture which

accompanies the column she is perfectly restored and much appreciated at The Connecticut Trolley Museum in East Winsor, Connecticut. The car has spent much of the last few decades as the museum's gift shop, but now is being readied to join the museum's "rolling stock" and will one day haul passengers again. So some day, stop by in East Winsor and ask about the Wickford Combo-car. I think Rose Weaver would be just as pleased as you will be when you see her.

Many thanks to the good folks at The Connecticut Trolley Museum and the Connecticut Electric Railway Assoc. for their assistance.

Printed in the North East Independent 3/14/02

## Chinese Laundry Building



The original photo that caught Ken McWilliams' eye shows John Hainsworth and his two children outside his shop.



Wickfordites in the late 1800s crowd around the burned-out tavern. To the left of the tavern is a small office building that also was damaged by the fire and, to the right, a bakery.

Back in the spring, regular reader Ken McWilliams of our fair town wrote me to ask about the photograph of the Hainsworth family and their shop, which appeared in the column concerning the history of the site that our library now sits upon. It seems that his father Harold McWilliams was born in the building that Hainsworth had his shop in. Around the time baby Harold was being born in the upstairs apartment, Hainsworth had moved his establishment into the nearby Avis Block and a Chinese Laundry had taken up residence in the storefront that Hainsworth had vacated. Ken had heard that the building had been relocated when the Town Park had been created and was curious about its fate. I've held

on to Mr. McWilliam's letter (as I have with many others) hoping to be able to answer his question with some certainty. Now I can. Here's the story as best as I can find out.

Ken's father recollects that he had lived above the Laundry, but I'll bet that Hainsworth still had his shop there when he was born in 1899. Soon after that, though, he relocated his plumber's shop to the nearby Avis Block. Perhaps he had heard of the plans that were swirling through the heads of the more prominent citizen's of the village to create a town common or village green in that location. Whatever the case, Hainsworth moved out and the Chinese laundry moved in sometime shortly after the turn of the century. Unfortunately, as of this time, I have not been able to find out much about the folks who

ran the laundry, or their ultimate fate (perhaps one of you can help unravel that mystery), but the story of the building itself can be told. In order to do that though, we need to take a quick look at the history of the park site itself.

The site which we now know as the Wickford Village Veterans Park and the small cluster of shops behind it, was once home to four buildings and a short side street. There was the building that housed Hainsworth's plumbers shop, another that housed a bakery, one that was occupied by a tavern, and a fourth which had what amounts to office space on the street level. All four of these buildings had rentals on the upper floors. Sometime around the end of the 1800's there was a devastating fire within the building which was home to the tavern. It was gutted by the blaze and the nearby office building was damaged. The accompanying photograph shows a cluster of town folk surveying the damaged tavern. The bakery building is in the foreground and the office in the background. This disaster was turned into an opportunity by the town fathers when they decided to move on the village green idea at this propitious moment. The two damaged buildings were destroyed, and the bakery building and the Chinese laundry building were sold with the caveat that they be moved. The second photo shows rubble piles where the two fire-damaged buildings once stood and the bakery building jacked up on blocks ready to be moved. The front of the Chinese Laundry/ Hainsworth building



An unknown boy, thought to be a member of the family that ran the laundry out of Hainsworth's old shop, stands in an alley between two buildings that stood at what is now the front of the Ryan's/town parking lot. The market can be seen across the street in the background.

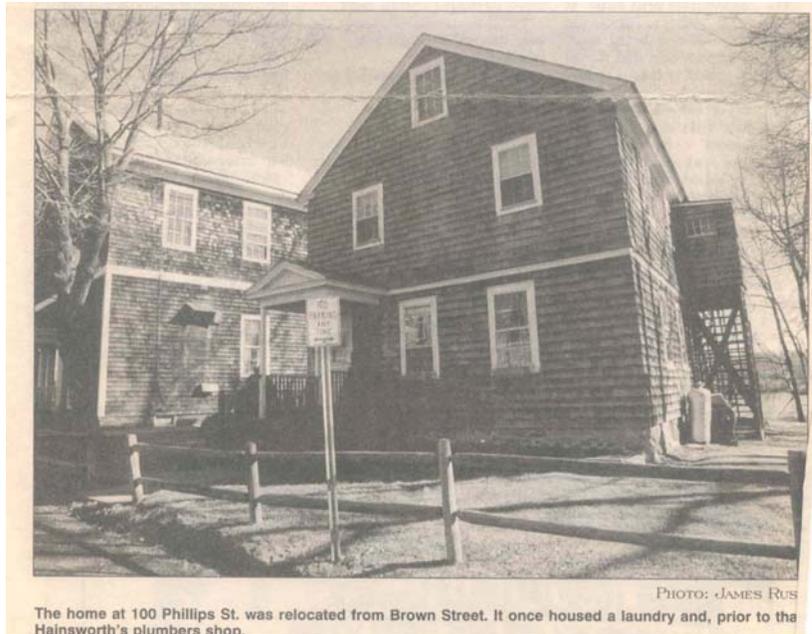
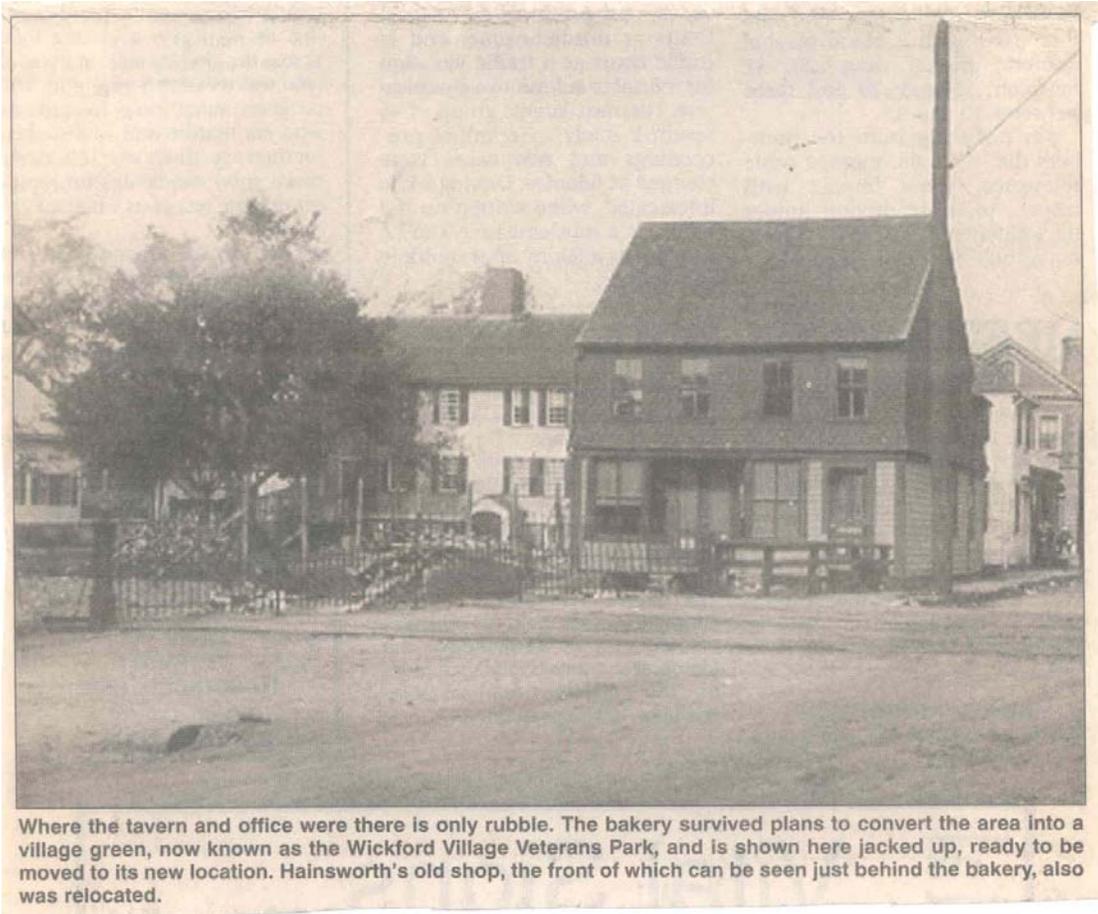


PHOTO: JAMES RUSSELL  
The home at 100 Phillips St. was relocated from Brown Street. It once housed a laundry and, prior to the Hainsworth's plumbers shop.

can be seen just behind the bakery. The ultimate fate of the bakery building is fodder for another column, but the story of the Chinese Laundry building can be told. It was relocated to a site on Phillips Street, right next to the Odd Fellows Hall, and remodeled into a single family home. It sits there to this day, slyly (until now that is) holding on to the tale of its secret past. So there's your answer Mr. McWilliams, as they say, "Better Late than Never".



Where the tavern and office were there is only rubble. The bakery survived plans to convert the area into a village green, now known as the Wickford Village Veterans Park, and is shown here jacked up, ready to be moved to its new location. Hainsworth's old shop, the front of which can be seen just behind the bakery, also was relocated.

Printed in the North East Independent 2/21/02

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

## Eamshaw's Drugstore

As the time nears when one of Wickford's institutions changes hand, it seems appropriate to take a look at the history of this wonderful establishment that we all take for granted.



Above is Eamshaw Drug pictured just before it moved to its current location in February 1952. Below the store is seen as it appeared in the 1960s.



The business that we now know as Eamshaw's has roots which branch off in two different directions. The family name that is attached to the store goes back to the 1850's in nearby East Greenwich. The Eamshaws were, at that time, operating an apothecary wherein they mixed their own medicines and even made their own pills. They operated a pharmacy on Main Street for more than one hundred years. The business, which has evolved into the Wickford store that we all know and love was purchased by the Earnshaws in 1932 from the family, which ruled the local pharmacy trade since the beginning of the 1800's. The father and son tandem of Eliphalat (now there's a name for you) Young Senior and Junior dispensed medicine for more than a century combined. The younger Young known by all in town as "Doc" Young sold the business to our own Alan Eamshaw's dad and his partner Howard Ericson rather than close it. So you see, this store has roots that go back nearly 200 years here in town and 150 years in East Greenwich. So, I must say to whomever assumes the mantle that generations of Earnshaws and Youngs have worn for all these years; you've got some pretty big shoes to fill, certainly a tough act to follow. The concern, compassion, and kindness with which these folks have dispensed their potions are, in this Swamp

Yankee's eyes, even more important than the contents of the pills and elixirs. Thank you Mr. And Mrs. Eamshaw, for your decades of service to the community. We all owe you a debt.

Printed in the North East Independent 11/15/01

## North Kingstown and the Oyster Industry

North Kingstown's fate, it would seem, has always been tied, in a large part, to the sea. From the early days of ship building and the maritime trade up until today's nuclear submarine and barge construction and pleasure boating, the townfolk's livelihood depended upon Narragansett Bay and the vast Atlantic. The period of time which extended from around 1885 until 1940 was no exception, but in that case the bounty that the bay was providing came in the form of the oyster.

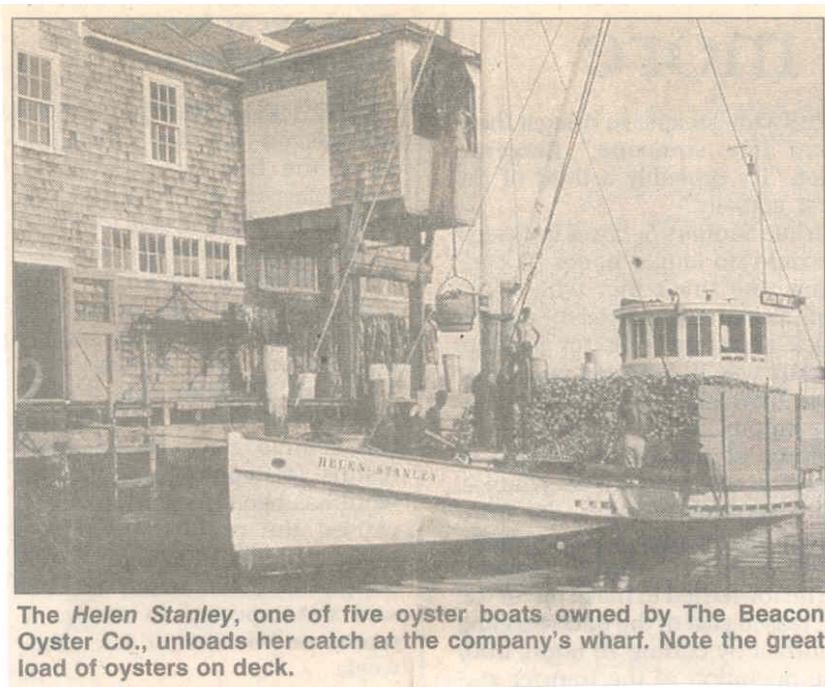
This period of approximately fifty years ought to be known, in Rhode Island, as the era of the oyster. You see, from Providence down to nearly the Rhode Island Sound the oyster was king, and farming the oyster was a way for many a hardy hearted Rhode Islander to put bread on the table and coal in the fire. Long before some marine scientist thought up the fancy word "aquaculture", Rhode Island fishermen were already living that life. Rhode Island oysters were renowned up and down the eastern seaboard, from Boston to Florida for their sweet succulence. It was big business.

Here in town, the focal point of the local oyster industry was the wharf at the end of Pleasant Street in the village of Wickford. It was here, in about 1885 that three enterprising sea captains and businessmen, John Lewis, George Hunt, and Stephen Farnham opened an oyster plant. Around 1888 the business was sold to the Pettis family of Providence who called their operation the Sea Coast Oyster Company. After the death of the last Pettis the business was taken over by a New Haven, Connecticut company.

Just across Pleasant Street, in 1907, a competitor to the Pettis family's Sea Coast Oyster Company was formed. The Beacon Oyster Company was begun by local captains Irving Reynolds and Rollin Mason and soon became a worthy competitor to their neighbor across the street. At its peak it employed more than sixty men in both the plant and on its five oyster boats, one of which is shown in the

accompanying photograph. This operation stayed in the hands of the families of its founders right up until the end.

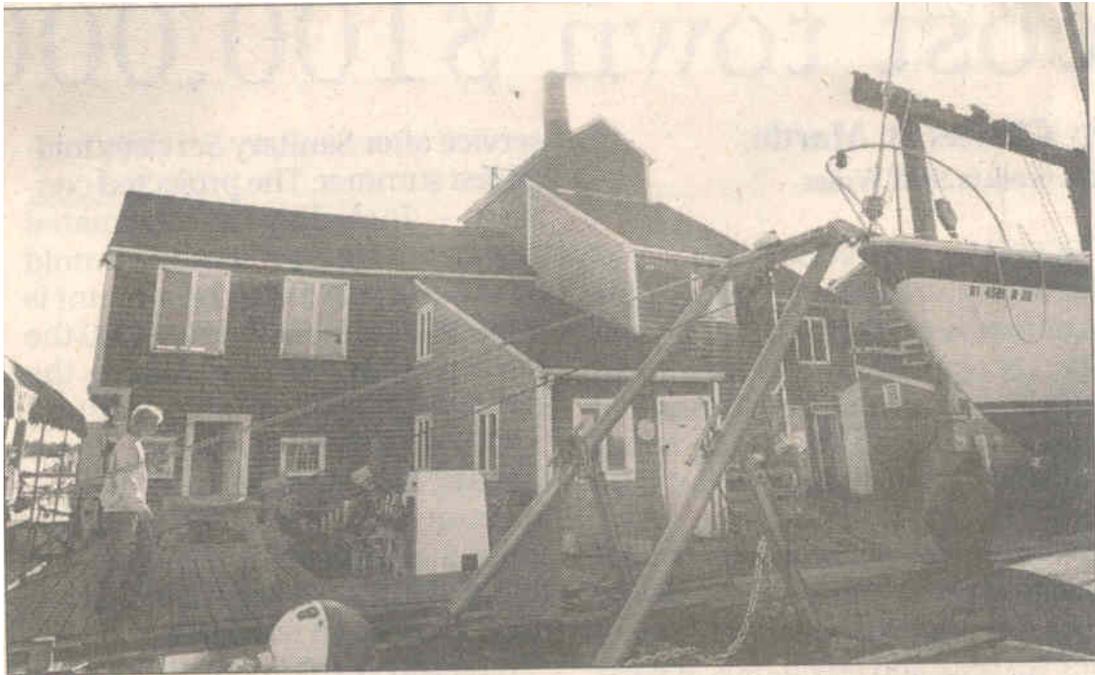
The end came with a one-two punch which decimated the industry, not only in North Kingstown, but up and down the whole of Narragansett Bay. The first blow was struck by nature herself in the form of the great hurricane of 1938. The storm sank many of the oyster boats, destroyed the wharfs and oyster plants and ripped the myriad oyster farms and beds from the floor of the bay. As the industry was beginning to recover the knockout punch was landed by the U.S. government when they, without much warning, began the construction and subsequent dredging of the bay for the Quonset/Davisville base. This finished off what the hurricane had begun and killed the industry statewide.



The *Helen Stanley*, one of five oyster boats owned by The Beacon Oyster Co., unloads her catch at the company's wharf. Note the great load of oysters on deck.

Thankfully, we have some vestiges of those days to remind us of what was once a vital part of the local scene. The circa 1885 Sea Coast Oyster Company's properties have been transformed into the simple, but elegant structure we now know as The Wickford Yacht Club, and the enterprise began

by local lads H.Irving Reynolds and Rollin Mason is now the home of the Pleasant Street Wharf. I guess you could say that those two crafty sea captains were visionaries of a sort. The rest of the world has finally caught up with them; although what is now known by the fancy moniker of "aquaculture" was just "oysterin" to H.I. and Rollin.



PHOTOS: JAMES RUSH

The former site of The Beacon Oyster Co. now is known as the Pleasant Street Wharf. Below, the Wickford Yacht Club now occupies the land that once housed the Sea Coast Oyster Co.



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## The Daniel Wall/George Bailey Double House

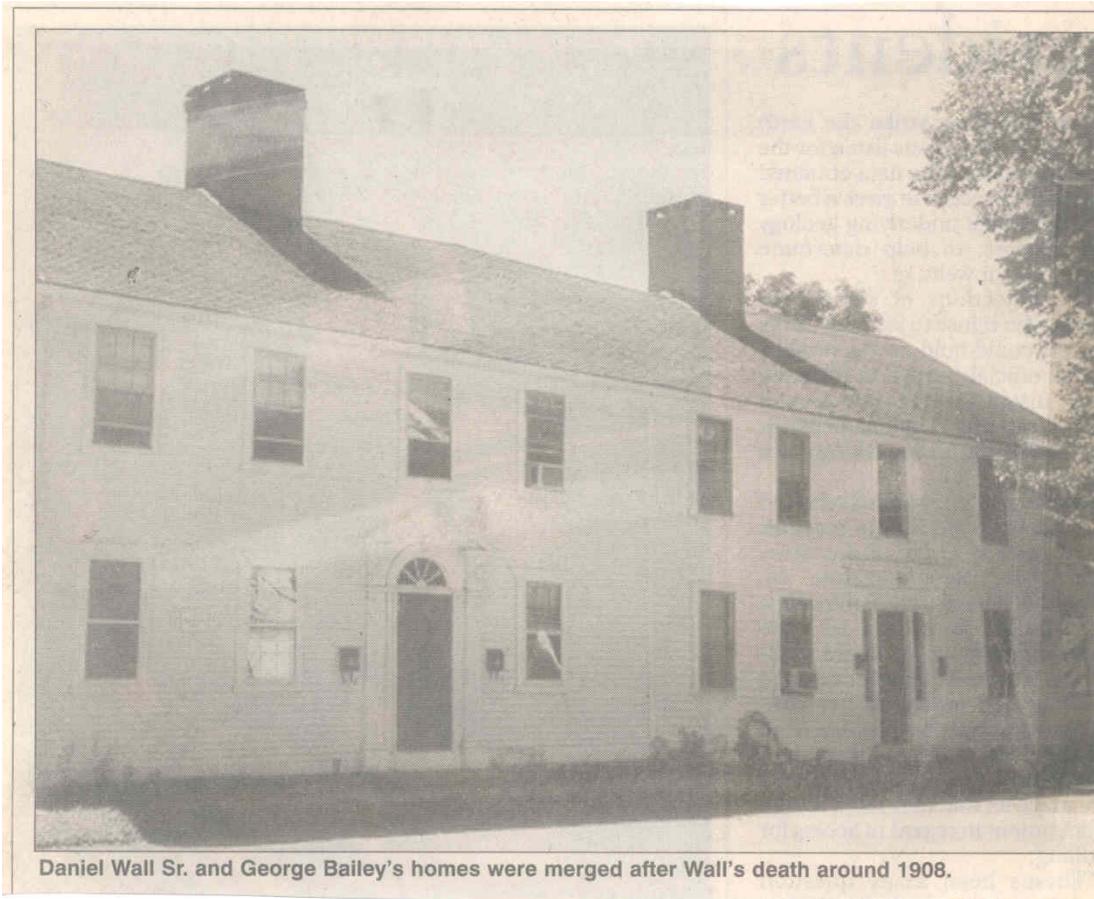
Long before some anonymous real estate developer or landlord coined the word "duplex" the residents of the countless small colonial villages up and down the eastern seaboard were already constructing just such a homestead. One of the earliest examples of this, in Wickford, is the double house built in the very beginnings of the 1800's by Daniel Wall Sr. and George Bailey.

Daniel Wall purchased a lot of land on The Grand Highway (Main Street) from the Phillips family, the real estate tycoons of the time, around 1800. It was bordered on the west by the lane which would eventually be named in honor of his family. He built his two-story colonial home, on the lot, in 1802.

Sometime shortly after the Wall family purchased their lot from the Phillips family, George Bailey bought the lot adjoining theirs to the east which also fronted The Grand Highway. Unfortunately for Bailey, his small lot was not large enough to support a home of the size he desired. As is so often the case though, one family's misery is another's opportunity; and the death of Daniel Wall in 1808-9, gave Bailey the opportunity he was looking for. In 1809, he purchased from the "Widow Anna Wall" the narrow strip of land between the Wall house and the property line, as well as "the right of framing" his house into the Wall house. This was not an all together bad deal for Anna; in this time long before Social Security survivor's benefits, the income from this transaction allowed her to stay in her home with her family in the village she loved.

Although the Bailey clan disappeared from the local record in short order, the name of Wall was a prominent one in the village for decades. Daniel Wall Sr.'s namesake son and grandson; Daniel Jr and Daniel III owned and operated a hardware store on the corner of Brown and Main for many years. It is thought, although not known for certain, that Daniel and Anna Wall are buried in the large cemetery at "The

Platform", the original site of the Old Narragansett Church, on Shermantown Rd. Their children and grandchildren rest peacefully together in a family plot in the old section of Elm Grove Cemetery. Finally, as a lasting honor to this family, on June 7, 1855 the citizens of North Kingstown, at the yearly town meeting, voted to name the little lane which bordered the old Wall place on the west, Wall Street.



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The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

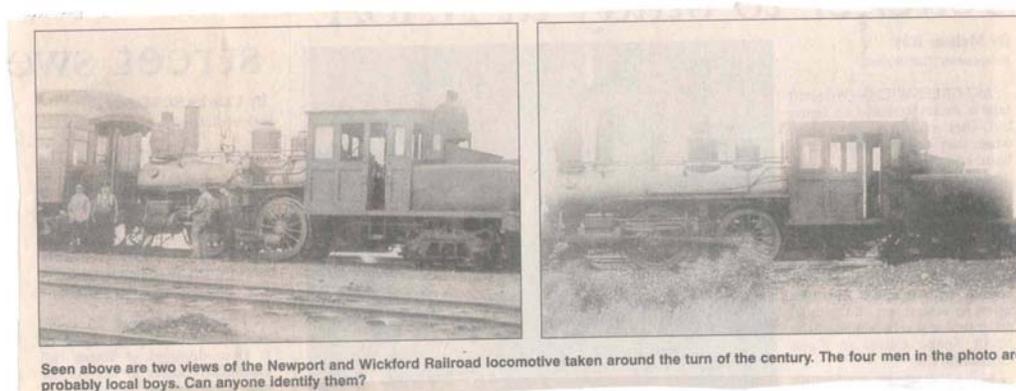
## The Train That Saved Wickford

Take a close look at the accompanying photographs, all ye who call Wickford home, for you are gazing upon her savior. For without this "ugly duckling" of an engine, the "beautiful swan" we know as Wickford Village would be a far more mundane place. For the want of this train, we would have few, if any, of the many historic 18th and early 19th century homes which grace our streets; none of the stately late 19th and early 20th century grand residences would have ever been built. As a matter of fact, even the course of history in nearby Lafayette Village would have been far different without this ungainly looking double-ended locomotive.

Before I lose myself in "waxing poetic" over these rare photos of the locomotive which pulled and pushed the Wagner and Pullman passenger coaches of the Newport and Wickford Railroad and Steamship Company from the Wickford Junction Rail Station to the steamship dock at the Wickford Landing on the end of Poplar Point; let me explain myself. By the last quarter of the 1800's, the village of Wickford had grown stagnant; granted, it still possessed a viable commercial district and was the regional center for the banking that the town's mills relied upon, but by and large things were not altogether rosy for North Kingstown's main village. The power brokers in Providence had won the battle and Wickford was never to become a major player in the maritime trade. Other than the small (by the standards of the time) fabric milling operation of Wm. Gregory, there was no industry to support the community as there was in the town's other villages such as Lafayette, Belleville, Davisville, and Hamilton, and the grand colonial homes, which even then were a part of Wickford's charm, had, by and large, fallen on hard times. They were big and it was expensive to maintain them for the average "Joe". A number of them fell into such disrepair that they were eventually demolished.

But then, like a knight in shining armor (here comes that waxing poetic

again) along came the N & W Railroad and its Pullman cars full of wealthy New Yorkers and Mid-westerners on their way to trendy Newport, the summer home of the rich and famous of the time. They needed to be catered to up at the Wickford Junction Station just north of Lafayette, and the good folks of that village were happy to oblige. Stores, shops, eateries, and hotels sprang up around the station. Porters, baggage-handlers, and teams of horses were hired to move freight and Newport-bound mail around the station. A rail spur was added so that village-builder Robert Rodman could tap into the freight handling expertise of the folks on the main line. Down in Wickford the same things were happening, and even better than that, many of the affluent riders of this rail fell more madly in love with the quiet pace and colonial charm of our village than they were enamoured of Newport and her hustle and bustle. They bought up the beautiful, but declining, old homes and rebuilt them. Crossholme on Pleasant St, the Thomas home on Main St, and the Parley Matthewson Estate on West Main are prime examples of homes that were saved as a direct result of our homely little train. They also built their own majestic homes as well. The "Spinning Wheel" (just profiled in a column a month or so ago) and the Isham house on Boston Neck Road, as well as many others, are examples of this. An entire industry of sorts grew up around this development; gardeners and cooks were needed, builders and painters were hired, tea rooms and shops opened, tutors and nannies were retained. In short, Wickford was reborn and the seeds of her present-day success, Tourism, were planted. A village on the decline was saved - saved by a homely little train.



The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

## The Captain Daniel Fones House

Without question, the most under appreciated house in all of Wickford has to be The Captain Daniel Fones House. It is amongst the handful of homes in the village that pre-date the Revolutionary War, was built by a colorful character who was a real live hero of the French and Indian War, comes complete with a long and interesting list of past uses - and - hardly anyone knows a thing about it. It has no plaque on it proclaiming its age and first owner; why, it's not even mentioned in the town's survey done by the RI Historic Preservation Commission. All this because for more than sixty years, this goliath of a colonial home has been, what amounts to, an apartment building. It has no proud live-in owner to sing its praises, it has no champion to herald its history; until now that is! This Swamp Yankee says enough is enough and challenges the good folks at "Historic Wickford" to give the big house its due, after all, it has waited patiently for more than 230 years. Well, on with the story.

The story starts more than ninety years prior to the house's construction, when young John Fones and a group of investors arranged a land purchase, purportedly with the help of Roger Williams himself, from the local Narragansetts. This sale, known from thenceforth as the "Fones Purchase", was for the huge parcel of land which ran north from the Devil's Foot Rock up to nearly the East Greenwich border and included much of the land west of The Post Road. The Fones Homestead was located on a section of the old Post Road which is now called Namcook Rd and existed, albeit in a much altered state, into the 1960's. John's son Jeremiah Fones lived there and it was into this house that Daniel Fones was born sometime in the first quarter of the 1700's. Daniel Fones next shows up in the historic record in the 1740's as the Captain of the 19 gun sloop "Tartar" out of Newport. During this timeframe, the colonists were willing allies of the British in their war against the French, who were doing their darndest to expand their colonial empire out of the Canadian provinces into New England and New York. The British hired all the colonial privateers (Translation - governmentally sanctioned pirates) they could find in New England and sent them out after the French naval and merchant fleet. Literally

leading the pack in this enterprise, known as "The Louisborg Expedition" by the British Crown, as well as historians, was Captain Daniel Fones and his well-manned (he used nearly ninety men over the course of the Expedition) and heavily-armed (Fourteen cannons, two of which can be seen to this day on the front lawn of the Newport Historical Society) sloop the "Tartar". The "Tartar" and the other privateer ships from Mass, Ct, and RI wreaked havoc upon French shipping and played a major part in the eventual victory of the British Crown. Fones and his men, as was usually the case with privateers, were paid with the booty which they seized from the ships they captured, and their success at sea was a guarantee of a great financial reward when they were safely back home in Rhode Island. Daniel Fones returned to his family homestead, where tradition holds that he built a small house across the Post Road from his father's near to the site of the present-day intersection of Post and Newcomb Roads.

But it appears around 1770 that Daniel Fones had a new house built for him in the seaport community of Wickford. Perhaps he even paid for it, and the plot of land he purchased from Immanuel Case to build it upon, with the remainder of the proceeds from his privateering days during the French and Indian War. Whatever the case, the house he built was easily the largest in all of Wickford. The story goes that he built it, not only to be his dwelling house, but also to serve as a tavern, hotel, and public meeting hall. It is easy for one to imagine the, then retired, old sea captain dispensing both rum and colorful tales of the sea and privateering to his enthralled guests and patrons. I'll bet it was a popular place with the many sailors who pulled into port here in Wickford. Daniel Fones passed on to that great sailing ship in the sky early in 1790 and his house was purchased by Benjamin Fowler, the first president of the Narragansett Bank, soon after his demise.

The old banker, one of the town's wealthiest men, gave the house to his grandson Benjamin Fowler Spink. Ben Spink continued to run a tavern and hotel out of the big house, but he also rented out a portion of it as a singing school and another part as a private evening school for children run by one

Henry Reynolds.

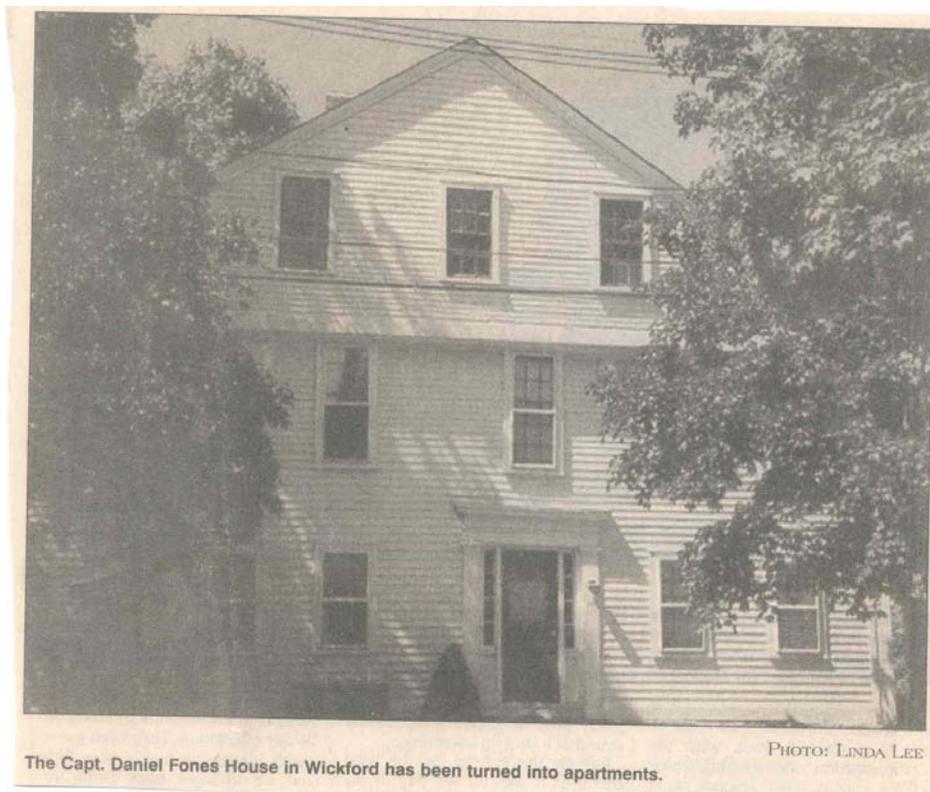
Along about the same time that Ben Spink was serving up grog and vittles in his popular tavern in the Fones House, young John Gladding was in the process of learning the cabinet makers trade from his father across the bay in Newport. John, born in 1816, was a third generation American and cabinetmaker and was learning his trade in one of the epicenters of fine furniture making in the region. A few years later, John Gladding was plying his trade in Wickford with a partner, Thomas Wightman, on Main Street in the busy village. He eventually married Ben Spink's daughter, Hannah, and ran his cabinetmaker's shop out of the back of the large (and busy) Fones House. When Benjamin Fowler Spink met his maker, John and Hannah became owners of the house. Times had changed in Wickford and there was less need for taverns, so the Gladding's closed theirs and opened up a grocery store and rum shop instead; all the while keeping the cabinetmakers business with Wightman (who now lived next door) going as well. The Gladding's were a fixture in Wickford for decades, so long in fact that the Fones house began to be known as the Gladding's house. By the last quarter of the 1800's, John Gladding was still working with wood out in the back of his big place. But by now, he was strictly making wooden coffins; perhaps old age had limited his talents in the fine art of cabinetmaking or maybe he just fell into a lucrative unfilled niche, but whatever the reason John Gladding was now known primarily as a coffin maker. There are a number of notations in the historic record of Mr. Gladding delivering coffins around town with a large wheelbarrow; which was apparently his conveyance of choice. As the son of a son of a son of an undertaker, you can trust me on this part of the story.

John Gladding, a fixture in the village of Wickford for a half a century, died at the age of 86 in 1905. The big house passed through a number of hands until it reached those of the man who would set it on the path that it now follows. Sometime in the early part of the 1900's it was acquired by another sea

captain. This time it was Captain Rollin Mason, a man equally as colorful as Captain Fones, although he made his living on the sea not as a pirate, but as a fisherman. Captain Mason had been an extremely successful menhaden fisherman, but at the time he purchased the Fones House he was making his mark in the world of seafood as the owner of one of the successful oyster businesses which were based at the end of Pleasant Street. Once Mason purchased the big "storied" home he was at a loss to know what to do with such a big house. But the answer came with the construction and staffing of the big Navy base at Quonset Point. Housing was needed, and a lot of it, and the rest is, as they say, history.

So, there you go loyal readers, the story of the Fones house is told. The gauntlet has been thrown down all you "Hist-Wick" members out there. hope you'll take the challenge and give the old house the respect it is due, put a plaque on this venerable old home so all can know of her story.

Printed in the North East Independent 5/24/01



The Capt. Daniel Fones House in Wickford has been turned into apartments.

PHOTO: LINDA LEE

## Talbot's Corner and the Katydid Cottage Tea Room

Sometimes, the most innocuous of buildings can have the most intriguing of histories. Such is definitely the case with the unassuming apartment building that sits placidly at 30 Tower Hill Road. It's fair to say; that we've all glanced at it as we've sat impatiently waiting for the light at West Main to change. To look at it you'd probably never guess she's even as old as she is, no less imagine the interesting events which have played out under her eaves.

This building's story begins, in a way, when she was put together, around 1875. I say in a way, because, the gentleman who constructed her, actually made her out of three smaller structures. William Talbot, the man for whom this area of town, Talbot's Corner, was named, took two small cottages, which were on this lot and faced his big summer home across the street, and combined them with a small abandoned "Holy Rollers" Meeting House (to quote his daughter, Helen Talbot Porter) which he moved from somewhere on Ten Rod Road to the lot and made the building that we see today. So, although the home's construction date is 1875, she is actually somewhat older.

Little is known of the building's history until around the turn of the century, when Talbot rented it out to Mrs. Lucille Luth. Mrs. Luth joined the latest craze that was sweeping the area at that time, and opened up a tea room on the street level of the building. Her tea room, unlike many others of the era, was an unqualified success due to Mrs. Luth's abilities as a cook. It quickly became a mainstay on Talbot's Corner and can be seen in the accompanying photograph. It is curious to note that, on the telephone pole right next to the tea room is a sign for one of Mrs. Luth's main competitors, Mother Prentice's Wickford House. The Luth family operated the Katydid Cottage until the early 1930's when she abandoned this location and opened a new tea room on Fowler Street down in Wickford proper. Again her reputation as a great cook held her in good stead, as a few long time residents of the village can still remember the crowds that flocked to her establishment. It has been said that it was the favorite lunch stop for the RI State Police, who at that time, had their barracks at 24 Brown Street right in the heart of the

village. Sort of the historic predecessor to the ubiquitous donut shop of the present day.

Back up at Talbot's Corner, the old Katydid Cottage was being treated in the same manner as all empty buildings were at that time. She was being carved up into apartments to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the virtual tidal wave of folks coming in to North Kingstown to construct and later serve at Quonset/Davisville. She would fade from the historic record right then and there if it wasn't for the fact that right around the start of the big one - WWII, a young jug-eared Texan bound for eventual fame and fortune rented an apartment in the building for himself and his new wife while he trained at the base. To paraphrase that now famous character, "It's tales like this that make you want to pop the hood on this baby's history, stick your head in there and see what makes her tick". This Swamp Yankee wonders what Mr. and Mrs. Ross Perot would think of their old apartment now. Next week; the story of the Talbot family and their home.

Printed in the North East Independent 2/28/02



The building at 30 Ten Rod Road is shown above as it appeared when it housed the Katydid Cottage Tea Room, and below as it appears today.



In the 1930s, Lucille Luth relocated her tearoom to this home on Fowler Street.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

## The Talbots and Talbot's Corner

One way you can be certain you are in a true New England village (if you're a non-native, or carpetbagger, as we Swamp Yankees like to call you) is to just ask one of the colorful-looking old-timers you see on the street for directions. If the instructions you receive are so obscure and arcane as to leave you scratching your head and wondering, "What the heck did he just say?" then you're assured of being in a New England village talking to a true blue Swamp Yankee. For example; let's say you walk up to a crusty looking character on the street in Wickford and ask him "How can I get up to McKay's Front Porch on Route 102?"

If his response goes something like this, "Well.... Turn yourself around and head up the road over there..That's right, right up Quality Hill — up to Talbot's Corner and take a left.. .the old Katydid Cottage will be on your right. Keep going past where old Ezra Thomas' place was; you know it burned down back in the thirties, then you're going to turn right at the Collation Corners and head through West Wickford and East Lafayette. 'Fore long you'll be in Lafayette proper and you'll see the Rodman Mill. If you keep going you'll head right into Scrabbletown; course if you done that then you've gone too far. Just as you pass the old Swamptown Road, that's right next to the Hornbeam, you know. The old Phillips place was on the other corner, she burned down too; not the big Phillips place mind you, that one burned down too, you know, but it was down by the Belleville station you shouldn't be going anywhere near to there, if you do you're lost. Well, never mind that, you'll start seeing the Rodman Mansions, you want Old Robert's place, not Colonel Robert's mind you, Old Robert's. You see the Colonel, I think he lived at Walter's place or maybe Franklin's but you want Old Robert's. The Masonic fellows turned it into their Temple back a spell; that was after they moved out of The Odd Fellow's Place down onto Phillips Street right across from where the academy used to be. Just follow these here directions and you can't miss it." Well then you know you're in New England and you've just received the Swamp Yankee version of "You can't get there from here."

Today, we are going to take a gander at one of those reference points; Talbot's Corner and the Talbot family for whom it was named. Now that crusty old gent who just gave you directions and is chuckling to himself as he moseys on away from you, would call the Talbots "Summer Folks" and would hold them in pretty high esteem. You see, the patriarch of the family, William R. Talbot bought his summer home, the 45-acre Barberry Hill as the family called it, from Syria Vaughn in 1873 and the Talbots and later the Porters summered there literally for generations. The Talbot's were quite involved in the civic and religious affairs of the village of Wickford, were well-liked by all. But before we look at he Talbots, let's examine their home, Barberry Hill.

As I mentioned, William Talbot bought his summer house from Syria Vaughn in 1873. Vaughn was one of the real movers-and-shakers in 19<sup>th</sup> century North Kingstown. He was a Coventry-born lad who had a hand in the founding of mills at Potowomut with Christopher Allen, at Hamilton Web (which he named after his wife Loisa Hamilton) and in Wickford with his son-in-law and future RI Governor William Gregory. He also was involved in the founding of the Newport and Wickford Railroad and Steamship Company as well as the Wickford Public Library. So you see, Syria, who was also a State Representative, was a busy man. He had purchased the home some four years prior from relation Thomas Vaughn; who in turn had purchased it from Anthony Turner in 1866. Mr. Turner bought the home from Nicholas Frye nearly ten years prior to that. So the home known to the Talbots as Barberry Hill, is now at least 150 years old. It may be older still, as Talbot Family tradition insists that a portion of the home existed as an Inn on the Boston Post Road beginning some time in the 18th century. Talbot tradition goes on to say that Syria Vaughn remodeled the home by jacking it up and constructing a new and more modern first floor underneath the original home. It was at that time, according to the Talbot's, that the attractive widow's walk was added. Only the Talbot's, Vaughn's, and maybe a historical architect know for sure.

Now, the Talbot's were Providence folks. They lived on Williams Street in that city, in a home famous thereabouts for its "Gaspee Room"; a room removed intact from a family home on South Main Street in which the plans for the destruction of the British ship "Gaspee" were formulated. William Talbot traced his ancestry back to Major Silas

Talbot, a hero of the Revolutionary War. His wife, Mary, could trace hers back to Welcome Arnold, one of the financiers of the Colonial Army as well as Capt. Barnes McKay, an officer under General George Washington. Mr. Talbot owned and operated the Tockwotten Button Company in Providence where he manufactured buttons and upholstery nails for Rhode Island's burgeoning fabric industry. He was quite successful at this enterprise and the family was very well off. Each summer they would move their household down from Providence and stay at Barberry Hill in Wickford. The Talbot's had four children; one son and three daughters. Eventually one daughter, Helen, married J. Benton Porter of Philadelphia, and the Porter's, as well, would come along. I imagine those summer's as being idyllic and consisting of teas and picnics by the seashore. As the 1800's turned into the 1900's the elder Talbots joined their Revolutionary ancestors in heaven and the home passed down to the three daughters; known in Wickford simply as the Talbot Sisters. The Talbot sisters were quite religious and proud of their heritage. They were involved in the DAR both here and in Providence and were known to have hand woven many vestments for local churches including St. Paul's in Wickford where they attended. The Talbot Sisters continued to summer in Wickford right to the bitter end when Helen, the last of them passed away quietly in her sleep at her beloved Barberry Hill. Her widower, J. Porter Benton eventually sold the summer home and its 45 acres off and returned to Philadelphia.

As the Talbot's summer estate is now being developed, I am reminded of one of the many Talbot-related stories that survive in the local lore. It seems that one day the Talbot Sister's were down at Sealey's ice cream shop in Wickford with their brother Arnold and some of their Philadelphia friends. The whole party ordered their ice cream and the clerk at the parlor, Jimmy Tully, went to Arnold to collect payment for the many ice cream cones. As a joke, Arnold whipped out a \$100 bill and handed it to Jimmy, fully expecting him to be unable to make change. Let's face it back in the early 1900's \$100 was an extraordinarily large sum of money. Jimmy, who was a resourceful local lad, was not about to be the brunt of Arnold's joke. He left them there in the shop and ran around town until he had scrounged up enough change to complete the transaction with Arnold. In the end, the joke was on the Talbots as

Jimmy handed Arnold a veritable mountain of ones, fives, tens, and coinage to make up the difference. Arnold good-naturedly took the pile of change and headed home. Needless to say, there was not a merchant in Wickford who could change even a five-dollar bill on that day. So, even though the new development, Harbor Ridge, which is rising on the Talbot Estate just behind Barberry Hill is just a little too pretentious for most locals, I'll bet the Talbot's would be amused by it all just a little.

Printed in the North East Independent 3/07/02



Barberry Hill, the summer home of the Talbot family, is located at the top of West Main Street at 1 Tower Hill Road. The house since has been separated into apartments.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

## The Burning of the Tockwogh

Although I never knew the man, I feel certain I can say that April 11, 1893 stood out as one of the worst days in the life of a night watchman whose name was recorded in the historic record as night watchman Cozzens. For at 3:45 AM during the graveyard watch that Cozzens stood at the steamship wharf at the end of Poplar Point here in our fair town, a mysterious fire broke out on the triple-decked side-wheeler steamship "Tockwogh" and she burned to the waterline. The majestic vessel was a total loss. The only bright spot in the entire affair was that the local firefighters had been able to contain the blaze to the ship and thereby save the adjacent train sheds and boarding areas of the Newport & Wickford Rail and Steamship Company; the owners of both the elegant side-wheeler and the wharf and buildings itself.

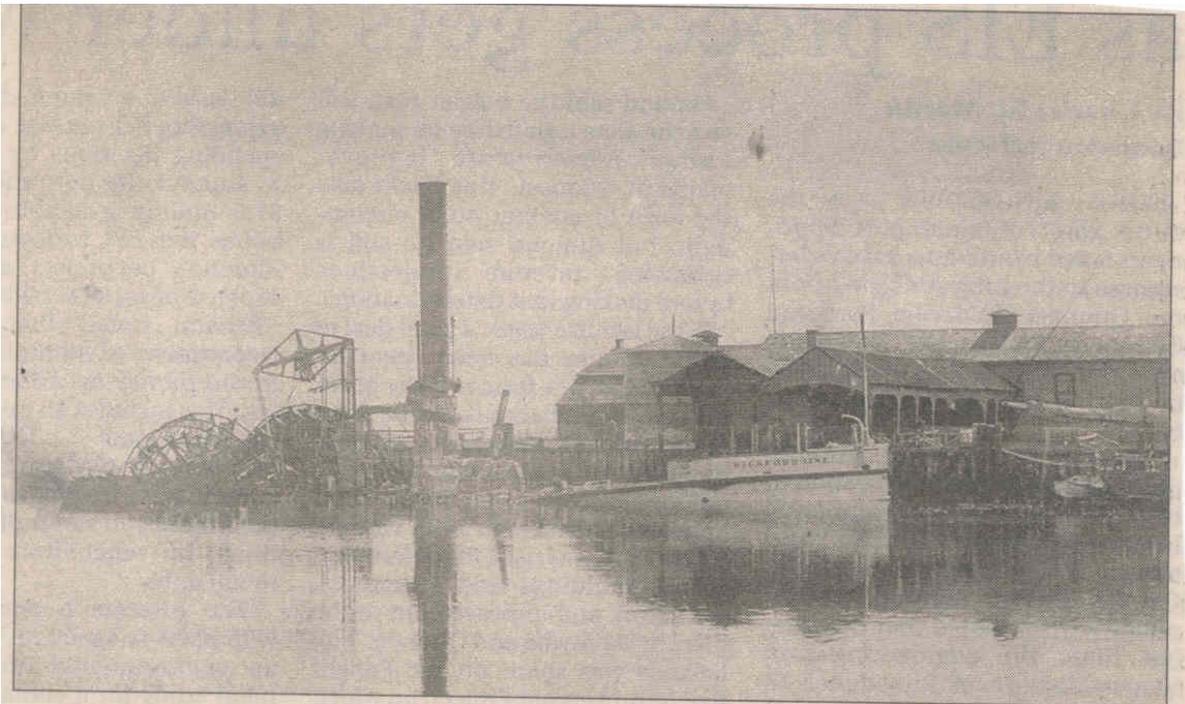
The next day, an anonymous photographer took the amazing photograph that accompanies this column. It shows the remains of the Tockwogh settled in the mud of Wickford Harbor at the location now used by the University of Rhode Island's fishery school's training boat, "Captain Bert". Some of the buildings shown in the photo, taken from the present day town dock, are still in existence today, and are used by the marina which sits on the site of the old steamship dock.

The powers-that-be at the main offices of the Newport to Wickford Line had little time to waste. The high season was fast approaching and they knew that their wealthy and influential passengers would be arriving soon and would be expecting an opulent vessel to take them from Wickford to their "summer cottages" in Newport. They leased the "What Cheer" from the Providence- Fall River line and used her until the Tockwogh's ultimate replacement "The General" could be made ready for the run.

The General was always called the most popular boat that made the run between Wickford and Newport. But, for what it's worth, this Swamp Yankee prefers the classic lines of the side-wheelers to the more modern look of prop-driven vessels like The General. As I said before, although I never knew watchman Cozzens, I

bet he wishes the Tockwogh had never burned and had been able to continue gliding across Narragansett Bay each day. I've got to agree with him.

Printed in the North East Independent 11/22/01

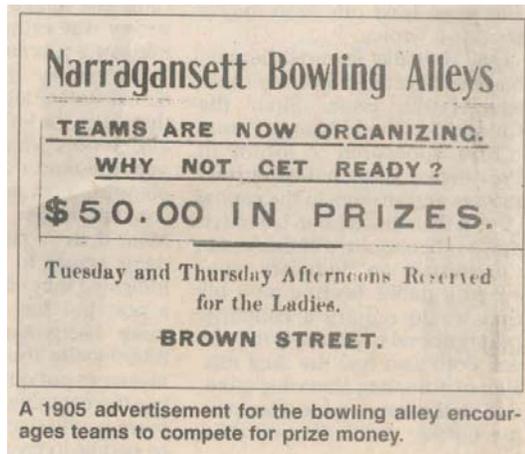


PHOTOS COURTESY: THOMAS PEIRCE

Above is a rare photo of the remains of the *Tockwogh* after the devastating fire in 1893. Below is a view of the ship steaming across the bay to Newport in 1892.



## Bowling on the Bay

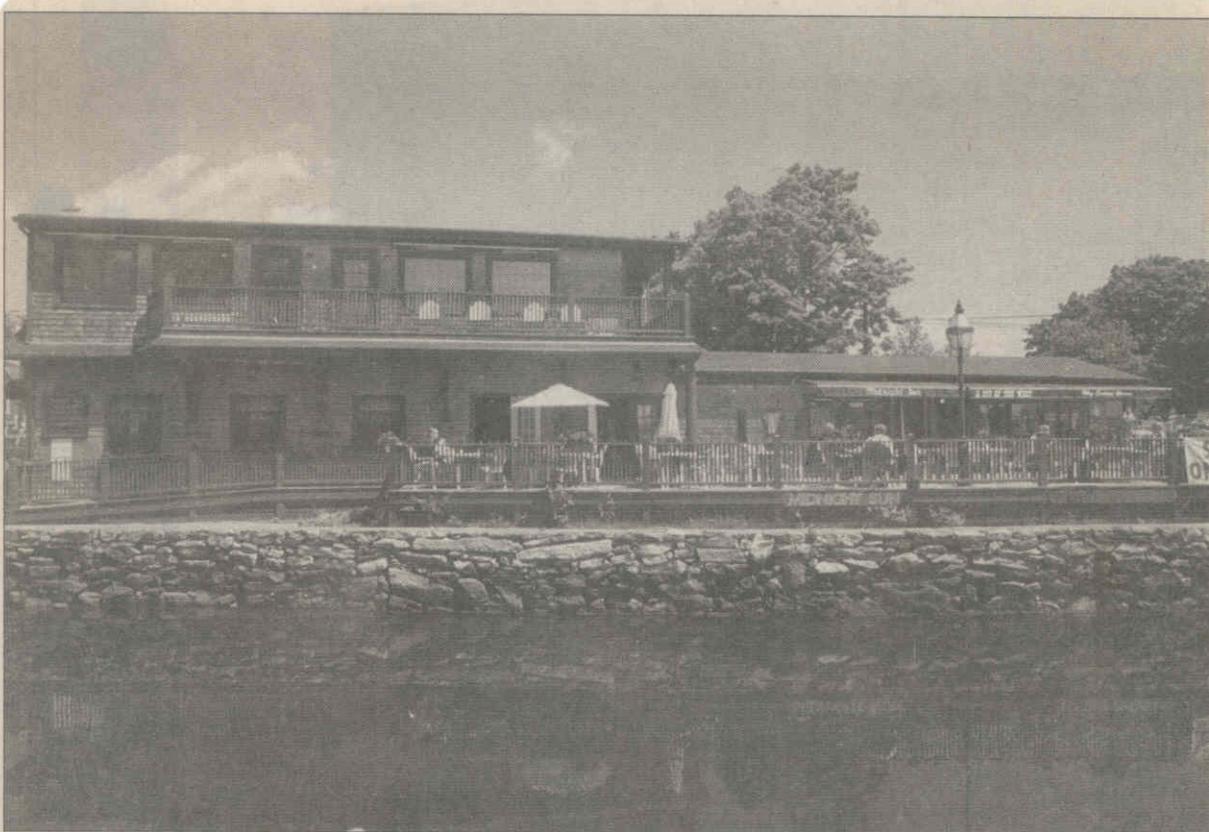


I think I can state with a undisputable amount of certainty that when the average citizen of our fair town thinks about bowling, Wickford is not the first place that comes to mind. But, as all the old-timers in town can tell you, Wickford, was in fact, the site of one of southern Rhode Island's first bowling alleys. As the accompanying advertisement from 1905 attests, the Narragansett Bowling

Alleys operated on Brown Street in the "Old Quaint & Historic" village.

The Alley was located in the building which now houses the Brown Street Deli. A knowledge of this fact goes a long way in explaining the shape of this Wickford landmark. The Narragansett Bowling Alleys was a three lane affair which operated from the turn of the century until the early 1950's when, then owner, Harold Seavey, closed the alleys to expand his newsstand/lunch counter into a full fledged drugstore which competed with the venerable Doc Young/Earnshaws establishment on the other side of the bridge. Mr. Seavey had purchased the whole "shooting match" from the building's previous owner, Joseph Sealey, in 1932. Mr Sealey, who had operated a variety store and luncheonette there, as well as the bowling alley, for decades, was famous for his ice cream which drew people from all over the area. As an aside, the similarity between Messrs. Sealey and Seavey's names has been, understandably, confusing the issue for amateur historians for just as many years.

So the next time you and your family head out for an afternoon or evening of fun up on Post Road at the fine Wickford Lanes, stop a bit and think of people, 100 years ago, doing just that same thing down on the waterfront in Wickford.



This building that now houses Waterfront Grille once held a three-lane bowling alley.

PHOTO: JAMES RUS

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

## The E. E. Young House

As a part of our continuing effort to eventually take a gander at all of the historic homes in our fair town's central village of Wickford, this week we'll stop at Doc Young's place at 71 Pleasant Street.

As regular readers of this column already know, E. E. "Doc" Young was the most well known of a number of pharmacist's who called Wickford home during the first third of the twentieth century. As we learned a couple of weeks ago, Young's drugstore is the predecessor to the Earnshaw's Drugstore that so many of us frequent today.

"Doc" Young's home was built in 1895. Tradition has it that Young had it built as a wedding gift for his new bride. The home is a cross-gambrelled "Shingle" styled affair with Tuscan accents. The home's obvious focal point is the beautiful oval entry window. Its architectural style is somewhat unique to the village. I'm sure it's a safe bet that the new Mrs. Young was duly impressed by this exceptional wedding present.

I guess I could have chosen a somber photo of E.E. Young to accompany this article. But instead I chose a caricature of the good druggist done by his Pleasant Street neighbor, the artist Paule Loring. Loring was the "Don Bosquet" of his day, and he worked for the Providence Journal as an illustrator and cartoonist for more than forty years. I think that this sketch, done at the very beginning of that long career, captures the essence of Young more astutely than any photograph ever could. He was known as a loveable old curmudgeon of a man by the community that depended on him so. You see, the nickname "Doc" is not one given to him by accident; he earned it. Back in a time long before the term "universal healthcare" was coined, well before health insurance and HMO's, druggists like Young were as close to a doctor as the less affluent members of society would ever get. He

dispensed care, counsel, and advice as well as pills and elixirs. "Doc" Young meant a lot to a lot of people. And that, even more than his former home, is his legacy.

In an interesting aside to this tale, the little fellow sitting at the soda fountain in the Loring sketch was known as NEHI and appeared often in his work. I know little about this character, although the phrase "knee-high to a grasshopper" does come to mind. Are there any more enlightened folks out there who can tell us all about Paul Loring's little pal NEHI. If so, please contact me at the paper or at my new e-mail address, [cranston@wickford.com](mailto:cranston@wickford.com).

Printed in the North East Independent 11/29/01



PHOTO: JAMES RUSH

Eliphalet E. "Doc" Young, according to locals, had this house at 71 Pleasant St. built as a wedding gift for his bride in 1895.

## Governor Elisha Dyer Jr. and the Beechwood House

I guess all of us who live in town are familiar with the magnificent building which houses our senior center. It sits proudly next to the town beach at Cold Spring as it has for nearly 130 years. Maybe you've gazed at it as your children played in the sand and wondered about its history; or perhaps you've even gone inside for a meeting or a craft sale and been amazed by the opulence that is evidenced by its wonderful wrap-around porch and decorative woodwork, both inside and out. And if the old real estate adage "location, location, location" is as important as they say it is, well then, what kind of person could have owned such a home? Well that gentleman was Governor Elisha Dyer, another well-to-do Providence politician and businessman, who like so many others of substance who came before and after him, fell in love with Wickford and its environs and just had to summer here. You see, our senior center was once the summer cottage of the families of Gov. Dyer and his wife, the former Nancy Viall.

Elisha Jr., was born in 1839 in Providence to Gov. Elisha Dyer Sr. and Anna (Hoppin) Dyer. Not only was Junior's dad the governor of the state, he was also a very wealthy mill owner and businessman, and no expense was spared in young Elisha's education. He spent his youth going to a private school in New Hampshire and then on to Brown University where he received a degree in Chemistry. His education was interrupted, as many young men's were, by the outbreak of the Civil War. He served in the Light Infantry as an aide-de-camp to his father, who was given an officer's commission, and eventually rose to the rank of Colonel. But an injury sustained at a battle at Easton PA, ended his military career in 1861. From there he travelled to the safe haven of Europe to finish his education. He eventually received a PhD in chemistry from a university in Germany and returned to the states as the war ended. He

spent the last year of the Civil War as the military aide-de-campe to the then Governor of the state, James Smith.

After the war was over, Elisha joined his father in the family business as chief manufacturing chemist, although he continued in the state militia as a reservist, retiring finally in 1895 as a brigadier general.

Although Elisha Jr. was primarily a businessman, he, like his father before him, had been bitten by the political bug and spent most of his adult life in public office. He served as a state senator, representative, Providence Alderman, and school committee member. His political career reached its zenith in 1897 when he was elected Governor of the state. He subsequently was reelected to serve two more terms.

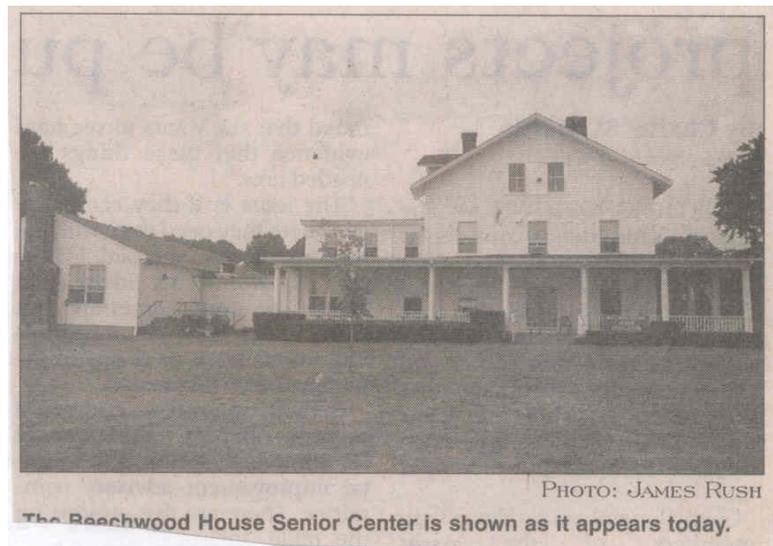
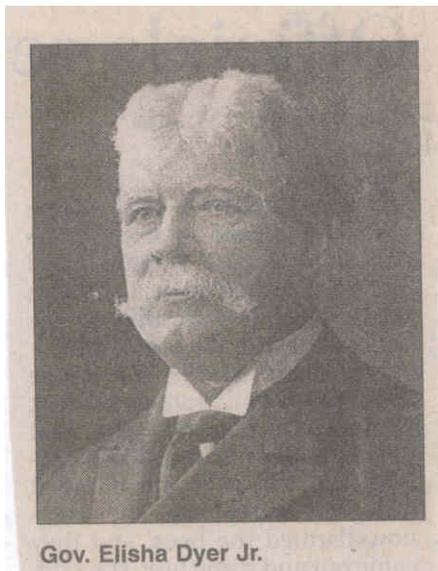
What's all this got to do with the senior center you are probably asking. Well, you see, in 1873, 34 year old Elisha and his family decided they needed a nice cool place to go to in the summer, with a sea breeze, where you could escape the incessant heat of the big city of Providence. They settled upon Wickford and had their summer home constructed on the water's edge at Cold Spring. There are many instances in the old stories of the village where the governor is mentioned as sitting on his porch enjoying his retirement, although he was not one to settle down; he having rejoined the state senate after leaving the governorship. In effect Elisha Dyer Jr was the first senior in town to enjoy our senior center. Elisha's last summer in Wickford was the summer of 1906; he died in November of that year at home in Providence.

After the death of the Governor, the majestic summer home became an inn, which catered to the many out-of-towners who summered at Cold Spring. Its proximity to the Cold Spring House, a resort hotel built by Thomas Pierce in 1891 made it an easy place to fill up each summer. It was run for a time by the Benson family who specialized in genuine Rhode Island clambakes. It was

known as the Belle-Court Inn, a view of which is shown in the accompanying photograph. The building eventually became a part of the Cold Spring property and was lived in by the Records family as they ran the adjacent hotel. In the late 1960s, as the Cold Spring Hotel was closing and being demolished, the town purchased the Beechwood House from the Records family and began its transformation into the wonderful senior center it is today.

Occasionally, when I'm at the beach with my boys, I'll look over at the Beechwood House and try to imagine it as it was 100 years ago, when an old Civil War veteran and former Governor sat on the big porch with his cronies and plotted his next career move.

Printed in the North East Independent 11/29/01



## Shipbuilding in Wickford

Greetings Readers! Today we are going to take a gander at a subject which has fascinated me since I was just a young lad exploring the shoreline and coves of Wickford with both my childhood friends and my earliest guide through our fair town's history, my grandfather. The subject is shipbuilding, and unbeknownst to many, it was a major industry in "The Old Quaint and Historic" from 1790 to about 1850.

Before we get started looking into the construction of sailing vessels in Wickford, let's get a little background information on exactly what types of sailing vessels we are talking about. All the major boats built in Wickford during that sixty year timeframe fall into four general classes: sloops, schooners, brigantines (or more commonly brigs), and ships. The first, and most commonly constructed hereabouts, the sloop, is a small one-masted vessel rigged fore and aft (the sails largely rigged parallel to the hull of the boat) with a jib, mainsail, topsail, and sometimes staysails. The next in size is the schooner, which is a vessel with two or more masts rigged, like the sloop, fore and aft. The third type of vessel constructed here in Wickford is a Brig, which is a vessel with two masts each carrying at least three sails, but square rigged, unlike the sloop and schooner. A square rigged vessel has its sails rigged, for the most part, perpendicular to the hull of the boat. The fourth and final type of vessel built here is a ship. Nowadays the word "ship" has become a generic term, but to be a ship in the classic sense of the word, a vessel would have to have a bow sprit and at least three square rigged masts carrying at least three sails each. A ship was truly a magnificent vessel and, although there were some very large schooners, was the biggest thing on the ocean at that time. So there you go, the "Swamptown Approved" abridged version of sailing vessel identification; now you can amaze the uninitiated with your abilities the next time you're looking at sailboat pictures.

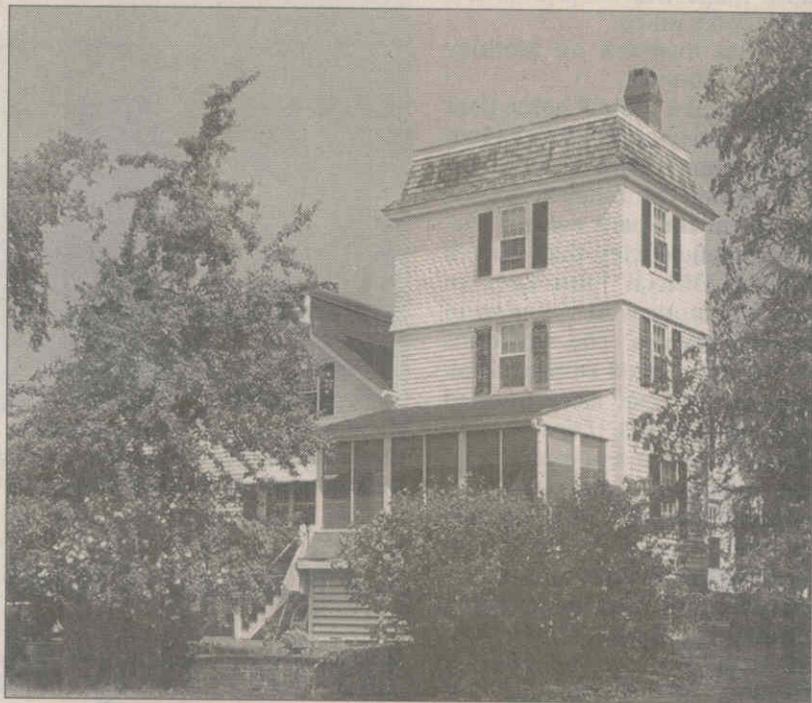
According to the Abstract, "Ships Registers and Enrollments of Newport RI" of which Wickford was an ancillary port, 43 vessels of substantial size were constructed in the harbor during this timeframe. For a sailing vessel to be considered substantial it would have had to have a "burden" of over twenty tons. Add these forty-three vessels to the literally hundreds of smaller ones built in the area and it is easy to see that boat building was, indeed, an important industry hereabouts. The largest of all, the Ship "Union" was an amazing 212 tons. To get a feel for its true size, consider that the average 25 ton sloop is about 40 feet in length. This, the sole ship built locally was preceded in size by six brigs, the largest of which was the "Atlantic" which weighed in at 137 tons. They were preceded in size by 8 schooners. The biggest of those was the 100 ton "Elizabeth and John". Finally comes the 28 sloops, of which the "Fame" was the largest at 89 tons. If any of you readers are interested in a complete list contact me at the paper.

All these sailing vessels were built at one of four local shipyards. Sadly, little is known about them, as a matter of fact, the exact location of one is still a mystery. Also unfortunate, is the fact that the abstract does not tell us at which yard each boat was built, only the name of the village in which it was constructed. I'll pass on to you what little I know of these yards. One was located at the end of present day Main Street, another was located at the present day site of the Gregory Mill Building (Gold Lady Jewelry), a third was located on the Mill Cove at an unknown site, more than likely somewhere off of present day Fowler Street, and the fourth was located off of present day West Main Street at the site of the Captain Vincent Gardiner House (90 West Main). So the next time you're filling up at the Mobil station, take a look across the street and try to imagine a group of determined men crafting a big three masted schooner.

Finally, today, this graduate of N.K.'s class of 1975 would like to congratulate his fellow classmates Messrs. Fage and Murray on their recent promotions. And Bravo to the powers-that-be at the town hall for doing the right thing by appointing these two

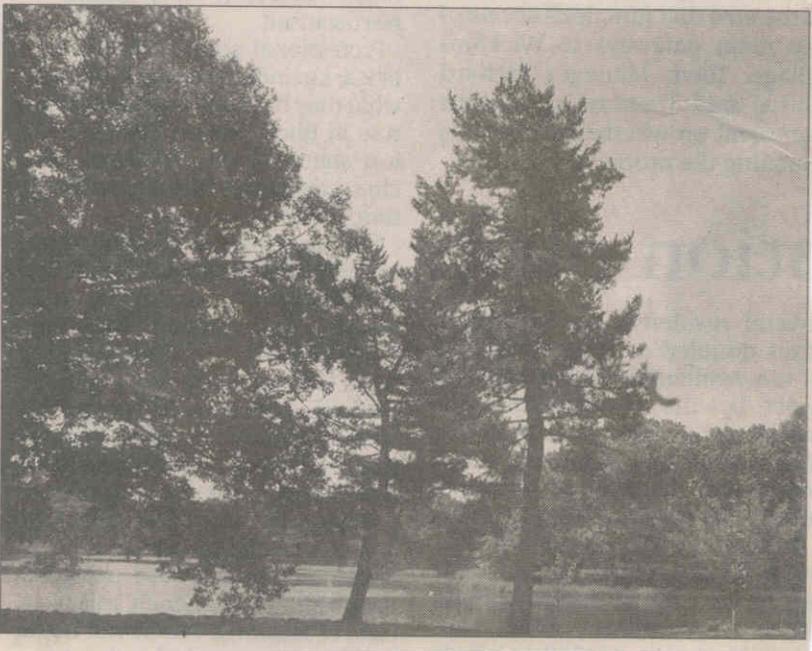
able local lads.

Printed in the North East Independent 7/26/01



PHOTOS: JAMES RUSH

The site of the Capt. Vincent Gardiner House at 90 West Main St. (above) and the cove behind it (below) were the site of one of Wickford's four shipbuilding businesses between 1790 and 1850.



The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

## The Wickford Diner

Any one who has taken a walk through Wickford lately couldn't have helped but notice that there is a passel of activity going on at the Wickford Diner. (Well, as my wife might say, anyone who is as inherently nose-y as this particular Swamp Yankee is would notice it.) There are carpenters and workman crawling all over the ancient little eating establishment. That's right faithful readers, this little diner rightfully qualifies as a historic spot. At around eighty years old, she bests most of the folks who have dined in her for longevity. Let's take a quick look at the history of the Wickford Diner.

The Wickford Diner began her life parked in the middle of the birthplace of diners, the big city up north, Providence. Her tenure in our capital was a short one though, for by the 1930's she was firmly entrenched on Bridge Street (Brown Street) here in "Ye olde quaint and historic". As its plain to see by the accompanying photograph, she wasn't always at the spot we have come to expect her. She spent her first twenty years parked next to the old library in the spot that is now taken up by the western half of Earnshaw's Drugstore (I'm afraid I'll never get used to calling it Brooks). With the 1952 construction of the Earnshaw's drugstore, the Wickford Diner made her short journey across the street to her present location. And there she has set for the last fifty years serving up "vittles" to more than one generation of hungry North Kingstownites.



So the next time you're strolling through town, take a gander at the old diner as she is again transformed for a few more decades of "eggs over easy and stacks of flapjacks". Go soon though, before the recently uncovered original siding is lost from view again. Close your eyes and imagine a time long ago when the hard-working men who were building Quonset Point sat here side by side with quahoggers, fishermen, and mill workers and enjoyed a "hot cup o'joe" before heading off to their daily toils.

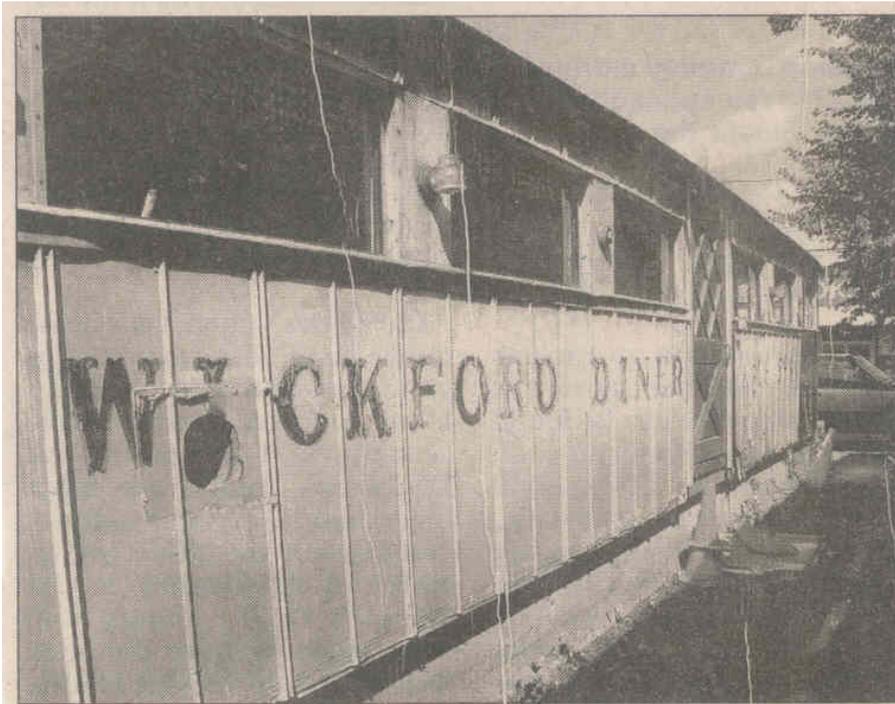


PHOTO: JAMES RUSH

The old sign and door, as well as the recently uncovered original siding, are testament to the diner's 80 years of service.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

## The Samuel Brenton Milkhouse

We've spent lots of time poking and prodding the historic record in an attempt to get at the stories behind some of the oldest notable structures in our fair town. Let's shift our focus this week and take a gander at what must be among "Ye Olde Quaint and Historic's" smallest historic buildings; the Samuel Brenton Milkhouse.

Why, if you were just to cast a quick glance at this little wooden outbuilding, you might take it to be nothing more than a mere garden shed; granted it's a nice one, but most wouldn't give it a second thought. A more curious soul might ask around a bit, and find that the little shed once had a former life as the milk house for the family farm which helped to support and feed the occupants of the wonderful colonial home just in front of it. It was here that all the implements necessary to run a home dairy operation were stored. Butter would have been churned here; cheeses, recently pressed, would have been aging on a shelf. A couple of milk pails and perhaps an old three-legged milking stool might have been stored in the corner of this little building made in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and framed with rugged pit-sawn beams that stand as straight as the day she was put together.

If you were to nose around a bit more, you'd begin to uncover an even more amazing story regarding this little structure. It may be that this *is* New England's smallest dwelling house. You see, back in the late 1700's/early 1800's, even a small farm was apt to hire on a farmhand or two. The records show that here in southern RI and in nearby Gardiner's Island, NY the tiny house for one person was occasionally found. This arrangement offered privacy to both the farmer's family and his hired man; (Often these folks would end up bunking with their employers if there were no other accommodations) heating expenses were low and if another hand was hired, another tiny home could be constructed. It has always been thought that all of these little one-room structures with an equally small upstairs sleeping loft were long gone, but when the old milkhouse was restored in the early 1960's into a garden shed by the Lambert

family, an amazing discovery was made. Up in the little upper loft area, the "remains of an ancient rope bed were found and in the walls\_were cleverly concealed secret compartments." This one's a tough one to prove, but perhaps, "Ye olde Quaint & Historic" possesses the tiniest little historic home in all of New England. Imagine that!

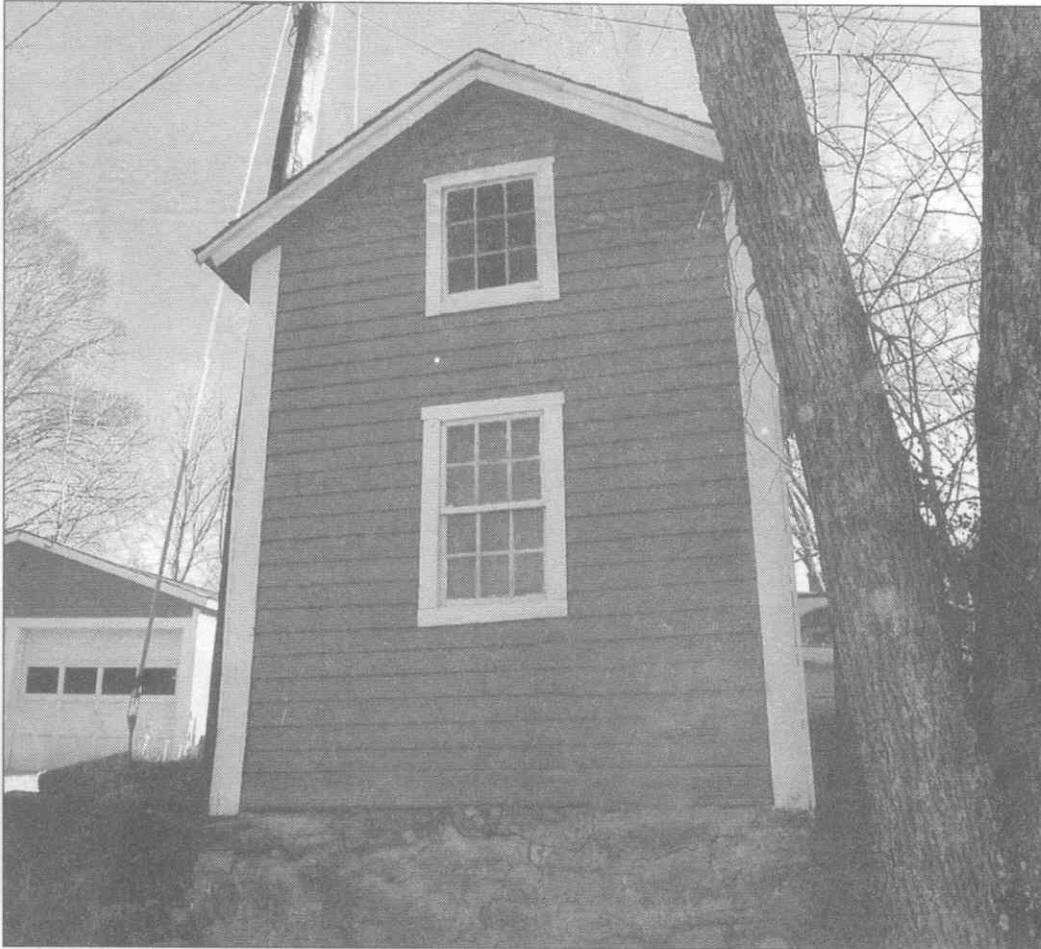


PHOTO: JAMES RUSH

**This small garden shed previously served as a milk shed, but also may have been used to house a farmhand. An old rope bed and some hidden compartments were found in the building's small upper loft during its conversion to a garden shed in the 1960s.**

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

## The Nicholas Spink House

As a part of our continuing effort to take a gander at all of the old houses in "Ye Olde Quaint and Historic" this week's column concern's the Nicholas Spink house on West Main Street in the village.

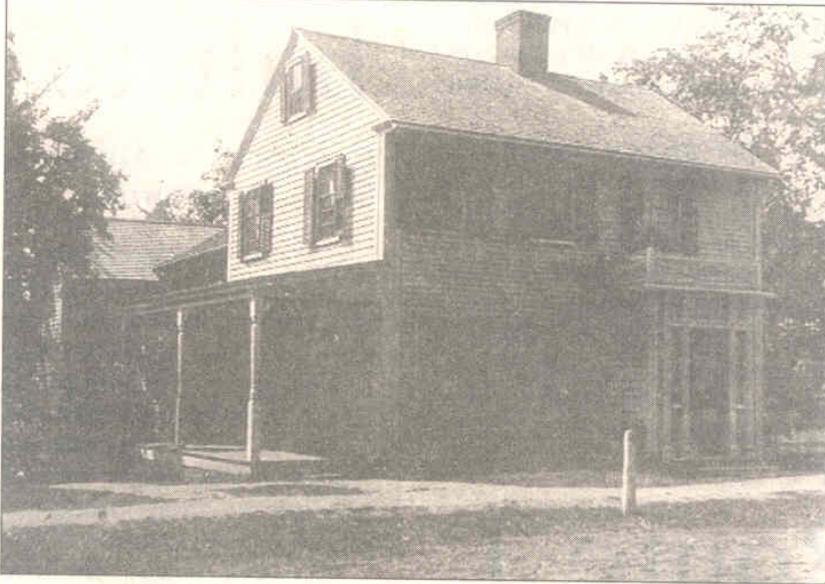
Around the time of the Revolutionary War all the land on the north side of the "Grand Highway" (West Main Street/Main Street) in the area which later became known as "Quality Hill" was a part of the fairly substantial Boone Farm owned by Samuel Boone. Upon Sam Boone's death in the 1790's most of the land was bought up by the Chadsey Family and eventually became the property of "cutting-edge" farmer Alfred Chadsey. (Featured in a past column) A small parcel of land though, remained in the Boone family when it was passed down to Ann Boone, the wife of a local lad, Nicholas Spink.

Spink was a milliner, better known as a hatmaker, and built his handsome little home, with its attached hat shop, around 1796. It doesn't take much, to stir the imagination to images of women trying on fancy "Sunday-go-to-meeting" hats or men donning a practical and sturdy work hat in the hat shop behind the house.

An interesting addition to this story is that Ann and Nicholas' namesake and grandson, Nicholas Boone Spink, eventually moved from Wickford back to the Spink ancestral home in south Quidnessett, the Samuel Spink farm and built it into one of the premier farms in the region. That house, built in 1798 was eventually used as Navy housing in the Keifer Park section of Quonset Point. But that's another story for another time.

The Nicholas Spink house was, ironically, eventually rejoined to its Boone farm roots when the home was purchased by the family which eventually came to own the Chadsey Farm. In 1941, George C. Cranston Jr. purchased the Bryson Place, as it was then called and added to the family homestead. Rejoined to the old Boone farm land it,

eventually, in 1958, became the first RI home for a certain history columnist when his father left the navy and moved his young family back to the Wickford he loved.



Above, the Nicholas Spink House is pictured around 1905. West Main Street in Wickford can be seen in the foreground. Below is the house as it appears today.



The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

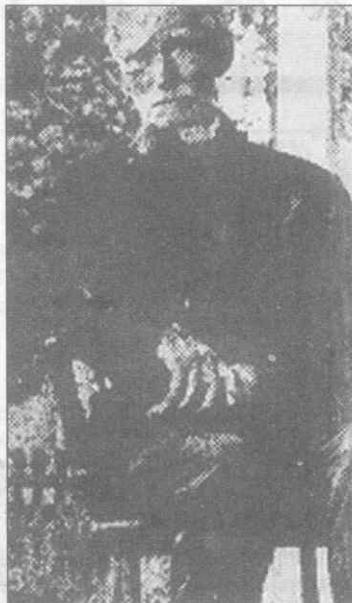
## The Fowler/Wightman House

I guess one of the most unusual things you'll see in downtown Wickford, at least in the last two hundred years or so, is a vacant lot. The densely populated little former island just isn't a place where such a thing generally roosts for long. But just such a rare bird has existed for the last fifty-three years at the corner of Main and Fowler Streets. We took a cursory look at it way back at the very beginning of this column's life in a piece on historic gardens. Let's go back now, and examine this unusual phenomenon more closely.

The last time this parcel of land had stood vacant was way back in 1769, when Benjamin Fowler decided to build his big house here on The Grand Highway (now Main Street) at its intersection with the little lane which would someday bear his name. Now those of you who are regular perusers of these writings will already know that old Ben Fowler, along with the Phillips Family, basically owned everything in Wickford at one time or another. He was truly a man of substance and his rather substantial home (shown in this rare circa 1910 photograph) reflected that fact. Tradition holds that Fowler began his Narragansett Bank in the east end of the home as well as a small shop which sold "West India Trade Goods". Fowler's daughter eventually married local lad and silversmith Peleg Weeden, who, while he lived across Main Street, sold his handmade jewelry there as well. Upon Fowler's death, the home became the property of his daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Peleg Weeden. In turn the Weeden's daughter, Mary, married another Wickford boy, Thomas Wightman and the house eventually became theirs. Mary and Thomas had nine children, some of whom did not marry. Upon the death of Thomas and Mary, these spinster ladies and bachelor men, along with some widowed sisters, inherited the home and lived there together. At that time, one of very few alterations was made to the house. The big bay window (seen in the accompanying photo) was added just above the front door. Wightman family tradition holds that these Wightman sisters would take turns looking out the big window watching the world pass by on busy Main Street. 1918 left only brothers James R.S. (a widower and former sheriff) and long time bachelor and master tailor Christopher F. Wightman left

of the original nine. With James' death in early 1919 Christopher was left alone; his grandniece Fannie V. (Baker) Barber and her husband Russell took over his care. On November 29, 1923 Christopher joined his family in heaven, he was buried alongside them in the plot shared by the Fowlers, Weedens, and Wightmans, adjacent to the old Narragansett Church. He was nearly 97 years old and had lived out his life in the house in which he was born. He passed that home down to Fannie, and by doing so, allowed it to retain the distinction of being the only colonial home in the village to still be in the hands of its original builder's family. Sadly, the Barbers did not have long to enjoy it. It was severely damaged by the great 1938 hurricane, and they never were able to move back in. It sat empty for about ten years until it was demolished around 1949.

The site of the big house is a garden now. Beautiful displays of freeform floral splendor stand where Fowlers, Weedens and Wightmans once trod. Folks jog or stroll by admiringly. Somewhere, the spirit of a Wightman sister is peeking through the drapes of a big bow window and smiling at the thought of it.



Christopher Wightman, the last member of the family, lived out his entire life in the house built by his great-grandfather, Benjamin Fowler.



Above, the Fowler/Wightman house is pictured in this circa 1910 photo. The photo below is taken from exactly the same spot. The hurricane of 1938 damaged the house so badly that it had to be demolished a little more than a decade later.



## The Bell-Raising at the Wickford Baptist Church

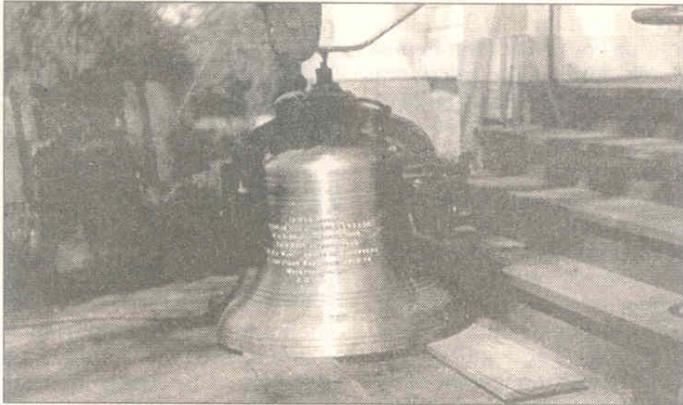
On a beautiful summer day in 1908, the good people of the Wickford Baptist Church on Main Street installed and then celebrated their recent gift of a new church bell for their belfry. The bell was a gift to the congregation from the widow Mary (Syms) Reynolds and her daughters, Harriet Rowe and Mamie McGeorge, and was to honor their husband and father, Thomas Aldrich Reynolds who had passed on in late 1905.

The belfry into which the bell was installed was added to the circa 1816 church in 1835, as a part of an expansion project which had been undertaken at that time. The 1816 version of the church originally included a steeple similar to St. Paul's just down Main Street a few yards. The original founding congregation was an offshoot of the Allenton Baptist Church, located south of Wickford, by a few miles, in the village of Allenton on Tower Hill Road. These folks, led by many of Wickford's most prominent citizens, felt that the congregation at Allenton was large enough to support two churches and chose the Main Street site due to its central location in the village. A local man, Daniel Spink, built the 1816 Church building for them. The Allenton Church, truly the "mother church" in the area, eventually spun off three more local congregations; one of which the Quidnessett Baptist Church, like its Wickford sister, is still a vital and vibrant part of the North Kingstown community.

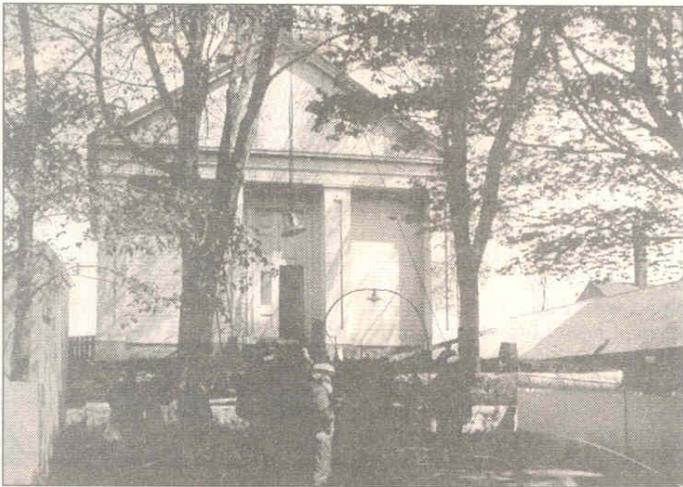
Luckily for us, the bell-raising was preserved on these remarkable photographs which accompany the column. The first shows the bell attached to a block and tackle, ready to be hoisted up into its new home. The actual raising of the bell can be seen in the next photo. The area surrounding the church is quite a bit different than it is today. Finally, we have an interior shot of the church as she appeared to the congregation as they entered it for the ensuing bell dedication service.

The sound of church bells, as you stroll through the village of Wickford, is as much a part of its special charm as the colonials homes themselves. The widow Reynolds and her two daughters couldn't have chosen a better way to ensure that Thomas

would always be a part of the town he loved so much.



The T.A. Reynolds memorial bell rests before the steps of Wickford Baptist Church, ready to be hoisted into the belfry.



The bell is pulled upward to the church's belfry.



The interior of the Wickford Baptist Church is shown as it appeared in 1908. At this time, the bell had been ringing out over Wickford for almost three-quarters of a century.

## The Daniel Lawton House

Sometimes when you go out and try to research the history of an old home, you end up with as many questions as you do answers. Such is the case with the big old apartment building that sets back from the street on Tower Hill Road, just a few hundred yards past its intersection with West Main Street. The big three-story mansard-roofed building and its adjacent carriage house have always fascinated me. If you ask around about the place, no one really knows too much about it. The reason being that it's been an apartment house for so long that hardly anyone left around remembers it as anything else. That was not always the case.

In researching the history of the building, I was able to come to the conclusion that it was built in the late 1870's by Daniel Lawton and his wife Phebe. Daniel had purchased the land from the widow Sally Freeborn; former wife of local silversmith Noel Freeborn. Freeborn was a silversmith of some note and folks came from all over the region to purchase his handiwork. The Freeborn's lived in the village of Wickford's only brick home down on Main Street. I'm uncertain exactly what they used the land for, but old maps do seem to show a barn on the property. Perhaps he kept livestock there rather than down in crowded Wickford. What is certain, is that they were an affluent and influential family; that is while Noel was alive. The story goes that for a time after his death, Sally and their only daughter Eliza were required to slowly sell off their things in order to survive in a world that knew nothing of social security and pensions. Eventually this piece of land went on the block as well. Prior to Noel Freeborn's ownership, the land was owned by Boone Spink (Now that's a name isn't it, right up there with Cranston Hammond.), his wife Ann, and his sister Hannah. The land's history can be traced all the way back to the Boone Farm, which at one time included much of the land between Tower Hill, West Main, and Phillips Streets.

Soon after purchasing the land from the widow Freeborn, Daniel Lawton had the big three story mansard-roofed home constructed. He called it "The Bayview House". I'm sure this was because back then much of the village was still fairly

treeless and Wickford Harbor could easily been seen from the upper floor of this home, which was set up on the top of the hill that overlooks the village. I have been unsuccessful in my attempt to find out much about Daniel Lawton. Much of this problem stems from the fact that in the late 1800's there were, at the minimum, three or four different Daniel Lawtons residing in town. The only certainty about the man is that in 1888 he moved to Lincoln and sold his big home to mill tycoon Robert Rodman. Or did he? Perhaps he sold it to the young grandson of Robert Rodman, who was also named Robert Rodman? The younger Robert also had a son Robert Jr. This is a perfect example of the bane of history buffs and genealogists the world over; a story with potentially four different Daniel Lawtons who perhaps interacted with one of three Robert Rodmans. The proverbial "Gordian Knot" all over again.

Leaving that confusing tale behind us, Robert Rodman (I'm betting my money on the mill-owner's grandson; Robert the Elder already had himself a fine mansion house on Ten Rod Road. Why would he buy another?) eventually sold "The Bayview House" to a member of the family that owned much of the surrounding land already. In 1895 Charles Talbot, relation to William Talbot, for whom the area was eventually named, decided he, too, needed a big summer home to get away to and bought the house from Rodman. New York City-dwelling Charles and his family would spend many a summer here, along with the rest of the Talbot clan, picnicking at the beach and riding "The General" over to Newport for society teas and the like. Things went on like that for decades, the big place was empty for much of the year, looked after by a local caretaker who was in charge of keeping up all the Talbot properties.

Around the middle of the 1930's the "Age of Talbot" (for want of a better moniker) was drawing to a close. The remaining Talbots sold off their summer places and faded into the memories of ages past. The big place languished for a time, until it was picked up by real estate wheeler-dealer Paul Hendrick. Mr. Hendrick knew an opportunity when he saw one. The late thirties were a time of massive local housing shortages brought on by the construction of Quonset/Davisville, and "The

Bayview House" met the same fate as most of the other Talbot holdings. Like William Talbot's big summer home and his Katydid Cottage house, 'The Bayview House" was partitioned off into apartments to meet this urgent need. Hendrick finished the place off by constructing one of his trademark carriage houses right next to the building, probably right about where Noel Freeborn's barn once stood. It stands there to this day, right next door to the old Bayview house, part of a puzzle that's a little clearer now.



PHOTO: JAMES RUSH

Daniel Lawton's home, The Bayview House, is pictured as it appears today. No longer the summer home of high society, it instead is occupied year-round by tenants in separate apartments created during the 1930s. Below is the Wickford home of Noel and Sally Freeborn, shown as it appeared in 1978. During the mid-1800s, the Freeborns owned the property that one day would be home to The Bayview House on Tower Hill Road.



## The Splinter Fleet

The phrase "The Splinter Fleet" is one that evokes a world of memories to those that count themselves among America's "Greatest Generation". To the average 21st century "Joe" it probably means little. We here in our fair town are lucky in that we have an additional connection to this bygone phrase.

Before we take a look at our local connection lets examine the vessels of the Splinter Fleet and just what they are all about. The easiest way that I can describe these vessels is to say that the submarine chasers that made up this fleet of wooden (ergo the splinter moniker) ships were the big brothers to the more famous PT boats. At 110 to 115 feet they were thirty to thirty-five feet longer than the more glamorous Patrol Torpedo boats (As a matter of record, the PT boats owe their glamorous reputation more to their JFK connection than to any inherent difference between these two classes of vessels.) and a few knots slower. They were armed with 3" 50mm cannons as well as a large array of depth charges. Their very reason for being was to harass and disable Germany's potent and powerful U-boat fleet, which, at the onset of 1942 when the sub chasers were rapidly being put to sea, was roaming the Atlantic virtually unopposed. The normal compliment on a sub chaser was 3 officers and 24 enlisted men. By the end of the war, thousands of men had served on the 438 suchasers which patrolled the seas from the Philippines to the coast of Rhode Island.

So that's the story of the "Splinter Fleet" in a nutshell. So what's the local connection you ask? Well, in early 1942, as America frantically geared up for war, all the big shipyards were backed up with contracts for building carriers, cruisers, battleships, cargo vessels and the like. So the U.S. Navy signed contracts with fifty small shipyards spread up and down both coasts and within the Great Lakes to build the vessels of the "Splinter Fleet". One of these boatyards was the Perkins and Vaughn Shipyard which had taken over the infrastructure and wharfage of the defunct Newport & Wickford Steamship Company at the end of Poplar Point in the late 1920's. The yard was run by Lincoln C. Vaughn and was used for building and repairing the fishing and

pleasure vessels that were Wickford Harbor's stock and trade before the advent of the big war. Mr. Vaughn's normal compliment of marine tradesmen was down to 25 men after all able-bodied souls had left to serve their country and the world. He sought out and secured the contract anyway, certain he could find the folks he'd need to bring the six sub chasers he had contracted to build in on time. He eventually hired 100 homebuilding carpenters and trained the already talented men to the ways of boat building. His original contract for six sub chasers was completed on time and to such a high degree of excellence that his was one of a handful of shipyards to get a second round of vessel contracts awarded. In the end, nine of WWII's sub chasers were built right here in our fair town.

At the time of their construction these nine boats were called "the biggest vessels to be built in Wickford in 100 years". I expect they were the last big boats to be constructed here. They have remained such a forgotten part of our local history, I expect, because of the fact that all the young local men of the time went off to war. They are the ones still alive to make certain the stories are not forgotten. These boats were built largely by local men too old to sign up in service to their country. They, therefore, have long since passed on into memories and are not here to be certain this part of the story is not forgotten. This is truly an important part of the marine heritage of North Kingstown and I'm proud to be able to reacquaint us all with it.

As a final tempting bit of information let me say that I have identified four of the nine sub chasers that were built here between early 1942 and the end of 1943. They are SC1065, SC1066, SC1298, and SC1299. Now SC1068 is still alive and kicking in far off Alaska and is one of only a handful of the original 438 constructed that have survived the sixty years. I'd love to be able to tell you all that she was built here in Wickford as circumstantial evidence suggests. Anyone who can help me identify the remaining five hull numbers please contact me at the paper.



PHOTO: JAMES RUSH

Wickford Shipyard, as seen today from the Town Dock on Main Street, once was home to Perkins and Vaughn Shipyard.



COURTESY: BEVERLY WOOD

After the war, the shipyard was simply known as Vaughn Shipyard, as seen in this late 1940s postcard.



PHOTO COURTESY: U.S. NAVY ARCHIVE

Shown above is a typical 110-foot subchaser exactly like the ones built in Wickford at Perkins and Vaughn Shipyard.

## **Wickford's (and East Greenwich's) Sub-chasers — the rest of the story**

Last week's article elicited so much response and brought to light so much new information, I decided to fill in the missing pieces of information this week. I heard from a number of local folks who had intimate knowledge of these fine vessels and, through the wonders of the Internet, was able to learn much about our nine members of "The Splinter Fleet". Also, thanks to the generosity of local lad Richard Bowen, who spent his boyhood on Poplar Point, we have some remarkable photos of the ships taken here at Perkins & Vaughn shipyard. First, let's take a look at what we now know about these vessels.

SC 1065 - After screening convoys to and from Pearl Harbor she participated in the invasion at Palau on Sept. 6, 1944. She remained in the Pacific until the war's end, and earned one battle star. She was transferred to the Maritime Commission 2/9/48.

SC 1066— This Wickford built sub-chaser had a distinguished war record in the Pacific and is one of the few with a complete history. She participated as a landing control vessel in the Marianas invasion, first at Saipan and then at Tinian, later at Eniwetok and Kwajalein. Late in the war she was a control vessel at Iwo Jima and then at Okinawa. Her Commanding Officer, Bernard M. Hollander, is still alive and well with a distinguished career as a trial lawyer for the antitrust division of the Dept. of Justice in Washington, DC. His Oral History of adventures aboard the 1066 (with several references to SC 1065) is on file at the Naval Historical Center, Washington DC. SC 1066 was transferred to the Foreign Liquidation Commission in May 1947.

SC 1298 - Records show only that she was converted to SC-C 1298 (landing control vessel) on 8/20/45 and was destroyed 3/6/46, reason not known.

SC 1299 — Records only show that she was transferred to the Maritime Commission on 8/12/46.

SC 1300 - Her shakedown cruise was to Guantanamo, Cuba, then assigned to Charleston S.C., from whence she did coastal patrol and convoy work for many months. She was transferred to the Maritime Commission 3/4/48

SC 1301 - After several months of escort and patrol duty up and down the Atlantic coast the 1301 was loaded aboard a freighter and taken to Scotland. She was at Omaha and Utah beaches during the Normandy invasion. She was returned to the U.S. aboard another freighter and spent five months in Newfoundland on the "Greenland Patrol". She was decommissioned in Charleston S.C., and transferred to the Foreign Liquidation Commission 8/16/47.

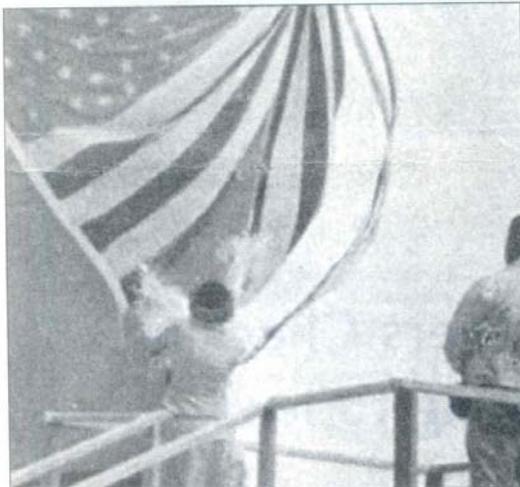
Sub-chasers 1510, 1511 and 1512 were completed in middle or late 1944 and within a few weeks were transferred to Russia. Their subsequent history is not known.

So there you have it. Although we didn't get the hoped for connection to a surviving Sub-chaser up in Alaska, we can take comfort in knowing that Wickford-built vessels took part in the invasions in the Pacific as well as D-Day itself. Besides, who knows, maybe a boat built by local lads is still pattering around off the coast of Russia somewhere. One of those local folks who worked on the vessels was Robert Allen Greene; at the age of sixteen or so, he picked up a hammer and helped built the boats that helped win the big war. From him we learn that our neighboring community of East Greenwich was the only other RI town to have a Sub-Chaser shipyard in it. The Harris and Parsons yard (later Greenwich Bay Shipyard and then Norton's Boatyard) built 8 subchasers as well. They were SC-1061, 1062, 1321-1324, and 1507-1508. Of these, I only know that the last three went to Russia along with Wickford's three. SC-1061 was transferred through the same lend-lease program to Norway, where it operated between the Shetland Islands and the occupied coast of Norway ferrying coastal spies and their communications into the Scandinavian Peninsula and escaping government officials out of harm's way. So this vessel, too, had an important history.

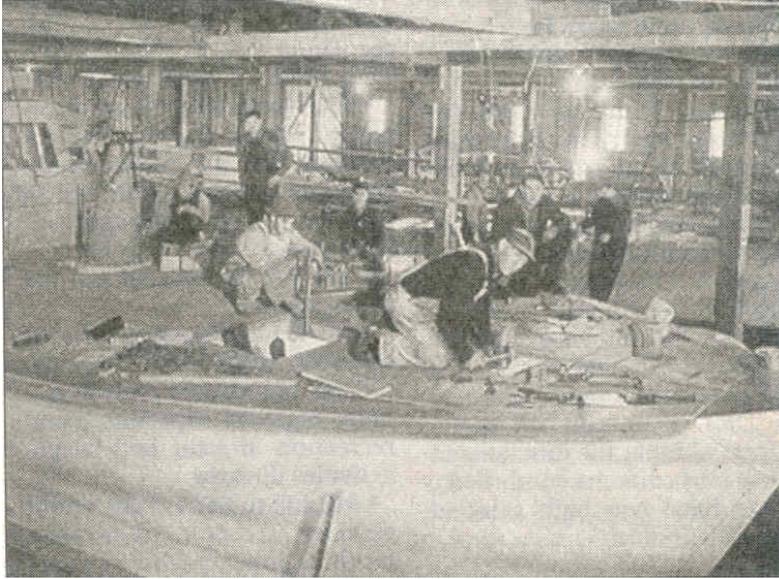
So that's the story of the local sub-chasers as I know it. Another piece of the story of "The Greatest Generation".



SC-1300 or 1301 is shown here being launched (above) and christened (below) out of Wickford Harbor.



In these photos, two subchasers are under construction inside the buildings of the Perkins & Vaughn shipyard. Can anyone identify these workers?



One of the three subchasers destined for Russia is on its shake-down cruise on Narragansett Bay.



The Perkins & Vaughn shipyard also built three 72-foot motor launches for the Navy. One of these, ML 1453, is shown here against the background of Poplar Point.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

## The Girard/Davis Farmhouse

Getting stuck at a red light isn't always bad. I've spent many a moment stopped at the light at Ten Rod Road and Tower Hill Road and spent the time happily. You see, while I'm sitting there I generally gaze off fondly at the big house at 1 Ten Rod Road. I remember it stained a dark brown and being surrounded by fields full of corn or pumpkins. If I think back farther still, I can remember sheep grazing contentedly in the pastures behind the big house and even bigger barn. I remember the joy only a little boy can feel when I'd be lucky enough to see one of the Davis' pulling a tractor out of or into that great barn. As a grown man with a penchant for local history and near-to uncontrollable daydreaming I often imagine what it would have been like fifty-or-so years ago to set back on that grand old porch and feel good about a day's work in the fields. The Davis Place, that's what we always called and that's what she's still known as to this day. Well, the Davis Place has been in the news of late. I've heard sad little whispered tales about the ultimate fate of the house that the RI Historic Preservation Commission called "a handsome reminder of Wickford's rural splendor." The NK Planning department has described it as an important aesthetic asset, and yet .....Well, let's take a gander at the history of this remarkable "grand dame" of farmhouses before we look at her future.

To really understand this house, we've got to take a look back before she was built. You see, there was a farm on this land long before this particular farmhouse came to be. This land was Thomas Family land going way back into the 1700's. As a matter of fact Ezra Thomas, a gentleman whose life we examined just a few weeks ago is buried with his family just northwest of the big barn. The Thomas property extended from what is now Dave's Market all the way to this corner and beyond. Thomas's owned great parcels of land all over town. Eventually the land passed into the hands of local merchant Anthony Turner. It seems he moved on to this parcel of land soon after selling his previous home which would one day become the summer house of the Talbot's of Talbot's Corner fame. Turner lived there until his death in 1872. I expect it was he who built the first farmhouse on the property, as well as the barns that still exist to this day.

Turner was a wealthy man and left all of his close relatives a sizeable chunk of money in his long and complicated will. But, he left the farm to Caleb and Lydia Bowen, and try as I might I can not find any kind of familial relationship between the Bowens and Turner. My research indicates that they were just folks who took care of the old widower and his farm during his waning years and this was their reward. When Caleb and Lydia joined their old friend in the great beyond some years later, the property went to their children, Edward and Agnes. Edward Bowen and Agnes (Bowen) Richter had both married and moved out west so they had little use for the place. They quickly sold it to a local merchant and wheeler-dealer Henry Girard and his wife Alice in March of 1900.

It was Henry Girard who demolished the everyday run-of-the-mill farmhouse and had the wonderful structure we enjoy today put up in its place. He transformed the Turner/Bowen farm from a working man's farm into a gentleman's farm. He eventually constructed a number of small cottages along the property's frontage on Ten Rod Road and rented them out. He rented the big barn to a saw mill concern, who farmed the farm's many acres of timber as well as cut other folk's logs up into useable lumber. His main concern on the old farm was the new house and he had it constructed in 1909-10 in a fashion befitting a man of substance during that time frame. It appears that there was smooth sailing for Henry Girard for many years. I imagine many a fancy soiree was held within the magnificent rooms of the home and on its unparalleled great porch during those "roaring" twenties. But the 1930's were not so kind to him. Alice died unexpectedly at the age of 65 in 1933. Then, along comes the Great Depression, and Henry's luck kept on going bad. He lost the house to satisfy unmet obligations in July of 1935.

This is where the Davis clan enters the picture. Twenty years prior to Henry's hard times, the James C. Davis family had their own hard luck. Forty-eight year old James Sr. left his South Kingstown family and joined generations of Davis' in the great beyond. His wife Sarah (McCall) was left with five children, the oldest James Jr. being eleven at the time of his father's passing. Lucky for her, James was prepared for the inevitable and had a sizeable trust set up to take care of his brood. When his eldest son and namesake became a man he set out to find a suitable place for him, his mother, and his

brother and three sisters. The place he settled on was Henry Girard's fancy farm and it was he who bought it at auction from the angry and despondent Girard.

James Jr. bought the farm, or more precisely I should say, his father's trust bought the farm, and all that went with it. The many rental cottages with their built in incomes became part of the trust, the big barn rented out to the sawmill folks too, were part of the Davis Trust. Most importantly to James Jr. and brother Bernard, the farmland was theirs as well and the brothers transformed the place back from a gentleman's farm into a working man's farm and worked the land for decades. I'm sure James Sr. looked down from heaven and smiled, knowing his wife and children would always be secure under his eldest son's care. It stayed precisely that way for longer than anyone would have imagined. Sarah lived with her children in the farmhouse until her death in 1947. Bernard went off to war and eventually retired as a highly decorated Lt. Colonel in the army. But the rest just stayed there on the farm. They all had their careers, but they never married; they just lived out their lives on the farm that eventually became their life. The youngest, Virginia, passed on and joined her wonderful family just a couple of years past. Now all that's left of them are the many memories and the farm that now bears their name.

In the end, the Davis brothers and sisters left their legacy to the one passion that exceeded their love for their land. The farm became the property of their beloved St. Bernard's Church and the RI Catholic Diocese. The Diocese has fantastic plans for the property; it will truly be a lasting legacy to a remarkable family and bring honor to all the ideals they loved and believed in. So what's the problem, you ask? It doesn't sound like any of these plans include a place for the wonderful house. The insidious word "demolition" keeps rearing its ugly head. It makes this old Swamp Yankee sad and I expect James, Bernard, Helen, Madeline, Virginia, and mother Sarah don't know what to make of it either. If you feel the same, let someone know; especially if you're a member of St. Bernard's. If Old James C. Davis Sr. can figure out a way to protect his family for more than eighty years, through wars, depression, and hard times a plenty, I expect we can find a way to save the home that stands as a monument to his accomplishment.



PHOTO: JAMES RUSH

The Girard/Davis farmhouse at the intersection of Ten Rod Road and Tower Hill Road today is the property of the Catholic Diocese of Providence.

Printed in the North East Independent 5/16/02

## **St. Paul's Bell Tower**

In March of 1872, The Reverend Daniel Goodwin issued a challenge to the members of his congregation, St Paul's Episcopal Church, as well as to the community of Wickford within which his church was deeply rooted. His challenge was, if the congregation could fund and construct a suitable steeple and clock tower, and if the non-parishioner members of the village could raise the funds necessary to purchase a 1,000 pound bell to hang in it, then he would purchase a large multifaced clockworks and install it in the steeple. The clock would be considered a "town clock" and would provide all in the community with a way to keep track of the time as they went on about their busy day. Just to up the ante a bit, Goodwin proclaimed that the deal was off if it could not be completed within the current year. As most often seems to be the case the good people at St. Paul's and the fine folks of Wickford were up to the challenge. In mid-December of that very same year, where once stood a simple bell cupola at the peak of the central gable, there was now the magnificent Gothic bell and clock tower, with attached vestibule, which we still see and admire today.

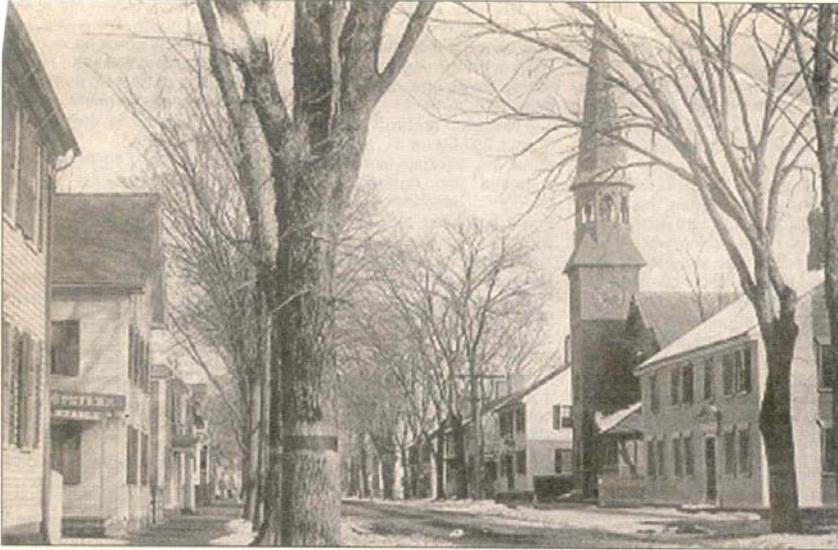
One might wonder, how was it that a simple village priest, and an out-of-towner to boot, was able to not only motivate an entire community to pull off such a feat but to also pay for such a wonderous fine clockworks as was placed in the bell tower. Well you see, not only was Daniel Goodwin an eloquent and gifted motivational preacher, he also married well. His wife Hannah, was the daughter of long time Wickford resident James Eldred; a man who ran a successful jewelry manufacturing concern which employed more than 70 local residents and who lived in a fine house, the Oaklands, just down the Street from the St Paul's Rectory (now 25 Boston Neck Road). The Oaklands was, at that time, an

even finer home than it is today. In 1916, its third floor was destroyed in a fire and the house was rebuilt as a two-story home. I expect there were many short walks between the simple parsonage and the grand Eldred Manor for Father Goodwin as his courtship proceeded.

A few short years after the dedication of the grand new steeple, the Goodwin's were called to do God's work in nearby Dedham, Mass, and the Eldred's as well as the entire community were required to bid a fond farewell to Daniel and Hannah. They were back soon, but under very sad circumstances, you see, Hannah passed under the great belltower just a short while later for the final time as she was laid to rest back in Wickford after dying suddenly in Dedham. She was buried in the Eldred family plot at Elm Grove Cemetery. I expect the tolling of the great bell and the ticking of the marvelous clock took on special meaning to Daniel and the Eldreds from that day on.

Now the clock and bell steeple paid for by the combined efforts of the Church's parishioners, its neighboring villagers, and the Goodwin/Eldred clan is in need of help again. Unfortunately, the steeple, which has been a landmark (not to mention an aid to navigation for generations of fine folk) in Wickford for 130 years is in trouble. An unfortunate mid-twentieth century renovation, which involved (shudder) aluminum siding has caused significant structural damage to the steeple itself. The siding, which does not breathe, has allowed moisture to become trapped within the structure of the steeple and the damage has been extensive. The good folks at St. Paul's have already suffered the shock of having a Church Steeple collapse (as you can see by the enclosed circa 1868 photo the Old Narragansett Church once sported a steeple, it collapsed without warning one night soon after this rare picture was taken.) and they don't want it to happen again. Let's all step up to the plate and help this important cause. Imagine what Wickford would be like without this distinctive landmark! I can't, and that's why I plan to help however I can.

Send your donations to the St. Paul's Tower Fund, 55 Main Street, North Kingstown, RI 02852, and mention that you'd like to see a plaque affixed to the tower dedicating it to the memory of Hannah Goodwin.



St. Paul's Church in Wickford is seen in the above photo circa 1900. Below is a rare photo of the Old Narragansett Church taken in 1868, a short time before the entire steeple collapsed under its own weight because of structural damage. The bell tower of St. Paul's is in danger of the same tragic end unless repairs are made soon.

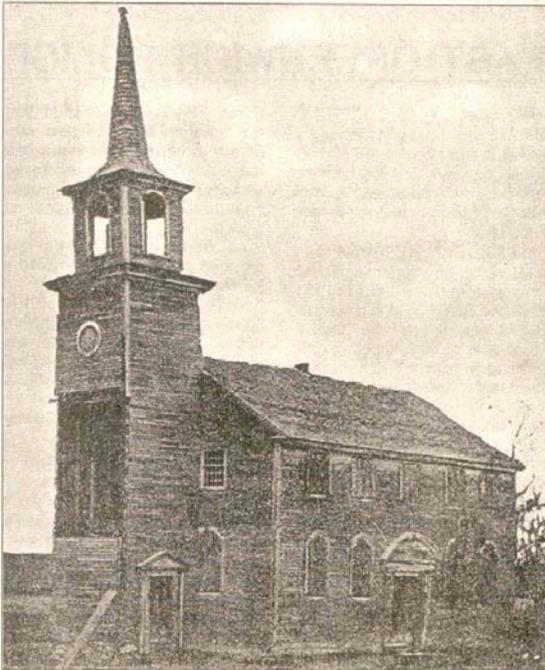


PHOTO: JAMES RUSH

The Oaklands, just down the street from the old St. Paul's rectory on Boston Neck Road, was home to the Eldred family. Hannah Eldred married the preacher at St. Paul's, Daniel Goodwin

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

## **The Hurricane of 1938 and the Creation of the NK Water Dept.**

If there's one thing that most folks take for granted these days, it's that when you turn on the faucet in your kitchen or bathroom good clear drinkable water is going to come out. But it wasn't always that way; back exactly 64 years ago this week, the good people of the villages of Wickford and Hamilton were learning this lesson the hard way.

You see, exactly 64 years ago, those folks had just gotten over the horror of the worst hurricane to ever hit these parts. The waters of the Narragansett Bay had subsided and left an awful mess. Trees were uprooted, homes were destroyed or moved off their foundations, boats were parked where no one ever imagined they could be, people were missing, families were separated, cars were swept away never to be seen again, and everything was covered in the most foul, slimy mud that you could possibly imagine. But that wasn't the worst of it, as these harried and overwhelmed folks were just realizing. Everywhere from Pleasant St to Poplar Point to Salisbury Ave. people were realizing that the truly unthinkable had happened. Everyone's well had turned brackish! No where across that wide swath of homes was there anyone with drinkable water. The delicate balance between the fresh groundwater of the land and the salty sea of the Narragansett Bay had been forever changed by the giant hurricane. It was a public health crisis of major proportions.

The elected and appointed officials of the town met in crisis mode. For the time being it was decided that the overworked men of the town's fire department would bear another burden. Each day they would make the rounds and fill up the pails and buckets which were left out on the front steps and

porches of all the citizens of the affected areas without water. That was for the short term; the long term solution required something that seemed an enormous task. Some way must be found to provide the town's people with good drinking water again.

With this daunting task in mind a group of prominent citizens began to meet informally at the beginning of 1939. By spring of that year, they were officially sworn in as members of the State sanctioned North Kingstown Water Commission. Chairman Hiram Kendall, Secretary Irving Hazard, and committee members Wilfred Kingsley, Walter Cook, and Edgar Burchell wasted no time. They immediately weighed all options and decided that designing and constructing a distribution system that would run from the NK - EG border at the Hunt River all the way down the Post Road to a Standpipe at Juniper Hill and then into the affected areas would be the most expeditious. They negotiated a contract to purchase water from the neighboring town of E. Greenwich at the rate of 7.5 cents per thousand gallons. Engineering firms and construction contractors were interviewed, Plans were drawn up, contracts were signed and work began post haste. All this was done in the evenings, night after night, as these men were volunteers and had full time jobs to go to as well; all the while the tireless volunteers of the NK fire department continued their daily ritual of water deliveries door-to-door one home at a time. It was an exhibition of community spirit at its finest.

After a mere nine months, in January of 1940, in which time miles upon miles of 12" water main was laid, a 625,000 gallon riveted standpipe was constructed, and countless homes were tied into the system, the valves were opened at the NK-EG border and clean water again began to flow into the homes of Wickford, Poplar Point, and Hamilton. Eventually, in 1942, the town would sink its own well and end its dependence on its neighbor to the north. But that was not an issue then, for after 16 long months of waiting patiently for the man from the fire department to deliver a few gallons of clean water, people's lives finally got

back to normal. But you can bet that folks who lived through that water crisis never again took that clean clear water pouring out of the tap for granted. Something to think about when you're about to grumble over odd/even lawn watering, eh?



These men are drilling North Kingstown's first well off of Oak Hill Road in 1942.

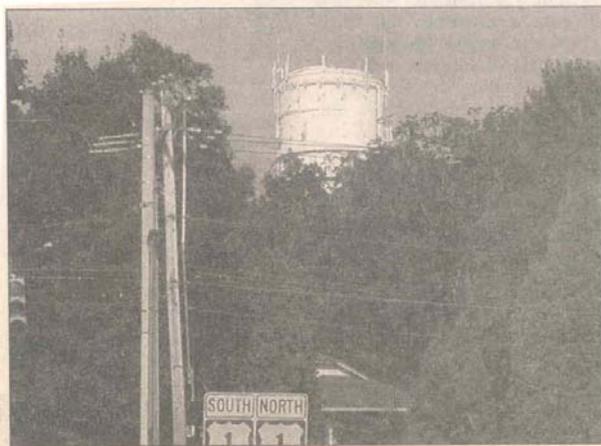


PHOTO: JAMES RUSH

The water tower at Juniper Hill, shown as it appears today, brought drinking water back to the residents of Wickford and Hamilton about 16 months after the Hurricane of 1938.



Although noted cartoonist and illustrator Paul Loring poked fun at the water system installation in September 1939, all of Wickford knew how serious a business the project was. Loring's artwork is used with permission of his family.

The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

## The Saltbox - A New England Architectural Tradition

If there is one building style that typifies New England colonial architecture, I'd say, it would have to be the saltbox. This style takes its name from the sloping gable roof that gives the house the shape of the wooden box used by folks, in colonial times, to store one of their most precious commodities, salt. The famous father & son presidential team of John and John Quincy Adams were born and lived in two adjacent salt box houses up north, in neighboring Quincy, Massachusetts. The saltbox was a typically practical New England way of getting the most "bang for your buck". It allowed for maximum useable space in the most reasonably priced format. Saltbox homes ranged in size from the fairly large two-and-a-half story affair like the boyhood home of our second president, to the simplest one room deep house that was so typical of small New England villages in the first half of the eighteenth century.

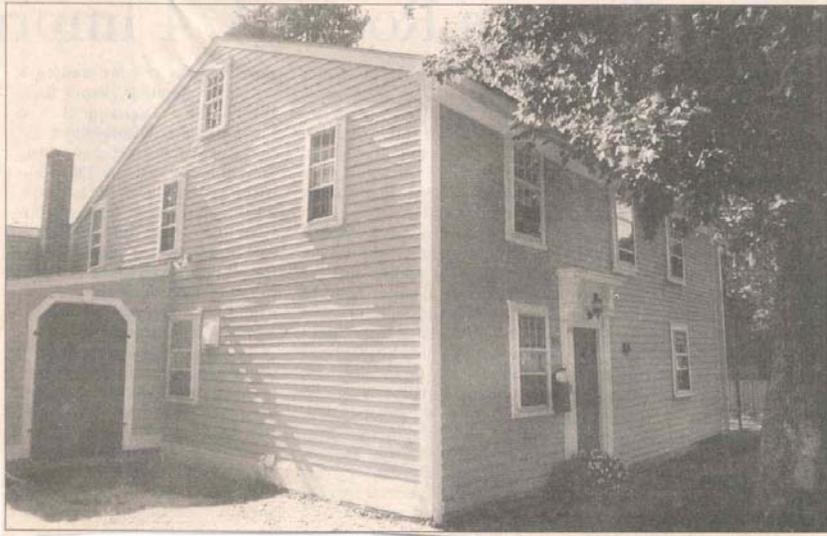
In Wickford, we are blessed with two charming examples of this very New England building style. The earliest is the circa 1750 Matthew Cooper House at 109 Main Street. Cooper was the son-in-law, by virtue of his marriage to Abigail Updike, of Lodowick Updike of Smith's Castle fame. This modest saltbox, built about the same time that young President-to-be Sam Adams was growing up in his Quincy Mass. saltbox, was his second home in the village and was subsequently used as one of the village's myriad taverns by later owners. Wickford's second saltbox was built in 1783 by Samuel Thomas and sits nearby at 85 Main Street. It was constructed during the height of the post-Revolutionary War building boom in the village, on a lot which once housed a goldsmith's shop. The often added to home once wrapped around a separate small structure which housed a privately run school. The little schoolhouse building was eventually moved across the street and incorporated into the rear part of the home next to The Greenway as an addition.

By the middle of the 1800's, the saltbox style of construction had fallen out of favor in the region. Slowly these little homes were replaced by more modern versions. Luckily though, some, like Wickford's two fine examples, survived to remind us of times long ago.



PHOTOS: WARREN A. ROWLETT

In the 18th century, the charming and economical saltbox house was typical of New England building style. These two homes on Main Street in Wickford, the 1750 Matthew Cooper House (above) and the 1783 Samuel Thomas House, are fine examples of their kind.



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

## **The Thomas/Weeden/Morgan House**

Looking at the little cottage at 115 Pleasant Street in "Ye Olde Quaint and Historic"; you'd probably never imagine the unusual saga that has unfolded within its four walls over the last 133 years. Additionally, most people would be surprised to find that this home has been in the possession of a direct descendant of the original owner for every one of those many years. Few if any, homes in our fair town can make that claim. The home's present owner, Thomas Morgan, is the great-great-grandson of the remarkable woman who first owned this home, Nancy T. (Hazard) Thomas. The story of this house is really the story of three remarkable African-American/Narragansett Indian women, and Nancy is the first of these. We'll take a look at her tale, as I know it, first.

Nancy T. Hazard was born in the Narragansett Indian tribal lands in 1817. Little can be found about her early life. The only fact which I know for certain is that by the time she was 19, she was raising a young son, named Henry, on her own, and living somewhere in the vicinity of Wickford as she was known to have been employed as a domestic servant for the well-heeled and prominent Hammond family of Wickford and nearby Hammond Hill (the area near the present day intersection of Tower Hill, Shermantown, and Gilbert Stuart Roads). At this same time, she married another member of the Narragansett tribe, a fisherman by trade, Braddock Thomas. The location of Nancy, Braddock, and young Henry's home during this time frame is unknown to me. One can only imagine what their lives were like. I expect that they both worked long hard hours to make ends meet. Braddock, working side-by-side with his fishing partner Sam Weeden, (another Narragansett Indian) harvesting the bounty of the Narragansett Bay and Nancy toiling away day after day attending to the needs of the prosperous Hammonds. They don't appear again in the permanent record until the winter

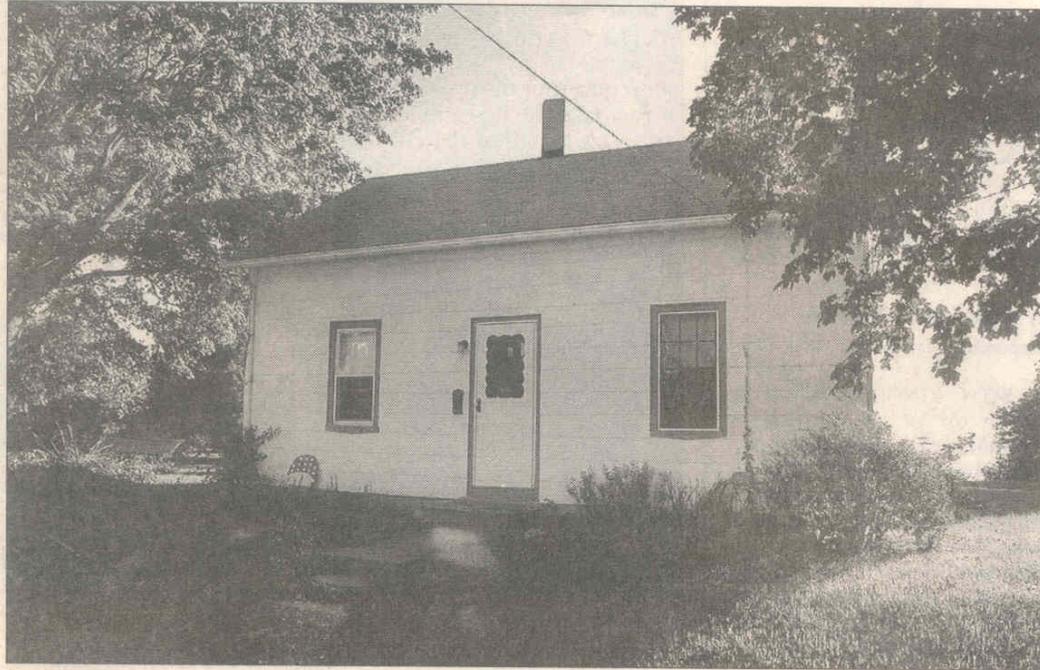
of 1858 and, as is often the case, the mark they left is evidence of a great tragedy. The consecutive entries in the town's death register for that time frame tell the tale all too well, first Braddock and then Sam are listed as "Drown'd in the Narragansett Bay". Nancy and her 19 year old son Henry were left without a husband and a father. Shortly after this tragic event, Henry married another Narragansett tribal member Nancy Perry. Henry, it appears, followed in his father's footsteps and was a fisherman. New bride Nancy, worked with her mother-in-law as a housekeeper. Somewhere along the line, Nancy Thomas and her son must have made quite an impression upon George Hammond and his bride, a member of a wealthy New York City family, Rebecca Giraud. George and Rebecca, for the most part, lived in New York, but they summered each year in Wickford along with the rest of the large extended Hammond clan. I expect, although can not prove with absolute certainty, that George and Rebecca, hired Nancy and her son and daughter-in-law as caretakers for their rarely used Wickford home. This appointment not only guaranteed regular work for the family, but also came with a wonderful bonus. The Hammonds sold a plot of land on Pleasant Street to Nancy Thomas. Rebecca Hammond even held the mortgage for her. So, in January of 1869, the land changed hands, the little house was constructed and Nancy Thomas, a 52 year-old widow, was a homeowner. Even more remarkably, in four short years, the hard working trio paid the note off and owned the place free and clear. Nancy lived out the remainder of her life in her own home, passing on peacefully in 1891.

The home was passed on by way of a will, not to Nancy's only son Henry, who was extremely ill by that time with diabetes, but to her 30 year old grand-daughter, Henry's child, Annie Elizabeth, who was married to Thomas Weeden. By this time the age of the Hammond clan had passed. Annie Weeden worked as a housekeeper for the Congdon family, who ran the Inn known as "The Narragansett House" at nearby 71 Main Street. Tom Weeden was a laborer who worked for the state department of roads and highways. When they inherited the house they had a five year old daughter, Evelyn. Before long Evelyn joined her mother and worked for the Congdons at their popular Inn.

Annie Weeden, who was well known and well thought of around town, also worked for a time in the district schoolhouse in the village. She, like her grandmother before her, lived out her life in the little house on Pleasant Street. Upon her death in 1938 at 78 years old, she had lived in the home for 69 years.

The house now passed down to Evelyn. Evelyn was married to a railroad porter named David Morgan. David worked the trains on the New York to Boston run. Evelyn continued on as a housekeeper even after the Narragansett House closed down. They had four children while in the little Pleasant Street home. Sadly, the lure of the big city pulled too strongly upon the railroad porter. He spent less and less time home with his family until eventually Evelyn divorced him. She took on the monumental task of raising her four children on her own. By all measures she succeeded in a great fashion. Evelyn lived out her entire eighty years in the little house on Pleasant Street. She joined her ancestors in 1966.

The little cottage now belongs to Evelyn's son Thomas Morgan. He, like all that came before him, has lived most of his life within its cozy confines. And he too, has added another chapter to the tale of this house. You see, just as Tom was finishing high school here in town, the Great War broke out. Tom joined up right away and shipped out before he even got to attend his own graduation. He fought in WWII, came back to his hometown of Wickford, worked a long career- at Quonset Point in the civil service and then with Electric Boat. He retired to the little cottage by the bay and lived a quiet but active life full of family and friends. Like the house itself, Tom Morgan is such a quiet modest local fixture that many don't even take note. That was until last spring, when he strode proudly across a high school stage like so many of "The greatest generation" were, all across the state and the nation, and accepted that hard earned and well deserved diploma. Nancy Thomas, Annie Elizabeth Weeden, and Evelyn Morgan were doubtlessly proud.



PHOTOS: JAMES RUSH

The house at 115 Pleasant St. (above) has remained in the hands of descendants of its original owner, Nancy T. Thomas, for 133 years. Current owner Thomas Morgan (below), her great-great-grandson, was honored this spring with a diploma from North Kingstown High School years after he left before graduation for World War II.



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

## **Brothers Build Twin Houses in Wickford**

So much about Wickford, her people and their homes, is directly tied to Narragansett Bay and the sea. This fact is true in the case of the Lewis Brothers' houses, which are identical classic late Victorian homes that sit side by side at 18 and 22 Bay St.

The Lewis family, longtime Wickfordites, always have been tied to the sea. The patriarch, John Lewis Sr., started fishing in the mid-1800s. He was a gillnetter and was quite successful at his craft. Gill-netting, to the uninitiated, uses a fairly light net with a weave just large enough to snag fish by the gills as they attempt to swim through the net. Lewis had to battle the tides, the elements and the ever-hungry sharks like the rare hammerhead shown in the circa 1915 photograph at a local dock. This big fellow, like all the rest caught by local fishermen, probably ended up as fertilizer at a nearby farm.

John Lewis' life got a little easier as his five sons, one by one, came of age and entered the family business. The family as a whole was involved in fishing, but also in the earliest stages of the town's oystering industry.

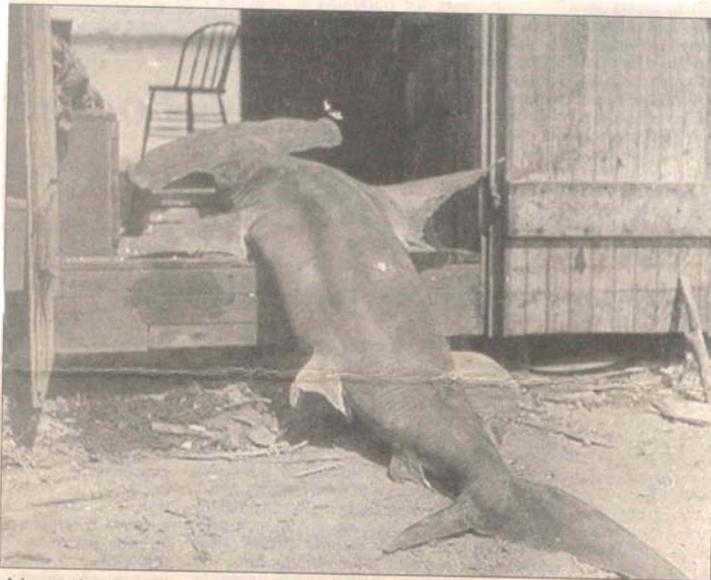
In 1895, two of those Lewis brothers, Fred and Bill, split a sizable piece of land on Bay Street and began to build homes for their families. They not only were fishermen together, though, they were Swamp Yankees as well. Why waste precious money on two different sets of architectural drawings when one would do just fine? That's how Wickford ended up with these two identical homes, side by side, built exactly opposite so that each ones entry doors were unseen by the other. (Who wants your brother to be able to see who you're inviting into your home?)

The five Lewis brothers and their enterprising father are all gone now, reunited with all the rest of the town's fisherfolk of long age at Elm Grove Cemetery. Their memories live on, though, in the hearts and minds of their many descendants who still populate

the area, and in the form of two lovely and identical homes on Bay Street near the sea in Wickford.



One of the Lewis brothers' homes is pictured around 1915.



A hungry hammerhead shark, the bane of the local fishermen and rare in this area, was photographed on the docks of Wickford around 1915.

Printed in the North East Independent 1/24/02

## The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

### The Oaklands

The "Oaklands", the majestic former home of jewelry manufacturer James Eldred and mill owner and Governor William Gregory, has popped up in this column from time to time. But until just recently, I've not had a good photograph of what she looked like prior to a devastating fire in November of 1916 which nearly destroyed this wonderful home. Well, as you can see, that has changed; so let's take a gander at the history of this wonderful manor house.

James Eldred was a man of style and substance when he decided, in 1850, that he needed a home that reflected his station in the community. His was Wickford's largest business, employing some seventy people in the manufacture of jewelry, and I expect he figured he ought to live in the village's grandest home. The recently built Hamilton Bridge allowed a person to go back and forth from the village to the lands known for ages as "The Boston Neck" without travelling all the way up and around Tower Hill and Annaquatucket Roads to do so. Eldred purchased the parcel just over that bridge and had his grand three-story Federal style manor built post haste.

Little is known of Eldred and his home's early years. By 1870, though, with the construction of the Wickford Station of the Newport to Wickford Line just across the street, the area became a busy place. The land surrounding "The Oaklands" was, by then, known as "The Circus Grounds" as each year one of the small circuses which travelled the country would have its railcars staged on a siding at the little station and set up across the street on the edge of Eldred's estate. One wonders if this common nickname elicited many a joke and a grin when our fair town's fathers decided to choose the "circus grounds" for the site of the new North Kingstown Town Hall.

All kidding aside, by the time of the Town Hall's construction, the Oaklands was no longer a private home. From 1889 to 1891, it served as the state's second Civil War soldiers' home. Arranged largely by local state senator and Civil War Veteran George T. Cranston (that name has a fine ring to it, doesn't it?), the Oaklands took the

place of the state's first Veterans home located on the good senator's (now demolished) Wickford Junction-area farm. The Oaklands GAR residents were eventually moved to the still extant Bristol, RI Soldiers Home upon the completion of its construction.

This is when Governor Gregory enters the picture. He too, felt he needed a grand home worthy of his station and bought the Oaklands after its stint as a Veterans Home. It was he who added the dramatic veranda and porte cochere. (We Swamp Yankees call it a porch and covered driveway but heck, that doesn't sound near as impressive, does it.) The Governor lived out the remainder of his life at The Oaklands, dying there unexpectedly in December of 1901, while still in office. The Gregory family stayed on at the Oaklands for a time, but eventually the place was felt to be too big and the memories were too strong and they left it. It sat empty for a while until it was purchased for use as Boy's School known as "The Shepard School at Wickford."

It was still being used as a school that fateful day, November 14, 1916 when a small blaze started in a nearby garage on the grounds. Whipped by the winds the blaze soon engulfed the garage and spread to the nearby barn which was adjacent to the Oaklands itself. By now the students and teachers of the school were aware of the fire and busied themselves by moving all the furnishings they could out of the grand house. Soon the hand pumper "Washington" and the volunteer fire brigade arrived on scene. They made every attempt to save the home, but the winds were too much and the flames leapt across from the fully engulfed barn on to the nearby home. She was nearly destroyed by the wind-whipped flames. Why the winds were so strong that, for a time, the fire chief contemplated dynamiting the mansion rather than have the flames spread into Wickford. Luckily the fire fighters got it under control before that was necessary and saved some of the homes structure.

The Oaklands was rebuilt as a two-story hipped roof building and although still grand, does not measure up to what she once was. With the exception of a stint as a resort hotel called Bellecourt Inn during Wickford's boom time of the 1920's — 30's, she has remained a private home. A private home, however, with a history like few others.

## BELLE-COURT INN

WICKFORD, R. I.

ON THE MAIN AUTO ROAD BETWEEN PROVIDENCE  
AND NARRAGANSETT.

Broiled Live Lobsters, Spring Chicken  
Soft Shell Crabs  
Steaks, Chops and Salads

Special Dinner and Supper parties serv-  
ed on short notice.

Genuine Rhode Island Clambakes  
made by an expert, and served to parties  
of 15 to 50, on two days notice.

JOHN JAY BENSON.

**An advertisement for the Belle  
Court Inn notes some of the din-  
ner choices available.**

Printed in the North East Independent 1/30/03

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

## **The Wickford Christian Science Society**

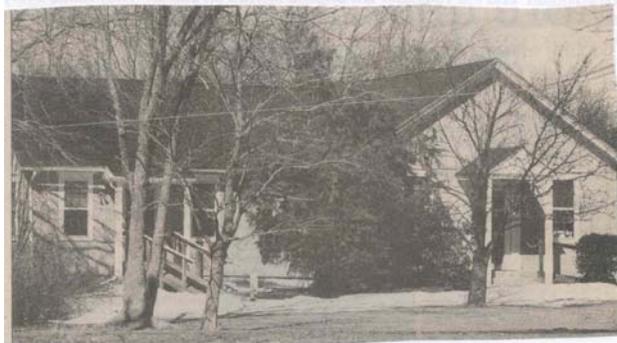
Over the years, as we've travelled through the history of our fair town, we have taken a look at a number of church buildings that have lived on after their congregations outgrew them. These former places of worship have served as homes, warehouses, retail stores, and even a Native American Meetinghouse. This week we are going to take a gander at a former church building that now serves the community as a dentist office; the former Wickford Christian Science Society's meeting house at the corner of Philips and Boone Streets.

Before we look at the life of the building, let's focus on the history of the congregation that made it the vital little church that it was. According to a history of this congregation, the first Christian Science service in North Kingstown was held aboard the yacht "Marvel" in Wickford Cove in early 1922. Later, the small congregation held its first regular service in a home on Main Street on September 22, 1922. The Mother Church in Boston formally recognized these devoted folks on August 2, 1928, at that time services were being carried out in the Avis Block. The State of Rhode Island, in turn, formally recognized them in April of 1931 and in June of that same year they purchased the little building on Philips Street from Howard and Eva Gardiner for \$10.00. They worshipped there for more than 36 years, surviving two major hurricanes as well as many a minor mishap. They outgrew the little church in 1967 and moved into their present home on Tower Hill Road in the latter part of that year. In early 1968, they sold the little Philips Street church building and officially ended an era.

The building itself, (seen in the accompanying 1944 photograph) had been built prior to its 1931 purchase by the Christian Scientists. There is evidence to suggest that it may have housed a laundry before becoming a place of worship. As mentioned, the little Church held its own through both the hurricanes of 1938 and 1954. In the '38 storm, the rear ell section was lifted right off the foundation and set down at a right angle to its original position. Sixteen years after its repair, the 1954 storm came through town and

filled the Church's interior with seawater three feet deep. Those rising tides can be witnessed in this 1954 photo taken looking down a brand new Boone Street towards the Church. In both cases, the church's dedicated communicants, with some help from the Mother Church in Boston, made things right in short order.

For the last 32 years, the former church has served as the home to a dental practice; for the vast majority of those years, the practice of long time local dentist, Jay Shehan. I do recall, as a matter of fact, saying a couple of prayers in there myself, when, as a young man, I awaited word on my latest set of dental X-rays. And I bet I wasn't the only one either.



When the 1954 hurricane swept through Wickford, water levels rose dramatically in certain parts of town, as shown by this photograph taken from the corner of Boone Street and Cranston Circle. The church itself was filled 3 feet deep with sea water.