

## The View From Swamptown

### A Microfilm-fired Trip Through Time

I'm pleased to be able to announce some exciting news for all fellow students of local history, as well as anyone out there doing genealogical research on South County based families. The good folks at the North Kingstown Free Library have recently added microfilmed copies of the *Rhode Island Telephone*, the newspaper that preceded the *Wickford Standard* here in our fair town, to its collection. Both of these two newspapers are connected through their editors, as the *Telephone* was printed and published by Wickfordite J. Warren Gardiner and the *Standard* by his son Claude Gardiner. Warren started the *Telephone* in the Avis Block in October of 1883 and worked out of that building until March of 1884 when he decided to expand the scope of his fine publication to include the booming South County village of Westerly, and every village in between for that matter. In the process, he relocated his printing press and office to Westerly, but kept tabs of the goings-on here in Ye Olde Quaint & Historic through a network of friends and relations that served as his reporters in his absence. One such "reporter" was relation Harrison G. O. Gardiner, who lived in what is now 89 West Main Street, and kept tabs on events in Wickford, even periodically writing a column titled "Wickford Reminiscences" in which he talked about the good old days in the village. Warren Gardiner doubtlessly had numerous such "reporters", as he was able to report on events in nearly every small village from Davisville south to Westerly and beyond. The *Telephone* is also chock-a-block full of interesting local advertisements and announcements such as some of the ones that accompany this column. He also kept his readers abreast of national and world events as well. And thankfully for today's genealogists, he published numerous birth, death, and marriage notices throughout each issue.

Shortly after relocating to Westerly, Warren Gardiner renamed his paper the *Westerly News and Rhode Island Telephone*, as is apparent by the accompanying masthead reproduction, but he continued to fully cover the news in North Kingstown until 1888, when, in deference to his son's new venture the *Wickford Standard*, he focused solely on Westerly. That was good news for Claude, but, I must say, bad news for us because one glance at Warren's newspaper, and you'll have no trouble deciding who, father or son, was the better newspaperman. So the next time you're at the library spend a few moments scanning the pages of the *Telephone* and travel back some 120 years or so to the villages of old. Don't be surprised though, if I'm already there before you.



Pictured is the flag of the *Westerly News and Rhode Island Telephone* from 1885. Although the paper focused on Westerly and Wickford, it covered all villages around and between the two centers of South County.



PHOTO: JAMES RUSSELL

Peleg Wightman would have expected to return to this house on Pleasant Street following a voyage. The photograph of the Melissa Babcock/Peleg Wightman home above is as it is seen today. The photo below was taken around the time of his death.



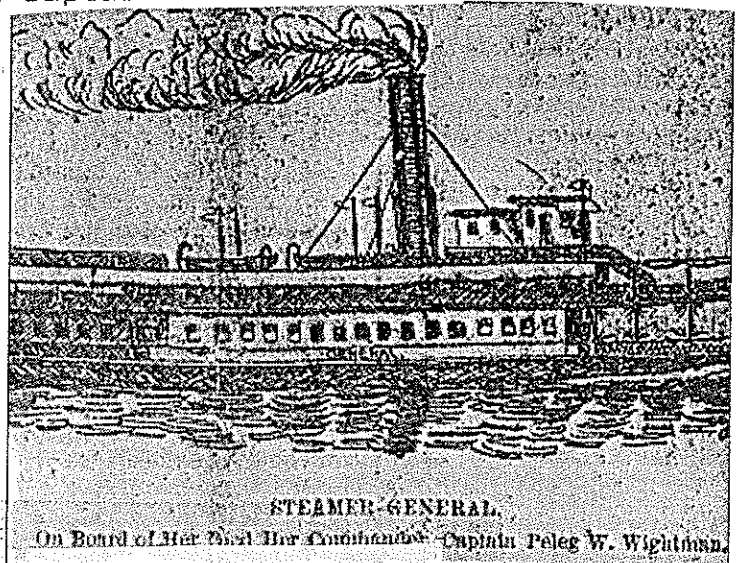
THE LATE CAPT. PELEG W. WIGHTMAN

## The Death Of Peleg Wightman.

On a cold night in February of 1898, one of Wickford's most prominent citizens met his maker while doing what he was born to do. For it was on that night that Peleg Wightman, the Captain of the steamer "General" had a heart attack while at the helm of his vessel. It was considered most ironic at the time, as Captain Wightman had succeeded Captain Allen, who had died in the same fashion at the helm of the Steamer "Eolus" just a decade or so earlier.

Peleg Weeden Wightman was born in October of 1831 in the Wightman Homestead at the corner of Fowler and Main Street (demolished around 1948). He was named after his maternal grandfather Peleg Weeden. His father Thomas Wightman was the local County Sheriff and Justice of the Peace. He was immediately called to a life at sea and began his career as soon as he was able. He was a true "Hawse-Piper" working his way up through the ranks of the mariner's trade until he received his pilotage and Captain's rating in the 1860's. In 1856, he married Catherine Babcock, and by 1870 he was in the employ of the Newport & Wickford Railway and Steamship Co., being involved in the planning and construction of the rail line and steamship dock. In 1880 he moved into the Babcock house, which James Fludder, a prominent Newport architect, had designed. The impressive two-and-one-half story Pleasant Street home, seen in the 1890's, as well as the present day, is shown in the accompanying photographs. At the time of his death, he was 67.

Wightman, I expect, would not have wanted to die in any other fashion. In his memorial the following was written, "On the dark and cheerless night of the 16th of February, while wind and wave were indulging in a chant as weird as a witches incantation, the spirit of our much esteemed captain, Peleg Wightman, in obedience to the Supreme Will, winged away on its flight to a home beyond the sea.....With him the storms of the sea are o'er....God gave, He took, He will restore." No Sea Captain of old could ask for more than that.



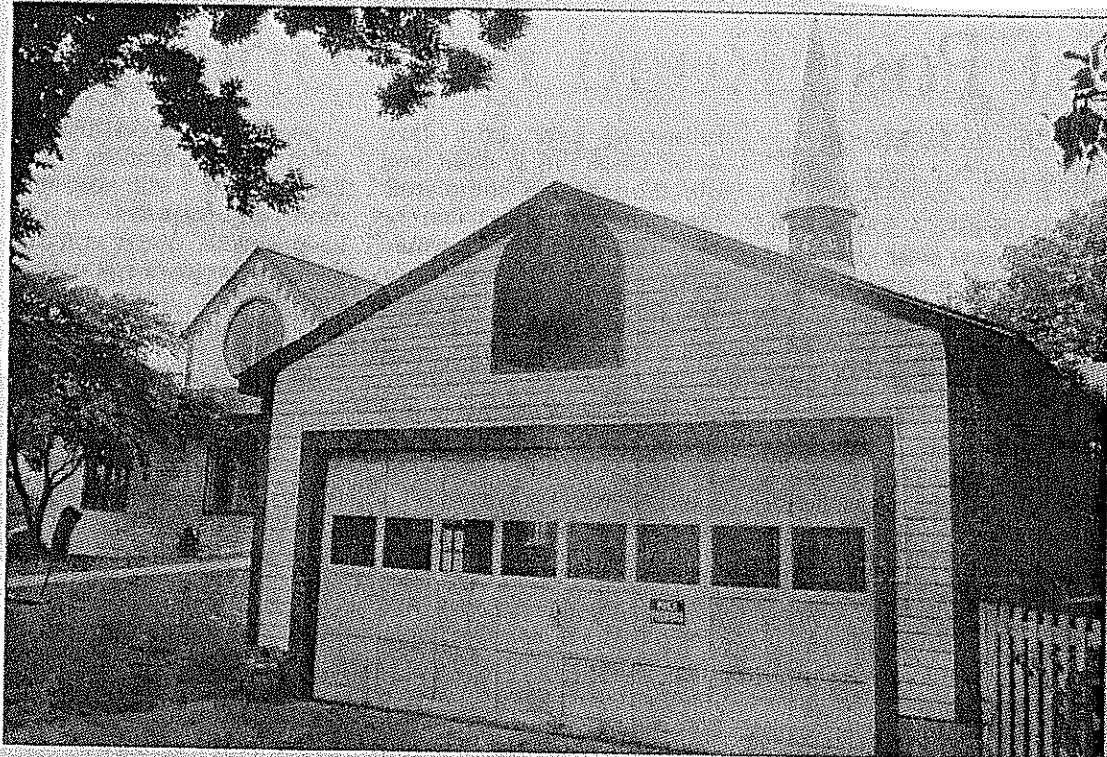


PHOTO: JAMES RUSH

**A garden and this garage behind St. Paul's parish house in Wickford stand where Daniel Stanton Hammond's Carpetbag Factory at the corner of Gold and Washington streets once employed about 100 locals making carpetbags.**

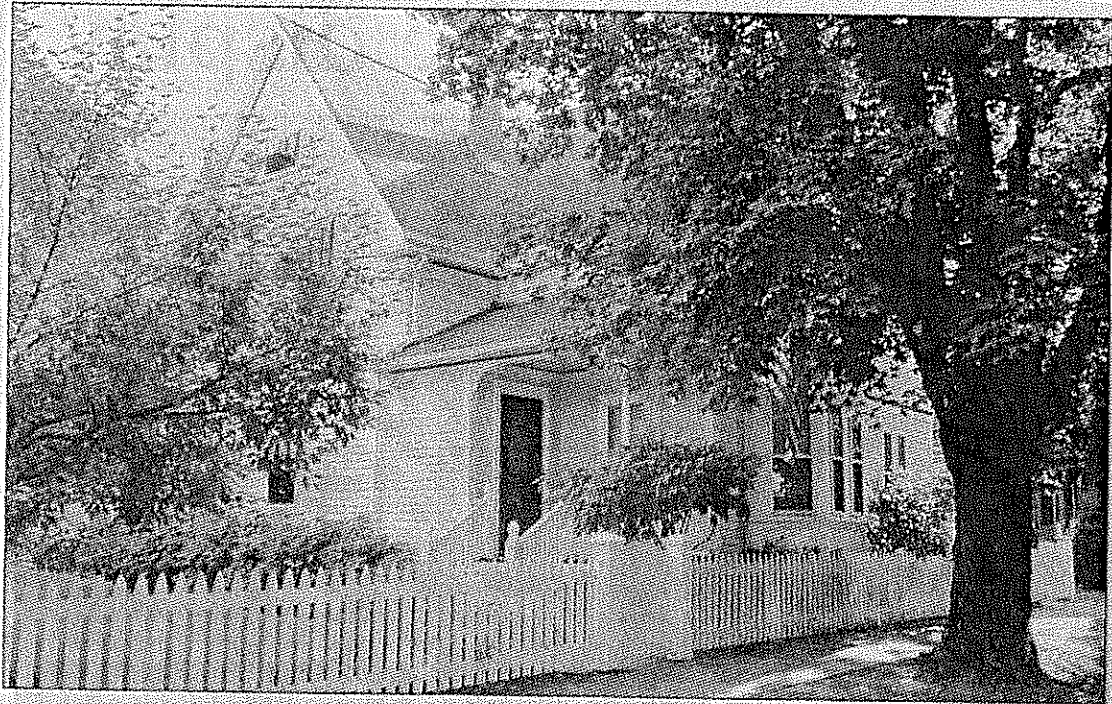
## The View From Swamptown

### Daniel Hammond's Carpet Bag Factory

Those of you who are regular perusers of this column know that I occasionally use the phrase "Wickford carpetbaggers" to describe folks who have or had "shallow local roots" and try to tell us local swamp yankees the what fors and where hows of the way things ought to be done. It's a moniker that's been handed down for many a generation and I'm far from the first to fling it around.

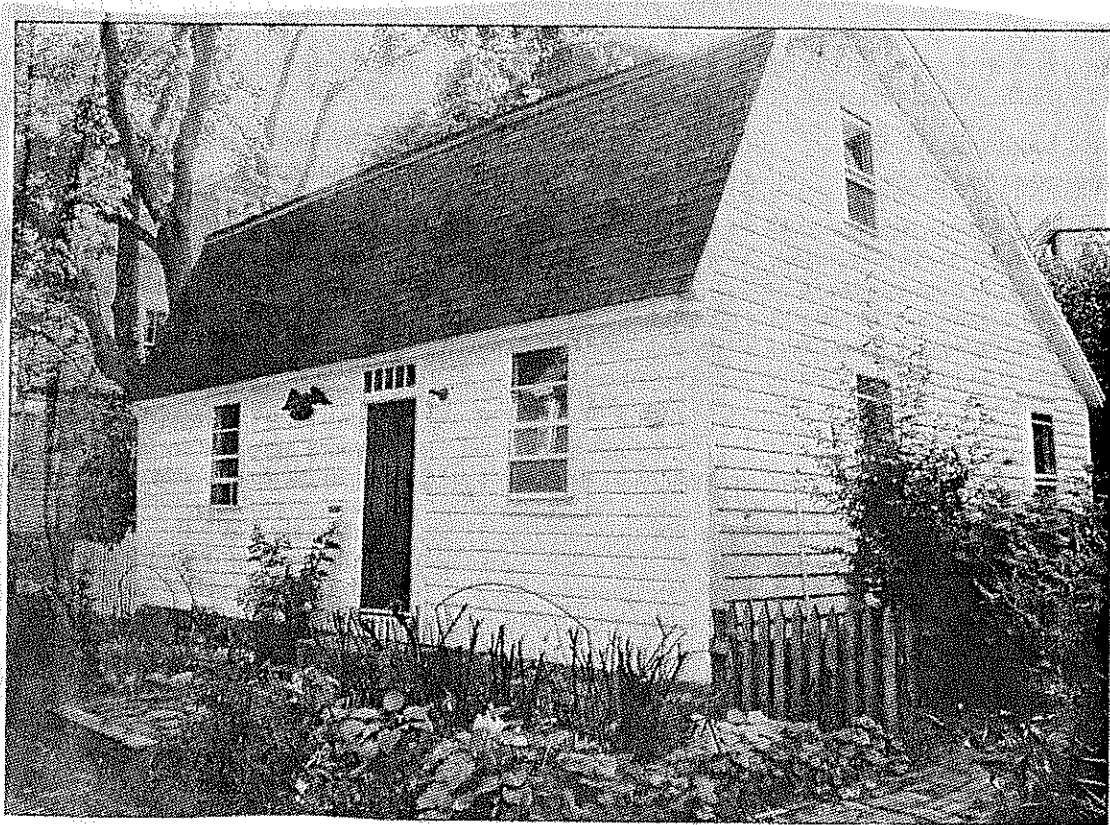
This week we're going to take a gander at the story of some real Wickford Carpetbaggers; the good folks who worked for some twenty years, from 1855 to 1875, in Daniel Stanton Hammond's Carpetbag Factory at the corner of Gold and Washington Streets here in "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic".

Now by 1855, the Hammond Family had been a part of the Wickford scene for decades. The Hammond Homestead on Main Street and the many Hammond Houses out on Hammond Hill (the area near the intersection of Gilbert Stuart Road and Tower Hill Road) were home base to countless Hammonds that had literally spread out across New England and New York. Daniel Stanton Hammond already had himself a couple of successful carpet bag factories in New York City and Brooklyn when he decided to open his Wickford enterprise. He built his little factory and warehouse on land right behind the circa 1798 John Smith house (now St. Paul's Rectory) which was at that time owned by his grandfather and namesake Daniel Stanton. Hammond's factory, off and on, employed more than 100 local folks who were paid anywhere from \$1 to \$2 a day according to extant pay ledgers. He shipped his finished products from the busy docks of Wickford off to markets all up and down the east coast. Perhaps some of these very carpet bags were employed by the opportunistic businessmen who took advantage of the south's postwar situation and gave carpetbags the bad name they still possess. As for Wickford's carpetbag factory, the flat-roofed stone building was torn down in the early 1900's and replaced by a small garage which is now used by St. Paul's parish priest.



PHOTOS: DANIEL G. DUNN

Charles Stafford, Wickford's blacksmith, businessman and town treasurer from 1895 to 1928, is responsible for the placement of these two homes on Main (top) and Bay streets.



## The View From Swamptown

### The George Fowler Jr. and Charles Stafford Houses

As part of our continuing effort to tell the tale of all of Wickford's historic homes, we are going to take a Swamptown gander at two wonderful homes that are forever tied together by one man; Charles Stafford.

The first and older of these two homes, is the George Fowler Jr. house now situated at 11 Bay Street. For the first 140 years of its existence the charming little gambrel-roofed cottage with a lean-to rear addition stood front and center on Main Street on the corner now occupied by the much grander Charles Stafford home. Those of you who are regular readers know that its builder was a member of one of the two prominent families most responsible for the actual build up of "Ye Olde Quaint and Historic". It may have been Lodowick Updike's vision that got the ball rolling on the little island that would one day become Wickford, however it was the Fowlers and the Phillips family's that actually had the patience and wherewithal to see the plan through. It was in this house that one of those original "land developers" resided. When it was originally constructed back in 1755, the home was gambrel-roofed on both sides and possessed a large center-chimney as most homes of the period did. It is the fourth oldest home in Wickford.

Now, to continue the story, we must jump ahead to 1895, when the then owner of the house, blacksmith and businessman Charles Stafford and his wife Susan (Cozzens) Stafford and their growing family, decided they needed more space and a home with a little more prestige. The little cottage just wouldn't do for the newly appointed Town Treasurer and his clan of four, so Charles planned some changes. Luckily for us Charles was a frugal Swamp Yankee and couldn't see tearing down the quaint and homey little cottage that had served so many for so long. Instead he knocked out the big center chimney, turned it around 90 degrees, and moved the house a short way to the back of his lot. With a new smaller chimney installed, the home was as good as new. Charles then had his grand home built on the site of the little cottage. He continued on in the village, as a highly respected businessman and Town Treasurer for 33 more years, until his death in 1926. One of his daughters, Mary Stafford, assumed the Treasurer's office upon her father's demise, and held the position another 20 years until her passing. All told, the Town of North Kingstown's finances were in the able hands of a Stafford for 53 years, and the business of the community was run out of this grand house during all of that time. Mary's sister, Miss Nellie Stafford, a dressmaker who had a shop in East Greenwich, lived in the home for 57 years until her passing in 1951. The home, to this day, is still known by the old-timers in town as Miss Nellie's house.

So, as you can see, these two homes, one from a day well before the founding of our nation and the other from a time when that same country was on the verge of the 20th century, are connected by the village blacksmith, Charles Stafford.

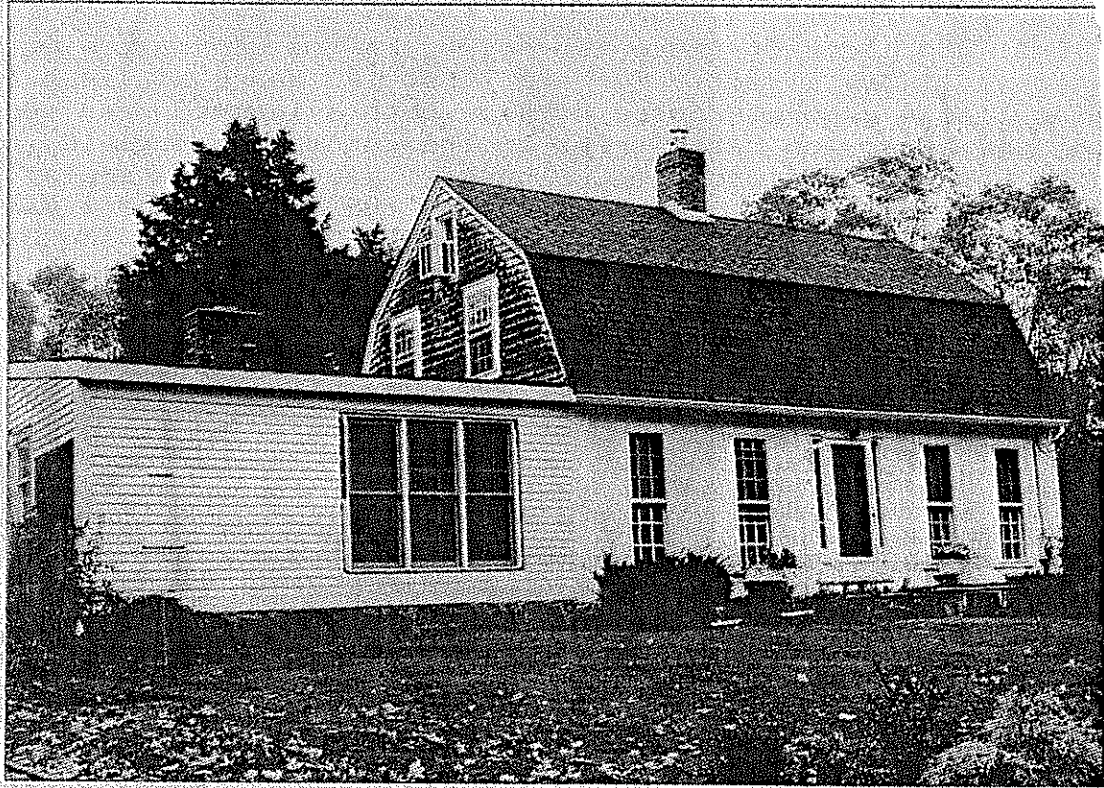


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The property on which this nearly 200-year-old farmhouse in Wickford sits is thought to be the site of an even older rum distillery, though no concrete record exists of its exact location.



## The View From Swamptown

### The House on Distillery Hill

Back in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, rum was as much a part of Wickford's water front as ships that plied her harbor and the sailors that populated her many taverns. Rum was more than a drink, it was a commodity. Rhode Island rum formed one side of the colony's triangle trade where sugar, rum and slaves made men rich. Most of it was distilled in Newport and Providence, but here in our fair town we too, had out distilleries.

The most well remembered was sited here on the north side of Philips Street where the house shown in the accompanying photo now sits. The land was for a time, a portion of the Boone Farm which stretched from Phillips Street to West Main. It is thought this distillery existed here during the time that Samuel Boone owned the land. But no concrete record exists. The land passed from the Boone's to the Updikes and then into the hands of Peter Phillips who built this graceful Gambrel-roofed farmhouse in 1808. From there the land and home passed into the hands of Daniel Spink. So as you can see almost every family that had a hand in the history of Wickford has had a chance to own the house on Distillery Hill. And now those long ago souls, as well as the men who worked the distillery itself centuries ago, are joined by its most recent owner. Rest in peace, Don, like all who went before you, you shall not be forgotten.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

At right, the Hurricane of 1938 toppled one of Wickford's magnificent elm trees into the Ishmael Eldred House, signaling the end of its primary use as a home. Like many other houses on Brown Street, the bottom floor since has been rented out to various businesses, part of a transformation that saw this residential area of the village grow into a thriving commercial thoroughfare. Today, its top half story gone, the building houses Green River Silver Co. and Gelart Candles.

## The View From Swamptown

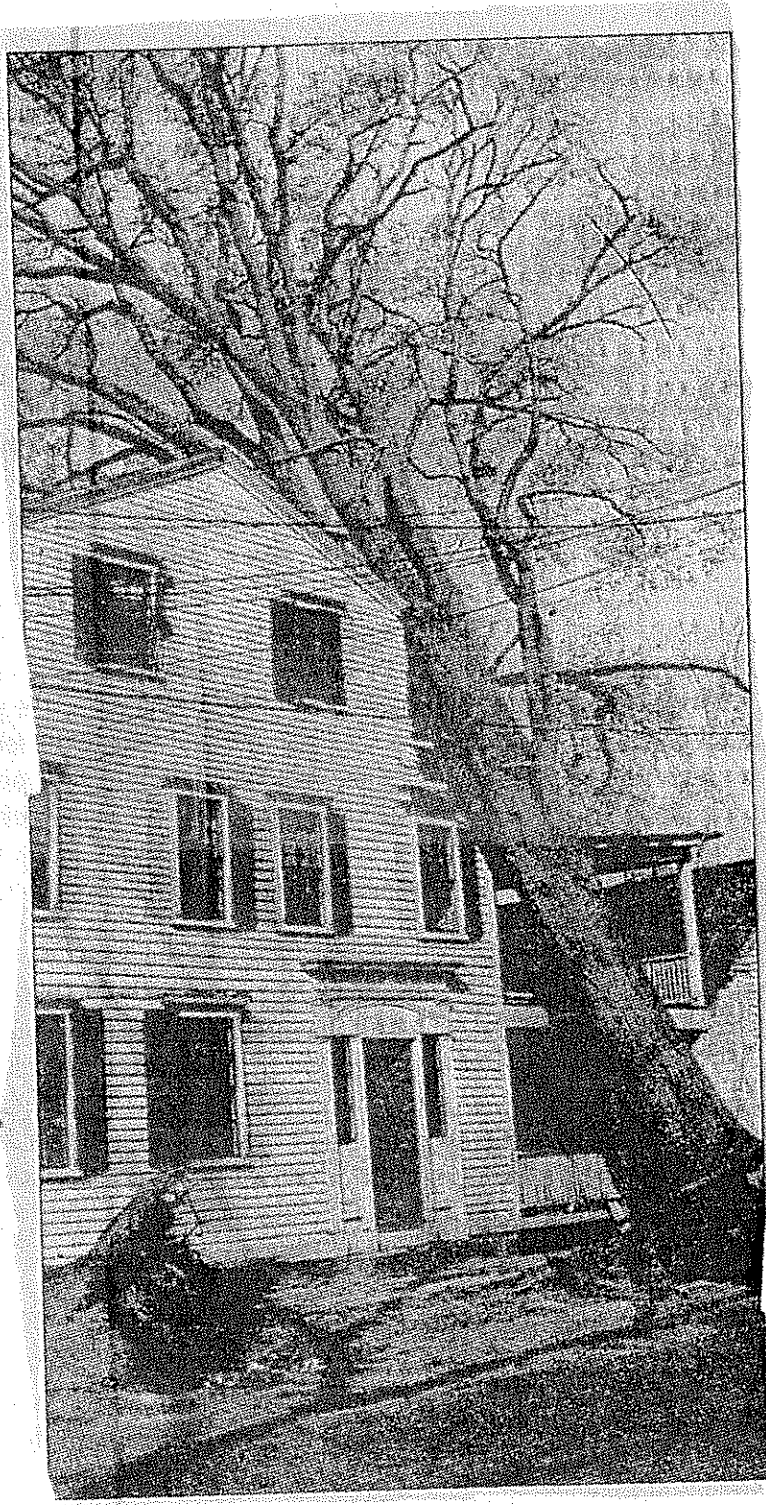
### The Ishmael Eldred House

The somewhat non-descript building at 24 Brown Street is a perfect example of how things just aren't as they seem in "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic". I expect folks walk on by day after day and never realize that this innocuous unassuming building on Brown Street is more than 175 years old and has just as interesting a tale to tell as the Jabez Bullock or William Gregory houses just down the street. That's what happens to a building when no one remembers its story anymore; without a champion, it becomes no more interesting than the "little boxes made of ticky-tacky" that populate the outlying suburbia. Well we can't have that! So let's tell the tale of Ishmael Eldred and his home.

Ishmael Eldred was born in 1802 on the Thomas Eldred homestead farm smack dab in the middle of what is now the airport at Quonset/Davisville. His father was Thomas Eldred Jr. and Eldred's had been a part of the history of "Our Fair Town" right back to the 1600's. Young Ishmael lived a typical life for his time. Working on the family farm when necessary, going to school at the South Quidnessett one-room schoolhouse when time allowed, and upon reaching the age of 18, being apprenticed to a tradesman so as to learn a craft with which he could support himself. You see Ishmael was not the firstborn son and the farm would not be his one day. That's just how things were back then. So Ishmael was sent off to the nearby village of "Little Rest" (now Kingston) to become the apprentice of an unknown local harnessmaker. Three years later he was obviously trained and ready to go out on his own, as his father then passed on to his son a piece of land that he had purchased in a newly platted parcel of land adjacent to Wickford; that land was known then as Elamsville and Ishmael built the seventh home in Elamsville on his lot which fronted both Brown Street and Spink Street. It was 1827 and the 25 year old newly trained harness maker's business was up and running in the busy and relatively populous village of Wickford.

In 1830, Ishmael married a local gal, Caroline Allen and began a family which eventually included three children; William, Alfred, and Sally. They lived in the fairly large 2 and ½ story home that Ishmael had constructed and he ran his business out of a barn that sat in the back of the property at the corner of Spink and Champlin (now Elam St.) Streets. Things went along like this for more than 60 years, believe it or not. Ishmael and his sons were the sole providers in the village, of a valued service. It was the age of the horse and buggy, harnesses, saddles and the like needed mending and new ones were often required. Times were good for the Eldreds.

By 1894 Ishmael was North Kingstown's oldest male resident, at 92 he would still manage to get out to his shop and contribute to the family business. He died in December of that year and was mourned by the village's still tight-knit community. His home and shop remained in his son's hands until 1922, when, in age no longer requiring harnessmakers, it was sold by the family that had owned it for nearly a century to Arthur and Mary Cole.



The Cole's still used the building primarily as a home until around the time of the Great Hurricane of 1938. As you can see by the accompanying photograph, the house became a final resting place for one of Wickford's famous elm trees. The reconstruction of the building after the storm resulted in the loss of its top half story, the removal of its central chimney, and the big addition on the back of the building. From then on, the Ishmael Eldred Estate house, as it was known, became more of a business building and less of a home. For from then on the bottom floor of the building would be home to a business not a family. These various tenants included the RI State Police, who used the building as their center of operation in South County prior to the construction of the Post Road barracks, and more shops and merchants than I'd care to count. The property was also subdivided during the Cole time frame and the other storefront, which can just be made out in the picture, constructed on the spot where Eldred children once played. This was not unusual though. You see, Brown Street, which began as a residential area, was fast usurping Main Street as the village's commercial center. At least Ishmael's home did not fall victim to the wrecking ball as did so many other Brown Street homes, primarily on the other side of the street.

So now we all know the story of 24 Brown Street, a building which began its existence as a home and a harness makers shop 175 years ago. Like Wickford itself, it has adapted and changed in order to survive the relentless march of time. Where once folks picked up a good bridle, people now purchase jewelry and candles. So the next time you are contemplating these wares stop a bit and think about Ishmael, harnesses, and hurricanes.

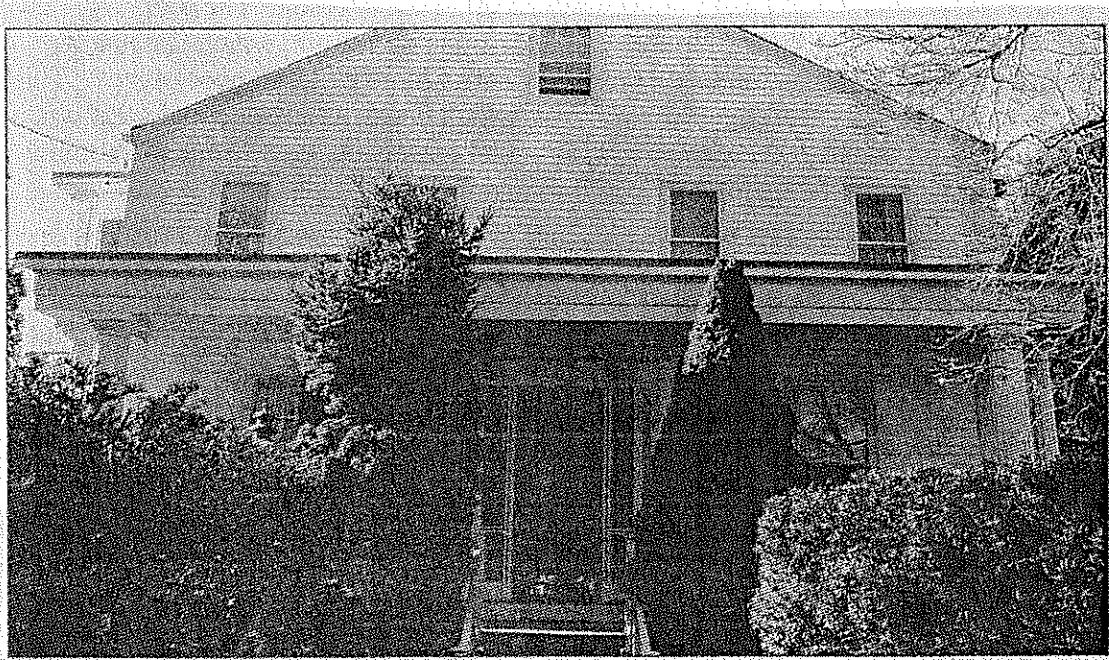


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The Capt. Jacob Smith House on Elam Street since has been divided into apartments, but Smith was so proud of its design by prominent architect Russell Warren that he placed an ad in the Newport Mercury about it.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Captain Jacob Smith House

This wonderful apartment building on Elam Street is another of the many forgotten historic treasures of "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic", the central village of Our Fair Town. Most folks who live in it or walk past it each day scarcely realize that through this unusual Greek Revival style former single family home, with its unique Doric 6-column front Porch, Wickford is tied in a small way to her colonial sister communities of Providence, Newport, and Bristol.

You see, each of these communities, like Wickford, are blessed to include a Russell Warren designed building. In Providence, the famous Arcade, America's first indoor shopping mall, exists to lend testimony to Warren's innovative architectural imagination. Out in Bristol, the several magnificent DeWolfe mansions showcase his sense of grand splendor, and in Newport, Warren added the Vernon mansion, Elmhurst, to the long list of showcase homes for the country's elite that that city houses. Finally, here in Wickford, Russell Warren, the most accomplished practitioner of the Greek Revival Style, designed for sea captain Jacob Smith, a home to rival the many "Captain's Houses" which existed on the other side of the village lining Pleasant Street.

So the next time you saunter by this interesting building, whose history has been largely forgotten due to its eventual addition to the Quonset/Davisville apartment housing stock, feel free to think of it in the larger more important context that it deserves, as Wickford's only Russell Warren designed home. In 1836, Captain Smith, who was so proud of this fact that he advertised it in the state's most prominent newspaper of the time, the Newport Mercury, would doubtlessly be pleased.

The Capt. William Cotter House on Pleasant Street is an architectural gem, but its real treasure is the story of the people who have owned it.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The Capt. William Cotter House on Pleasant Street is an architectural gem, but its real treasure is the story of the people who have owned it.



## The View From Swamptown

### The Widow Cotter House

The architectural folks call the handsome home at 45 Pleasant Street the Captain William Cotter House and describe it as a 1 ½ story cross gabled clapboarded house with decorative vergeboard (fancy trim to us, the uneducated) on three gables. Well, I guess that's all true, and I feel like it's important to add that the Cotter House possesses N.K.'s most popular vergeboard, which can be found all over town, but that all truly misses the point about what's really important about this home. What matters here, as it does with so many of the great houses of "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic", is the story of her inhabitants; in this case we are talking about the inter-related Cotter and Baker families that lived in the house for 100 years.

This house's story goes back to its construction around 1855 on a parcel of land just across the street from the childhood home of Abby (Baker) Cotter. Now Abby had just recently married a seafaring man out of Quebec named William Cotter. She met him through her brother John, as he was Captain Cotter's second mate on the ship "Bolton" which sailed out of Bath, Maine and traveled up and down the east coast. Both were in their thirties at the time of their marriage, not unusual for a man of the sea like William, but certainly a cause for concern to the well-heeled, and very large, Baker clan of Wickford, as Abby's age of 33 was bordering on "old maid" material in the 1850's. So I expect the joy and relief at the time of their nuptials was felt all across the Baker family. The house's location, in such close proximity to Abby's parents', was no accident, all involved knew that Abby would spend most of her days alone, as William's career meant months and months at sea. But the Bakers were no strangers to this life and Abby, I expect, accepted it gladly. Before long, the newly wedded Abby had a child, Jennie, and her life was a little less lonely. She settled into an ordered life in her new Pleasant Street home.

All went well for Abby and her child, until an early summer day in June of 1859, when her brother John appeared, quite unexpectedly, home early from the sea. He told a harrowing tale of thick fog, high seas, and a shipwreck. The Bolton had gone aground on the rocks off of Cross Island, Maine. The ship foundered and sank quickly in somewhat shallow water. The crew of 18 were left hanging to the jib boom, as it was above water, and one by one they were washed off the boom and perished in the rocky seas. Only three survived the ordeal, John among that small number. One can only imagine what he endured, not only in surviving this nightmare in which he had to witness the death of his fellow shipmates, his brother-in-law and captain, and his neighbor John Fowler, but also in the telling of the tale to his heartbroken sister. Eventually William's body was recovered and buried in Elm Grove Cemetery. Abby picked up the pieces and continued on with her life. She had no choice; there was a child to raise. With the help of her nearby large family, she did just that.



Abby spent the rest of her days in the house on Pleasant Street. Eventually her nephew Joseph W. Baker and his wife came to live there too. By 1903, she deeded the house to Joseph, and in 1910 an 88-year-old Abby Cotter joined her husband William at Elm Grove Cemetery. She had lived in the house for nearly 55 years.

Joseph and his wife Saraphine (Rice) Baker spent decades in the house as well. Joseph worked as a coal dealer at his family's big coal yard at the end of Main Street. They never were blessed with children and stayed in the house until 1960, living there for nearly 60 years. One of Joseph's last acts was to sell the Cotter House to another Sea Captain's widow; Beatrice Mason, wife of Captain Howard Mason. The Mason family owned the home until it was purchased by its present owners.

So, you see, this home is so much more than just a 1 ½ story cross gabled clapboarded house with decorative vergeboard. It's an artifact really; a reminder of lives lived well, of tragedies and triumphs. It's greatness is found, as with all of our fair town's historic homes, in the story of the folks who lived in it not in the details of its construction.

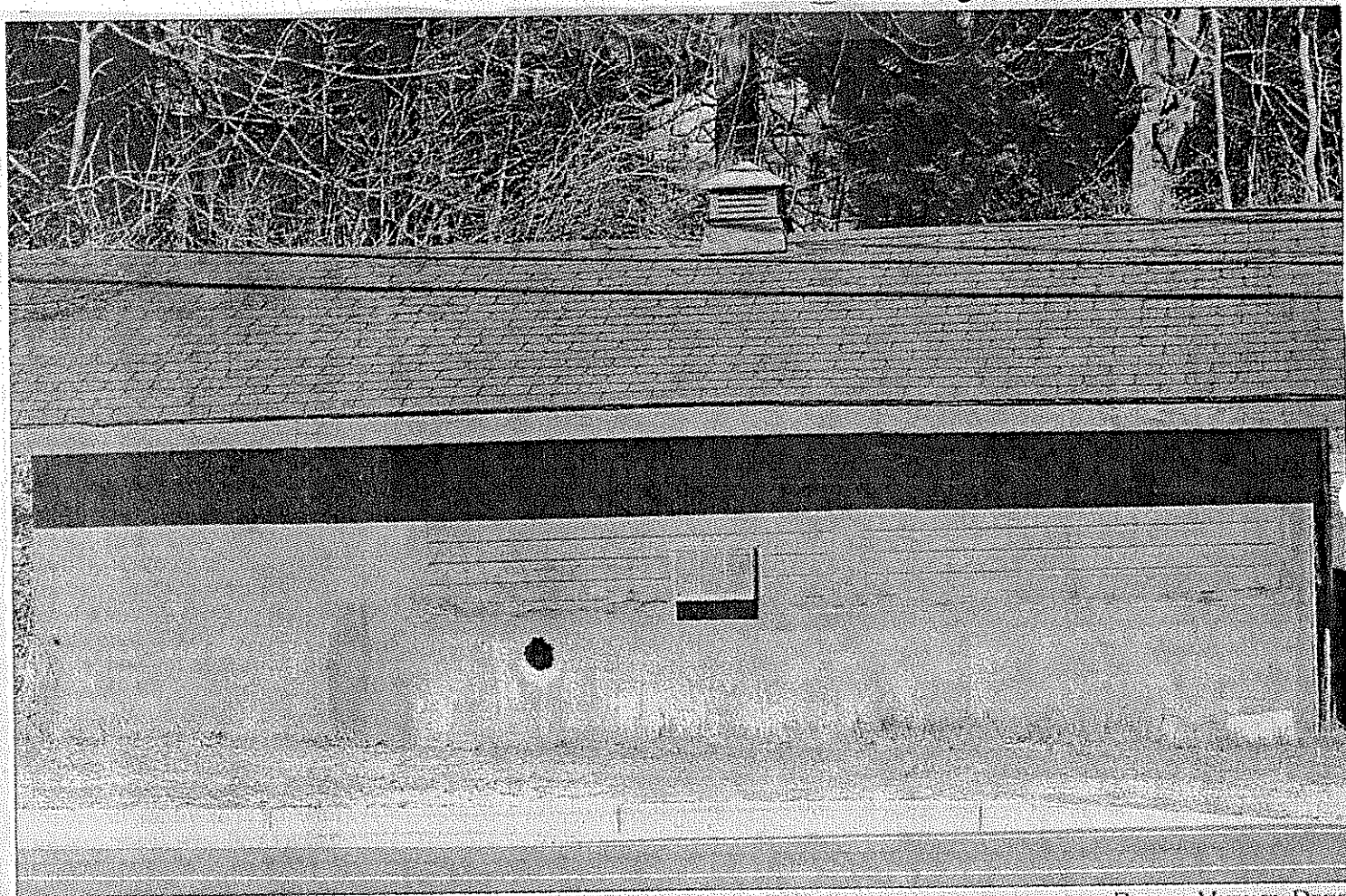


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

This shed-like building near at the corner of West Main Street and Post Road in Wickford was home to a clamcake shack operated by Waldo and Carmen Emery from 1936 to 1960.

## The View From Swamptown

### Emery's Clamcake Shack

Clamcakes as big as baseballs! The best blueberry pie this side of Mother Prentice herself! Gazing at the unassuming little shed like building in the accompanying photo, these are probably not the phrases that would come to mind to the average motorist sitting at the light at the top of West Main Street waiting to turn into "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic". But long time residents of North Kingstown know different, you see, from 1936 to 1960 this little building was the home of Waldo and Carmen ( Andrews) Emery's Clamcake shack, and its opening each year was "sure as shootin'" a sign of the beginning of the summer season.

Folks would stand in line, eager to pull up a stool at the window and order up a batch of those wonderful hot clamcakes or bite into a slab of Carmen's famous pie made fresh each day in the house just above the shack. You've got to use your imagination a bit to envision how it was back then. First and most importantly, Post Road was only one lane in each direction and the intersection with West Main was certainly much less imposing and a bit more pedestrian friendly than it is today. Wickfordites and Lafayetteer's alike would happily "hoof it" from their homes to Emery's for a bite of their favorite pie or a slightly greasy brown bag of those wonderful clamcakes. Others, not lucky enough to be within walking distance, would hop in the family jalopy, or hitch a ride on the Sea View Trolley to make the pilgrimage. Waldo, who worked as a chauffeur in the off-season, would be there each day holding court and dispensing both clamcakes and camaraderie. A number of local youths got their first taste of the working world behind the counter helping out during those busy summer nights. Summer truly ended when those doors would swing closed for the season each Fall.

I'll be the first to admit that there has been, and still are, plenty of places to get great clamcakes here in North Kingstown since Waldo and Carmen closed Emery's for the final season way back in 1960. But few of them have ever been held so dearly in the collective memory of "Our Fair Town". It's a pleasure to me that the old shack is still there to remind us of what was once a simpler time.



The view across "Cranston's Bridge" to the Soule Farm sometime between 1913 and 1925 is shown above. The small white house on the right is the core of the home that exists today on the property, as seen below. To the left and behind the barn is the house that burned to the ground in February 1926.

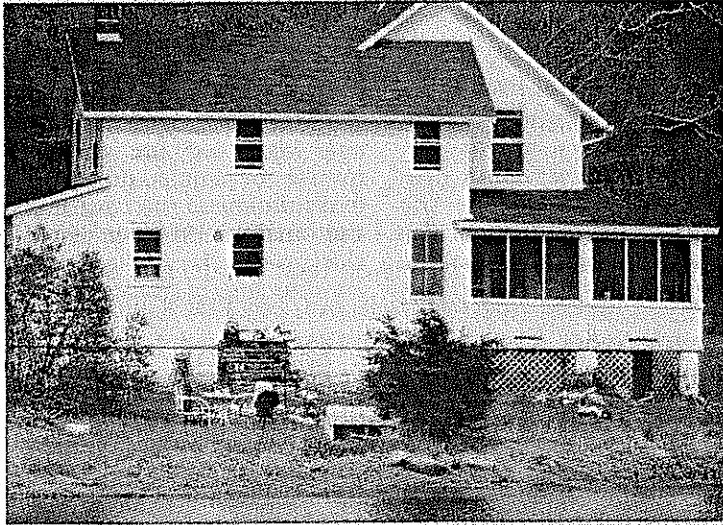
## The View From Swamptown

### The George Soule Farm

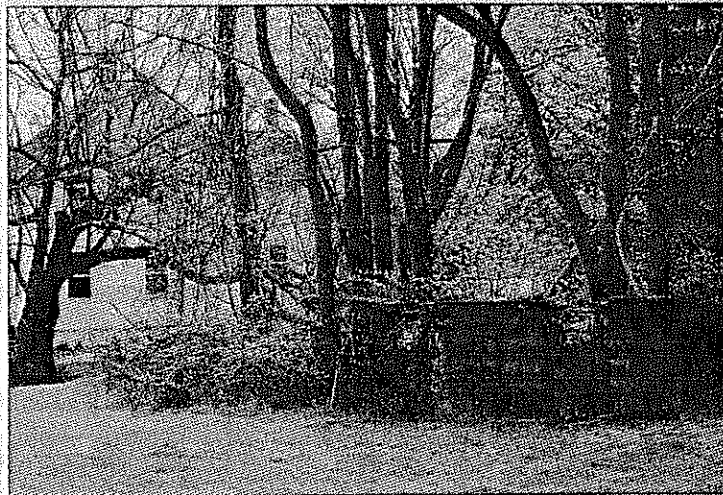
If you're anything like me, you probably are literally driven to distraction each time you drive down Phillips Street into Ye Olde Quaint & Historic and see the remains of the old foundation shown in the accompanying photograph. Actually, my wife assures me that most folks are indeed not at all like me and are capable of passing by a "what's it" like this and not worrying about the whats, whys, and hows of its history. Well, be that as it may, there are probably at least a few good folks out there who have a little bit of curiosity about this concrete artifact, which has been a fixture in the village for as long as any one can remember.

For some reason, (it probably relates to long buried memories of two naturally curious boys with a rowboat and too much time on their hands, and an old codger with a surly attitude and a shotgun loaded with rock salt, but, hey that's another story) I've never taken the time to figure out what this cement memory has to tell us. Well, I fought off those rock salt tainted flashbacks and decided to take a look see at the history of this locale and here's what I've learned.

Way back in 1878, two simultaneous events occurred that have great bearing on our tale. Firstly, Young Doc Shaw, who was actually quite old, but called Young Doc Shaw to differentiate him from his father Old Doc Shaw, passed away after a long and illustrious career of service to Wickford. At nearly the same time, another second generation doctor, 24 year old George Soule of Chaplin Ct., was graduating from Boston Medical School, and ready to leave his home town, with his new wife Anne in tow, and make his mark in the world. Well, the first event left our village sadly understaffed as far as hometown doctors go, and somehow Dr. Soule caught wind of the opportunity and settled here in the village. After a time during which they must have rented a place, in 1884, George and Anne purchased a small 16 acre Phillips Street farm, known locally as the Johnny Cranston place (yes that's right, another one of those Cranstons) and set up their medical practice and their home in it. Things went along just fine, the good doctor delivering babies, setting broken bones, and tending to the sick, with Anne at his side as his nurse, until September of 1913 when the good doctor's circa 1835 home burned down due to a chimney fire. Luckily, Doc Soule had built himself another fine place on the property in 1909 or so, it had all the newest amenities, including being one of the areas first homes with an all cement basement. He had set relatives up in the place for starters, but after the older home burned (thankfully no one was injured in the fire) they all moved into the newer home and made do while Doc rebuilt on the site of the first home. Soon after a time, the doctor had a cottage placed on the site of the old Johnny Cranston place, and things went back to normal. That is until the next year when Doc Soule's diabetes rapidly got the best of him, and he too, joined Old Doc Shaw and Young Doc Shaw in the great beyond. Anne and her extended family got on as best they could; they adjusted and got by all right until 1926, when the big house with the fancy cement basement went up in flames as well. Again, Anne and her clan all moved back into the cottage set on the



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR



**The foundation of the Soule family house that burned in 1926 is filled with trees and weeds now.**



site of the old Johnny Cranston farm and made due as best they could. No one though, it seems ever got around to removing the remains of the Doc's second home and they're still there to this day; full grown trees growing up through the floor of the town's supposed first cement basement. Maybe the Soule clan just felt that the old place allowed them to hold on to the memories of the good doctor. Whatever the case, we can see what they saw, courtesy of this wonderful photo of the Soule farm taken from the other side of "Cranston's bridge", which was on the site of the present-day Loop Drive bridge. And I'll bet you, old doc Soule delivered a few of those younguns' that are swimming there in the sight of his old farm. You know, I hope Anne Soule, who died in 1943 at the age of 86, was looking out the window the day this photo was taken. Those boys, full of life as they were, would have brought a smile to her face and a fleeting memory of her husband to her mind.

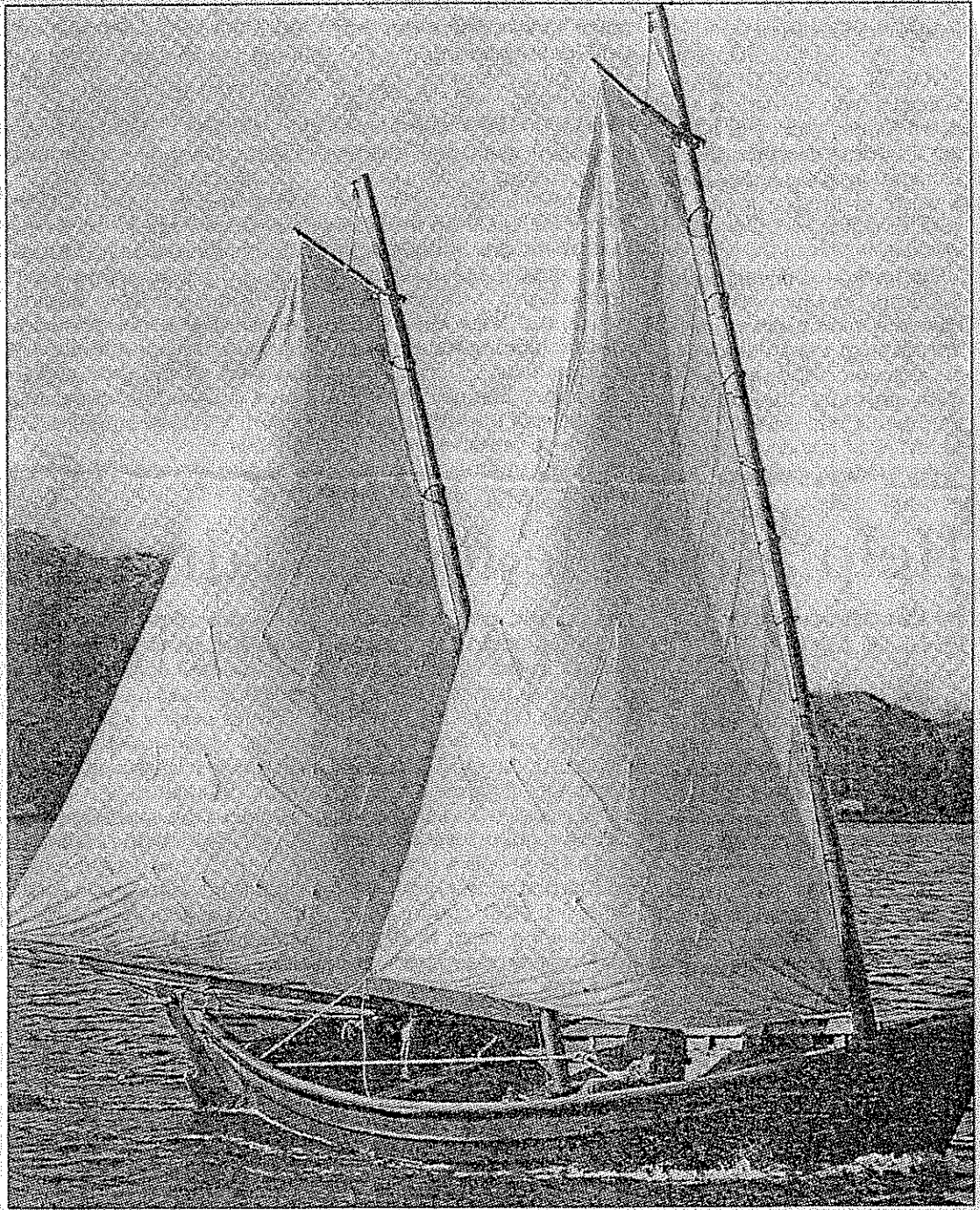


PHOTO COURTESY: MYSTIC SEAPORT

The restored *Glory Anna II*, a former regular sight in Wickford, now can be seen cruising in the Mystic (Conn.) River.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Block Island Cowhorn "Glory Anna II"

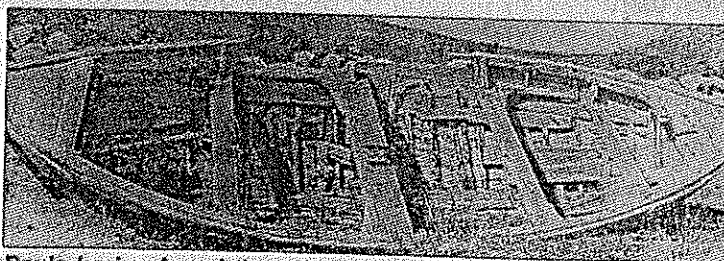
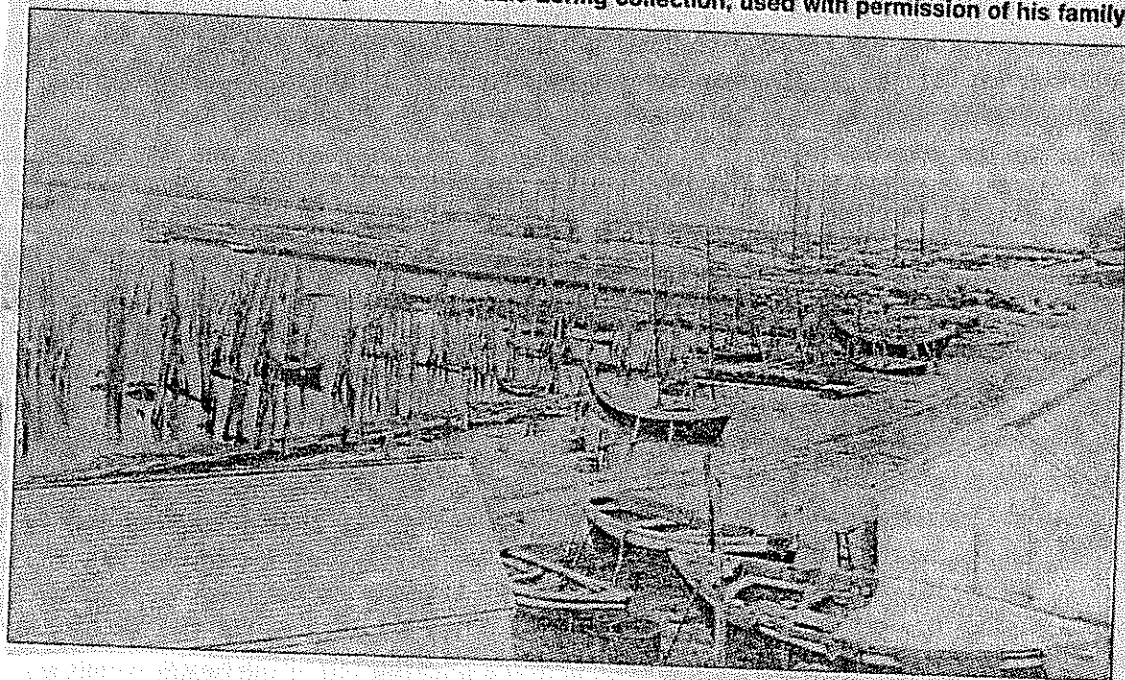
Last week, we took a Swamptown gander at a boat that was neither practical nor utilitarian. There's no doubt that these two qualities were not on the list of attributes that Providence Industrialist Charles Davol took into consideration when commissioning his grand yacht "Paragon". On the other hand, these are the very reasons for the existence of the local fishing vessels known as the Block Island Cowhorns (named in this fashion, as their high ends do resemble a cow's horns) in general and the cowhorn owned by local swamp yankee and marine illustrator Paule Loring, the Glory Anna II, in particular. Before we carry on about Wickford Harbor's own Cowhorn "Glory Anna II" lets learn a little about cowhorns in general.

The cowhorn was just one of many distinctly different 19<sup>th</sup> century fishing vessels known collectively as "beach boats". These boats were designed and built over the course of time specifically to be used in places with no naturally protected harbor or manmade breakwater. These "working man" boats were designed to be both tough and practical at sea and also light and manageable enough to be completely hauled out, by either man or beast, on the beach each evening, to a point just above the high tide mark. To facilitate this they carried no permanent ballast as boats do today; each day began with putting the boat in and filling its belly with beach stones. Conversely, after a hard day of long line fishing the evening ended with the pitching out of the beach stones and then the arduous task of hauling your boat out. They had a whole raft of very local colorful names for all of these similar vessels. Other beach boats include the "Pinky", the "No-mans Land Boat" and the "Newport Carry away". Their unique and practical design, however, was also their downfall. You see, as safe harbors were created by the addition of manmade breakwaters, as was the case on Block Island in 1873, the beach boats, which were smaller for obvious reasons, fell out of fashion and by the wayside. By the beginning of the 1930's, when our own local curmudgeon, Paule Loring became intrigued by them, they were, by and large, gone from the scene.

Loring was, by no means, the only person who had taken note of this and many other changes in the way folks were doing things. The breakneck speed of the industrial revolution, and the resulting push towards all things modern, was causing all sorts of well accepted ways of doing things to fast disappear. A way of live was vanishing and all across the vast range of the American Experience people were scrambling to document such things before they vanished forever. Out of this movement, and in conjunction with the Roosevelt Administration's WPA and the Smithsonian Institute, fabled marine architect Howard Chapelle began the documentation of the "American Working Water Craft" and the rapidly vanishing class of vessels known as the beach boats.

Among those boats, obviously was the Block Island Cowhorn. Luckily for all involved, one original cowhorn, the Glory Anna, lay rotting on the beach near Cormorant Cove on Block Island. Measurements were taken, and plans drawn up; the cowhorn was officially documented for posterity and was included in Chapelle's landmark book on

Pictured below is "Pole Harbor" on Block Island where the so-called cowhorns pulled out. The 1873 breakwater, seen in the background, eventually spelled the end of the cowhorn. This photo is part of the Paule Loring collection, used with permission of his family.



Paule Loring found the rotting hull of the original 19th century *Glory Anna* on the shore of Block Island. This photo, part of the Loring collection, is used with permission of his family.

American Working Water Craft. No one was more tickled over this than Paule Loring, a man who dedicated a good portion of his professional life to preserving these very kinds of things. Loring was so tickled in fact, that he had local boat builder John Brady, ably assisted by Saunderstown's own Al Howard, use Chapelle's plans and build an exact replica of the Glory Anna. He called it the Glory Anna II, and eventually had it modified to include a small house, a design change which was not in keeping with the original Cowhorns. Loring cherished his cowhorn throughout the remainder of his life. Upon his death, the Glory Anna II was purchased for Mystic Seaport's marine museum fleet by Thomas Wilcox, and she floats there placidly to this day. The next time you visit Mystic, ask to see the Glory Anna II a little slice of Block Island via Wickford.

In closing, I'd like to say that hopefully soon Wickford will again sport a wonderful Block Island Cowhorn of its own. You see, John Brady had such a thoroughly good time constructing the Glory Anna, that he then built another cowhorn "The Island Belle". The 52 year old Island Belle is now owned by Dave Butler, who lives at the corner of Beach Street in old Doc Metcalf's home. Look for the Island Belle on display in the near future.

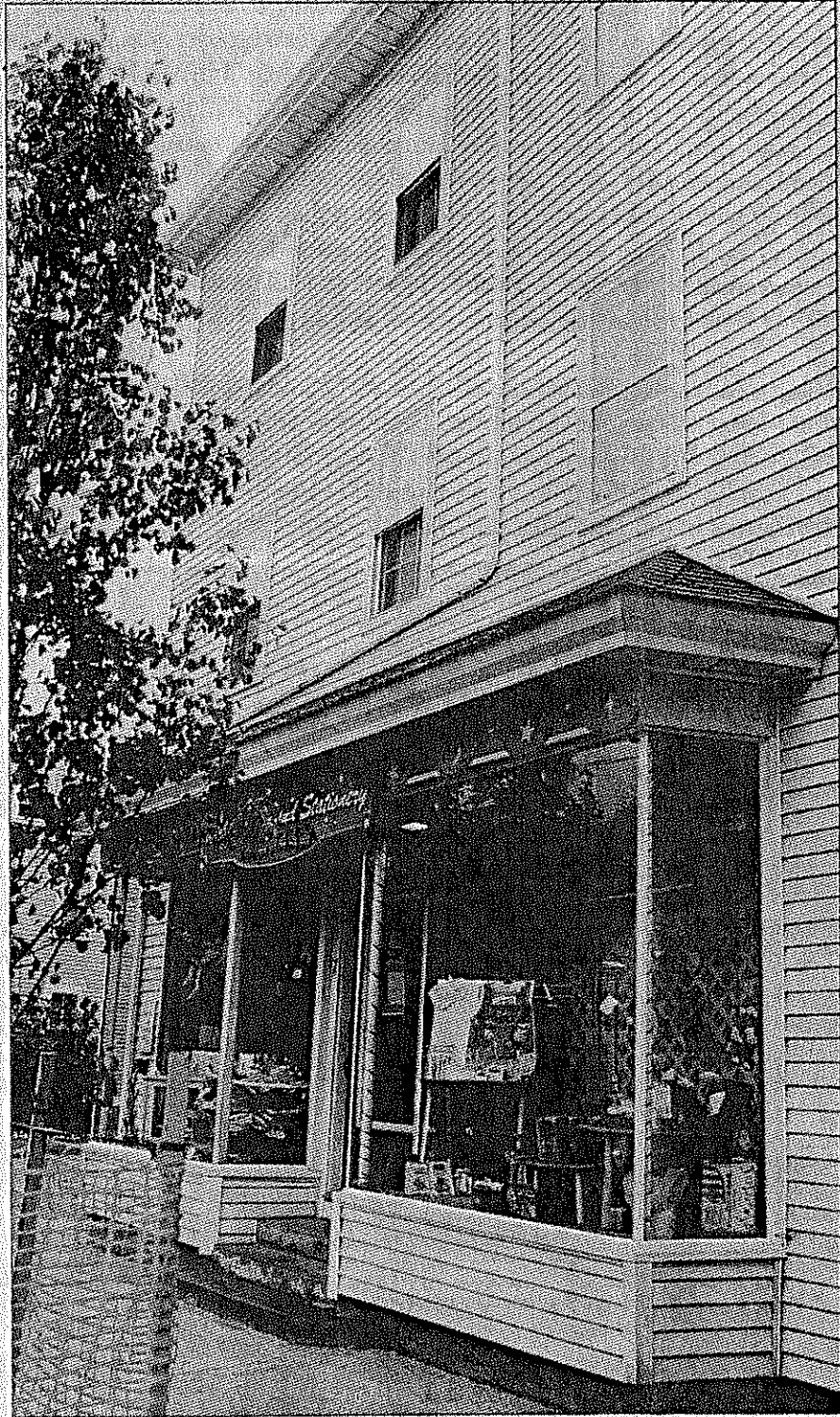


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The Main Street building that most recently has housed a toy store once was home to the village's first fancy department store, Allen, Page & Tucker.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Allen, Page, & Tucker Building North Kingstown's First Department Store

As a part of my long-standing continuing effort to take a look at each of "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic's" many notable buildings, today we are going to take a Swamptown gander at the three story commercial building located at the head of Main Street and shown in the accompanying photograph. Depending upon how long you've been in town you'll think of it as either the toy store building or The Art Shanty building. However, these two identities for this structure only account for about 35 years of its 135 year history.

This story begins somewhere around 1870, when merchant John Page and tinware peddler Samuel Tucker purchased the small dry goods store of Daniel Wall Jr. Wall's store was located in what was then known as the Corner Store Building, a wooden storefront that sat at the corner of Brown and Main Streets where the Gregory Building is now located. Soon after this, Page and Tucker took on a prosperous partner in William Allen, another shopkeeper and the former postmaster of the village named after his family, Allenton. Together they constructed a three story store which rivaled any store this side of Providence. With literally thousands of square feet of floor space, their store, Allen, Page, & Tucker was the biggest and fanciest store any Wickfordite or North Kingstown had ever seen. Here you could find anything your heart could desire, from a casket to a stove to a couch to a tin cup, it could all be had at Allen, Page, & Tucker. Even better yet, Mr. Tucker continued to run his tin peddler's cart from village to village, so even if you lived in Quidnessett, Sand Hill Village, Saunderstown, or anywhere in-between, you could place an order with Tucker and get it delivered the next time he came around. As you can imagine, folks were pretty pleased by this very cosmopolitan department store here in little Wickford. As these advertisements indicate, the players at the big store changed across the years. Mr Allen passed away in 1890, Messrs. Tucker and Page sold their shares and relocated south to the hustle and bustle of Wakefield. But new blood came on board as time passed, in the form of Clarke Potter, and Joseph Rockwell and his sons (one son eventually partnered up with a member of the local Jenkins clan and opened another store at Collation Corner, but that's another story), and the big store thrived from its opening in 1870 through to 1916 when it finally closed.

In that year the building was purchased by retired educator Edwin Noyes of East Greenwich. Around that same time, Noyes also purchased a business to run. Edwin fancied himself as an editor and publisher and figured he'd take a chance in the newspaper business. He took the already established Wickford Standard and after moving it out of the bottom floor of a Main Street home just a few blocks down the street, ran the presses for decades, with his son at his side, right here in the old department store building.

POTTER & PAGE,

DEALERS IN

HOUSE FURNISHING GOODS

OF EVERY DESCRIPTION

FURNISHING

UNDERTAKERS,

FUNERAL DIRECTORS AND EMBALMERS  
Dealers in

CASKETS AND COFFINS

Of every size and quality.

BODIES PREPARED FOR BURIAL DAY OR NIGHT.

DEALERS IN

Watches, Clocks, Jewelry,

Silver Plated Ware,

ORGANS  
AND OTHER

Musical Instruments,

Cutlery, Spectacles, Etc.

CLEANING AND REPAIRING  
CLOCKS AND WATCHES

A SPECIALTY.

All orders will receive Prompt At-  
tention at the very Lowest Prices.

PARTICULAR ATTENTION

PAID TO ALL KINDS OF

TIN PLATE,

Copper & Sheet Iron Work.

The Tin Cart will run regular  
through the different villages in  
Washington and Kent Counties every  
four weeks.

Above, an 1889 ad shows the range  
of goods at the store, by this time  
run by Clarke Potter and John  
Page. By Christmas of 1913,  
Joseph Rockwell and family ran the  
store and his ad boasted more than  
8,000 square feet of merchandise.

## GREETING

We wish all a Merry Christmas and a  
Happy New Year. We appreciate your  
patronage, and we assure you that we extend  
to all our sincere thanks.

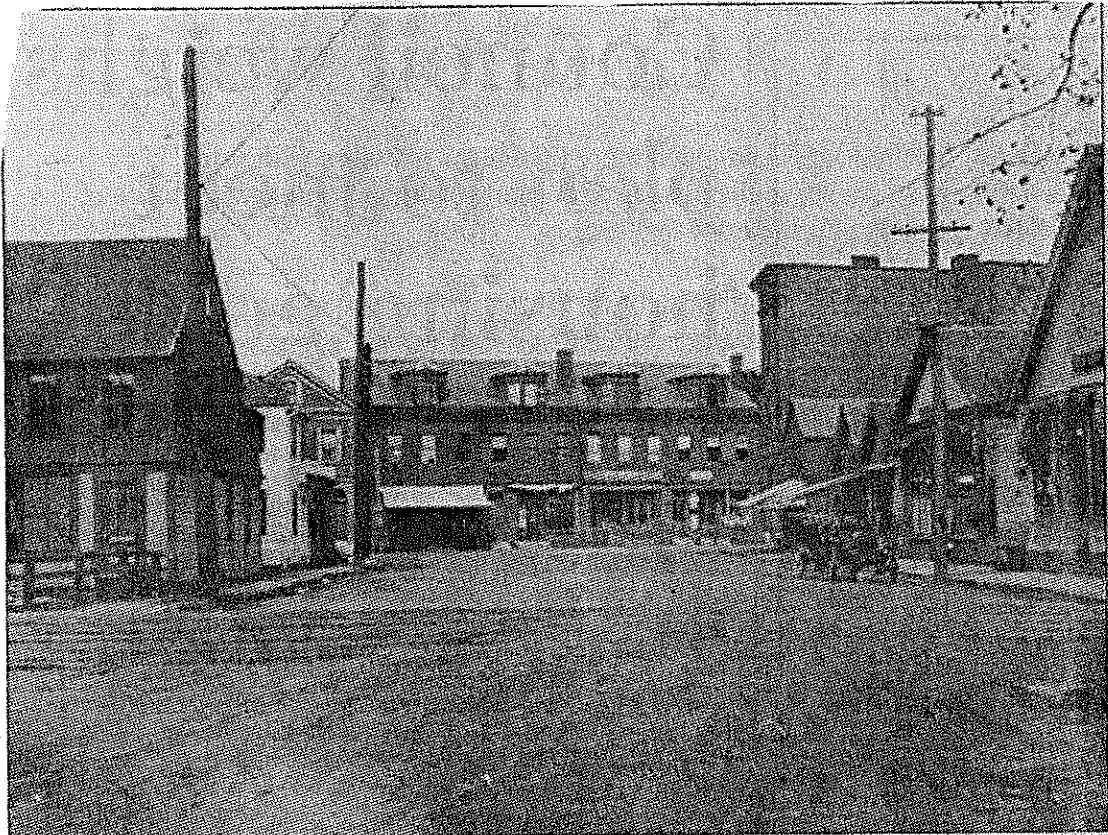
We have the largest stock we have ever  
carried and occupying a floor space of over  
8000 square feet filled with goods of every  
description. And we have marked them at  
a price you will find less than elsewhere.  
Call and be convinced.

J. H. ROCKWELL & SON.



So, you see, this building is so much more than just a toy store with some apartments above it, it's a player in the history of our fair town, not to mention the site of the town's longest standing chronicler of that history.

A now for some shameless self promotion. First, if you want to learn more about Wickford and her history, won't you join me in a Friends of the NK Library sponsored walking tour of the village on Saturday. You might also want to sign up for next month's walk through Elm Grove Cemetery as well. Call the library for details. Speaking of books and printing, I will be printing another run of the hard cover version of the four volume set of my column compilations. So if you want to own a copy of The View From Swamptown just like the library's have, contact me through the paper or sign up at The Wilson-Scott Gallery on Main Street. Finally, be on the look out for Swamptown Enterprises' return to the North Kingstown Adult Education program in the fall. More details to follow.



The Avis Block on Main Street in Wickford as it appeared in the first decade of the 20th century does not look too much different 100 years later, as shown at right. Mary Shippee owned the building at the time the above photograph was taken. Today, its first floor is occupied by shops and its second and third by apartments.



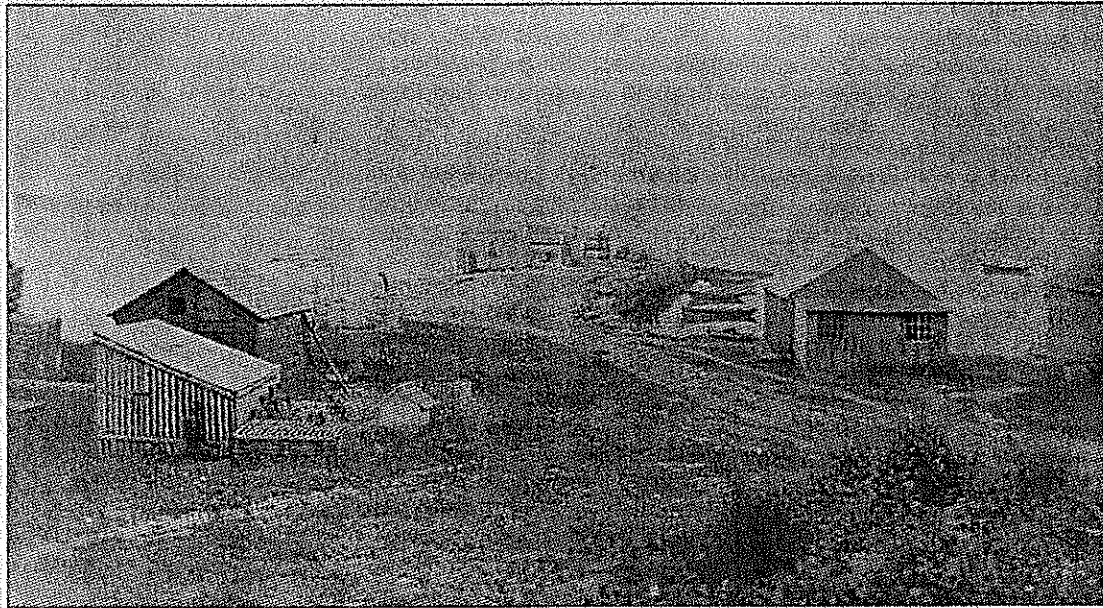
## The View From Swamptown

### Avis Ann Smith Spink Brown and the Avis Block

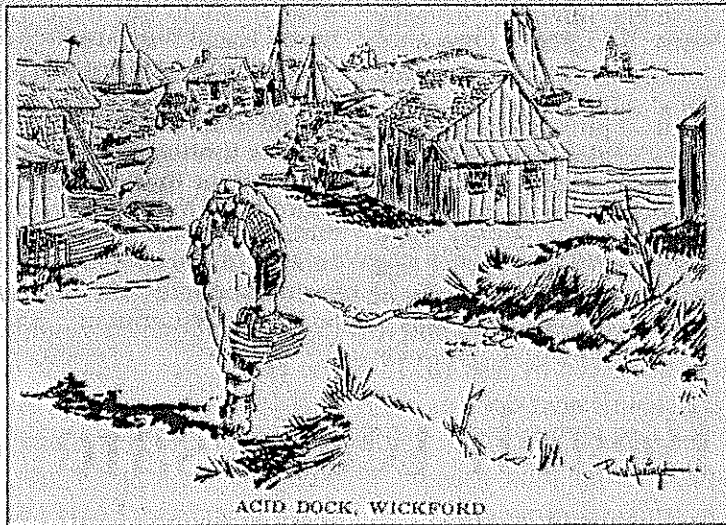
You know, it's awful appropriate that the Avis Block now contains a number of wonderful small shops that, by and large, cater to women. For, you see, the Avis Block's history is, in a large part, the story of two women, bound together by kinship and the kind of perseverance and determination that makes a Yankee woman the tenacious sort of survivor that they often are. Those women are Avis Ann (Smith) Spink Brown and her grand-niece Mary Shippee. Together these two women owned the village's oldest commercial building for 88 of its 153 year history.

The first woman in our tale, and the woman for whom the building was named, was born in 1799 as Avis Ann Smith, a member of one of North Kingstown's largest and most notable families. She married, first, Captain Oliver Spink who died in 1846 and then second, in 1850, she married a member of the equally large and important local Brown clan. Unfortunately, the conditions of the town's records have not allowed me to identify the full name of Avis' second husband. Sadly, this marriage too ended quickly as Avis, by the middle 1800's is always referenced as Mrs. Avis Brown or more commonly, and most confusingly for historians and genealogists alike, Avis Spink. As a matter of fact Avis' death records clearly label her as a Spink; it appears that by 1871 this is the name she prefers. Whatever the details of Avis' life are, it is apparent that, in 1851, she quickly responded to a crisis in her home town of Wickford. For on December 31<sup>st</sup> 1850 at 1:30 in the morning, the sleepy citizens of the village were awakened by the sound of fire bells and shouts of "Fire!". On a snowy night, a massive fire broke out. In one fell swoop, seven buildings in the most densely settled part of the village were destroyed. These included a bank, a tailor shop, a variety store, a law office, a general store, a millinery shop, a shoe shop, a small home, and a dry goods store. When the smoke cleared and the facts were sorted out it was found that a pair of bungling bank robbers started the blaze. All these two scofflaws got out of their enterprise was jail time, but the village paid a terrible price; not only was a large portion of the business district destroyed, the town records, which were stored in the very vault that was being burgled, were burned as well. Avis Brown acted quickly and had the building which would one day become the Avis Block constructed by late 1851. Some years later, Avis had a hand in having the bank building rebuilt next door as well. Not long after this feat Avis died. In the spring of 1871, she was buried in the Spink family plot on West Main Street next to her first husband, and one must assume, greatest love, as a Spink, not a Brown. The business block was passed down in her will to her grand niece Mary Shippee.

Mary was born and raised in her aunt Avis' home, Mary's mother, also named Mary, (Wightman) and father Horace Shippee lived with Avis starting out and then stayed after Mary's mother died suddenly. Horace was the local blacksmith and while he was off working, it was Avis who took care of his children, young Mary included. Mary never forgot the beneficence of Aunt Avis and eventually had the big commercial building named in honor of Avis. She like her great aunt before her, was an independent and successful business woman during a time when this was an unusual occurrence. So ladies and gentlemen, the next time you're shopping in an Avis Block business, stop a bit and imagine the scene that greeted Avis on that snowy New Years Eve in 1850.



Above, a rare photograph of the acid dock was taken in 1893 when it was known as Lake's fish dock. It was probably the basis for the sketch of the acid dock below by local artist and marine historian Paule Loring, used with permission of the Loring family.

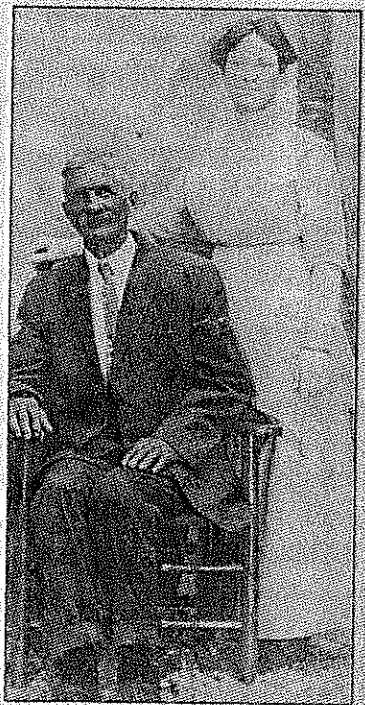


## Isaac Lake and the Pleasant Street Acid Dock

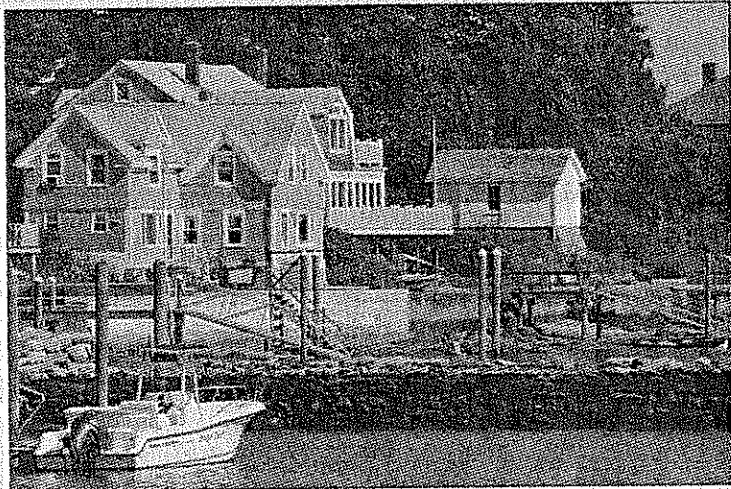
Truly one of the most intriguing and mysterious landmarks found on the old maps of "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic" is the Acid Wharf found jutting out into Wickford Harbor from the eastern side of Pleasant Street. This structure surely dates back to the 1700's, but today, nearly nothing remains of this enigmatic feature, other than the remains of the stone jetties that formed the retaining walls of this manmade peninsula into the cove. The hurricanes of 1938 and 1954 swept away nearly all evidence of what was once an important part of the vital maritime community that existed in Wickford for more than two centuries.

The earliest records and historic notations dating back to the 1700's regarding the acid dock indicate that it was the site of, among other things, a kiln in which birch logs were burned in a controlled fashion to produce some sort of acid which was loaded into barrels and hauled aboard the schooner "Fashion" captained by local lad Thomas Holloway to a location along the Fall River harbor front, other valuable byproducts of this operation were a tar like substance which was used in the construction and maintenance of the region's many sailing vessels, and charcoal which was also shipped out and sold in other locations. Additionally, the records make mention of another operation where local sawmill operators and woodsmen would bring oak bark to the village of Wickford and sell it by the pound to a middle man who would in turn resell it to tanneries where it was eventually processed to extract tannic acids, an important component of the process of "tanning" leather. This, too, may have occurred here at the acid dock or at the acid wharf located at the end of Pleasant St. The exact time frames involving these "acid" related processes are unclear; what is certain is that by the second half of the 1800's this location was clearly involved in the locally important fishing industry and the various acid plants were already a quickly fading memory.

The names most notably associated with the property at this timeframe were of the seagoing Baker family, who owned the acid dock and Isaac Lake, a colorful Yankee fisherman character if there ever was one, who leased the land from the Bakers and ran it as Lake's fish docks. An 1893 photo of Lake's Fish docks accompanies this column. Isaac Lake was born in Tiverton in 1847 and by 1860 was living "the strenuous life of a fisherman". Before long, he was the captain of his own fishing boat and eventually was successful enough to set up shop on Pleasant Street where he owned his own home and run the old Acid Dock. He married, after a time, Sarah Gardiner, daughter of Ezekial and Susan Gardiner of nearby Main Street and raised two children, George and Susan. As it so often did back in those times, tragedy struck the Lake family in 1906. It seemed that Sarah as she entered her 50's, exhibited symptoms akin to what we might now characterize as schizophrenia or early-onset Alzheimer's disease. Unfortunately these things were not understood 100 years ago, and eventually she was considered to have gone mad. Although Isaac hired someone to watch over her when he was not around Sarah escaped and on December 1<sup>st</sup> of 1906 wandered off and was claimed, ironically by



**A photograph of Isaac Lake and his second wife, Liza, was taken at the Narragansett Pier in the late 1910s.**



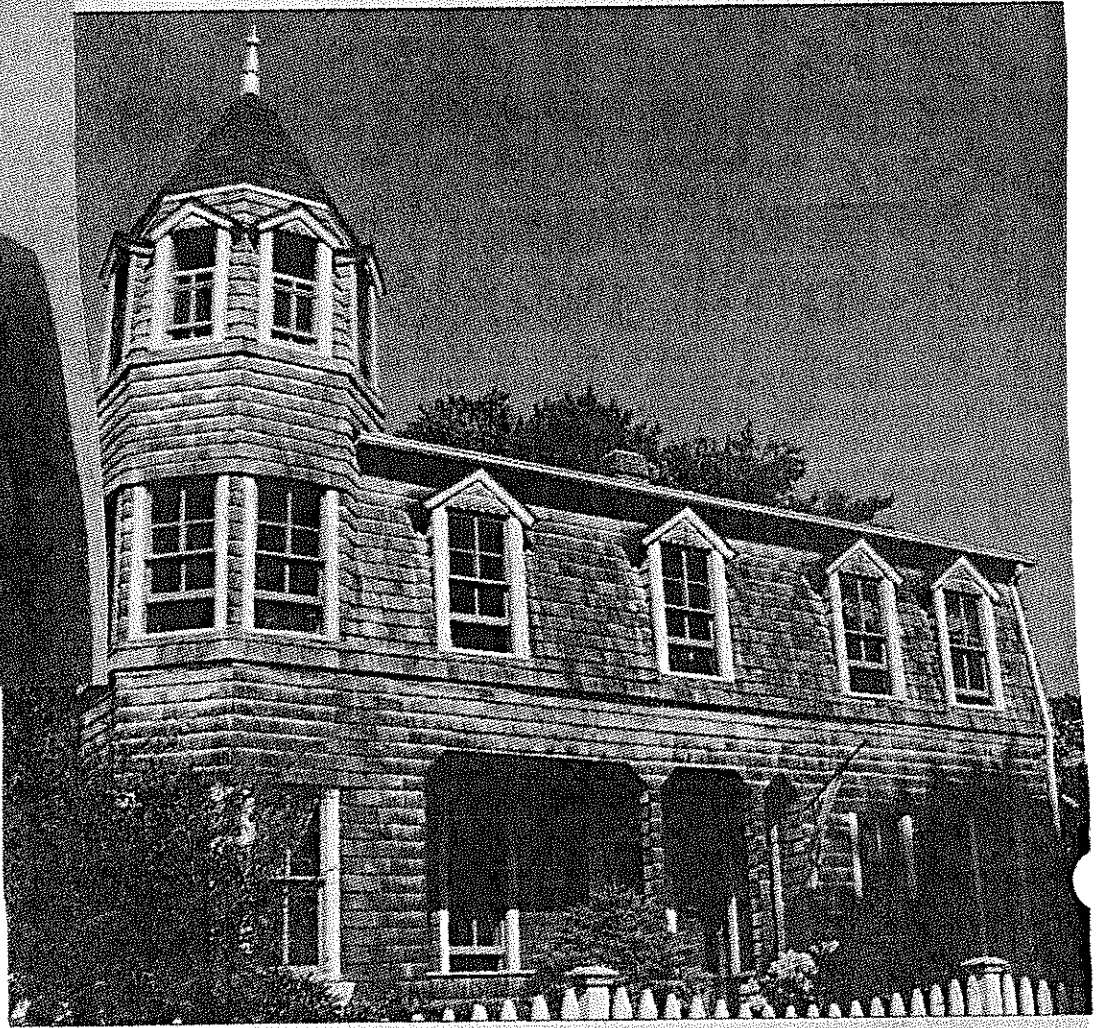
**PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR**

**This stone jetty in front of 61 Pleasant St. is about all that remains of Wickford's acid dock.**

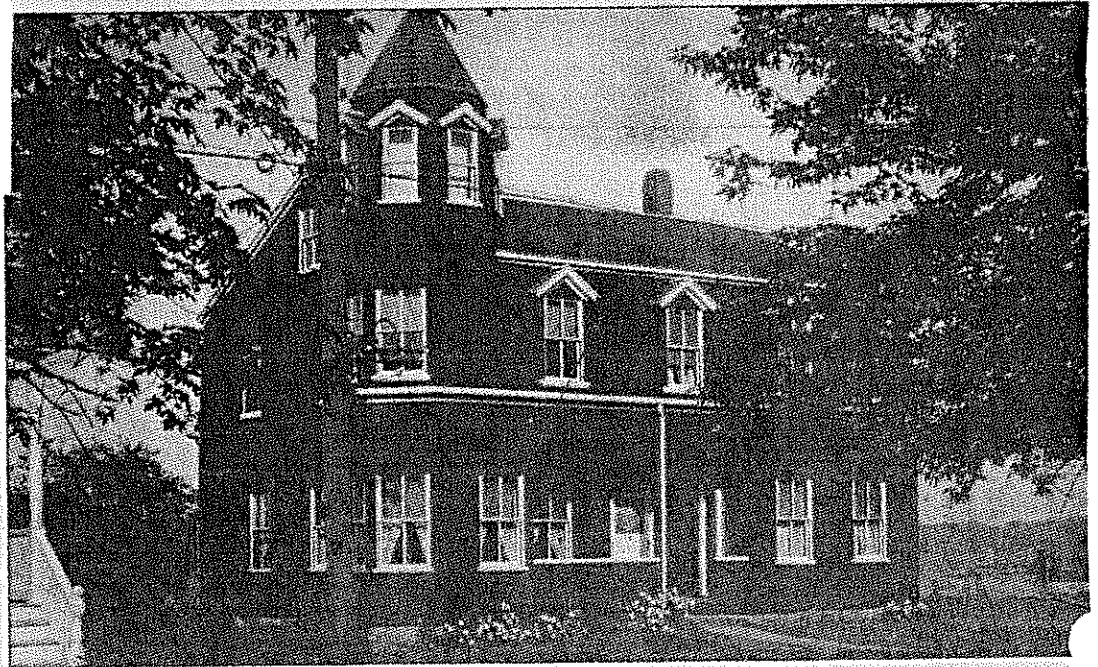
the sea. She walked off the end of the Acid dock and drowned. Most folks at that time were surprised by the fact that the sea had not claimed Isaac, a man who had spent a lifetime risking life and limb on the open ocean in a small fishing vessel; rather it was Sarah whose life she took. The community was, to the person, saddened by the tragic events that had befallen the Lake family.

Life, though, goes on, and after a time Isaac began to search for a new wife for himself. He was quite taken by the young South Kingstown lass, Liza Watson, who was living with Lake's neighbor Robert Chappell and tending to Chappell's bedridden wife who had been the victim of a stroke. But most folks figured he ought to marry someone more his own age. Isaac was known to have queried a number of his cronies with the following question, "What would you choose if you were in my place, the old hen or the young chick?" Men of the sea being what they are, Isaac studied on their advice and soon after married Liza Watson a young lass 32 years his junior. A look at the photo taken at the Narragansett Pier not too long after their wedding shows us how the happy couple appeared at that time.

Isaac Lake died in February of 1926 near to 80 years of age. It's apparent that he lived his life exactly as he wanted, and for an old Yankee fisherman that's as good a compliment as you could ever desire. Young Liza lived on until 1971 when she died at nearly 93 years of age. She was a remarkable connection, through her life with Isaac, to a time when Wickford was a very different place. A place where remarkable people climbed aboard a fishing vessel tied up at a place long known as the Acid Dock and eked out an existence from the sea.



Fall River native Robert Chappell, left, came to Wickford after the Civil War and built his home, seen at right as it stood in the early 1950s, at 70 Pleasant St. His friend, Isaac Lake, bought it as investment property when Chappell died and Lake's widow lived off of the income in her later years. The house has now been renovated as a single-family home, above, by its current occupants, the Miller family.





## The View From Swamptown

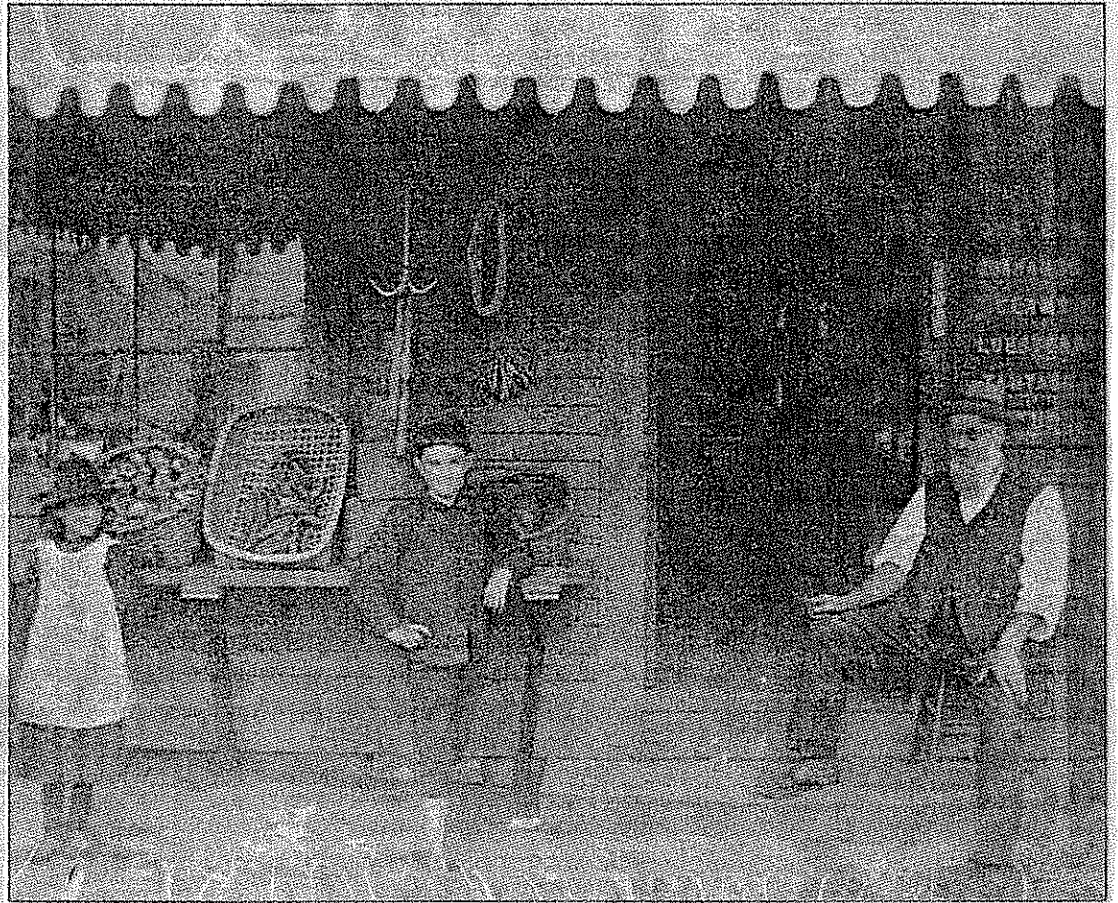
### The Robert Chappell House

This house at 70 Pleasant Street is surely one of Wickford's most distinctive homes. Local carpenter and Civil War veteran Robert Chappell built it in 1893. Chappell was born in Fall River, Massachusetts in 1829, he later moved to Newport and it was from there that the 32 year old enlisted in the 9<sup>th</sup> Rhode Island Volunteers in 1862. After the War he decided to call Wickford home, and in August of 1866 Chappell, who was then working locally at a carriage shop, married Edna Smith, the daughter of Wickford shop owner Daniel Smith.

Sadly, as mentioned in last week's column, shortly after moving into the home, Edna suffered a severe stroke that left her completely debilitated and unable to care for herself. Robert hired a young girl from South Kingstown, Liza Watson, to care for Edna while he worked. She eventually married Robert's friend and neighbor, the widower Isaac Lake. Liza continued to care for Edna until she eventually succumbed to the effects of her stroke. In January of 1911, every elderly person's worst nightmare occurred when 82-year-old Robert Chappell slipped on his icy front step and broke his leg in two places. A tough old soldier he survived the fall and was on the mend, he did, however, contract viral pneumonia while recovering at Rhode Island Hospital. He passed away later that month and was buried with military honors in Elm Grove Cemetery next to Edna in the Smith family plot.

His friend Isaac Lake, who lived just down the street at the corner of Friend and Pleasant Streets with his young wife Liza, purchased Chappell's home from his estate. Although the Lakes never lived in the Chappell place, it did serve Liza well after her husband's death. In a time long before Social Security benefits, the rental income from the home in which she cared for a disabled woman, allowed Liza to live out her remaining years in a manner that she deserved. The house was sold in 1964 to fund Liza's last years.

The family that purchased the Chappell home in 1964 the Miller's, were its eventual saviors. As you can imagine, after 80 years as a rental property, the house had seen better days. But, luckily for the Chappell place, and for all of us who enjoy its charms, Erica Miller and her husband Mark Hawkins returned the Chappell home to its former glory, restoring it from an apartment house back into a single-family home. I expect, Robert Chappell as well as his wife's nursemaid Liza Watson would heartily approve.



Daniel Smith sits in front of his fish market in the late 1880s. With him are Agatha and Stuckley Northup, two of the 21 children of Benjamin and Delia Northup.

## The View From Swamptown

### Uncle Daniel Smith and his Fish Market

You know, sometimes an old photo just catches my imagination to such a degree that I really feel the need to figure out what's going on in it. This circa 1880's photograph of a jovial looking fellow and two children in front of a fish market is just such a picture. All three of these folks spoke to me from across the nearly 120 years that separate us. The children in particular almost call out to me as if to say, "Hey, I was someone once, someone worthy of remembering. Tell my story and I'll be someone again, if only for a moment." Actually, it's this recurrent thought that motivates much of my research. Whether it's a photograph or a gravestone, I'm often haunted by the notion that at one time this person was of the greatest importance to all that loved him or her. They meant everything to someone at sometime, and now no one even has an inkling of who they were or what they were all about. That just doesn't seem right to me and I hope by telling what I can of their story I can change them from a name carved into a cold piece of stone or an image on an aging glass plate negative into the real person they once were; if only for a moment.

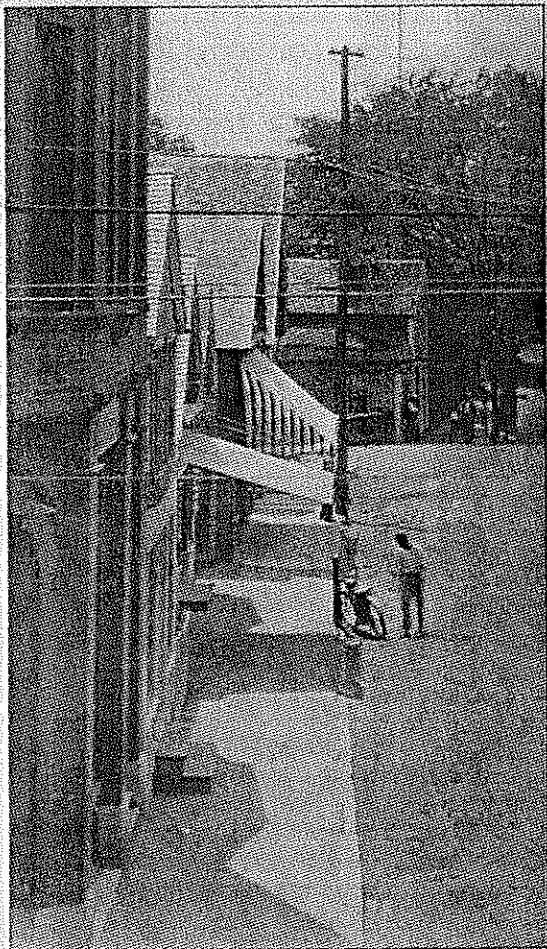
So what about these three? In this case I was lucky, at some time or another, some wise individual took the few seconds necessary to jot their names down on the back of the print. Let this be an important lesson to all; without that person's foresight, these three lost souls would remain just that, lost for eternity. So take out all those old family photos and call up whomever you need to in your clan and get those names down. Some day, decades from now perhaps, you will save your beloved relative from permanent anonymity this simple act. From these names I was able to learn that we are looking at "Old Uncle Daniel Smith" the village of Wickford's fishmonger from 1849 until his death in 1916 and Stuckley and Agatha Northup, two of Benjamin and Delia Northup's incredible brood of 21 children (No ladies I'm not exaggerating, Delia Northup indeed had 21 children). First lets talk a bit about Daniel Smith and his fish market. It was located in the spot where we all park our cars now to go to Ryan's Market. As I mentioned Daniel was a fixture in the village for more than 60 years, and by the apparent age of the Northup younguns we can surmise that this photo was taken around 1887. Dan Smith's market was also famous for his prominently posted Swamp Yankee rationale regarding his long-standing prohibition towards extending credit to his customers. It read thusly; "Two reasons why I do not trust you:

One, because I do not know you

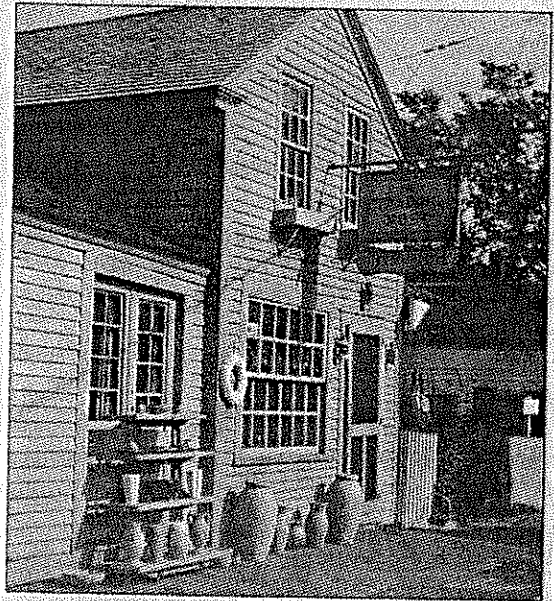
The other - - because I do.

Uncle Daniel was a beloved character in town. He rests now in Elm Grove in one of the many Smith family plots.

I'm afraid I know less about Stuckley and Agatha. As I mentioned they are two members of this famous brood of Northups, and they lived with their fisherman father on Cornelius Island just off the end of Pleasant Street. Benjamin and Delia were originally from Block Island and they moved here with a number of their children in tow around the time of the Civil War. Benjamin, Delia, and Stuckley are also buried in Elm Grove in



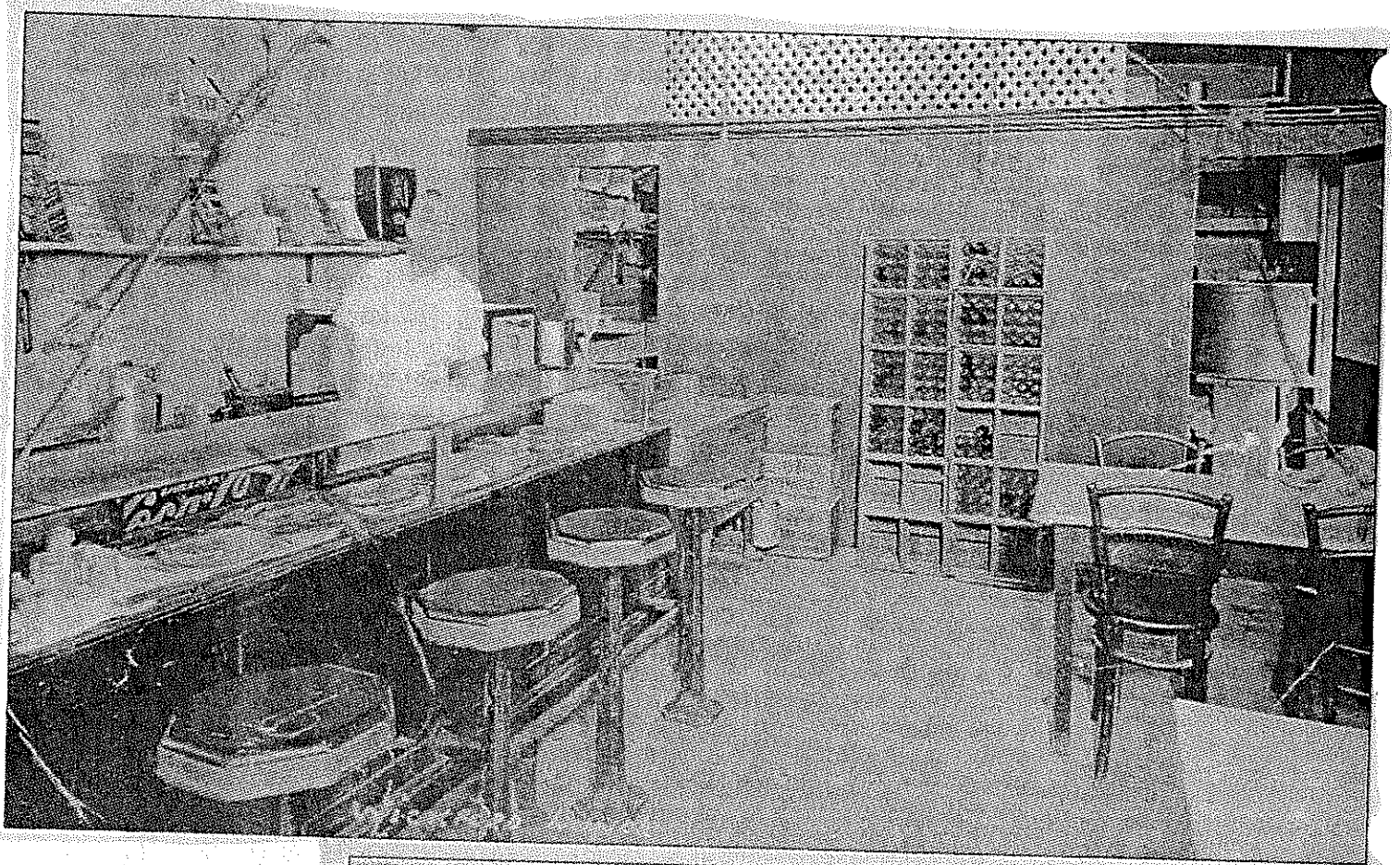
Smith's Fish Market can be seen in the distance with a number of people gathered in front.



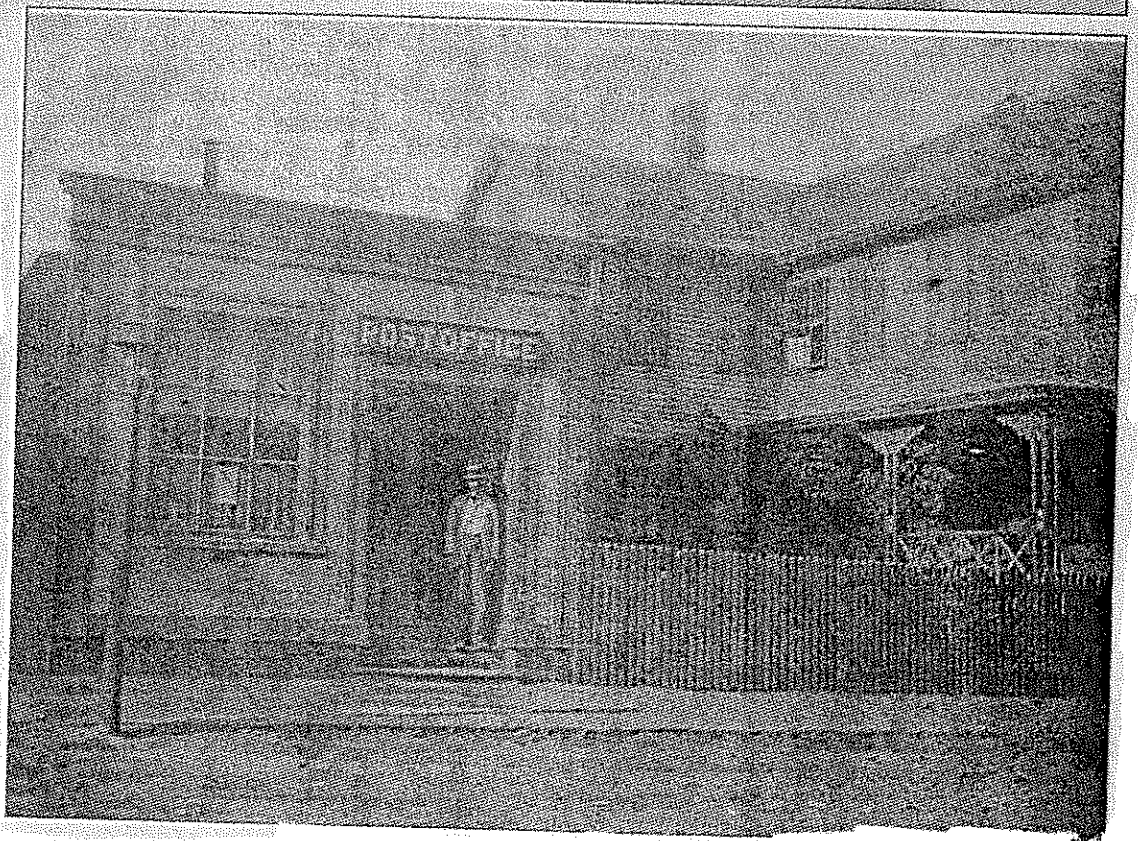
In the 1920s, Daniel Smith's Fish Market was replaced by Rodman's Trading Post. Perhaps the village's first gift shop, it featured hand-turned pottery made in the basement of the Walter Rodman mansion.

one of the even more numerous Northup family plots. Sadly, Stuckley's life was a short one as he died unmarried at 22 years old from diabetes. I have yet to track down what became of Agatha, but rest assured I'll keep looking and will let you know if I turn anything up.

Finally, what of Daniel's store? After his passing, it was purchased by the Rodman family and was reopened as, perhaps, the village's first gift shop. The shop, known as "The Trading Post" featured hand turned pottery made in the basement of Walter Rodman's home by Walter's wife Caroline and her teacher, well-known potter and ceramist Laura Washburn. It's shown here in a post card view from the late 1930's or early 1940's. It stayed that way until the family of Walter's daughter and son-in-law Hope and E. J. Ryan decided they needed parking for their thriving village market. Now that's all something to ponder while you wait for one of those helpful Ryan's Market bagboys to clear a milk crate out of a parking spot for you.



Charles Adams, above, weathered the Hurricane of '38 inside the Wickford Lunch, shown here in the late 1940s occupying the building at the intersection of Main and West Main streets in Wickford. It first housed the Wickford Post Office, seen at right around the turn of the century. The building eventually became retail space just like its next-door neighbor, the Marlor Homestead, and so many other village establishments. It now houses an artist's studio and gallery.



## The View From Swamptown

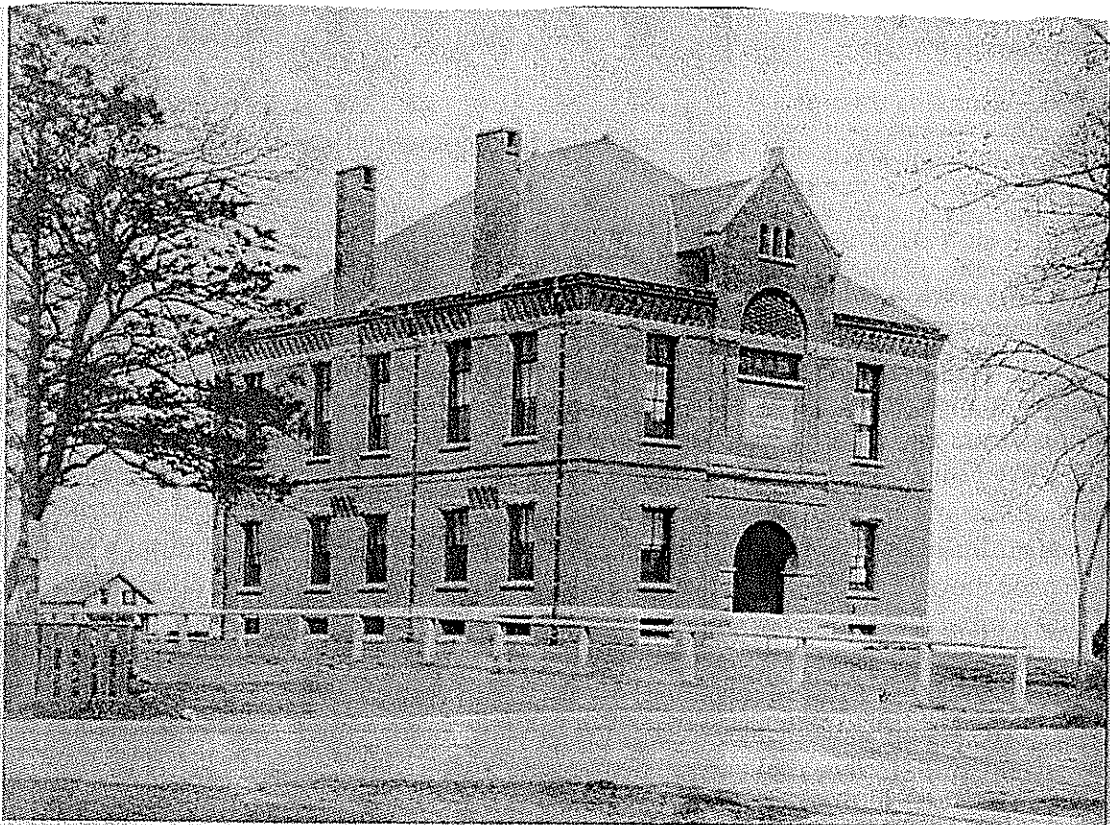
### Wickford's First Post Office Building

This week's column topic is a prime example of how, often the smallest and most inconspicuous of buildings can possess the most interesting of histories. The little shop at the intersection of Main and West Main seen here in the accompanying photos would be known to most residents as either Elsie Kilguss's Art Studio or the Christian Science Reading Room and rightly so, as these two tenants have occupied the tiny building for nearly forty years. But prior to the middle 1960's this diminutive member of "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic's" retail space had another story.

Our little art gallery building was constructed at the turn of the century by local retail space mogul Mary Shippee whom we recently profiled in a column about the building's immediate neighbor, the Avis Block. Shippee, always the savvy businesswoman in a decidedly male world, already had a tenant lined up for her newest addition. Soon after it was constructed, the Wickford Branch of the U.S. Postal Service moved in and set up shop. This was the first building in the village solely designed to be a post office; prior to this a village resident would pick up his mail in a nearby store where the post office was an actual part of the store and the store owner served as postmaster. This set up served many other nearby villages for decades to come, but by 1900, Wickford was a big enough place to support a stand-alone Post Office. However, just a decade later, this building too, was deemed too small to support the village's needs and the Post Office moved across the street to the nearby Gregory Building.

From that timeframe, until the 1930's, businesses came and went at the little post office building. Finally in the middle of that decade, Mary Shippee found another tenant that would stay. As a matter of fact, that tenant, Charles Adams, eventually purchased the shop from her for his little restaurant "Wickford Lunch". Like its competition the Wickford Diner, the Wickford Lunch was a place where the "average Joe" went to get a cup o' Java, or a man-sized breakfast or a hearty burger for lunch. Regular folks met there and talked about everyday things over a plate of simple but excellent fare. I expect they also came to chat with the proprietor Charlie Adams as well, a man who loved his place of business so much that he elected to ride out the Hurricane of '38 there; a mistake in hindsight, as he ended up being the village's only casualty when the chimney fell in on him during that great storm. Luckily for his family, remembers daughter Tillie (Adams) Beckwith, Charley was not the villages only fatality, he was pulled out in time and hauled up West Main St to his "Quality Hill" home where, patched up by "Doc" Manning, he recuperated just long enough to be able to get back down to his Luncheonette and get it back up and running posthaste. The Wickford Lunch outlasted the '38 storm and continued to operate for decades after that.

So, that brings us to the end of the 1950's, when, except for a short-lived time when it was Barry Goldwater's local election headquarters and a short stint as the home of state Republican honcho Brad Gorham's private law practice, things have been real quiet at the little storefront. But who knows what the future holds?



The above picture, the earliest known of Town Hall, was taken soon after its construction in 1888. Below is North Kingstown Town Hall as it appears today.

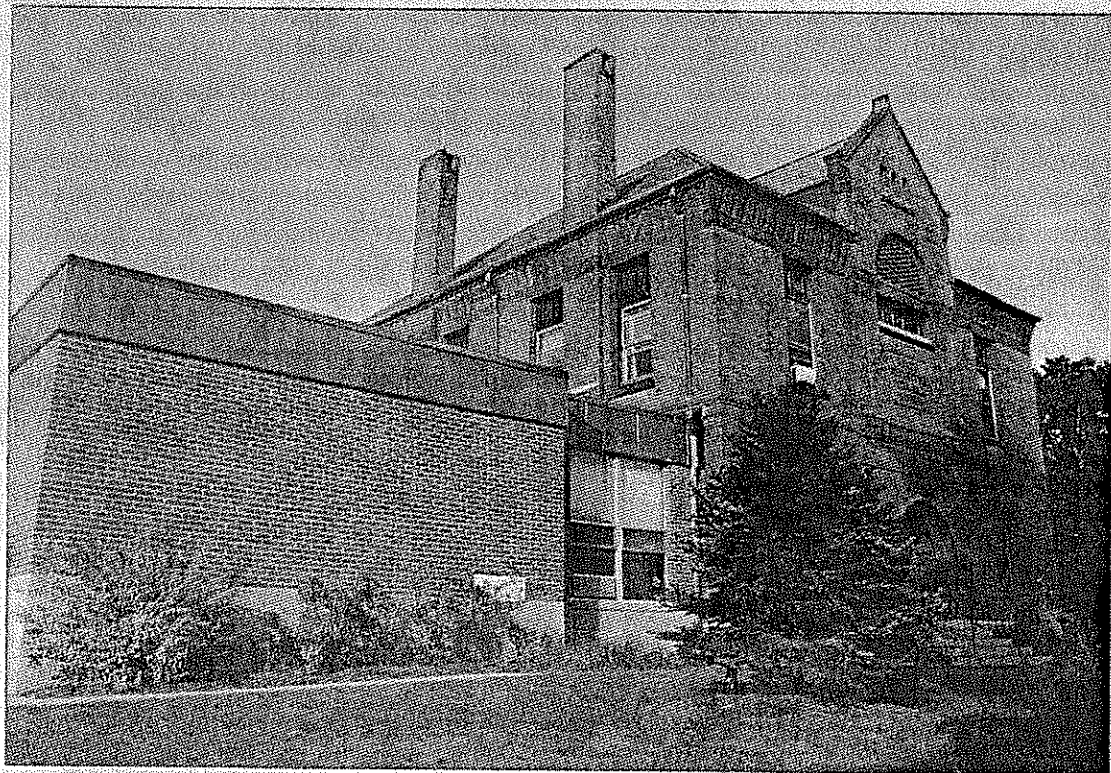


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR



## The View From Swamptown

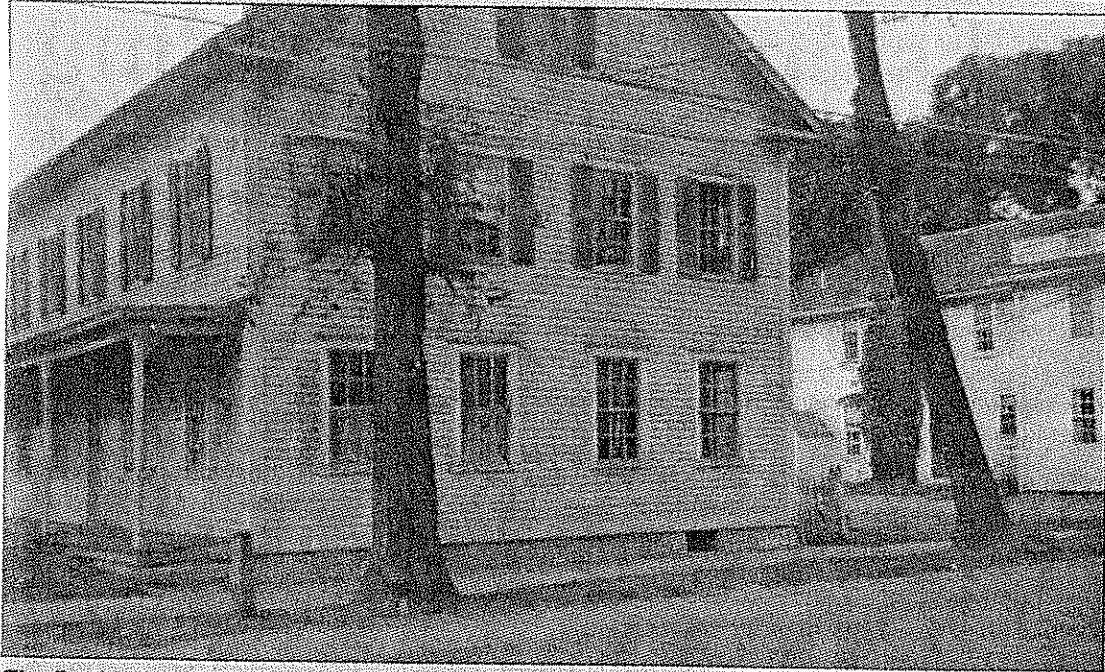
### The Town Hall, the Guild Hall, and William Gregory

The end of the 1880's must have been a busy time for our fair town's future governor William Gregory. He was already deeply involved in politics at the state level, was running two small textile mills; one in Wickford and one at Oak Hill, and was in charge of the committees to build both the new Town Hall and St. Paul's Episcopal Church's new Guild Hall, both of these which were to be located on Boston Neck Road just over the Hamilton (now Hussey) Bridge.

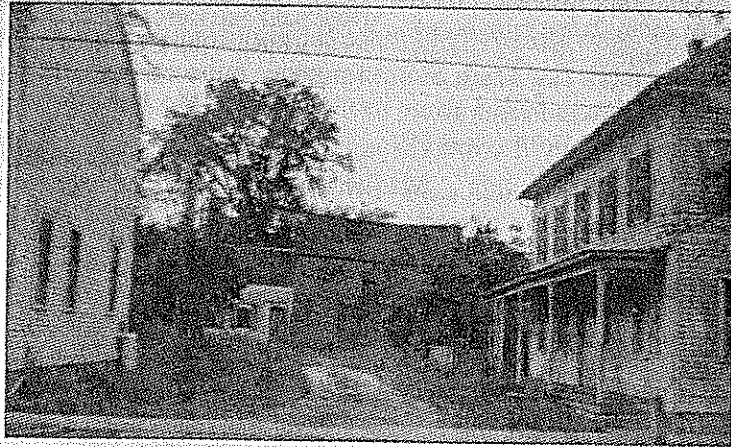
One method that Gregory used to simplify his life in regards to these two projects was to use the same architect for both. He hired Edgar B. Peck of Providence in both cases and was able to keep the two buildings moving forward nearly simultaneously. In the end the Town Hall was dedicated in 1888 and the Guild Hall opened in 1889.

Prior to the construction of the new Town Hall, town meetings were held in the Town House up on West Main Street (now part of the Cranston Murphy Funeral Home Property) and the various town functions were carried out in the home or business of the respective office holder. The St. Paul's Guild Hall served two valuable functions for North Kingstown. Firstly it was the primary meeting place for the many groups and organizations associated with St Paul's Church. From her Vestry to her ladies sewing circle to her Sunday School classes, they all met here. Secondly its upstairs room held the Town of North Kingstown's first free library, that library eventually evolved into the wonderful library we now enjoy.

One fact that has always tickled me is that the land that the Town Hall was constructed upon already held quite the significance for the community. It's location right across from the Train Station made it quite convenient for use by the many traveling circuses which went from town to town during those times. These troupes would set up there each time they'd come through town and before long folks got to calling that big field the "Circus Grounds". Maybe future Governor Gregory had a bit of a wry sense of humor and just couldn't resist.



The Deakin House as seen above was in a somewhat rundown state by 1958 when the Wickford Baptist Church acquired it. The property included a lot beside the Masonic Temple seen below known locally as Deakins' Alley.



## The View From Swamptown

### The Lawton/Deakin House

You'd look at the Wickford Baptist Church Parish House, known also as the Stafford House or Deakin House, and probably not think an awful lot about it. It's really one of those buildings that blends into the background; nothing showy or ostentatious about it, just another 19<sup>th</sup> century building in amongst so many other of that ilk. It's quiet and reserved, and that's certainly appropriate for a building that's part of an old First Baptist parish community that's been around for the better part of two centuries. But it too, like so many others of our fair town's old structures, has a unique story to tell if you know how to listen.

The tale really begins in nearby Exeter back at the start of the 1800's. There, in an area known locally as Lawtonville, Caleb and Alice (Albro) Lawton and their three sons Thomas, Samuel, and Beriah operated a textile mill that kept the locals employed and formed the core of the tiny village that existed there. Also in that same village, the Lawton family ran a store and kept an inn. Youngest son Beriah, who was elected state senator from Exeter at the age of 21, eventually moved into Wickford where he became a prominent businessman and continued his political career as North Kingstown's Representative for many terms. Following close behind his younger brother on the move to Wickford was Thomas. Thomas had earlier lost his wife; left a widower with four daughters to raise; he quickly got remarried to his wife's sister Emeline (Gardiner) and left the Inn and store he was running in Lawtonville, and presumably the painful memories attached to them, behind and settled in Wickford.

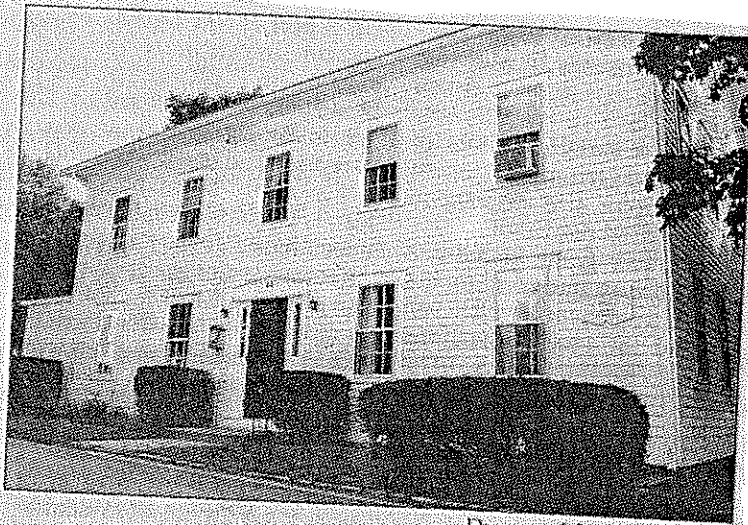
Some time between 1840 & 1850, on a parcel of Gardiner family land, the Lawton's constructed the big house which would eventually become the Baptist Parish House and, falling back on skills they already possessed, opened up the Washington Hotel; perhaps taking the name from the adjacent lodge building of the Washington Chapter of the Masonic Organization. Sadly, little detail is known about how the Washington Hotel operated. More than likely it was a tavern with rooms to let, like the nearby Narragansett House which existed across Main Street and was run by the Congdon family for many decades.

The Thomas Lawton family ran the Washington Hotel until 1865 when Thomas's unexpected death at the age of 61 forced changes to occur. Emeline was forced by circumstances to sell the Hotel to Seth Keach. She and her youngest daughter returned to Exeter and moved in with her oldest daughter who had married into the Exeter line of the Brown family. She died there in 1887 and is buried in the Chestnut Hill Baptist Church graveyard, far from her husband Thomas who rest eternal in brother Beriah's family Plot in Elm Grove.

The Washington Hotel however, continued on, run by Seth and Sarah Keach from 1865-1868, John Nicholas from 1868-1871, and Henry Shepard from 1871-1876.



**Hugh Deakin, who purchased the fire-gutted Washington Hotel in 1876, is shown here (seated) with some of his Civil War compatriots at the local GAR Chapter.**



**PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR**

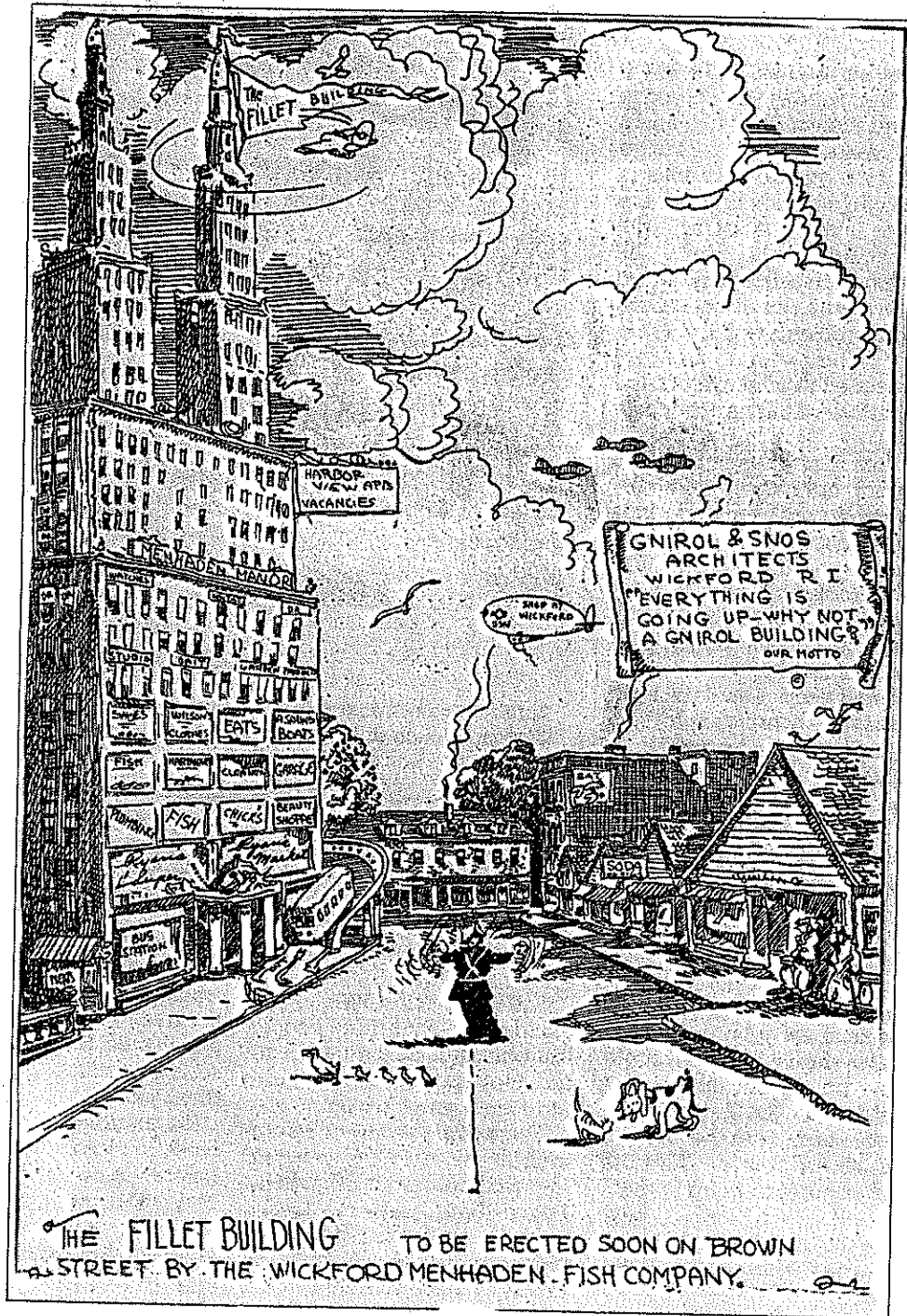
**The property known as the Deakin House, now Wickford Baptist Church's parish house, housed generations of the Deakin family for 82 years.**

Unfortunately, in 1876, a "ruinous fire" broke out in the Hotel, virtually gutting the building and, after perhaps 30 years of hospitality, changing the course of events on the "Washington Hotel Estate" property forever.

In 1876, Civil War veteran Hugh Deakin, seen seated in the accompanying photograph, purchased the fire damaged hotel property and went about rebuilding it into a home for his family. So damaged by the fire, that only the exterior walls were useable, Deakin virtually reconstructed the entire interior of the building, turning an inn into a home.

Hugh Deakin was born in County Roscommen, Ireland in Jan. of 1840. Like so many other young men of his time, he enlisted in the army immediately after the outbreak of the Civil War and served bravely in Company H of the 4<sup>th</sup> RI Volunteers reaching the rank of Sergeant by war's end. He came back to the area and married Caroline Connor of the Silver Spring Mill Village. They eventually had seven children together and obviously were able to put the big house, which now existed within the shell of the old hotel, to good use. I'm not certain exactly what Hugh Deakin's occupation was after the War, as, although on a few occasions he identified himself as a gardener, he is listed as "a notorious seller of liquid damnation" in an 1876 article clipped, most likely, from a Temple of Honor or other prohibition organization newsletter. That's certainly a harsh way to describe a gardener so I guess the jury is still out on Hugh's stock and trade. Well a little mystery is always a good thing. Whatever the case, the Deakin clan prospered, in spite of Hugh's death in 1905, and stayed in the big house for generations, living there for nearly 82 years.

This brings us to 1958, a time when the Wickford Baptist Church was looking to expand, and the heirs of Hugh Deakin and his wife Caroline were ready to sell the somewhat rundown home and adjacent property known locally as "Deakins' Alley". Things worked out well for all involved, and the Church using money associated with the Estate of Nellie and Mary Stafford were able to acquire the old Washington Hotel. Before long, alterations to the structure were accomplished and the building began its third life as a parish meeting place and Sunday School Building.



## The View From Swamptown

“The more things change, the more they stay the same”

If there was one thing that Paule Loring, the renowned artist, historian, and cartoonist, enjoyed more than anything else, it was poking fun at those who deserved it and using his unique skills to point out the obvious. This cartoon dates from around early 1945 and was drawn in response to local grumblings about rapid changes in Wickford's character due to the massive influx of personnel into nearby Quonset/Davisville. Long-time locals were complaining about the fact that many of Wickford's retail spaces were no longer being used by merchants with practical businesses, rather by souvenir shops, or shoppes as Loring said they are often called for reasons beyond his Swamp Yankee sensibilities. The new folks in town, commonly known by locals as “Wickford Carpetbaggers” were upset about a new bait shop which had just opened up at the end of Brown Street, a shop which these folks felt, just didn't belong in a modern Wickford.

Loring, with his flair for exaggeration and tongue-in-cheek humor came up with his “Fillet Building” to solve everyone's problems. He adds in the accompanying text that, “There will be some objections raised to sticking a modern building in the heart of our quaint and early American village, but that will be overcome by hanging a picture of the Gilbert Stuart House in each room or store.” I've got to wonder, looking at the style of his building, if Loring's vision had anything to do with the Industrial National Bank changing its name to Fleet. Fleet and Fillet are awful similar aren't they?

I feel certain that Paule Loring knew, what most people who take a long-term look at Wickford's history realize, that the very reason that Wickford has survived across the centuries has a lot more to do with careful thoughtful adaptation to the inevitable changes that will occur no matter what we do about it, than with fighting that change every step of the way. You see, Wickford is not Sturbridge Village or Mystic Seaport, it's an honest to goodness living changing community. Our charge, as part of the long chain of stewardship that has protected this unique village, is to guide Wickford through the upcoming years, mindful of the fact that we need to balance the protection of the village's character with the important understanding that Wickford needs to continue to be a part of the present and future as well as the past.

CLARK POTTER.

DEALER IN

*Oliver, Hampden & Waltham*

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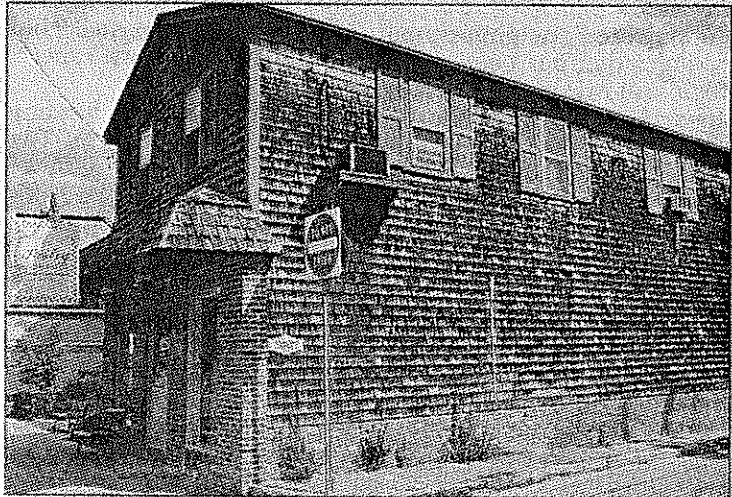
WICKFORD R. I.

This store broadside advertisement came from the late 1880s, before Clarke Potter began selling coal stoves and added the letter "e" onto his first name to gain an air of sophistication.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

Clarke Potter lived and worked in Wickford village. Above is his former home at 109 Main St. Below is his former shop on Brown Street.





## The View From Swamptown

Clarke Potter

Recently, thanks to the NK Free Library's voting machine project, I've spent a good bit of time pondering the life and times of Our Fair Town's own Governor William Gregory. One can't look at this period of local history for long without coming across Republican Gregory's chief political rival, lifetime Democrat and perennial "also-ran" Clarke Potter. Clarke Potter ought to have been the poster boy for "Always a bridesmaid never a bride", for you see, although he was on the state Democratic ticket as a candidate for General Treasurer more times than I'd like to count, he never did win. He did come close though, on one occasion missing out in the statewide election by only a handful of votes. The kick in the pants on this occasion as well as all the others, the bone that I'm certain stuck in Clarke's craw at the conclusion of each and every election season was that he never once carried the vote in his hometown of North Kingstown. Not that he wasn't popular around here, for he certainly was! Everyone loved Clarke Potter, a colorful character if there ever was one, his famous fiddle never far from his side. And yes Clarke could fiddle (he was a fiddler, not a violin player- he'd be certain to tell you that) and he'd happily put bow to strings when ever asked, whether it be at his shop on Brown St. or at his home on the corner of Main and Fountain. And certainly everyone frequented Clarke's establishment on Brown Street, in the building that now houses a Bakery, where Clarke sold an unusual mishmash of watches, musical instruments, household furnishings, and his "bread & butter", those big coal stoves that everyone was putting in their homes during those years at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>. And you bet he was involved in many local social endeavors as well; why Clarke was one of the mainstays of the local temperance organization, the Annaquatucket chapter of the Temple of Honor, which met up in the big hall on Phillips Street, where the phone company is now. He eventually rose to be its leader, and then the head of the Temperance movement at the state level, and finally in 1924 he was made the nationwide head of the organization when he was crowned "Supreme Templar of the World". Clarke was also an active member of the local Odd Fellows chapter, a trustee at the Wickford Savings Bank, and an active and loyal member of the Wickford Baptist Church. Sure he was involved, but that was just not enough.

For you see; with all that Clarke had going for him, no matter how beloved he was, he was still a Democrat and any swamp yankee worth his salt will tell you, "Friendship is one thing, but politics is politics". A democrat in a town where Republicans ruled, a democrat in a state which was, at that time, virtually owned by the Grand Old Party. Yes, the party of Lincoln and Grant had a firm grip on politics in Little Rhody and being a Democrat here was "a hard row to hoe". Ironic how things have reversed themselves in recent years isn't it.

Towards the end of his political career, Clarke got a little bitter and little over-zealous in his temperance leanings. One political missive written in 1906 and directed at my great grandfather Senator George Cyrus Cranston spoke of Cranston's love of saloons and private drinking clubs as "they were very good for his business as an undertaker". Potter then proceeded to paint a rather ghoulish mental image of Senator Cranston waiting in the dark with a wheelbarrow ready to cart off another poor soul to Cranston's



own private club, "the Tombstone Club". As you can imagine, Clarke didn't win any friends with that vitriolic stab at the perennially popular son of an even more popular former Senator and Civil War hero in the state's most Republican community. Eventually though, time passed and all was forgotten and forgiven. So much so that, upon the death of a sitting state Senator in 1914, the townfolks felt that Clarke deserved his opportunity to serve and appointed him as the only Democrat at that time to ever represent North Kingstown in the General Assembly. And who was that senator that passed away so suddenly? The one and the same Senator George Cyrus Cranston that Clarke had hammered less than a decade earlier. Isn't life ironic?



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

This house at 10 Elam St. in Wickford built by John Hull served as a parsonage for the First Baptist Church of Wickford for more than 120 years.

## The View From Swamptown

### The John Hull/Baptist Parsonage House

The little house at 10 Elam Street is like so many other lesser-known historic homes in our fair town. For 157 years, it has sat there, quietly, and counted off the years. It has seen the village of Elamsville grow and change, and then slowly become a part of Wickford once the bridge on Brown Street permanently joined the two villages. Even the house's address has changed over the decades; Elam Street was, for the better part of its existence, known as Champlin Street, right up until the time that the town's leaders realized that the name Elamsville was lost to all but a few stubborn old-timers, and that, Samuel Elam, the patron of the famed Washington Academy, that once sat upon the site of Wickford Elementary School, would not be remembered if they did not take action.

None of this mattered, I'm sure; to John and Waity Ann (Brown) Hull as they set out to built the little house, on the Champlin Street lot they purchased from John J. Reynolds, back in the early summer of 1847. Jamestown-born John Hull had just finished a long stint as the lighthouse keeper of Wickford Harbor's Poplar Point light and I'm certain, was eager to begin his new and less stressful life doing what he had been trained for from boyhood, cabinet making and fine carpentry. John and Waity Ann had had two children while serving at the Light, and they all settled into their new home in Elamsville and their new life.

The Hull's were regular members of the congregation of the First Baptist Church of Wickford and before a decade had passed, the now 49-year-old cabinetmaker and former lighthouse keeper struck a deal with the church's leadership. The hardworking versatile and talented Hull would become the sexton of the Church, take care of its grounds and buildings, stoke the fires, shovel the snow, and most likely utilize his many skills in woodworking to improve its facilities. This position came with a sexton's quarters certainly large enough for he and Waity Ann, as his children were all grown, married, and on their own by then. He in turn, would sell his home, at a most reasonable price, to the Church membership for use as a parsonage for the family of then Pastor William Nelson and his family, not to mention every Pastor from thenceforth. The deal was struck to the benefit of all and in December of 1854, Church member Jerome Anthony took possession of the home temporarily until a group of 15 shareholders, headed by Nicholas Spink, could be found to share the financial burden of the purchase price, a little over a year later. Hull, for his part, stayed on as Church sexton for 24 years until he was well past 70 years of age. Only the death of his beloved Waity Ann, in 1880 was enough to stop the hard working sexton from the performance of his duties to his Church. Soon after that sad event, John Hull gave up his third career and retired from the working world, to live out his final years with his son in Fall River. John Hull returned to North Kingstown in 1889 when he was laid to rest in Elm Grove Cemetery right next to Waity Ann after 84 years of a life well spent.

The home that John Hull built though, continued on in service to the Wickford Baptist Church for many decades after his passing. The Parsonage was finally sold in 1974, during the ministry of beloved Pastor Weldon DeMeurers after housing the families of 20 Pastors over nearly 120 years. John and Waity Ann would have been as proud as could be.



Lighthouse Keeper Edmund Andrews is pictured in his Lighthouse Service uniform.

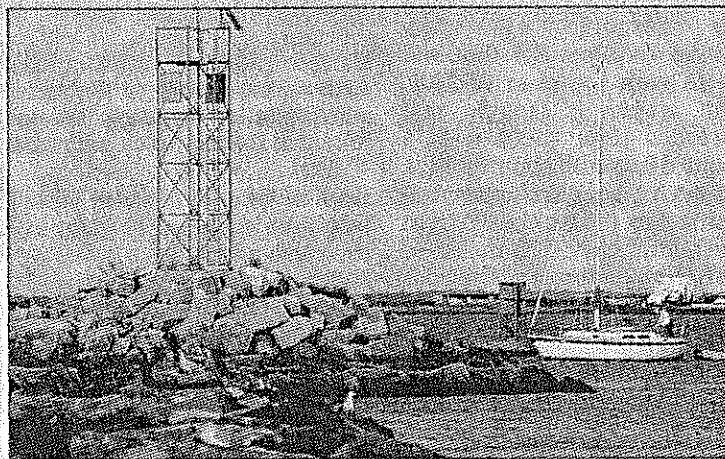


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The approach to Wickford Harbor around the turn of the century afforded views of both the Whale Rock Light and Wickford Light, above. All that remains of the latter is the caisson for its base now supporting a day beacon (left), while the Whale Rock Light was destroyed in the 1938 hurricane. Below, Edmund Andrews and his wife, Lillian, stand on the frozen bay in front of the Wickford light with two of their four children. Historic photos are courtesy of Jeanne Tarbox.



## The View From Swamptown

### Edmund Andrews and the Wickford Light

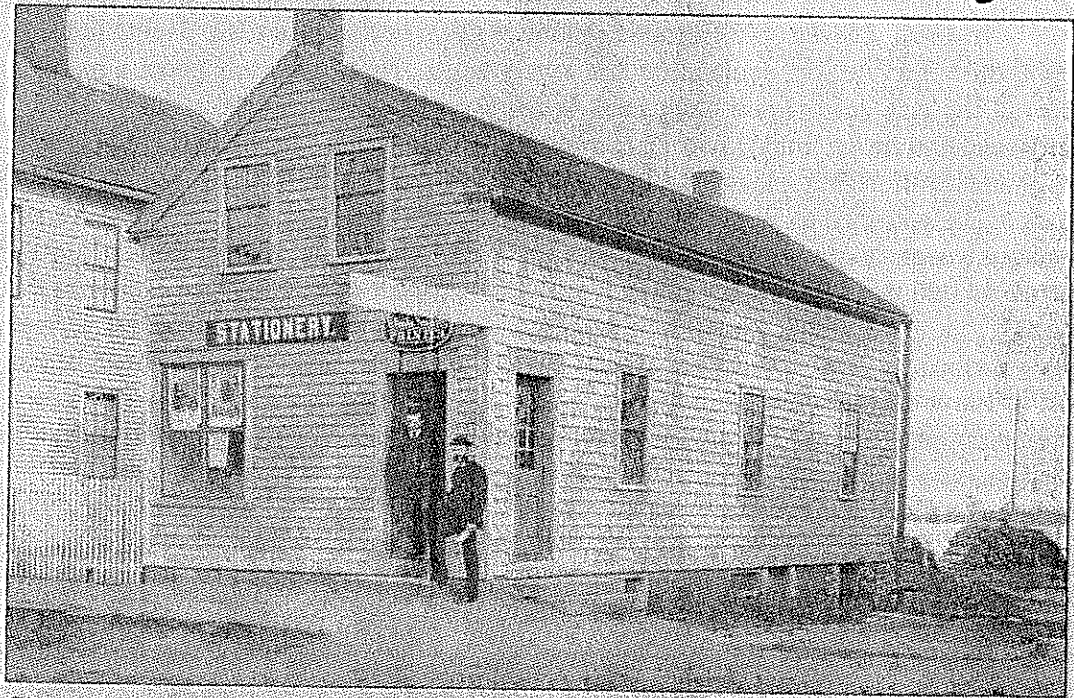
In 1893, 25-year-old Edmund Andrews got a new assignment. Being in the Lighthouse Service was demanding and lonely work. He had already spent a number of years at the very remote and dangerous Whale Rock Light (swept away in the 1938 Hurricane and never found) with his young bride Lillian (Sprague) and their first child and was most certainly pleased to be transferred to the Wickford Light set atop Old Gay Rock at the entrance to Wickford's sheltered harbor. The Wickford Light had a more spacious keeper's quarters and was just a short row away from busy little Wickford. For sure, Edmund and Lillian were pleased with the prospect of moving to a lighthouse close enough to a town with a school where they might send their child. During his service at the Wickford Light the Andrews' would have three more children, all of which became a part of the Wickford community through their involvement in the schools. The new assignment also offered the prospect of a social life of sorts for Lillian, relationships with family and friends could more easily be maintained, church might be attended, and Wickford offered a wide variety of shops and stores that the Andrews family might frequent. Edmund Andrews and his family were so taken by Wickford that in 1909 he turned down a transfer To Eaton's Neck Light on long Island preferring to stay at the light on Old Gay Rock.

And stay he did! Edmund Andrews kept the light burning and the fog bell ringing for 37 long years. His dedicated service certainly saved lives; for one, he was recognized in 1898 for rescuing a drowning man. His familiar face was a welcome relief for many a sailor returning back to the Harbor after a long trek at sea or an arduous fishing trip to the Banks. Coincidentally, when he retired in 1930 with 40 years of service, the Wickford Harbor Light was discontinued and destroyed. Nine years later, in 1939, the U.S. Lighthouse Service was absorbed by the Coast Guard. In that same year, Lighthouse Keeper Edmund Andrews died in his 71<sup>st</sup> year.

Today, the caisson that was the base to the Wickford Light stands ever fast topped by an unmanned day beacon. It blinks away reliably, just in sight of the older former Poplar Point Lighthouse, which by the way is the oldest existing wooden lighthouse in America. Sure it's as dependable as could be, but I doubt it could bring a sigh of relief to a sailor the way the reassuring sight of Edmund Andrews once did. It certainly will never elicit the smiles and laughter on the wizened faces of seaworn fishermen the way that the vision of four happy Andrews children playing in the sun did as their fishing boat rounded that bend into the safety of Wickford Harbor; the Harbor guarded by Edmund Andrews.



Above is the Whale Rock Lighthouse as it appeared before it was destroyed in the 1938 hurricane.



Claude Gardiner's printing shop is seen above on what is now Brown Street. One of the men in the photo likely is Gardiner himself. Below is the shop as seen today.

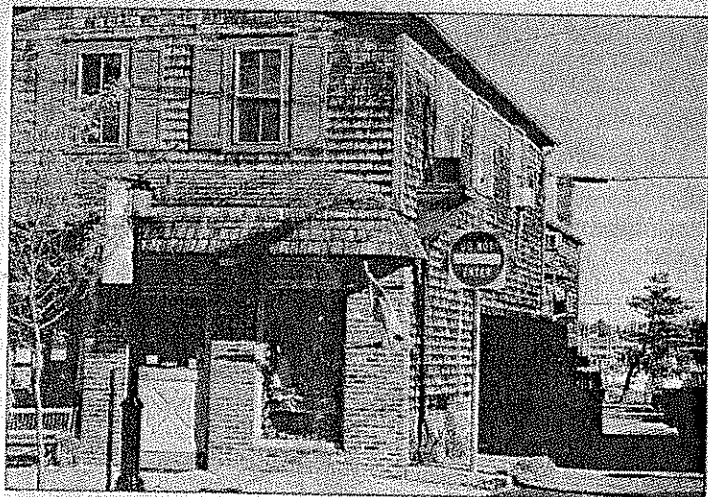


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR



## The View From Swamptown

### Claude Gardiner – Printer

Claude Gardiner was born into a printer's family. Printer's ink ran through his veins. His father, J. Warren Gardiner was a printer, Claude's uncles and cousins, too, were printers. I'm sure before he came of age; Claude was immune to the smells and sounds of a press and could set type with the best of them. You can be certain that Claude had a part in the production of Wickford's first newspaper (no its not the one you are thinking of) "The Rhode Island Telephone" which was printed in town from October of 1883 to March of 1884 by Warren Gardiner and company from out of the Avis Block (then called simply, the Brick Block) until he merged with "The Westerly News" and moved south to that community.

Claude though, stayed behind and opened up the printer's shop on Bridge St. (now Brown St) shown in the accompanying photograph. One of these fine gentlemen is most certainly Claude himself, although I can't say which. This building still exists in the village, albeit in a drastically altered form, as the building that now houses a bakery. Along about 1888, Claude hooked up with Bristol-born journalist James Coggeshall and decided to follow in his father's footsteps. No newspaper had taken the place of "The Telephone" when it moved down south to Westerly and Claude knew the time was right. With that, "The Wickford Standard" was born, with Coggeshall doing the writing and Claude Gardiner as printer and publisher. Still very much a family affair, Claude was assisted at the presses by his cousin Llewellyn Gardiner. Llewellyn did double duty, as he also performed as the newspaper's proofreader as well. For at least the first two years of its existence, "The Standard" was printed in Claude's shop on Brown Street.

Claude Gardiner, it seems, had a wandering spirit, for by 1891 he had sold his interest in the Wickford Standard and opened a print shop in Providence. By 1910, he had another print shop in Crown Point Indiana, and, still on the move, was the proprietor of still another printing establishment in Cleveland in 1920. Cleveland was where Claude finally put down roots. He spent the remainder of his life there and died at the age of 78 in March of 1946.

Claude Gardiner returned to Wickford at least once, for in August of 1931 the very newspaper he had founded made note of his visit to cousin Messena T. Gardiner, a popular butcher in Lafayette. Imagine his surprise when he realized that his newspaper was still around 43 years after he began it. Could he have possibly envisioned at that time, how long his legacy would continue?

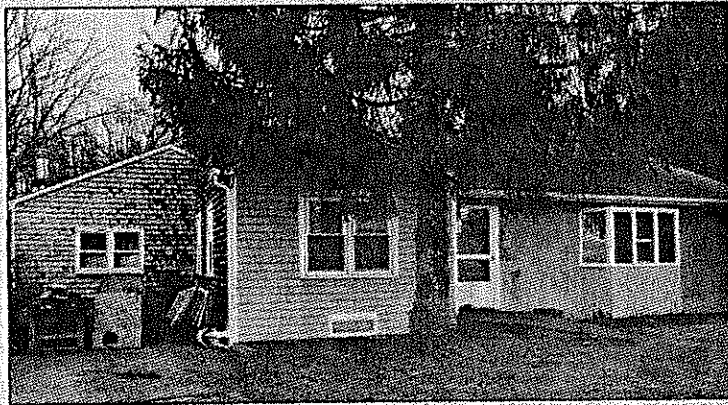


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**The community pulled together to build this house on Boone Street for Donald "Dinky" Gardiner and his family after Gardiner was paralyzed in a fall.**

## The View From Swamptown

### The Donald "Dinky" Gardiner House

This modest ranch house, situated on Boone Street, just a stone's throw away from the NK Free Library and the Wickford Elementary School, may not look like a noteworthy member of our fair town's housing stock, but the fact of the matter is this may be among our most important homes. You see, it's a home built out of love and friendship firmly grounded on a foundation of community concern and spirit. This is indeed the right story, not only for the spirit of the season we are now entering, but also for an age when even the Salvation Army bell-ringing Santa's are under fire.

It all begins like this. Local lads and school chums, Donald "Dinky" Gardiner and his best friend Don Blatchford having served their country with honor during the big one, WWII, have returned to Wickford and are working together in their first civilian jobs since mustering out of the service in the late 1940's. Those jobs, working side-by-side at Seavey's Drugstore (now the home of the Waterfront grille on Brown St.) are certainly not what the two young men had in mind as they planned their future, but no bother, they had a plan and quickly began to carry it out. You see, as the 1950's began, North Kingstown was one of the region's fastest growing "bedroom" communities and there was much opportunity available for the two ambitious young veterans. Before long Don Blatchford and Dinky Gardiner were working side-by-side again in a landscaping business begun by the young Blatchford. Things were really looking up, the many new neighborhoods sprouting up all over town meant ample work for the two friends. Dinky and his wife, the former Jane Johnson, welcomed a son Glenn into the world. Yes life was rosy for the boys, until tragedy struck in the form of an on-the-job ten foot fall which left Dinky paralyzed and fighting for his life in a local hospital.

Jane Gardiner, their extended families, and in fact, the entire close-knit community of Wickford was stunned and saddened by this turn of events. Hit perhaps hardest of all was friend and co-worker Don Blatchford. He was understandably distraught and certainly felt frustrated by his inability to help his injured buddy out of this scrape. Everyone was struck by the sad irony of the fact that this young man had survived a tour of duty as an Air Force gunner during the greatest War in the history of mankind, only to fall victim to a freak accident. Don Blatchford at last came up with a plan. While his friend spent nearly two years in the hospital and in rehab recovering from his injury and readjusting to life in a wheelchair, he got busy making certain that Dinky had an appropriate house to come home to. With that the Dinky Gardiner Fund was begun.

Enlisting the aid of the Wickford Lions Club, Don Blatchford, assisted by friends like Everett Lord and John Mather, began the challenge of raising enough money to build the Gardiner family a home. The community responded, money was raised, and in August of 1953 an all-volunteer crew began building one of the regions first handicapped accessible homes on a plot of land donated to the fund by Margaret Cranston and her son,



then Town Moderator and businessman George Cranston. In spite of delays caused by harsh winter weather and logistical demands beyond their control, Don Blatchford and Everett Lord pounded in the last nails of the Dinky Gardiner house almost exactly 50 years ago today. The following January, Dinky, Jane, and young Glenn came home to a house designed specifically to allow him to be as self-sufficient as possible.

Don Blatchford had been able to help his friend through difficult times. Dinky Gardiner as determined as the day he had signed up to fight the Germans, had persevered through an ordeal that a lesser man might not have survived. And what had began as a young family's darkest time had ended as a community's best moment and as perhaps the Wickford Lions Club's finest hour. For, long before Habitat for Humanity had ever even been conceived of, the Town of North Kingstown pulled together and reached out a helping hand to those that needed it most. Food for thought, North Kingstown!



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The grand house at the end of Main Street in Wickford likely was built by local bank president Charles Boyer Reynolds in 1899, perhaps using part of the building that was on the property before it, a ships chandlery/general store built by the Westcotts.

## End-O-Main

I expect anyone who has strolled the streets of “Ye Olde Quaint & Historic” is familiar with the grand house at 161 Main Street, known for decades as “End-O-Main”. It’s hard to miss, possessing both a distinctive style and extraordinary vistas from every window. Perhaps the eagle-eyed among you have also taken note though, that no date-marked first-owners plaque is posted proudly adjacent to its front door. Fact of the matter is, that, to my knowledge, there never has been one, and this Swamp Yankee is ready to do his part to right that unfortunate wrong.

The story of the beginnings of “End-O-Main” are linked hand in hand with the history of Wickford. You see, the land that this home sits upon was once considered among the village’s most valuable. Back prior to 1850, when Wickford was a viable and booming commercial seaport most of the harbor front land on Main Street (then known as The Grand Highway) and Pleasant and Bay Streets (then one street, known as Main Street) was occupied by commercial ventures related to the sea. Things like warehouses, docks and piers, coal yards, and ships chandlers (stores that supplied provisions to ships and the maritime trade) dotted the landscape. There were very few homes in this area. Homes were relegated to land considered more suitable for that use. Land on the upper portions of the Grand Highway or the western side of Main Street for instance. Sitting upon the property that now contains “End-o-Main” was the Ships Chandlery/General Store of John and Oliver Wescott. Most certainly, there was a wharf or pier attached to the property where the schooners, ships, brigs, and the like could tie-up while they did business with the Wescotts. The Wescotts lived next door to their store in a small home that was physically attached to the shop. At this time, the only known image of this “double building” exists on the remarkable *1888 Bird’s Eye View of Wickford* print; a small number of these wonderful works of art are floating around town – a copy is posted in the Town Hall if you ever wish to examine it. Unfortunately, I have yet to be able to fill in two important blanks in this part of the story; firstly, I do not know for certain when the Wescott shop/house was constructed and secondly, I am not certain of the relationship between John and Oliver, my money is on father and son, with John being the elder, but they could also possibly have been brothers or cousins. Perhaps one of this column’s sage and savvy readers will be able to answer these two queries for us. The Wescotts retained ownership of the property well past the end of Wickford’s days as a viable commercial seaport, and sold it to local fisherman Gilbert F. Willis in 1891.

Gilbert Willis, a hardworking fisherman, only owned the old Wescott place for a short time. In 1897, he sold the property to one of Wickford’s most prosperous gentlemen, Charles Boyer Reynolds. Reynolds was born and raised here in the village, but went off to further his education at Eastman College in Poughkeepsie, NY. After graduating, Charles went on to New York City and was partner in a very successful furniture concern in the “big apple”. He married well, getting hitched to Emilie Wetstein a member of a wealthy New Jersey family. In 1893 “C.B.” retired from the furniture trade and the hustle and bustle of New York City and returned to his ancestral home of Wickford. Charles and his family lived for a time with his parents, Capt. Stephen and Harriet (Gardiner) Reynolds, but before long, decided that he, by that time the President



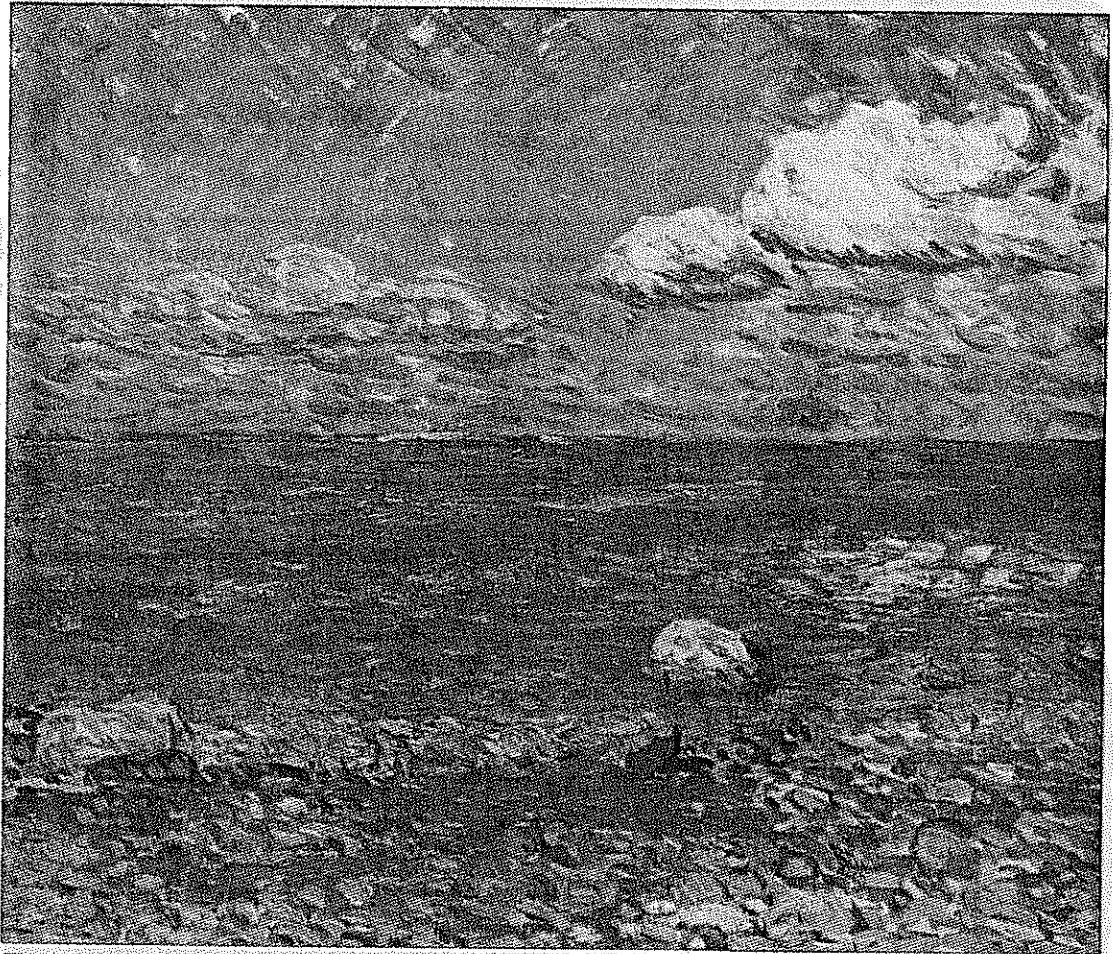


of the Wickford Savings Bank (now the Standard Times Building), needed a home of his own; one appropriate for the "man of means" that he most certainly was.

With that, Charles Boyer Reynolds went about the process of transforming the old Wescott house and shop into the magnificent home we now call "End-o-Main". He evidently succeeded in 1899, for in that year the tax valuation on the property doubled. So that answers the question we began this process with; End-O-Main, although I suspect it contains at least the framing of much of the Wescott building that preceded it, was for all intents and purposes, constructed in 1899 by Bank President Charles Boyer Reynolds. The Reynolds Family retained ownership of the property for 100 years, selling it to its present owners in 1997.

Well, that should end the story of this great old home, but it doesn't. You see, I did all this research at the request of my good friend Edith Niles, who passed away unexpectedly just last week. I must say, it saddens me to know that she didn't get a chance to enjoy the history of the home she lived in and loved so much. Edith was passionate about local history – no surprise there to those who knew her, for Edith Niles had the blessed ability to go about all that she undertook with just such a passion. I used to tease her about being a "Wickford Carpetbagger". In her case though, it was a term of affection, for although she was indeed a carpetbagger, it was in the best sense of the word; Edith's carpetbag was loaded with compassion, commitment, and a sense of community involvement based in the knowledge that she, who had been blessed with so much, had a responsibility to give back to her fellow citizens and neighbors. She was an example to all of us and will be sorely missed.

As a final note I wanted to point out that if you are looking for the perfect gift for that history nut on your list, be certain to check out the Swamptown Enterprises historic maps and photographs on display at the Wilson-Scott Gallery on Main Street.



The William Glackens painting "Wickford, Low Tide" is in the Museum of Art in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. The photograph below approximates the view today.

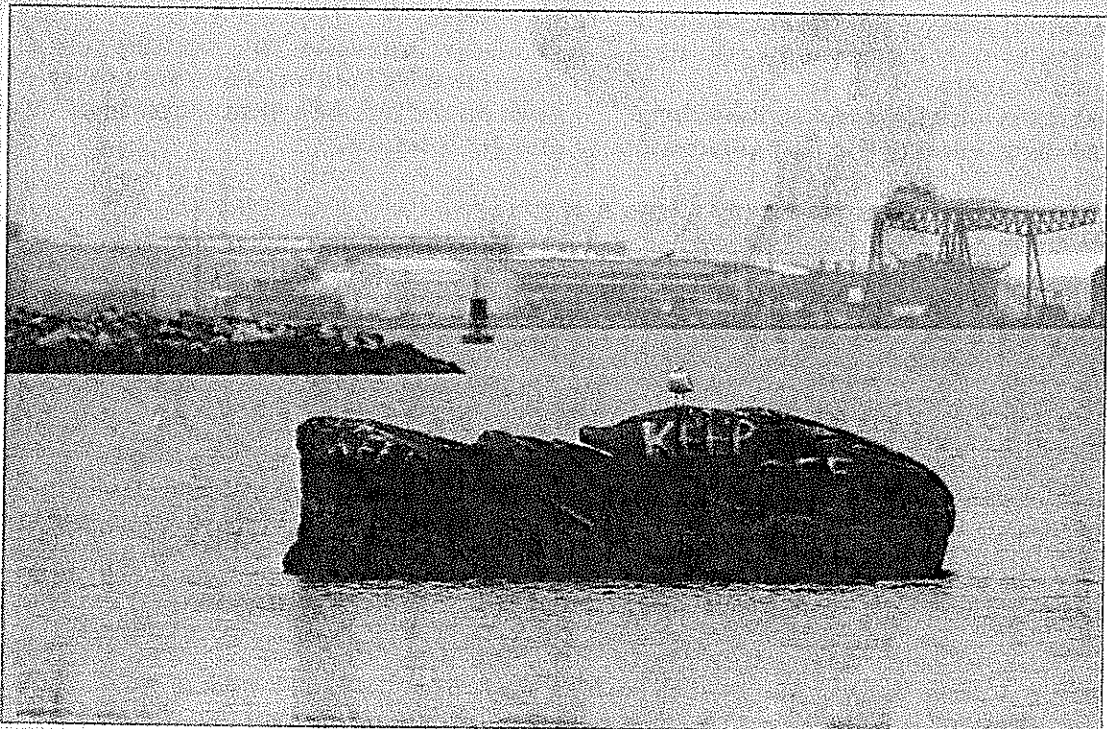


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERI

## The View From Swamptown

### William Glackens and his Summer in Wickford

I guess its only natural now to associate "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic" with art. Between the nationally famous Wickford Art Festival, the legacy of Paule Loring, John Huszer, and others, and the number of small but successful galleries that the village now possesses, the two do seem to go hand in hand. But really, how and when did this all begin? Well, I'm not certain I can completely answer that one today, but I am certain that a vital piece of that puzzle can be attributed to the Cold Spring House; Wickford's former luxury summer hotel, and a visit in the summer of 1909 from two of America's most prominent contemporary artists of the time, William Glackens and Everett Shinn.

Now Glackens and Shinn, one quarter of a closely associated group of artists who along with Henri, Sloan, Luks, Lawson, Prendergast and Davies, called themselves "The Eight" or the "The Eight Americans", were accustomed to spending their summers each year in a different inspiring setting. In the summer of 1909, that place was Cold Spring in Wickford, and although, apparently, for Everett Shinn and his family it was truly a vacation and nothing more, for the more driven William Glackens it was a working holiday, for during that wonderful summer, between frolicking and vacationing with his wife Edith and two children Ira and Lena, he produced between eight and ten glorious paintings, all centered around life at the Cold Spring House and its beach (now the North Kingstown Town Beach).

Why would a couple of New York City's most accomplished artist desire to spend a summer in little Wickford, you might ask? Well, why not! You see, in 1909 it was indeed as wonderful a place as it is now, as well as being a transportation hub of sorts. If one tired of the quiet charms of Cold Spring or the nearby village, one could walk but a few hundred yards and hop aboard "The General" for an exciting steam over to busy Newport and a day in that "City by the Sea". Another option, a short walk away, was to jump aboard the Sea View Electric Trolley at the Station just across from the North Kingstown Town Hall and motor down to Narragansett Pier and the hustle and bustle of that "City by the Sea's" many casinos. Each evening one could always safely return to the tranquil peace of the Cold Spring House and Wickford, the "Village by the Sea".

While here, Glackens painted works depicting scenes that included folks playing tennis, bathing in the cove, and clamming on Cold Spring Beach, along with a number of harbor scenes. Most of these were sold to private collectors and are now lost from view to us the general public. A few though, *Wickford, Low Tide* and *Treading Clams, Wickford*, most prominently, are in museums and can be seen in all their glory. Glackens was so taken by his time in Wickford that, when painting one of his most famous works *Nude With Apple*, in 1910, he chose to include a reproduction of one of his Wickford paintings, *Woman on the Beach*, on the wall in the painting above his subject's head.



**This photo of William Glackens is from the Whitney Museum in New York City.**

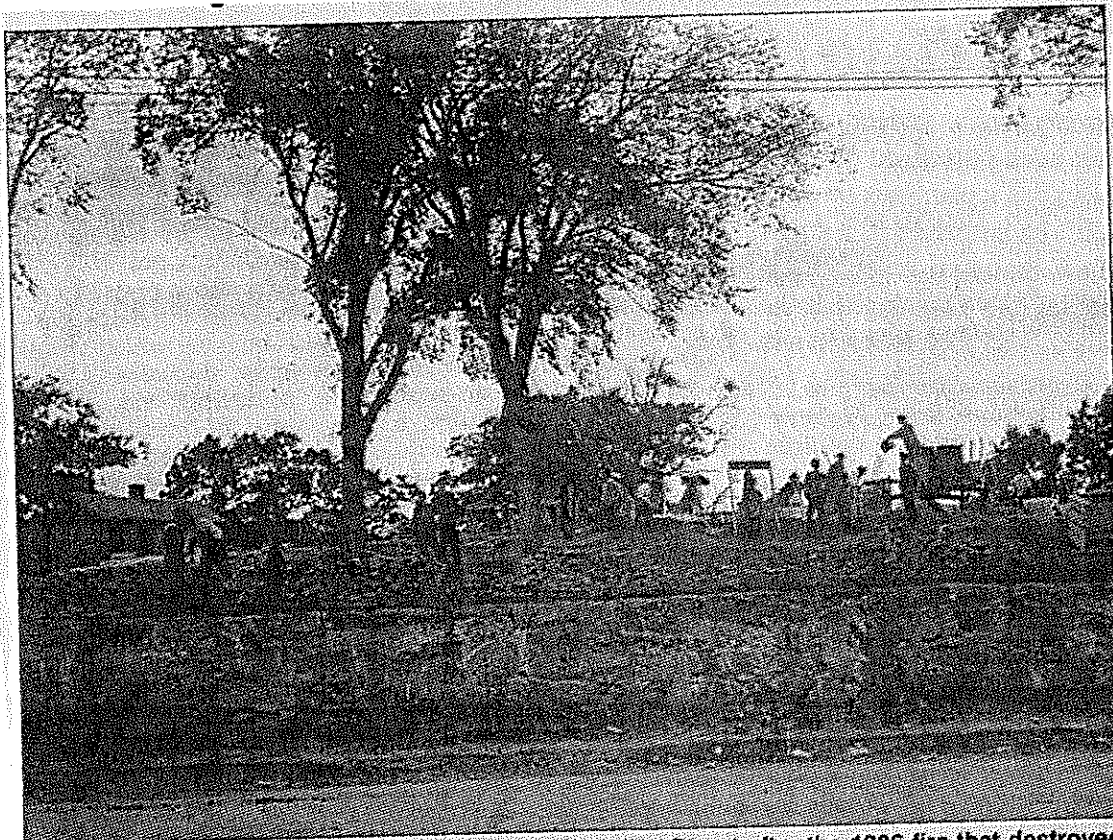


**"Nude With Apple," a portion of which is seen here, is in the Brooklyn Museum in New York City. One of Glackens's most famous paintings, it features one of his Wickford paintings, "Woman on the Beach," in the background.**

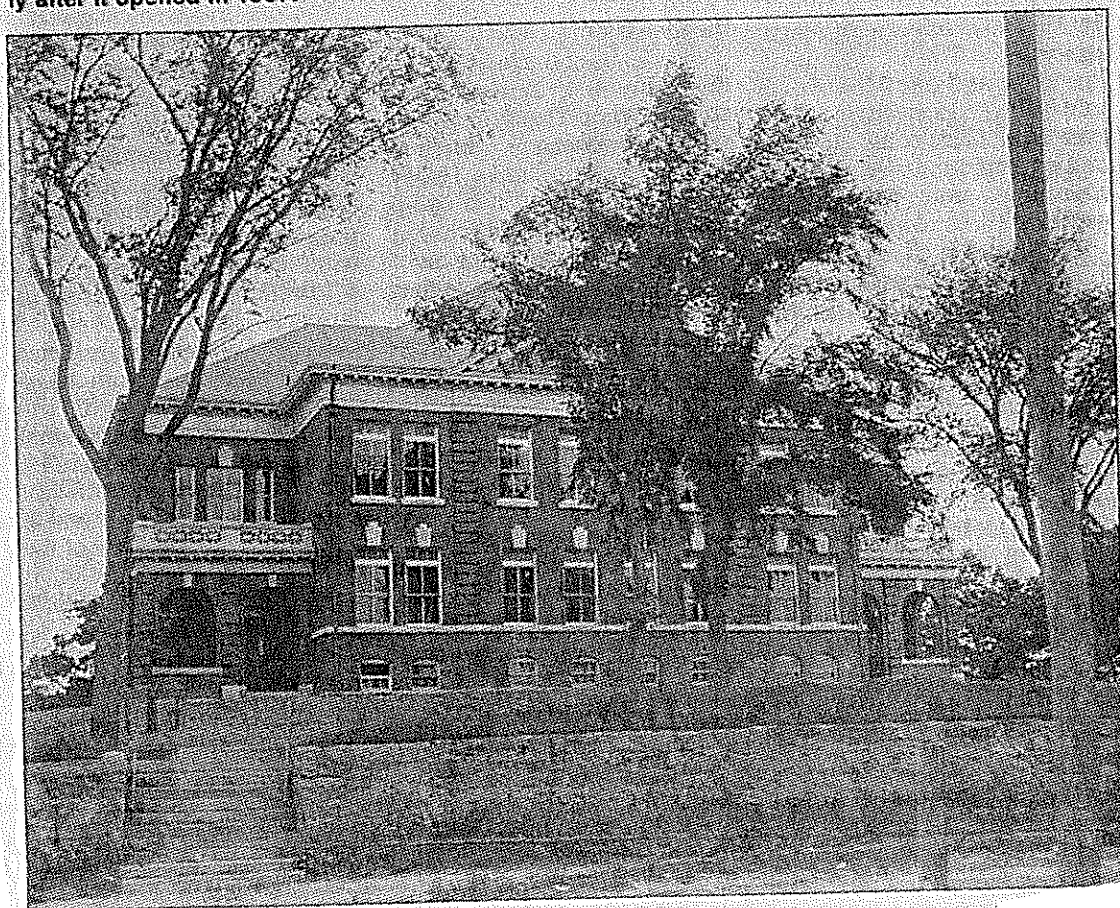
As I mentioned, most of Glackens's Wickford paintings were sold and are now in private hands. Indeed, it's not outside the realm of possibility that a local Wickfordite may have purchased one or more of them. So, with the A-listed artist William Glackens's paintings now regularly fetching prices in the high six-figures at auction, don't be surprised if, someday, you see a serene, and somewhat familiar vista, on a work of art shown on an episode of Antiques Roadshow, owned by a very happy patron of the arts happily realizing that their painting of folks digging clams on a beach in a place called Wickford is worth a million.



This postcard view of the Cold Spring House shows the grand hotel as it looked when the Glackens and Shinn families stayed there in 1909.



Men are hard at work building a new school on Phillips Street after the 1906 fire that destroyed the Wickford Academy building. Note that the only structure to survive the blaze was the outhouse structure in the background. Below, the Wickford Grammar School is pictured immediately after it opened in 1907.



## The View From Swamptown

### The Story behind the Wickford Elementary School Site

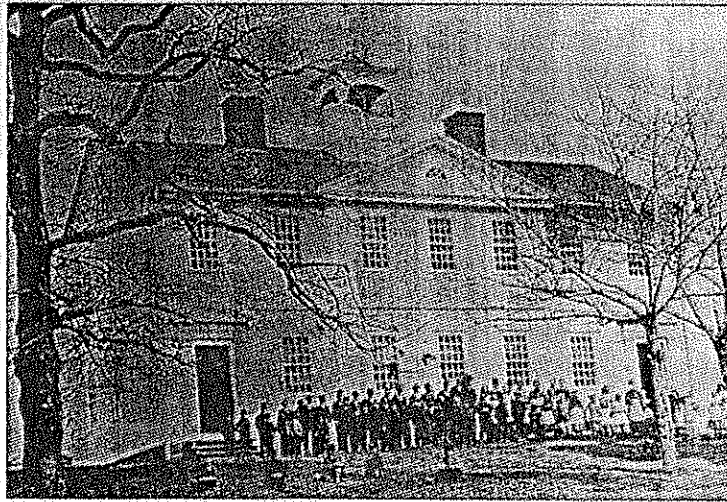
Well, I've got to say; I've been getting lots of questions on this topic. People calling me on the phone, folks stopping me on the street, they're all asking me the same thing, "What do you know about Wickford Elementary School?" Recent events being what they are, it's certainly on everyone's mind. So lets tarry awhile on the topic of Academy Hill and its surrounds. Lets take a Swamptown gander at the history, the facts, that have brought this us to this point in the story of the Wickford Elementary School.

Those facts take us back to 1800. To a time when folks began to realize that we the people, have an obligation to provide a modicum of education to all of the young citizens of our country. Prior to this, only the wealthiest could afford an education for their children; America, by and large, was a nation of illiterates and this would not do in the rapidly changing world of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Slowly, this mindset of education for the masses began to take hold. Village by village, district by district, state by state, a change occurred. Those one-room schoolhouses we all remember reading about and hold so close as a part of national heritage began to appear across the landscape. As the drive towards free public education for all began to pick up steam, a problem arose. There were not enough qualified folks to teach in these "one-roomers" and even more importantly there was scarcely any place where such people could be trained.

It is at this important juncture that we turn our attention to the Washington Academy, the original school that sat upon the present-day site of Wickford Elementary. For this was the purpose of the circa 1800 Washington Academy; unfortunately the sign at the Philips St. school is incorrect, this is not the site of the first public school, on the contrary this is the site of something even more remarkable, this is the site of one of our nation's earliest teacher colleges. For that was the charge of this institution, to educate the educators, to train the future teachers of 19<sup>th</sup> century America. And that is just what happened here. For year after year, decade after decade, the Washington Academy churned out a class of exceptional educators that in turn spread out across New England and staffed those countless one-room schoolhouses that helped bring America into its golden age.

In order to get the Washington Academy built, the folks here in Wickford held a lottery, a common fundraising strategy of that timeframe. The money raised by that lottery was supplemented by a generous donation from Samuel Elam, a man of education and wealth who lived primarily in Newport, but who summered here outside of Wickford on the "Tailor Northup Estate" (still extant and profiled in a previous column) off of what we now know as Hamilton-Allenton Road. The Academy was constructed on land donated specifically for the cause of public education by John and Hannah Franklin and Nicholas and Anna Spink. The building constructed on this land (seen in the accompanying photo) was grand by anyone's estimation and worthy of the honorable task it was meant to carry out. As a way of thanking those involved in this noble achievement, the town's folk in Wickford later renamed a number of nearby streets. This is how the adjacent Elam, Franklin, and Spink Streets got their names.

By the time the 1840's rolled around, the Washington Academy had become, in a way, a victim of its own success. The concept of public education had spread to such a



**The original Washington Academy was destroyed by fire in 1874. It sat on land the Franklin and Spinks families donated expressly for educational purposes.**



degree that state sponsored teaching colleges, such as the Rhode Island Normal School (the predecessor to RI College), were instituted and fewer and fewer aspiring teachers were attending the Academy. It closed around 1847.

The school building though, did not stay idle for long. Understanding the need for a larger building to house the students of the village of Wickford and the surrounding area, in August of 1848 the trustees of the Washington Academy signed a 99 year lease for the building with the town fathers with the specific documented understanding that the Town of North Kingstown would "use the building to accommodate all of the public school children of the combined districts #3 and #4 and continue to allow the trustees access to the building for inspection and for meetings." The terms of this lease were a very generous one penny a year.

And that was just what happened up until 1874 when a fire destroyed the original Washington Academy. The building constructed to replace it, paid for largely with insurance proceeds was known as the Wickford Academy until it too, was burned to the ground in 1906. Again, insurance proceeds allowed the Town of North Kingstown to construct a fine brick replacement building in 1907; seen in the accompanying photo and known to all as Wickford Grammar School. Throughout all of these trials and tribulations, the owners of record of the property were the trustees of the Washington Academy.

That changed in September of 1948, you see the original 99 year lease had expired and the remaining descendants of trustees of the Academy, understanding all the town had invested in the property, decided to sell the Academy Hill site to the Town. The deal was not officially finalized until 1951, but for all intents and purposes, in 1948 after nearly 150 years, ownership of the land passed to North Kingstown, again for a very generous total cost of \$1.00.

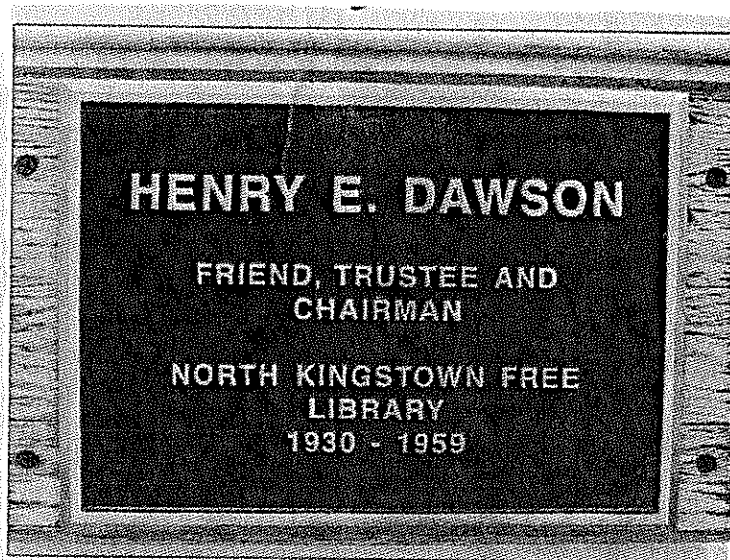
So now, the Town of North Kingstown, for the total cost of \$1.99, payments spread out over 100 years, owned the Wickford Grammar School. But really the school was all they owned. You see, the property lines were at that time roughly defined by the driveway that circles around the school building. All the flat land around the school was owned by the widow Margaret Cranston and her son George C. Cranston Jr. But no problem there; quietly, with no fanfare, ceremonies, or signs required, my great-grandmother and her son, my grandfather, donated the large parcel of land to the Town as well. Again, as was the case with the Academy Trustees, specific language requiring that "Said premises are to be used for recreational or school purposes" only, was included in the deed of gift. So as of April 1949, the Town of North Kingstown owned a 9-acre parcel of land with a magnificent schoolhouse and a playground for just the paltry sum of \$1.99.

The facts surrounding the playground land have been known to all us Cranston's since we were very young. I remember vividly walking home for lunch each day (there was no lunch program back then) as a first grader and feeling a sense of quiet pride as I strode across the land that my family once owned. I remember sitting in that wonderful giant sandbox, which was a magnet for children of all ages, and thinking about my grandparents and their generosity. And now as I an adult, contemplate the fact that my sons were the fourth generation of my family to attend school in this building, I still feel that same sense of pride over what Margaret Cranston, as well as the Franklins and the Spinks, did for their community. And although, no sign exists and no big ceremony ever



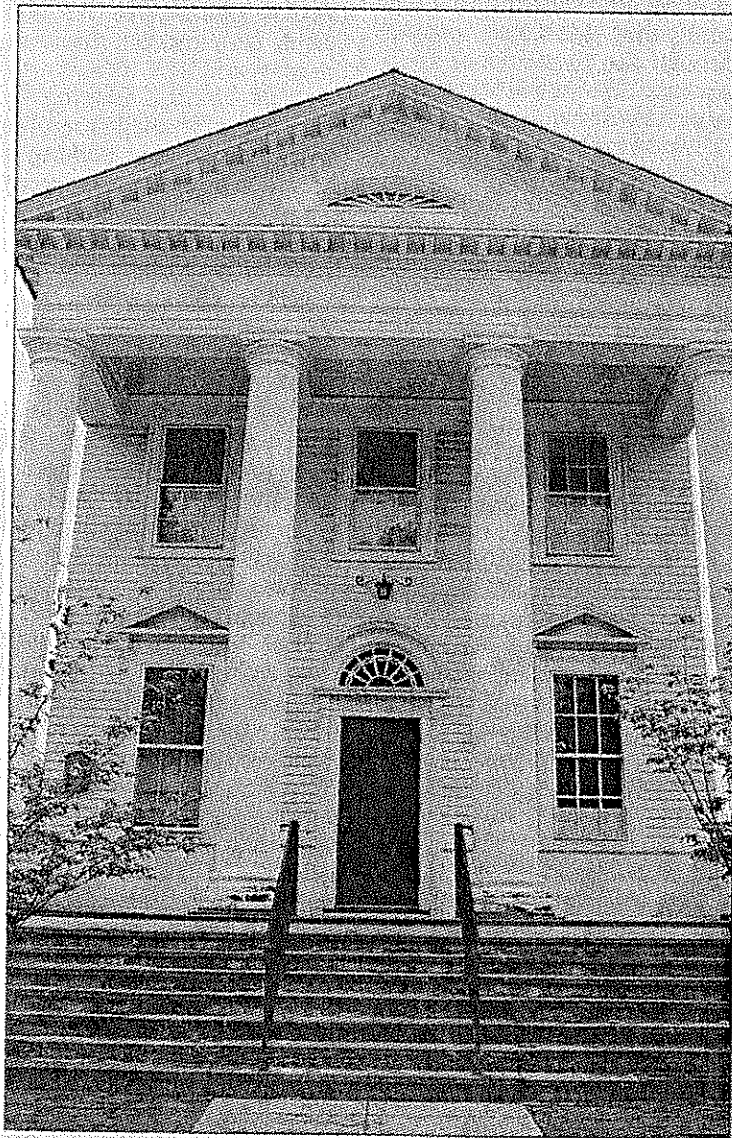
occurred, the Wickford Elementary School playground is just as important to this community as Ryan or Wilson Park is and that's the way it ought to remain. For no greater ceremony could be held than the one that occurs daily as 100 or more children rush out happily on to that field to enjoy the day as only children can. No sign will more elegantly state the importance of this land to all, than the beaming smile of a youngster on a sled whizzing down the hill or running willy-nilly with his or hers best friend in the world across that grassy space.

I urge the School Committee and all the citizens of our fair town to search their hearts as we contemplate the future of this venerable site. Remember the promises made to the Spinks, the Franklins, the trustees of the Washington Academy, and to Margaret Cranston. Most importantly, remember the promise inherent in the nations pledge to provide a quality education to all children in a neighborhood school just like Wickford Elementary. Its my hope that, my sons will at least have the option of sending their children to a school that has meant so much to so many.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

A sign honoring Henry Dawson is mounted on the old North Kingstown library building, pictured below. Dawson was the grandfather of writer Michael de Guzman, who grew up in Wickford and set some of his stories there.



## The View From Swamptown

### Wickford in Literature

I guess it's a pretty well known fact that John Updike's novel "The Witches of Eastwick" is set in a town loosely based upon our own "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic", the village of Wickford. Updike spent some time here in the village prior to writing his novel, and when it was published, everyone here in town had some secret fun trying to figure out who in town might have been included in Updike's work. The popular film based upon Updike's book featured a whole host of big name movie stars, and was a great success, but it never really did give the audience any real feel for what Wickford is all about.

That is not the case with Michael de Guzman's screenplay and subsequent novel, "Strangers – The Story of a Mother and Daughter" written for the small screen in 1977 and then "novelized", again by Mr. De Guzman, in 1979 for Dell Publishing. The film and novel are set in and around Wickford (called Middleport in the film and book) and each and every street scene and shop - why, every single location in the story, corresponds with a real live place here in our fair town; and even a short-time resident of North Kingstown can pick them out with little difficulty. Mr. De Guzman's screenplay was produced as a "made for TV" movie, shortly after he wrote it. It aired on Mother's Day of 1979 and starred none less than Bette Davis and Gena Rowlands. It was critically acclaimed and won an Emmy for Ms. Davis for her wonderful portrayal, both sensitive and powerful, of the mother, Lucy Mason. Not only is this film and book great fun for us local folks, in that we can easily identify with all the local landmarks and village characters - from Ryan's Market to Old Ken Mumford, they're all there, it's also an extraordinary story of reconnection and redemption that easily stands on its own two feet, regardless of the setting.

You might wonder, how did Michael de Guzman so perfectly capture the essence of Wickford and its citizens in this his very first serious work? That's easy, he grew up here; he's as much a Wickford boy as I am. Mr. De Guzman's mom was Addie Lynch, a wonderful lady, fondly remembered by all whose life's she touched, who resided in the little house on the corner of Church Lane. Her son Michael spent his childhood here and her father Henry Dawson (the only real Wickford name used in "Strangers") lived a long a full life here in Wickford. I wrote Michael and asked him about his time here in the village, this is part of what he said, "I can close my eyes and see a small boy running through Bush Hill, or swimming at the end of Main St., often diving off the Town Dock, or exploring the woods where the present library is, or going sailing when I had the chance, or walking to school, or playing pickup baseball. I don't know what it's like now for a kid to grow in Wickford, but it was great back in the 1940's and early 1950's."

It's a funny thing, but when I close my eyes and look back, nearly the same scenes play out in my head, the only difference being the timeframes become the 1960's instead.

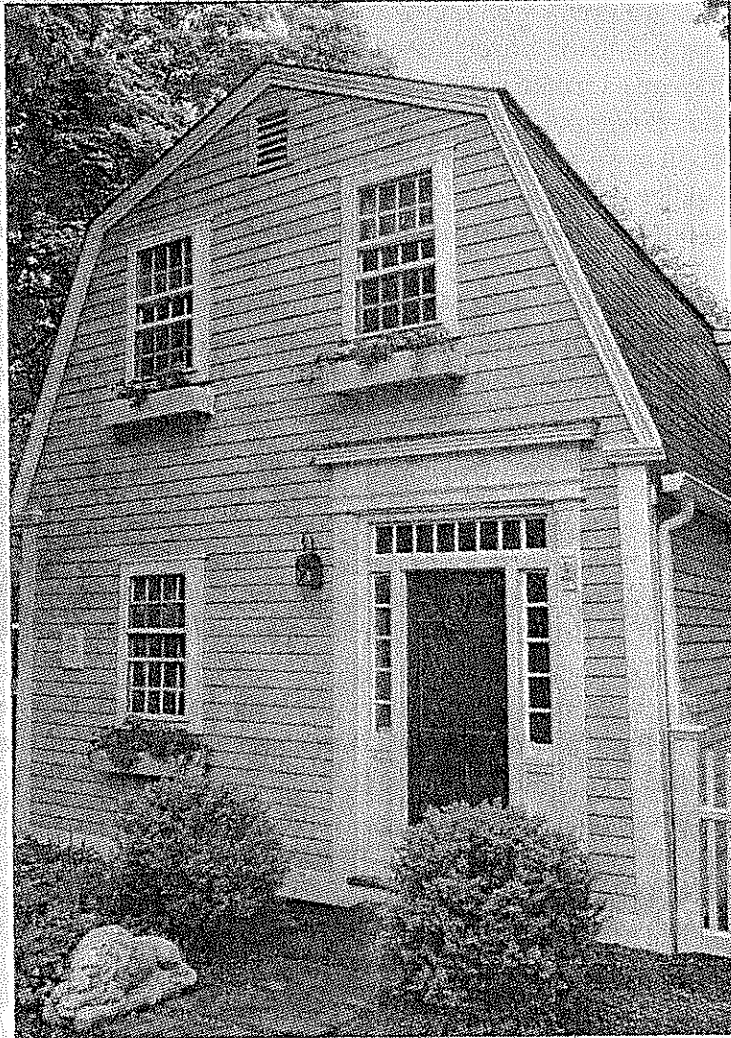


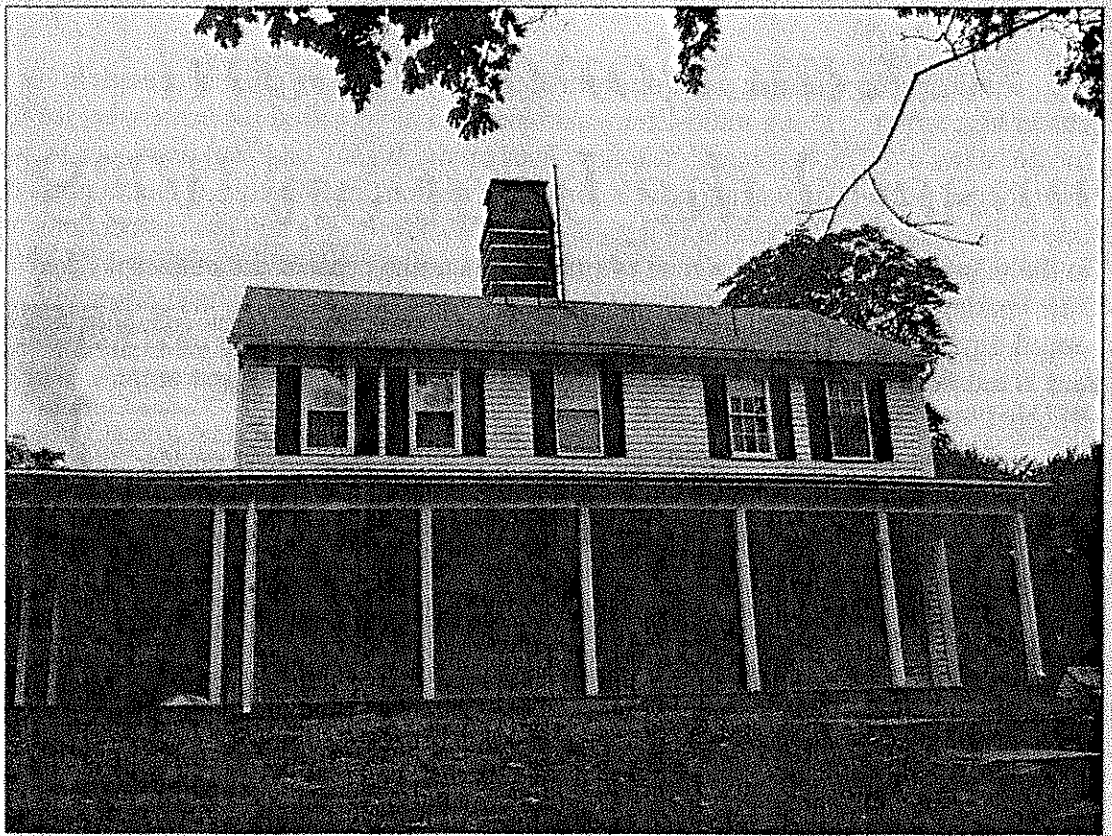
PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**Michael de Guzman was raised in this house at 38 Church Lane in Wickford by his mother, Addie Lynch.**

Michael de Guzman went on from “Strangers” to many great successes in his career as a writer. He is a multi-E Emmy nominee and also crafted the screenplay for the movie “Jaws 4 – The Revenge”. He now lives on the West Coast and continues to write, now focusing solely on writing novels for young readers, as a matter of fact, a portion of one of these books, “Melonhead” is again set in Wickford. He still has connections here in the village and returns from time to time. Even at the peak of the publicity surrounding “Strangers” Michael was pleased to be able to return to his hometown with out to much fanfare. His take on that was, “My experience growing up in Wickford was that it didn’t matter so much what you did but what kind of person you were.” Well said, Michael, well said.

Michael de Guzman’s many books and the movies written from his screenplays can be found at the library. Check “Strangers” out soon and have a ball picking out people and places you know. Be careful though, you’re bound to fall in love with Abbie and Lucy, don’t worry I’m not going to tell you how it ends.

You know, I’d be remiss if I didn’t take a few moments to take note of the pending retirement of North Kingstown’s longtime Planning Department Head, Marilyn Cohen. All across Rhode Island – no, all across New England, the Town of North Kingstown is the benchmark when it comes to responsible community planning. By that I mean, we are the goal that other communities strive towards as they “wrassle” with all that makes retaining a community’s character so difficult. We owe this honor largely to the wisdom and patient determination of Marilyn Cohen. Marilyn is a friend to all that I hold dear. She loves history and the many buildings, homes, and structures that define it in a concrete manner for us. She, too, cherishes the little details that add so much to a village; from big trees (my favorite thing in the world) to little flowers, from street signs to street scapes, Marilyn Cohen understands all too well that “the devil is in the details”, she has taken nothing for granted over the course of her nearly two decades at the helm. We owe her a debt of gratitude that I don’t think we can ever repay in kind. Good luck in whatever you undertake Marilyn, keep “tilting at windmills” wherever life leads you. And to whomever has the unenviable task of following this little (no metaphor here, she really is little) lady’s class act, good luck to you, for not only will the good folks out in Swampstown be keeping an eye on you, Marilyn Cohen will be as well.



Sisters Lucy Waite Reynolds (below, left) and Abigail Updike Reynolds, summered in the house, above, their grandparents of Joseph and Abigail Reynolds built at 173 Boston Neck Road and later moved there permanently in 1910. After their deaths, the property was turned into rental units. It recently was sold, and its new owner wants to demolish the building and construct modern apartments.





## The View From Swamptown

### The Joseph & Abigail Reynolds House

This week, we are going to take a journey through time and observe the goings on at this grand circa 1805 "center-chimney colonial style" home now located on the west side of Boston Neck Road just south of its intersection with Beach Street. This building, known by many as the "Stonecroft Apartments" its most recent name, is at a crossroads in its existence to be sure. Why its new owner has some ambitious plans for the place it seems. More about that later in the column; lets begin by telling the tale of the home built by Joseph Reynolds and his bride, Abigail Updike.

Joseph Reynolds was born in 1770 on a 700 acre farm situated smack dab on the North Kingstown-Exeter town line centered right around the location of the present day Schartner's Farm. There is little record of his early life; as a matter of fact there is little record of his life at all, other than the fact that he ended up marrying his second cousin Abigail, a member of the prominent Updike Family of what we now call Smith's Castle, sometime before the close of the 1700's.

In 1804, Abigail's father, Lodowick (II) Updike died, and his vast real estate holdings were divided up among his many children. Most of this land had already been in the Updike family for well over a century; its acquisition dating back to the first Lodowick and earlier. Lodowick (II)'s five separate working farms were divided up among his five sons, with Wilkins inheriting the Smith's Castle Farm. His many daughters, including Abigail were left with a number of smaller lots in and around Wickford and varying amounts of cash. One of the five brothers, Alfred inherited what was then known as the Cold Spring Farm, a 250-acre parcel of land which included the place where Joseph and Abigail would build their home. Shortly after the estate was settled, Alfred sold his Cold Spring Farm parcel to his sister Abigail and brother-in-law Joseph and they built the core structure of the fine home we still see today.

As mentioned earlier, little is known of the life of Joseph and Naby (an unusual variant nickname for Abigail and the one she apparently used) Reynolds. What is known is that they were, like most of their Reynolds and Updike relations, active members and ardent supporters of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in the village of Wickford. No greater testimony to the level of their involvement could be made than the fine stained glass window dedicated to Abigail sometime after her death at the amazing age of 93 in 1862 which graces the space just above the church's altar. As Joseph had preceded her to heaven in 1843, the fine home and 180 acres of the original 250 acre Cold Spring Farm, a parcel of land that included all of Poplar Point, Cold Spring, and the area around what would become the North Kingstown Town Hall was left to eldest son Edwin Halsey Reynolds, by then a prominent jeweler and gold plater in Providence.

Halsey (his preferred name) and his wife Mary (Andrews) Reynolds and their three children, Abigail Updike, Lucy Waite, and Joseph Lodowick lived for the most part, on the east side of Providence, but each year after inheriting the home in 1862, they summered here in Wickford at what Halsey called "my father's homestead". When Halsey joined his parents in the great beyond in 1878, he left the homestead equally to his three children. In 1889, youngest child Joseph Lodowick, sold his share to his sisters Abby and Lucy who then owned the property outright.



Abby and Lucy, seen in the accompanying circa 1880 photographs, continued their parents' tradition of summering in Wickford. However, since neither of them ever married, they were most often accompanied by friends and relations rather than by spouses and children. They loved it here in Wickford and therefore, after the winter of 1909-10, they decided to live here year-round and never returned to Providence except to visit their many Reynolds and Updike cousins in the capitol city. Like their parents before them, Abby and Lucy were extremely active at St. Paul's Church.

The two sisters, who never held a job, existed quite nicely on the dividends from an extensive stock portfolio left them when their parents died. From time to time, as they saw fit, they would sell off a portion of the Cold Spring Farm and use the funds to maintain their home and the lifestyle they were accustomed to. Things went along fine this way until 1918 when Abby passed away suddenly at the age of 64. Lucy missed her sister and lifelong companion terribly, but filled the void left in her life with the company of her cousin through the line of Wilkins Updike, and recent widow Kate Hidden. This comfortable existence was forever altered though, by the onset of the Great Depression. Lucy's stock portfolio, recently nearly doubled upon the death of her sister Abby, was declining at an alarming rate, and she was required to sell much of her property along the way, to get by. In 1932, Lucy Waite Reynolds joined her family at their eternal rest. The opening paragraph of her last will and testament spoke hopefully of holding off on probating her estate until the Depression was ended. That was not to be, and her reduced holdings were divided up among a number of relatives and numerous charities as she requested. The house though, with its now greatly reduced attached parcel of land, was left to her cousin Kate Hidden. In this fashion, Lucy was able to keep this little portion of the once vast Updike holdings in the hands of a direct family descendant.

Kate Hidden retained the property until 1940, although she utilized it in way quite different from those before her. Kate was the person who began the process of dividing the building into rental units to take advantage of the housing shortage brought about by the construction activities at Quonset/Davisville. She also allowed the fledgling South County Museum to set up their exhibits in the barn behind the house, after they were required to vacate their original home in the Knight owned farm on Scrabbletown Road. Numerous local folks who grew up in the village during the 1930's can recall enjoying the exhibits of the Museum in the barn at Abby and Lucy Renolds place.

Kate sold the property in 1940 ending a chain of nearly 300 years of ownership by a direct Updike descendant. As a matter of fact, this property seems to have been owned by an Updike longer than any other parcel of land. From 1940 to 1950 the house changed hands numerous times until the Barber Family purchased it in 1951. It stayed in that family until just recently.

So that's the tale of this magnificent 200 year-old home up until now. Its seen the comings and goings of generation upon generation of Reynolds/Updikes, housed both a locally important museum and the builders and workers of Quonset/Davisville and countless others. It has graced the little hill above Boston Neck Road with its presence through hurricanes, the Great Depression, and numerous wars. So what next for this, the "Grand Dame" of Boston Neck? What are its new owners ambitious plans? Well he plans to demolish it, to destroy two hundred years of history so that he can construct some nice modern apartment buildings. So here we go again loyal readers, another attempt to hijack our heritage by a shortsighted developer blinded by profit. The Town



government claims it can do nothing to stop this. The folks at the RI Historic Preservation Commission say the same; although the director did tell me he'd be more than happy to work with the owner should he want to save it, on a package that would include generous tax incentives. So crank up the level of righteous indignation a notch or two and call or e-mail our Town Council President or your favorite member. Tell them you aren't going to stand for this. North Kingstown cares about its past.



**Capt. Rollin Mason stands amid the remains of America's Cup winner *Pocahontas* on Cornelius Island in November 1937 holding a plank with markings denoting her tonnage of 4,942 and her hull number. The metal nameplate letters, once displayed proudly on her stern, are at Mason's feet.**

## The View From Swamptown The Sailing Yacht "Pocahontas"

I figure that it's a pretty safe bet that the first location that comes to mind when I mention "The America's Cup" is not Cornelius Island; sure you might think of Newport perhaps, but definitely not Cornelius Island here in Wickford Harbor. But indeed, there is a connection, a connection made way back in 1881 when the New York Yacht Club's anointed Cup defender, the classic racing sloop "Pocahontas" was practicing for her defense race against her training partner or "trial horse" as it was then known, the iron-hulled yacht "Mischief".

A funny thing happened though during those training races. It seems that the unheralded "Mischief" consistently beat "Pocahontas" at her own game. "Pocahontas", a wooden hulled yacht designed by David Kirby and constructed in Bath Maine, regularly came in second during the 1881 Cup defense training runs and, after a meeting of the ruling body of the New York Yacht Club, it was decided that "Mischief" not "Pocahontas" would defend the Cup. And defend it she did; "Mischief" made short work of the British (actually she was a Canadian yacht) contender "Atalanta" and won by a margin of more than 28 minutes. The America's Cup was safe.

How does this all connect with Cornelius Island you ask? Well, after being stripped of her title of "America's Cup Defender" the yacht "Pocahontas" 15 minutes of fame was over. She does show up in the Yacht Registries for a number of years after 1881, but soon thereafter drops out of sight, her provenance a mystery from that point on. A mystery that is, until shortly after the turn of the century, when she shows up here in Wickford Harbor purposely beached on the windward side of Cornelius Island in an effort to keep the surging tides, in a time long before the construction of the breakwater, from washing away the sand. And there she lay, decade after decade, until all that remained of the once proud Cup defender was her sun bleached, wind beaten ribs jutting out of the sand of Cornelius.

In 1937 though, a retired sea captain, our old friend Rollin Mason, realizing full well what that wooden hulk represented, decided to do himself some digging around the old sloop's remains, and came up with what you see here in the accompanying photograph. He gave these artifacts of a bygone era to his friend, the artist and editorial cartoonist Paule Loring, who intended to open a marine museum here in Wickford one day. For the sake of accuracy, I did some research on that tonnage designation and hull number and sure enough, that wreck was the remains of the "Pocahontas". It's a good thing Capt. Mason performed his amateur archaeological sleuthing when he did, for less than one year later, the Great Hurricane of 1938 came along and obliterated any hint of the vessel. The "Pocahontas" was gone.

I guess this story, perhaps better than most, reinforces the dark side of idea that "America loves a winner". As a matter of fact, no matter where I looked I was unable to come up with what I wanted most for this column, a photo of the "Pocahontas" in her glory under full sail racing against "Mischief" as if her life depended upon it, as indeed, as it turned out, it did. As to what happened to the artifacts resurrected from the sea by Rollin Mason, I must say I have yet to find them. Maybe somewhere out there someone can help locate them and together we can restore some of the magic of the "America's Cup" to the legacy of the racing sloop "Pocahontas".

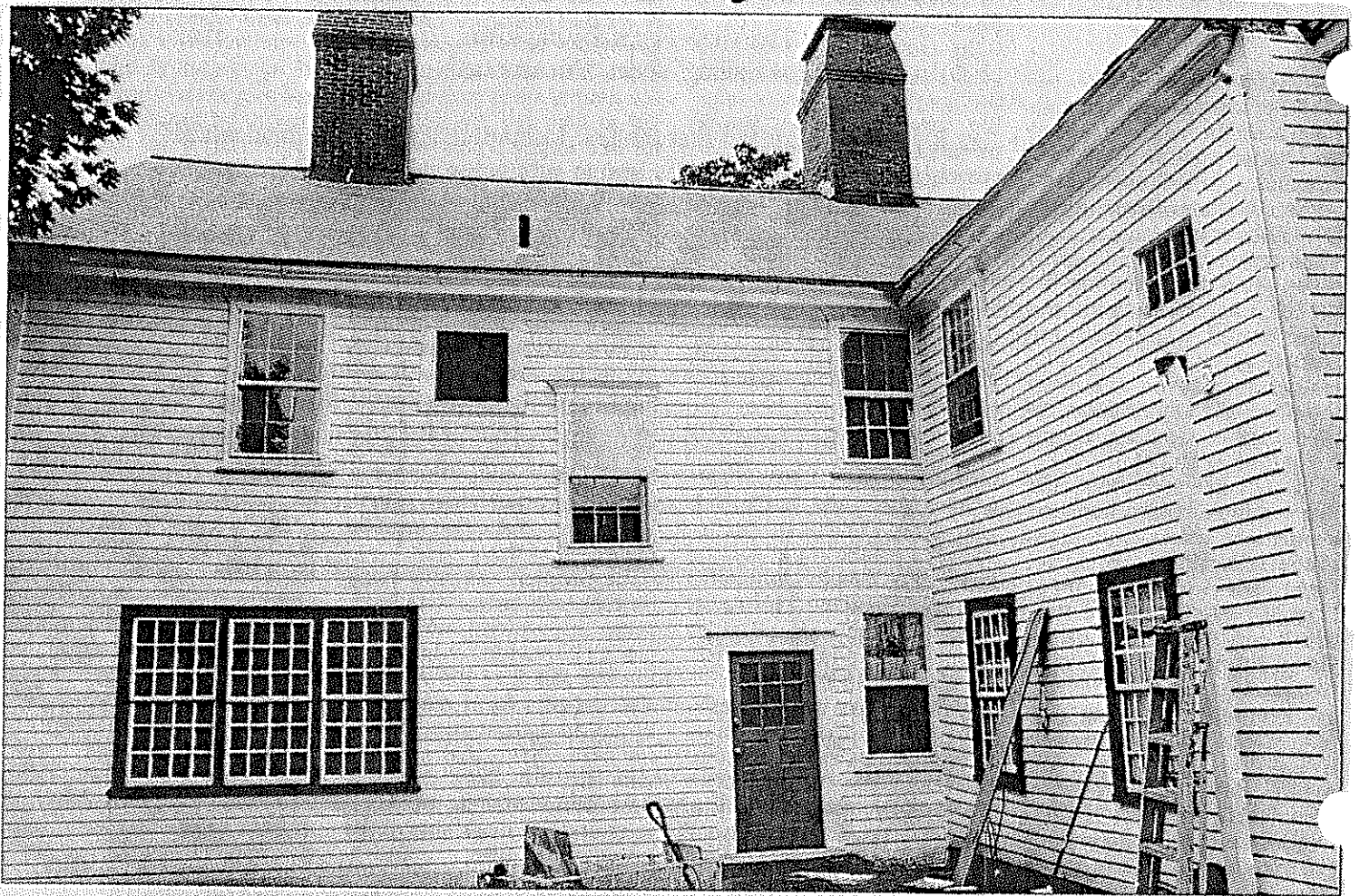
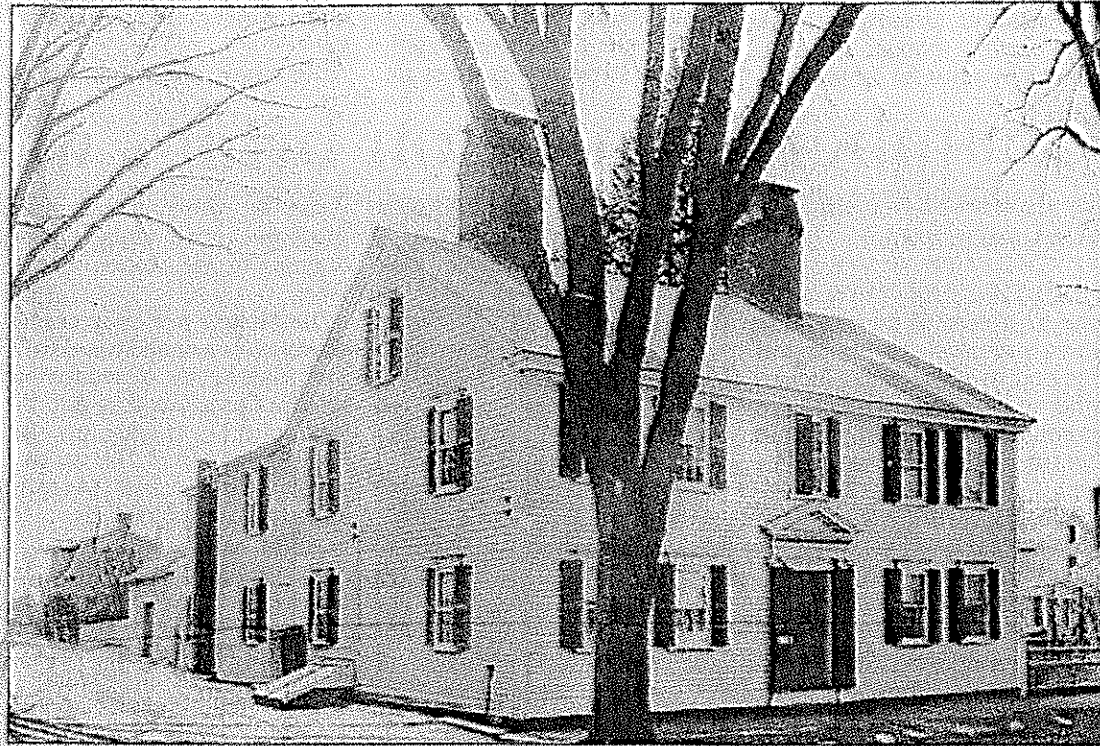


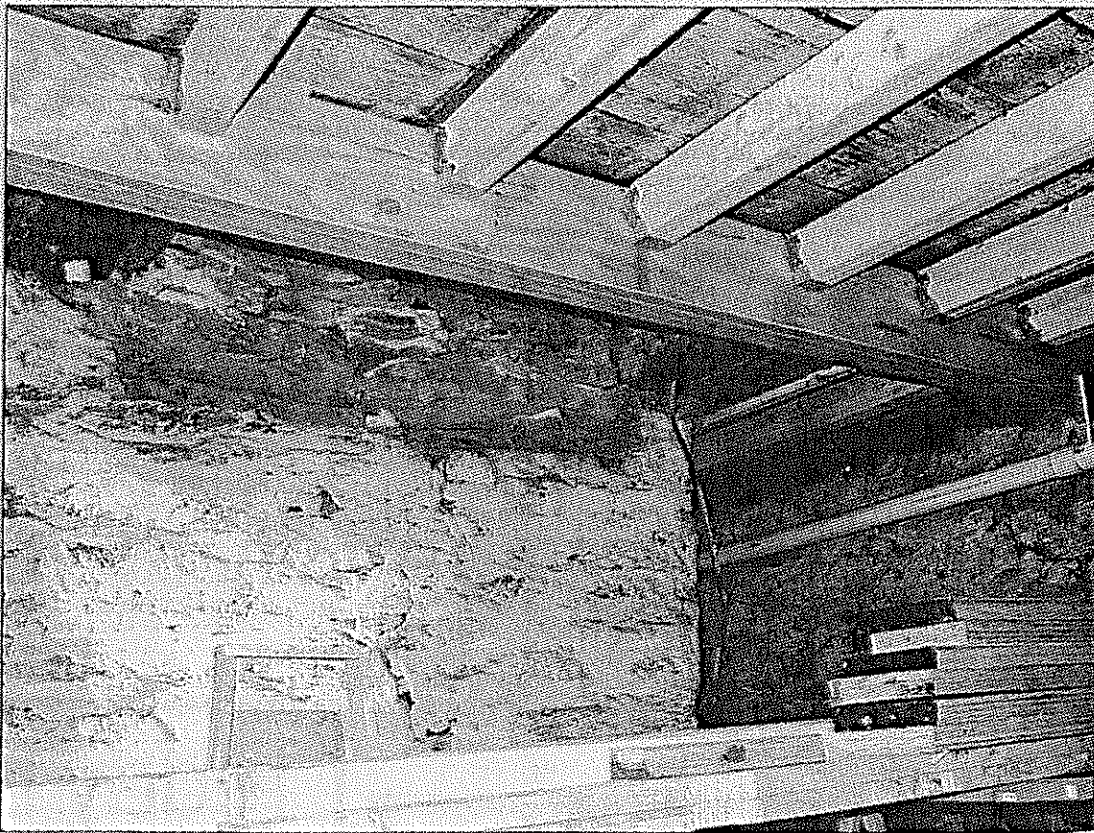
PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

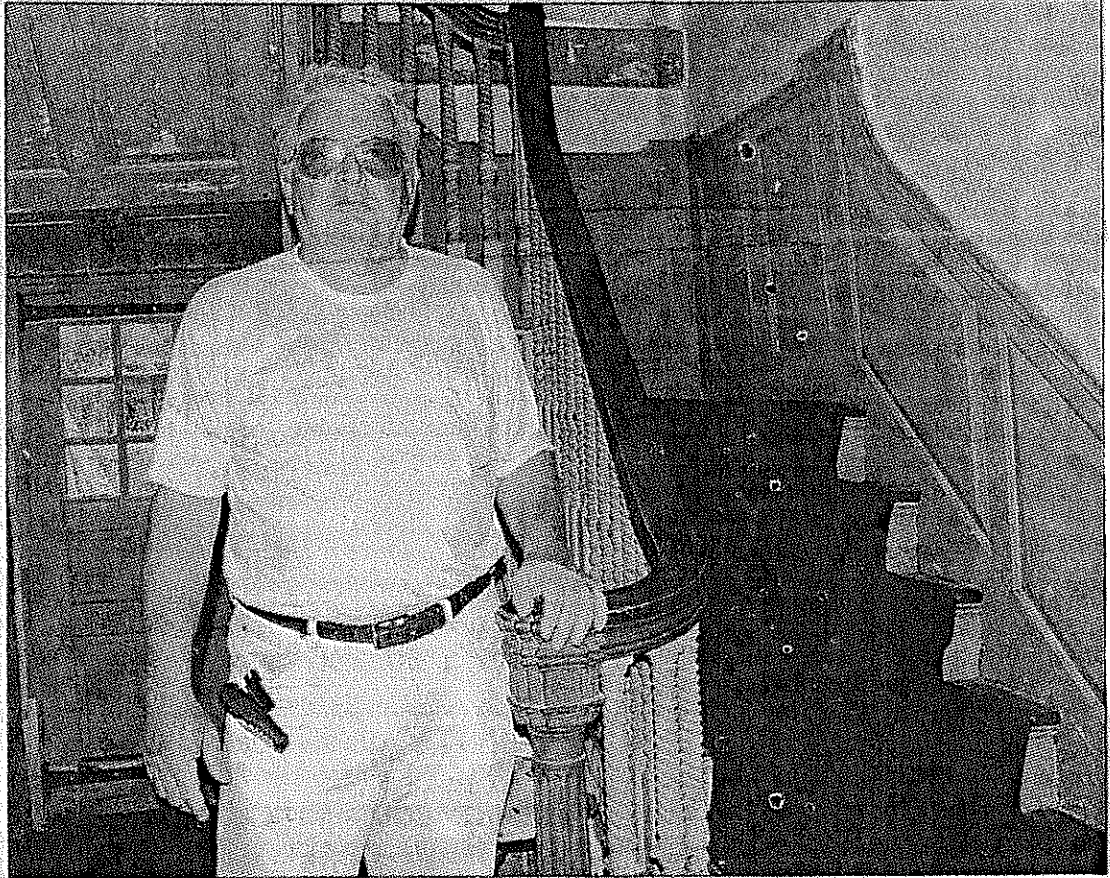
The rear wall of the Immanuel Case house at 41 Main St., formerly known as Wickford's "Pink House," was reconstructed for stability. Its owners, Jim and Donna Jensen, are working to preserve the house's structure and restore it to its glory.



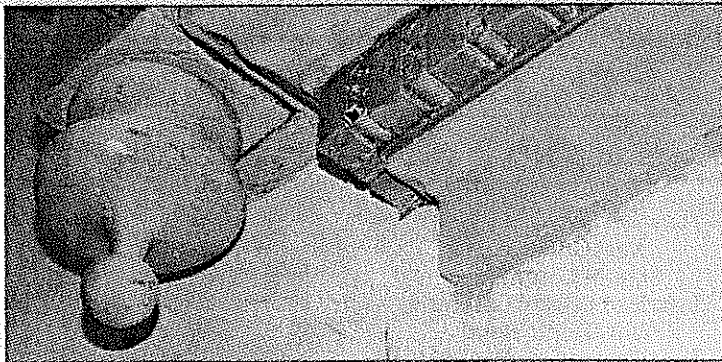


Above, the house at 41 Main St. is pictured as photographed by G. H. Paine on March 15, 1934, for the Historic American Buildings Survey, which documented it as one of a few homes representative of the time frame in which it was built.





PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR



Pictured above is owner Jim Jensen near the stairway of the 1786 house. He and his wife, Donna, are committed to its restoration. At left is restored trim work in the main hallway. At right, new rafters in the basement support the building.

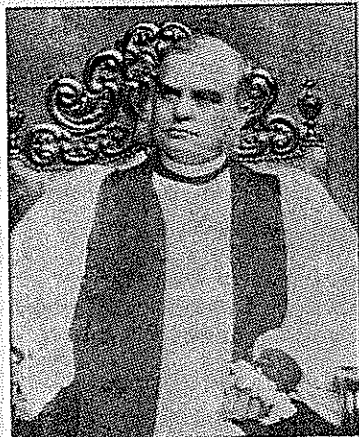
## The View From Swamptown

### A Preservation update

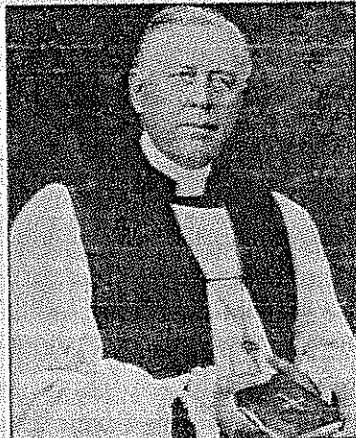
I've got to say, old Immanuel Case would be pleased if he could see his home today. Why the retired former tavern owner who moved to Wickford from the long-vanished village of Tower Hill would simply beam from ear to ear over the events, the efforts, that are being undertaking to keep his extraordinary double interior-chimneyed Georgian "Mansion House" (as he himself called it) in the condition that he was accustomed to. He had it built thusly in 1786, because he had become a man of position, of importance, and I'm sure he felt that the home of the newly appointed "Port Surveyor" for Wickford and the vicinity ought to reflect his station in the new nation of the United States of America. As a matter of fact his home, with its grand entrance hallway, elaborate central staircase, and "motifs of high architectural style of the middle 18<sup>th</sup> century" was chosen in 1934 by the U.S. Government's Historic American Building Survey as one of a small handful of representative homes for its timeframe. As such, a complete set of measured drawings was made of the house at that time.

Now the present day owners of Immanuel Case's Mansion House, Jim and Donna Jensen, are well aware of the existence of those plans and fully understand the important, no make that critical, part they play in the ongoing stewardship of this relic of a bygone time. They are also cognizant of the undeniable fact that this home has felt the fury of three massive hurricanes, one back in 1815 and the others in 1938 & 1954 that filled the basement to the brim, inundating the substantial support structure in salt water, thereby hastening the inevitable decay that affects all colonial era homes situated by the sea. Jim Jensen has no intention of letting Immanuel Case or the many generations of Gardiners that followed him in the home down. He has already reroofed and painted the fine building, as well as attended to the immediate needs of the two massive chimneystacks. This past summer he has had that brine soaked and powder post beetle-affected support structure repaired, thereby insuring that 41 Main Street won't tumble into its own basement within the next few centuries. "Not on my watch!!" is his firm commitment to stewardship here at 41 Main. All the while, the Jensen's have been slowly and meticulously restoring the grand home's interior to a state worthy of its importance. Room by room, Immanuel Case's showpiece is returning.

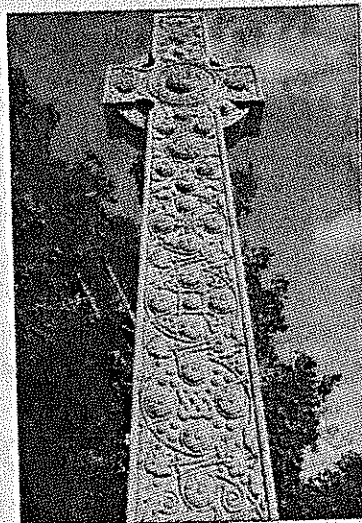
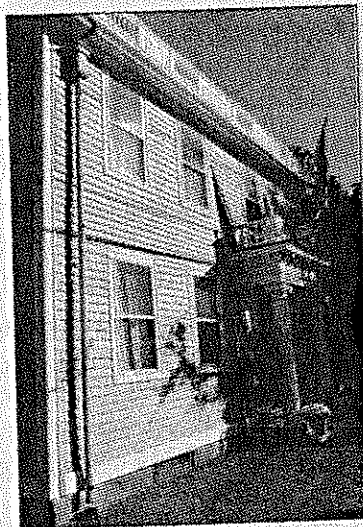
Last year, I was as pleased as could be to leave Wickford's "Pink House" off of my list of 5 Most Endangered Historic Sites for the first time since I began making that sad tally. This year, I'm even happier to be able to offer up "A Swamptown Tip of the Hat" to Jim and Donna Jensen for their able stewardship of such an important building. Bravo!!!



The Rev. Elisha Thomas was second bishop of the Kansas Territory.



The Rev. Nathaniel Thomas was second bishop of the Wyoming Territory.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

Wickford's connection to the Old West began at the Allen Mason Thomas Homestead at 56 Main St. Thomas's son, Elisha, later became a bishop in Kansas. Above right, an intricately carved cross stands in memorial to Bishop Elisha Thomas.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Bishops Thomas – Wickford's Connection to the American West

A pair of stained glass windows, crafted a century ago by the world famous artisans of the Heaton, Butler, & Bayne Studio of London England, are tangible evidence of the thread that ties Wickford, Ye Olde Quaint & Historic, to the fabled American West of the late 1800's. One of these extraordinary windows can be found in St. Paul's Church on Main Street here in the village, and it depicts an image of St. Cecilia, the patron saint of musicians. It is dedicated to Georgina (Brown) Thomas, local lass, and one time organist at the Church. The other half of this memorial masterpiece depicts an image of St. Aiden of Lindisfarne appropriately giving his fine horse, a personal gift to Aiden from the ruler of England at the time, King Oswin, to a beggar who stands there awestruck by the countenance of Aiden and the magnificence of the horse all bedecked in its royal trappings. This beautiful window can be seen in Laramie Wyoming, in the Episcopal Cathedral there. It is dedicated to Georgina's husband, also born and raised here in Wickford, The Reverend Elisha Thomas, the second Bishop of the Kansas Territory. Both windows, one in Wickford and one in Wyoming, were commissioned by the son of these two fine people, the Reverend Nathaniel Thomas, the second Bishop of the Wyoming Territory. This thread, which extends from Wyoming through Kansas and Minnesota on its way to Wickford, begins in the fine home just across the street from St. Paul's Church, The Allen Mason Thomas Homestead at 56 Main Street.

That house was purchased by Allen Thomas from James Bullock, whose second wife declined to live in the house built for her predecessor (Bullock built another fine home on Brown St for that wife; it is now occupied by an advertising firm). Allen Thomas, who eventually had eight children, expanded the Bullock house greatly, adding the large addition to the back of the original structure. His move into that home with his wife Charlotte (Smith) was a short one. Allen was born and raised next door in his father's enormous double house/store. It was there that Allen Mason Thomas learned his trade as a merchant, under his father Richard's tutelage, who was also the local Justice of the Peace for more than four decades. Allen Thomas was very active at St. Paul's Church as a warden and the church's clerk for more than fifty years as was his wife Charlotte, and it's no surprise that their eldest son Elisha Smith Thomas felt so at home in the Church that he decided to answer his personal call and become a member of the clergy. Allen Mason Thomas' life ended tragically, when he, in the throws of what we now know as Alzheimer's disease, began to act strangely, making decisions that threatened the stability of his sizeable financial empire. His family was therefore forced to take him to court and the probate records of North Kingstown during that timeframe are full of references to "the madman Allen Mason Thomas". It was a sad end to a vital and successful man's life and had to have been difficult for his family.

His son Elisha was born here in Wickford in 1834 and after an education in the public schools of North Kingstown attended Yale and then the Berkeley Divinity School in 1861. His first position was at the Louisiana School for the Deaf where he mastered sign language. This was followed by a three-year assignment at a church in New Haven Ct. and then 5 years as a professor at Seabury Institute teaching Biblical Studies. After that he served at Episcopal Churches in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Finally in 1887 he was

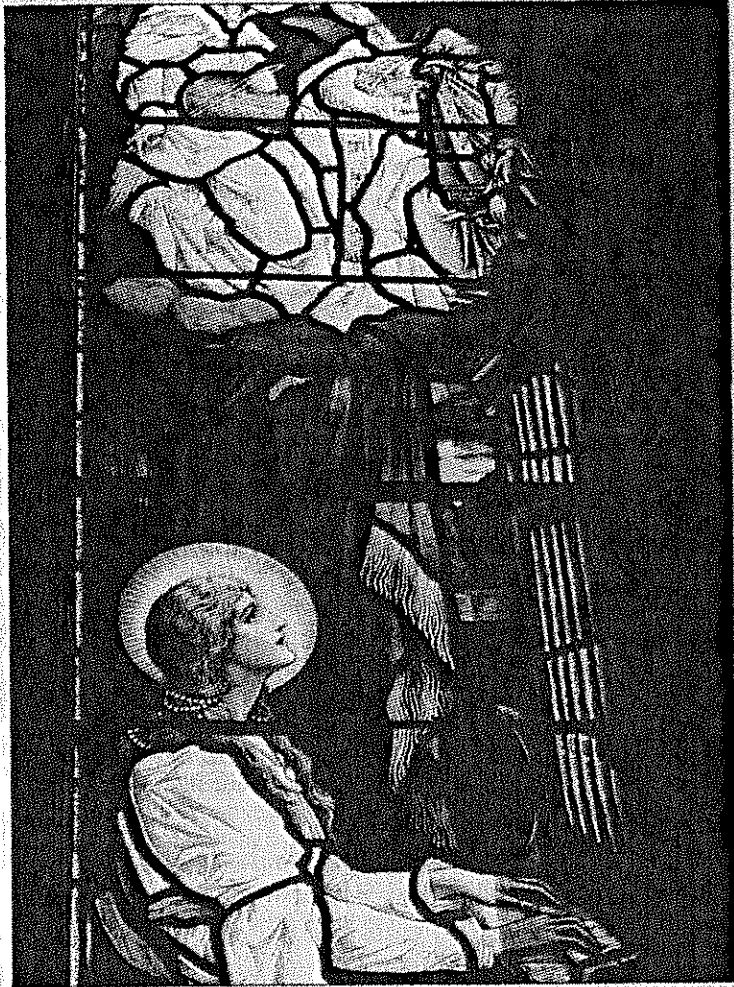


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

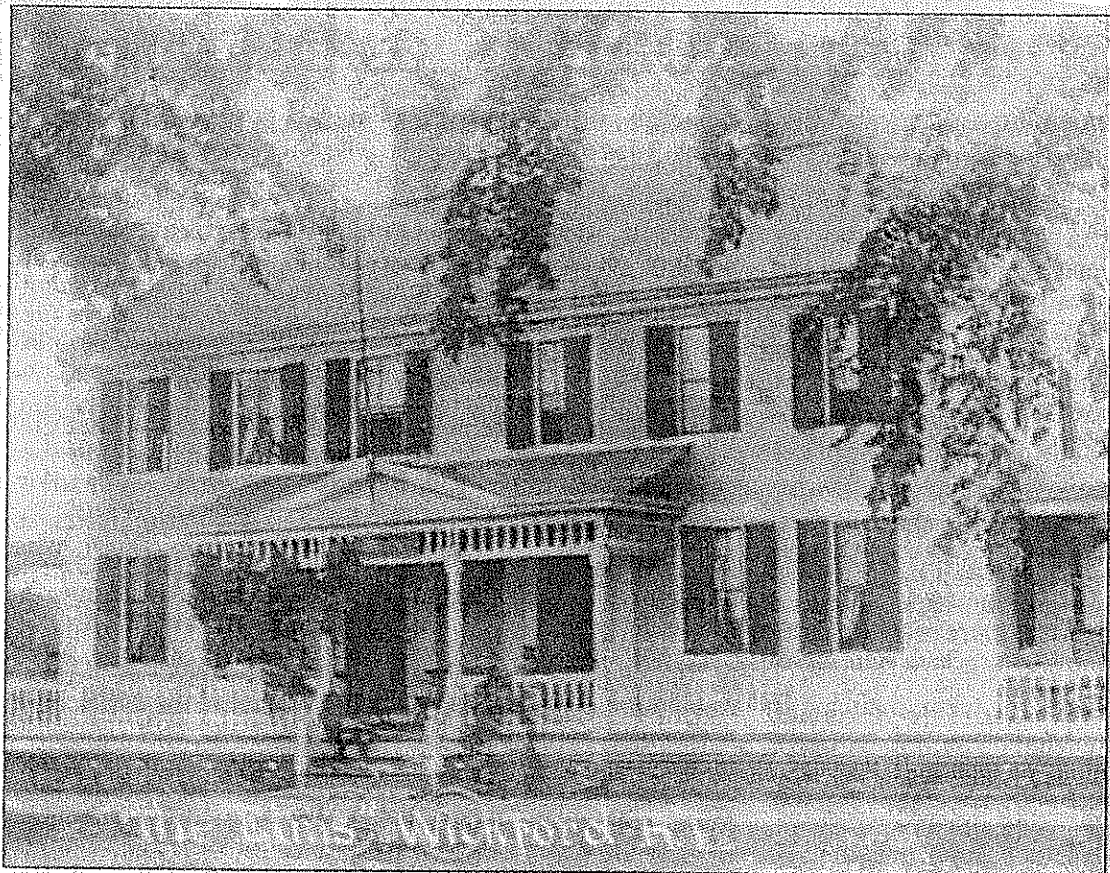
The Rev. Nathaniel Thomas commissioned two windows in honor of his parents. One, of St. Cecilia at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Wickford, is dedicated to his mother, Georgina. The St. Aiden window in the Wyoming Episcopal Cathedral, below, was dedicated to his father, Wickford-born Bishop Elisha Thomas.



elected Assistant Bishop of Kansas and then in 1889 Bishop of the Kansas Territory. His dramatic life in the Kansas Territories and the image of a Bishop saddled up and riding the western ranges furnished the basis for a number of stories about western life profiled in magazines of the time and the books of western writer Cyrus Townsend Brady. Along the way, Elisha Thomas founded numerous churches and missions along with a number of schools; chief among them St John's Military Academy in Salinas Kansas. His unexpected death in 1895 rocked the entire western territory, the well-known Bishop was mourned by all and his loss was best expressed by the Diocese of Kansas' official proclamation, which said in part, "Words are too poor to express our loss. We are in no mood for formal resolutions. We only cry, God pity us and raise up another whose qualifications may reach to some degree those of the late universally loved Bishop of Kansas now numbered with thy Saints". After a service in Kansas, Elisha Smith Thomas came home to Wickford and was buried within sight of his parent's graves.

Accompanying his father's body on the long train trip from Kansas to Wickford was his son Reverend Nathaniel Thomas. Elisha was not only his father, he was also his boss, as Nathaniel served the Diocese of Kansas at Fort Leavenworth where he not only ministered to the community there, but also to the outlaws, rustlers, murderers, and general bad men incarcerated at Fort Leavenworth's Federal Penitentiary. Every legendary outlaw of the old west who wasn't killed outright ended up with his soul in the hands of the good Reverend Thomas. His friend, Leavenworth saddle manufacturer Charlie Ackenhausen, used to say that the Daltons, Doolins, Youngers, James, and Cooks thought highly of their priest calling him "the best 'sky pilot' (priest) out there, a good fellow who mixed well with all at the prison". By 1909, the good reverend, who had nearly obtained the same legendary "old west" status that his father held before him, was elected Bishop of a Territory even wilder than Kansas; Nathaniel Thomas was the Bishop of the Wyoming Territory. He reigned from the saddle just as his father had, tallying up trips of 1000's of miles across Wyoming from Jackson to Laramie to Yellowstone and everywhere in between along the way he opened up missions, churches, hospitals and schools for white men and Indian alike. He was respected by all he met along the way. The Minnesota born son of a Wickford boy returned here to the village as well and cemented the end of that thread which tied it all together when he had the memorial window to his mother installed at St Paul's Church adjacent to the main pulpit, constructed by Gorham in Providence and dedicated to the memory of his father. He died in 1937 and is buried in his retirement home of Santa Barbara, California.

You know, there's one more tangible solid memorial that secures the ties that bind Wickford to the Old West. Out in Elm Grove, standing there tall and proud is a pink granite intricately carved Ionic Cross dedicated to the memory of Bishop Elisha Thomas. It was paid for by the people who loved him here in Wickford and out there in Kansas and dedicated by a Minnesota boy bound for glory in Wyoming.



**This rare photograph of The Elms was taken sometime before Jan. 13, 1905, when it burned.**



## The Elms

I expect it's a safe bet to say that the Byron Lawrence family were firm believers in the superstitions surrounding "Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>s", after the horrendous day they experienced on Friday January 13, 1905. You see, it was on that very day that their summer guest house "The Elms", located on West Main Street, in the Quality Hill section of town burned to the ground. It was a day that changed their lives, and, I'm certain, each and every time another Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> rolled around after that, they all experienced a little shudder.

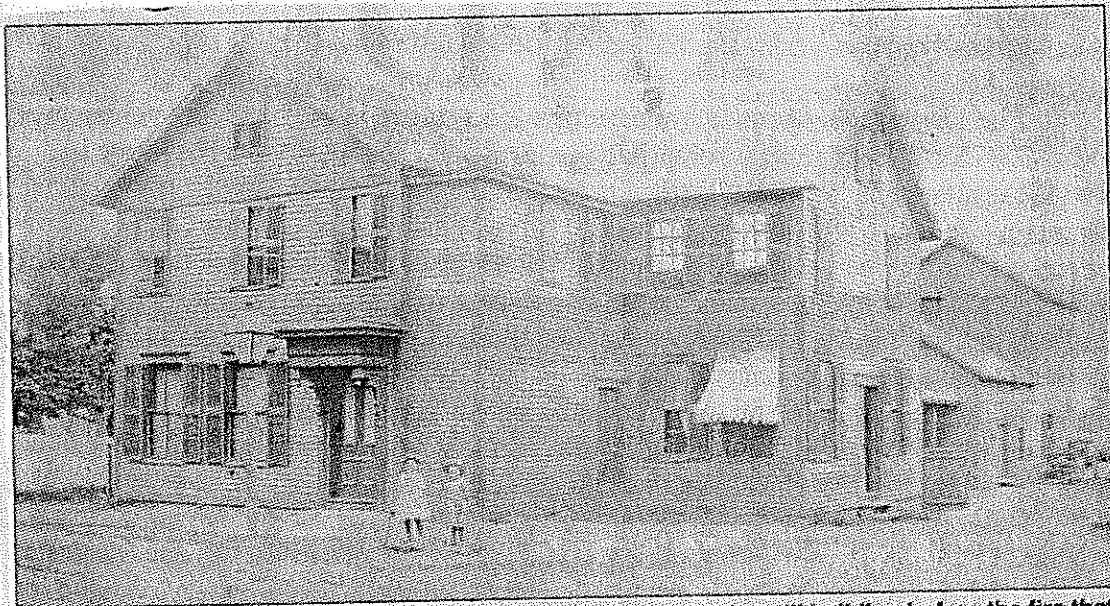
The Lawrence's were far from the first folks to live in the big double-chimneyed home. For decades, beginning sometime in the middle 18<sup>th</sup> century the big house had been the center of life for the Wickford branch of the Spink family. But in 1889, taking advantage the influx of folks into the village brought here by the Newport & Wickford Line, the family home was transformed into a summer hotel of sorts; one that quickly gained an excellent reputation and began to compete with Mother Prentice's Wickford House just down the hill on Main Street. The Elms was first operated by the Holloways, another Quality Hill area family, but was subsequently run by William and Abby Sherman, Eugene Nichols, and, of course, the not-so-lucky Lawrences. The accompanying photograph, a rare view of the Elms; is a souvenir photo taken, most probably during the "Sherman" era of the hotels existence.

After the blaze, which completely consumed the venerable old home, the land was purchased by Peter Byrnes and became the location of the village florist business that he ran with his adopted son, Luke Ward (recently profiled in the series on the graduating class of 1905). That business changed hands a few times and eventually became Schartners' Wickford Flowers.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Peter Byrnes rebuilt his flower shop on the site of The Elms. It's now owned by Wickford Flowers.



The above photo, taken in 1884, shows the Peirce house and grist mill building before the fire that destroyed the grist mill but spared the house. Pictured is Mary Peirce, who married into the Rodman family and was the last person to live in the home that became the former Lafayette Nursing Home, and John P.B. Peirce, who grew up to be the third generation of his family to serve as North Kingstown's town clerk. Below is the same building as it appears today.

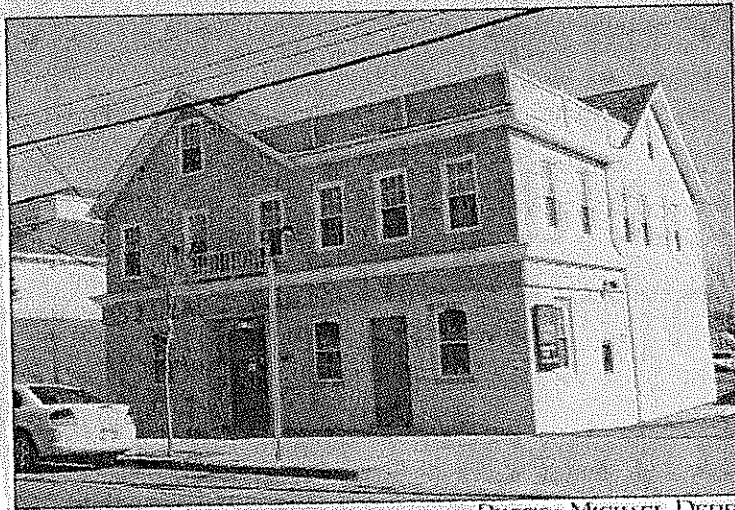


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

## The View From Swamptown

### The John B. Peirce House

If there is a “poster child” building in Wickford that illustrates the fact that many seemingly innocuous commercial structures can possess an interesting and unusual past, then the bank building at 27 Brown Street in “Ye Olde Quaint & Historic” is just that building. Most folks pass it by or enter it to do their banking never realizing what has transpired within these walls. But this building, built sometime around 1850 by one of Wickford’s first “power couples” William and Avis Brown, does indeed have a tale to tell.

Brown bought this “wharf lot”, as he called it, from a relation of his wife, Boone Spink in 1845. It was strictly a commercial venture, as Brown already had a fine home just across the street that bore his family’s name. These were busy times for the Brown’s, shortly after the occurrence of a great fire in 1850 that destroyed a large number of commercial structures, Avis had the business block that would eventually bear her name constructed, and the couple had a hand in building the Wickford National Bank building (now the home of the Standard-Times) too. Somehow, in and amongst all that, they also had the nice home shown in the accompanying circa 1885 photo, constructed on the old Boone Spink wharf lot as well. The Brown’s intentions seemed to be to run a grain and feed supply store on the site, utilizing the wharf space for shipments in and out of the village and having this fine home as living space for the family they would hire to run the operation. At first, that family was the one headed by Cyrus Morse, and Cy Morse’s Feed Store shows up in the historic record throughout this period. This business was also run for a time, by Thomas Hughes as well. The Browns eventually sold the business to Hughes, who in turn resold it after a time, to a Civil War veteran named John B. Peirce (featured in a recent tale about RI’s Black Civil War regiment). Now, John Peirce had even bigger dreams for this grain and feed store than his predecessors had had.

Prior to Peirce’s purchase of the property all grain brought in to be milled was “subbed” out to local grist mills like the one that existed on Camp Avenue or out in Scrabbletown. The miller would have to come down with a wagon and a team of horses and haul away the corn or wheat and mill it at his establishment. The meal or flour would then have to be hauled back into Wickford to the grain and feed store. For these services, the miller would take a portion, known as the “let”, of the finished product for use by his family or for resale. This was a big part of how a miller made ends meet in a world where barter was still quite prevalent. John Peirce intended to change all that and did so by installing a steam powered grist mill at his business establishment in the 1870’s. John Peirce could now grind all the corn and wheat he wanted to right on site. Before long John Peirce was operating the most successful grain business in town and began to deal in coal and lumber, brought in to the wharf at the back of property as well.



Things went well for the Peirce clan for many years, John's son Thomas joined the business and raised a family here in the fine home on Brown Street. The children shown in the 1885 photo are his daughter Mary and his young son John P. B. Peirce. All three of these Peirce men, John B., Thomas J., and John P.B. successively served as North Kingstown Town Clerks and gave back to their community in that fashion. But the year 1885 was an eventful one for the Peirces. Not only did the patriarch of the family John B. pass away, but there was also another horrific fire in the village, one that nearly consumed their home and all around them.

It started in the neighboring yards of the Sherman Brothers Lumberyard (later Barber Hardware and then Green Ink/Teddy Bearskins) in a lime storage shed on the property. Before long the wind swept flames had spread to the Peirce Grist Mill Building, numerous lumber storage sheds at the Sherman Lumberyard, a large coal pile on the grounds of the nearby Gregory Mill (now Gold Lady Jewelers and the Kayak Center) and the schooner "Castilian" which was tied up at the Gregory Mill wharf. The village's handpumper was brought out and seawater was pumped onto the flames. But the winds and the numerous fuel sources kept the fire raging. Next the fire fighting crew at the Gregory Mill joined the battle and, with this additional manpower, the fire was kept from spreading further, but could not be extinguished. Finally, the firefighting equipment from nearby East Greenwich was hauled down into Wickford by a hastily arranged emergency train and finally, with this additional manpower and a fortuitous change in wind direction, the fire was brought under control and extinguished. Damage at the Sherman Bros was extensive, and the Peirce gristmill building was destroyed, but their home and the home of neighbor Charles Straight was only slightly damaged and could be repaired quickly. Undaunted by the tragedy, Thomas Peirce rebuilt the steam-powered gristmill building and got back into business.

Finally, in 1903 after nearly 30 years of occupancy, the Peirce family sold their successful business to local entrepreneur Harry Dixon. Dixon was already quite well known in the area as the man who had single-handedly brought telephone service into the village. He eventually sold this village wide system to the Providence Telephone Company after they had extended their reach into East Greenwich and made for himself a handsome profit. He took this money and purchased the Peirce Gristmill and Feed Store and renamed it the Wickford Milling and Supply Company. He ran the business essentially the same as the Peirce's had before him, living comfortably in the home built decades before by the Browns, and continued to be quite successful.

Harry Dixon and his family's time at the Wickford Milling and Supply Company ended tragically in 1929 with his death from pneumonia. And with his death a business which had operated for more than 75 years ended as well. Dixon's widow lost the business to foreclosure and that bank, the Wickford Savings Bank, which had operated out of its office in the brick Freeborn House on Main Street for decades, decided to retain the building and move their offices to the prominent Brown Street location. From that point on until today, a bank has operated in the building that formerly had served as a home for many families that had run a grain and feed establishment on the property. And in the ironic way that things often occur here in our fair town, for many of those years, the manager of the Wickford Savings Bank was none other than the son of John P. B. Peirce, Thomas J. Peirce II.



So, the next time you walk into the Sovereign Bank to use the ATM or make a deposit, or if you are walking by on a fine sunny day, stop for a while and look at the building in a new light. Imagine the sound of a horse impatiently neighing while its owner and John Peirce both stand there mesmerized by the sound of the mill stones whirring away grinding hard corn into a fine meal. For those are the sounds of this plain old bank building some 120 years ago.

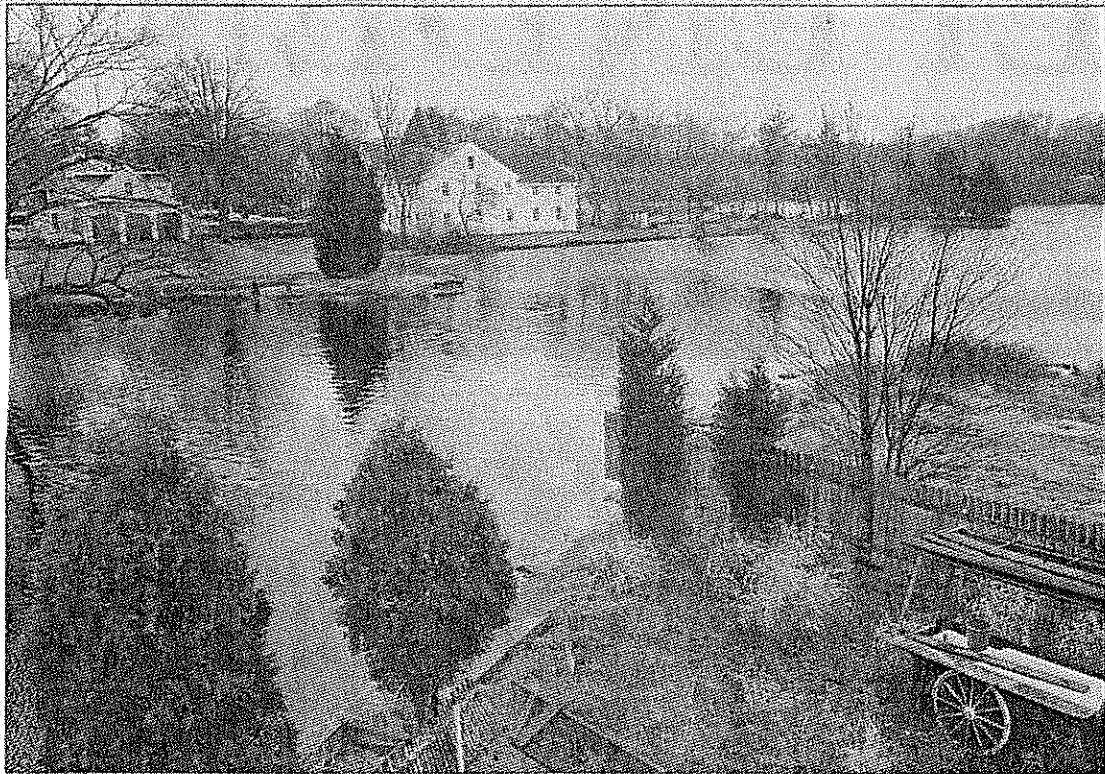
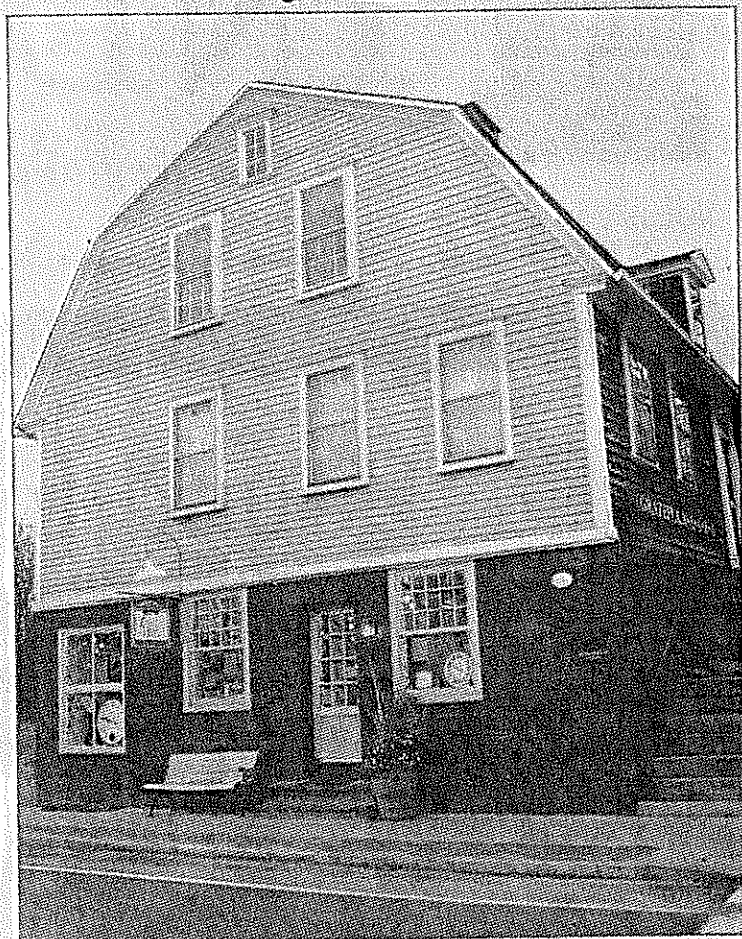


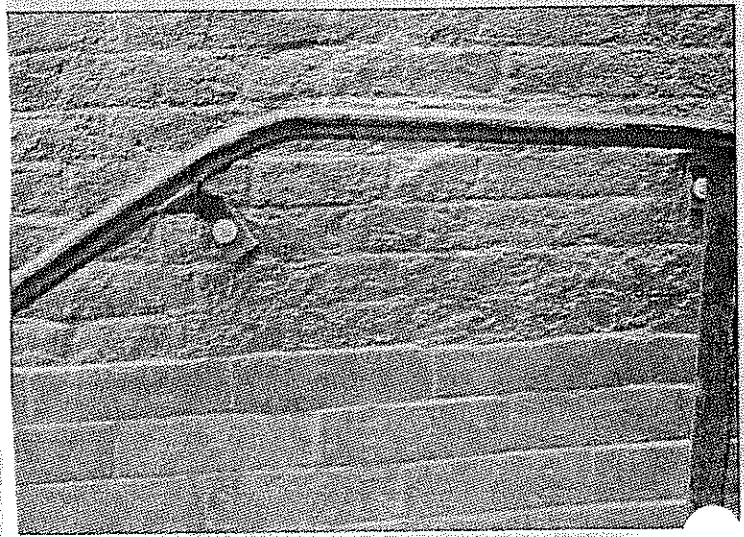
PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Residents in the early 1800s weren't happy with a bridge that connected Wickford with the area across the channel known as Elamsville and made plans to erect another. It was a process that forever changed the look of the Cooper/Brenton House, which now houses the Hour Glass and the Grateful Heart.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

The ridge between the Cooper/Brenton House and the Daniel Eldred Updike House was dug out to create a new bridge to the village, requiring the house's foundation to be shored up with bricks, a detail of which is pictured below. The uppermost bricks, which are original to the home, are in the style of the 18th century. The lower bricks, used to reinforce the structure of the home when all the soil around its southern face was removed, are sized in a style indicative of the 19th century.





## The View From Swamptown

### Another Mystery Involving the Cooper/Brenton House

This week's column is in direct response to a question posed by my good friend and fellow explorer of the history of our fair town, Mr. Rudi Hempe. In a recent review written in that "other paper" Rudi wonders about this ancient home which now houses a pair of local businesses. It is apparent by a close examination of the brickwork of the foundation of this fine building, constructed in either 1728 or 1779 – depending upon which version of its history you believe, that some major changes have taken place over the centuries. What happened here to precipitate these modifications Mr. Hempe wonders? Well to answer that question we must go back nearly 200 years to a time when "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic" itself was undergoing changes that would help define its future.

Indeed, if we could go back some two hundred years, to the year 1812 or so, we would find this very location, at the intersection of what we now call Main, West Main, and Brown Streets, to be a hubbub of activity. Why just four years earlier the first bridge connecting Wickford, which until then had been virtually an island at each moon tide, with the area just across the channel known as Elamsville (now the Brown Street area), had been completed, opening up a whole new portion of land for development. It spanned the channel from the end of what is now Elam Street and connected directly with the Grand Highway (now West Main). This bridge though, most probably for reasons revolving around its size and sturdiness, was not favored by the local population and a new bridge was now being planned to cross at a location just east of the old. There were some obstacles here at this location though. Firstly, there was quite a rise in the road here directly between the Cooper/Brenton House and the Daniel Updike Home on the other side of the road. Indeed, the original topography here can still be discerned by examining the "lay of the land" surrounding each of these two venerable old homes. Secondly, the channel at the new location was much wider than at the Elam Street crossing, too wide in fact for a wide and sturdy bridge to be constructed utilizing the technology at hand at that timeframe. The channel would need to be narrowed here; fill would be required. Luckily, these two problems together, provided their own solution. The ridge that existed between the two houses would be dug out and the fill used to narrow the channel at what would one day be called Brown Street, so a proper wide and sturdy bridge could be constructed. During this process, the foundation of the old Cooper/Brenton home, which until that time had been underground as most foundations are, was shored up and reinforced with new brick. This is shown by the two different sized bricks used in the foundation itself; The uppermost bricks, which are original to the home when it only possessed a small crawl space like cellar, are sized in a style that is indicative of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when it was originally constructed, the lower bricks, used to reinforce the structure of the home when all the soil around its southern face was removed, are sized in a style indicative of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the work adjacent to the building was done. An additional bonus to the owners of the Cooper/Brenton was that a street level commercial space was now opened in their building and before long a tavern indeed opened up in that very space. So that Rudi, and all you other fellow travelers through the history of our fair town, is the story behind this fine building.

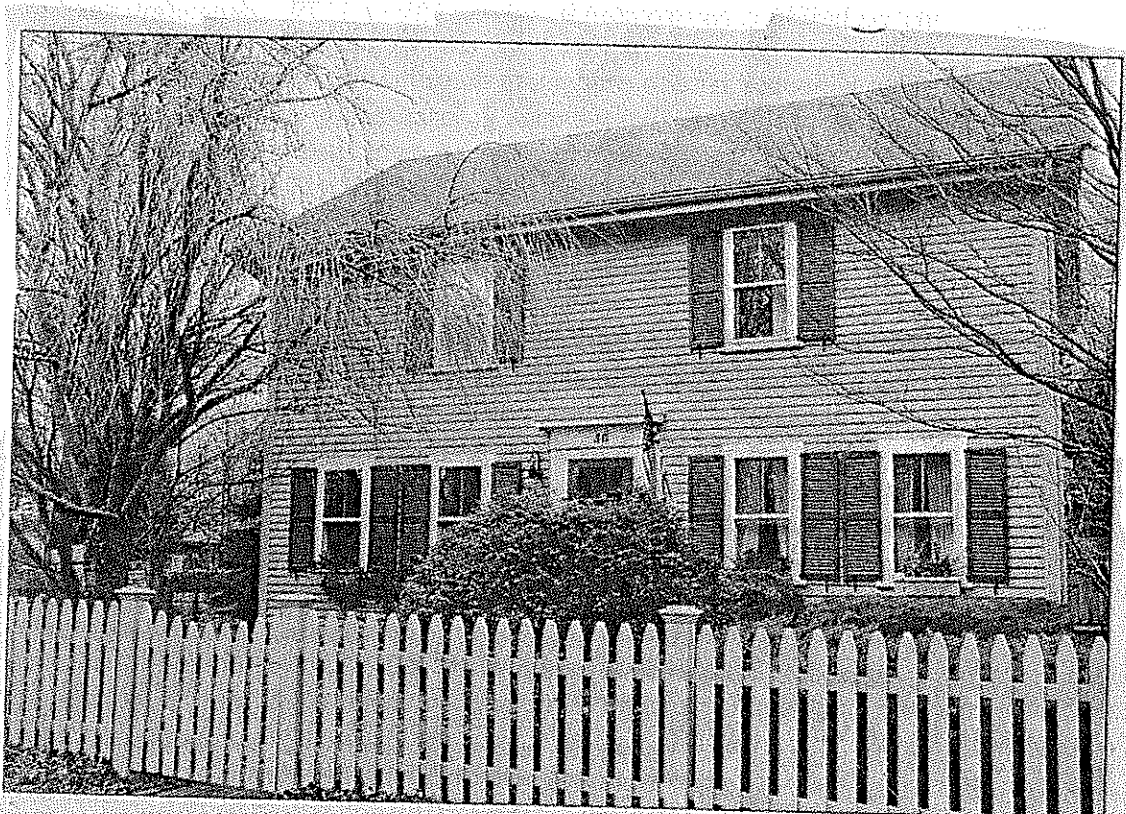


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR  
The Colonial revival-style house at 56 Fowler St. in Wickford was built in 1890 by the farming Congdon family.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Walter Congdon House

As a part of our ongoing effort to delve into the history of all of the wonderful homes in our fair town's central village, "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic", today we are going to examine the story behind the fine colonial revival style home at 56 Fowler Street.

The story of this home goes back to 1890, when the father and son team of Daniel and Walter B. Congdon purchased a nearly six acre parcel of land bordered on the east by Fowler Street and on the west by the Bush Hill Pond from a relative, the widow Mary Gardiner. Straight away, Walter had the fine home, built to mimic the style of a traditional "Wickford center chimney colonial", constructed on the land and he moved in with his parents Daniel & Ruth (Gardiner) and father and son began farming their land. They also received an additional income from their property each winter when they allowed the use of their portion of the land surrounding the pond for the harvesting of ice, which was stored in the adjacent Bush Hill Pond Ice House. Just a few years later, when the Sea View Trolley Line came through town, Walter left the running of the farm to his father and hired hands, when he took a job at Gorham Manufacturing, the famed Providence silver company. Each day Walter would take the early trolley, and by way of an exchange in East Greenwich, head into Providence for a day at the factory. He eventually met and married a city girl, Emilie Gottshalk and brought her back to the village to join the family. Things went on in this fashion until 1921, when the death of his father caused him to relocate closer to the city, in Warwick and sell the Wickford farm. It was purchased by a longtime grocer named Rowse Hoxsie.

Rowse Hoxsie's life had always centered around shopkeeping. His father Franklin Hoxsie kept a grocery store in Carolina Mills and Rowse, named after his grandfather, worked there. Eventually Rowse too, purchased and ran a grocery store in Hope Valley, where he also eventually became the postmaster. By the turn of the century, Rowse Hoxsie and his wife Susan (Potter) were living in Providence and running a grocery store there. By 1921 he was successful enough to move his family out of the city to the fine home on Fowler Street and commute to Providence each day to work. He retired to his country home for good in 1935 after nearly 55 years of tending to the needs of his countless customers. Ironically enough, Rowse Hoxsie the grocer and Walter Congdon, the farmer turned factory worker, two men whose paths crossed but once, passed away within months of each other in 1945, their lives bound together as it were by the fine home at 56 Fowler Street.

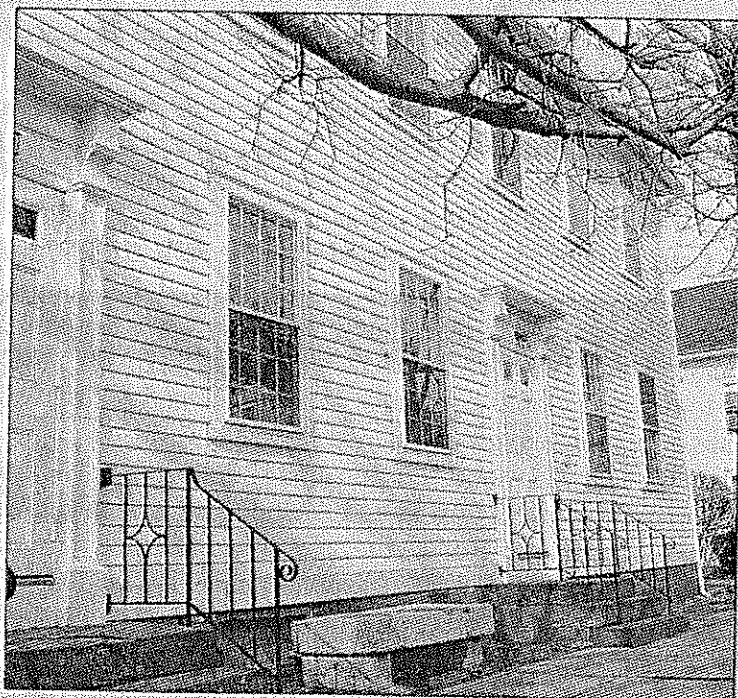


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The old Freemason Lodge on Main Street in Wickford looks much the same today as it has over the years.

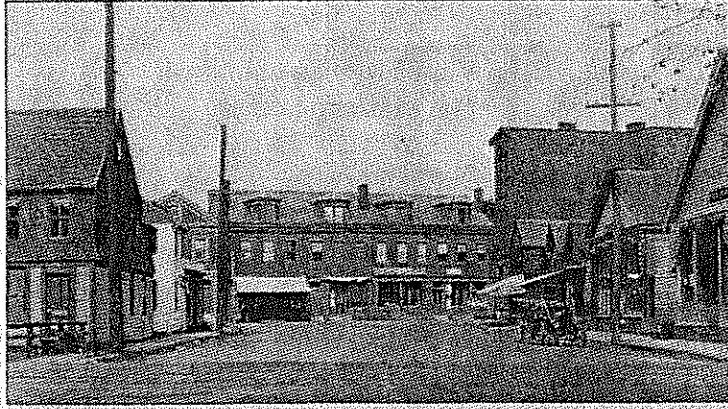
## The View From Swamptown The Masonic Lodge

This week, as a part of our continuing effort to take a look at the history of each of the many venerable buildings that make up our fair town's central village, we are going to explore the story behind the circa 1826 meeting hall of the members of the Washington Lodge of the Freemasons on Main Street in Wickford.

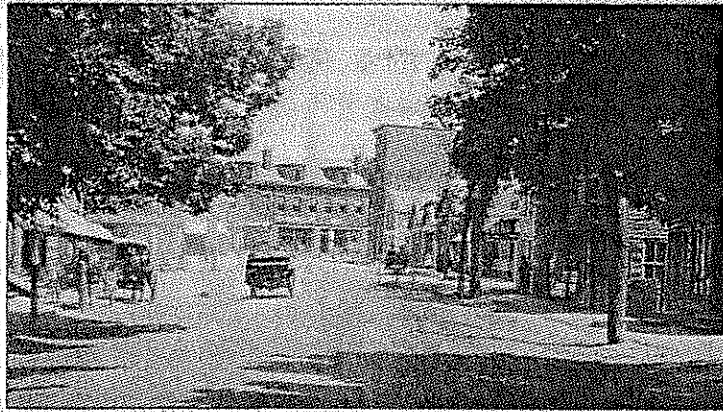
The Order of Freemason's roots in North Kingstown reach back to 1798 when a group of interested gentleman throughout South County, decided to form a Lodge that would be open to men throughout the region. For the first thirty years of its existence, meetings of the Washington Lodge were held in its member's homes throughout South County, from Westerly, to Little Rest (now Kingston) to Wickford and everywhere in between. Finally, in 1825, the organization was large enough, that the members decided they needed a permanent meeting hall. So in October of that year, the Washington County Freemasons petitioned the State General Assembly for permission to raise money to construct a meeting hall through the establishment of a lottery; a common fund raising strategy of the time. They were successful in raising \$4000 and purchased a lot of land on Main Street adjacent to the Wickford Baptist Church and commenced construction in July of 1826 with a grand ceremonial cornerstone laying attended by Mason's from throughout the state.

Sadly for the members of the Lodge, the late 1820's was not a great time to be a Mason. At about the same time that these enthusiastic Masons were constructing their Lodge Hall, a certain William Morgan in Batavia NY was shooting off his mouth about how he planned to write and publish a book detailing every secret of the order. He was subsequently arrested on a pretext by police officers involved in the local Batavia Lodge and "disappeared" without a trace. His fate has never been learned to this day. When the media of the day got a hold of this story, it was played for all it was worth. This incident touched off a powerful wave of anti-Masonic sentiment, fueled by the press and the Catholic Church, which was against Freemasonry in all forms, that ended with the formation of a national political party the "Anti-Masons" large enough and powerful enough to field the only viable candidate to run against Andrew Jackson in the presidential election. Needless to say, with all this going on, it was not a good time to be a Mason, so in 1833 the Lodge was dissolved and the last twelve members assumed control of the meeting hall by buying up all the shares of the former Lodge members. These men, known as the "Proprietors of the Lodge" also happened to all be members of the nearby Baptist Church. From this point on the building's focus became more of the activities of the Church and less of the interest of the former Masons. Even when the Organization was reformed in the latter part of the century, their meetings were held in a hall jointly owned with the Odd Fellows and others. The old Lodge was now firmly a part of the church next door.

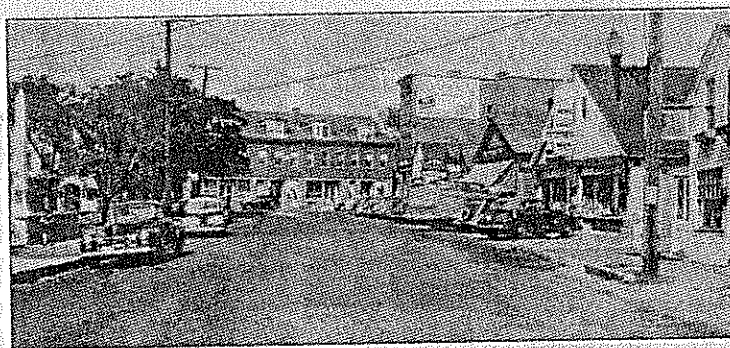
At first, the former Masonic building was rented by the Church for various uses, but slowly the Wickford Baptist Church acquired each of the 12 shares of the Proprietors and by 1905 the Church assumed complete control of the building and the Masonic Lodge Hall officially became the Chapel of the First Baptist Church in Wickford. And so it has been for the last 100 years.



A lone car sits on Brown Street in this photo looking north toward the Avis Block taken around 1900.



The venerable Ryan's Market is on the left in this view of the street, circa 1915.



The street saw many changes by 1945, around the time this photograph was taken.

## The View From Swamptown

### 100 Years on Brown Street

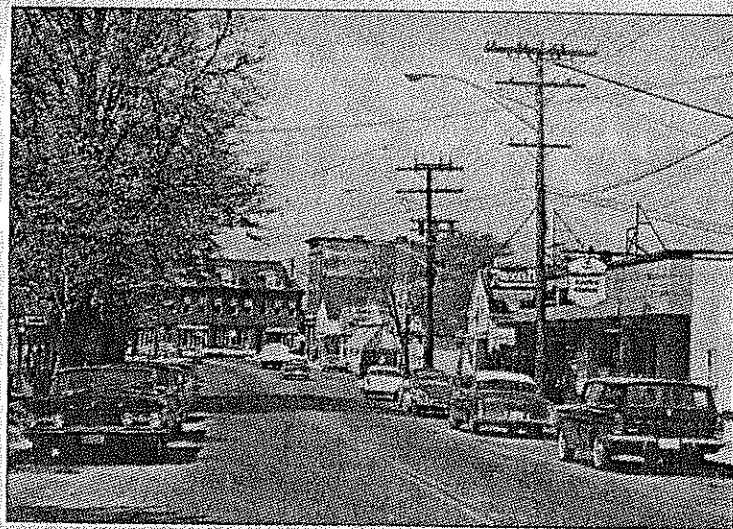
This week we are going to take an interesting little incremental journey through time at a location that's familiar to all of us – the northern half of Brown Street in "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic". Luckily for us, this is an oft photographed crossroad that has retained enough landmarks across the decades to allow us to pick out a familiar reference point or two. So allow me to point out the high points as we travel the ages standing on the eastern side of this, the village's main "drag".

Our first view is taken around the turn of the century on a typical quiet Wickford day. The only car on the street, an 18 hp Stevens, belongs to Frank Holloway and is parked between E.E. "Doc" Young's village pharmacy and the area's popular Pool Room and Bowling Alley which now houses, among other things, a popular 21<sup>st</sup> century restaurant. The ever present Avis Block, then known as the "Brick Block" and the Gregory Building can be seen in the background.

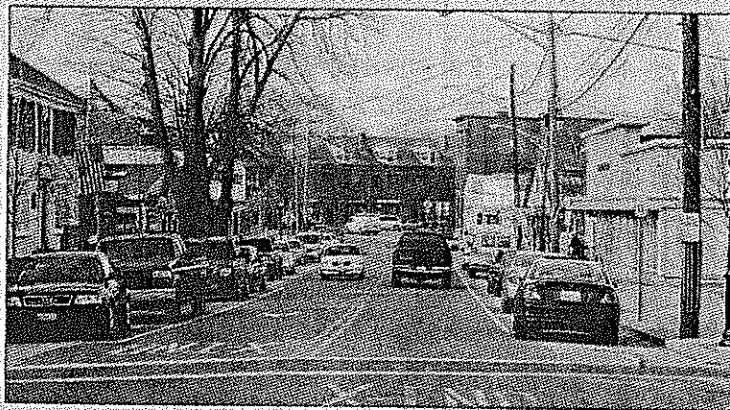
Next, we move ahead in time 15 or 20 years, and step back a 100 ft or so. The business immediately to the left is the venerable Ryan's Market, already by this time an institution in Wickford. Across the street from Ryan's, one can just make out Uncle Daniel Smith's Fish Market as well as the fine homes and businesses that once populated this part of the village. Still prominent are the Avis Block and the Gregory Building.

Thirty years or so later, the scene looks like this. The old pool hall and bowling alley has changed and become Seavey's Drugstore, luncheonette, bus depot and news stand. Just down the street Doc Young's old shop is now owned by the Earnshaw family of nearby E. Greenwich. On the left side of the street a park has replaced the building's that were formerly there and the WW I monument and the old archway styled to represent the village well that once stood there can be seen. Up on the side of the Gregory Building, a hand painted billboard advertising the great meals that can be had at The Hummocks can just be made out. Also interesting is the torch-style streetlight on the closest utility pole.

Now we jump forward to around 1960 and the fine homes and businesses on the right side of the street have been replaced by the Rexall orange and blue building that housed Earnshaw's new drugstore as well as the local office of Narragansett Electric Company. Also just visible on the right side of the photo is the sign for Tower Appliance, a business located in a building that was sited on what we now call Old Library Park. The unique torch style streetlights have been replaced by the more "modern" cobra-head streetlights that typified the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Just barely visible is the old billboard sign on the side of the Gregory Building.



**By 1960, homes and business on the right side of Brown Street were replaced by a new building housing the village's pharmacy.**



**PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR**

**Brown Street, as photographed this week, is still the busy commercial district today it was more than 100 years ago.**



Finally for reference sake, we offer up this view of the same scene today. It certainly reinforces the truth of the old adage that in the case of Wickford "The more things change, the more they stay the same".

I'd also like to take this opportunity to, on behalf of my extended family, thank everyone for their kind words and support during this difficult time. Everyone's favorite gym teacher "Miss Cranston" will obviously be sorely missed by a community that extends far beyond the little village she called home. Again, Thank you from all of us.

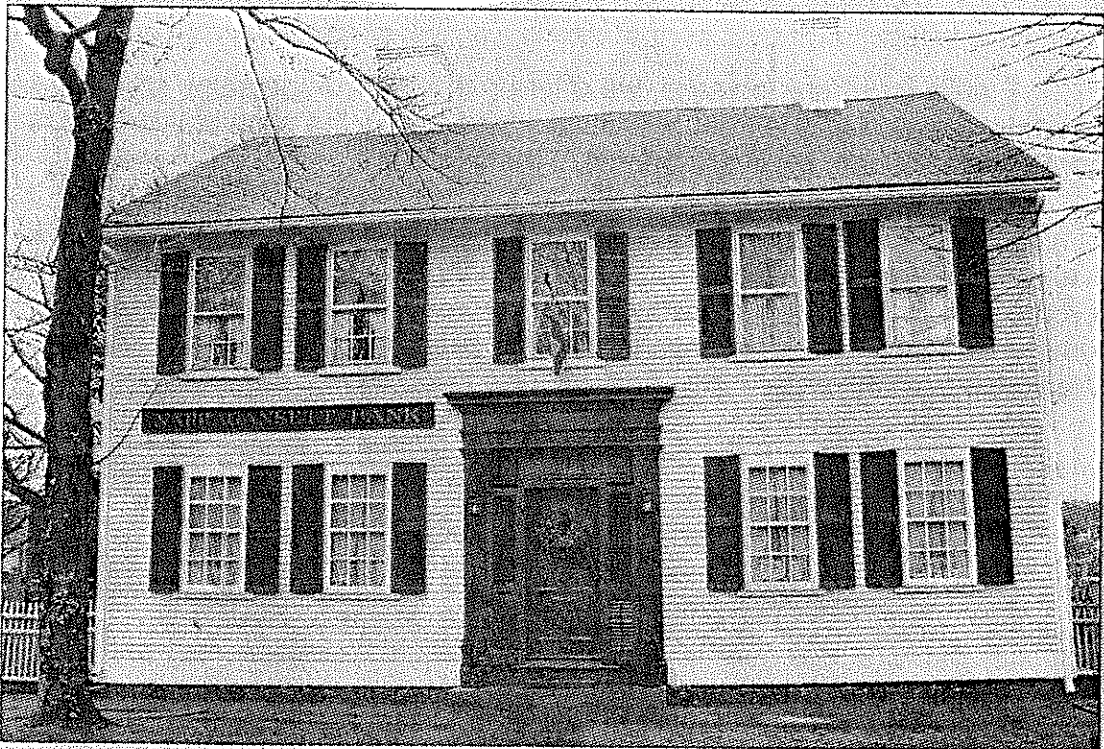


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The region's first bank, the Narragansett Bank of Wickford opened its doors in 1805 in this building owned by its president, Benjamin Fowler. It's now a private home on Main Street.

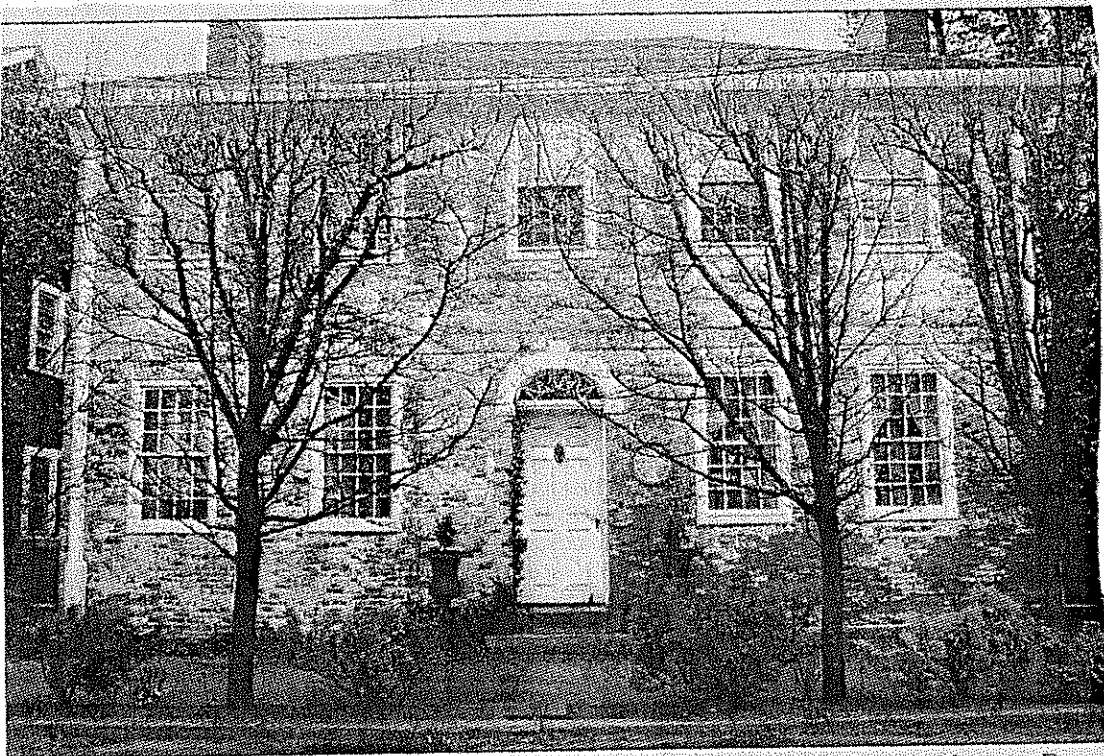


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

In 1819, Judge Daniel Champlin and Pardon T. Hammond opened the North Kingstown Bank of Wickford in a portion of the Main Street brick house of the Noel Freeborn family.

## The View From Swamptown

### Banking in North Kingstown

Just a few months ago, an anniversary of sorts here in our fair town was reached. For it was 200 years ago, at the end of November, that the region's first bank, the Narragansett Bank of Wickford opened its doors to the public for the first time. It was located in a building owned by its President Benjamin Fowler, which still exists to this day, as a private home on Main Street. Fourteen years later in 1819, Judge Daniel Champlin and Pardon T. Hammond received a charter for a competitor to the Narragansett Bank and opened the North Kingstown Bank of Wickford in a portion of the substantial brick home of the Noel Freeborn family. For decades after that, these two well-capitalized and soundly managed institutions operated as the "only games in town." All that changed at the halfway point of the century, as North Kingstown, along with the rest of southern New England, raced into the industrial age, riding the coattails of the rapidly expanding textile industry.

Before you knew it, banks were spring up like daffodils in April, all over the region. Here in North Kingstown, the Farmers Bank of Wickford, the Peoples Exchange Bank of Wickford, the North Kingstown Exchange Bank of Wickford, and the Wickford Savings Bank all opened within seven years of each other and attempted to compete with the two already well established institutions. As you can imagine, six banks all operating within the confines of one small, albeit robust, village was more than the market could bear, and they began to fall by the wayside just as fast as they formed. The first to go, in a rare instance of state intercession in an industry loosely regulated at the time, was the North Kingstown Exchange Bank of Wickford. The state pulled its charter one year after issuing it after it was revealed that the bank had no actual capital and was preparing, as all state chartered banks had a right to do at that time, to issue its own currency in the form of banknotes. Soon after that, the Peoples Exchange Bank of Wickford, relocated to less crowded pastures when they opened in Wakefield as the Exchange Bank of Wakefield. The worldwide financial crisis known as the "Great Panic of 1857" claimed the Farmers Bank of Wickford, opened four years earlier by Euclid Chadsey, his prominent farmer brother A. B. Chadsey (who lived in what is now the Cranston/Murphy Funeral Home on West Main St.), and their father, well-known entrepreneur and farmer Jeremiah Chadsey, whose house and farm were located in the area of the road that now bears his name. These types of things were occurring, not only here in North Kingstown, but all over America, and each time a bank failed, was closed or relocated, local folks were impacted, savings were lost, lives were ruined.

Finally in 1865, the US government stepped in; enough was enough. Sweeping banking reforms were begun and individual local banks were no longer allowed to issue currency. The banks that remained were required to comply with certain national standards and in order to survive, often were required to merge where practical.

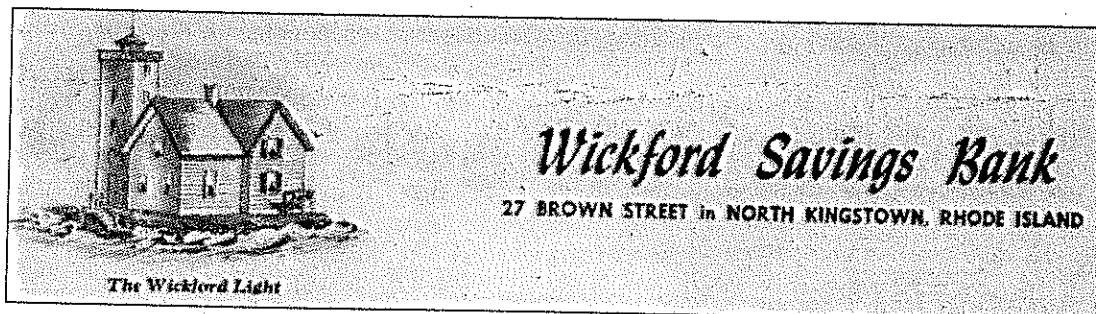
When the national banking reform dust settled here in North Kingstown, only two financial institutions remained. One, the Wickford National Bank, formed by the merger of the original Narragansett and North Kingstown Banks of Wickford operated out of a



Early banks produced their own currency, like this note from the Farmers Bank of Wickford.

wooden bank building at the intersection of Main, West Main, and Brown Streets. That building, which burned in 1870 during a bungled bank robbery, was replaced by the building that now houses the offices of the Standard Times. The second bank remaining was the Wickford Savings Bank, operating out of the same Noel Freeborn house that once contained the North Kingstown Bank. The Wickford Savings Bank used as its symbol, an image of the Wickford Harbor lighthouse, seen here, in this column as a part of its letterhead.

The rest of the banks of North Kingstown all fell by the wayside. But we can remember them in the form of the occasional individual banknote that shows up from time to time. These intriguing slips of financial history are physical reminders of an age when choosing your banking institution was a risky business indeed.



The letterhead for Wickford Savings Bank on Brown Street featured the Wickford Light.

**Abby Brenton Mumford etched her name alongside her love's in the window at 17 West Main St. Theirs are just some of the signatures there. Restoration carpenter Joseph Bullock signed his name in blue carpenters chalk on the building's roof.**

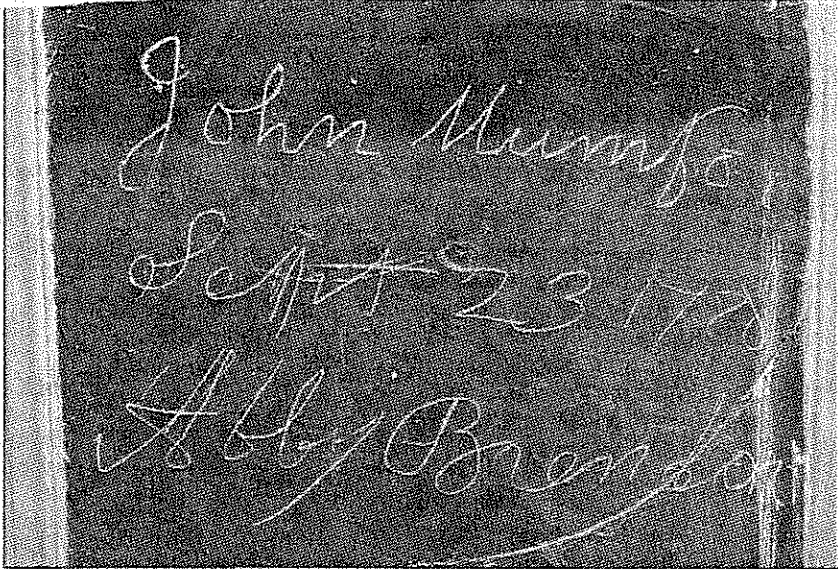


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR



## The View From Swamptown

### Etched in History – The Samuel Brenton House

Each and every building in “Ye Olde Quaint & Historic” has its stories to tell. No other of them, however, so aptly tells its tale quite like the circa 1779 Samuel Brenton House does. You see, this house, built on the site of the earlier 1728 Stephen Cooper homestead, carries the signatures of many of the folks involved in that tale.

It all begins, as many stories do, with the tale of two star-crossed lovers, Abby Brenton, the daughter of Samuel, the home’s owner, and her fiancé John Mumford, the son of a local merchant involved in the maritime trades. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of September 1788, the 19-year-old love lost lass scratched her name, and that of John, on a pane of glass in the parlor window, thankfully for all of us, she dated it as well. Soon after that, she and John Mumford were married. They lived much of their life in Providence and Abby Brenton Mumford, who died in 1814 is buried in that city in the Old North Burial Ground. John Mumford moved to Newport after Abby’s death and lived until 1831. He is buried in the Common Burial Ground in that city by the sea.

Our next signature is that of another resident of this house, Charles H. Shippee. In April of 1876, perhaps inspired by Abbie’s handiwork, the 21-year-old scratched his name in the glass of a bedroom window. Charles was educated as an accountant and had just finished his training at Bryant & Stratton Commercial College in Providence, previously having attended both the Washington Academy in Wickford and the Colby Academy in New Hampshire. He would spend some of his future employed as a bookkeeper in Providence; however, as a tinkerer and inventor of sorts he developed and patented a steam-coupling device used widely in the railroad industry, he was able to retire quite early and live off that income combined with what he made managing his family’s large real estate holdings in town. Neither Charles nor his sister Mary ever married and they both spent their lives in this very home. It was these two folks who decided to honor the memory of their favorite aunt and name the “Old Brick Block” as it was known then, the “Avis Block”. Charles died of a heart attack in 1916. He had spent his whole life looking out the windows of this home past the names scratched there.

Finally we must turn to the roof of the building for our final “John Hancock”. For it was here that Joseph Bullock, perhaps the area’s pre-eminent restoration carpenter signed his name in carpenters chalk, in September of a yet undetermined year. Bullock was born and raised here in Wickford and after a couple of years spent honing his craft in Newport returned to this village as a Master Cabinet Maker and carpenter. He was the favorite of, and a partner with, famed colonial restoration architect, (and also a local resident) Norman Isham and together Bullock and Isham restored virtually every important colonial structure in the state, including locally, Gilbert Stuart’s Birthplace, the Old Narragansett Church, Smith’s Castle, the Glebe, Crossholme on Pleasant Street, the Bullock/Thomas House on Main Street, and yes indeed, the Samuel Brenton House here at the intersection of Main, West Main, and Brown Streets. Joseph Bullock died in 1947 at the age of 86, satisfied in the knowledge that he had helped save our heritage.





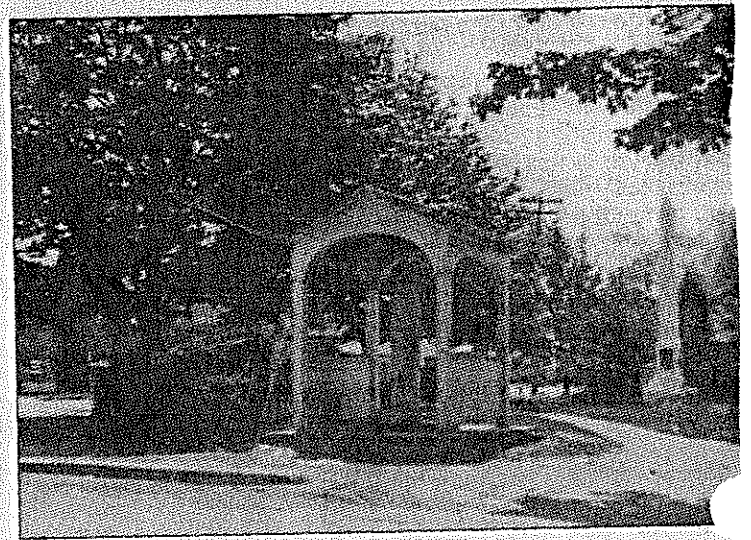
So somehow, a tradition begun by a lovesick teenage girl some 220 years ago has allowed us all an opportunity to peak back through the “windows” of time and learn a little bit more about our fair town.

To see the window that began it all, stop a spell at “The Grateful Heart” on West Main Street in the village; Abby and John are waiting there for you.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

This arch in Wickford's Updike Park recently replaced the old well house, which remained in the park after the well was destroyed by the Hurricane of 1938. At left, Mary Emma Shippee pumps water from the well around the time of World War I.



## The View From Swamptown

### Mary Emma Shippee and the Village Well

I guess we've all strolled through the little park at the intersection of Main, West Main, and Brown Streets and through the arched walkway, without even giving the place an additional thought beyond how beautiful the gardens are there, at this, one of "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic's" most attractive vistas. Few realize the truly utilitarian function that this location once served. Why its even fair to say that a large percentage of the population of the village, at one time, depended on this very spot for their survival. You see, this was once the location of the village's primary well, a place critical to all the folks in the village of Wickford who did not possess their own reliable source of drinking water.

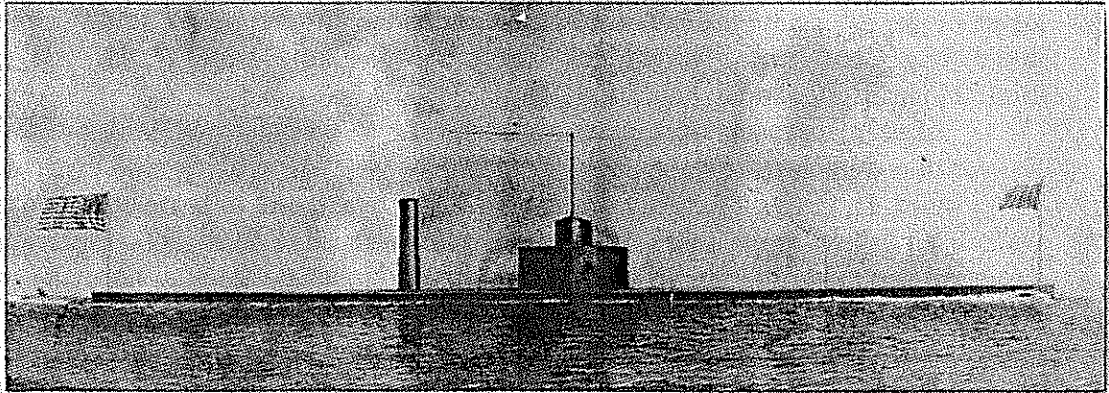
Indeed, there was a well here as long as records have been kept. Back to the days of a simple mechanical pump well and beyond; back to the days of a small wooden well house sporting a wooden windlass, rope and wooden pail and farther beyond; back even to the days of an open air well with a bucket attached to a long pivoted wooden dipper. Literally, hundreds of years worth of hard working folks going back and forth day in and day out, hauling precious water from the well to their home and hearth.

The accompanying photograph shows us one of these folks, Miss Mary Emma Shippee, hard at work drawing cool water up from the well that had quenched the thirst of countless generations of her forbearers. These photos date back to the period just after the end of WWI and Miss Mary Emma is not dressed in some sort of colonial costume as one might surmise. She was an "old-fashioned gal" you see, and that was just the way that she dressed – befitting of a modest devout Baptist woman not only born in, but truly a part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By this time she lived alone, just across the street from the well in the big gambrel-roofed home of her ancestors, which now houses the Hour Glass and Grateful Heart gift shops.

As regular readers of this column are aware, all wells including this one were forever ruined by the Great Hurricane of 1938 and Miss Mary, along with everyone else in Wickford, had to wait patiently for the NK Fire Department to bring her a few pails of water each day while the Town of North Kingstown raced to construct a municipal water system to supply those affected by the storm. After things got back to normal, the town government at the time, in memory of the old village well and all that it represented, moved the existing well shelter over a bit and modified it into a walk-through archway. I bet that looking out the window each day and seeing the old well house there brought comfort to Miss Mary Emma and all folks like her who were carried willy-nilly into a future they neither understood nor wanted. The town for its part, faithfully retained the exact look of the old well house until just recently when it was replaced with the present arch – attractive, yes but missing the point completely. Mary Emma Shippee and her contemporaries would miss the familiar lines of what once was.



**Pictured is Rear Admiral Steven B. Luce, whose daughter, Charlotte, bought George Lewis's Washington Street house.**



**Rear Admiral Steven B. Luce began his career during the Civil War on the monitor-class gunboat *Nantucket*, pictured above from the U.S. Navy's online archives.**

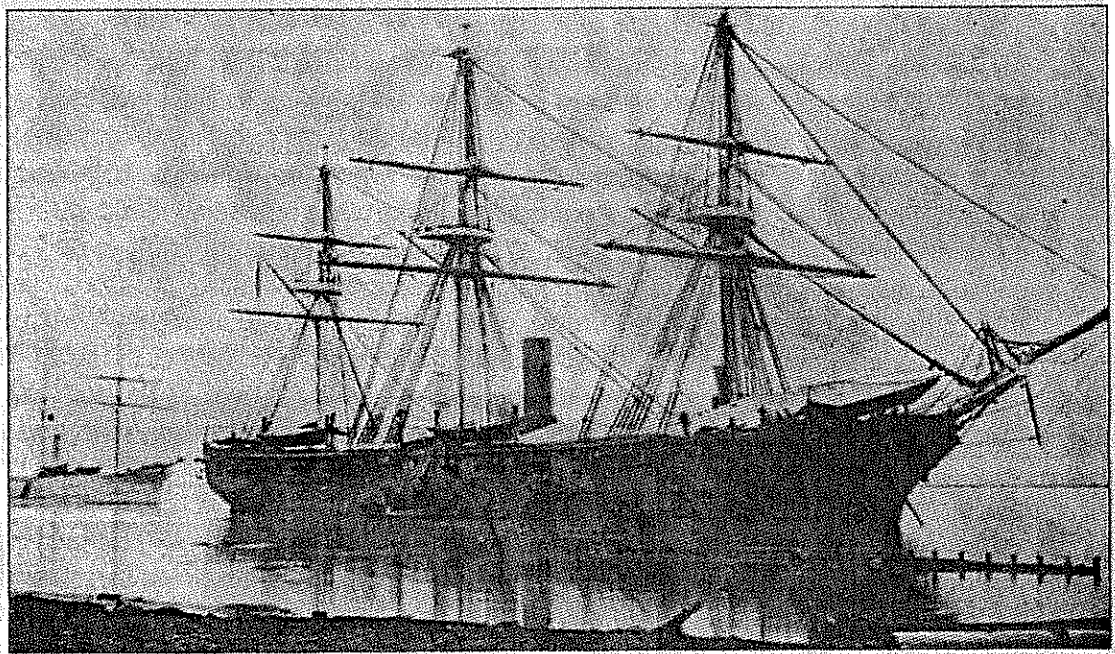
## The View From Swamptown

### Charlotte Luce Noyes and her Kin

The four little houses that run from 5 to 35 Washington Street have seen a lot of history in their two hundred years or so of existence. Backing up to Wickford Harbor, the homes, which were originally constructed to house the working class folk of the village, have stood witness through the period of time when sloops, barks, ships, and schooners not only made Wickford a frequent and important port of call, but were actually constructed here in great numbers. As a matter of fact, the three-masted, 212 ton "Union" an honest-to-goodness 83 ft long ship; the largest ever built in Wickford Harbor would have had to slide by the little cottages on her maiden voyage in 1805 with North Kingstown resident, ship's Master William Gould at the helm. The houses survived three great hurricanes, sheltered Wickfordites through a Civil War and two World Wars with a Great Depression thrown in as well. Yes, they've weathered many a storm both literally and figuratively. We learned a large part of the story they have to tell a couple of weeks ago when we looked at the life and times of the fishing Lewis's of Wickford. Now its time to tell the rest of their tale; the tale of another family bound to the sea, bound this time not by the bounty that exists beneath the waves but by the potential for warfare that exists above. For the clan that bought all of these four homes from the Lewis's, the inter-related Luce-Noyes family, were inexorably and forever connected to the US Navy.

The story begins with the widow Charlotte Luce Noyes the woman who purchased the first of these homes. Charlotte, from a wealthy Philadelphia family, most probably knew of Wickford due to her father's amazing Naval career. You see in 1884 Charlotte's father Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce was made the first superintendent of the institution that he had championed; the Naval War College in Newport RI. He and his family would have gone back and forth between Newport and Philadelphia by way of little Wickford via the Newport & Wickford Rail and Steamship Co. Ironically as it sounds, the Admiral would have boarded "The General" in Wickford each time he made the trip to Newport. Luce's illustrious career, which had begun on the monitor-class gunship "Nantucket" during the Civil War, would end gloriously at the War College in Newport. Three US Navy ships have borne the name USS Luce in his honor, including one, the Fletcher-class destroyer "Luce" that fought bravely, but was sunk by kamikazes during the Battle of Okinawa. Charlotte's dead husband was Lieutenant Boutelle Noyes, another Navy man who had graduated from Annapolis with honor in 1868 and went on to a stellar naval career that ended tragically in 1883 with his death aboard the ship he commanded, the "Richmond" while serving in the Asiatic Squadron. At some point during all this, Charlotte became enamored enough of Wickford Village to purchase the home of George Lewis a short while after his early death.

The other three Lewis homes were purchased by Charlotte's eldest son, Robert Boutelle Noyes. Robert's naval service was during WWI where he served aboard the original Battleship "Utah". A 1902 graduate from Harvard, Robert had also attended Annapolis as his father had before him. After the war he left the Navy, and purchased substantial property on Puerto Rico where he became a successful coffee plantation



**Lt. Boutelle Noyes, husband of Charlotte (Luce) Noyes, died on the warship *Richmond*, pictured in this U.S. Navy archive photo.**



**PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR**

**Members of the Noyes family purchased the four houses on Washington Street once owned by members of the Lewis family.**

owner. He and his wife Pauline lived between their plantation in Puerto Rico, an apartment in the Hotel Savoy Plaza in New York City and the little family compound they shared with Charlotte and Robert's brother Stephen. Sadly tragedy struck Charlotte's life in rapid succession when by the beginning of 1938 both of her sons passed away suddenly. She and Pauline were now the owners of the four homes.

Charlotte lived on until 1946 summering in Wickford each year with Pauline and spending the rest her days in Philadelphia. She passed away in October of that year and was followed two years later by Pauline who had continued to summer here until that last season in 1948. The four houses were then willed to Charlotte's nephew, R. Keith Kane, a New York City lawyer with a tale all his own.

R. Keith Kane was also Harvard educated and a successful and prominent member of the New York bar. He had handled his aunt's complex financial and legal affairs for years prior to her death. During WWII Kane was a member of the Roosevelt administration involved in intelligence and counter-intelligence gathering and interpretation. After the war, Kane's behind the scenes efforts were very important in the formation of the United Nations. He was well-known and well-respected in both Washington and New York political and legal circles and there's no telling what sorts of interesting folks he entertained here at what was by then known as the Kane compound on Washington Street in Wickford. The homes, to this day, are still owned by descendants of Mr. Kane. Oh the stories they could tell!

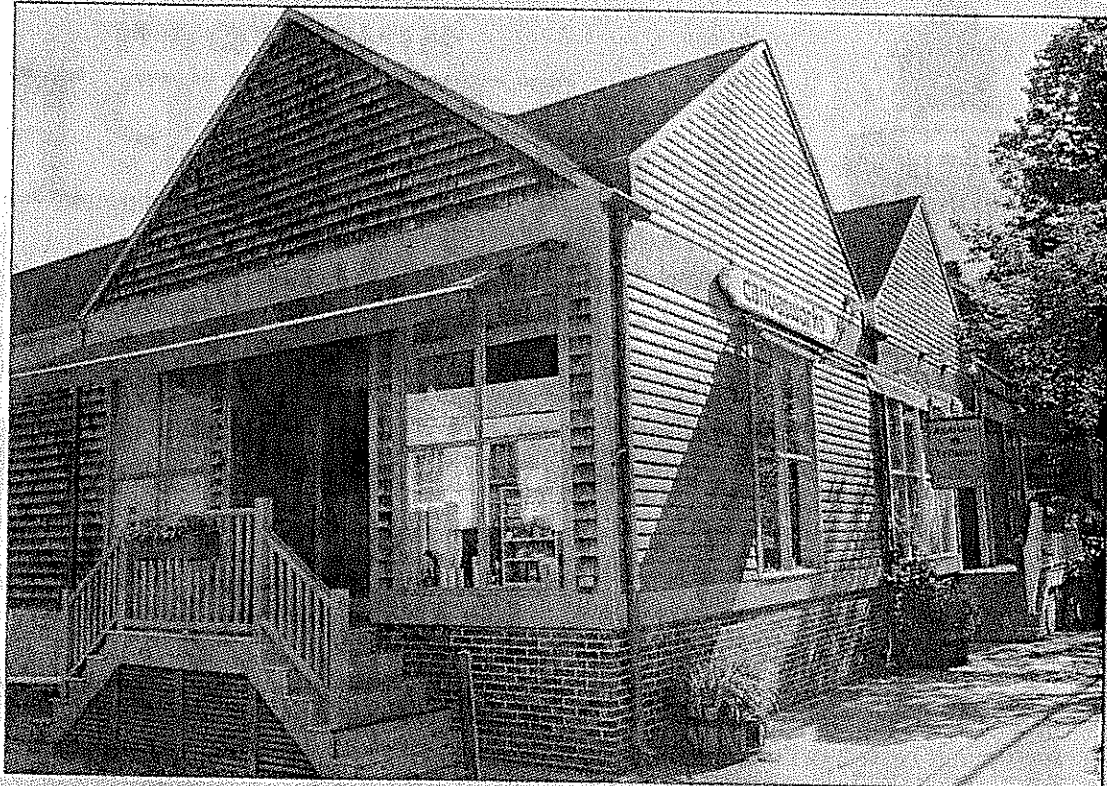
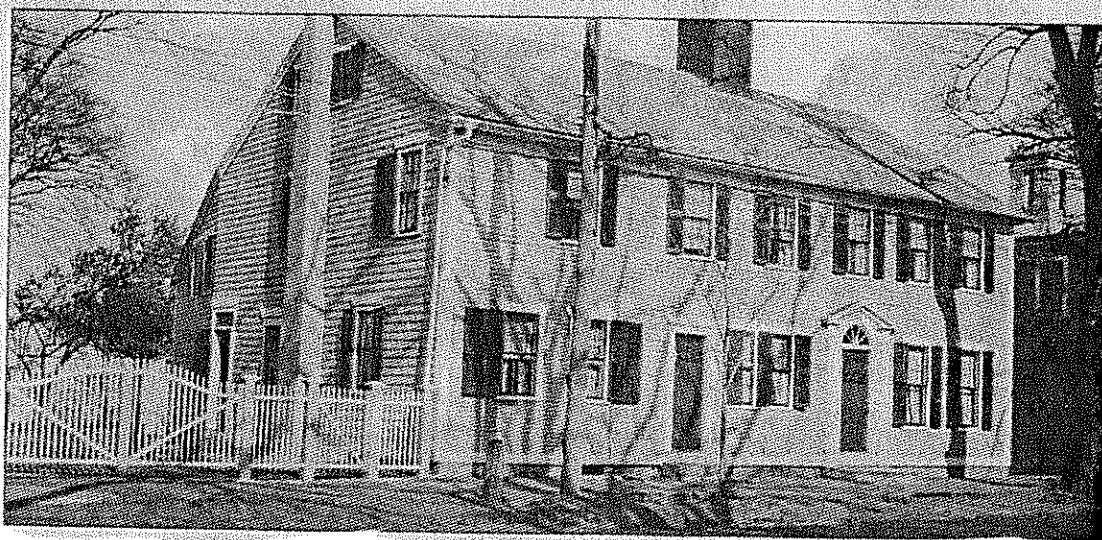


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The land where the Lt. Gov. John Jonathan Reynolds House, pictured below circa 1925, is now occupied by an addition to the adjacent retail establishment. The house was demolished following damage to it by hurricanes in 1938 and 1954.



Lt. Gov. John Jonathan Reynolds lived all of his 96 years in the now-demolished Main Street home constructed for his father, prominent Wickford merchant Jonathan Reynolds.





## The View From Swamptown

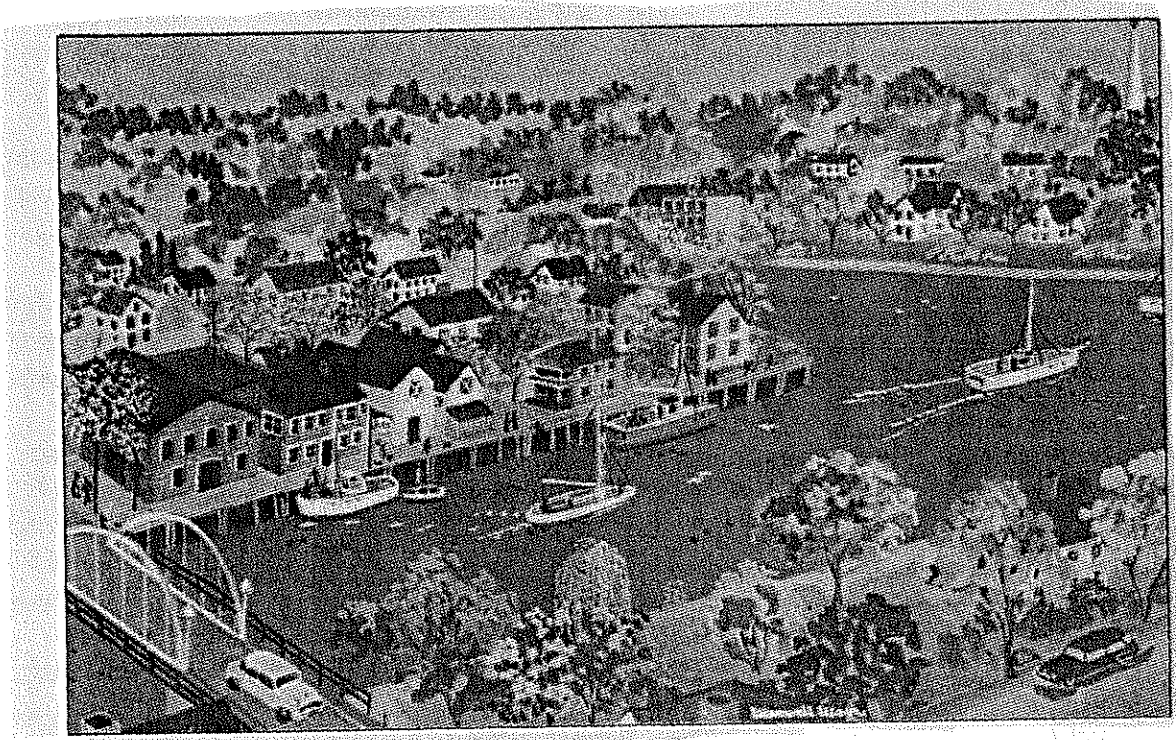
### The Lt. Governor John Jonathan Reynolds House

Most of us are aware of William Gregory, the only North Kingstown resident to serve as Governor of the State of Rhode Island. He served as the State's Chief Executive at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and his legacy includes a number of wonderful buildings that grace the landscape of our fair town to this day. Few though, remember North Kingstown's 19<sup>th</sup> century Lieutenant Governor John Jonathan Reynolds; this man, whose impact on North Kingstown was equal to or perhaps greater than Gregory's, is forgotten in great part due to the fact that his physical legacy, i.e. the building that bore his name, was demolished more than 50 years ago.

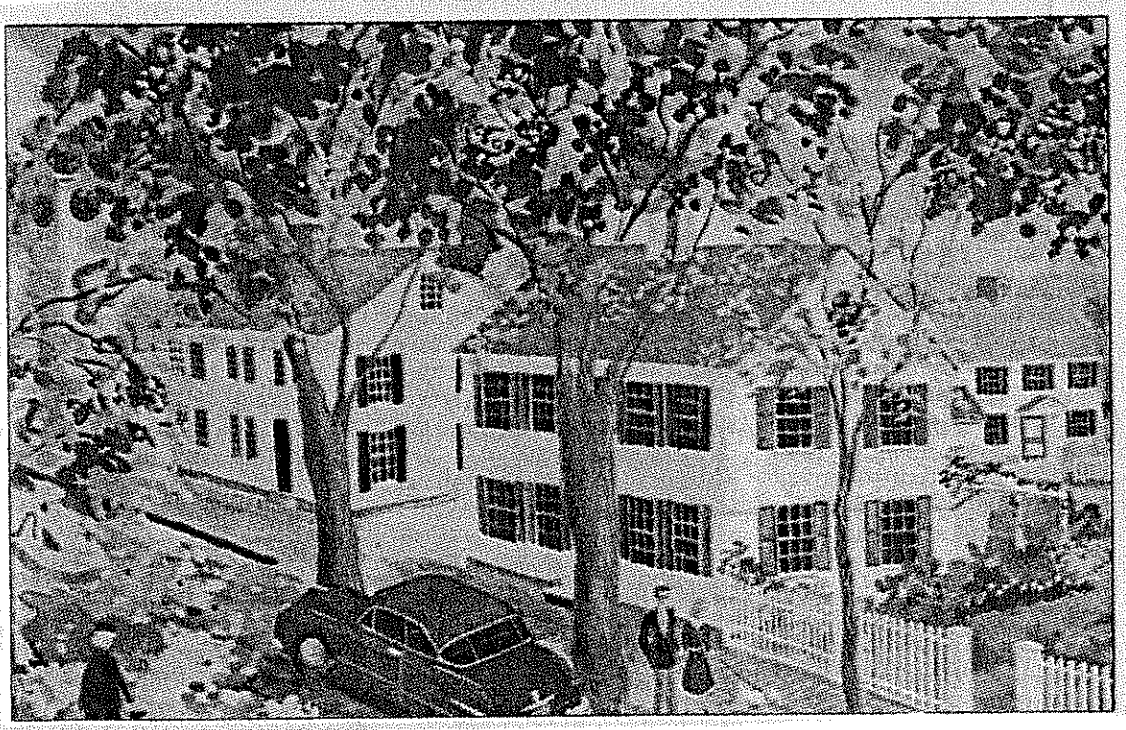
John J. Reynolds spent all of his 96 years in that very same building, the home constructed for his father, prominent Wickford merchant Jonathan Reynolds, in 1804. He began his business career in 1835 at his family dry goods store, but soon switched gears in 1836, when he was made a director of the fledgling North Kingstown Bank. By 1851 he was that bank's president and remained such through its merger with the Narragansett Bank in 1865 and then beyond. In the middle of all this, the very politically active gentleman, found time to serve as an elected Representative and then Senator for North Kingstown as well as serve a term in 1854 as Lt. Governor of Rhode Island. In the end Reynolds retired from his work some 66 years after he had begun and at the time of that retirement in 1902, he was the oldest bank director in the United States of America; a fact he was immensely proud of. As a matter of fact, Reynolds was proud of everything having to do with his outstanding longevity and vigor, even issuing a challenge to the general populace through a letter to the Providence Journal where he challenged anyone near his age to best him in penmanship, "If you have any better penman in RI at my age, well then trot him out!" There were no takers to this offer and the ProJo for its part concluded that the 96-year-old former Lt. Governor was its oldest subscriber. John J. Reynolds died later that year, secure in his legacy and beloved by his community.

That legacy was remembered in large part, due to the home he left behind, known by all as the Governor Reynolds House. It can be seen here in the accompanying circa 1925 photo when his unmarried daughter, Miss Emma Reynolds, occupied it. The house suffered serious damage during both the 1936 and 1954 Hurricanes and was demolished shortly after the latter. Some twenty year later, a retail addition to the adjacent building filled the footprint of the old homestead.

With the disappearance of his 150-year-old home in '54, Lt. Gov. J.J. Reynolds legacy faded away as well. And that's just a shame; I for my part, challenge anyone to find an elegant old gentleman more worthy of being remembered than John Jonathan Reynolds. "If you've got one, well then trot him on out!"



VIEW OF TOWN FROM HARBOR. THE TOWN IS BUILT ON A HILLSIDE OVERLOOKING THE HARBOR. THE BRIDGE IS A REMARKABLE EXAMPLE OF BRIDGE ARCHITECTURE. THE TOWN IS A MIXTURE OF OLD AND NEW ARCHITECTURE. THE TOWN IS A MIXTURE OF OLD AND NEW ARCHITECTURE.



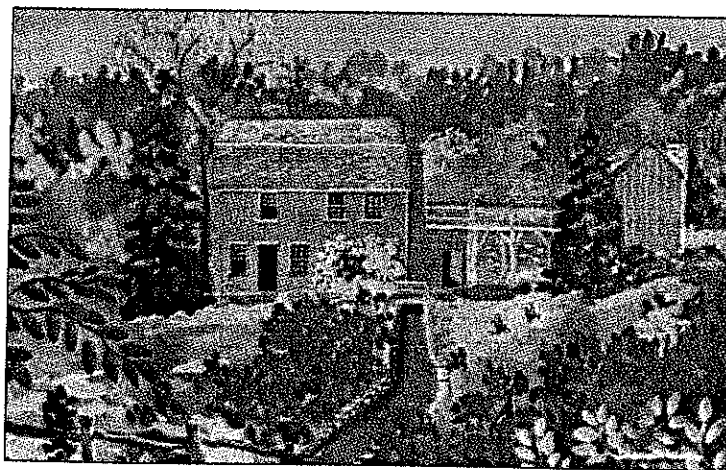
## The View From Swamptown

### The Lost Maxwell Mays Images

I guess just about every Rhode Islander is familiar with the artist Maxwell Mays. His work is everywhere and perhaps no one artist has been more successful at capturing that intangible something that makes "The Ocean State" what it is. Not only a renowned artist, Mr. Mays is, in addition, a philanthropist of the highest order. A success no matter how you look at it, Maxwell Mays is a Rhode Island icon. But it wasn't always that way.

Maxwell Mays was born in Rhode Island in 1918. His artistic endeavors began while in the service during WWII and became his life-long passion after his military discharge. Although he had some initial success after the war including a well received show at the famed Ferargil Gallery in New York City, it was as an illustrator that he not only paid his artistic dues, but his day-to-day bills as well. The beautiful illustrations accompanying this column hail from that period. They were created in the Spring of 1953 and appeared in June of that year, in what was basically a "throw-away" sort of magazine "The Ford Times" a monthly travel guide published by Ford Motor Company and sent out, courtesy of Ford's local dealer network, to their best customers. Mr. Mays not only illustrated the short piece entitled "The Wickford Tonic", he wrote it as well. In it, Mays, who's not a bad writer I might add, proclaims the wonders of not only our old friend "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic" (Wickford, for the uninitiated) but also the delectable delight of a good old fashioned "Wickford Shellfish" clam boil. Mays claimed that the combination of the beautiful New England seaport and the tasty RI treat was the tonic that would cure whatever ailed you. Who am I to disagree?

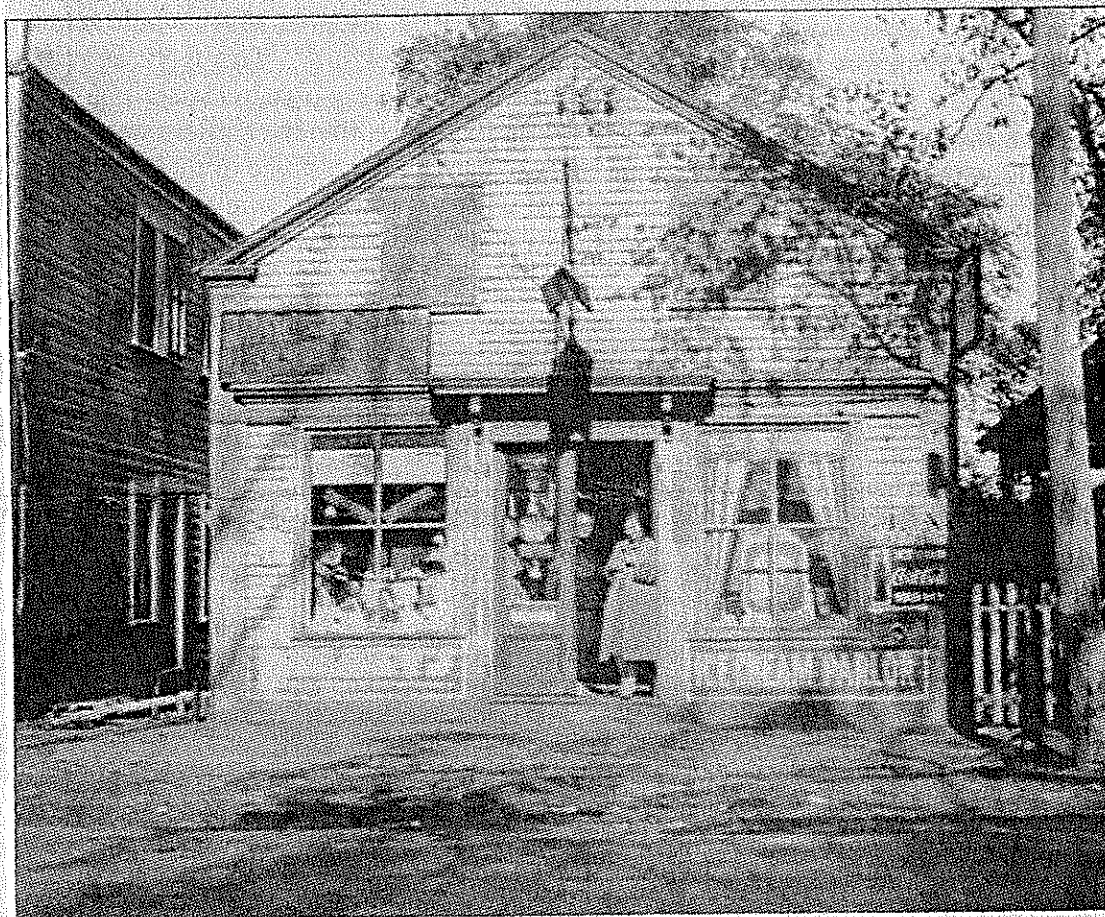
Some forty years later, in 1993, as an artist of critical acclaim, Mays would return to the subject of Wickford and paint a masterpiece "Olde Wickford". This work, in print form, graces many a living room wall around town, including my own, and captured the flavor of our favorite place like few others have. In that piece, like the earlier ones shown along with this column, Mays paints more to capture the essence of a place rather than to make an exact and precise reproduction of what once was. A true artist, Maxwell Mays, then and now, allows us all to experience a place as it once was.



The above Maxwell Mays illustrations of familiar North Kingstown sites appeared in a Ford publication given to local customers called "The Ford Times."



**This photo shows the A&P store next to the now-demolished Reynolds House.**



**In this photo, you can see the small storefront leased out long-term to the Londons. The roof of the barber shop can just be seen on the extreme right.**

## The View From Swamptown

### The Jonathan Reynolds Dry Goods Store Building

I think it's safe to say that no building in "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic" has undergone the kinds of changes that the fine looking building at 20 Main Street has. To examine it today in a cursory fashion, even a trained eye would assume that this mixed use structure has changed little across the two centuries or so that it has sat here, front and center, on Wickford's primary thoroughfare. But boy, would they be wrong! You see, this building is an imposter of sorts, and a deliberate one at that. Certainly the core of this building does date to the first quarter of the 1800's. But there is literally so much more here than meets the eye. Let's take a Swamptown gander at the life and evolution of 20 Main Street.

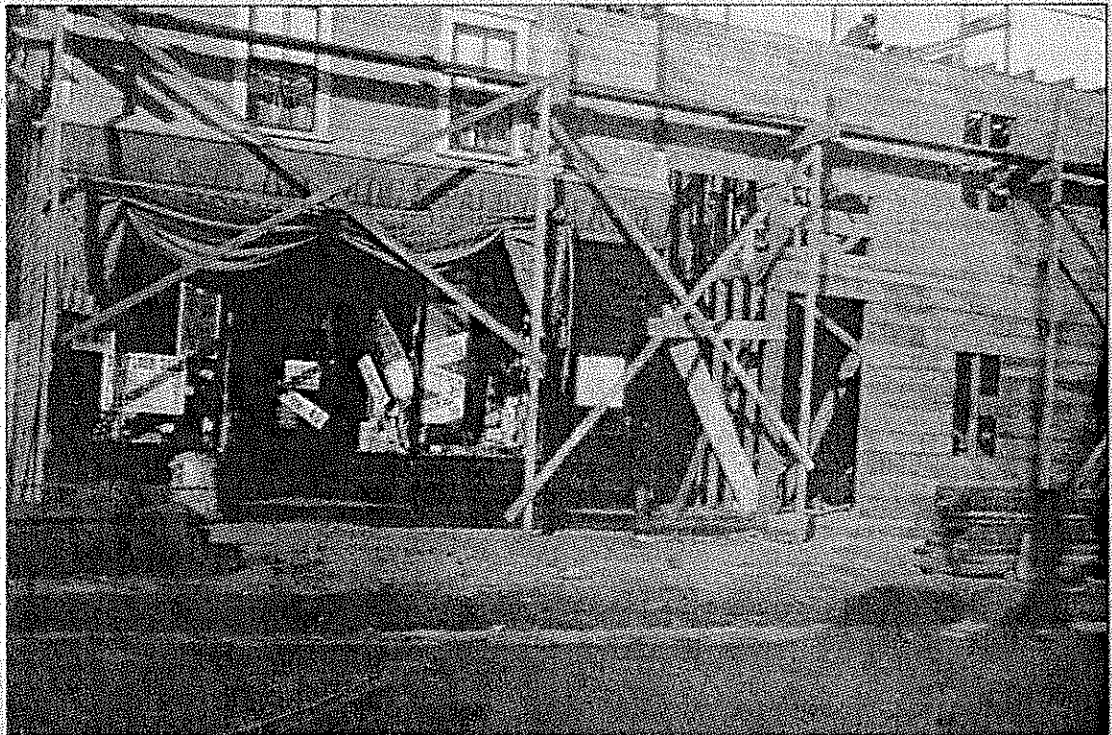
As I mentioned the core of 20 Main Street was indeed constructed in the early 1800's by Jonathan Reynolds for use as the home of his Dry Goods Store. Owned and run by Jonathan and then after his death, by his son John Jonathan Reynolds, the one time Lt. Governor of Rhode Island, it was ideally located right next door to the home that they both shared across the years, the Gov. Reynolds house, featured in a recent column. The Reynolds Dry Goods Store building though, looked much different than it does today that's for certain. Towards the end of the Lt. Governor's life he leased the storefront out to the Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company, known more commonly then and now, as the A & P, one of the nation's first chains of Dry Goods Stores. That version of 20 Main Street can be seen in the accompanying circa 1927 photographs. Yes, that's right, that narrowly fronted structure with the very commercial looking façade is the same building that we see today. Next door to the A & P was another small commercial structure, also owned by the Reynolds family and leased by Max and Mary London for many years. At the time of these photos, that building obviously was home to an ice cream parlor. Next door to that, crammed between the ice cream parlor and the adjacent brick Freeborn House was a tiny shed like building that housed a barber shop. Wickford, at this timeframe, was a busy place; every bit of space that could be utilized commercially was occupied.

Change was in the wind though for this little corner of the village. The A & P was now ready to make the jump from being a dry goods store to being a full-fledged market with meat, dairy, and vegetables (traditional non-dry goods items) and the little store was not big enough. This building and the adjacent little shops were still owned by a member of that same Reynolds family; Charles B. Reynolds and he decided to accommodate the popular chain store. He demolished the two small properties and expanded the old dry goods store building of his ancestors. A man respectful of family tradition, I expect Charles Reynolds wanted a proper building for the place that once housed the family business and he took the rather humble looking storefront and had it transformed into a building befitting of Wickford and his family. To accomplish this he hired Howard Gardiner Sr. a prominent and respected builder, and a man with Wickford roots that ran as deep as his own, to do the work. Thankfully for all of us here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Reynolds also photo documented the process. It is those 1927 photos that we are examining today.

Reynolds had Howard Gardiner model his new building upon the Governor Reynolds House next door. To pull it all off in a fashion capable of fooling even a

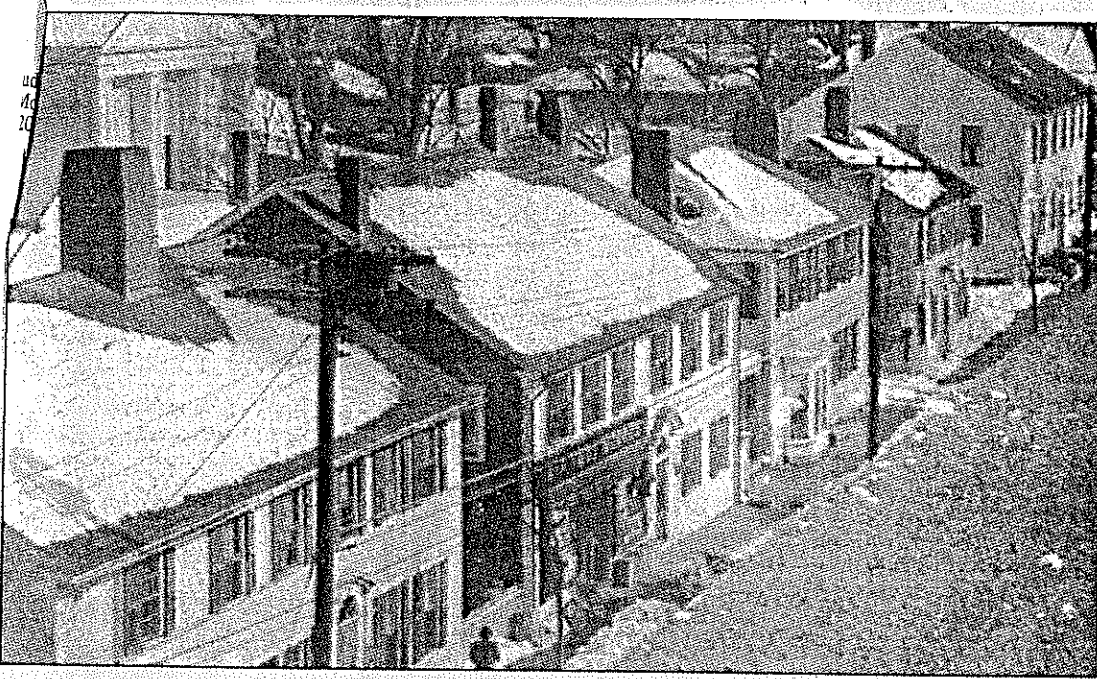


With both small stores gone, construction by Howard Gardiner's crew begins. Note the simple 20th-century windows in the second floor.

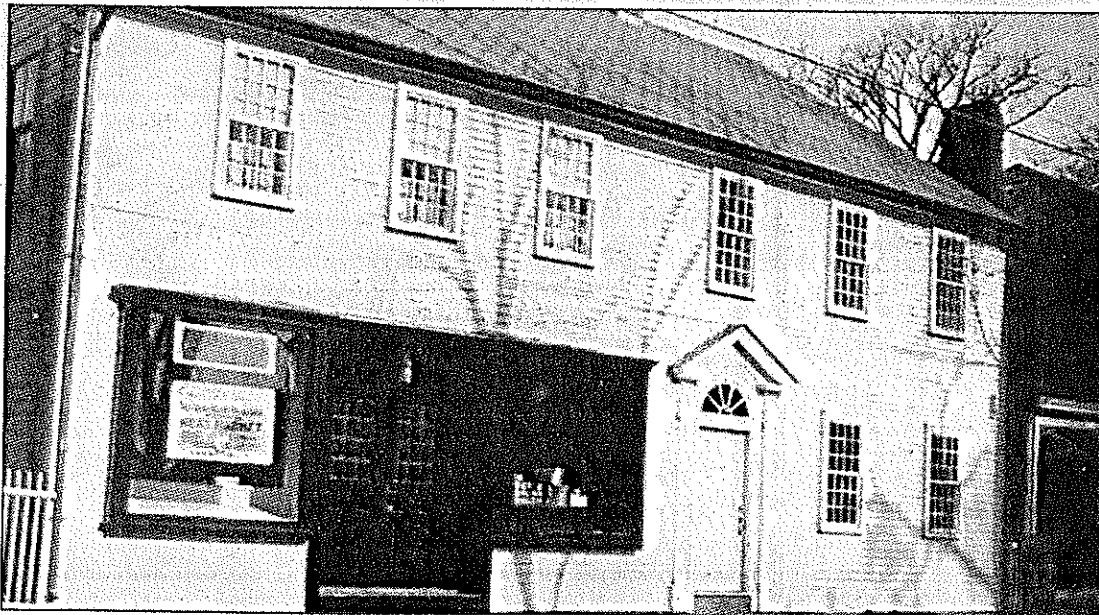


Work continues and the building's new form is revealed.

discerning eye some eighty years later, Reynolds purchased all of the windows and the circa 1802 front door of the George Slocum House which sat on the west corner of Church Lane and Main Street until its demolition around the same time as this reconstruction.. The last photo, taken by Hunter White from the roof of the Gregory Building shows them side by side; the real 1804 Gov. Reynolds House parked right next door to the very 1802 looking 20 Main Street Building. Ironically, the authentic 200 year old building is no longer with us. Thankfully, we have its flattering imitator here with us today to remind us of what once was.



The view from the roof of the Gregory building in the 1940s shows the two buildings side by side.



The building is pictured as it appeared just before A&P reopened. With the 1802 windows and doors in place, it looks like it has been in Wickford for years previous. The sign in the window announces the addition of a meat market to the A&P.

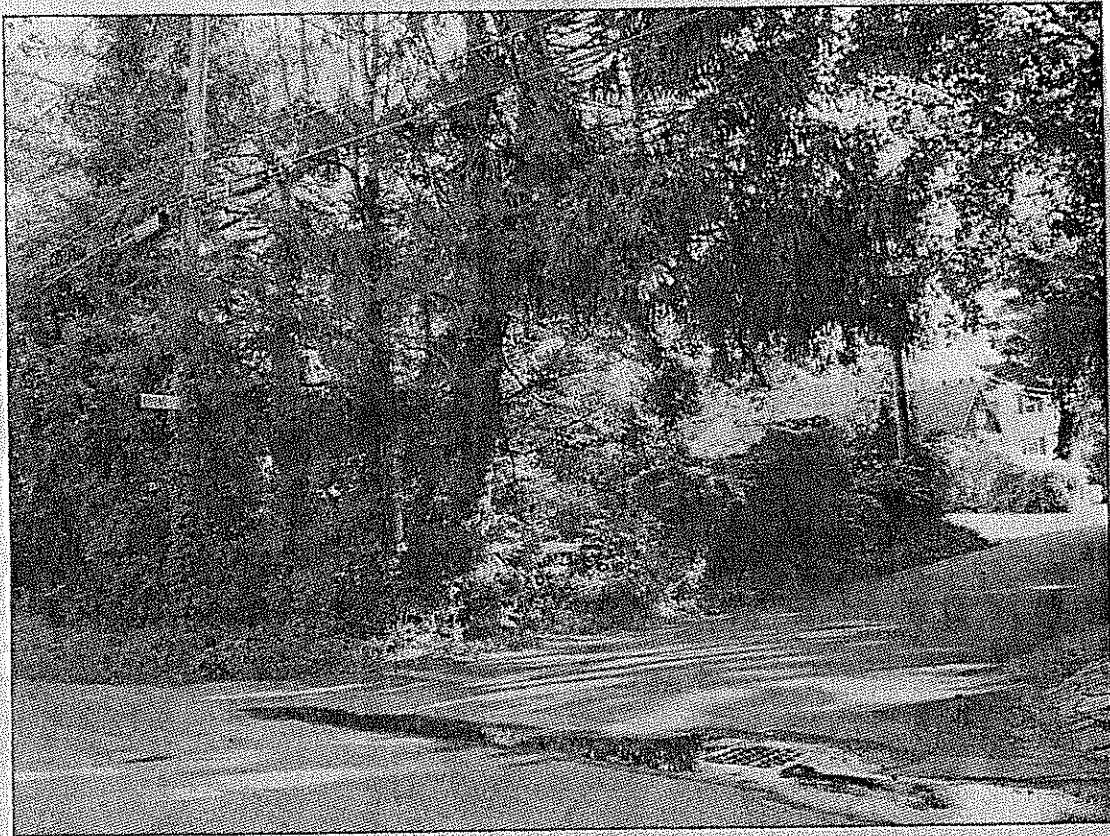


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The Wickford Society of Friends built a meeting house at the corner of Friend and Fowler streets in Wickford in 1797. It later was moved to a private residence off Boston Neck Road. At right is a notice outlining the persecution members of the New England Quakers had suffered. They found the religious freedom they sought in Rhode Island.



## The View From Swamptown

### The Quaker Meeting House

I'm sure when most of us think about the first church in the village of Wickford, it's an almost automatic assumption that we are talking about the Old Narragansett Church; moved from its original home out in Shermantown to our fair town's central village in 1800. You might be surprised to learn that, as ancient as this Church's connection to the village is, there was already an active congregation with a dedicated House of Worship up and running prior to that date. That congregation was the Wickford Society of Friends, and their Church was the circa 1797 Wickford Quaker Meeting House, found on the corner of the roads now known as Fowler and Friend Streets.

As is evident by the accompanying broadside drawn up to bring attention to "the sad and great persecution and martyrdom . . . . of the Quakers in New England", particularly those in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, centered in Boston and of which this broadside speaks, and the Plymouth Bay Colony centered on Cape Cod and in Plymouth, times were tough in the vast majority of the New World for the adherents of Quakerism. You see, our grade school education version of those other folks; known as the Puritans or Pilgrims, conveniently left out the part about how these Pilgrims, who left the old world to "escape religious persecution", cornered the market on persecuting folks once they became entrenched here across the Atlantic. They literally owned the "persecution" franchising rights here in New England, hammering anyone bold enough to attempt to live their life in a manner different than that described in Puritan doctrine and dogma. High on the list of folks worthy of persecution were, of course, the heathen Native Americans, those pesty French Huguenots, those upstart Baptists led by that know-it-all Roger Williams fellow and that – dare I say it – woman Anne Hutchinson, and last but far from the least those accursed Quakers.

Now the Quakers were singled out for a number of reasons, first and foremost, their manner of worship was strange and quite different from that of our "pilgrim forefathers". For the most part, Quakers practiced what was known as *unprogrammed worship* whereby they would get together at an appointed time and gather for *expectant waiting*. This was a practice where adherents would speak or bear witness as they felt moved by their God. Quakers felt that God was resident in all believers in the form of a Holy Spirit or *inner light*. This concept was blasphemy to any and all God-fearing Pilgrims! Additionally, Quakers refused to practice what they called *Hat Honor*, this meant that they would never deferentially remove or tip their hat to another person, as all men, in the eyes of a Quaker, are equal in God's sight. In a hierarchical society like that of the Puritans, as well as the caste-like structure of English society, this too was blasphemous in nature. America's top Quaker, William Penn, took this tenet to its ultimate test, when he refused to remove his hat before the King of England himself. All in the King's Court felt that Penn should have been immediately executed for this display of disrespect, but when questioned by the King himself regarding his stand, Penn's explanation and his bold idealism was impressive enough to save his life.

So with all that as a premise, how does Wickford fit in? You see, the only place in New England at that juncture in time that truly practiced religious tolerance was the



Colony founded by that know-it-all Roger Williams fellow, and it was to Rhode Island and the Providence Plantations that all the banished and persecuted Quakers fled in great numbers. Here they were truly afforded toleration and allowed to practice their religion as they saw fit. They quickly became an established and respected part of most communities in the Colony, including Wickford, and in 1797, three years before the Old Narragansett Church, the Anglican Meeting House was relocated to Wickford, the Quakers constructed their own House of Worship, the Friends Meeting House; the very first structure in the village dedicated solely to this solemn purpose. The Wickford congregation, which practiced *unprogrammed worship* without fear of ridicule or persecution, met at the corner of what is now known as Friend (named after the Society of Friends) and Fowler Streets for 43 more years until all that remained of the group was two congregants; Beriah Brown and Howland Vaughn. The two elderly men would come each week and sit in silent *expectant waiting* until Senior Elder Beriah Brown would signal an end to the worship with a hearty shake of the hand as was the Quaker custom. In June of 1840 the meeting house was closed and Brown and Vaughn were picked up and taken to the larger East Greenwich meeting by members of that congregation.

But that was not the end of the story for the Wickford Society of Friends Meeting House, for in August of 1845 the long shuttered building was purchased at auction by Benjamin Bicknell and moved to his farm on Boston Neck Road just south of the village of Hamilton. The widower Bicknell added it on to his small farmhouse as an addition, and eventually brought his second bride there, the widow Sally Cranston. The old meeting house sits there patiently to this day; down a quiet lane off of Boston Neck Road, after 209 years it's quite used to expectant waiting.

*This house was not photographed out of respect for the present owner's desire for privacy.*



# A DECLARATION

## Of the S A D and G R E A T Persecution and Martyrdom

Of the People of God, called  
Q U A K E R S, in *NEW-ENGLAND*,  
for the Worshipping of God.

22 have been Banished upon pain of Death.  
03 have been M A R T Y R E D.  
03 have had their Right-Ears cut.  
01 hath been burned in the Hand with the letter H.  
31 Persons have received 650 Stripes.  
01 was beat while his Body was like a jelly.  
Whereof } Several were beat with Pitched Ropes.  
} Five Appeals made to *England*, were denied  
} by the Rulers of *Boston*.  
} One thousand forty four pounds worth of Goods hath  
} been taken from them (being poor men) for meeting  
} together in the fear of the Lord, and for keeping the  
} Commands of Christ.  
} One now lyeth in Iron-fetters, condemned to dye.

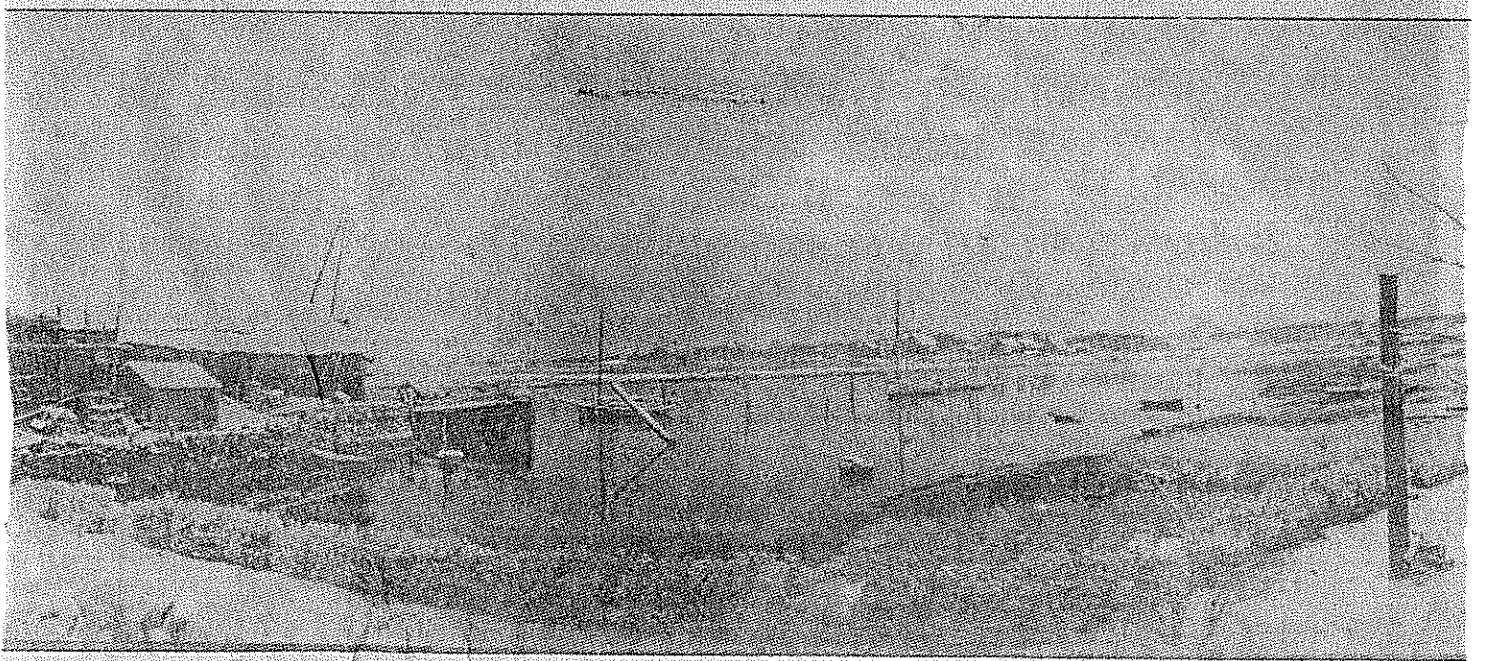
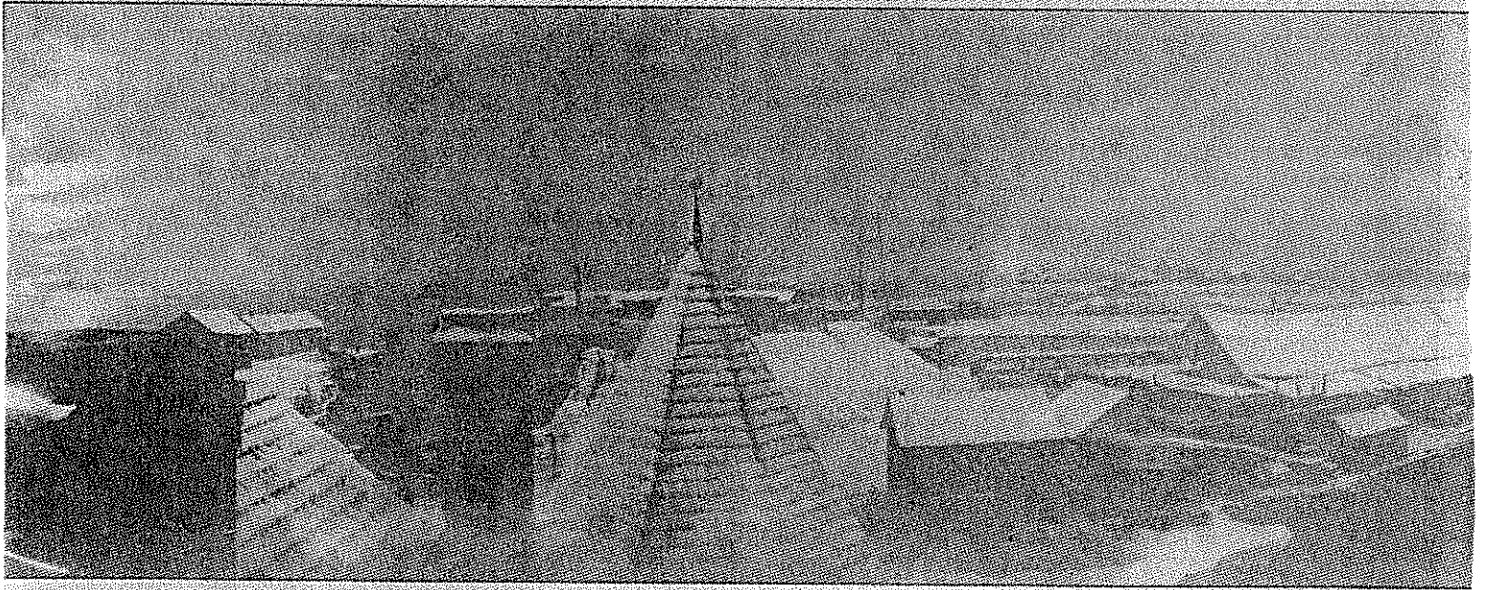
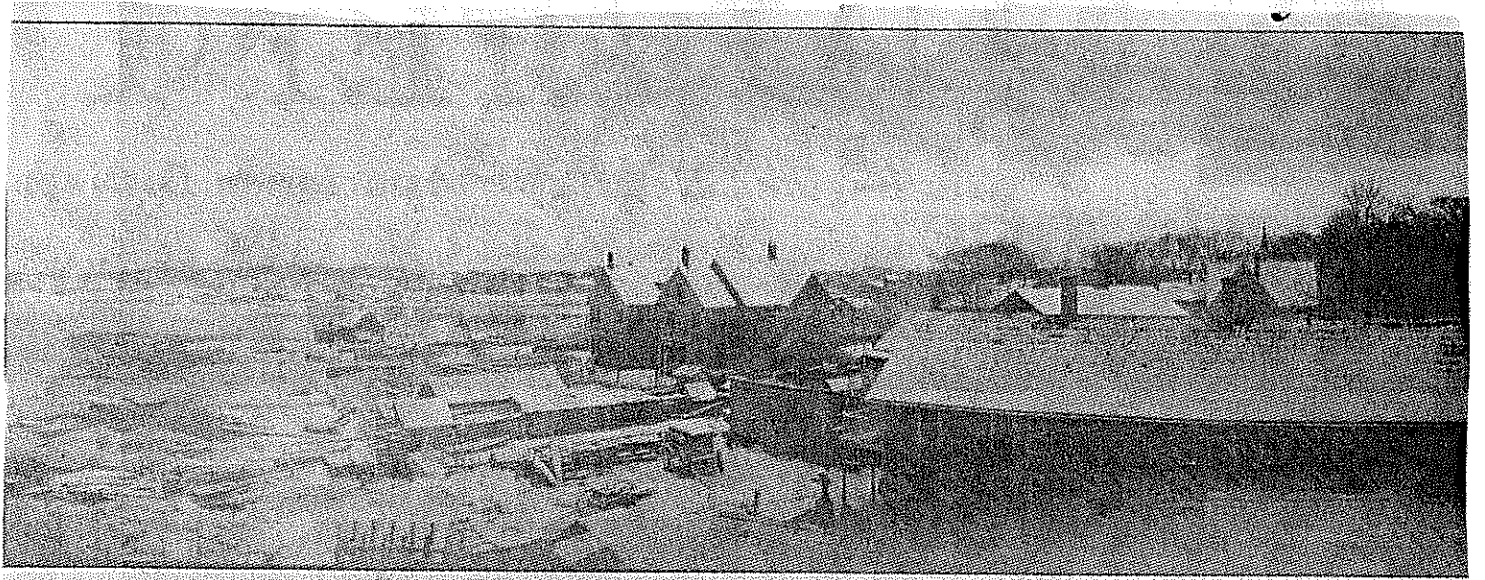
A L S O

Some CONSIDERATIONS, presented to the K I N G, which is  
in *Answer* to a *Petition* and *Address*, which was presented  
unto Him by the General Court at *Boston*; Subscribed by  
*J. Endicot*, the chief Persecutor there; thinking thereby to  
cover themselves from the Blood of the Innocent.

Gal. 4. 29. *But as then, he that was born after the flesh, persecuted  
him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.*

God hath no respect to *Ceins* Sacrifice, that killed his Brother about Religion.

*London*, Printed for Robert Wilson, in *Martins Le Grand*.



## The View From Swamptown

### The "End-O-Main" Panoramic Photos

One winter day sometime around 1905, Charles S. Reynolds climbed up to the widow's walk atop the home of his father Charles B. Reynolds and snapped a number of shots with his latest gadget, a panoramic camera capable of capturing an image equal to 90 degrees of the horizon. The younger Charles saw himself as a cosmopolitan gentleman; living most of his life in New York City, he claimed to have little need for "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic", but it seemed that Wickford always called him back home. That day, Charles "freeze framed" time for us in the form of these three images that form an almost complete circular view of the goings-on around "End-O-Main", the center of the world as far as the Wickford branch of the Reynolds clan was concerned. And that Reynolds clan, through the generations, kept these photos safe for all of us to enjoy some 100 years or more later.

A cursory examination of these remarkable images reveals the sight of the engine of the Newport & Wickford Line train billowing steam just behind the steamship "General" which is tied up at her wharf awaiting another voyage over to Newport. Great piles of coal sit at the Baker coal dock, covered in snow. The fishing shanties that, prior to the '38 hurricane, sat on Reynolds or Gardners Wharf (known by both names) can easily be made out, as well as an old warehouse on the Rodman half of what we now call the town wharf. The familiar lines of the Lewis Brothers twin houses can also easily be discerned.

But thankfully for all of us, a cursory examination of a small newspaper version of these three wonderful images is not all that we North Kingstownites will be allowed. You see, through the beneficence of the Board of Trustees of the North Kingstown Free Library and its Director Susan Alyward the residents of our fair town will be treated to a much larger version of these moments in time. Soon copies of these three images, scanned, digitally enhanced, and printed through a special process on canvas, and measuring some 6 feet long by 2 ½ feet tall will grace the entryway to our fine library. Be on the lookout for them very soon and be prepared to be amazed as they transport you back to the Wickford of another age.

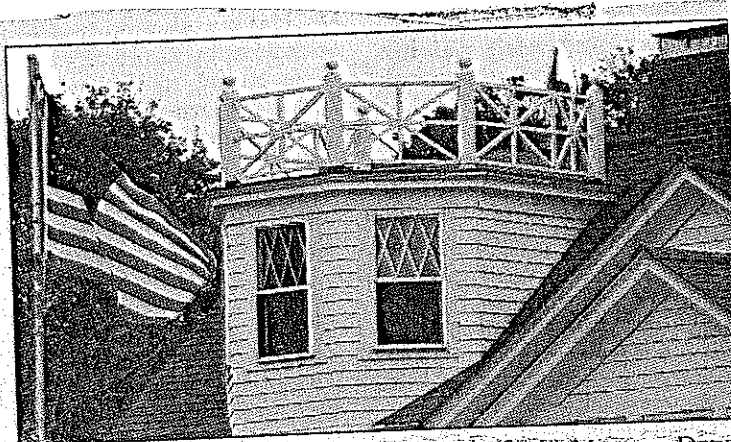


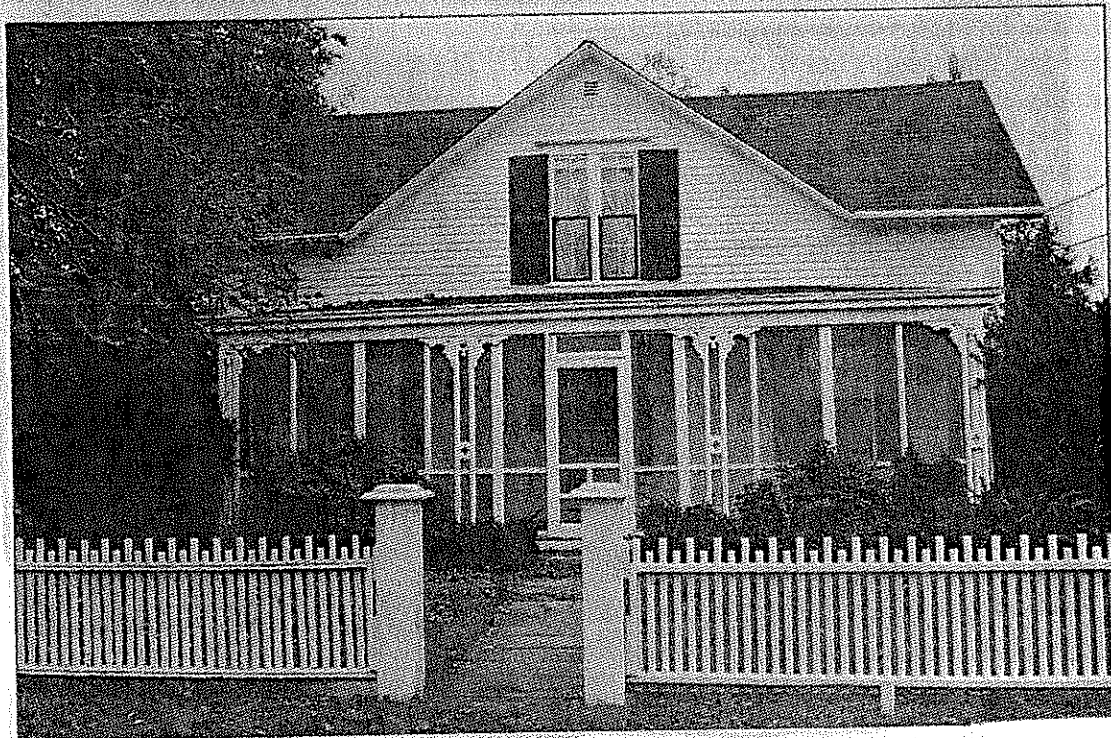
PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The panoramic photos at right were taken from the widow's walk pictured above at "End-O-Main."



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

The houses at 20 (above) and 30 Elam St. in Wickford look similar but were built 14 years apart.





## The View From Swamptown Two Similar Houses – Two Different Stories

You know, I've always been intrigued by the similarities between the two side by side houses at 20 & 30 Elam Street. A cursory sidewalk survey of these two fine homes seems to point to a mid 19<sup>th</sup> century construction date for both of them, and gosh, they do look an awful lot alike; I wondered if there could be a connection between the two. So I did some digging, performed a little sleuthing among the old musty dusty ledgers and tomes at my disposal and this is what I came up with.

The house at 20 Elam Street is the older of the two. It was built around 1837 by carriage maker Asa Beriah Waite on land he purchased in the "Elamsville Plat" from Boone Spink. This would have been an ideal location for wheelwright and carriage maker Asa Waite's home and business, right near the center of the village and just around the corner from the saddle and harness shop of his contemporary Ishmael Eldred at what is now 24 Brown Street. You can bet that these two craftsmen of old worked together often on projects. Asa's life went along like this for decades until the election of President Abraham Lincoln. Asa Waite, a diehard Republican and a local champion of the "rail splitter" president, was appointed United States Customs Surveyor for the Port of North Kingstown upon Honest Abe's inauguration and he held that position until his death in 1883. It also certainly couldn't have hurt his chances for that appointment that Asa was married to the Frances Freeborn, daughter of prominent Wickford ship owner and sea captain Gideon Freeborn. After the death of Frances in 1885, the house came into the possession of their daughter Harriet who lived out her life there as well. From that point on it was owned by the Mason family and then some fifty years ago, it was purchased by its present owner.

As I began to research the history of 30 Elam Street, I realized that my theory of a connection between the construction of the two homes was incorrect, as this home was constructed some 14 years later in 1851 on a plot of land in the "Elamsville Plat" purchased from Alfred Updike. It was built for the family of famed local sea captain George Hutchinson Thomas Cole (now that's a moniker and a half, isn't it). George Cole's family was one of the very first to settle in what was to become North Kingstown and through his ancestral connections to the Hutchinson's he was able to lay claim to being related to one of Rhode Island's founders Anne Hutchinson. George's father, Hutchinson Cole was a ship's captain as well, and had perished on the ship "Agenora" off the Turk Islands at just about the same time that George was being born. In spite of this, George was drawn to a life on the sea and at various times was the master of the vessels Eliza Hamilton, Henry, Huntress, River Queen, and the Van Buren. He was married to a local gal, Eliza Crombe, and they had five children together. George Cole's life was cut short though, by what we might now call early onset Alzheimer's, and he died in the State mental hospital at the age of sixty. His cause of death was listed as "insanity" a by-product of an age that did not understand this horrific disease. Eliza lived on in the house some thirty more years until her death in 1911. The house then was occupied by Arthur Cole until it was sold to another local legend, Anthony "Tony" Perry, the man who set the course for high school level athletics in North Kingstown and is remembered through the naming of the Tony Perry athletic complex at our new high school.



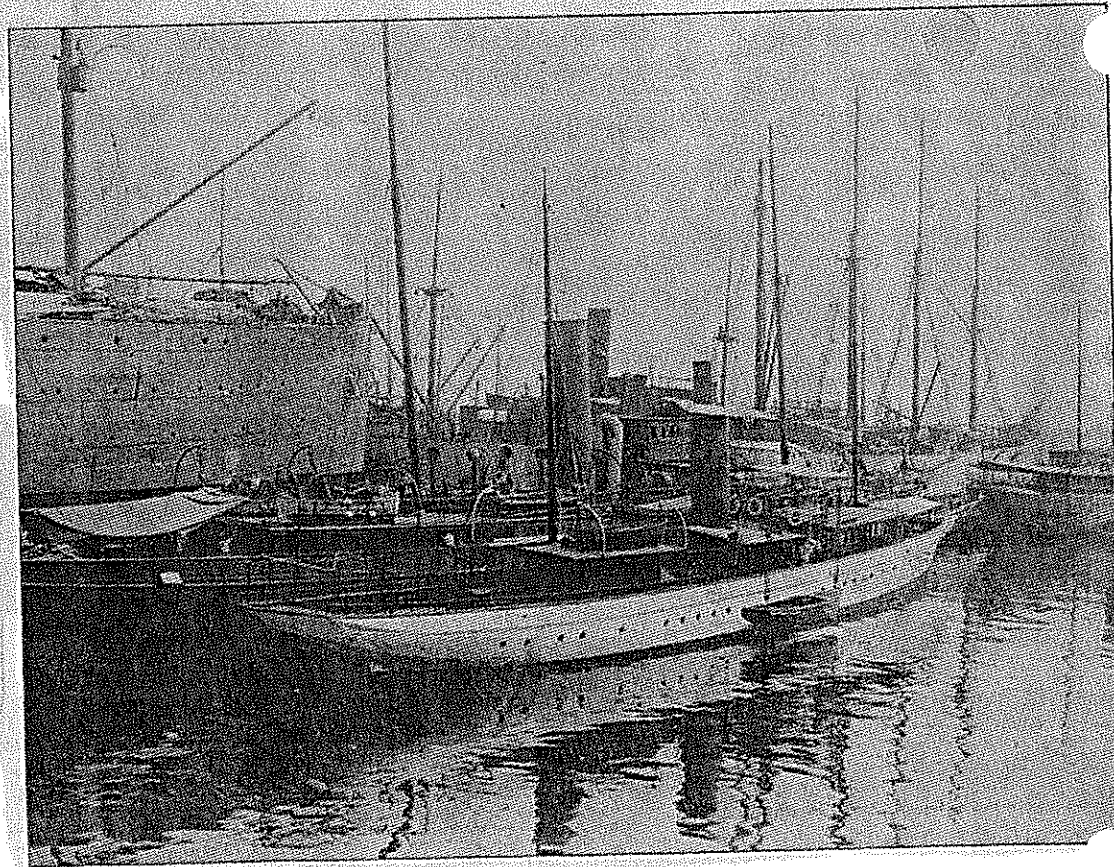
So, although I was not able to find any connection between these two wonderful Elamsville homes, we did learn a little more about the history of our fair town in the process.



The yacht *Vixen* is tied up at the dock behind what is now Teddy Bearskins in this circa 1915 photo. Below, a photo from the Naval Archives shows the *Vixen* after she was taken over by the U.S. Navy.



*Vixen* owner John Dustin Archbold is pictured above, courtesy of Syracuse University.



## The View From Swamptown

### The Vixen

Interestingly enough, during a timeframe stretching from around 1895 to the beginning of the Great Depression, the sight of a grand private yacht in Wickford Harbor was, well, just not a very big deal. The village's popularity among folks who could afford such things, combined with the sheltered nature of the cove itself, made them a fairly common sight. The rich summered here year after year, decade after decade, they hired local retired marine masters to captain them and they "wintered over" many of these floating palaces right here in the harbor. In spite of all this, in spite of the jaded attitude of locals who had seen more yachts than they could shake a proverbial stick at, when the "Vixen" arrived in town, heads were turned; folks perked up and took notice. The "Vixen" you see was just not any run of the mill yacht.

For one thing she was big! Bigger than Julius Fleischman's (the yeast magnate) yacht "Hiawatha", bigger than the vast majority of merchant vessels that came and went over the course of the year, bigger even than the Steamer "General" that took folks back and forth to Newport each day. Why at 168 feet long and 20 foot abeam she was one of the nation's most impressive yachts. For a present day perspective, the "Brandaris", a magnificent fixture on our waterfront today, is 63 feet long and many of the sailing vessels that ply the harbor today are just a little bit longer than the "Vixen" was wide. Yes, there was no missing the "Vixen" when she pulled into town.

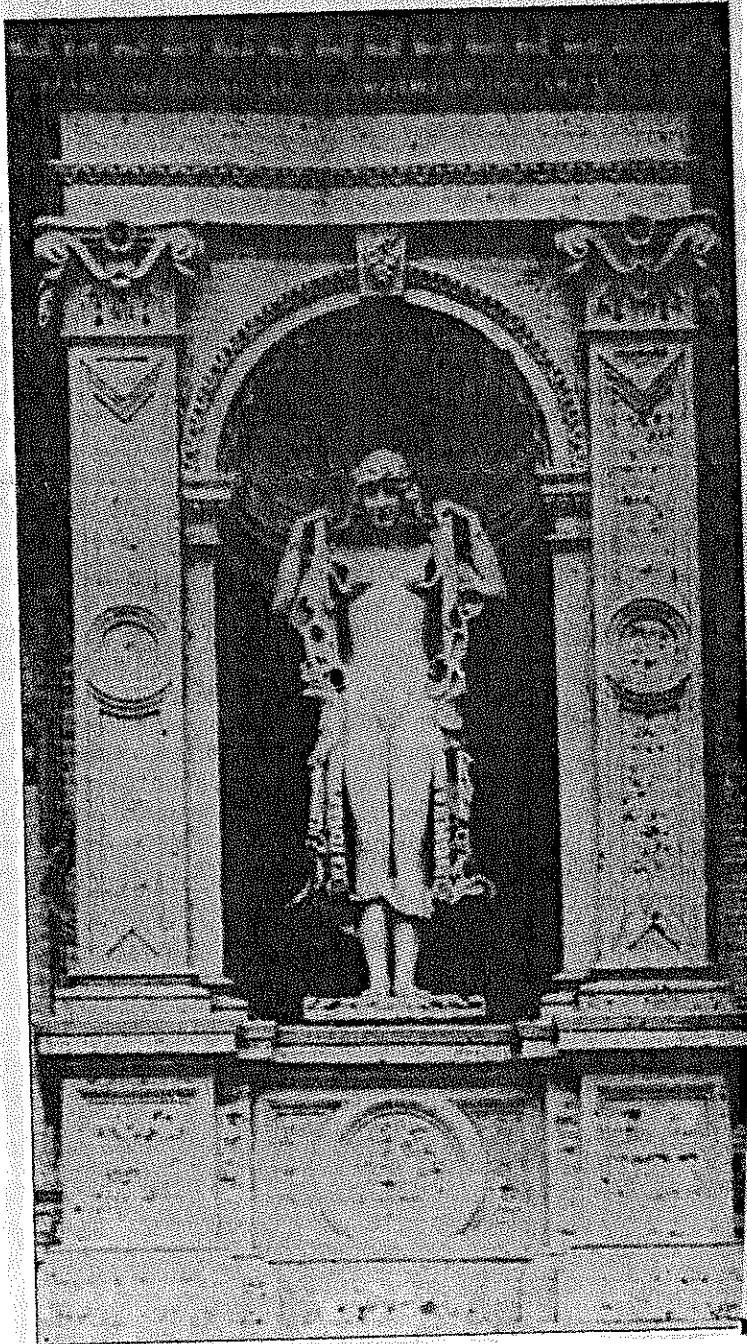
Another reason folks took notice of the "Vixen" had to do with who owned her. You see, although today the name John Dustin Archbold means nothing to most, back in 1915 when the accompanying photo of the Vixen tied up in Wickford was taken, everyone knew who he was. As the President of Standard Oil Company, this John D. only took marching orders from one other man in America, another John D. strangely enough, but one with a particularly well known last name, for Archbold was the business partner and friend of John D. Rockefeller Sr., America's most prominent and powerful man. Why anyone who read the paper or watched the newsreels knew that the "Vixen" belonged to Archbold and was the sailing seat of power when the two "John D."s had a mind to take to the sea.

A year or so after this photo was taken, John Archbold died suddenly and unexpectedly at his home in Tarrytown NY following an emergency appendectomy. The yacht "Vixen" was sold by his estate to the US Navy who in turn renamed her "Despatch" and as a patrol yacht she carried mail, supplies and high ranking officers and government officials between Washington DC and naval bases up and down the east coast. During WWI she was the flagship for two separate Battleship forces stationed out of Hampton Roads and Norfolk Virginia. After the Great War, "Despatch" was assigned as the US sponsored flagship and tender for the Governor of Santo Domingo in the Caribbean and in 1921 again, after returning to US waters, served as the flagship for the Atlantic Fleet. Her final voyage as a US Navy vessel, fittingly enough, was a run from New York City to Newport RI. She was then decommissioned and turned over to the State of Florida in May of 1928.

I've got to say, I'm disappointed that I can't relay to you the rest of the tale of this very storied vessel. Unfortunately, and amazing from my perspective, the State of Florida, through its state Archives, has no record of the "Vixen". When I asked her how it was that all mention of a vessel a full 168 feet long was missing, how no one in the state of Florida knows what happened to one of America's premier yachts after they clearly took possession of it ceremoniously from the US government just 78 years ago, she didn't seem very happy with me. But I'll keep looking and maybe one of you out there who winters down in sunny F-L-A, can tromp on down to Tallahassee and visit the archives and get to the bottom of the story of the Vixen. If you do, let me know and I'll pass it along.



Prominent guests at Cold Spring House included (pictured above) J. Noah Slee and his wife, Margaret Sanger, founder of Planned Parenthood, who summered here, and sculptor A. Stirling Calder, who created the sculpture below for the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition. He and his son, Alexander, who would later become a renowned artist in his own right as the "father of the mobile," stayed at Cold Spring house in the summer of 1910.



## The View From Swamptown

### The Cold Spring House Guest Register #2

Sometimes a single historic artifact can freeze frame a moment in time and allow us to hold it, examine it, and turn it over in our hands, and in our minds, and connect in a real way to the past. Such concrete, physical connections to time gone by are rare indeed. Even rarer still, are single individual, almost iconic relics, that, in and of themselves, hold the keys to unlock the story of an entire place and time. These items become a virtual "Rosetta Stone", allowing an entire world to unfold before our eyes. These things are "goosebump" material to historians. To hold such an item in your hands raises the hair on the back of your neck in a way that leads you to believe that all those that have come before you are peering over your shoulder as you turn its pages, whispering their secrets in your ear. Such an item is the Cold Spring Hotel Guest Register recently recovered by a member of the "Good Folks at Swamptown Enterprises". This book, like nothing else, tells the tale of two decades of the glory days of Wickford. A time spanning the summers of 1902 to 1922; a time when just about everyone who was anyone might just turn up sauntering down Main Street or enjoying an ice cream cone in a shop on Brown Street. You see, the Cold Spring House, as long time readers of this column are aware, was a place frequented by the elite of the Victorian era and those halcyon days leading up to the Great Depression; and each and every one of those folks signed their names here in this wonderful old ledger. Now last year, we explored the story of a famous artist, William Glackens and his summer in Wickford, and sure enough his signature can be found here in the ledger, tangible proof of his time at the beautiful old summer hotel. But Glackens' signature is only one of dozens upon dozens that stopped here in "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic" and spent some time. So, armed with our very own "Wickford Rosetta Stone", we are going to journey back to those glory days on a regular basis and take a look, each time, at another handful of people who stopped here in our fair town to recharge and refresh themselves during the midst of the timeframe in which they left their mark on the world.

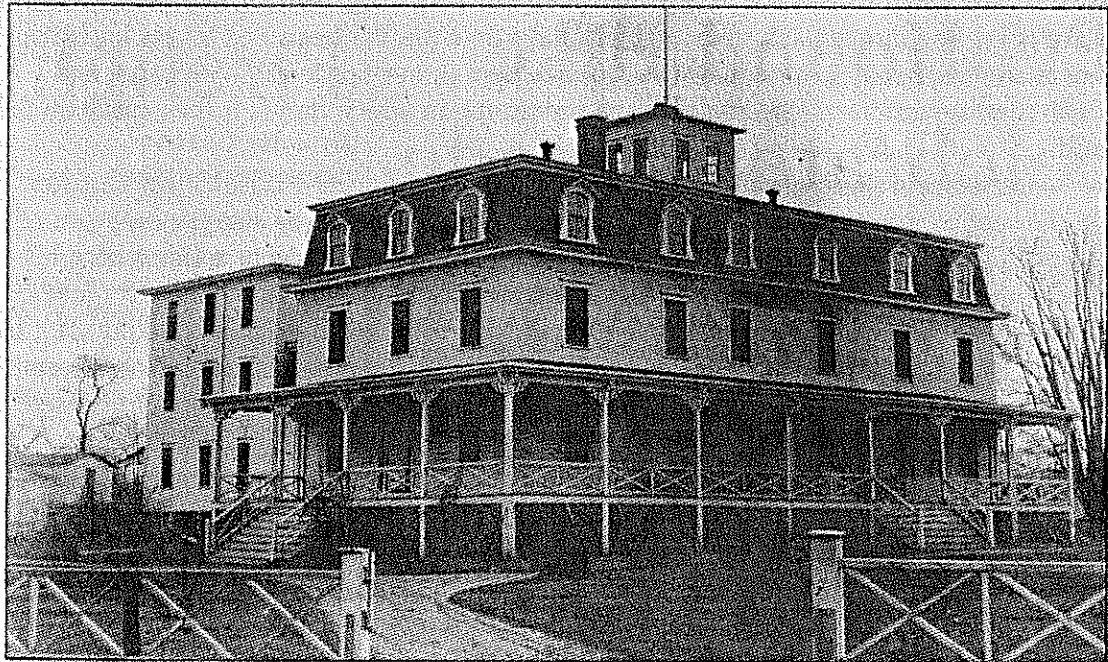
Let's begin this month's examination of the Cold Spring House Guest Register, with the second wealthiest man that has ever lived, a man who was also the only son of the wealthiest man in history. No we're not talking about a Walton or a Gates here; either of this father and son team had the financial where-with-all to buy or sell those folks on just a whim. I'm talking about John Davison Rockefeller Jr., who along with his dad John Sr., at a number of times during the 1920's-30's had combined personal assets equivalent to 15-20% of the US Gross National Product. A Brown University graduate who was married to the daughter of RI Senator Nelson Aldrich; John Jr. was most certainly acquainted with Wickford even before he began summering at the Cold Spring House. Why, you might ask, would Rockefeller stay here when the palatial Aldrich Mansion was just a few miles up the coastline? Because, although few realize it, John Jr. perhaps the greatest philanthropist the world has ever known, was scouting sites for his planned Colonial Reproduction Village and Wickford was high on the list. Heck, if it wasn't for the vagaries of New England weather, Williamsburg, Va. would be the sleepy



DATE	NAME
	August 14 <sup>th</sup>
14	Chas. A. George
" "	H. J. Martin
15 <sup>th</sup>	Mrs. Mrs. John D. Rockefeller Jr.
" "	Miss Adams
16 <sup>th</sup>	Mrs. Walter Hedges

PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

John D. Rockefeller Jr. (pictured at left) and his wife were guests at Cold Spring House, which was Wickford's summer home to society's elite. Pictured above is the register from the hotel they signed from the week of Aug. 14, 1904.



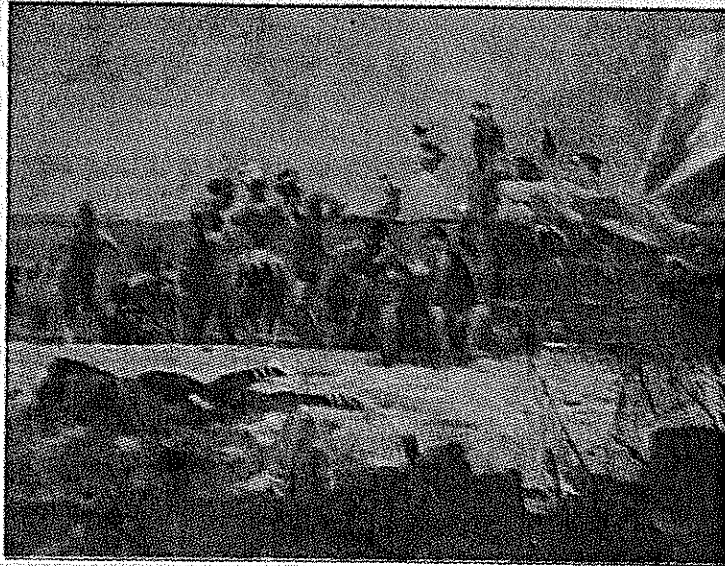


little village and Colonial Wickford would be the signature working museum that all others would hold up as a standard to be strived for.

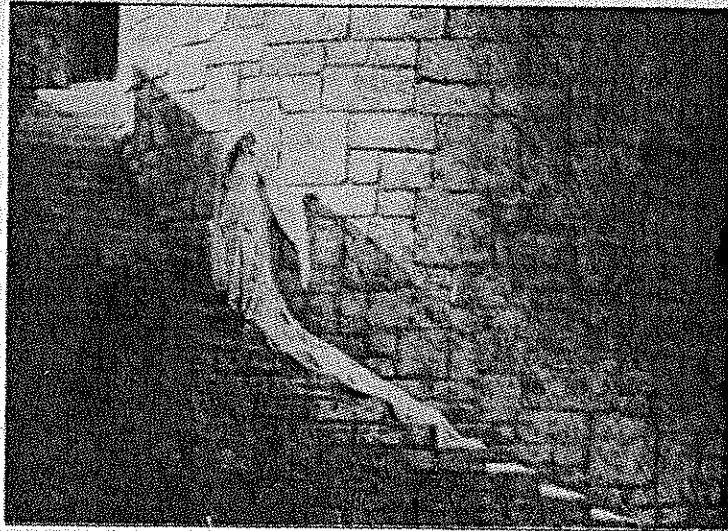
Next let's ponder the contributions of the father-son art team of A. Stirling Calder and Alexander Calder who stayed here during the summer of 1910 when Alex was just a lad of twelve-years-old. A few years after that summer, Stirling would literally "wow" the artistic world with his extraordinary work as Chief Artist for the 1915 "Panama Pacific International Exposition" a Worlds Fair that ran in San Francisco for nearly a year and was focused on celebrating (and driving) that city's rebirth after the devastating earthquake and fire that nearly destroyed it. Another focus of the Fair was the recent opening of the Panama Canal and its far-reaching impact upon the western hemisphere. Stirling Calder was a classically trained sculptor, his son Alexander, however, literally turned the art world on its ear as the inventor of mobile, stabile, and kinetic art. Although he is most well known as the "father of the mobile", he is also rightly renowned as the artist responsible for some of America's grandest outdoor art seen today in nearly every major city in the world, including some monumental pieces at JFK Airport, Washington's National Sculpture Garden, Chicago, Paris, and at the Mexico City site of the Olympic Games.

Last but far from least, for this installment, let's not forget the world changing contributions of Mr. & Mrs. J. Noah Slee. There are perhaps, no two people in modern history that have made a more profound and controversial impact upon world culture than Mr. & Mrs. Slee. I suppose right about now you're scratching your head and wondering if this Swamptown lad has gone a bit daft. "Who the heck is Noah Slee", you might ask. It may all become clear when we further identify Mrs. Slee as Margaret Sanger, the founder and driving force behind "Planned Parenthood". It was J. Noah Slee, the millionaire owner of 3-in-1 Oil that financed that group through its early years when it was known as the American Birth Control League. Slee not only provided the financial backing to keep this renegade group running, he paid for the scientific research required to develop the modern birth control pill and even risked jail time when he secretly converted one of his 3-in-1 plants into a pharmaceutical factory that manufactured spermicides. Margret Sanger out front and center, and her husband Noah in the background, are, in fact, responsible for the social, economic, and political revolution wrought worldwide by the ready availability of safe birth control for women. Nothing has ever been the same since. The Slee's came here each and every summer and certainly enjoyed their time here out of the limelight in little Wickford.

Next month we will again delve into the Cold Spring House Guest Register #2 and take another gander at a handful of folks that not only impacted the world they lived in, but stopped for a spell here in our fair town.



**Bathers at the beach at Cold Spring are featured in this Everett Shinn piece.**



**Cold Spring House visitor Arthur Kales was an innovator in a movement in the art world known as Pictorialism whereby photographers would stage their compositions like fine works of art, such as in his piece, "The 39 Steps."**

## The View From Swamptown

### More From the Cold Spring House Guest Register

About two months ago, we took our first look together at an extraordinary artifact, Guest Register #2 from the *grand dame* of local summer hotels; the Cold Spring House, which once stood at the end of Beach Street on the site soon to be occupied by our fair town's proposed new senior center. And, as promised then, today we are back to take another "Swamptown gander" at the life and times of a handful of the remarkable folks that spent a few summer days here, whiling away the time on the beach at Cold Spring and in the village of Wickford during those halcyon days in the decades before the Great Depression.

Back in 1904, when this family spent a summer week here at Cold Spring, the name Mary Mapes Dodge was known by every parent in the English speaking world. Lets face it, even today most folks are familiar with her premier children's book "*Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates*", but back at the turn of the century, Mary was also an editor, along with her friend Harriet Beecher Stowe, of the family magazine "Hearth and Home" and the editor of one of the first children's monthlies, *St Nicholas Magazine*. She came here to Wickford to vacation with her son and daughter-in-law Mr. & Mrs. James Mapes Dodge an important man in his own right. James was a celebrated mechanical engineer and inventor who joined the farm and excavating equipment manufacturing company Link-Belt and is credited with bringing it to the fore front in the beginning of the new century. Dodge's innovations in conveyor belt technology brought farm equipment into the mechanized age.

Those wonderful Wickford summers also brought NYC lawyer Charles Anderson Boston and his wife to the relaxing confines of the spacious Cold Spring House front porch. Boston was one of the "Big Apple's" leading legal minds as well as one of America's most forward thinking social activists. He, a prominent white man with everything to lose, was willing to risk it all as a member of the fledgling National Association for the Advancement of Colored People legal advisory committee. As an advisor to and member of the NAACP, Boston, who counseled the organization in the "use of new litigation strategies in the fight against racial segregation", put his career and even his life on the line for a cause he truly believed in.

Boston could have very well spent time sipping whiskey in the hotel's lounge and chatting with Californian Arthur Kales; a leading West Coast innovator in the field of photography. Kales and his contemporaries and friends Fred Archer and William Mortenson were on the forefront of an movement in the art world known as Pictorialism whereby photographers would stage their compositions like fine works of art. Kales, who was quite successful in this genre, paid his bills however, as one of Hollywood's first celebrity portrait photographers. His sensuous dreamy style had helped propel the careers of Gloria Swanson, Muriel Evans, & Ruth St. Denis, three ingénues of the era. His photos still command a premium to this day.



Mary Mapes Dodge (at right), writer of "Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates," summered with her son at Cold Spring House.



Edward Alexander Powell, an adventure and travel writer and influential World War I correspondent, also visited Wickford.

Everett Shinn was another artist that spent time at the Cold Spring House. He often vacationed here with his friend and fellow painter William Glackens, but came here many times with just his family. Shinn was often called the American Degas for his sense of style and interest in the NY theatre scene. In fact he was so enamored of the theatre that he not only featured it in his paintings, but he also wrote a few short plays, including one titled "More Sinned Against Than Usual" that ran all over the world for more than a quarter of a century. Accompanying this column is a delightful Shinn piece that he painted here in Wickford, using the beach at Cold Spring as his background.

Our final summer visitor profile is of Edward Alexander Powell, an adventure and travel writer and influential war correspondent during World War I. Powell wrote more than 30 books during his life, covering topics that ran the gamut from the stark horrors and gallant bravery he witnessed during the Great War to travelogues across Africa, Europe, and the Middle and Far East, to early 20<sup>th</sup> century politics. During his career he interviewed young men who would virtually shape the world, including Theodore Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Marshall von Hindenburg, Pancho Villa, the Shah of Persia, and Adolph Hitler to name just a few. His regular features about WWI for the then influential New York World newspaper shaped the way Americans looked at the Great Conflict that changed the world forever.

So that's our periodic installment regarding the "movers and shakers" of the world that spent a few quiet moments here in "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic" before returning to their busy lives. We'll examine another handful of names in a month or so.

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PHOTO: JAMES RUSH

Like so many others in the 19th century, the Warburton family emigrated from Europe with the dream of someday living in their own home. After almost 10 years of working at the Rodman mills, they were able to build this house on Ten Rod Road in Lafayette.