

**G. Timothy Cranston's**

**The View From Swampston**

**Volumes 9 & 10**

**January 2007 thru December 2008**



Freeman Perry Watson Tefft founded the Barbour's Heights Hotel in 1900 using a piece of property he inherited from his family. Besides being known for its views, the property was an ideal spot for a hotel because of the trolley line that passed through it.

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**The View From Swamptown**

**Volumes 9 & 10**

**January 2007 thru December 2008**

**Written By**

**G. Timothy Cranston**

**Published By**

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The Green Acres Motor Court was opened in 1958 by Armand Gadoury and offered a dozen cabins, two motel-like units, a restaurant and a filling station. Above is a picture of the Motor Court in its heyday. Below is a picture of the Post Road building that was created from the remnants of the filling station on the property.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

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## Author's Note

More than a decade of writing and researching and more than 500 columns and still at it! As my wife would point out, that's a lot of nosiness! This, the fourth column compilation book that I've put together, includes all 102 columns written during years 9 and 10 of the existence of the weekly newspaper the *NorthEast Independent* and the 8 pieces written for my regular feature in the monthly local interest magazine *South County Living*. Again, for consistencies sake, this compilation follows the basic format of the previous three as much as is possible.

There have been a number of changes since the last compilation was published that deserve mention here. My largely imaginary organization Swamptown Enterprises has, with the flourish of a pen on a few legal documents, become Swamptown Enterprises Incorporated an actual state non-profit corporation whose mission is preservation advocacy, education, and the recording and promotion of the history of our community. A requirement of that designation was the creation of a board of directors and the unwitting accomplices that have joined me on my mission are my good friends Karen-Lu LaPolice, Susan Aylward, and Rachel Peirce. I greatly appreciate the continued support and encouragement of these three brave souls. Additionally, Swamptown Enterprises Inc. has entered into a long term agreement with the good folks at the North Kingstown Free Library to begin the process of sharing the story of our fair town and the good people who have made it such with the world through the magic portal of the internet. The out-of-print compilation of years 1 & 2 are already available on the library website along with virtual walking tours of Hamilton Village and the Pleasant Street area of Wickford. There will be much more to come.

I'd like to thank all the wonderful folks without whom these two years' worth of ramblings would not be possible. As always, the staff of the NorthEast Independent, particularly my former editor Kristen, my editor Bryan, his boss Betty, and local lad Mike Derr, my photographer and friend are deserving of a Swamptown tip of the hat. Many thanks to the staff, volunteers, and "Friends" of the North Kingstown Free Library especially Susan Aylward, the now retired but never forgotten Susan Berman, and the person who inherited the unenviable task of dealing with me, Elizabeth Donovan. I'd get nowhere without the help of fellow local historian Thomas Peirce and his wonderful family, and Harry Beckwith always returns my phone calls no matter how many questions I spring upon him. And I cannot function without the joy that Karen-Lu LaPolice, the sage "font of knowledge" brings to the conversation – if you don't think history is fun than you just aren't hanging out with the right people. Althea McAleer and Doris Moon have never let me down either; thank you ladies! I'd most certainly be remiss if I didn't mention the generous support and encouragement I receive from both the NK Arts Council and all the wonderful people that make up HistWick. Again, as





The administration building for the old naval base at Quonset Point had 10 wings and 164,000 square feet of space and was home to dozens of functions for the Navy.

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always, thanks to my loyal readers who continue to inspire me with their feedback, suggestions, and encouragement. Last, but far from least, none of this would be possible without the patience and support of my wife Linda and my sons Ryan and Eric. I am nothing without them.

## **Dedication**

Those of you who have gone on my walking tours know I am quick to point out that the greatest repository of the collective history of our community is neither the South County Room in the NK Free Library nor the convoluted disorganized dustbin that exists between my ears, it is the countless cemeteries and graveyards, both big and small that exist in North Kingstown; along her highways and byways and in her deep woods and abandoned farm lands. To paraphrase my great great grandfather, George T. Cranston, "I'm as proud as the tail feather on an American eagle" to say that the vast majority of those folks were lovingly and respectfully placed in those many graveyards by my ancestors; five generations of undertakers doing right by their friends, family, and neighbors. I like to think that I continue that tradition of respectful concern by doing my part to make sure that those thousands of souls, everyone at one time or another, the most important person in the whole wide world to someone, are not forgotten by us, the people who they paved the way for. I have not been alone in this mission to be sure, as a matter of fact; I joined this vital effort as a Johnny-come-lately, aiding and abetting the one person who understands all this even more than I do. That person is Althea McAleer, a human dynamo packaged in the deceptive guise of a loving little retired librarian. Althea you are one of my hero's and I'm so proud that you count me as one of your friends. This book of stories is dedicated to you.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**This home, located at 141 West Main St. in Wickford, was purchased by Joseph Congdon, a whale ship captain, in 1869 after Congdon spent years on Nantucket-based whaling ships.**

Congdon family's seafaring history was stuff of legend May 15, 2008

As I've delved into the past here in our fair town, I've kept a mental list of sorts of the various front parlors, front porches and sitting rooms I wish I could travel back in time to, just so I could sit there in a comfortable rocker or easy chair and listen to the stories told by the folks who live there.

I'd surely be on the edge of my seat at Major Sam Phillips place on Pleasant Street as he spun the tale of how he and his compatriots stealthily kidnapped British General Prescott during the Revolutionary War, and you can bet I'd be listening to every single word spoken by Capt. Daniel Fones at his Main Street tavern house as he detailed his days as a privateer harassing and capturing enemy shipping during the French and Indian War on his warship the Tartar.

I'd be spellbound, too, at Jim Chase's Bay Street home while he told of his days as a slave on a tobacco plantation and how he made his way to Wickford after he obtained his freedom. There's also no doubt I'd hang on every word spoken by my great-great-grandfather, George Cranston, as he held court at his general store and recounted his Civil War heroics and his escape from a Confederate prison.

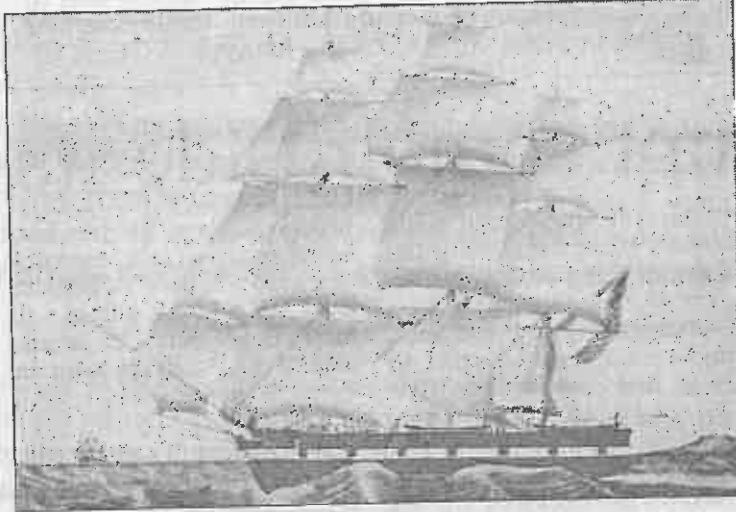
Now, I've got to add the front parlor of the big center-chimneyed colonial at 141 West Main Street to that list. I know I wouldn't want to miss a moment when retired whale ship Capt. Joseph Congdon got together with his son Joseph W. Congdon, the former captain of the Civil War gunship Housatonic, to swap tales of the sea.

The elder Joseph Congdon was born in 1805 in Newport, but had spent much of his childhood and youth here in Wickford, surrounded by the numerous Congdon relations that called North Kingstown home. He went to sea at an early age and worked his way up through the ranks until he became the master of the Nantucket-based whale ships.

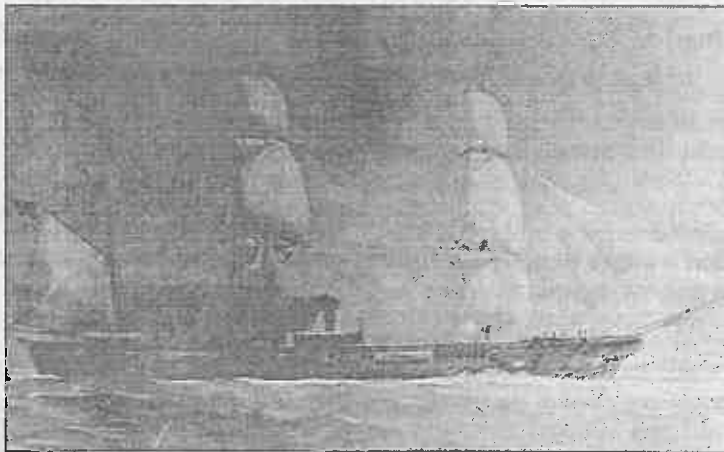
He spent five years as the Captain of the whale ship Pacific, four years on the whaler James Lopez, and seven years in charge of the Alpha, seen here in a rendering now owned by the Nantucket Historical Society.

His 16 years at sea were spent primarily in the Indian and Pacific oceans, and all those years were parceled out into voyages that might last as long as two years at a stretch. During those years, he called Nantucket home and managed to raise a family there with his wife Phebe. In 1869, the retired sea captain returned to Wickford and purchased the big Main Street home. He and Phebe lived out their days here and are buried in the Elm Grove Cemetery.

You can bet that a frequent visitor to the comfortable home of Joseph and Phebe Congdon was their son, Joseph William, who remained on Nantucket after his parents moved here. During the Civil War, he was the master of the gunship Housatonic, a 1,930-ton behemoth bristling with cannons. While on blockade service off the coast of



The *Alpha*, seen here in a rendering now owned by the Nantucket Historical Society, was one of the whaling ships captained by the elder Joseph Congdon during his 16-year career.

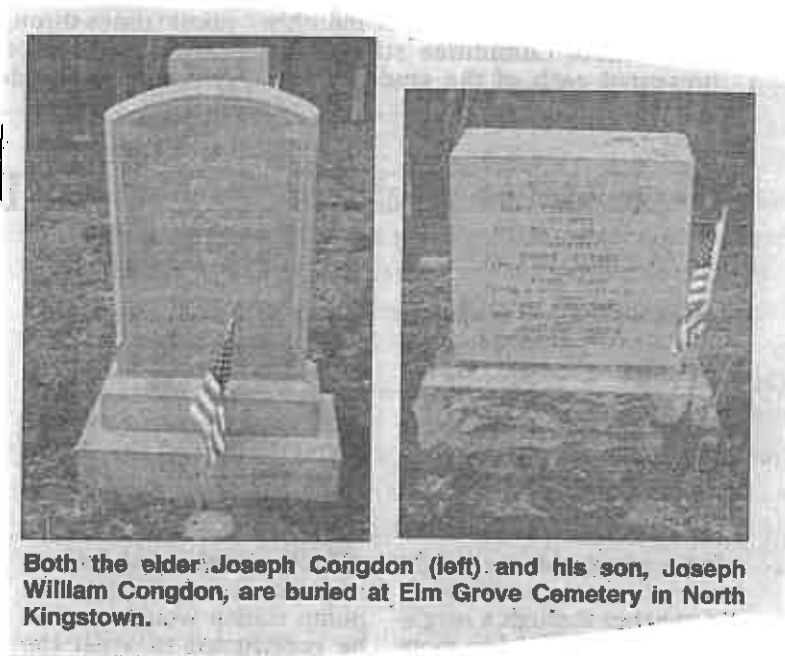


Joseph Congdon's son, Joseph William Congdon, captained the Civil War gunship *Housatonic*. The ship would go down in history as the first vessel sunk by a submarine when it was taken down by the Confederate sub *Hunley* while off the coast of Charlestown, S.C.

Charleston, the Housatonic became the first vessel to be sunk by a submarine when the Confederate sub Hunley, which was recently raised from the depths of the Atlantic and is being restored, brought her down.

After his term of service during the war, Joseph William joined the Revenue Cutter Service, the predecessor to the U.S. Coast Guard, as the master of the cutter Dexter, which was based out of New Bedford. He eventually rose to the position of chief training officer for the RCS and also was involved as a supervisor over the construction of the cutters Seminole and McCulloch. He also spent his final days in Wickford and is buried at Elm Grove in the same lot as his parents.

So, you can just imagine the tales told in front of a roaring fire on a winter day here at 141 West Main Street, when the tongues of this father-and-son combination were loosened by a sip of brandy or two. Oh, if I could only have been there.



## The View From Swamptown

### The Poplar Point Light

The month of March in 1831 was milestone marker for the little seaport village of Wickford. Events during that timeframe signified that the village was “on the map” in the maritime sense of the phrase. You see by an act of the U.S. Congress on March 3, 1831 the United States Bureau of Lighthouses appropriated \$3000 for a lighthouse “at or near to the entrance to Wickford Harbor”. Of this sum, \$300 went to a local, Thomas Albro for the purchase of a parcel of land he owned out on Poplar Point. The same piece of land, indeed, that the members of the local militia, the Newtown Rangers and their famed cannon, the Wickford Gun, had used just 53 years earlier to defend the harbor from invasion by the British during the War of Independence. Christopher Ellery of Newport, the regional Superintendent of Lighthouses, contracted for the construction of the light and dwelling house with local builder Charles Allen for \$1889, and Winslow Lewis of Boston was hired to install the 8 wick lamps and their respective 14” reflectors up in the lighthouse tower, set 48 feet above mean low water. The whole business was accomplished by November of 1831, on time and under budget. Samuel Thomas Jr., a local lad, was hired as the first keeper at a salary of \$350 per year.

Wickford Harbor truly was, by 1831, a busy enough place to warrant a lighthouse. Four separate shipyards run by the Holloways, Vaughans, MacKenzies, and Saunders clans were churning out sailing vessels at a regular clip. The harbor and wharves were alive with the hustle and bustle of a vibrant maritime and fishing industry. Folks were working, ships, barks, brigs, and schooners were coming and going. Sails furled and unfurled; yes Wickford Harbor was on the map indeed.

The Poplar Point Light continued to be a valuable asset into the 1870’s as the steamers of the Newport & Wickford Rail & Steamship Line began to ferry the rich and famous and the “regular joe” alike back and forth to Newport. Soon after the steamer “Eolus” made her first run, the US government again gave a “thumbs up” for Wickford when the Eolus became a part of the primary mail route for mail in and out of Newport. The Eolus unfortunately, and the steamers that followed it, the Tockwogh and the General, were a part of the eventual discontinuance of the Poplar Point Light. As these vessels ran more and more frequently, eventually adding night time runs, the Bureau of Lighthouses decided that a light which better defined the edge of the harbor’s narrow navigable channel was required; and in 1882 the Wickford Harbor Light was constructed and lit.

The old lighthouse sat vacant for quite a spell, until 1894 when it was sold as surplus, at auction to Albert Sherman. It was during this timeframe that the wonderful accompanying photograph of the two lighthouses, with Albert’s very effective lawnmower in the foreground, was taken. The house was subsequently owned by numerous folks, with the Grant family adding a large, attractive and appropriate addition to the little keeper’s house in 1932. Also caring for this remarkable structure over the years were the Vaughan’s, Headington’s, and the present owners, the Shippee family.



The lighthouse still survives today, some 176 years after its construction, as a remarkable reminder of Wickford's nautical heritage. It is now, the oldest wooden lighthouse in the entire United States of America. Yes, you read that correctly, the oldest wooden lighthouse in America!!! Builder Charles Allen, wherever his spirit resides is no doubt rightfully proud of that fact.

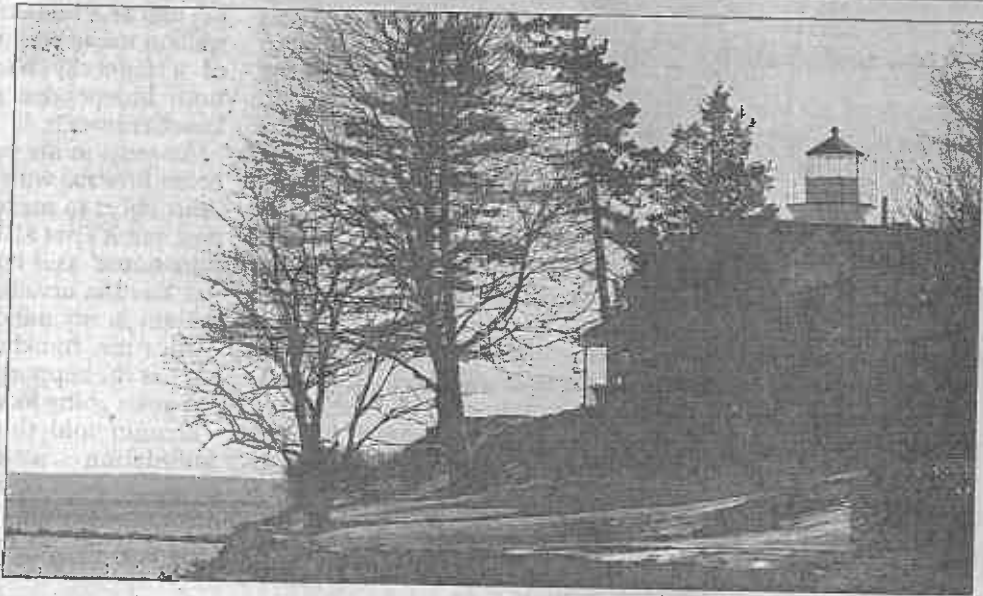
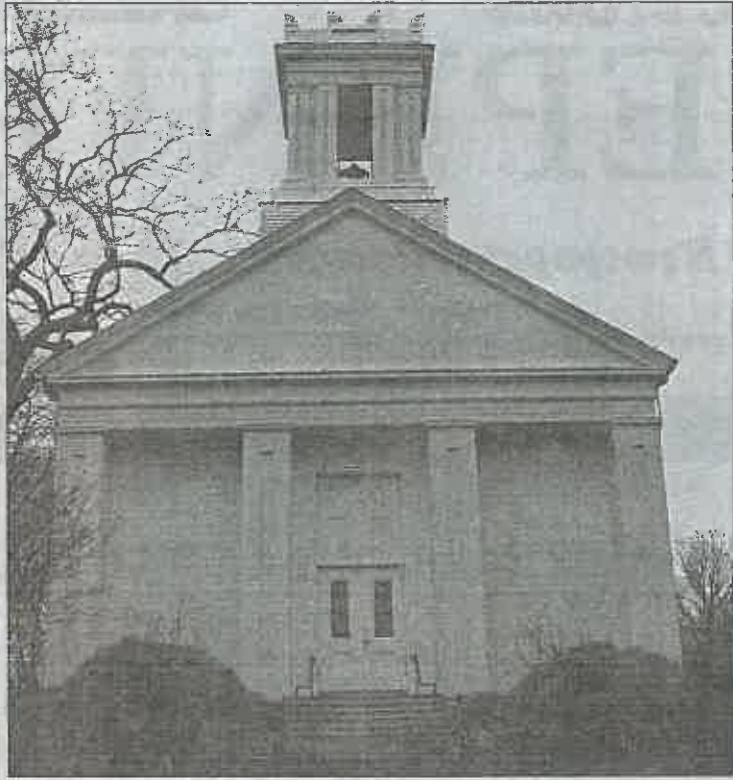


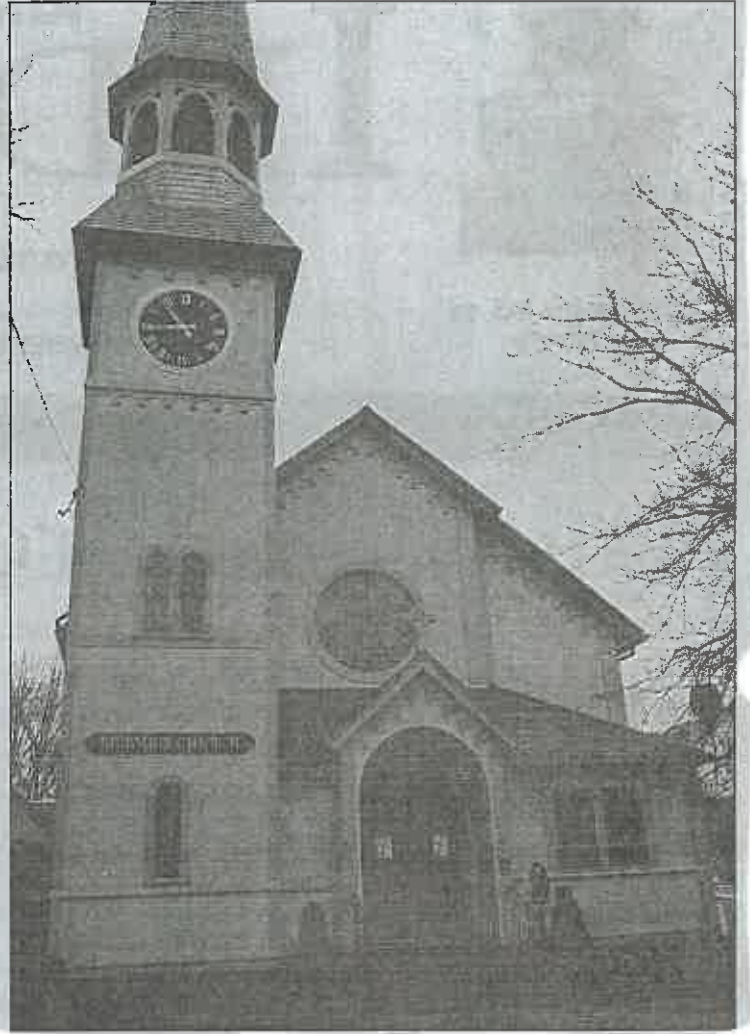
PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**Poplar Point Lighthouse** looks out at the Wickford Harbor Light in this view (top) from the turn of the last century. As seen today (bottom), the oldest wooden lighthouse in the country has outlived its replacement.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

Parishioners at the First Baptist Church in Wickford (pictured above) found the St. Paul's Episcopal Church (shown at right) too fancy when it was first built in 1848. The Baptists showed their disdain for the building by avoiding the "Episcopalian side" of Main Street when they walked to their own church for services.



## The View From Swamptown

### The New St. Paul's Church – The glorification of God or a Showpiece of Mankind's Vanity

As the community of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Wickford continues its yearlong celebration of its 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary; we here at Swamptown Enterprises are, as promised, from time to time, going to join in on the festivities and highlight some of the lesser known tales surrounding this very storied local institution.

Now 1848 was surely a banner year for this congregation. Alive, growing and vibrant after more than 140 years, the folks of St. Paul's, Wickford were preparing to move into their new and much larger Church building, designed the year before by Thomas Tefft, one of Rhode Island's most gifted native architects. The new Church building sat proudly, front and center on a prominent Main Street location just down and across the street from the home of the congregation of the Wickford Baptist Church. Up until that point, all three of the village's places of worship, The Old Narragansett Church, The Wickford Friends Meetinghouse, and the aforementioned Baptist Church had been constructed in the style of the traditional New England Meetinghouse, elegant perhaps, but simple, with the emphasis on simple; no fluff and fineries to detract from the primary purpose of the structure – the worshipping of God. This tradition of "plainness" harkens back to the beginnings of organized Christianity in New England. Practiced by all in the early days of the Colonies, it was especially part and parcel to the traditional worship of the First Baptists and the Quakers that shared not only Wickford, but most of New England with the Anglican community of which St. Paul's was a part.

So, before long, it became apparent to the folks of St Paul's that the rest of the Christian community in Wickford were less than thrilled with their new house of worship. What the parishioners of St Paul's saw as a building attempting to express their desire to glorify God in his majesty was thought by many of the local Baptists and by the region's few remaining Quakers to be excessively grand and all about glorifying earthly man's vanity. This ever expanding theological divide in the village was expressed, in a typically dignified manner, by the women of the Wickford Baptist Church, who insisted that they go out of their way rather than walk on the "Episcopalian side" of Main Street. In retaliation, numerous Episcopalians followed suit and would take a circuitous route through town rather than set foot on the "Baptist side" of the street. This philosophical gap expanded greatly after the close of the Civil War when the local Baptist community became deeply committed to the temperance movement beginning to take root in America, while the Episcopalians in Wickford and elsewhere were somewhat less than thrilled with taking on the "evils of drink".

The little chasm that existed between these two fine communities was bridged by a challenge of sorts. As detailed in a previous column, in 1872, the Rev Daniel Goodwin's appeal to the greater Wickford community to raise enough money to fund a bell in the new proposed bell & clock tower and vestibule to be added to St. Paul's appeared to have brought the community together. Working side-by-side and hand-in-hand towards the exciting promise of a four-faced town clock which would allow all to keep track of the passing of the hours whether or not they could afford the luxury of a clock or watch seemed to remind Wickford-ites how much they could accomplish together. Today they share ecumenical services, equipment and special events, and the good will found in a village of friends bound by common wants, needs, and concerns.

*This column is dedicated to the memory of Canon William Shumaker; to the good shepherd from a member of his flock.*



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

Talented homebuilder Thomas G. Lawton built the unique house on Standpipe Lane in North Kingstown in 1887, just five years before he took his own life with a revolver. Above, left is his gravestone in a historic cemetery on Stony Lane.

## **Standpipe Lane House Built by a Troubled Lawton January 4, 2007**

Tuesday, Nov. 22, 1892, was a dark day for the greater Lawton clan spread out across North Kingstown and Exeter. Tragic, but not wholly unexpected, news spread from one Lawton relation to the next.

Tom Lawton, you see, had finally given in to the demons that had both driven and possessed him. He walked out of the family home on Stony Lane that he had inherited, the one owned before him by his parents Benjamin and Emeline Lawton and his grandparents before them, carrying a large Colt revolver. Carefully and deliberately he placed it just above his left ear and then, as he had always said he one day would, he pulled the trigger. All Tom Lawton's tenant Desire Himes could do was stand there in horror and watch the scene unfold. It happened that fast; Lawton was that sure of his plan of action--no one could stop him.

Today we would most probably realize that Thomas G. Lawton suffered from bipolar affective disorder; he was by all accounts a classic manic-depressive, teetering between periods of extraordinary energy and creativity and then desperate periods of overwhelming depression. On that November day in 1892, it appears that the 46-year-old Tom Lawton had had enough. He ended his rollercoaster life the only way he could in that time before modern psychiatry.

Lawton left behind a legacy of sorts, though. You see, when he was in his right mind, or in a manic state for that matter, he was an extraordinarily talented homebuilder. Although he constructed numerous fine homes, including the Meadowlands Bed & Breakfast house on Old Baptist Road and the fine mansion house of his relation, Daniel Lawton, which was recently reconstructed in place at the beginning of Tower Hill Road, his piece-de-resistance, perhaps, is the fine home we are examining today, the Standpipe Lane House built by Lawton in 1887.

Lawton still owned the Standpipe Lane house at the time of his demise on that sad afternoon in 1892. It was sold at auction early in 1893 and purchased by recently retired Providence jewelry craftsman Ames Hobart and his son, a trained machinist also working in Providence, Francis Hobart.

The Hobarts owned the house until 1914, when Francis got a new career in the Detroit area designing torpedoes for the "Great War." The Hobarts sold the home in 1914 to a recent English immigrant, Ernest Cheetham, who was also a homebuilder and general contractor. Cheetham is most well remembered by NK old-timers for what he and then his son, Ernest, Jr., did after he "retired" from the home building trade. From 1950 until the 1980's the Cheethams ran a secondhand furniture store in the old boarding house building in nearby Lafayette. Many a new family or a Navy clan passing through town bought and sold their furniture at the Cheetham place on Ten Rod Road.

The Cheethams owned the home for 54 years and were generous enough to sell the back portion of the property to the town in 1938 as a site for the emergency construction of a

water tower after the crisis brought about by the 1938 hurricane. The Cheetham's long driveway off of Post Road eventually became Standpipe Lane. They sold their home to the Peet family in 1968, and it's the Peets who own it now in its 120th year.

I'm sure Tom Lawton, free from the torment that ended his days, is immensely pleased when he looks upon the fine home that stands as a monument to his ability and craft. Rest easy Tom Lawton, rest easy.

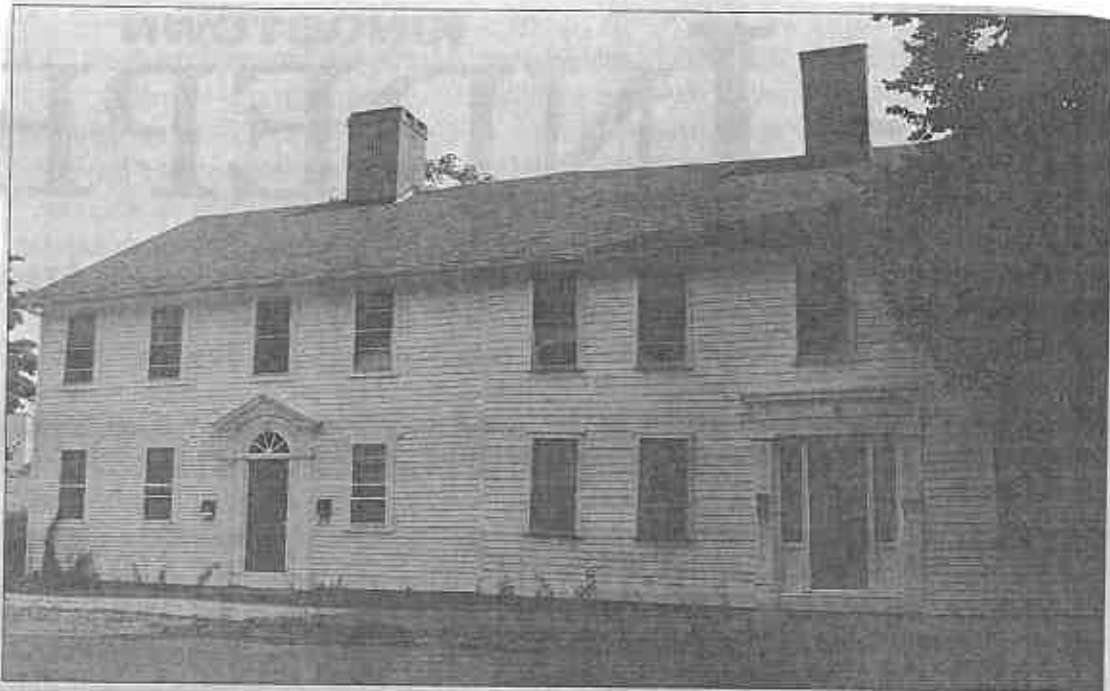


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**The Wall home on Main Street was constructed between 1802 and 1809 by George Bailey to help out the wife of a friend and business partner who was lost at sea. In addition to the home, Bailey also provided his friend's widow with a yearly stipend.**

## The View From Swamptown

### The Real George Bailey

I guess we are all familiar with the story of the fictional George Bailey, a man who lost his perspective regarding what was truly important in life and then found it through the intercession of a guardian angel. An American film classic, this George Bailey's imaginary life is played out over and over again each and every Holiday season on TV screens across America. But most folks are not familiar with the real life story of an early 19<sup>th</sup> century George Bailey who truly was a guardian angel of sorts right here in the village of Wickford.

The story begins around 1800 when two men, friends and business partners Daniel Wall and George Bailey of Newport purchase adjoining lots on the Grand Highway (now Main Street) in the up-and-coming village of Wickford from the reigning real estate tycoon of the area Richard Phillips. Wall and Bailey are both master mariners – sea captains that together as partners, own a number of significant sailing vessels that ply the waters of the Narragansett Bay and beyond. Each of them work the sea as Master of one of the vessels they own together and both have families that wait at home for them back in Newport while they sail the briny deep. In 1802, Daniel Wall relocated his growing family to Wickford, so as to allow his wife to be closer to her family while he is off at sea. The Wall's build a very typical Wickford-style center-chimneyed colonial on their lot, which sat on the corner of the Grand Highway and the little lane that would one day bear their family's name. George Bailey's family remained in Newport.

Things went along as before for both families. The rhythm of their separate lives were unchanged; George and Daniel spent more time at sea than at home, their wives picking up the slack as mariners wives do then and now for that matter. Things changed though forever in 1808 when one of the Bailey/Wall owned vessels did not return from a voyage and Mrs. Daniel Wall became the widow Anna Wall, and she, in an age long before pensions and social security survivor's benefits, had a family to support all on her own.

Now George Bailey, a man who had not only just lost his friend and business partner to "Davey Jones Locker" but was no doubt painfully reminded of his own mortality by the event, stepped up like a real friend would and should. He surely knew what Anna's limited options were. Either a quick "marriage of convenience" to a man she did not know and could only hope to get along with, or the inevitable slide into insolvency that would end with her and her children residing at the town poor farm. George however, came up with another option. He moved his family from Newport to Wickford, purchased from Anna the strip of land between their shared property line and the Wall homestead, and then paid her a yearly stipend known as "the right to frame in", effectively giving Anna a pension of sorts before pensions were ever imagined; George then built a new home right there physically connected to the Wall place. And that's how Wickford ended up with this very early "duplex" one half built in 1802 and the other half in 1809, and that's how the real George Bailey, a man of the sea, a man who knew all too well that "every mother's son that sailed the briny deep" surely needed a guardian angel; became one himself.





The Cold Spring House attracted people from all walks of life to Wickford. Above, Rhode Islanders come to the Cold Spring House using the "Sea View Electric Trolley Line," which helped shuttle people in from all over the state in a time where automobiles were almost unheard of. Below is a picture of the Cold Spring House that was included in a promotional brochure from around 1910.



## The View From Swamptown The Cold Spring House Guest Register – Part 3

As promised, this week we are going to take another look at the lives represented by the signatures scrawled in this Swamp Yankee's favorite local artifact; Guest Register #2 from the Cold Spring House – that great big wonderful summer hotel that used to exist on the site of the present-day band shell near the North Kingstown Town Beach on Beach Street, a short stroll from downtown Wickford.

The last few times we've examined this tome, I've focused on the rich and famous of the day; those nationally known "movers and shakers", artists and writers, and millionaires and politicians, folks who would have come to the Hotel via the rail line known as the "Newport & Wickford Rail & Steamship Line" an enterprise set up specifically to get folks from the main rail line at Wickford Junction to the social center of the then known universe – Newport RI. It's through this Newport "connection" that these influential individuals got to know "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic" and, as we've seen, many of them decided that there was more to Wickford than meet the eye at first glance; charmed by her quiet ambiance, they came back again and again.

But that's only part of the story of the Cold Spring House and her guests. You see, there was another whole class of folks that came here year after year, in fact, decade after decade. These were local people, Rhode Islanders from the very industrialized core of the state – from Woonsocket and Central Falls, from Providence and East Providence, and everywhere in between, these folks came here to escape the city, the smoke and smog, the noise and congestion; Wickford was "the country" to these stressed-out city folk, and they all came via the very convenient and inexpensive transportation network that crisscrossed the state; the electric trolley lines of Rhode Island. You see for just "two bits" a person could hop on the United Electric Railway or UER owned in whole by our old friend Marsden Perry, the most powerful man in New England, and then with a switch at Bleachery Hill in East Greenwich, jump on the Sea View Trolley Line and head down to the country and get away from it all for a spell. And "get away" they did; from North Kingstown all the way to the end of the line at Narragansett Pier, all of South County was ready and waiting for them; hotels, inns, tearooms, restaurants, casinos, and beaches all were there poised and ready to sooth their jangled souls. This was the roots of the South County tourism industry. So let's take a Swamptown gander at some of the local folks that unwound at the Cold Spring House in the summer of 1910.

I've chosen 1910 as the year to look at because it is also a US Census year, and from that data I can learn just a little bit about these local folks who hopped on the Trolley Car and came to Wickford for some fun in the sun. Lets start though with two families who came here in an unconventional manner for that timeframe; they came in a private automobile. How can I tell that you ask? I know because they also rented one of the hotel's smaller rooms in the back wing in order to put up their chauffeur for the time of their stay. This tells you a little bit about these two families, in a time when few people had a car, these folks had a chauffeur driven auto standing by at their beck and call. First we have the family of Arnold Buffum Chase owner of the giant Valley Falls textile mill on the Blackstone River in what is now Cumberland. A. B. Chase came with his whole clan, including young son Malcolm. Now if that name rings a bell it's because Malcolm's son, Malcolm "Buff" Chase has an awful lot to do with the ongoing



**The appeal of the Cold Spring House brought people from all over the state and New England. Above, an unknown Providence family has fun on the beach around 1910.**

Providence renaissance. The other chauffeur driven family at the Cold Spring House during the summer of 1910 was the family of H. Martin Brown of Providence. This fellow may sound like one of the city's most elite clans, but he's not and for a good reason. You see, the aforementioned Marsden Perry, the man who ruled New England during this timeframe, had acquired everything he had ever desired, except for entry into the social circles of the capitol city. This was blocked for the former junk man by, you guessed it, the Providence Brown's, who would have nothing to do with Perry. Out of spite, Marsden went to nearby Connecticut and procured some Browns of his own; two brothers H. Martin & D. Russell Brown – no relation to the Providence Brown's. D. Russell was "made" the Governor of the state by Perry and his partner Nelson Aldrich. H. Martin was "made" into a prominent businessman heading the US Bobbin & Shuttle Company, a textile supply outfit, and sitting on the Board of Directors of all of Perry's Companies including the Industrial Trust Bank, Narragansett Electric, Providence Gas, Providence Telephone, and Travelers Insurance. So strictly to rub a Brown in the face of the Providence Browns, H. Martin a former dry goods clerk and son of a farmer in Manchester CT. became one of the city's most powerful citizens; forever controlled by Marsden Perry and Nelson Aldrich.

Now lets take a look at some of the regular folks who hopped on Perry's UER and came down to spend some quality time in the Wickford sunshine. Often in the record I've found extended families staying at the hotel in adjoining rooms. An example of this is the Woonsocket clan of Aaron Warfield a Woonsocket grocery store owner who came with his family and that of his daughter and son-in-law Mr. & Mrs. John Boyden a clerk at a bank in that same city. It seems that doctors appreciated the clean fresh sea breezes of Wickford as they came in droves, including the families of Dr. Frank Day, Dr. Halsey DeWolf and Dr. Marcius Merchant. Providence business owners too, showed up with the wife and kids, including prominent architect and firm owner Edward Ely, the designer of the Providence YMCA building and numerous structures on Brown University, and Lodowick Tillinghast, a Wickford-born lad who made his mark in the big city as the owner of New England's largest plumbing supply firm; he probably came to visit relations as his parents kin, the Tillinghasts and Eldreds were still living in the village. Even David Hall, a hotel proprietor on Lloyd Street in Providence bought his family here to escape the hustle and bustle of his downtown hotel.

You didn't have to be related to come to Wickford. Two friends, jewelry factory workers Gracie Hewett and Anne Pleger left their Daboll St rooms in Providence for a little getaway to the countryside; for certain it was the highlight of their year.

You didn't have to come from the industrial center of Rhode Island either, to enjoy some time on Cold Spring Beach. Department store salesman Louis Horton of Edgewood and silverware salesman Sidney Curtis out of nearby East Greenwich came and spent time with their families sunning and strolling the streets of the village. Even folks who worked on the Electric Trolley Lines themselves knew of the value of a Cold Spring House holiday. Eddy Woodruff a dispatcher for the UER in Providence spent time here with his missus and the kids too.

So you get the picture, the Cold Spring House was a place where regular folks could rub shoulders with the nation's elite, where you might be able to sip a fine bourbon and hobnob with someone you'd never meet anywhere else. Who knows maybe Gracie Hewett and Annie Pleger met the man of their dreams here.

The Elam Street home shown at the right was built for Dr. William Allen "Young Doc" Shaw in 1845. Shaw, whose grave is shown at the bottom left, had the home constructed large enough to accommodate his future family and his medical practice, a trade that he inherited from his father, Dr. William Gardiner "Old Doc" Shaw, whose grave is shown at the bottom right.



## The View From Swamptown Young "Doc" Shaw's Place

As part of our longstanding continuing effort to take a look at the history of each and every historic structure in "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic", this week we are going to make an appointment to visit the home of Dr. William Allen Shaw, known throughout the middle half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as young doc Shaw to differentiate himself from his father, William Gardiner Shaw who was also a practicing physician and known by Wickfordites as, you guessed it, Old Doc Shaw. Now we took a Swamptown gander at old doc Shaw's home way back in September of 2000, so I guess it's high time we gave the younger practitioner of the medical arts his due.

Now Young Doc Shaw was born in 1805 in the Brown Street home (now relocated to Charlestown, RI) of his father and he stayed there learning the physician's trade until 1845. At that time he had the fine home, big enough for a future family and his practice, constructed towards the northern end of Elam Street on land already owned by his family. He married Ann Case in 1848 and William and Ann had first, a daughter Elizabeth in 1849 and then a son John in 1850. The birth of his son was for certain a bittersweet event for the good doctor as his wife of just two years died in childbirth. I can only imagine the helplessness felt by this man who had nursed so many back to health, as these events unfolded. Doc Shaw remained a widower for some time until he married Julia Rhodes with whom he had no children. Young Doc Shaw, like his father before him, lived a life centered around service to his community. He passed away in 1878, leaving behind a combined father-son practice that spanned more than 76 years.

Although I'm sure Young Doc Shaw was a serious man who practiced a serious profession, he was certainly known across North Kingstown for his wry sense of humor. A fitting example of this is his supposed "secret family recipe" for pickled cucumbers which he, after much goading by the good ladies of St. Paul's Episcopal Churchwomen, finally offered up for inclusion in a cookbook they were preparing.

### Doc Shaw's Pickled Cucumbers

- 1) Peel rather thick
- 2) Slice not to thin
- 3) Soak in cold water for one hour
- 4) Pour off water and add vinegar, salt, & pepper
- 5) Throw the whole foul mixture to the hogs

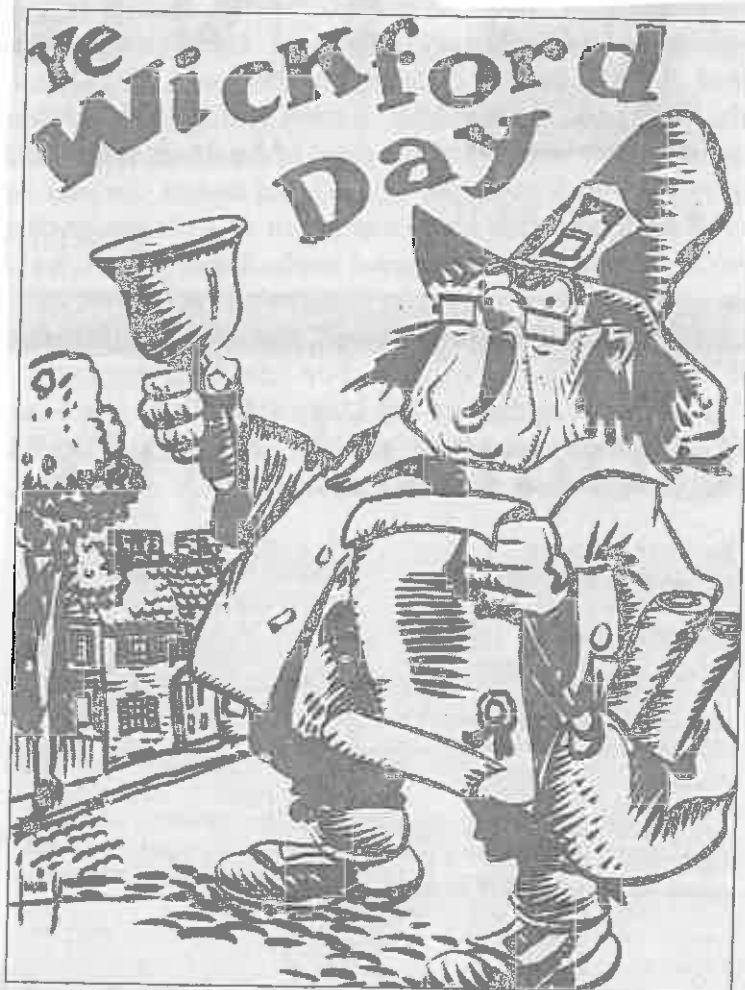
Obviously Doc Shaw cared for his patients a lot more than he did pickled cucumbers.

I'm pleased to announce that I have finally completed my latest column compilation book and it is back from the printers. The book contains the complete unedited texts of all of "The View From Swamptown" columns written during the fifth through eighth year of this wonderful weekly paper; 194 columns in all. Also included with the more than 320 pages of text are the 600 or so images that accompanied the columns. All have been reorganized based upon village location within North Kingstown. The book, more than 650 pages in all, is available by mail for \$48.00 plus \$4.00 mailing costs (\$52 in all). Send your check, made out to "Swamptown Enterprises" to Swamptown Enterprises, P.O. Box 94, North Kingstown, RI 02852. I'll also have copies available with me at all my walking tours and appearances this summer.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The Main Street Association held its first meeting in the home of R.G. Clarke on the corner of Main and Church Lane and decided to work to preserve the historic village's "beauty, charm and character." The group is credited with creating a historic district zoning plan that has served as a model for several other communities.



The cover of the Wickford Day brochure from 1962 was designed by Paule Loring and Paul St. Pierre. The image is used with permission of the Loring family.

## The View from Swamptown

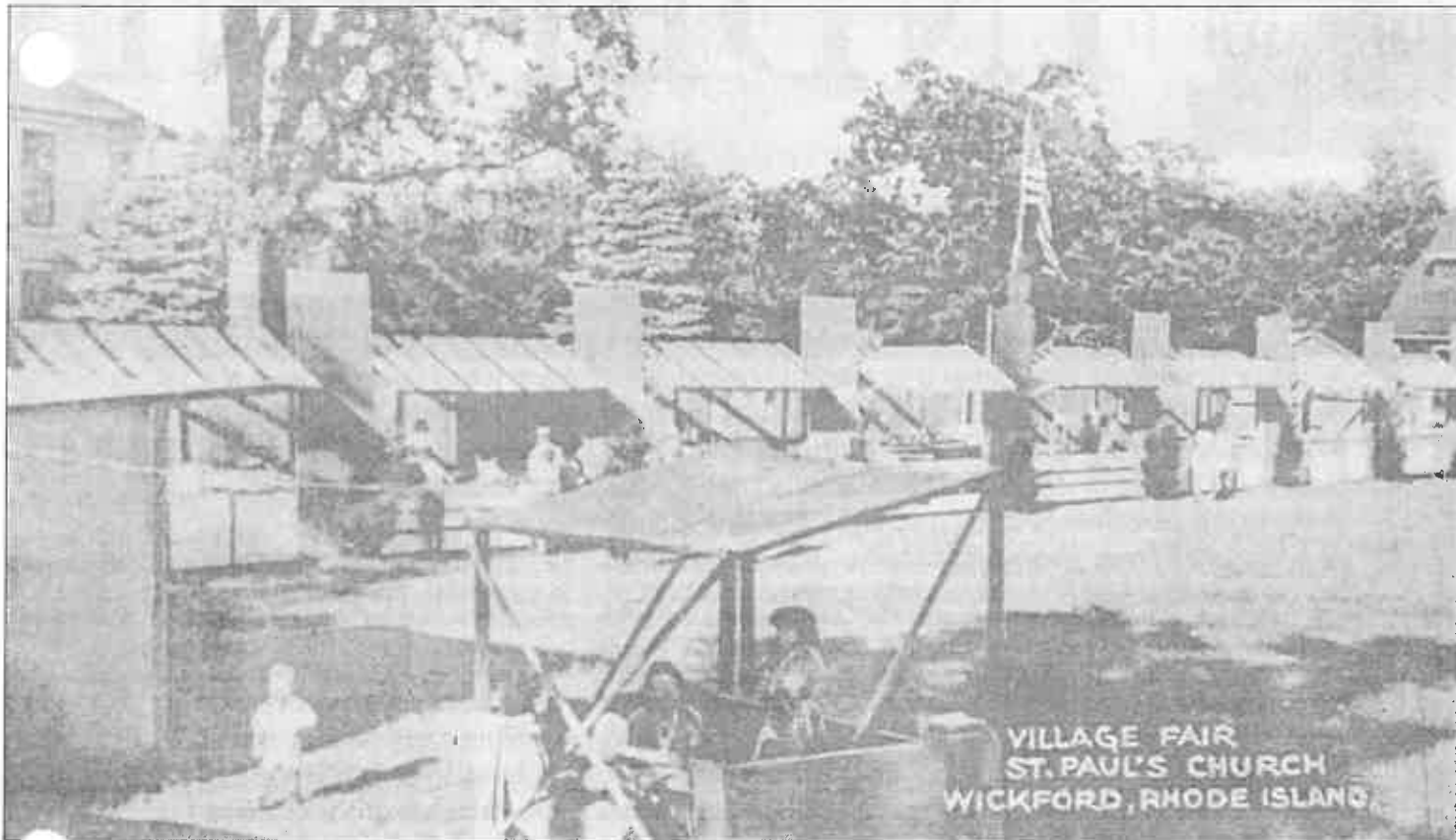
### Wickford Day

I guess you'd have to be fairly "long in the tooth" to remember Wickford Day. A spring celebration begun by the Main Street Association back in 1951, it was held each year for a decade or so until it was eclipsed by the success of the Wickford Art Festival. The Main Street Association itself, had been formed nearly 20 years prior to that, in 1932, by a group of village residents whose nucleus consisted of R. G. Clarke, J. Earl Clauson, George T. Hammond, Herbert Cross, and Hunter White. Their first meeting was held in Mr. Clarke's fine home on the corner of Main and Church Lane and at that time they decided that their express purpose was to "preserve and enhance the beauty, charm, and character of the ancient village of Wickford" and to protect her magnificent elm trees. The group worked tirelessly towards these ends, planting along the way, literally 100's of trees (first elms and then in the end Norway Maples) and crafting an historic district zoning ordinance that stands as a benchmark for other communities. Additionally the Main Street Association had a hand in the installation of sidewalks in the village and the design of and improvements to the little patch of green at the corner of Brown and Main now known as Updike Park.

Let's face it though, to do these types of works you need fundraising and that's where "Wickford Day" came in. Each spring on a selected weekend in May or June, a celebration of all that made the village so special occurred. Homes were opened as a part of a wonderful walking tour of the history of the area. Harbor tours left on the hour from the Town Wharf and at the Town Dock, the biggest and best Coast Guard Cutter available was tied up and open to the public. Booths selling food and drink were set up as well, in addition to a booth manned by the folks of the Main Street Association selling Hunter White's wonderful book about the village's old homes. In later years, artists in the village set up and displayed their wares and Smith's Castle got involved. All the monies raised were utilized to support the good works done by the folks at the Main Street Association.

As I am a little bit long in the tooth myself, and due to the fact that both of my grandfathers were involved in the Association, I do have hazy memories of those special "Wickford Days", and in spite of the fact that I love daffodils as much as anyone, maybe its time our Spring celebration took a long look back at "Wickford Day" and the wonderful meaningful event it was all those years ago.





Starting as just a rummage sale, the Village Faire at St. Paul's Church turned into a much-anticipated annual event for the entire community. Church officials put local business owner Walter Rodman in charge of the event, and he promised that the event would be "bigger and better" every year. After not being held for more than 50 years, the Faire will return to Wickford this weekend. The event will be held on Saturday and Sunday from noon to 6 p.m. on the grounds of the Cold Spring Community Center on Beach Street.



One of the biggest attractions at the Faire was the merry-go-round the church brought in every year. Because of World War II, it became hard to find people to run the faire's pony rides, forcing the church to look at an automatic version to satisfy those attending. The ride lasted until 1952, when the church was forced to sell it because of the costs associated with the ride.

## The View From Swamptown

### Celebrating the Rebirth of "The Village Faire"

Beginning in 1938 and occurring yearly after that for nearly two decades, the parishioners of St. Paul's Church in Wickford held a grand village fair; an event that was as important to the folks in our fair town and the surrounding communities as the Wickford Art Festival is today. It all began, innocently enough, as a simple rummage sale held in July the year before. That sale's success got Church rector Father Harold Whitmarsh thinking about what a wonderful community occasion it had been; perhaps it could become a yearly event, something for the Church community and the entire town to look forward to each summer. Thankfully for all involved he handed his vision off to the right man; Walter Rodman, local businessman, village fire chief, and, in this case as in many others, a visionary in his own right. His over-riding concept for "The Village Faire" as it became known was a simple one – "Bigger and better every year!!", and he and the legion of fellow Faire organizers who assisted him held true to this credo as the years marched on.

And as those years went by many new and exciting events were added to the three days of festivities and fellowship. There were concerts and contests, games of skill and games of chance, fireman's musters and marionette shows, dinners and dances, and demonstrations that ran the gamut from sewing skills to flower shows to an exhibition of "modern electrical cooking equipment". In the early years of the Faire, all of the children of the more urban villages enjoyed the pony rides which were an instant hit right from the start. But the advent of World War II and its subsequent shortage of young men made this popular attraction more and more difficult to pull off. Therefore, in the summer of 1943, a time when all in America, no less little Wickford, could use a joyous diversion and an opportunity for a smile and a wave, St. Paul's Episcopal Church became the proud owner of a 36-horse, 2-sleigh merry-go-round. Word of this wonder spread quickly, and in short order, 7000 nickels per day on average were being plunked down for tickets guaranteed to bring joy to young and old alike. The fame and popularity of Wickford's merry-go-round spread quickly and before you knew it Kate Smith (yes, THE Kate Smith) herself was discussing it with Ted Collins on his popular radio program. The fact of the matter is that money raised by rides on St. Paul's carousel, for the most part, paid for the construction of the parish house that sits to this day on Main Street right next to the Greeneway.

From that summer of 1943 through the summer of 1952, the church operated the carousel to the delight of local children. Why for a time even, they ran it each warm and sunny Saturday afternoon and evening. Finally in 1952, the Church vestry, in response to the increasing costs associated with maintaining the popular amusement, voted to sell the merry-go-round. With that vote, an era ended, and just a few years later the Faire ended as well. However, the St. Paul's Parish Hall remains, serving as a reminder of a time before video games, movie multiplexes, and the internet; to a simpler time when a nickel and a ride on a painted pony brought a smile to child and temporarily eased the worry of a mother or grandparent concerned about young men fighting a war a world away.

Well, the "Village Faire" is back again!! As a part of their 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration the community of souls that call St Paul's home has decided to bring back a bit of local history and return this event to North Kingstown's summer calendar. As the old fairgrounds next to the Town Hall has since become a neighborhood, the Faire will be relocated just a bit south to the area around the Senior and Community Centers at the end of Beach Street and held in conjunction with the area's annual Dahlia show, a delight in its own right. It will all begin at 11AM on Saturday, with a grand parade through the village of Wickford featuring the Lafayette Band and more than a surprise or two. So, grab your kids, put on a smile and join us at the Faire; who knows may be some day we'll even get us another merry-go-round!!



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The *Ambergris*, once named the *Ortem*, sits in Wickford Harbor this week. The boat was designed by John Alden, who stressed comfort in his designs, and is one of only a handful that have ever been constructed.

## The View From Swamptown

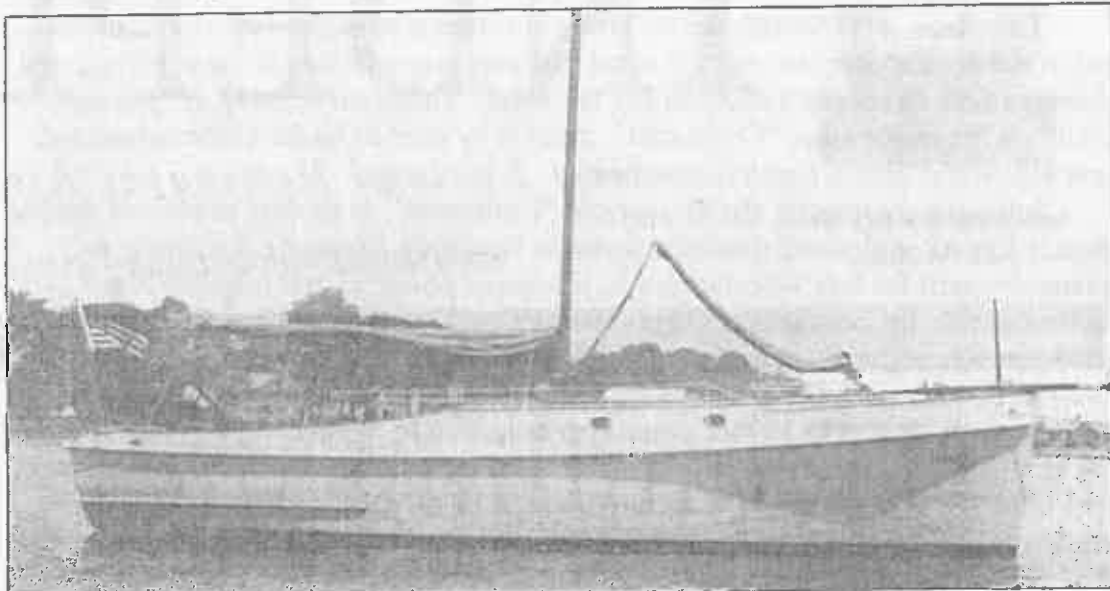
### The Alden "Hawksbill" Sportsfisherman

As I've said so many times before, there's no escaping the fact that the history of our fair town is intimately linked to the sea. From its beginnings in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, right through to today's 21<sup>st</sup> century timeframe, North Kingstown in general and Wickford in specific owes its existence to the Atlantic Ocean, the Narragansett Bay, Wickford Harbor and the vessels that motor and sail upon them. Now in the past we've taken a look at some of those boats – We've examined the story of the fabled "OK", a vessel that is really signatory to the village and her character, and taken a look at the "Cap'n Bert", the URI fisheries vessel named after local master fisherman Capt. Bert Hillier the crusty but beloved instructor who has been forever honored by this training vessels name and heck, we are all aware of the elegant sailing vessel "Brandaris", the circa 1938 shallow draft Dutch yacht involved in the evacuation of the Allied forces from Dunkirk in early 1940. But you know, there are so many more boats out there; on pilings in the harbor, moored in various coves, and tied up at numerous docks up and down the coast line of North Kingstown that deserve our attention. So, from time to time during this boating season, we are going to turn our gaze to the sea and take a "Swamptown Gander" at some of North Kingstown's more interesting seagoing vessels; and we're going to start with the 58 foot "Ambergris", a rare Alden-designed "Hawksbill" offshore sportsfisher, of which only a handful have ever been constructed.

Now for those of you who are not familiar with the name John Alden, he is one of the premiere 20<sup>th</sup> century American yacht designers, standing toe-to-toe with Herreshoff, Burgess, Stephens, and Rhodes. All designs bearing the Alden name are influenced by the practical, comfortable designs of traditional New England fishing schooners and coastal traders so typified by Alden's masterworks, a series of sailing schooners all named "Malabar". The Hawksbill offshore sportsfisher, of which the "Ortem/Ambergris" is a classic example, is no exception to the Alden rule of vessel construction which says that "a vessel should sail on her bottom not on her beam ends", meaning that comfort and stability in the water are hallmarks of an Alden designed vessel.

The "Ambergris" built in 1970 at Lyman-Morse Boatbuilding in Thomaston, Me., began its life as the "Ortem", based out of Point Judith and owned originally by Springfield Mass. Businessman Victor Muzinski. As I mentioned, this is an unusual vessel, designed for offshore sportsfishing, with its large fuel tanks and ability to switch to sail as an auxiliary means of propulsion, the "Ambergris" can not only take in swordfish in the Block Island Sound, (which it has on numerous occasions) it can also then motor and/or sail from Nova Scotia to the Caribbean without need to refuel (which it also has done o number of times). The vessels present owner Dr. Henry Laurelli has her tied up to pilings near the town dock and right in sight of his Bay Street home, which appropriately enough was constructed by one of the famed trap-fishing Lewis Brothers. Dr. Laurelli brought the old "Ortem" here to Wickford Harbor, renamed her "Ambergris", and has graced the Harbor with her classic presence since. So, the next time you are down at the Town Dock at the end of Main Street, take a glance over to the

right and ponder the “Ambergris”. Oh by the way, as any good seaman knows, Ambergris, secreted by whales and widely used in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as a base for fine perfumes, was always considered to be a gift given up by the sea to the lucky few that finds it. I guess you just couldn’t come up with a better name for a fine boat such as this.



A picture of the *Cormorant* when it was still known as the *Mildred IV*. The 81-year-old boat was constructed in Maine and built to survive the harsh New England seas.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

George W. Zachorne Jr.'s boat shop has certainly seen its share of the *Cormorant* as Zachorne not only worked on the boat, but later purchased it from the Aldrich family.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Cormorant

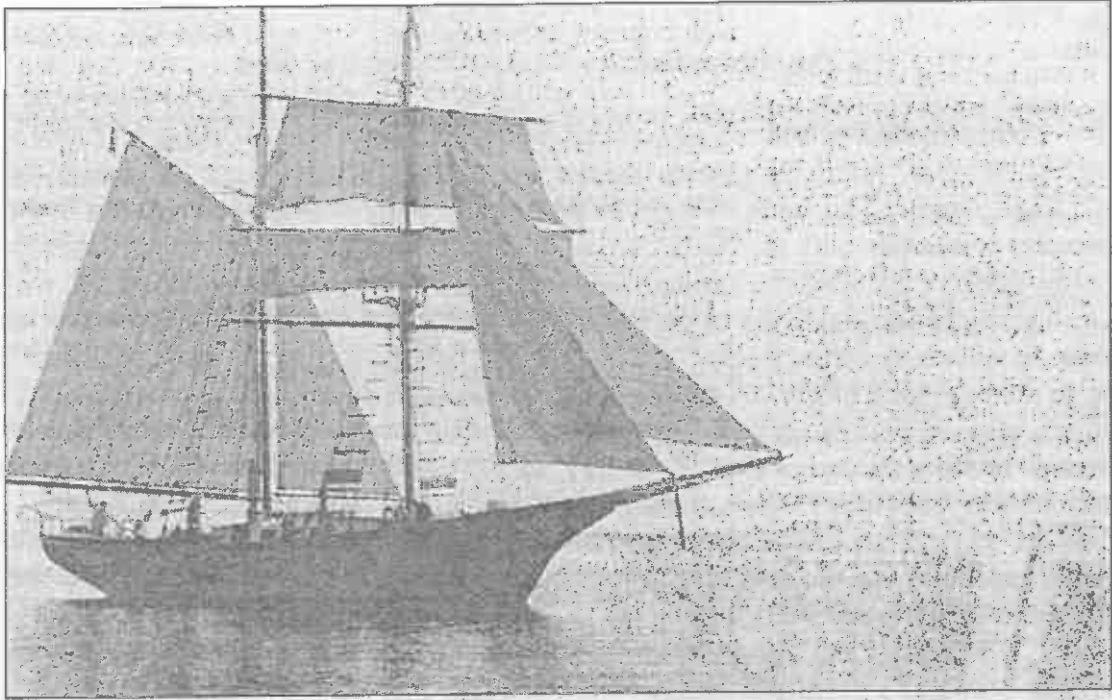
This week, as promised, we are going to continue to explore the stories behind some of the numerous motor and sail boats that now grace the docks, piers, pilings, and moorings of the coves and harbors of our fair town. Today we're going to "pull up anchor" on the motor sailer "Cormorant", thought by most to be the oldest substantial vessel still afloat here in North Kingstown.

Interestingly enough, the 81-year-old "Cormorant", is another product of marine architect John G. Alden and was constructed in Boothbay, Maine by the Goudy & Stevens shipyard for Jere Wheelwright Jr, the son of powerful coal magnate Jere Wheelwright Sr. the president of Consolidation Coal Company of Kentucky. The Cormorant was originally named the "Mildred IV" and was designed specifically to be comfortable in any weather or seas along the coast of Maine, a locale where Jere Jr. enjoyed vacationing. The 34 foot vessel was described by Wheelwright in this fashion, "The amount of grief this boat can stand and come through comfortably is astonishing." As with the "Ortem/Ambergris" which we examined last time, Alden's designs are specifically crafted to ride well in any sea that New England waters can dish out.

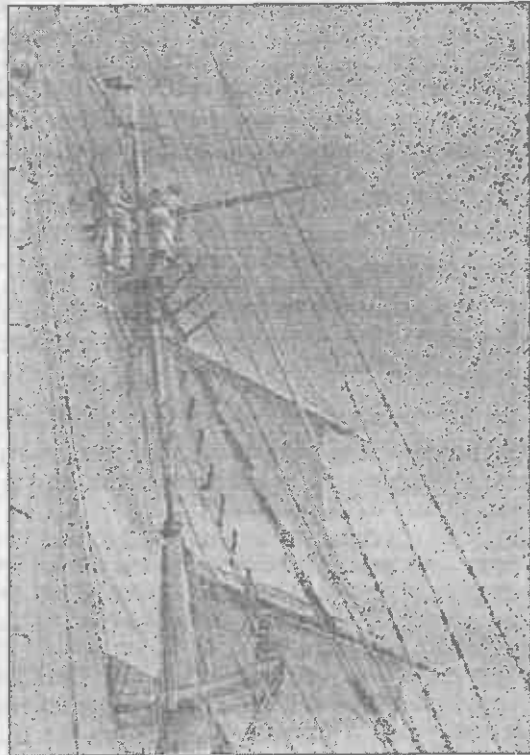
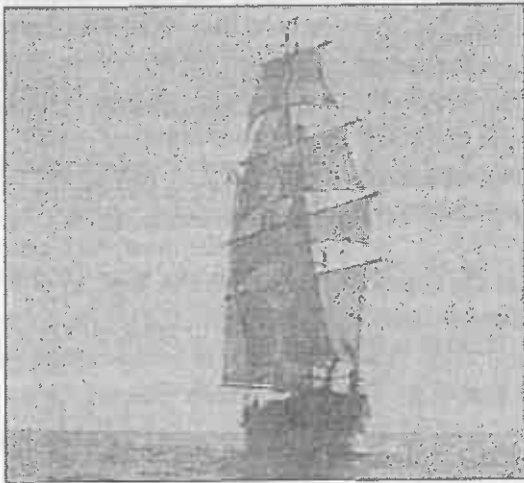
The Mildred IV/Cormorant has indeed survived many a New England storm in her eight decades afloat. After motoring up and down the coast of Maine with Wheelwright at the helm, she then spent a considerable amount of time on Block Island where she not only received her present moniker, but also was the sturdy platform from which many a monster swordfish was landed by subsequent owner Bob Noyes. Later she ended up here in Wickford under the capable hands of owner and local lad, Bob Aldrich Jr., who utilized the Cormorant as a family pleasure boat.

You might wonder how a hard working wooden vessel such as the "Cormorant" could survive so many years at sea in New England waters, and end up in such fine condition in the here and now. This is due to not only the care taken with her by her owners, but also to the craftsmanship and due diligence of those that have worked on her since her arrival here in "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic". You see without the knowing touch of wooden boatbuilding craftsman like the local legend John Brady of Steamboat Avenue and George Zachorne, the man, who in the present day, carries on in the ancient local boatbuilding tradition of the Bradys, Saunders, Vaughns, Holloways, and McKenzies that preceded him, the Cormorant would most certainly not be the fine vessel that she is today. As a matter of fact, the Cormorant was the last wooden boat that Brady and Zachorne worked on together. It sails to this day as a monument to John Brady's skill and craftsmanship. So, you might ask, who might we find at the helm of the Cormorant on a fine summer day here in Wickford Harbor, some 81 years after her maiden voyage? That would be George Zachorne himself or perhaps his youngest son Christian, as, in the end, George purchased the "fine little cruiser" from the Aldrich family. So if you spy the Cormorant on her mooring in the harbor, or motoring around in the Narragansett Bay this summer, pay this fine old gal her due; after 81 years on the water, the Cormorant, North Kingstown's oldest boat deserves nothing less.





Above, the Brigantine *Black Pearl* sails the sea as North Kingstown's last "Tail Ship." Designed and constructed in Wickford, the ship can be seen in the picture below during its keel-laying in the early fall of 1948. At right, Macy Webster and Irving Sheidon work in the crow's nest of the *Black Pearl*, which competed in several races and was even featured in a James Bond movie.



## The View From Swamptown

### The "Black Pearl" – Wickford's Last Tall Ship

Over the last year or so, as you may be aware, I have been working on a new book tentatively titled "North Kingstown and the Sea" with my friend Susan Aylward of the NK Free Library. This work, due out in the summer of 2008, will detail our fair town's intimate connection with the Narragansett Bay and the oceans beyond and will include a comprehensive list of all the known "Tall Ships" built here in our community and will touch upon the life and times of the folks that built them, financed them, and sailed upon them. It will cover a time frame roughly from just before the War of the Revolution right up to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is one of those stories – a tale of the end of an era; you see even though the "Age of the Tall Ship" was supplanted by the "Age of Steam" towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these vessels were still seen and constructed around here from time to time, right up until WWII. The Brigantine "Black Pearl" marked the very end of that "from time to time" period. You see, this Black Pearl, the real Black Pearl, not the imaginary one piloted by rock & roll pirate Jack Sparrow, was the last tall ship to call Wickford home.

The Black Pearl's story actually begins around the same time as World War II, with her design by noted marine architect Edson Irwin Schock based upon a concept imagined by her owner C. Lincoln Vaughan of the local shipyard Perkins & Vaughan (now Wickford Shipyard). Now Edson Irwin was the middle generation of a trio of exceptional marine architects, and his father Edson Burr Schock may very well have put his noteworthy two cents in as well and perhaps even his son Charles David Schock, just at the beginning of his career may have taken a peak over his dad's shoulder on this as well. Whatever the case, the molds for the Pearl's hull were constructed, based upon Schock's design in late 1940. Progress on her, at that point was interrupted by America's involvement in WWII and the Perkins & Vaughan Shipyard's contracts to construct wooden-hulled subchasers and launches for the US Navy here in Wickford (for more info on this topic, see the two previous columns on the subchasers built in Wickford & E. Greenwich). After the war was concluded, the Black Pearl's keel was laid in 1946 and her finished hull was officially launched in the early fall of 1948. Her power plant, a Hercules diesel engine, and her masts, rigging, and sails were added by the summer of 1950. She was indeed a splendid sight as she sailed the Narragansett Bay during that first summer.

Lincoln Vaughan utilized the Pearl as his family's sailing yacht, and he and his whole family, particularly son Wheaton "Wheat" Vaughan, enjoyed every marvelous moment spent upon her. The Pearl was a marvel of design in that the two-masted vessel, with a length overall of 79 ft and more than 2,000 sq. feet of sail area was set up so it could be run with a bare-bones crew consisting of Mrs. Vaughan at the helm and Lincoln & Wheat working the rigging. All sails could be set without ever leaving the safety of the deck. She could accommodate a crew of ten plus a captain and mate and boasted a toilet, a shower, hot & cold running water, an ice box and a stove as well. The family sailed her to the Cape & Islands and beyond and for basically the entire decade of the 1950's, the Black Pearl was a fixture here, moored at the entrance to Wickford Harbor adjacent to the

Vaughan's home in the old Poplar Point Lighthouse. In 1959 Lincoln Vaughan sold the Black Pearl to Newport resident Barclay Warburton III.

From 1959 to 1983, the Black Pearl was the family yacht of the Warburtons of Newport. Again, as with the Vaughans before them, the Pearl was a huge part of their life; youngest son Peter Warburton, who was two when they acquired her, virtually grew up on her decks. The Warburtons were so taken by the "Black Pearl" that they named their very famous Newport restaurant "The Black Pearl" after the brigantine. The Pearl took part in the first New York OpSail in 1964, together with the "Eagle" was the first American ships to take part in the Cutty Sark trans-Atlantic Tall Ships Race in 1972. She also took part in America's Bicentennial Celebration in 1976 and sailed in the '76 Bermuda to Boston race. If that's not enough she was also tied up in NYC as an exhibit in her off times to help promote the South Street Seaport Museum there and appeared as an extra in the wonderful James Bond movie "Thunderball". All this ought to have been enough to secure the legacy of this fine vessel and her owners but there's more to this story. You see while on that 1972 trans-Atlantic race Barclay Warburton and his family were inspired by the spirit and enthusiasm he saw at the race's conclusion in Kiel Germany. He realized that young people and Tall Ships were a magic combination; a catalyst for remarkable personal growth in youth. Warburton who is quoted as saying, "This is the great purpose of sail training – that the greatest handiwork of man, the sailing ship, shall be borne across the greatest handiwork of God, the sea, to bring together our young people in friendship." Then came back to Newport and founded the American Sail Training Association with the Black Pearl as its flagship. Upon his untimely death in 1983, the Black Pearl was willed to ASTA.

From 1983 to 1993 the Pearl was under the control of the American Sail Training Association. During this timeframe, crewed by young people from all over America, she participated in the Operation Sail 1983 & 1986, took part in the Statue of Liberty Rededication Celebration in 1988 and was the subject of a 1990 documentary made with the support of the National Maritime Society. In between these big events she continued to be utilized by ASTA in their sail training programs for youths. In 1993 she was sold to the Aquaculture Foundation of Chester Ct., and utilized for sail training programs for regional high school students involved in hands-on marine science education.

1993 was the beginning of trouble for the Pearl, although she still took part in a number of high profile events like the 1995 Special Olympics Tall Ship Race in 1995 and the Irving Maritime Fleet race in Canada in the summer of 1996, the Aquaculture Foundation either did not have the funding necessary to maintain this fine ship or did not understand the level of maintenance required for a wooden sailing vessel. Whatever the case, by 1998, the Black Pearl was suffering from lack of maintenance and began to decline. By 2000 she was in such a state of disrepair that she was no longer seaworthy. At this time she is out of the water at a shipyard in Chester Ct. ready to be sold to pay her mounting storage fees.

So now some 60 years after she was launched here in Wickford, the real "Black Pearl", the inspiration for and the jewel of ASTA, the inspiration for the restaurant in Newport, a star of a James Bond movie and a fixture in New England waters for six decades is now out of her element wasting away in Connecticut, playing second fiddle to an imaginary "Black Pearl" populated by imaginary pirates in a series of popular movies. It's the "Black Pearl" that needs rescuing now, so Johnny Depp if you're out

there (hey a columnist can dream too, you know) put on your Jack Sparrow outfit grab your checkbook and come save the day.

This column is dedicated to the memory of my friend Maryanne (Mason) Sabo; born into a Wickford clan forever tied to the sea, she and her whole family have a deeply rooted connection to the Narragansett Bay and the sailing vessels that glide upon her. She will be sorely missed by all that knew her. I would also like to pay my respects to the families of Louise Gardiner and Lillian Lewis; both of these wonderful souls were also deeply rooted in North Kingstown and gave generously of themselves to their family, friends and neighbors. Although the world is diminished by the loss of these three wonderful women, heaven has gained immensely. You will all be missed; fair sailing ladies.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The building at 30 Brown St., now the home of the Cote and D'Ambrosio public relations firm, was constructed by Jabez Bullock in 1840 when he married Lydla Hammond. Some say Hammond asked Bullock to build the home because she refused to move into a home originally built for his first wife, Abble Updike (Cooper) Bullock.

## The View From Swamptown

### Miss Abbie Bullock's House

As a part of our long-standing continuing effort to tell the tale of each and every historic home and structure in Wickford Village; today we are going to tarry for a time at 30 Brown Street, the handsome Federal Style home known to most old-timers as the Abby Bullock House.

Contrary to what is written on its first owner's placard, this grand home was constructed in 1841 by Providence born and trained cabinetmaker Jabez Bullock. Jabez had come here from the future capitol city, many decades earlier, to take advantage of the employment opportunities available as Wickford's many fine homes were being either constructed or remodeled to fit the needs of its affluent citizenry. For certain Jabez Bullock's craftsmanship can be seen to this day in the fine decorative doorways and interior detailing of these classic late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century houses. Jabez, while here, married Abigail Updike Cooper daughter of Matthew Cooper and Abigail Updike and constructed his own extraordinary home, now known as the Bullock/Thomas House on Main Street in around 1825. Sadly for Jabez, less than a decade later, he was standing over a grave in the ancient Smith/Updike burying ground at Cocumscussoc, while his wife's body was being lowered to its final resting place; Abbie Updike (Cooper) Bullock was dead at the age of 33.

With no children to be tended to, there was less of a need to rush into marriage, so it was a while before Jabez wed again, however in 1840 he married Lydia Hammond who lived just across the street from him in the house owned by her influential oldest brother Pardon T. Hammond. Now local tradition indicates that Lydia refused to move into the home built for Jabez's first wife Abbie, and therefore in short order, he purchased a double lot in Elamsville and constructed the fine Brown Street home, selling the first to Allen Mason Thomas. Perhaps that was indeed Lydia's reason or maybe it had something to do with living across the street from her brother; whatever the case, Jabez and Lydia Bullock began their married life together in the Brown Street home and just a year later celebrated the birth of a daughter whom Jabez insisted they name Abigail after his deceased first wife (maybe there was something to that "jealousy over the first wife thing" after all!).

Over time, Jabez became more involved in the banking/financial interests of the Hammond family and spent less time working within the creative sphere of the cabinetmaker's craft. True to his roots however, although more of a banker at his death in 1861, Jabez had his occupation listed as cabinetmaker. His life had spanned roughly the entire period between the Revolutionary War and the beginnings of the Civil War.

Lydia followed Jabez to the Bullock family plot in Elm Grove some 20 years later. This left never-married "spinster" Abbie Bullock in the house by herself, although, as she was a very social person deeply involved in the community and her beloved St. Paul's Episcopal Church, she was rarely alone. Miss Abbie Bullock lived out her entire life in the home she was born in, and after 80 years she too joined her parents at Elm Grove in 1922. At her death, she was one of the wealthiest souls in all of Wickford and she spread that wealth around between the friends and relations that had cared for her towards the end of her days and to charitable causes associated with the Episcopal

Church that had nurtured her throughout her time on earth. She left the Brown Street home to her elderly friend and Hammond cousin Harriet (Helene) Richardson of Providence. Harriet, a widow at that time, moved down from the city and spent her last nine years in Miss Abbie's house, passing away in 1929 at the age of 93.

In a turn of events that would have doubtlessly pleased old master woodworker Jabez Bullock, the house was purchased from Harriet's estate by local builder and master carpenter Howard L. Gardiner Sr. It couldn't have been in better hands as is evidenced by its remarkable condition today. Miss Abbie would smile from ear to ear if she could see it.

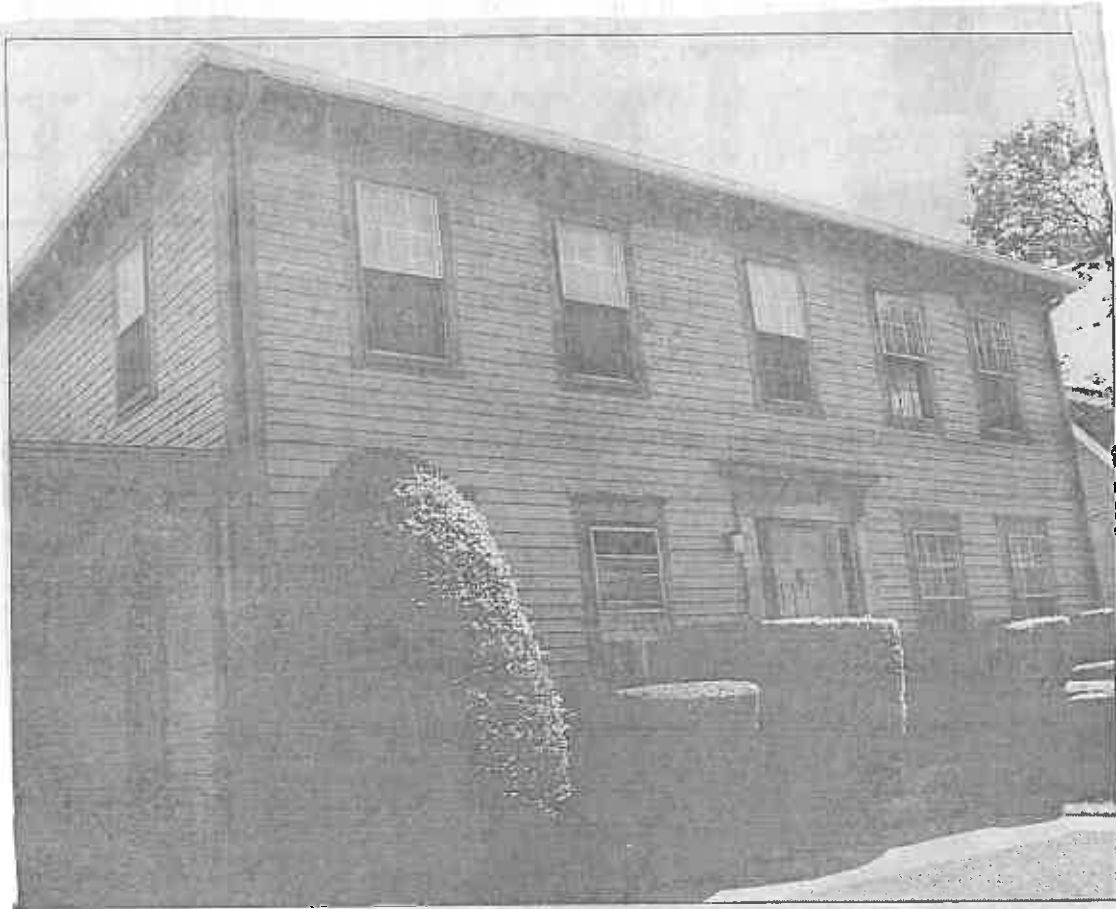


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Prominent businessman and political figure Joseph Tisdale bought this home, located at 40 Phillips St., in 1867 after his term as an advisor to the Rhode Island Governor Charles Jackson came to an end when Jackson pardoned Thomas Dorr, who started a rebellion over voter rights.



## The View From Swamptown

### The Joseph Prentice House

As a part of our continuing efforts to delve into the stories behind each and every one of the many historic homes and structures within the confines of "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic" (Wickford Village, to the uninitiated) today we are going to examine the goings-on at the intriguing flat roofed home at 40 Phillips Street.

This building most certainly, like 120 & 126 Main Streets and the big apartment house on Church Lane, falls into the category of historic homes with no one to champion their tales. Divided up into apartments during the late 1930's and early 1940's to meet the pressing needs for housing for folks involved in the construction of Quonset/Davisville, these former single family homes and others like them lost their "individuality" due to the transient nature of not only their occupants but their owners as well. But these homes do have a story to tell us; you've just got to be willing to look a little closer and dig a little deeper to get at it.

Boy, before we begin, I've got to say, this one was a tough nut to crack. You see the particulars of its beginnings fall into what I call "the gap"; a span of time stretching some 20 years or so between 1840 and 1859. You see the entire 330 years of land evidence records here in our fair town has been, over the years, indexed in a fairly reliable fashion; all of it that is except for those years within "the gap". So if you ever find yourself researching real estate records at Town Hall and you realize you need to track down some detail that can be found in Land Evidence record books numbers 30-33A; well good luck to you!

Well back to the matters at hand. As far as I can figure, this fine home was constructed around 1845 by prominent and successful brick and stone mason Joseph Prentice. He purchased his parcel of land from the husband and wife team of William Brown and Avis Spink Brown; the real estate powerhouses of the era just prior to the Civil War, and moved in with his wife, Sarah, the daughter of retired lighthouse keeper John Hull who lived just a stone's throw away in the village. Joseph and Sarah Prentice had a number of children as well, most memorable among them would be son George who would one day open up the Wickford House on Main Street along with his wife affectionately known by all as "Mother Prentice". Hard working mason Joseph had a shop behind the home and most certainly settled here not only because of the proximity of his wife's family, but also to take advantage of the business potential afforded by the rapidly growing area. Sadly Joseph took ill during one of the many epidemics of tuberculosis (or phthisis as it was then known) that swept through the region at that time and succumbed to it finally after a long battle in 1859. The Prentice clan stayed in the home until 1867 when they sold it to prominent political figure and business man Joseph Tisdale.

Tisdale's roots extend back to the Slocum & Exeter areas and although he spent much of his adult life in the northern part of the state, he never completely lost touch with his North Kingstown beginnings. Through his sister's husband, Charles Jackson, Joseph made his mark in the business and political world in Providence and when Charles

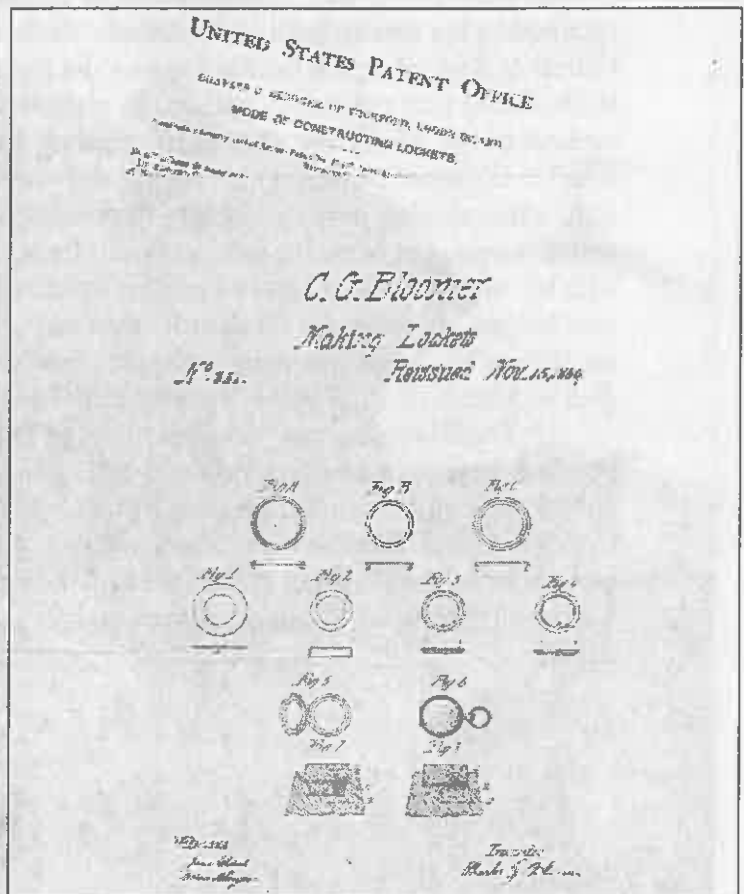
Jackson businessman became Charles Jackson Governor of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Joseph Tisdale went along as well, as one of the Governor's closest advisors and staff members. Unfortunately for these two fine gentlemen, their ascendancy to the governor's office coincided with one of Rhode Island's most turbulent times; the era of the Dorr Rebellion; a hard fought battle over individual voters rights. Thomas Dorr, the leader of the rebellion (for a more detailed description of the Dorr Rebellion check out my April 19, 2001 story on Governor Jackson's Slocum home) was in jail for some serious hard time when Jackson and Tisdale took over from Governor King. Trouble was, that both of these statesmen had much more common roots than King their predecessor, and realized that what Dorr was fighting for, although his methods may have been less than desirable, was right as rain. You see, the issue was that before the time of Dorr's uprising, due to the peculiar nature of RI's charter upon which all its laws were based, only landowners had the right to vote. Dorr, and Jackson and Tisdale knew that this was inherently wrong. Jackson & Tisdale, however, also realized that to pardon Dorr would be political suicide. But right was right, and they did it anyway. Both of them were soon out of favor with the Providence "landed gentry" and were exiled to, where else – North Kingstown; with Jackson and his wife Phoebe (Tisdale) landing on one of the Tisdale farms on Liberty Road and Joseph ending up here in the fine Prentice place in the village. The Joseph Tisdale family spent the remainder of their days here in Wickford with the respected businessman Joseph passing on in 1895 and his wife Hannah (Arnold) joining him at Elm Grove in 1911. Their son Walter Tisdale ended up at the other Tisdale farm off of Ten Rod Road; a farm that took many an intriguing turn in its history eventually becoming Rolling Green Golf Course, but heck that's another story isn't it..

Over the years since the last Tisdale passed on, this great home has been owned by members of the Bray, Moodie, and Hendrick clans. It was the Hendricks (who coincidentally also played a major part in the Rolling Greens story) family that took advantage of the buildings spaciousness in 1941 and divided it into much needed apartments for the war effort. From that time forward the real story of the building has faded from the local consciousness – until now that is.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Charles Bloomer's locket patent (below, right) kept many locals employed at the Eldred & Sagendorph Locket Factory, which used to be located at the Town Dock in Wickford (above). Although Bloomer left North Kingstown when the factory was closed following the end of the Civil War, he and many of his family members are buried here in town at Elm Grove Cemetery (below, left).



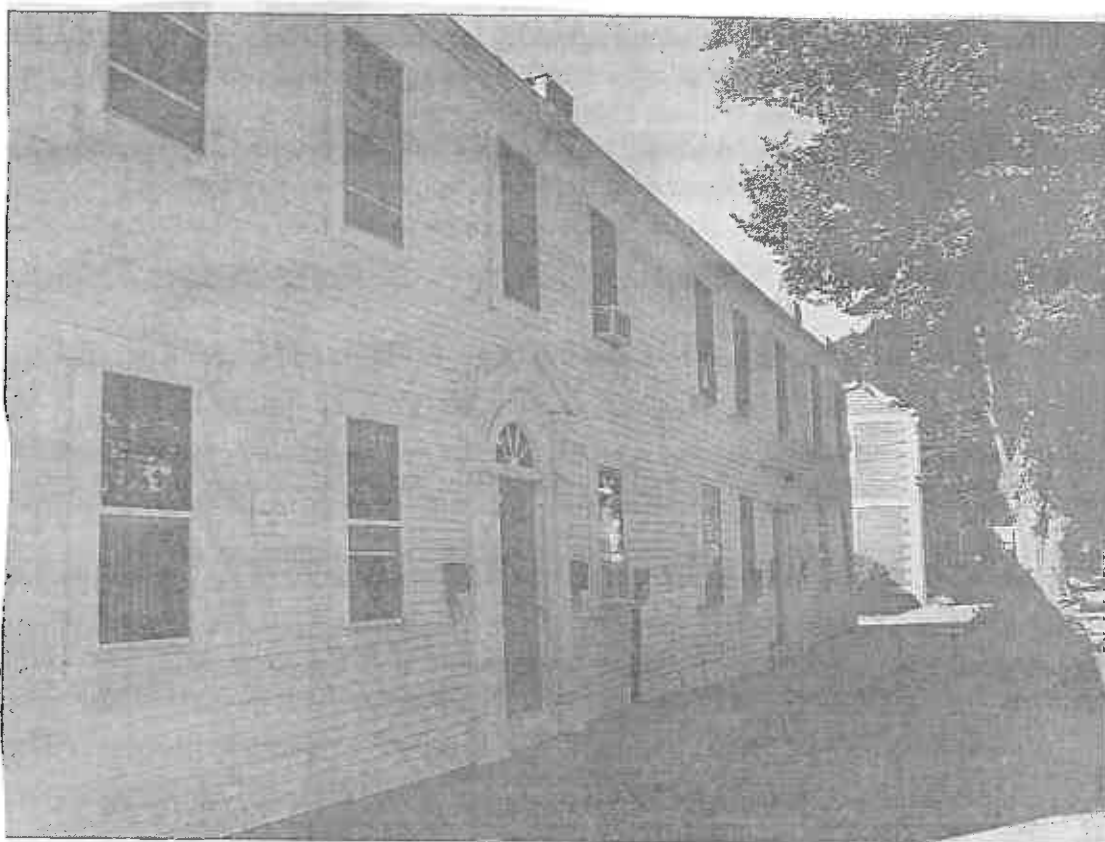
## The View From Swamptown Charles Bloomer and the Locket Factory

April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1857 must have been an auspicious day of sorts in the little Post Office in the village of Wickford. Heck, whether it be 150 years ago or just yesterday, let's face it, it's not too often that a friend and neighbor receives a registered letter from the United States Patent Office in Washington DC. But that's just what happened on that day; for April 28, 1857 is the day that US Patent #17137 was issued to Charles G. Bloomer of Wickford RI, the manager and foreman of the Eldred & Sagendorph Locket Factory on Brown Street in the village. Charles, who rented half of the Wightman house, which formerly sat on the corner of Main and Fowler, where he lived with his wife Lillius and their seven children, was already a well-known figure around the village. He was the driving force down at the Locket factory, Wickford's largest employer with some sixty or so workers at its peak, and everyone knew that he had been hired here special from New York City by Mr. James Eldred himself, one of the village's wealthiest citizens who lived with his family in a house known as "The Oaklands", for his expertise in the jewelry manufacturing trade. The gold lockets and embossed pocket watch cases turned out at the factory put food on many a table here in the village and beyond. So you see, Mr. Bloomer was already a prominent figure here in "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic" and holding a patent certainly, only made him seem more important.

The Eldred & Sagendorph Locket Factory ran from about 1853 until the peak of the Civil War, when too many of its employees left to attend to the pressing matter at hand; the preservation of the Union of States. Charles Bloomer was no exception; he returned to New York and enlisted in the 151<sup>st</sup> NY Regiment where he saw action at among other places, the great Battle of the Wilderness and Appomattox. The 151<sup>st</sup> was, as a matter of fact, in attendance for Lee's surrender at the Appomattox Courthouse, a turning point in the war. Charles Bloomer mustered out of the 151<sup>st</sup> as a Sergeant, and returned to his family back in Wickford. Sadly though, his job was not waiting for him. Eldred & Sagendorph's Locket Factory did not reopen after the War's end, and ironically the building was eventually sold to the members of the local GAR chapter (the Civil War version of the VFW) and used as the meeting hall for the Charles C. Baker chapter. Charles Bloomer packed up his family and moved up to Cranston to find work in the state's burgeoning jewelry industry. Eventually, Charles, always the innovator and entrepreneur, got in on the ground floor of a brand new industry, when he, in partnership with his son William, began a business involved with cast aluminum manufacturing. He also helped his other son Charles Jr. start up a "novelty" manufacturing plant and lived to see two of his daughters open up, appropriately enough, a flower shop. Charles Bloomer died in March of 1913 some 56 years after he received that locket manufacturing patent.

The Bloomers may have been forced to move from Wickford after the Civil War, but their hearts, in a sense, remained here. For out at Elm Grove in family plot #211 was buried their eighth child infant son Edwin, who died of pneumonia at 5 months old and Charles' father Thomas who passed away in 1884 at 90 years of age. One by one, the remainder of the Bloomer clan came back home to Elm Grove right up until 1954 when Virginia (Whitford) Bloomer, wife of youngest surviving son Franklin Bloomer was laid to rest.

Somewhere out there in someone's jewelry box or bureau exists an ancient gold locket or finely crafted pocketwatch or two, that commemorate and honor not only Charles Bloomer and his boss William Eldred, but all of the numerous local folks that labored away at their creation. And that labor was all based upon the details contained in Patent #17137 sent to Charles Bloomer on a fine spring day 150 years ago.



Daniel Wall penned the poem at right in the journal of his then-girlfriend on April 11, 1846. The two were married shortly after. Wall, a hardware store owner, was the grandson of Capt. Daniel Wall Sr., who built the home on Main Street pictured above for the wife of his former business partner, who was lost at sea.

To Flora

O! how you yearn to know what shall be  
 Of my heart's true love, and how far  
 O! how I wish you your eyes were as bright  
 As the stars that gleam in the night  
 When though I should not see you face  
 As the sun on the mountain's side  
 Yet I know I should not see you  
 They surely must read it in lines of gold

Dear Flora, the friendship that has united  
 Affection for thee that will ever be bright  
 O! how I wish you were as bright  
 As the stars that gleam in the night  
 When though I should not see you face  
 As the sun on the mountain's side  
 Yet I know I should not see you  
 They surely must read it in lines of gold

Yours  
 Daniel Wall  
 April 11, 1846

## The View From Swamptown

### Daniel & Eliza – A Love Story

This week I was going to continue on with our exploration of some of the more historic small vessels that populate the harbors and shorelines of our fair town. But, the sudden unexpected passing of my friend Marge Vogel set me back a bit, so instead, to honor Marge, I've decided to travel down a different path and examine the details surrounding a 160-year-old love story; the story of Daniel Wall and Eliza Hiscox.

Now the name Daniel Wall probably sounds familiar to those who peruse this column on a regular basis as we've spent some time looking at the life of this Daniel Wall's grandfather, also named Daniel. The big "double-house" constructed by that Captain Daniel Wall Sr. and his seafaring partner, Capt. George Bailey sits on Main Street and stands as a testimony to loyalty and honor among men who shared a life upon the merciless sea. The younger Daniel's story is no less affecting and is all about love and loyalty of a different kind. It's a story that came to me through a poem written by Daniel in a journal owned by his beloved Eliza Hiscox and found more than a century later by Kim (LaFreniere) Blake.

Now I do not know how Daniel, the son of Captain Jeremiah and Sally Wall met Eliza the daughter of James Hiscox of Westerly. I expect it was through a relative of Eliza's, Daniel Hiscox, who was a prominent mill owner at Silver Spring during that timeframe. Whatever the case, Daniel Wall "wooed and won" the heart of Eliza as is evidenced by his eloquent poem and the margin footnote that accompanied it, "Eliza, do not forget the winter of '45 or the spring of '46." Here's his poem transcribed for all to enjoy:

#### To Eliza

A line for your Album. O what shall it be?  
A compliment, Eliza, dear Eliza, for thee:  
O not should I tell you your eyes were as bright,  
As the gems that bespangle the brow of the night?  
And though I should tell you your face was as fair  
As the snow on the mountain untainted by air  
Yet, Eliza, I would avail not, for all who behold  
Thy beauty, must read it in letters of gold.

But, Eliza tis' friendship these lines would indict,  
Affection for thee, that will ever burn bright:  
And O, tis' affection that wishes thee joy,  
Unshadowed by sorrow, without an alloy.  
And O, may thy life for ever run on,  
Like a stream of the valley, beneath the bright sun  
Whose water for ever dances gaily along  
To the lighthearted music of its pebble toned song.

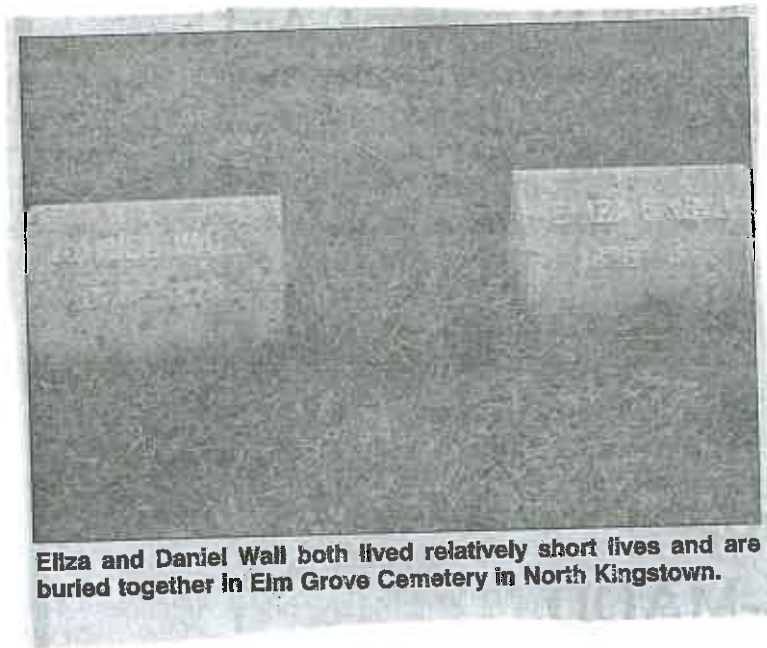
Wickford

D. Wall

April 11, 1846

Eliza and Daniel were married not long after the 23 year old hardware store owner and tinsmith penned these words to his 21 year old beloved. They had three children together, but lived sadly short lives, Eliza dying of tuberculosis in 1863 at 38 years old and Daniel succumbing to typhoid in 1870. They are buried side by side in Elm Grove Cemetery linked by a love that spans the ages.

Marge Vogel, you will be missed!!



Eliza and Daniel Wall both lived relatively short lives and are buried together in Elm Grove Cemetery in North Kingstown.



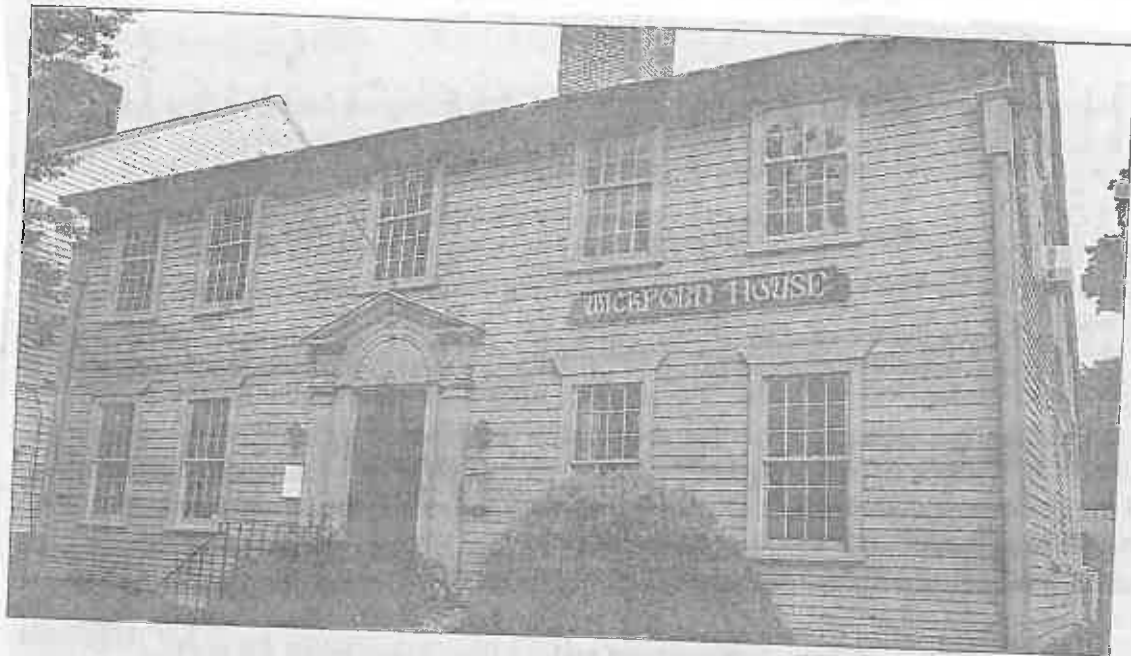
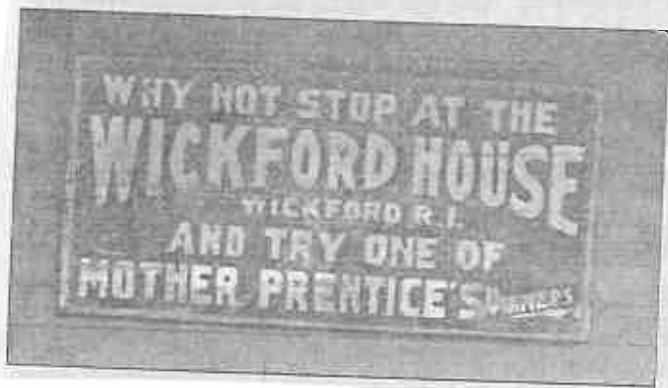


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Ellen "Mother" Prentice (at right) worked with her husband, George, to make the Wickford House one of the most popular inns in the area. While the opening of the Newport & Wickford Rail & Steamship Line certainly helped business, one of the main attractions was Ellen Prentice's home-cooked meals, which were known throughout the state.



## The View From Swamptown

### Mother Prentice and the Wickford House

I don't expect that 16-year-old Ellen Lucas of Provincetown Massachusetts could have possibly had an inkling of how remarkable her life was to turn out when she married George Prentice in 1872. The fact that she was born a leap-year baby, her birthday was February 29<sup>th</sup>, was just the first unusual occurrence in her extraordinary life's story, one that reached its apex around the time that the accompanying photograph was taken. By this time, Ellen Lucas had become Mother Prentice, a legendary hostess and nationally famous cook, who truly was the Martha Stewart of her time.

Ellen was the widower George Prentice's second wife, and she left Provincetown and moved into his Main Street home, immediately after they were wed. George's plan was to take advantage of the opportunity presented in the village by the recent opening of the Newport & Wickford Rail & Steamship Line and start up a little Inn where folks who missed the last steamer to Newport could stay and take advantage of the ambiance of "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic". His home, the Alexander Huling House was perfect for this undertaking as it already had a long history as a colonial inn and even possessed a fine upstairs ballroom where many an 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century waltz or minuet had already been danced; George surmised that this space would make a fine dining room for his Inn. Perhaps his young wife Ellen could transform some of her delicious home-cooked New England fare into a menu that would attract some attention.

By doing this, George set the whirlwind that was young Ellen Prentice in motion and by the time the dust settled, their little Inn, The Wickford House was not so little anymore. The popularity of "Mother" Prentice's homecooked New England fare, combined with the ambiance of George's well managed Inn and the quaint quiet beauty of the surrounding village made them hugely successful. George and Ellen purchased the enormous house next door (now demolished and replaced by St. Paul's parish house) and remodeled it completely into guest rooms and still their waiting list was legendary. Along the way, she also managed to raise a family as well. Mother Prentice also had to politely fend off requests (it's always wise to say "no" politely to folks like these) from none other than both the Astors and the Vanderbilts of Newport to quit the village and come work for them in their gilt mansions across the Bay.

Yes, by the time this photo postcard was created, Ellen "Mother" Prentice was one of New-England's most well known women; her name was in newspapers and heard on the radio, poems were even written about her. Not bad for a somewhat stoic and even a little bit dowdy girl from Wickford. The Wickford House literally lasted until the last train steamed down to Poplar Point and the final steamship carried the last traveler off to Newport. Its existence was tied to the train line and it closed the same year. Mother Prentice enjoyed her ensuing retirement right here in Wickford and passed away at 74 years of age in 1930.

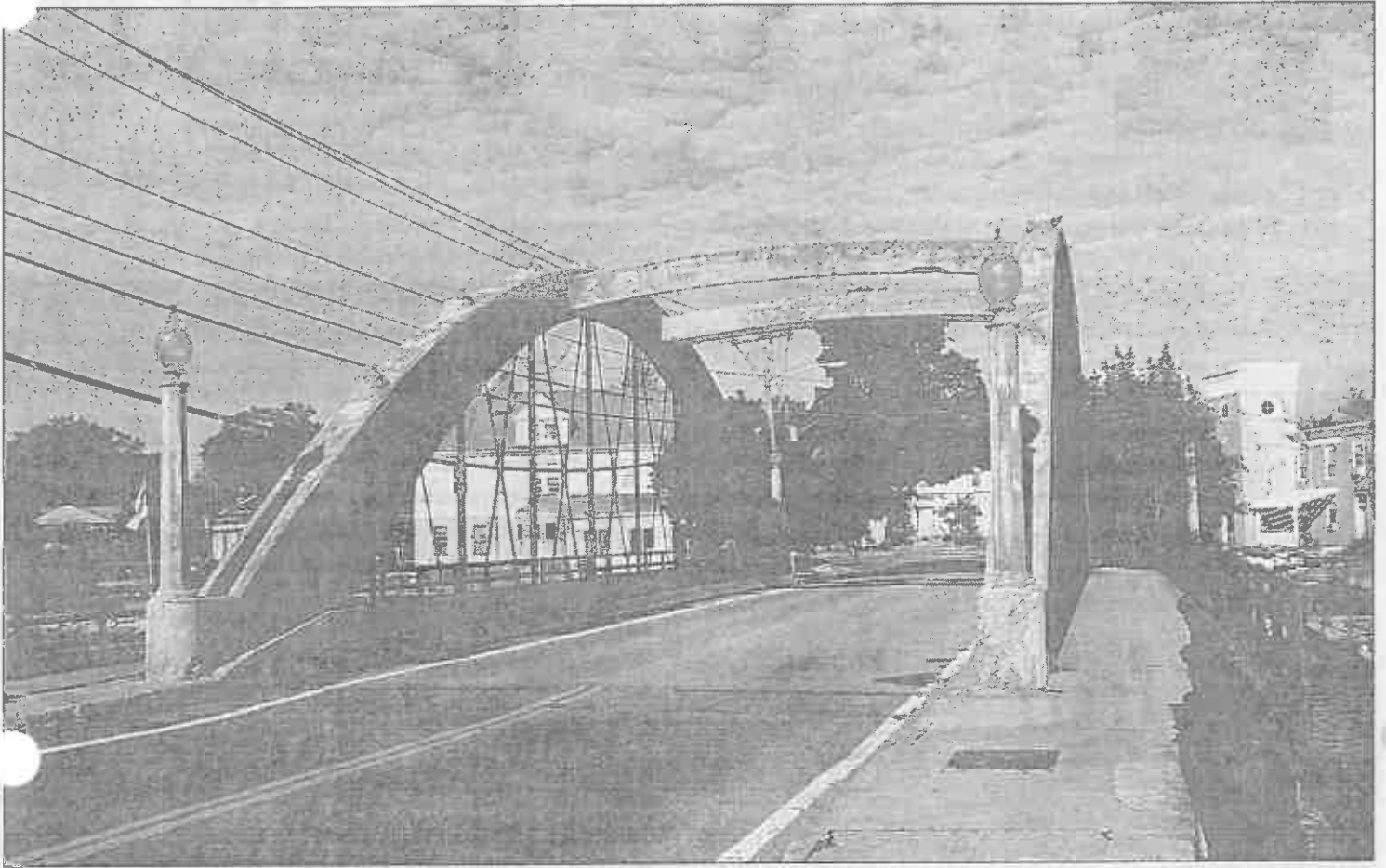
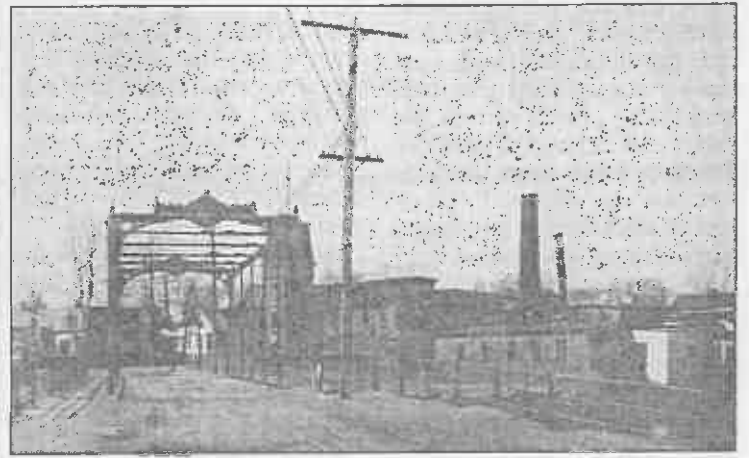
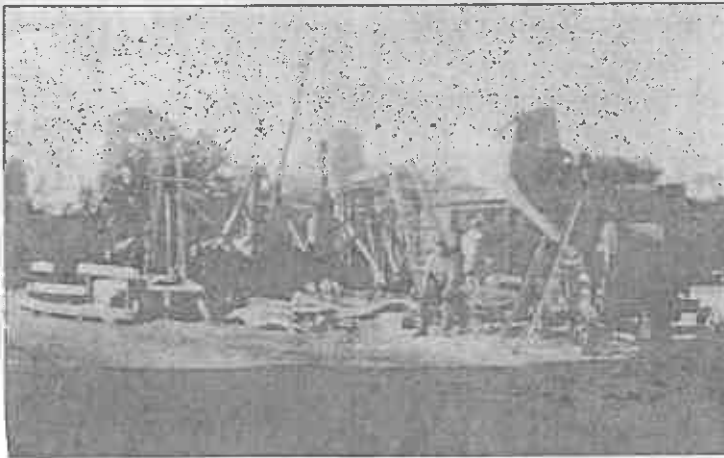


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

There have been many versions of the Hussey Bridge during its 164 years in North Kingstown. The first one, a wooden bridge, was replaced after just 46 years. The picture below to the left shows the construction of an iron bridge next to the old wooden one, with the final results on the right. That bridge was also replaced, giving residents the current configuration above.

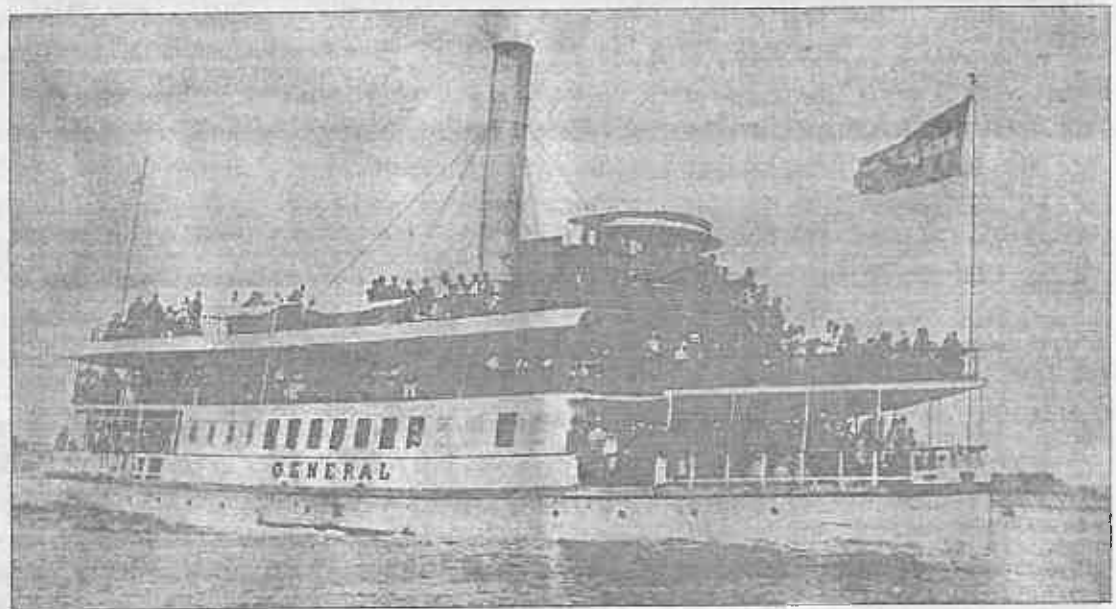


## The View From Swamptown

### The Hamilton Bridge

For 82 years now, North Kingstownites have driven over Wickford Harbor on the fine reinforced concrete through-arch Hussey Bridge, named in honor of its designer Clarence Hussey; the State of Rhode Island's first dedicated bridge engineer who died during its construction at the age of 42. This familiar old span is actually the third bridge to cross the cove here at this location. The first, a wooden bridge built in 1843 was financed locally by the Pitman family of Duck Cove Farm, along with local Wickford businessmen Alfred Reynolds, John Sherman, William Brown, and Beriah Lawton. Its total costs were somewhere around \$1,000 and it lasted for 46 years when it was replaced by an iron bridge in 1889.

The 1889 bridge seen in the accompanying photos was constructed by the Dean & Westbrook Engineering Company out of New York. This firm designed and made bridges at their New York location and then had them assembled on site, sort of like a giant erector set project. Sadly, this handsome span was a victim of progress. Designed well before the full impact of the automobile was understood, its life here bridging the harbor was short and after only 36 years it was deemed unsafe and outdated and was replaced by Hussey's modern concrete design in 1925.



The Wadsworth home, built in 1891, sits right on Wickford harbor. In the picture at the top, three children are standing on the ice in the harbor and the home, the third building on the left, can be seen. The Wadsworth used to sit on the porch in the back of the home and watch her son, Capt. Billy Wadsworth, pilot the *General*, seen here at right, past the home. The home has been renovated in recent years and can be seen in a 2000 photograph at left, below, and a current photograph at right.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

## The View From Swamptown

### The Leeman & Sarah Wadsworth House

This week, as a part of our longstanding commitment to taking a look at the stories behind all of the fine historic homes of "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic" we are going to stop a spell and look at the goings-on at the much remodeled home of Leeman Wadsworth on Pleasant Street in Wickford.

Leeman Wadsworth, born in Hamilton, NY in 1846, was a successful fisherman, husband and father when he had his fine home constructed here on Pleasant Street in 1891. He moved into his home with his wife Sarah, his 15 year-old son Billy, their 7-year old daughter Edna, and his father-in-law Tim Clark. It was through Clark, another RI fisherman who worked out of the village of Pawtuxet in Warwick, that Leeman had met his wife. Taking care of her dad was indeed no new task for Sarah, as she, the oldest of five children, had been running a household since her own mother Edna had passed away when Sarah was only ten-years-old.

Leeman, chose this location for his home with a purpose. You see, he also had a wharf and a fish shack constructed on the property as well. From the house's fine back porch, seen here in a photo from around 1930, Sarah and her family could watch and wait for Leeman as he harvested the bounty of the sea in order to provide for his family. As Leeman got older, his excellent reputation as a fisherman became such that he was appointed Deputy Fish Commissioner for the State of RI; he held this position for 23 years.

The comfortable home on Pleasant Street got a little quieter when Edna married a marine engineer, William Baton, who worked in a shipyard in East Greenwich, and moved to that village with her husband to raise a family of her own. Son Billy though, who continued to live at home, followed his father's example and began a life at sea, a "hawse-piper" Billy rose through the ranks becoming a mate on a fine yacht and then eventually the Captain of the Steamer "General" the familiar vessel that ran folks back and forth from Wickford to Newport. Now Sarah could watch her son captain the General as it steamed by the house each day, from the comfort of that back porch.

Sarah Wadsworth passed on in 1913 at the age of 60; her husband Leeman lived another 13 years, sharing the house with his son, and eventually joining his wife at Quidnessett Cemetery in October of 1926. Leeman Wadsworth was 80 when he died and he had remained a fisherman 'til nearly the end of his days. Capt. Billy Wadsworth, as he was known to all, sold the Pleasant Street home a year or so after his father's death; but he remained a fixture in the village working as a Captain on the vessels of the Beacon Oyster Company located at the end of Pleasant Street. Like all sea captains, Capt. Billy liked to tell tales of the sea as he got older. His most famous tale involved his harrowing brush with death as he raced back to port during the "big blow" in 1938. Capt. Billy Wadsworth was one of only a few mariners who were at sea during the Hurricane of '38

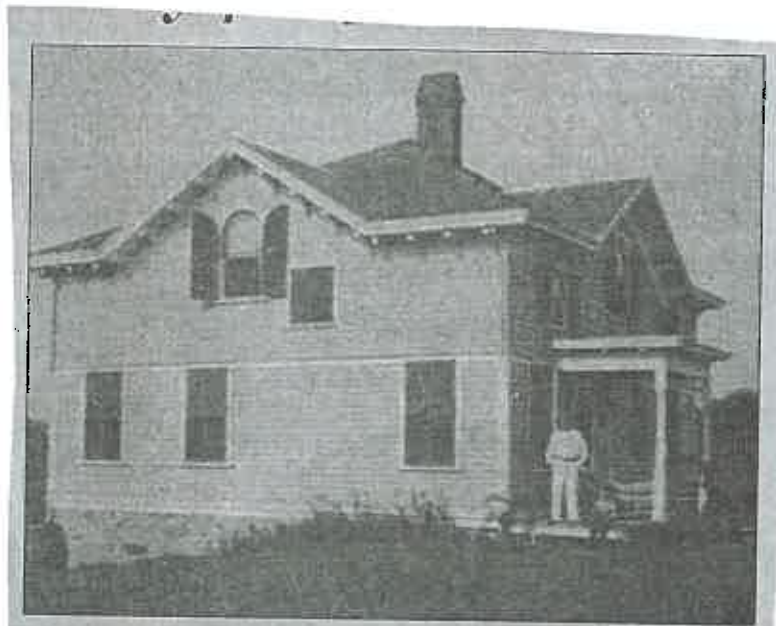
that lived to tell any tale at all. He spent his last five years living with his sister Edna and her family in East Greenwich. He died in 1952 at the age of 76.

Leeman's home changed hands numerous times across the years. It has recently been extensively remodeled and restored. It's now a much fancier place than Sarah and Leeman ever envisioned. One thing though, remains the same; other than the loss of the familiar Wickford Lighthouse, the view from the backyard is the same one that greeted Sarah Wadsworth each evening as she waited for Leeman and Billy to return from the sea.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Fischer/Hainesworth House & Barn

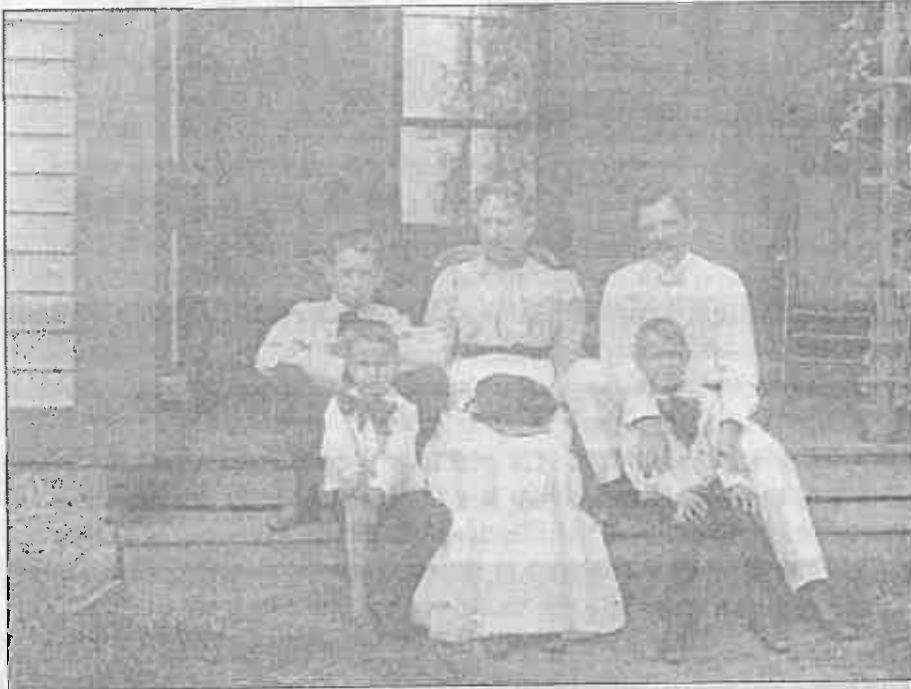
Those of you who have gone on a Wickford walking tour with me over the last few years, most of which start from the "sunken garden" in front of our wonderful town library are familiar with the tale behind this enormous old cellar hole. This structure, and the foundation of a small carriage house, are all that remains of the circa 1887 home of the Rev. Joseph Fischer and his wife Deodata (Chadsey). The house that used to be on the library lot has been gone for 40 years now and the barn for nearly a century. As a starting point for many of my tours I often tell the story of the Chadseys and Fischers and the Hainesworths as well, the family that bought the home from them in 1910. I always lament the fact that I don't have any good images of these two interesting buildings that once graced this hill overlooking Academy Cove. But that has finally changed as, lo and behold, these images were in the South County room archives all along. So, the next time you are walking across the library parking lot, imagine this beautiful home at the beginning of the parking lot, and this fine barn perched just over the brow of the hill atop the foundation stones we have appreciated for all these years.



Though it was believed that the "sunken garden" in front of the North Kingstown Free Library were the only reminders left of the former home and barn of the Rev. Joseph Fisher and his wife, pictures have emerged that show the house (above) and barn (at right) that graced the property long before the library.







The family of John Farnsworth (above) sits on the porch of the Tisdale House, located at 44 Phillips St. in Wickford (left). The family's photos capture South County life circa 1900. Claudius Farnsworth and his son John (far right) are pictured during a beach outing to Bonnet Shores in Narragansett.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Farnsworth Photographs

Like so many other of the “well-heeled” folks of their day, the Farnsworths, father Claudius, and his son John spent their summers, with families in tow, here in Wickford. From the early 1890’s all the way up to 1918, the Farnsworths, were a summer fixture in “Ye Olde Quaint & Historic”. During some of those many summers, they stayed at the Elms on West Main Street, or the grand Cold Spring House on Beach Street. For a few years, they rented a cottage on Pleasant Street as well. But for most of those idyllic summer seasons, the extended Farnsworth family shared what was known to the locals as the Tisdale place, the unique flat-topped home on Phillips Street just across from the Elam Street intersection.

Claudius Farnsworth and his son John were already men of rank and distinction by the time they chose Wickford as their favorite summer retreat. A graduate of Harvard College, Claudius Farnsworth studied at Harvard Law School before being admitted to the Massachusetts Bar in 1844. He practiced law in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and maintained a law office in Pawtucket, RI. Farnsworth served as treasurer of Dunnell Manufacturing Co., a textiles firm engaged in calico printing, from 1859-84. A member of the Rhode Island General Assembly, he was the very first president of RISD and brought the School of Design’s application for incorporation before the Rhode Island Legislature. His son John also graduated from Harvard with a degree in business and eventually became the treasurer and chief agent for Providence Dying, Bleaching, & Calendaring Co. He was also a member of the Providence City Council.

While they were here, the combined Farnsworth families enjoyed the beach at Cold Spring, explored the shorelines of the village’s many coves, picnicked at Bonnet Shores, boated around Wickford Harbor, and visited with friends and neighbors that they had become acquainted with throughout the years. They strolled down the streets and avenues, enjoyed lunch at Uncle Dan Smith’s lunchroom and seafood market, and explored Smith’s Castle. You’re probably wondering how do I know all this? Well, the Farnsworths, they took numerous photographs across those years and, in 1963, they left those photos to the North Kingstown Free Library’s South County Room. They’ve sat there ever since just waiting to be discovered. Its to the Farnsworths that we owe a debt of gratitude regarding last week’s photos of the house and barn that once graced the site of our present-day library. We’ll be seeing more of these wonderful photos as the winter progresses; thanks to John and Claudius Farnsworth and their 100-year-old Christmas gift to us all.



The snowy scene in this picture, taken about 100 years ago, shows Wickford as it once was. The main building in the photo is Ryan's Market. The small building to the right, which was moved to make room for a loading dock for the store (shown below), was originally a cobbler's store, but would later be the starting point for both the Wickford Package Store and the Harborside Grill.



PHOTO. MICHAEL DERR

## The View From Swamptown Wickford Snowscape

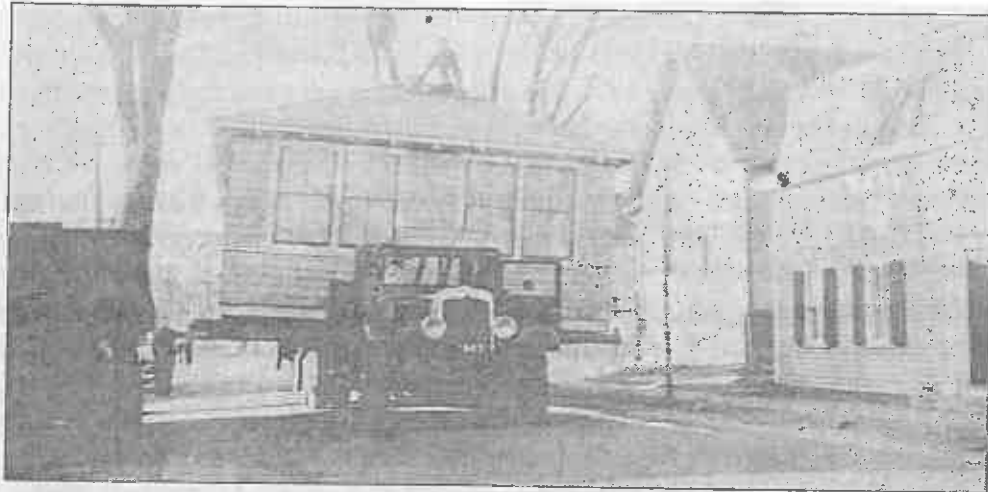
With the arrival of the first big snow of the season, I thought it might be interesting to take a gander at a winter scene from about a century ago. To all but those hale and hearty old-timers who still are around, this image might look a bit unfamiliar, but actually it is a photograph of, until just recently, the very heart and soul of Wickford's business district. You see that big building front and center in this picture is Ryan's Market the way it looked when it first began nearly a quarter century before this picture was taken. In the beginning, the Ryan family as an extra income stream maintained a rental apartment above the store. The venerable building does look very different than the familiar storefront we see today, but if you look closely at both pictures you can easily make out the similarities.

Just north of Ryan's, sits a little building that has the most intriguing history of any in the image. It began its life as the first fire barn in Wickford and actually was constructed on a plot of land on the west side of Gold Street. Eventually it was relocated to the little plot of land between Ryan's Market and the bridge and housed O'Brien's cobbler shop. You can see on the small sign that you can get your sole renailed for only seventy-five cents. Two of this cobbler's children loom large in local history; anyone who's been around for a time will certainly remember Doctor O'Brien or my favorite, the school nurse Miss O'Brien. Later this building was a starting point for two familiar businesses in town. You see, it was here that the Wickford Package Store, possessing RI State liquor license #1 first opened its doors, and later, just in case you were ever wondering why the former Harborside Grill was called that, when it was not next to the harbor; well it began in this building, right beside the harbor, during my boyhood. At various times, this little building also was home to a fish market and even housed the town police dept. for a little while. It was eventually demolished to allow for a loading dock for the market.

Just to the south of the market can be seen Hunt's paint supply store. Daniel Hunt not only sold house paint and wallpaper here, he also was an accomplished sign painter and sold perhaps, the village's first line of art supplies. Wickford's history as an art colony of sorts can trace its roots back to this little shop. I've seen a few paintings created upon D Hunt stretched canvases. It always pays to check the back of any local paintings for his little label.

Just south of Hunt's paint supply store we can make out the side of SH Farnham's drugstore and its advertisement for cool soda, most probably painted by Daniel Hunt. This was a popular place in the village at that time because it had the only public phone around. As most folks did not have the luxury of a phone in their home, if you wanted to make or receive a call back a hundred years ago, you had to make your way to Farnham's and heck you might as well have a cool soda while you are waiting.

Finally, this picture reminds me to let you all know that, according to my vast and far-reaching Swamptown Enterprises network, changes are in the wind for this stretch of Brown Street. You'll hear more on that in the near future when things become a little more official. Until then kind readers, Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and a glorious holiday season!!



**This small cottage was lifted from its pilings during the Hurricane of 1938 and swept away to the land behind Smith's Castle. The building had to be moved by a truck back to the land where it was constructed and still sits on Enfield Avenue today (right).**



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

## The View From Swamptown

### A Most Mobile of Homes

As we are all aware, North Kingstown has its share of mobile homes; but there are none quite like the little cottage at 54 Enfield Avenue just off of Fowler Street in Ye Olde Quaint & Historic. Now I know what you're thinking, "I don't recollect any trailer parks in Wickford, what is he talking about?" No, I'm not talking about your typical mobile home here; this little cottage's travels are of a very different sort than that!

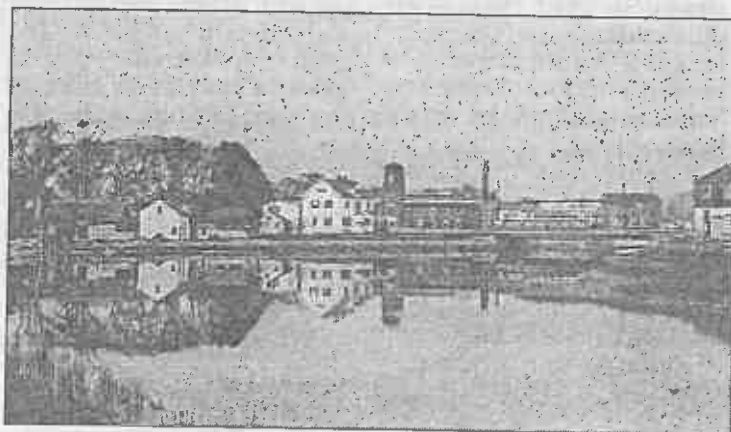
Our tale begins around 1920 when Charles and Julia Williston of Hartford Connecticut decided they'd like to have a little summer getaway far from the hustle and bustle of busy downtown Hartford. They chose a little plot of land in the newly platted summer community just off of Fowler Street a short stroll from the village of Wickford and had their little summer "home away from home" built. It was a simple little place really; just the basics, not even a cellar or crawl space – just a cottage built upon some concrete pilings.

Things went along just fine right up until September of 1938, when the great hurricane came along. The extreme storm surge and high winds lifted the little cottage right off its pilings and carried it to the north and west and, when the hurricane receded, set it down on the lawn behind Smith's Castle. It sat there for a few weeks until the roads between there and Wickford were cleared of debris and then, just about 70 years ago today, began the second half of its unusual journey back to where it began; before long Wickford's most travelled home was firmly planted back in its little lot on Enfield Avenue.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

These two buildings on Phillips Street were both once owned by the McDonnell family, which emigrated here from Ireland. The core of the building at 14 Phillips St. (at right) once served as a grocery store while the building at 10 Phillips St. served as the family's home. The homestead, which may have been one of the first in Wickford to be supplied with electricity, can also be seen from the other side of Wickford Cove at the center of the historical photograph below.



## The View From Swamptown

### The Patrick McDonnell House

The substantial building at 10 Phillips Street just adjacent to Wickford's Hussey Bridge is one of those places we all just sort of take for granted. We all drive on by it from time to time, and never give it a second thought beyond, "Hey, it sure would be fun to paddle around in one of those kayaks I see behind there." But the big house does have a story to tell us, and it begins interestingly enough with the building next door at 14 Phillips St.

The core of that building dates back to the early 1850's and it stood alone on the property as the carpenter's workshop of Charles Straight, a busy house Wright who built, among other things, the imposing Wickford Academy Building, the all wooden predecessor to the Wickford Elementary School Building, which burned to the ground in 1907. In 1868, his success was such that he expanded his business to include a lumberyard and hardware store and purchased a site on Brown Street from fellow carpenter Stephen Reynolds big enough for his planned expansion. That site served in that same capacity for more than a century, owned by Straight and then the Sherman brothers and finally Henry Barber, it now houses the Green Ink & Teddy Bearskins stores. He sold his smaller Phillips Street property with the little workshop to recent Irish immigrant Patrick McDonnell.

Patrick McDonnell was a green grocer by trade, and he opened a store in the former carpenter's shop soon after purchasing the property. He may have even lived in the back with his growing family while his fine home was being constructed next door to the shop. Although the exact date is unclear, their big home with its front porch was finished sometime in the early 1870's. Patrick McDonnell died of heart failure in 1888 and the home became the property of his son Thomas Francis Irving McDonnell.

Young Tom McDonnell attended the Wickford Academy that Charles Straight had constructed, and then, as there was yet no high school in North Kingstown, attended school in Providence. He went on to attend Brown University and graduated with a law degree in 1891. This first generation American, the son of Irish immigrants, achieved his part of the "American Dream" and returned to Wickford to work in the office of prominent Providence and Wickford lawyers William C. & David S. Baker. Eventually, Thomas McDonnell was made a partner in the firm. When the Baker's passed away, He formed a new law partnership with retired Providence judge Richard Lyman. Although he, like the Bakers lived in Providence for much of the year, he retained his parent's fine home in Wickford and used it often. Additionally, it was also used by his sister Mrs. Dennis Sheahan and her family and his niece Mrs. Stephen Caswell and her family.



Thomas F. I. McDonnell was also involved in two other local enterprises. He served on the board of directors of the Sea View Trolley Line from 1907 – 1915 and was also the President of an off shoot enterprise from the Sea View, that being the Wickford Light and Power Company, a corporation set up to sell excess electricity generated by the big Sea View Power Plant at Hamilton. This enterprise was the first to bring electricity to the homes of North Kingstown that were fortunate enough to live in the vicinity of the Sea View's tracks. Tom McDonnell died in 1939 and after a funeral service in Providence, was returned for a final time to North Kingstown where he was buried next to his parents in Elm Grove Cemetery. The Phillips Street house, overlooking Wickford Harbor, was left to his sister.

So you see, the big house has an awful lot more to offer us than just a launching point for kayak adventures. 10 Phillips Street was not only most certainly one of the first homes in Wickford to have electric lights, it was the also launching point for the McDonnell family as they pursued their share of the American dream.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**This home at the corner of Boston Neck Road and Beach Street – built by Christopher and Hattie Peirce and once owned by Edward “Skitty” Wilson, founder of Wilson’s of Wickford – now exists as the Haddie Pierce House, a Wickford bed and breakfast.**



## The View From Swamptown

### The Hattie Peirce House

You've got to figure that Hattie Peirce is looking down from heaven right now feeling quite a bit conflicted. I'm sure she's pleased as can be to see her fine home at the corner of Boston Neck Road and Beach Street so lovingly maintained. She's probably just beaming with pride over the undisputed fact that the home she made with her husband Christopher exists now as one of the area's finest Bed & Breakfasts. The grounds are beautiful from season to season, the welcome lamp is always lit, but that name; that name has got to stick in her craw a bit. She probably wonders, "Heaven's to Betsey, just who is Haddie Pierce?" Why everyone who knew Harriet Louisa (Waldron) Peirce knew she'd been called Hattie since she was just a young lass. And every god-fearing Swamp Yankee in South County knows that folks who share the Peirce/Pierce/Pearce name around these parts take the spelling of their particular branch of this extended family quite seriously. There was a time back during the Revolutionary War when this kind of mistake would elicit the response, "Them's fightin' words!!"

Lets take a gander at the history of this fine home while the spirits the countless Peirce's that have gone on before cool down a bit. The story of this home begins back in May of 1905, when Hattie herself purchased this fine corner lot of land from the primary land owners in the region, the spinster sisters Abby & Lucy Reynolds. She chose the spot specifically because her husband Christopher Phillips Peirce worked with his father just down Beach Street, running the very successful Cold Spring House, the premium summer resort hotel in the area. Hattie could afford to purchase the property due to her Waldron family connections, as the niece of wealthy Providence wholesale grocer Nathan Waldron, who owned a large summer home in nearby Quidnessett and the notorious and successful NYC gambler William Waldron, who had his own summer place near Hamilton (now Waldron Ave.) she had the financial wherewithal to own the place outright. Hattie and Christopher had their grand home built in 1906/07 in a style befitting their station in life. After the Peirce family sold the Cold Spring House, Christopher became one of the area's earliest insurance agents, a business he most probably ran out of their house. Christopher died young in 1915 and in 1920 Hattie sold her home and went to live with her married daughter Marguerite Fearnery. Hattie died in 1955 at the age of 98.

The house was purchased for a short while by Providence businessman Harry Bowen who used it as a summer home. In 1923 he sold it to local born Henry E. Rathbun and his wife Mary (Gardiner) Rathbun. Henry had attended the public schools in town and then had gone on to further his education in Providence where he eventually became a mechanical engineer. He held a number of patents for spring-loaded window shades and was half owner of a window shade factory in Worcester, Massachusetts. They lived here throughout the end of Henry's business career and into his retirement. Mary sold the place in 1939 after his death, to Wickford businessman Edward "Skitty" Wilson, the founder of Wilson's of Wickford, and his wife Ethel (Hainsworth) Wilson.

The Wilson's raised a family here in the home, just a short walk from the store that bears the family name. Additionally, during this timeframe, the fine stonewalls on the property were constructed utilizing, in part, some of the foundation stones from an old barn found on the Hainsworth property in Wickford. That old foundation still exists as the "sunken garden" in front of the wonderful North Kingstown Free Library.

So as you can clearly see, there's been a long history of Swamp Yankee ownership of this fine home over the years. And, although there's not a Swamper among us that wants to trod upon the vital rights of property owners to do as they wish with their home within reason, or to call their home whatever they want, we also would like to see old Hattie Peirce get her due.

While I'm on the subject of Swamp Yankees, I feel obliged to take note of the passing of one of the finest of that group to ever grace the village of Wickford. Mary Winsor, who through her Hammond and Gardiner roots was able to trace her family back to the beginnings of our fair town, lived a full and wonderful life on her own terms; no Swamp Yankee could ever ask for more than that. She was a quiet loving and caring lady who impacted more lives than she or her family could ever realize. Mary Winsor left her mark on this village and she'll never be forgotten. The community of Wickford has been lessened by her loss, and Heaven has gained an angel. My thoughts and prayers go out to her family and friends. You will be missed, Mary Winsor, you will be missed.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Although the Burdick home has changed hands several times over the last 100 years, deed restrictions remain from the sale of the land to John P. Burdick in the 1920s. These restrictions prohibit homeowners from things like producing and selling liquor and constructing fences that are more than 4 feet tall.



The John P. Burdick house, shown here in a circa-1950s postcard, was built on land that once was part of the Oaklands estate – an estate once owned by businessman and local jewelry factory owner James Eldred.

## The View From Swamptown

### The John Powell Burdick House

Whether it be as a backdrop for the historic fishing vessel the "O.K." or all on its own, the magnificent circa 1932 John P. Burdick House cuts quite a figure for itself there on the edge of Wickford Harbor, just east of the Hussey Bridge. An interesting home, constructed on land that has its own intriguing story, this is a house with a tale to tell.

The land that it occupies was, at one time, part of "Oaklands" an estate owned first by businessman and local jewelry factory owner James Eldred, and then mill owner W.B. Chapin. The estate, along with the Chapin "Waterside Mill" just across the harbor in Wickford (now home to Gold Lady Jewelers & The Kayak Center) was purchased from Chapin, by the prominent mill owner Syria Vaughan and given to his daughter and son-in-law Mr. & Mrs. William Gregory. Gregory later went on to become North Kingstown's only Governor of Rhode Island. With Bill Gregory's sudden death at the very start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ownership of the land was transferred to his wife Harriet and son Albert. Upon Harriet's death 10 years after her husband's, the Oaklands Estate was subdivided, with a parcel of the land staying with the fine three story mansion house, and ownership of the remainder being transferred to St. Paul's Episcopal Church on Main Street. For many years, St. Paul's retained ownership of the land and utilized it as the site of numerous summertime picnics and events, until the early 1920's when the Church Vestry chose, against the wishes of the Gregory family, to sell the land. It was purchased by local ship's engineer Byron Matteson.

Now Byron Matteson, he had for himself one colorful life! As a teen he left the area and headed west. Eventually he took a job as a cowhand on the famous King Ranch of Texas; a cattle ranch whose owners often boasted was bigger than the state of Rhode Island. He returned to Wickford after a time and began a career as an engineer in steamships on the Colonial Line, a steamship company that ran daily runs between Providence and New York City. He worked his way through the ranks in the hot noisy environment of a steamship's engine room, eventually becoming the Chief Engineer on the Line's largest vessels. He served as a Chief Machinist Mate for the US Navy during WWI, and rode out the Great hurricane of 1938 on the tugboat "Gaspee" out of Quonset. Byron Matteson had some stories to tell for sure. His purchase of this land appeared to be for investment purposes, as he had it sub-divided and platted in 1925; naming one street after the Oaklands itself, one after the Gregory family, and one Matteson Street after his own clan. Soon after dividing the land, he sold a number of the small lots to John Powell Burdick, a local lad who had been recently hired as the Advertising Manager for Providence toolmaker Brown and Sharpe. Matteson sold the land with a number of peculiar caveats attached; one being that no intoxicating liquors could be made or sold on the property. Additionally no fences more than four feet tall can be erected and no outhouses will be tolerated. And finally no camping in tents on this land can be allowed. These prohibitions were apparently acceptable to Burdick and his wife Hope (Mason) as they signed off to them as a part of the purchase.

In 1932, the Burdicks had the fine brick home seen here in a circa 1950's postcard constructed on their portion of the old Oaklands Estate. He lived there until 1957 and was

actively involved throughout the years in the Town's volunteer fire dept. John Burdick is, in fact, credited with refurbishing the old hand-pumper Defiance in the 1920's. He sold his home to Donald Collier who fairly quickly resold it to Gilbert H. Kingsley; another local lad.

Kingsley began his adult life running his family's Slocum Potato Farm, but later got involved in investments and commodities trading. He was such a success that the erstwhile potato farmer eventually bought himself a winter home in Smyrna Beach Florida and spent his time between the two houses. In 1978 Kingsley sold the brick Burdick house and moved full time to Florida. He passed away suddenly in 1982 at the age of 62.

Since 1978, a number of folks have owned and cared for the home, with its present owners installing a handsome and appropriate addition in recent years. I must add though, that after a careful search of the land evidence records, I find that Byron Matteson's restrictions are still binding. So I sure hope there are no moonshine stills or outhouses hiding behind tall fences or in big tents on the property. You don't want to raise the ire of the spirit the old seafarer now do you?



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR



Though not much is known about the life of Wickford's Sam Carr, those who live in North Kingstown are likely to have seen one of the two homes he left behind. The 166 Main St. home is shown in its current state at top and in two late-19th century photos immediately below. The other home that he is known for (shown at left) is a house on Ten Rod Road that is often referred to as the "Carr Homestead" or "The Castle."



## The View From Swamptown

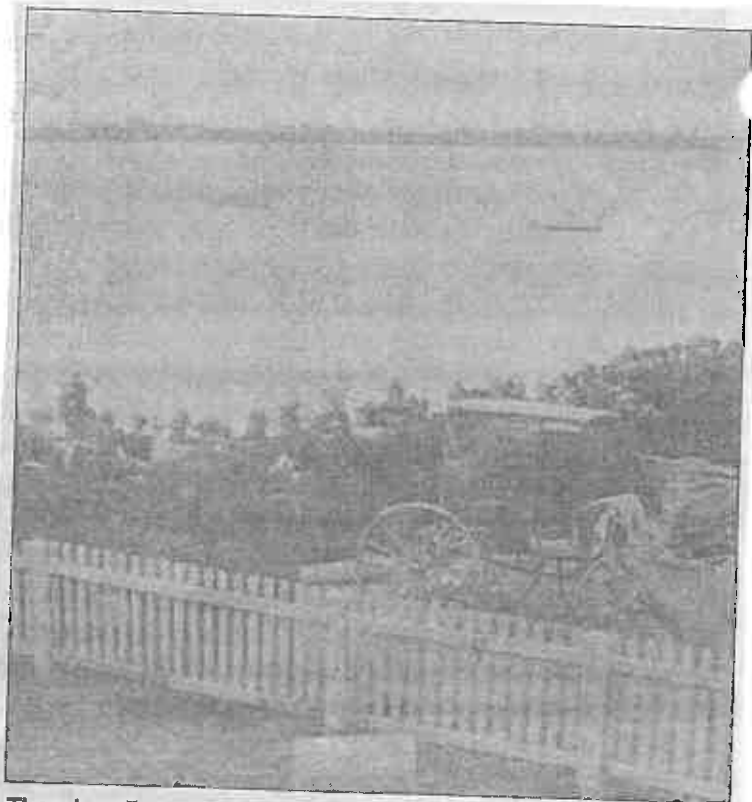
### The Samuel Carr House

As a part of our long standing project to take a look at all of the fine homes that populate the streets of Wickford, today we will stop a spell and examine the home of Samuel Carr at the end of Main Street.

Sadly, I have not found out an awful lot about Sam Carr and his life. I do know that he was the son of John Carr and was named after his grandfather Samuel Carr of Newport, a well known colonial gunsmith. Perhaps Wickford's Sam Carr followed this trade as well as his home indicates he must have been a man of some wealth. In 1779, after returning from service in the Revolutionary War, Sam Carr married a Wickford lass named Frances Eldred and together they had six children. In 1797 he purchased the last lot on the north side of Main Street from Wickford real estate tycoon Benjamin Fowler and constructed his fine home; it would have looked remarkably similar to the accompanying circa 1895 photos; although it would not have possessed the small kitchen el seen in the back. The Carr clan lived here in the village only 5 years. In 1802 they sold the house to John Cottrell of Newport and moved up the Ten Rod Road to the area that would one day become Lafayette. Here Carr had constructed another fine home, the centerpiece of a very large farm, also still extant and known as the "Carr Homestead" or "The Castle". Sam and Frances Carr lived out their days on this farm. Sam died in 1818 and Frances died as a very elderly woman in 1858. They are buried in a often vandalized family graveyard behind the house next to their children Deborah, Joseph, and John. The remaining Carr children sold the large farm to Robert Rodman and he basically constructed the entire village of Lafayette on the site of Sam and Frances's farm.

Back in Wickford, Sam Carr's old Main Street home was sold by the Cottrell clan to the family of James Reynolds. It stayed in possession of his descendant's until 1953 and was one of three long-standing Reynolds family homes in the village.





The shoreline parallel to Pleasant Street, a current picture of which is shown below, was used by the congregants of the Wickford Baptist Church as a spot for baptisms. As shown in the historical pictures above and at left, the events were well-attended regardless of the time of year. In fact, many attendees can be seen wearing heavy clothes.

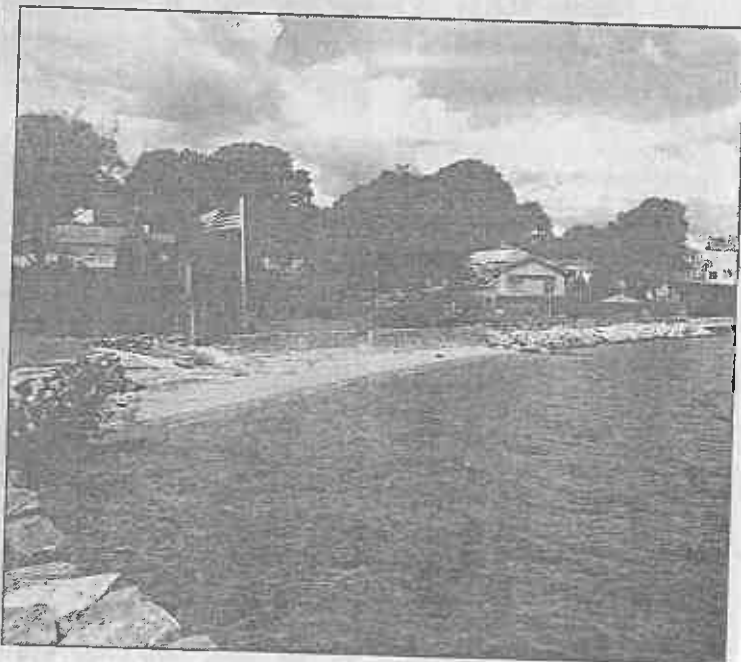
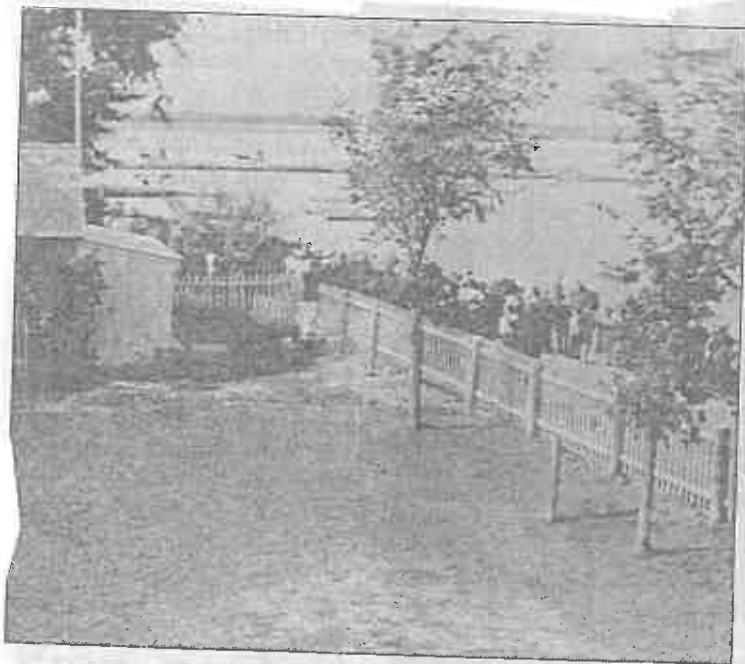


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

## The View From Swamptown

### Baptisms in Wickford

For decade after decade during the 1800's, the little sandy shoreline east of, and parallel to, Pleasant Street not far from its intersection with Main Street held a special place in the hearts and minds of the congregants of the Wickford Baptist Church. You see this place, known locally at that time as the sandshore, was the place where almost all baptisms were performed upon the members of this flock. And time of year or weather conditions mattered little, as witnessed by this description of a February 1843 ceremony, "Assembled at the water's edge .....four brothers and two sisters rec'd the Ordinance of Baptism, notwithstanding the driving snowstorm which prevented us from assembling in the PM at the Meeting House, the Communion ... was postponed one week."

These photos, taken by a member of the Reynolds family from an upstairs window of the recently profiled Samuel Carr House, show two different Baptismal Ceremonies being performed, most likely by the Rev. Fredric Blake or the Rev. Charles Hutchinson, during the late 1880's or early 1890's. Look at them closely and you can not only make out an actual immersion baptism being performed in the harbor, but you can also see that most of the witnesses to this sacrament are wearing what appears to be fairly warm clothing. It just goes to show you that folks were made out of sterner stuff back a hundred years or so ago.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**The Heffernan House (left) has seen many uses in its more than 200 years of existence, but has been owned by just two families. The house can also be seen below (at left) in a photo taken around the turn of the 19th century.**



## The View From Swamptown

### The Heffernan Homestead House

As a part of our long-standing effort to take a closer look at each and every one of the historic homes in the village of Wickford, this week we are going to tarry for a time at the Heffernan Homestead House on Main Street.

The Heffernan House began its days in 1795 as the first double house constructed in the village. It was built for Captain Stephen Heffernan and his wife Abigail (Cranston) Heffernan and for Israel and Freelove Williams. Try as I might, I have not been able to ferret out very much information on Israel and Freelove; I only know that on May 11, 1797 they sold their half share of the property to the Heffernans and by the turn of the century they had moved out of Wickford and relocated to somewhere in Connecticut. Whatever the case, by the Spring of 1797, the house was solely owned by the Heffernans.

Stephen Heffernan was an important merchant mariner and owned, in partnership with other Wickford folks, a number of sailing vessels that plied the waters of the Narragansett Bay and beyond. One of those vessels was the "Abigail" named after his wife and owned in partnership with his brother-in-law Capt. Jeremiah Cranston and his next door neighbor Capt. Richard Barney. These co-operative partnerships allowed these ship's captains to have a steady income from the vessel and still have an opportunity to stay home for a time with their family. While at sea they would receive an owner's and a master's share in the vessel profits and while home they would still receive a smaller owners share. Over time Capt. Heffernan was involved in similar arrangements involving ownership of the vessels, Fair American, Betsy, and Fox. These partnerships involved the aforementioned captains as well as Heffernan's son-in-law Capt Beriah Gardiner and another neighbor Capt. Abel Reynolds. The Heffernan's lived out their lives here on Main Street, raising a number of children including son Capt. Jeremiah Cranston Heffernan and daughter Susan Heffernan. The home was in fact, left to Susan after the death of her parents.

Susan Heffernan, who was a milliner, seamstress, and dressmaker, never married, but lived in the big house with her niece, Abby Frances Carpenter and her family. Abby was also a seamstress who along with her daughters, worked for Susan at her shop located where the Avis Block in Wickford now stands. Abby's husband Charles was a jeweler who most likely worked at the locket factory in town run by James Eldred. When an enormous fire destroyed all the businesses located at the intersection of Main and West Main Streets, Susan and Abby moved their millinery shop into the bottom floor of the Heffernan House, as they were now living as one family following the unfortunate death of Charles in 1870. When Susan died in 1885, having lived her entire life in the big house, it was left to Abby. Abby too passed on in 1900 and her heirs sold the home, after 105 years of Heffernan ownership, to a member of the prominent Lewis clan, a family involved for years as fishermen here in the village.

George Lewis and his wife Josephine (Smith) Lewis purchased the house in August of 1900. George was involved in the family fishing business and at that time this family was literally surrounded by Lewis relatives who lived all over the village. Their son Harry A. Lewis became a well known RISD and MIT educated architect who designed not only a number of the many buildings at Quonset Point, but also the Wickford Middle School Building, the Rhodes-On-the-Pawtuxet Ballroom, and the High School in Coventry. The Heffernan House stayed in the Lewis family and is now owned by Harry Lewis Jr.

So this wonderful storied home can not only lay claim to being the first double house in Wickford, it is also one of the few homes with only two families owning it over its long lifetime; having been in the hands of a Heffernan descendant for 105 years and in Lewis family ownership for 108 years and counting.

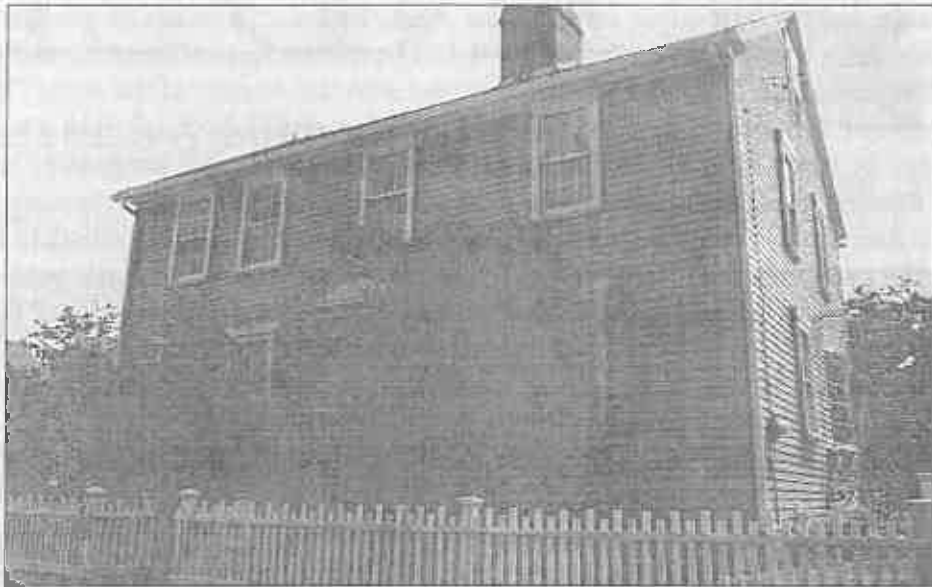


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**Built in 1795, the John Smith House on Gold Street in Wickford spent much of its history in private hands before being sold to St. Paul's Episcopal Church in 1931.**

## The View From Swamptown

### The John Smith House

Recently, the Rectory for St. Paul's Church in Wickford, the circa 1795 John Smith House, has received a well-deserved rehabilitation inside and out. With that in mind, it only seems fitting that we take a gander at the goings on here on Gold Street over the 213 years or so since its construction.

This house was built on land purchased by John Smith from Aaron Peck in 1795. Prior to that the land was owned by the Updike Family, Richard Phillips, and Samuel Thomas. It is built in the style of a classic Wickford center-chimney colonial and may have been constructed by any number of house wrights that were working during that time frame, but my best guess for a builder would be Smith's father-in-law Benjamin Reynolds. John Smith sold the home to his son Benjamin Reynolds Smith in July of 1822. Benjamin Smith was a merchant mariner who was master of the sloop "Iris" owned by Daniel and James Updike. He held on to the home until March of 1836 when it was purchased by Roby H. Hammond with funds given to her for that purpose by her father Daniel Stanton. At that time in history it was unusual for a woman, particularly a married one like Roby to own a home outright. She lived in the Hammond Homestead House with her locally prominent husband Pardon T. Hammond on Main St., and her parents Daniel & Ruth Stanton lived here in the former Smith House. During the middle of the 1800's, the Hammond family, who owned a total of four adjacent homes here in Wickford, were principle partners in one of the village's largest banks and really were the "venture capitalists" of their day. As agents of the North Kingstown Bank they invested in shipbuilding and sailing vessel ownership, particularly risky investments at the time, and were quite successful for their depositors. The Hammond name, representing the bank, was attached as partial owner to at least 12 vessels sailing the Narragansett Bay and beyond. Hammond's prospered in other business arenas as well. One of Pardon and Roby's sons, Daniel Stanton Hammond moved from the village to Brooklyn NY where he became a successful dealer and manufacturer of leather and carpet bags. The historic record indicates he made and stored carpet bags in the village out of a flat roofed stone building on the property from 1855-1875. These bags were shipped to New York from the village.

In 1877 the house was left in Roby's will to her daughters Ruth & Mary Hammond who lived in the Hammond Homestead House on Main Street. It is unclear who lived in the house during this timeframe and it may have been used seasonally only, to house the numerous Hammonds & Hammond relations that summered here in the village.

In 1917, the house was left to the Hammond sisters' married niece Mary Hammond Northup. And in 1918 she sold the house to real estate agent Frank Holloway, who owned it until it was sold to St. Paul's in 1931 for \$4000. The Church had been looking to buy the house for quite some time, but felt that Holloway's original asking price was "exorbitant". Reverend Herbert Piper was the first priest to live here in the Rectory.

*(Many thanks to Larry Ehrhardt for his invaluable assistance on this!!)*



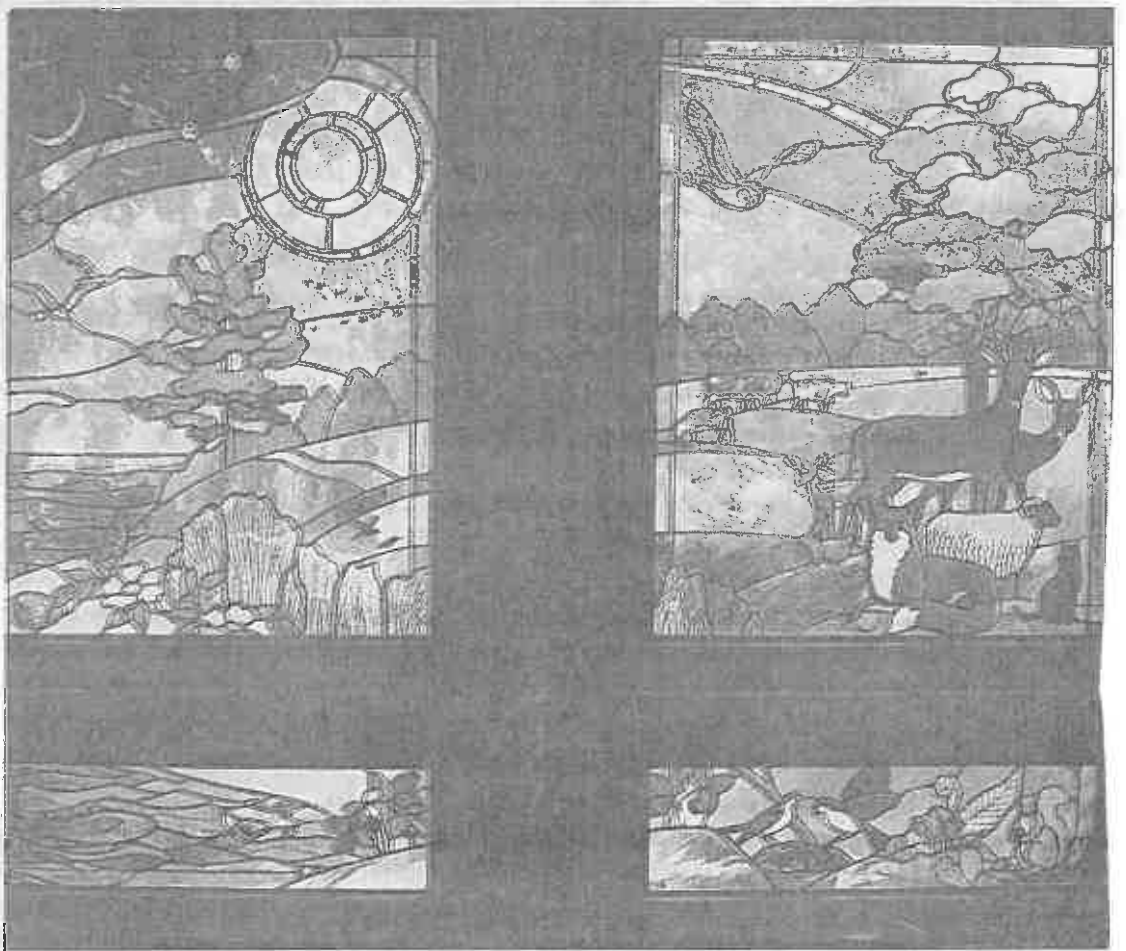
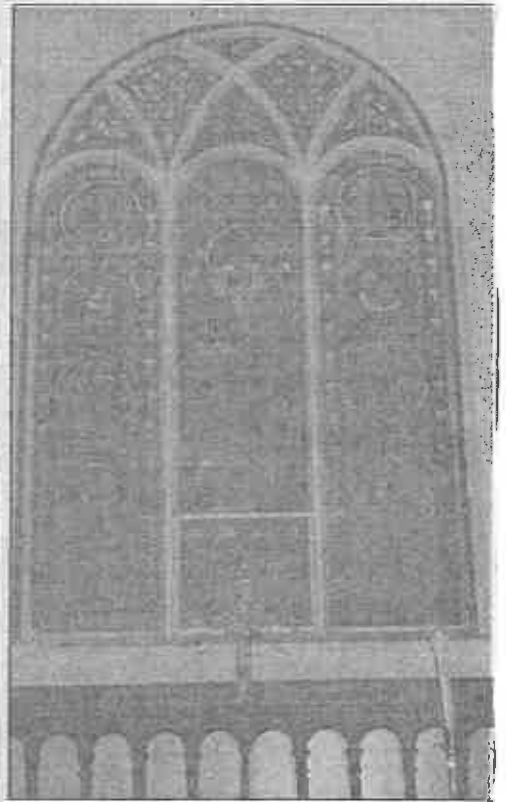


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Though each window tells a religious story, a lot can also be gleaned from the stories of how these windows came to the church and the stories of the former residents that the windows were created in honor of.



## The View From Swamptown

### History Captured in Glass

There are few sights more beautiful in the village of Wickford than catching the first rays of morning light through the easterly facing stained glass windows in St. Paul's Episcopal Church on Main Street. The rich colors and pastoral images are almost guaranteed to invoke feelings of peace and calm regardless of your personal religious beliefs. Each and every window is an individually created work of art. St. Paul's, bathed in the early morning light becomes, all at once, an art gallery, a historical repository, and the sacred place that it always is.

Yes you read that right, a historical repository, you see these windows are there to do more than just amaze us with their beauty; they are here to help us to remember folks that came before us. These windows are here to testify to the lives and labors of people who made a difference in their world. These windows are extraordinary jumping off points to the stories of these people and their times. Front and center over the altar, we have the image of St. Paul himself done by an early American stained glass artisan named Henry Sharp who worked out of New York City. This window honors Abigail Updike Reynolds, the very person through which the Updike and Reynolds family were united by marriage. These two families, perhaps more than any other, can be called the founders of Wickford. Just to the right of this window is another Sharp creation featuring St. Cecilia based upon the famous painting by Raphael. This one memorializes the life of Hannah (Eldred) Goodwin a daughter of another prominent early family and the wife of the parish priest responsible for the construction of the striking steeple and clock tower that defines the buildings profile. Speaking of St. Cecilia she can be found as well on the other side of the church in a window created by Heaton Butler and Bayne of London. It is one window of a pair, the other being in the Episcopal Cathedral in Wyoming where Georgina and Elisha Smith Thomas lived. Elisha was the bishop of this wild west region and the former Chaplain at Leavenworth Prison. This "cowboy bishop's" roots extend back to a boyhood in Wickford. A number of other windows in the Church were done by American artisan Charles Booth also of New York City. Booth had a very specific idea regarding the countenance of Jesus and this face seen in many of Booth's masterworks provides a certain continuity to the windows. These include windows dedicated to sea captain Gideon Freeborn and Charlotte (Smith) Thomas.

You know, I could go on and on about these windows and the people that they call us to remember, and if you're interested I am indeed going to do just that. So please join me at St. Pauls on Main Street on Saturday at 1PM for a lecture about the windows to benefit the rehabilitation of the church rectory on Gold Street. I will be joined by David Zaltzberg, a stained glass restorer. Come down and enjoy these timeless works of ecclesiastical art, won't you!



**This home at 151 West Main St., shown above in a 1960s-era photo, was once the home of a locally prominent North Kingstown family, but is better known as the Metz-Ross Guest House that was a temporary home for tourists and those working at the nearby Navy base at Quonset. Francis "Frankie" Ross and her sister, Oda Metz, rented out rooms in the home, shown in a current photo at right, until 1978.**



**This was a typical scene around the big table at the Metz-Ross Guest House. Francis "Frankie" Ross sits on the end of the table on the right and Oda Metz sits at the end on the left.**

## The View From Swamptown

### The Metzi Ross Guest House

In most cases, the most noteworthy events associated with any of the myriad historic homes in Wickford occurred centuries ago. And, although its true that the fine home at 151 West Main Street, our subject today, built more than 150 years ago, has a long association with the locally prominent Holloway family, its really not these ship and house wrights for whom this house is remembered. On the contrary, if I were to ask even an old-timer where the "Widow Susan Holloway" place was, chances are they wouldn't have a clue; but mention the Metzi-Ross Guest House to that same old-timer, and their eyes will light up with memories. You see, from 1947 to 1978, Francis "Frankie" Ross and her sister Oda Metz and their guest house were a part of the scene here in the village.

Frankie and Oda came to Wickford Village as a result of tragic circumstances. Within the span of a few short months, both of the sisters' husbands passed away, leaving them alone. They came to Wickford to be near another sister that already lived here on West Main Street and decided to stay. They purchased the West Main Street home in 1947 and came up with a plan to run a boarding home in it to support themselves. They came up with the name Metzi-Ross because it sounded a lot like Betsy Ross something that folks would have an easy time remembering; and remember it they did. For more than thirty years, the "No Vacancy" sign was more often than not, hanging out front. The place was utilized not only by a steady stream of tourists who would come year after year and utilize one or more of the five rooms that they rented out, but also by a never ending string of Navy personnel who were here for either a short time for training or stayed at Metzi-Ross while they searched for more permanent housing elsewhere.

Oda and Frankie both had their duties to perform. Oda was in charge of what when on inside and the more out-going Frankie, who had a driver's license, ran around town as need be. Both women were actively involved in the goings-on at the First Baptist Church in Wickford and the Order of Eastern Star, a Masonic related women's organization which met at the Masonic Temple on Ten Rod Road.

Things at the Metzi-Ross Guest House came to end in 1978, with the massive scale down of personnel at Quonset/Davisville and the death of Oda Metz the year before. Frankie stayed in town until she passed away in March of 1986. Both women were buried out of state back with their respective husbands. They were fixtures here in Wickford, and sometimes as I walk by their old home, I can almost see them sitting there on the front porch whiling away the hours as they wait for another guest to arrive.



**The Alfred J. Reynolds home, shown above in a photo taken in 1941, has passed through the hands of many prominent Wickford families throughout its 165 years. The building, shown in its current state at right, was a two-family home for much of its history before being broken into apartments.**



**PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR**

## The View From Swamptown

### The Alfred Joseph Reynolds House

As a part of our longstanding continuing effort to take a closer look at each and every historic home within the confines of "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic"; this week we'll shine the Swamptown spotlight on the handsome home at 120 Main Street.

This fine house, like the sad boarded up center-chimneyed colonial at 173 Boston Neck Road is a testament of sorts to the union of two of the village's most prominent colonial and post colonial families; the Updikes and the Reynolds. Built for Alfred Joseph Reynolds, the eldest son of Joseph Reynolds and Abigail Updike, who spent his boyhood and youth in the once commanding farmhouse that is now that forlorn boarded up relic, it too has an important story that has been long forgotten.

Alfred had the home constructed in 1843 on land purchased for him by his father from Abigail's sister Anstis Lee. Although the builder's identity is not certain, I would expect that it was constructed by one of the numerous Reynolds family members who were among the most prominent house wrights of the time. Alfred, who was by the way named after his maternal grandfather Alfred Updike, moved into the home with his wife Susan (Weeden). Susan had just inherited a substantial sum of money and numerous landholdings upon the recent death of her prominent father Peleg Weeden, and the construction of the home may have been financed with this Weeden inheritance. Alfred, like his father before him, identified himself as a farmer, although his farmland was not adjacent to his fine Wickford home. Indeed his 165 acre parcel of farmland was a part of his father's larger farm, which had before that been a portion of the even more substantial farm of his grandfather Alfred Updike, and was located somewhere just southeast of the house at 173 Boston Neck Road. After the death of her husband, Joseph Reynolds, the matriarch of the clan, Abigail moved in with her son and daughter-in-law and lived out her remaining days in the village until her death well into her 90's. Unfortunately for Susan and Alfred, but sadly typical for this particular branch of the Reynolds, they had no children that lived to adulthood, and after both Alfred and then Susan died in rapid succession in the fall of 1883, the house was left to two of Susan's nephews; brothers Benjamin Weeden Wightman and James Royal Stone Wightman.

Benjamin and James Wightman both were law enforcement officers, with Ben working as a police officer and James working in the Washington County Sheriff's Dept.. They took their Aunt and Uncle's home and converted it into a two family home of sorts, with James and his family living downstairs and Benjamin and his living upstairs. Across the years, each unit was also rented out from time to time. Towards the end of their lives, both men eventually moved back into the family homestead (now demolished) on the corner of Main and Fowler Streets owned by their brother Christopher. As each man had married into the Baker family, upon their death, the two half shares of the house passed into the hands of married Baker relations; with James leaving his half to Fanny (Baker) Barber and her husband Russell, as Fanny had cared for him towards the end of his life, and Ben's half share going to Gwendolyn (Baker) Letondress and her husband Fred.

The Barber's and Letondress' moved into their shared home in the middle 1920's and apparently had their differences as when the Great 1938 Hurricane laid two mighty elm trees on the roof causing significant damage to the home, the Barbers declined to

help pay for the repairs saying that their ground floor half was not being affected by the trees. In the end though, after some negotiations, Russell and Fanny Barber bought out the Letondress family and owned the entire home. When they eventually purchased another home on Washington Street they broke the 120 Main Street building into apartments and it is in that configuration to this day, still owned by their daughter who inherited it in 1952 upon Fanny's death.

Like its neighbor The Fones Tavern House at 126 Main, The Alfred J. Reynolds Home has been one without a champion to make certain its interesting story and how it relates to the history of Wickford Village is known to all. So now as you stroll down the streets of the village on a fine late summer day, you can amble on over to 120 Main Street and pay your respects to the many Reynolds, Wightmans, and Bakers whose lives are intertwined within the walls of this 165 year old home.



The Wickfords went to the finals of the R.I. State Amateur Championship in 1892, its first year in the league, but lost in the finals to the Newport team. The players are (from left): Standing - Bill Hammond, Allen Briggs, Bert Rodman, James Worden, an unknown assistant manager, John Kelley, Manager George E. Gardner, Frank Hammond, John Dillon and William Johnson. Sitting are William Horton, John Conley and Tom Dawley.



## The View From Swamptown

### The Wickfords

Baseball is timeless. Sure, the uniforms are different and the equipment has evolved, but the game remains what it always was.

The diamond is the great equalizer. Once you enter the field, who you are and where you came from has no bearing. You could be a farmhand, a mill worker's son or a mill owner's son – once you are on that field together, you are all ballplayers.

Such was the case with the Wickfords, North Kingstown's entry into the very competitive R. I. Amateur League in 1892.

For decades, North Kingstown, like most of America during that timeframe, ran its own baseball league. Highly cohesive mill village communities like Allenton, Hamilton, and Lafayette fielded teams that fought fiercely for town wide bragging rights. The year 1892 was different though. Folks in North Kingstown thought that this was their year, that they were ready to enter the "biggs", the State League, and compete with the teams from Providence, Newport, and beyond.

They knew this because they had all seen the play of three very different young men. Allen Briggs, the farm boy, was as close to "the natural" as the town had ever seen. He played second base like nobody's business and hit like a demon possessed. Tom Dawley, the son of a mill worker, was thought to be the state's finest pure pitcher and this with no training, as he had left high school to work in the mill alongside his father. Finally, there was the first baseman, Albert Rodman, son of mill owner Franklin Rodman. No one had ever seen him make a fielding error and he always managed to get on base.

More than 100 other young men vied for the remaining eight spots on the team. Chosen to play with the mighty threesome, were brothers Bill and Frank Hammond, James Worden, John Kelley, John Dillon, William Johnson, William Horton, and John Conley. George E. Gardiner was chose to manage this bunch. After the selection process was completed the town fathers donated enough money to buy the team uniforms and equipment. Austen Fox, an obvious lover of the game, allowed a baseball diamond and grandstands to be constructed on the corner of his pastureland on West Main Street (now Wilson Park) to be used for their home games. The Wickfords were on their way.

When the dust settled at the end of the season, it was the upstart Wickfords and the perennial league champions from Newport playing in the final game. And although they lost, 2-0, to the Newport team – a group made up of semi-professionals and college players on summer break – what a run it had been!

Bert Rodman headed off to Brown University that fall and eventually ran the textile empire that most of his teammates worked for, Allen Briggs went back to a life of farming eventually owning his own Exeter farm, and Tom Dawley, well he spent his life working for his first baseman at the Lafayette Mill; but that summer – that grand summer – Tom, Allen, Bert and all the boys were equals playing America's game in the warm summer sun.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

This home – located on Ten Rod Road – was the pride of George Arnold, who moved from Jamestown to North Kingstown to work in the mills. After more than 20 years of working in several North Kingstown mills, he bought this home for himself and his young family. Below is the weave room in the Lafayette Mill overseen by George Arnold after he worked his way up the ranks.



## The View From Swamptown

### The George F. Arnold House

The first six months of 1921 must have been an exciting time for George Arnold. The 40-year-old textile worker had finally grabbed a hold of his part of the American dream. He had come to North Kingstown, from nearby Jamestown, decades earlier when he began work in the trade at the Gregory Mill (now the site of the Kayak Center & Gold Lady Jewelry) in 1897 at the age of 17. After 23 years of laboring next to the clacking looms, first at the Gregory Mill and then at Robert Rodman's Lafayette Mill, George had worked his way up through the ranks to the position of overseer in the Lafayette mill weaving room. After more than twenty years of having his young family, wife Margaret (Jenkins) and two daughters, sharing mill housing with his brother-in-law George Salisbury the mill blacksmith and his family, he was finally to have his own home near the intersection of Tower Hill and the Ten Rod Roads.

That home, seen in the accompanying photo, was constructed on the big lot he purchased in January of 1921, but not before he sub-divided it and sold a piece to his blacksmith brother-in-law. So the two very similar houses were built side-by-side and that Spring, the two proud families moved in.

George Arnold lived in his fine home, certainly enjoying that nice front porch, until his untimely death at 58 in 1938. Wife Margaret, supported by the large extended Jenkins clan in the area, made due by taking a part time job in the cafeteria of the Town's brand new High School (now Wickford Middle School) and taking in unmarried teachers from the school as boarders. One of her two daughters, also named Margaret (Kauppi), eventually became a teacher herself and, although she did marry and move out west for a time; she lived here with her mother too, while teaching English at the High School. Margaret Arnold's second daughter Sybil, had three husbands and outlived two of them; marrying first to a Tucker, and then local boat builder Allie Saunders, and then finally marrying a Mathewson. She too, spent time in the house with her mother.

All told Margaret Arnold spent 59 years in her fine West Wickford home. She passed away in 1980 at the age of 98. The home she built with her hard working husband George, stayed in the family for 83 years until it was finally sold as a part of Sybil's estate in 2004.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**This home at 325 Ten Rod Road, which was once located at the intersection of Stony Lane and Huling Road, has served as a home, a school and a Baptist meeting house.**

## The View From Swamptown

### The First Stony Lane Schoolhouse

At a glance, the little 19<sup>th</sup> century home that sits at the core of the rambling series of additions that constitutes 325 Ten Rod Road, does not appear to be all that special. We all have probably driven by it hundreds of times, myself included, and not given it a second thought beyond entertaining the notion that there seems to be no rhyme nor reason to this home's floor plan. But there's more here than meets the eye; you see this little building, constructed more than 170 years ago, was, until 1867, situated on the southwest corner of Stony Lane and the Boston Post Road (now the intersection of Stony Lane and Huling Road) and was the very first Stony Lane District one-room schoolhouse.

The Stony Lane District schoolhouse, constructed during the 1830's, was deemed too small and run down by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and replaced by a new building just up Stony Lane a few hundred yards (profiled in a past column). The building stood largely empty, with the exception of a period of use as a Baptist meeting house by Elder Hammond a local preacher, until 1867 when it was sold by the school district through Isaac Hall, to Alfred Gardiner. Gardiner and his relations shored up the building, then jacked it up, placed some wheels under her and began the 2 day move down the Post Road and up Ten Rod Road to its new home. The schoolhouse made it as far as the Nichols place on the Post Road the first day (just south of the Chamber of Commerce) and wound up at its present home later on the second day. Alfred Gardiner, a stone mason who often worked for the Rodman Manufacturing Company, had purchased the three acre parcel from Sylvester Franklin, a farmer whose large farm was centered around his house and barn complex at the present day site of Bailey's Auto Dealership, and added two ells once it was on its new foundation. He moved in with his wife and two sons.

The house stayed in the extended Gardiner clan for nearly 100 years, passing from Alfred's hands upon his death in 1910 to the ownership of his surviving son Thomas W. Gardiner, a teamster for the Rodmans, and his family. When Thomas passed on it was then owned by a cousin Harrison Gardiner who then left it to his daughter Ruth Gardiner. Additionally, this home, which once housed the very studious children of the Stony Lane District, also was home for a time for North Kingstown's present Fire Chief David Murray and his young family. So, I guess the old saying, "you can't judge a book by its cover" applies to buildings as well.



PHOTOS ON THE RIGHT: SELENA MILLARD

The former Rodman mill owner mansions have been North Kingstown landmarks since the end of the 19th century, when the pictures on the left were taken. Although all four buildings are still standing, three of them are no longer used as private homes. The former Robert Rodman home, pictured at top, is now McKay's Front Porch. The second set of photos shows the home of Rodman's daughter, Hortense, which is the only one that is privately owned. The third set of photos shows the former home of Walter Rodman that was transformed into the Trading Post, what is believed to be the first gift shop in Wickford. The final set shows the Franklin Rodman Mansion, which was once the Lafayette Nursing Home and now sits vacant. Only the tip of the original home can be seen over an addition built during the building's nursing home days.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Rodman Mansions Re-visited

Nearly seven years ago we took our first look at the four wonderful Rodman mansions, located on the south side of the Ten Rod Road right in the heart of the former mill village of Lafayette. These extraordinary homes were more than just that, they were symbols of what the Rodman family and their countless employees had accomplished and, as such, were sources of pride to, not only their occupants, but the community as a whole. Recently, my friend and fellow traveler through our fair town's past, Rachel Peirce, acquired a set of photos of all four of these fine mill owner homes, taken concurrently right around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Let's take a gander at these homes and see how the passage of about 110 years has affected them.

The first of the mansions, chronologically anyway, is the Robert Rodman house; built in 1863 by the founder of the textile empire and the village of Lafayette, Robert Rodman. Like all four of the homes, it was equipped with all of the modern conveniences of the time including a well within the home and inside bathrooms that operated off of a gravity fed system supplied by a large oaken tank in the attic which was in turn filled by rainwater which fell on the roof and was channeled through the gutters into the tank. No wife or child of Robert Rodman would have to trudge out to a cold outhouse on a frigid February night, by golly!! After serving four generations of the Rodman family, the house was sold in the late 1940's to the local Masonic chapter, the Washington Lodge. As you can see by the photos, then and now, the Masons removed many of the home's grand details during their alterations. The Robert Rodman home is now occupied by McKay's Front Porch.

Just to the west of Robert's home sits the home of his eldest child; daughter Hortense. She married George Allen and the earliest portion of the home was constructed for them in 1865. In response to Hortense's dissatisfaction with the simpler stylings of her home in comparison to her two brothers' houses to the east of the Robert Rodman Mansion, a generous Queen Anne style addition was added to the front of the house in 1882. Built into this addition is a music room featuring a full sized church organ selected by Hortense who loved music. One of Hortense's descendants was national TV celebrity David Hartmann, who spent numerous summers here in the grand home. He still comes for a visit from time to time. This is the only Rodman mansion still used as a private family home.

In 1879, the third of the mansions was constructed for Robert's son Walter and his wife Caroline (Taber). Walter, the accountant for the Rodman empire, was an artistic man and a passionate gardener and the home was originally surrounded by extensive gardens and greenhouses. Many of Walter Rodman's specially selected specimen trees still exist on the grounds, including the giant tulip poplar next to the house. This home also featured a full sized pottery kiln in the basement run by Caroline and her pottery instructor well-known potter and ceramicist Laura Washburn. They sold their creations in a shop in Wickford Walter owned called "The Trading Post". This may have been the village's first gift shop and stayed in Walter's control until he deeded it to his daughter Hope and her new husband grocer E.J. Ryan.

The last of the mansions was built in 1882 for son Franklin and his wife Sarah (Allen). Franklin was the superintendent of the Lafayette Mill; the nuts and bolts guy who made sure the looms continued to hum each day. His third son Robert F. Rodman eventually became the first state highway engineer and nearby Route 4 is named in his honor. The last Rodman occupants of this once grand home were Franklin's youngest son Albert and his wife Mary (Peirce) great aunt to Rachel who acquired these fine photos. Albert was also the final President of Rodman Manufacturing Company; as the Textile age in New England began its long decline during his tenure forcing the closure of the mill. Franklin's home was for a long time a nursing care facility and now sits empty while we all await word of her fate.

So there you have it, with the exception of Franklin's home, we can see that these four grand symbols of the Rodman's and Lafayette's finest hours have fared well over the last century or so. Lets hope that the contractor temporary fencing that now surrounds the old Lafayette Nursing Home is the beginning of something wonderful for Franklin's Mansion and not the beginning of the end. I'll be watching!!





Above is a picture of a home at 181 Ten Rod Road taken around 1910, when Joanna Sherman lived there alone. Joanna Sherman was given the property as part of an arrangement to marry Pardon Hammond Sherman, who was almost twice her age at the time, after the death of his first wife. The move angered his children, causing them to forbid him to be buried with them or their mother. Below is a current picture of the home.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

## The View From Swamptown

### The Joanna Sherman Farmhouse

This solid utilitarian little farmhouse on the Ten Rod Road doesn't jump out at you as you drive by it each day. It looks an awful lot like so many other houses of its kind here and all across southern New England for that matter. You probably wouldn't even give it a second thought or ever imagine that it has a story to tell us. But this house, built in 1883 as a retirement home of sorts, by local carpenter Pardon Hammond Sherman does have something to tell us about the very different roles that marriage played in a very different time more than 100 years ago.

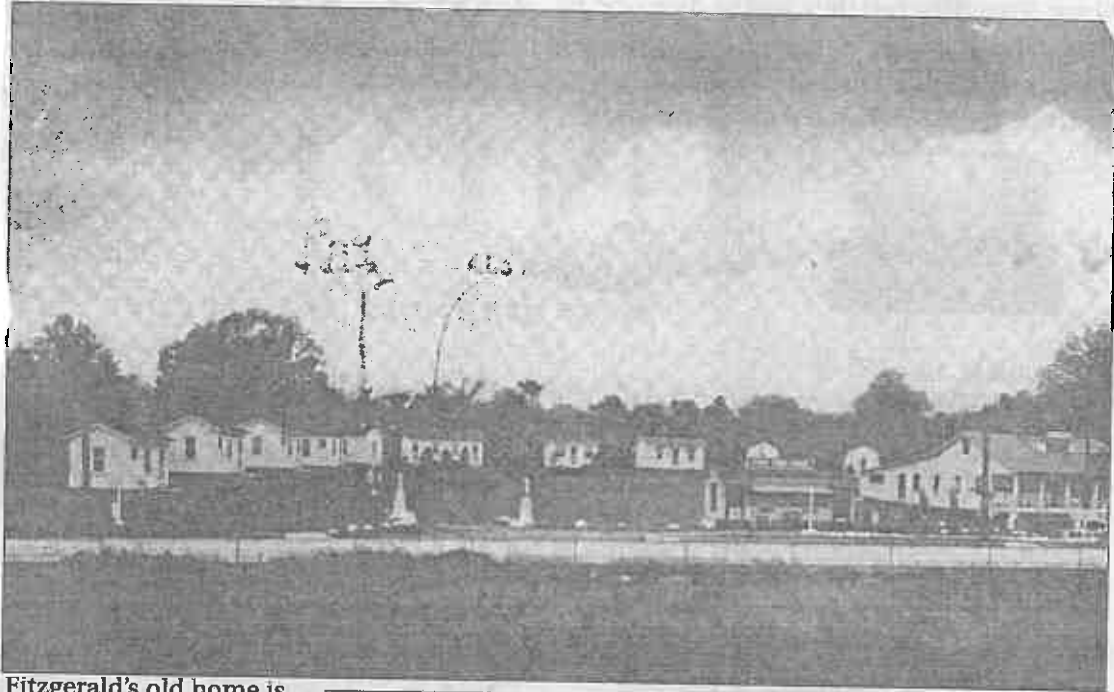
Before we examine that part of the tale lets go back to the home's beginnings in 1883. Pardon Sherman purchased the 21 acre lot that this home was the center of in that year and constructed this home for himself and his wife of nearly forty years Abby (Taylor) Sherman. Throughout those years Abby and Pardon had raised three children and lived in numerous communities always following the construction work which was their "bread and butter". Their two sons Alpheus and William Sherman had followed in their fathers footsteps, but had become much more successful, they, as the Sherman Brothers, owned their own lumber and supply store in the heart of Wickford (now Teddy Bearskins & Green Ink) and were involved in the construction of nearly every fine home built recently in and around the village. Pardon and Abby's daughter too, was married and so they were ready to change their life to that of a farm couple raising just enough to sustain their own needs. All went as planned until 1893, when Abby, who was 8 years older than Pardon, died at the age of 78. She was buried in Elm Grove in the family plot of her son William.

Pardon, now a 70-year-old man, was left alone on the farm, but not for long. Within a few months of his wife's death he had struck a deal with a forty year old woman from Peacedale and was married to Joanna Hazard, the eighth child of Peter Hazard, a night watchman at the Peacedale mill and his wife Mary. In that timeframe, at forty years old, Joanna was considered an old maid and probably reluctantly jumped at the offer knowing it was the best she could expect. Wisely though, she had Pardon, as part of this arrangement, sign over the deed to the 21-acre farm to her. This legal maneuver was accomplished at nearly the same time that they became man and wife. This new arrangement worked for 12 years, Pardon had someone there to keep the home fires burning and Joanna was finally out of her parents place and in a home of her own, until 1905, when Pardon joined his first wife Abby in the next world. He did not; however join her in the William Sherman family plot in Elm Grove. As an indication that his very quickly arranged remarriage had not set well with his children, Pardon was not buried with his first wife, or in his other son Alpheus's family plot or his daughter and son-in-laws', he was put to rest in a separate plot in Elm Grove.

So now Joanna was the sole owner of the 21 acre farm. It was there as her nest egg; and as the years went by she sold off house lot sized parcels of the land as she needed the income. Interestingly enough, in spite of the obvious unhappiness within the Sherman clan over her "high speed nuptials" with Pardon, most of the land was sold back to Pardon's grandchildren and other relations. Finally in 1929, 77-year-old Joanna Sherman sold the last of the land she received as her part in the arranged marriage. She

then moved in to the village of Wickford and rented a room on Brown Street within sight of the Sherman Brothers Lumber yards. She passed away there in 1934 and was buried next to Pardon under the green grass of Elm Grove.

So you see, this little farmhouse does have a tale to tell us. It's a story about people faced with difficult choices in an age long before Social Security and pensions doing what they felt they had to do to get by. And it's a reminder to us that the ideal of "romantic marriage" is truly a 20<sup>th</sup> century concept and was often not the primary concern of folks in an age when romance as a primary reason to wed was a luxury reserved for the rich and folks in fairy tales.



Fitzgerald's old home is

As the popularity of the automobile increased, so did the popularity of the family trip and the motor court. Hunt's Pine Tree Lodge was the first such establishment to pop up in North Kingstown, opening in 1933 and offering families 15 cabins, a small filling station and a restaurant. Above is a 1941 photo of the lodge. At right is Gillian's Ale House on Post Road, which contains part of the old farmhouse and restaurant that used to exist as part of the motor court.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

## The View From Swamptown Post Road Motor Courts

Over the years, we've taken a look at the Inns and Taverns of old Wickford, the grand hotels at Cold Spring and Saunderstown, and the areas first true motel run by local character Bob Bean. Today we are going to turn our attention to the Motor Court, a concept whose roots are linked with America's growing love for the automobile in the 1930's and 40's and its impact on the "family vacation".

You see, the Motor Court was all about replicating the conveniences of the family home, while you were off on vacation touring the highways and byways of America in your grand automobile. Typically a motor court consisted of a group of cabins, individual little family homes as it were, that you could pull right up to; just like driving up in the family driveway. There was always a gas station right on site so you and the missus and kids would not have to wait a moment to get on with your adventure and heck, the best motor courts had both individual kitchenettes and a nice family restaurant; that way you can get either a home cooked meal in the cabin or sit down to a fine spread that mom didn't have to prepare. As you can imagine, as the American family fully embraced the auto and the freedom that it afforded, Motor Courts began to spring up all across the country.

Here in North Kingstown, we had two fine examples of this genre. The first, opened in 1933 was called Hunts Pine Tree Lodge and was run by a retired Outlet Dept. Store worker named Edmund Hunt and his wife Lydia. They purchased a small farm property on the Post Road just south of the Stony Lane intersection from the widow Ida Fitzgerald in 1932 and constructed 15 cabins, a small filling station, a turned a portion of the existing house, in which they lived, into a small restaurant. You can see it here in a 1930's postcard shot taken before the great widening and straightening of Post Road occurred; at the time of this photo Post Road ran on what we now know as Huling Road. When Edmund died unexpectedly in 1946, Lydia sold the place to John and Virginia Gray, who ran it as a Motor Court for a time, but then tore down the cabins and constructed a motel in their place. Gray's motel still included the old farmhouse as a restaurant and as a matter of fact, Ida Fitzgerald's old home is still there, incorporated into the larger structure we now know as Gillians.

In 1944, the Hunt's got some competition, when Armand Gadoury, a retired textile worker from West Warwick, opened up Green Acres Motor Court just north of Hunts Pine Tree Lodge and immediately south of the Wickford Lanes, with his wife Katheryne on farmland he purchased from John and Alice O'Hare. It had about a dozen cabins along with two small motel-like units and of course a filling station and small restaurant. In 1958 Gadoury too, got into the motel business when he opened the Kingstown Motel as well. The Green Acres Motor Court, although demolished can be remembered by the filling station which has been drastically remodeled into one of Post Road's less attractive buildings; seen here in the accompanying photo.

So as the 21<sup>st</sup> century begins and North Kingstown seems poised to come full circle with the construction on QDC land of its first Hotel since the Cold Spring and Saunders Houses closed decades upon decades ago, lets not forget the age when hopping into the Chevy or Plymouth with mother and the kids and taking off to explore America was every family's dream.

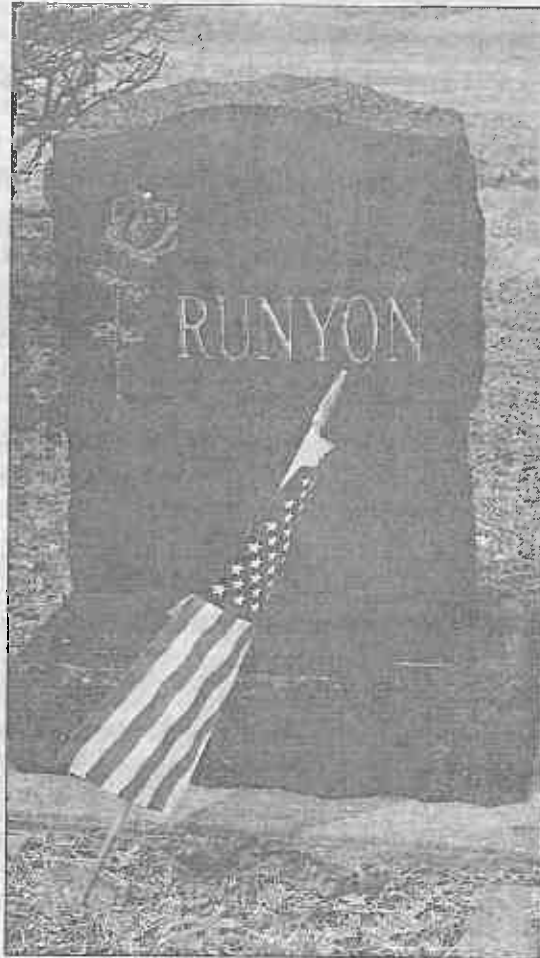


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**Patrice Runyon's life with her husband, Damon, was the inspiration for the play "Guys and Dolls," but she declined to tell many of those stories as she lived out her later years in South County. Runyon's is one of the many notable gravesites at Quidnessett Memorial Cemetery.**

## The View From Swamptown

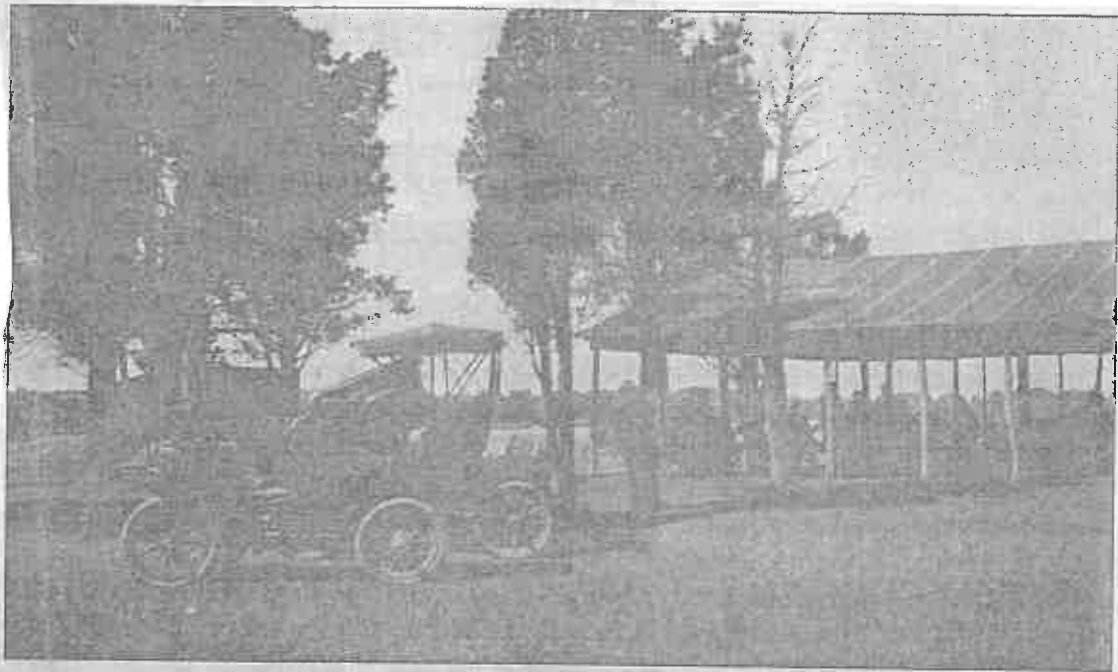
### Quidnessett Cemetery Notables

No one could say that Patrice Runyon was a shy and reserved woman; even towards the end of her life she seemed to love the attention she garnered as she drove around South County in her bright white Jaguar XKE “dressed to the nines” and wearing her signature white driving gloves. Why, she was used to, and even expected the attention; after all, she was the flamboyant wife of newspaperman and short story writer Damon Runyon, she knew folks who ran the gamut between celebrities and criminals; she was comfortable chatting with Franklin Roosevelt or sharing a drink with Al Capone. Her life with Damon was indeed the basis for the Broadway staple “Guys and Dolls”. Nathan Detroit and his gal had nothing on Damon and Patrice, that’s for sure.

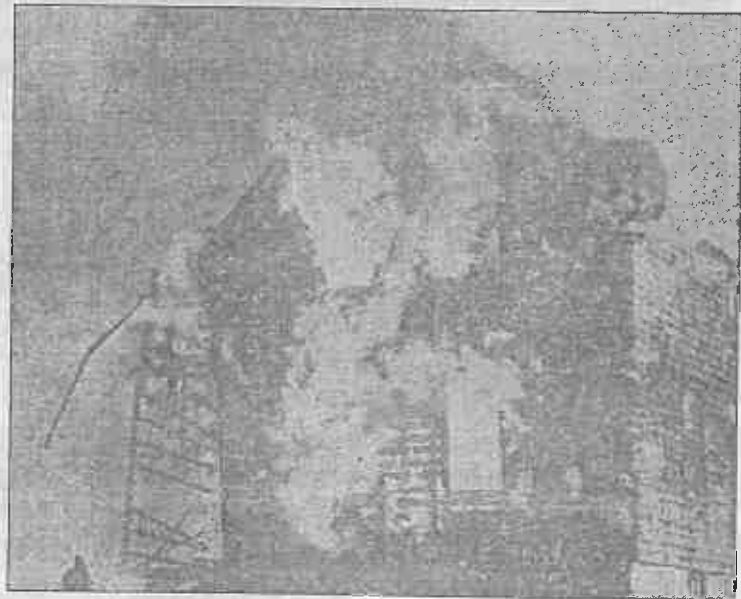
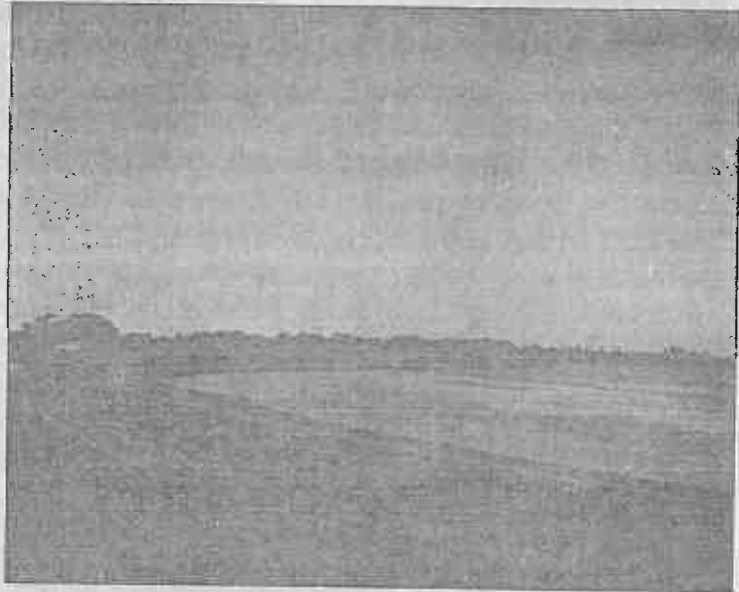
She was born Maria Gracia Patrice Amati in Calditas, Spain and she’d never say exactly when; after all a lady does not discuss her age. She spent her childhood in among other places Texas and New York City and it was there that she met and eventually married the hotshot writer and gad-about Damon Runyon in a small ceremony held in NYC mayor Jimmy Walker’s apartment; the mayor himself performed the ceremony. In 1971, she, by then a widow twice over, moved here to Narragansett for the remainder of her days. She was a licensed pilot, she raced cars in Monaco and France, she owned a Kentucky Derby entrant, she had dinner at Al Capone’s house and she boasted that her husband Damon sent her a white orchid each and every day and had hired a coterie of servants to attend to her every need while he spent the nights out on the town meeting with the folks who would become Nathan Detroit, Frankie Ferocious and Hot Horse Herbie. Boy did Patrice Runyon have some stories to tell.

But sadly, she rarely told them. Publicity shy to nearly JD Salinger levels, she gave but one interview in her lifetime and she took those tales and many more to her grave when she died in September of 1983. And that grave is right here in our fair town at Quidnessett Memorial Cemetery.

This is one of the many wonderful tales that Quidnessett Cemetery has to tell us, and thanks to the beneficent staff there, this summer we will be able to examine some more of them. I’m pleased to be able to announce that Swamptown Enterprises will be offering a respectful stroll through Quidnessett Cemetery as one of its summer walking tour destinations. Stayed tuned for more information on this and the many other walks that await us.



Above is a picture of one of the dining pavilions at the Johnson's Hummocks main dining area. The photo, taken around 1915, includes members of the Wickford Businessman's Association. The spot was popular with many at the time and clubs, groups and organizations competed with one another for time at the Hummocks. At right is a picture taken from the Hummocks looking back at Worsley Avenue and the Hamilton Plat. Below is a picture of the 1956 fire that claimed the Johnson homestead, the last building remaining on the property.





May 10, 2007

### **It wasn't a Rhode Island summer without the Hummocks**

Every once in awhile, a "what's it" turns out to be the last physical reminder of a page or an episode in the history of our fair town. The ruins on Cornelius Island, the concrete and brick chimney on Old Baptist Road and the mill foundations on Featherbed Lane are artifacts such as this; they are all the last tangible reminders of something that was an important aspect of North Kingstown's history many years ago. Sort of like Newport's stone tower, folks drive by them day in and day out, fully cognizant of their existence, but not having a clue as to what these relics represent; what story they might tell us.

The old foundation on the Hummocks is such a thing; you can't wander out there without encountering it, you see it without understanding the how and why of it each time you mosey out to the Hummocks' end. What a story it has to tell. You see, that old foundation was a part of something extraordinary, it was the homebase of Frank Johnson and his clan, the family that operated the Johnson's Hummocks--a place that ought to be a holy shrine to all across new England that love a good clambake.

Now, take any place you've ever been to for a real New England clambake, and yes I'm even including venerable old Yawgoo Bakes out in Slocum, and expand it exponentially and you might get a hint of the scale of the operation that went on week in and week out, summer in and summer out, from the 1890's right up to 1940 out at Johnson's Hummocks.

At its peak, around the time of World War I, the Johnsons had a covered outdoor dining pavilion capable of seating nearly 1,500 hungry clambake aficionados and Frank, assisted by his son Henry and the rest of the Johnsons, kept most of those seats full every weekend night. The place was so popular at that time that the nearby Hamilton Village stop on the Seaview Trolley Line was unofficially known as the Hummocks stop.

Yes, the Hummocks was truly the clambake Mecca, and bakemasters Frank and Henry C. Johnson were its undisputed kings. Every Grange chapter, every civic organization, every political party, every fraternal group had to fight for space with every wedding, anniversary and family reunion staged across New England for space under the Johnson's pavilions. Back in the early 1900's no summer could be considered a success in the region if you hadn't gorged on lobster, steamers, corn and all the fixins at the Hummocks at least once.

Heck, when the old Rocky Point Shore Dinner Hall opened up, folks used to remark: "This place is something, alright, but it ain't the Hummocks!"

All that ended for a time in 1925, when a giant blaze destroyed the big pavilion and all the outbuildings on the Hummocks--every building, that is, except for the Johnson family summer house; the building that sat on the very foundation we are examining today. That home base was enough, though, because, after a time, Henry Johnson rebuilt the pavilion

and ran the Johnson's Hummocks again, right up until the time that the 1938 Hurricane had other ideas and wiped the Hummocks clear just as effectively as the big fire in 1925 had.

Just like with the fire, though, the Johnson Homestead house survived the storm and remained a factor in the Johnson's family life until 1945, when they sold the property to Providence Police Chief John Murphy, who used it as a summer home. By that time, the Johnson clan had moved their well-tuned operation up to the capitol city, where they opened a seafood restaurant appropriately called "Johnson's Hummocks."

Chief Murphy used the house as a summer getaway until April 1956, when a 13 year-old-boy who lived nearby set it ablaze. The home that stood up to the big fire in 1925 and the hurricanes of 1938 and 1954 was consumed by a conflagration set by a boy who did it because "Heck, I just like fires."

So, the next time you stroll down past the old foundation on the Hummocks, stop and close your eyes and imagine the area as it is in the accompanying photograph taken around 1910. The Johnson homestead can be seen off in the distance among a grove of trees and I bet that, in just a minute or two, a whole slew of Model "T" Fords are going to pull into view, hurrying up the lane on their way to the best clambake that they ever had.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

A broken foundation is all that remains of the Johnson's Hummocks, a popular summer attraction in Rhode Island in the early 1900s. The family moved north to open a restaurant in Providence in 1945 and the last remaining building burned to the ground in a fire in 1956.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**"The Spirit of Wildacres," a sculpture of a Narragansett Indian, now rests at a home on First Avenue in East Greenwich. However, the details of how it traveled from the entrance of Charles Davol's hunting lodge on his Wildacres estate in North Kingstown (shown below) are still unclear.**



## The View From Swamptown

### More on the Davol Estate's Giant Indian Head Statue

A while back, I introduced you to the remarkable Indian Head statue that formerly graced the entrance to Charles Davol's extraordinary South Quiddnessett estate "Wildacres". This hunting and fishing retreat of nearly 1000 acres encompassed much of what is now Quonset/Davisville and featured private stocked ponds for fishing as well as for hunting. The grand sculpture called "The Spirit of Wildacres" sat front and center at the main entryway to Davol's Hunting Lodge which would eventually become the quarters for the Admiral in charge of the Navy installation at Quonset. If all that isn't remarkable enough, the statue, which was "lost" after the US Naval Air Station took control of the land, just before America's entry into WWII, re-appeared in the front yard of a home on First Avenue in East Greenwich. When we last took a gander at this statue, I asked anyone in the area with any knowledge of how it arrived at its present home to contact me and allow me to share this work of arts' amazing provenance` with all of us. Sadly, I have yet to get this call, but I have learned a lot about the origins of "The Spirit of Wild Acres".

It seems that "the Spirit of Wildacres" was commissioned by Charles Davol in 1921. The artist who won this commission was Rhode Island born sculptor Henri Schonhardt of Fruit Hill just outside of our capitol city. Schonhardt, who is best known for his wonderful larger than life rendition of General Nathaniel Greene at the State House and his Soldiers and Sailors Monument in Bristol, carved the likeness of a Narragansett brave out of a single 5-ton block of Bedford granite, completely by hand, in the front yard of his Fruit Hill home. The sculpture was installed at Wildacres in August of 1921 and stood there proudly until it disappeared. The last mention of it I uncovered was in a ProJo piece in 1968, according to the article written by special features editor Garrett Byrnes, the Navy was very interested in finding it but had no clue where it was. Byrnes remarked, "It was a pretty large and heavy thing to lose."

Amazingly enough, that's not all that was "lost" from Davol's palatial hunting compound. You see on another enormous brick entryway pillar sat another grand outdoor sculpture, this time in bronze, created by Christian Petersen. It featured two life-sized wildcats cavorting, and it's still MIA as it were. So the plot thickens and the mysteries deepen. Somewhere out there, someone knows the story behind Schonhardt's magnificent rendition of a Narragansett warrior and perhaps they even know of the whereabouts of the Petersen bronze. I'd be pleased as could be to get a call this time telling us the whole story behind this wonderful artifice of a bygone era. If I hear anything I'll be sure to let you know.

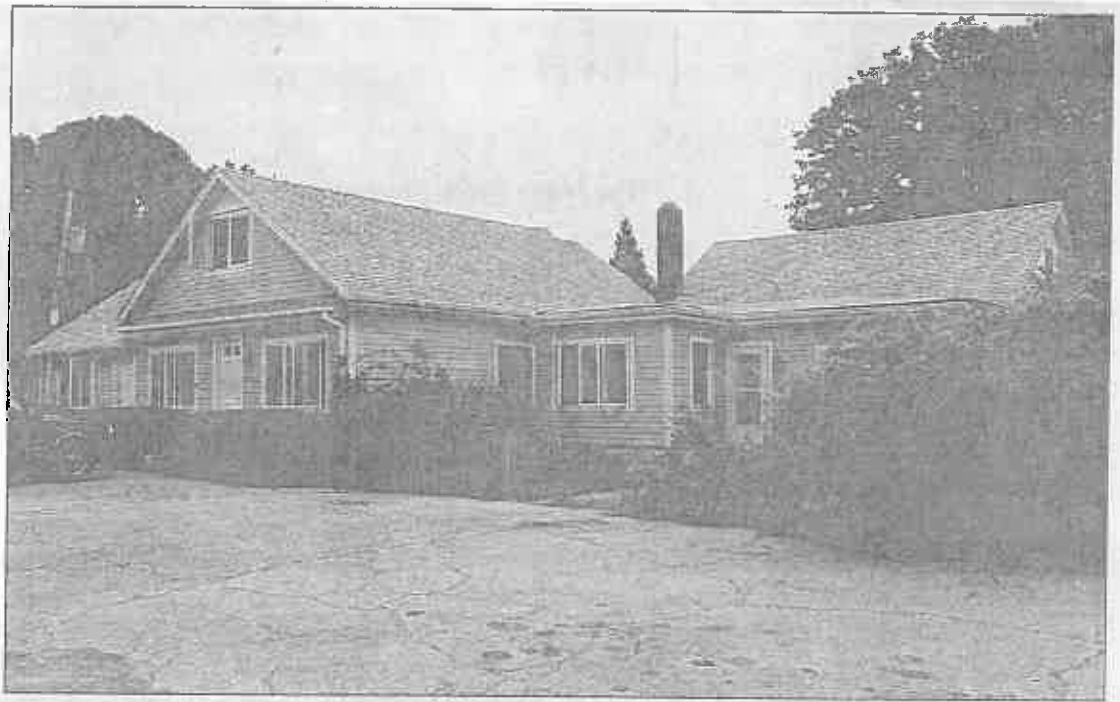
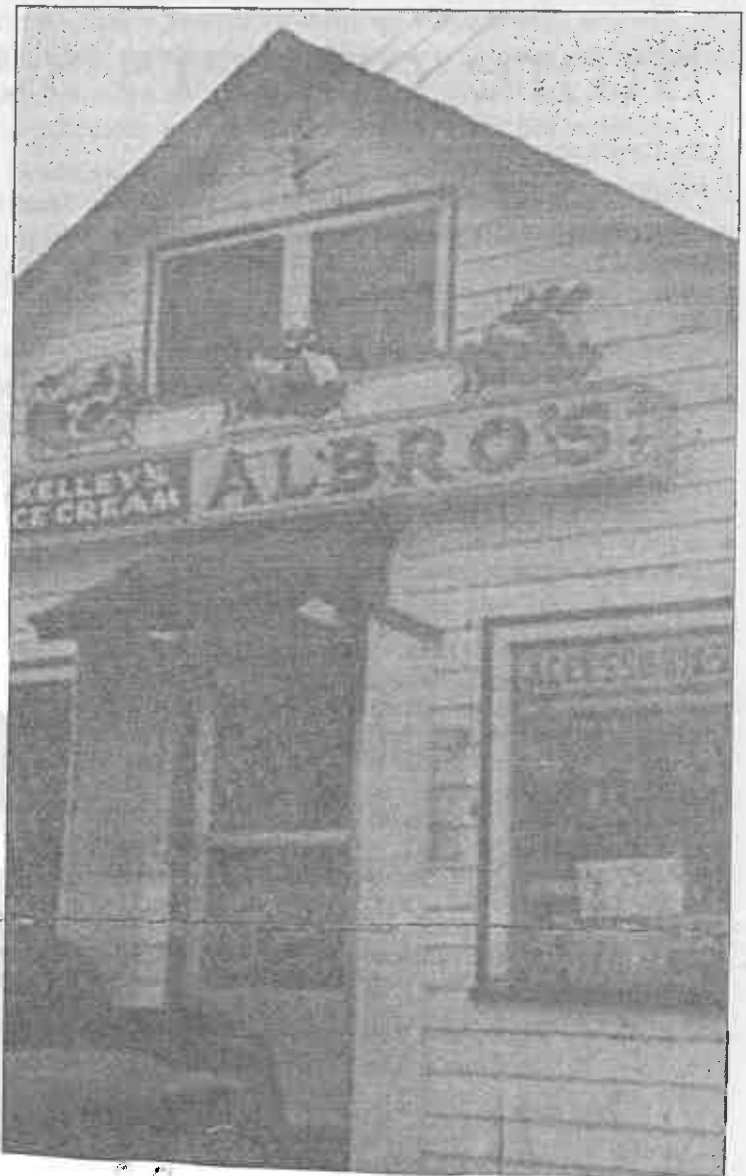


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The old Albro's variety store (shown in a 1950s-era photograph below) closed in 1976 after 30 years of serving the community of Shore Acres. The building, located at 266 Shore Acres Ave., is now a residential property.



## The View From Swamptown

### Albro's Variety Store

Ursula (Schaab) Albro was a human dynamo. A widow long before she should have been, she raised four wonderful children, kept up a happy home, enriched the lives of friends, family, and neighbors, and oh yeah, along with all that, she ran a full service variety store that served the needs of countless folks out in Shore Acres for more than three decades. "Wait a minute", you're probably saying "there's no variety store in the very residential neighborhood of Shore Acres!" Well you're right there isn't now, and unless you know where to look you'd never realize there ever was one; but from 1946 to 1976, Albro's Variety store was the epicenter of Shore Acres and Mrs. Albro was its heart and soul.

Ursula's husband, Howard E. Albro, a long time employee of the phone company, had purchased the land in Shore Acres back when it was an up-and-coming summer community in the early 1940's. He saw it as a summer place where he and his family could escape from the urban surroundings of their home on Broad Street in Providence. He and Ursula came up with the idea of a little convenient variety store in that neighborhood as a way to help the growing family, daughter Virginia and sons H. Earl, Robert and Ralph, make ends meet. His untimely death though left Ursula alone with her children and their future, and she had no intention of failing.

After Howard's death, the Albro's moved to Shore Acres year-round and Ursula and the family got to work. She herself would take the daily trip, in the wee hours of the morning, to the Providence produce market to pick up all the fresh wares needed at the store. Oldest son Earl would be off to the meat markets at the same time, and eventually became a self-taught butcher of sorts, providing for the needs of their patrons. Later Earl opened his own business which he ran out of the store, I'll bet half of North Kingstown, during that timeframe, learned to drive from certified driving instructor Earl Albro. After returning from the city, Ursula and daughter Virginia would open up the store and serve as clerks all day, serving up groceries, scooping ice cream, and even pumping gas when Ralph and Robert weren't around. Those two boys helped out as needed, stocking shelves, pumping gas, clerking, and even delivering groceries to homebound folks who couldn't make it to the store. They also helped out sorting the morning and evening newspapers too, as Albro's was a central location where numerous paperboys on bikes and on foot would pick up the papers for home delivery.

After the store closed in the evening (it also closed for lunch each day), Ursula's job was not done; there were family needs to attend to, the bookkeeping had to be kept up to date, plans for the next day had to be formulated – as I said Ursula Albro was a human dynamo.

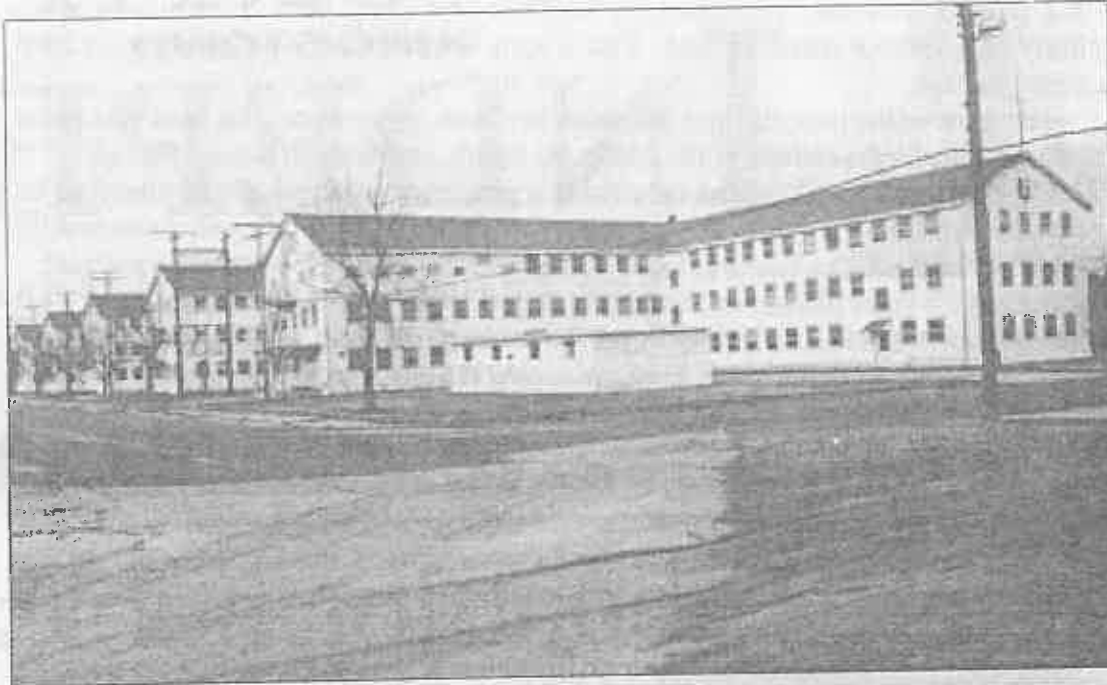


**A portion of the Quonset Naval Air Station can be seen in the background of Albro's variety store in this aerial picture taken in the early 1950s.**

Albro's Variety Store was successful in its little location, because the world was a different place back then. It was a time when family's were happy to have one car no less two or three and when dad was off at work, mom was tied to her neighborhood and it sure was great to have a place where you could shop within walking distance of home. There were no giant impersonal supermarkets then, only grocery and variety stores like Ryans in Wickford, the Stevens Store in Davisville, Lafreniere's in Allenton and yes, Albro's out in Shore Acres staffed by folks you knew and trusted; they were your friends and your neighbors. But as the world changed, the need for places like Albro's changed as well and in 1976, due to intense competition from the base commissary annex and the area's earliest true supermarket, Almac's, Ursula Albro was forced to close up the variety store for good. When she did hang those keys on the rack in the house for the last time, she was 85 years old and had spent nearly every day, six days a week, behind the counter at the store since 1946. Ursula passed away in 1980 at the age of 89 year old.

I drive by the old Albro Store on a regular basis these days and I can't help but remember my one experience there. As a boy of 13 I rode my bike out to Shore Acres from Wickford just because I wanted to explore the shoreline there looking for what ever interesting item that the sea had tossed up there during the last summer storm. Before I headed back home I stopped at the store and treated myself to a cone of maple walnut ice cream. Mrs. Albro gave me a smile and a generous scoop and I ate it on my bike in front of the store; I think it was the best ice cream I had ever tasted.





**The former administration building, known as Building 101, was thought to be one of the largest all-wooden structures in the eastern half of the United States. The demolition process for the building was completed in 2001 after about a year of work.**



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

## The View From Swamptown

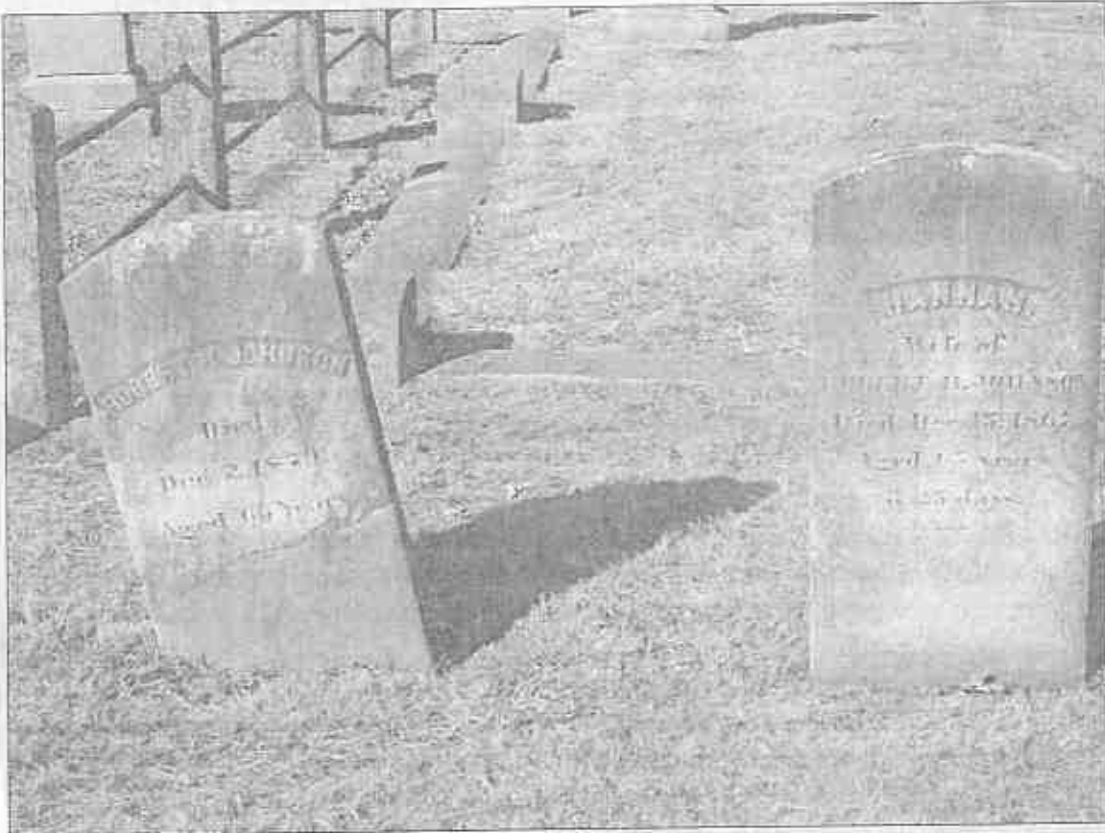
### Building 101

As there is an awful lot of activity occurring on the big empty lot at the corner of Post and Newcomb Roads, it seemed only fitting to take a look back at the history of this seemingly non-descript parcel of land. You'll soon see that there's definitely more here than meets the eye.

For most of the time that our fair town has been in existence, this land was either wooded or farmed by members of the Madison, Spink, and Watson clans. This all changed at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when this property was acquired and absorbed into the 370 acre Romano Vineyard, North Kingstown's one and only full scale wine making enterprise. At its peak, the Romano family produced 100,000 gallons of wine per year; utilizing 125,000 vines planted on the vast vineyard. This extraordinary enterprise, which is unknown to most folks here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and will be the subject of a future column, existed for decades, even producing the same quantities of vino during prohibition (supposedly for ecclesiastical purposes only – now that's a lot of communions). Its demise was not brought about by any business failings; this successful family run establishment was brought to an abrupt end when the land was taken by the US Government for the construction of the Quonset/Davisville base complex.

After the removal of the vineyard structures and vines, this particular plot of land was slated for the location of the main administration building for Davisville, this building was known across its decades long existence by its designation, Building 101. And what a building it was! Although very plain and utilitarian, Building 101, constructed by the George Fuller Company and the Merritt Chapman Company and completed in 1942, was enormous by any standards; whether it be those of the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century. This three story building, with its 10 wings contained 164,000 square feet of floor space and a total interior volume of 1.6 million cubic feet, was one big fellow. As a matter of fact, Building 101 was thought to be the largest all-wooden structure in the eastern half of the United States. In it was located the headquarters for the Naval Construction Battalion – US Atlantic Fleet and the Seabee and Seabee Reserves, also the large pharmacy for the base, the base dental clinic, two large auditoriums, two concrete multi-story vaults utilized for records and firearms storage, a photo shop/darkroom complex, payroll & personnel offices for civilian employees on the base, the base barber shop, and all other administrative functions for busy Davisville. The building also boasted its own dining hall and a separate small steam power plant for heating this massive structure. Building 101 was utilized in one capacity or another for nearly sixty years, and was still “ship-shape” when it was finally demolished just after the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

So, although I'm certainly no fan of “big box” buildings, its plain to see that the new Kohls and Lowes destined for this location can't hold a candle to their predecessor Building 101.



Robert H. Johnson and his wife, Hannah, left their Annaquatucket Road farm property pictured below to their daughter, Sarah, after their deaths. Pictured above are their headstones in the family plot in Elm Grove Cemetery.

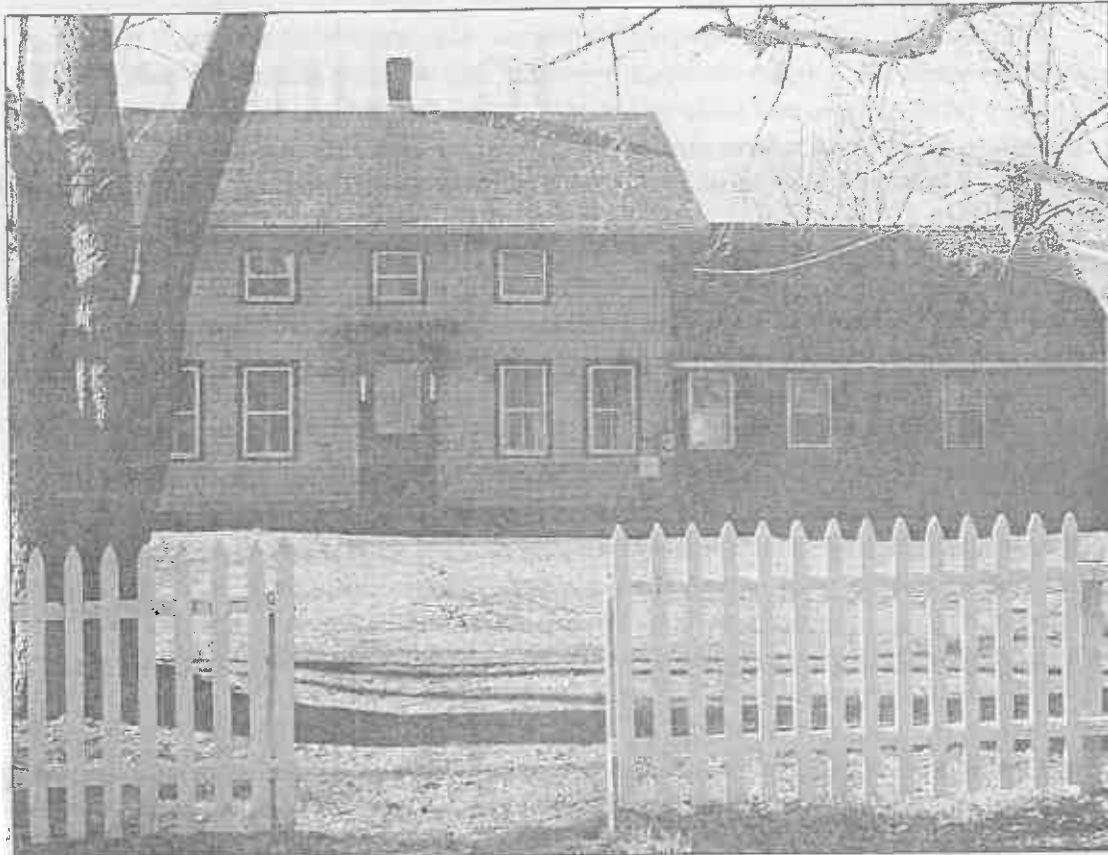


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

## The View From Swamptown

### The Johnson/Tingley Farmhouse Part 1

This week, we are going to begin a two part "*Swamptown gander*" looking at one of those unassuming homes that we all pass by, day in and day out, and rarely give a second thought regarding all that has transpired there. Our subject, the big old farmhouse on Annaquatucket Road, just a hundred yards or so east of its intersection with Prospect Avenue, is just such a place; this house has quite a story to tell to anyone who takes the time to search it out.

As near as I can tell the farmhouse dates back to around the time of the Civil War and was originally owned by the inter-related Johnson/James clan who moved up here from the nearby village of Richmond to farm the 20+/- acre parcel of land. At that time there were two houses on the property; one was occupied by Robert H. Johnson and his wife Hannah and another smaller home in which the Johnson's eldest daughter Sarah and her husband Sylvester James and their family lived.

Details on the lives of the Johnson/James families are few and far between, most likely they ran a dairy operation here, along with a farm sufficient to provide their families with enough food to eat. One thing that is certain, is that by 1879 Sarah (Johnson) James had lost both of her parents and was the legal owner of the farm; now known locally as the Johnson place. Also during this time frame, Sarah and Sylvester had the two homes combined into one. By around 1880 or so, the house looked pretty much just as it does today.

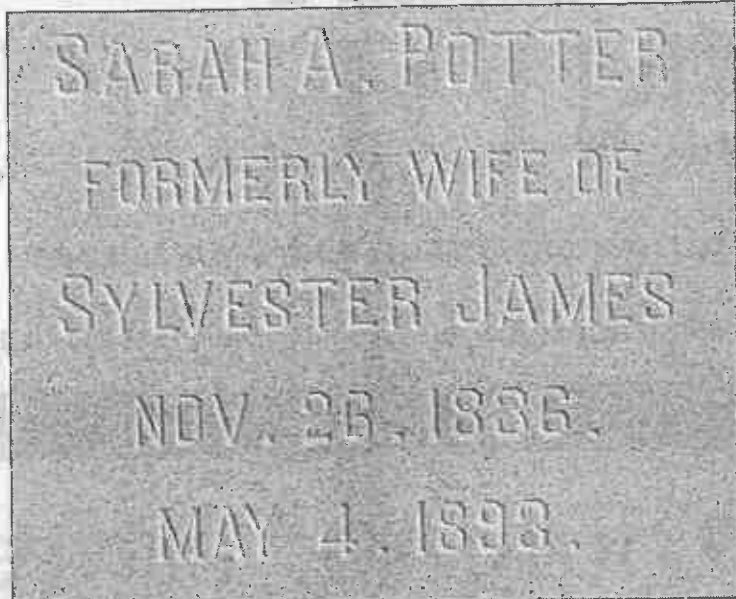
Shortly after combining the two homes into one, tragedy again struck the life of Sarah James when she lost her husband Sylvester. As we have seen in the past, 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> century farm widows and widowers rarely stayed single long; there was just too much work to be done on a farm during that timeframe and, as in most cases, Sarah remarried to a widower she met at her Church named Rowse Potter shortly after the death of her husband.

It's a good thing, in some respects, that the marriage of Sarah to Rowse Potter was one of convenience rather than love, for it seems that Rowse was not much of a husband, farmer, or provider. You might wonder how I could possibly know that, and the answer is that Sarah, through the wording of her last will and testament, written in 1890, tells the story loud and clear across the 117 years that separate us. In that document, Sarah leaves all of her worldly possessions to her two daughters Sarah and Mabel and their respective husbands. Everything that is, except for "*one bed and its bedding*" left to her husband Rowse, "*the one that he heretofore spent all his time in*" while they were married. Yes, Sarah got the last word in more ways than one as not only was she able to tell the world about Rowse's slothful ways through the wording of her will she also further let him know how she felt about him by the very specific way she asked for the wording on her headstone to be written. As you can see by the accompanying photograph Sarah, in death, let the world know who her real husband was.

Sarah, her parents and all the other related James' and Johnson's, share a family plot at Elm Grove just as they shared the farm out on Annaquatucket Road. I have no idea what ever happened to Rowse Potter, he does not show up in the records of the local

cemeteries, perhaps he's still roaming around with his favorite bed in tow looking for another place to plop down his lazy carcass for all eternity.

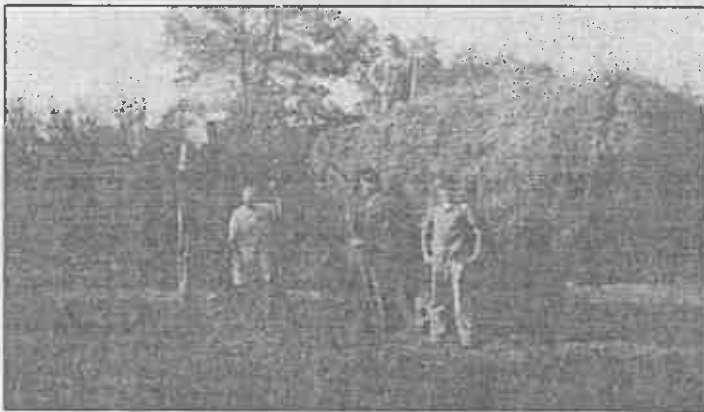
Next week we'll continue our journey through time at the Johnson/Tingley farmhouse as we examine the goings-on at the busy Tingley dairyfarm.



Sarah (Johnson) James Potter made it well known on her gravestone that she preferred her first husband, Sylvester James, to her second:



**Above, Everett Tingley (left) and his nephew, Eari North Jr., a World War II-era serviceman, pose with a heavy rake while working on the Tingley Dairy Farm, which serviced the area for more than 40 years. At right is one of the milk bottles that the family's dairy delivery business delivered all over town. Below, members of the Tingley/North clan are busy loading hay at the farm.**



## The View From Swamptown

### The Johnson/Tingley Farm

Last week we took a look at the lives and times of the Johnson/James clan, the earliest owners of the big farmhouse out on Annaquatucket Road. This week we are going to continue the story behind this fine home by examining the goings-on at the Tingley Dairy Farm run by J. William and Everett Tingley from 1910 until 1952.

The story really begins a generation earlier with the lives of George and Alfretta (Burton) Kingsley who immigrated to North Kingstown from Canada sometime after the turn of the century. George was a skilled master mechanic who may have brought his large family of eight children here so he could find work in one of the numerous textile mills in the area. He was known not only as a master mechanic, but as a master craftsman renowned for his ability to both construct and play extraordinary violins. The Tingley clan purchased the farm in 1910; some 15 years after the remaining Johnson/James family sold it off to Robert and Amelia Beck who in turn had sold it to John and Mary Straight. The Straight's then sold the farm to James William Tingley, George's eldest son, in February of 1910.

It appears that after the death of George Tingley in 1916, the whole clan lived on the big farm, working the land and running a fairly good sized dairy farm from the confines of the big barn behind the main house. Not only did they use their own twenty acres of land to pasture their herd of cows, they leased other pasture land from nearby landowners. During the farms peak through the 1930's and 40's, Tingley cows could be seen grazing in fields up and down Annaquatucket Road centered around the farmhouse and the road's intersection with Prospect Avenue. By this time, the farm's ownership had passed into the hands of Everett Tingley although it was still truly a family affair that included Bertha (Tingley) North and her family as well.

An important, and the most visible, part of the whole operation was the home delivery routes run in a classic old milk truck by, among others, Charlie Schneider and Bud North. The Tingley trucks were fixtures all across North Kingstown delivering fresh milk and other dairy products, in bottles like the one shown here in the accompanying photograph. Throughout the Depression and World War II, through good and bad times, the Tingley dairy farm kept going. Everett Tingley was well remembered as a man who not only took care of his own, no matter what the cost, but who also never failed to lend a helping hand to his neighbors as well; you can bet your bottom dollar that no one who was a Tingley Dairy customer ever went without a quart of milk just because they were a little short of funds one week or another. Everett Tingley was just that kind of guy. He retired from the dairy business in 1952 to a nice little home on Elam Street, where he lived out the rest of his days, passing on in early 1983 at the age of 94. The farm stayed in the family by way of the North's until 1968; when it was sold and the pasture land, like all similar pastures around it, was broken up into house lots for development.

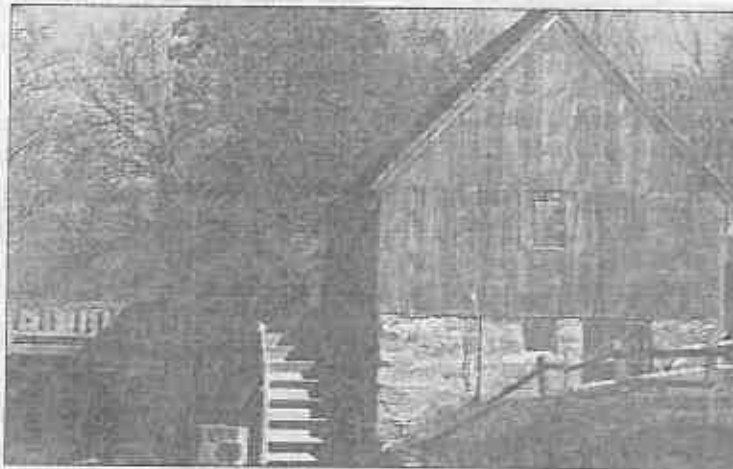
An unexpected pleasure for me, in researching this story, was to hear the tale of how, as a young boy of 7 years old, my dad waited on numerous occasions on the edge of West Main Street in front of his home, for Bud North to come by in his Tingley Milk Truck. Bud would allow my dad to ride with him up West Main and down Post Road as he delivered milk to his many customers in the wee hours of the morning. I can only

imagine how excited he must have been as he hung his head out the milk truck door listening to that familiar clink of bottle on bottle as Bud swapped out full bottles of fresh Tingley milk for the empties he would bring back to the truck. Then off they'd fly to their next stop and eventually on into their own futures.





**The gristmill at Gilbert Stuart Birthplace is pictured just after the turn of the last century.**



**PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR**

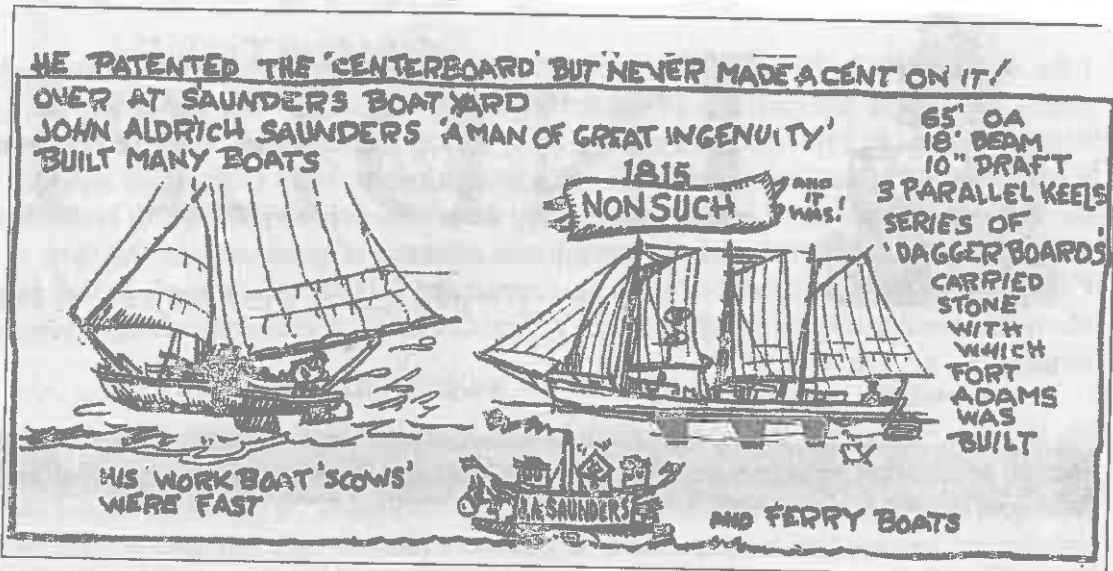
**The Giblert Stuart gristmill is pictured today.**

## The View From Swamptown

### The Old Grist Mill at Gilbert Stuart's Birthplace

Now that winter's chill is here with a vengeance, its hard to conjure up a vision of Spring arriving in our fair town. For me, one of my best spring memories revolve around the sights, the sounds, and yes even the smell of the alewife run each year at the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace. Back in the 1960's and early 1970's those determined fish ran so thick and plentiful that the Mettatumet River, just down stream of the Birthplace, seemed to be alive! Why, the sound of one of my boyhood friends hollering "the buckies are here!!" (bucky is the colloquial name for alewife), got us all up and running for our bikes just so we could race down there and see this yearly spectacle. Sure the buckies came up the Annaquatucket as well back then, and I could just walk down the street and see them there, but it was nothing like the deluge of fish that occurred each spring at the Birthplace and all of us made a point to make that pilgrimage down Gilbert Stuart Road to our fair town's alewife central. Why I can close my eyes to this day and still remember coasting down that final hill above the stream and then hearing the fish thrashing about in the river; why you could even sniff the air and know they were there!

Well, sadly, the buckies don't run like that anymore, and even sadder still, most boys don't seem to care about such things anymore. It seems that there's no one there to coast down the steep hills of Gilbert Stuart Road and listen to the wind and sniff the air hoping for the fist sure sign of spring in North Kingstown; the return of the alewives to Gilbert Stuart's Birthplace. But I am pleased to say that there will be one sound that will return to that special place this spring, one smell will waft across the breezes as it used to many many years ago. You see this year, for the first time since around 1908, the ancient Hammond gristmill, built in 1757 on the exact site of Thomas Mumford's 1686 sawmill, will be grinding hard corn again. Those wonderful old fine-grained granite mill stones, claimed by "old Shepard Tom Hazard" to be the best for making johnnycake meal in all the land, will slowly turn powered again by the Mettatumet as she races out of Pausacoco Pond, and grind RI hard corn again. Why tradition has it that, in the old days when the mill was utilized by farmers from all over South County, a bell hung from the eaves of the grist mill and was rung by farmers to call the miller back to the mill. That bell could be heard from quite a ways off, pealing loud and clear up out of the vale formed by the river. It would call the miller back, no matter who he was across the more than 150 years that the gristmill ran, whether he be a Hammond, a Hazard, a Sherman, or yes, you guessed it, a Cranston (William N. Cranston ran the mill for a time before he moved on to the Scrabbletown Mill a few miles north). So brace yourself against the cold February winds for now, but keep in the back of your mind the idyllic vision of riding an old three speed bike willy-nilly down a steep hill on a beautiful spring day with the sound of the millstones in the air and the smell of fresh ground hard corn wafting in the warm breeze and heck while we're dreaming lets throw in the sounds of thousands of alewives thrashing against the force of the river just like it used to be.



This illustration, created by artist Paule Loring and featured on the placemats for the old Top of the Dock Restaurant, shows some of John Aldrich Saunders' many creations, including the *Nonsuch*, which is believed to be the first boat ever constructed with removable centerboards.

## The View From Swamptown

### John Saunders and the Sloop Albany & the Schooner "Nonsuch"

Staring out across the tranquil beauty of the Pettasquamscutt Pond, just across the road and to the southeast of Gilbert Stuart's Birthplace, its hard to imagine that, during a time some 185 years ago, this was a busy place full of the hustle and bustle associated with an active early 19<sup>th</sup> century shipyard. The resident master boat builder at this shipyard was none other than John Aldrich Saunders, the progenitor of the famed Saunders line of boat builders; a family, which reached its zenith a little further to the southeast with its notable efforts in Willettsville, a place that would from thence forth be known as Saunderstown.

John A. Saunders had begun his boat building career back in 1809 outside of Westerly RI where the 23 year old built the 25 ton fishing sloop "Catherine" and the 30 ton "King Fisher". After 1813 he relocated his operation to South Kingstown where he constructed 9 more vessels of varying sizes, before relocating again in 1822 to the quiet shoreline of the Pettasquamscutt Pond just across the way from "the old Snuff Mill". It seems that the main attraction here for Saunders, was the vast amounts of good straight Oak and Chestnut that grew abundantly on the Hammond and Hazard owned lands in the vicinity. He would need plenty of good timber to construct the two substantial vessels he had in mind.

He began with the 120 ton sloop Albany constructed for Capt. William Tew of Newport for use as a packet boat between Newport and Albany NY. After completing that vessel, he began the three-masted shallow draft schooner "Nonsuch", a vessel so loaded with innovative features that it cemented J. A. Saunders place in ship building history for all eternity.

The 65 ft "Nonsuch" was constructed as a work boat suitable for hauling either building stone or lumber and was designed with a shallow draft to facilitate easy loading of these cumbersome and heavy cargoes. She was supposedly the first vessel ever constructed with removable centerboards rather than a permanent keel and also one of the first vessels to be steered with a wheel rather than a direct tiller. Saunders himself used the "Nonsuch" for a time hauling lumber and then sold it to parties in Newport who used it haul stone for the construction of Fort Adams. After that she ended her career back in Wickford Harbor, owned by Jonathan Reynolds who used her to haul both lumber and seaweed. After constructing this innovative vessel, John Saunders relocated his boat building enterprise back across the town line into South Kingstown; it would be the next generation of Saunders that would return to our fair town at shipyards in both Saunderstown and Wickford.

Paule Loring the artist, was also one of my predecessors at recording the history of these parts; he notes here, in an illustration taken from the placemats for the old Top of the Dock Restaurant, how important the Nonsuch was to local and maritime history.

Although he got a few of the facts wrong (J. A. never built ferries, his sons did, and the Nonsuch's draft was not 10 inches) he, as always, got the flavor of the thing just right!

Just a reminder! The "View From Swamptown" recent compilation is available now and makes the perfect holiday gift for the local history buff on your list. It includes the text and photos from the last four years of columns. Send \$48 plus \$4 shipping costs to Swamptown Enterprises, PO Box 94, North Kingstown RI 02852. This was printed in a limited run and won't be around forever.

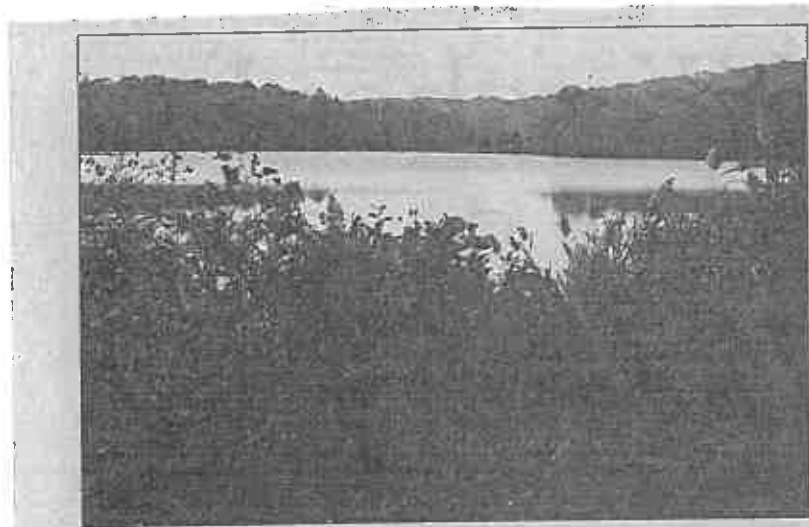


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Shipbuilder John Aldrich Saunders set up shop here on the upper part of the Pettaquamscutt River, just south of the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum, and built some of his most recognized vessels.

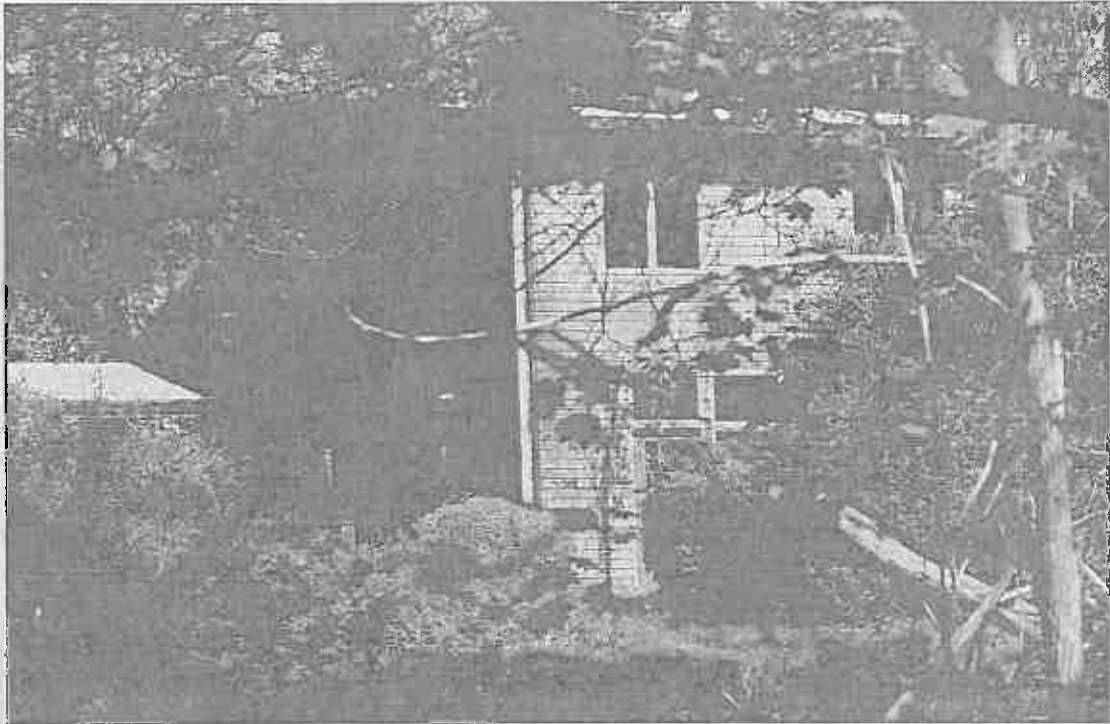


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**Winslow Ames, a famed art historian and museum curator, built this Saunderstown home in 1958 for his wife and family**

## Ames one of Saunderstown's 'A-list' May 17, 2007

As we have seen time and time again, the little seaside village of Saunderstown is a magical, magnetic sort of a place. It seems to inexplicably draw those with an artistic bent, a creative soul, toward it, and captures their hearts and minds, binding them to its peaceful, picturesque lanes and byways for the remainder of their days. From Edith Wharton, Teddy Roosevelt and Owen Wister to The LaFarge Family and Charles & Adolphe Borie; writers, statesmen and poets, artist and architects have called this little burg home. Today, we shall look at another member of this group; art historian and museum curator and director Winslow Ames.

Winslow Ames, born in 1907, grew up on Staten Island in New York City. He attended the prestigious Phillips Andover Academy, received an undergraduate degree from Columbia and a master's degree from Harvard. During his career, he served as the director of the Lyman Allyn Museum in New London, Conn., the Springfield Art Museum in Springfield, MO., and The Gallery of Modern Art in New York City. He also wrote extensively about art in professional journals and magazines and authored a number of books on the subject of art, his most notable being the first volume of "Great Drawings of All Times." Additionally, he translated and expanded upon an important German work--Joseph Meder's "Die Handzeichnungen" or "The Master of Drawing"--into English. On top of all this, Ames also managed to teach Art History at a number of universities, including the University of Rhode Island from 1966 to 1975. Ames succumbed to complications due to Alzheimer's disease and died in 1990 at the age of 83. As you can see by this brief summary of his remarkable career, Winslow Ames was another "A-lister" who called Saunderstown home.

The house that Winslow Ames had constructed for himself and his wife Anna (Gerhard) in 1958 was designed by a fellow Columbia graduate, Rockwell DuMoulin. DuMoulin not only operated an architectural firm in Providence, he was also an instructor and administrator at the Rhode Island School of Design's famed School of Architecture. The home is a fine representative example of modern residential architecture, thoughtfully sheathed in weathered vertical boarding that fits in perfectly with its surrounding Saunderstown environment. As this great home enters its 50th year, it seems fitting to stop a bit and contemplate the remarkable life of Winslow Ames.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Shown above, the Barbour's Heights Cottage is now a private residence, but it once served as one of the most-desired vacation destinations in its heyday (below). In fact, President Teddy Roosevelt was one of those that came to the hotel to take in its views of the sea (bottom).





## The View From Swamptown Freeman Tefft and the Barbour's Heights Cottage

Freeman Perry Watson Tefft had already spent more than thirty years in the hotel business when the 49 year old began construction of his grand "Barbour's Height Cottage" summer hotel, just north of Saunderstown, in the Fall of 1899. Born in 1850 to Stephen and Phebe (Watson) Tefft, he had dedicated his life to the hostelry business. After an education in the public schools of North Kingstown, the farmer's son was sent off to Cheshire Academy in Connecticut to learn the book keeping trade. He began his career as a clerk at the Atlantic House at the Narragansett Pier, not only working his way up through the ranks to a management position, but also marrying the owner, Abijah Browning's daughter Mattie as well. He left the Atlantic House to become the manager of the Elmwood House and the Revere House, both also on the Narragansett Pier and was a successful and well known figure in the area. Unfortunately Freeman's wife and two children all died in a short period of time and Freeman, unable to stay in an area that reminded him of his family, left the Pier and took a position in Jamestown running the still extant Bay Voyage Inn and an additional summer inn, the Prospect House. When Freeman and his two brothers inherited the large Tefft family farm of his father at Plum Beach in the middle 1890's, he knew the time was right for a bold move. The Sea View Electric Trolley Line ran right through the farm at its eastern edge along the Narragansett Bay and he knew, with its beautiful vistas and fine beach, this was a great location for a hotel of his own. To finance this venture, he divided up much of the farm into "cottage lots" and sold them off. These cottage lots make up what we now know as the "Plum Beach" neighborhood. He moved into his new hotel with his second wife Izitte (Gardiner) and their young son Stephen and opened it to much fanfare in the summer of 1900.

Freeman Tefft's wonderful Barbour's Heights Hotel was an instant success and soon became a favorite of all sorts of folks visiting the Saunderstown area each summer, including Teddy Roosevelt and his family. Its rooms were always full, booked months, even a whole season in advance. The area was so popular in fact that the Tefft's eventually rented out some of the adjacent cottages to take up the overflow, when their owners weren't using them. Freeman and Izitte Tefft had a second son, Freeman Jr. and lived a wonderful life until his death at the age of 72.

Freeman's wife, brothers, and sons inherited the Hotel and, calling themselves the Plum Beach Corporation, ran it just as he had, until the Sea View Trolley Line shut down in the late 1920's. From that point on, the Barbour's Heights Cottage ended a 30 year career as a hotel and became a private home.

As the sellers all kept their own summer places at Plum Beach, they included a number of interesting provisions on the Deed of Transfer when they sold it to Providence businessman Earl H. Ashley in 1929. These include a prohibition on the keeping of pigs or hens on the property and allowed absolutely no lewdness or prostitution. Also subsequent owners were banned from illegal gaming or the selling or making of liquor on the property. These prohibitions were passed on to the next owner in 1953, Arthur Rodgers. You've got to love the irony of the fact that, a Rodgers relation who, on



**The old Browning Farm, shown in a current photo above, was the home to several generations of the Browning family, including John A. Browning (below, left), Izitte Cole Browning (below, center) and Sarah IPC Browning (below, right).**



## The View From Swamptown

### The Farm on Browning Hill

Back when I was growing up in the 1960's, it was a "rite of passage" of sorts; one of those personal challenges, a milestone that defined when you went from being just a kid to being one of the guys. I'm talking, of course, about riding your bike all the way up to the top of Browning Hill on Boston Neck Road without having to stop, slow down, or heaven's forbid, get off and walk your bike that last few feet. The really cool guys made it look effortless, back in the day when all bikes were one-speed, their legs would churn away without pause and they'd arrive at the top of the hill seemingly without raising up a sweat. It was all about building momentum really, you'd start out riding as fast as you possibly could all the way down by Hamilton Elementary and build up speed as you whizzed by Gilbert Stuart Road and the dirt road down to Rome Point. If you had what it took, you'd ride that momentum all the way up the long steep incline to the top of the hill where you'd pause and look over at the pastoral scene laid out before you at the old Browning Farm, while you caught your breath a bit. I remember gazing at the great grand rambling house that was the centerpiece of the Browning Farm back then; often there were cows in the field in front of the place, the stone walls were great; boy, having the opportunity to look at that vista made the hard-fought ride up that cursed hill seem worthwhile.

Not much has changed at the Browning Farm really, it's still a grand building, although it's much harder to make out through the trees than it was 40 years ago, there are at least still cows in the front field from time to time. The story of the Browning Farm begins back in March of 1794, when brothers William and Gardiner Browning purchased a 100 acre parcel of land from Peter Greene. By August of 1796, Gardiner had sold his half share to William and bought another farm nearby where he moved with his wife Izitte (Cole) and started a family. William and his wife Sarah (Cole) purchased 75 more adjacent acres to add to the farm, had a fine home and barn constructed, and moved in with their family around 1799. When William passed on, he left the 175 acre farm to his son John A. Browning and his wife Izitte C. (Browning) Browning who was also his cousin. John had, in between his many duties at the farm, been educated in the sciences at the Washington Academy in nearby Wickford and had always "paid considerable attention to the subject of agriculture". As such, he took the farm to new heights, making it one of the most profitable in the area, raising potatoes, grains, hay, corn and dairy cattle. He and Sarah had two daughters, one of which died in infancy and the other, born in 1844, was given the impressive moniker of Sarah Izitte Phebe Cole Browning. After her father and then her mother passed on in rapid succession in the late 1880's, Sarah IPC Browning sold the farm to her cousin Benjamin Gardiner with the stipulation that she could continue to live there as long as he owned it. This is, indeed, exactly what happened and Sarah stayed on in the only home she had ever known until cousin Ben sold the place in 1906.

Sarah IPC moved to the Wickford home of another cousin Thomas Jay Peirce, the Town Clerk of North Kingstown, and lived out her days there with the Peirce family until she joined her parents at Elm Grove Cemetery in 1921. Her family farm, after 112 years in Browning hands, had been purchased by wealthy Providence financier Cyrus Perrin



**The old Browning Farm was also home to the Browning Hill Farm dairy, shown here in a circa-1910 photo. Started by Cyrus Perrin Brown, there are still several examples of the business' milk bottles in existence.**

Brown, who added it to his already substantial North Kingstown landholdings (for more on the remarkable story of the very philanthropic Cyrus Brown see last years column on him). Cyrus Brown made the Browning home his South County center of operations and hired prominent architect Norman Isham to design and supervise the construction of two appropriate additions to the house. Brown also hired on Colin Brown (no relation) to act as a tenant farmer and caretaker on the property as well as run a very large and successful local door to door dairy delivery service called the Browning Hill Farm. There are not only numerous Browning Hill Farm milk bottles floating around, but also a number of old-timers with fond memories of their milkman Colin Brown.

When Cyrus Brown passed on, he left all of his substantial landholdings, including the 175 acre Browning Farm to his daughter Adelaide Viall. In turn she sold the Farm to the Johnson family in 1952, who broke the big farm up into the individual parcels that today make up the Plantation Lane private subdivision.

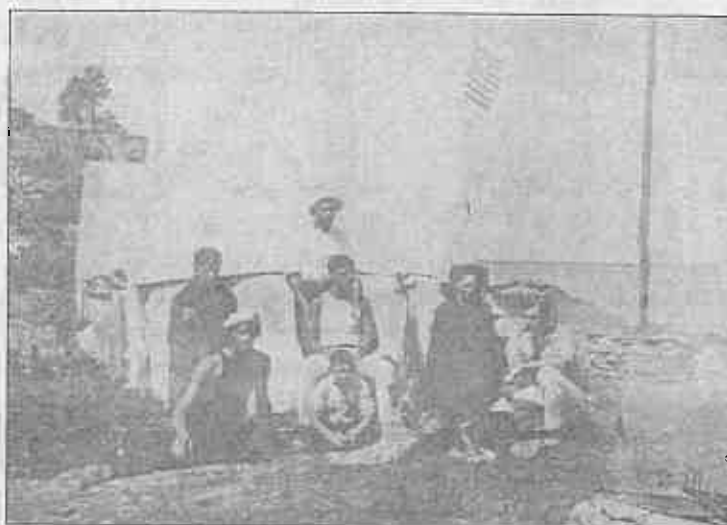
The core of the once enormous 175 acre Browning Farm, including Colin Brown's caretaker cottage, is now contained within a picturesque three acre parcel that fronts the Boston Neck Road just as it always has. That road is now far too busy to allow for boys to use it to prove their mettle on the steep incline that less and less people know as Browning Hill. But as far as I'm concerned, that's how I'll always see it, through the eyes of a 12-year-old who has just done something special.



**The campers work on their skiffs in Wickford before leaving on their great adventure.**



**With their gear stowed aboard and the skiffs under tow, the boys head out on the fishing vessel *Lewis Brothers* to be dropped off at the Hazard's Quarry campsite.**



**The group of campers poses for a photo at the Hazard's Quarry campsite.**

## The View From Swamptown

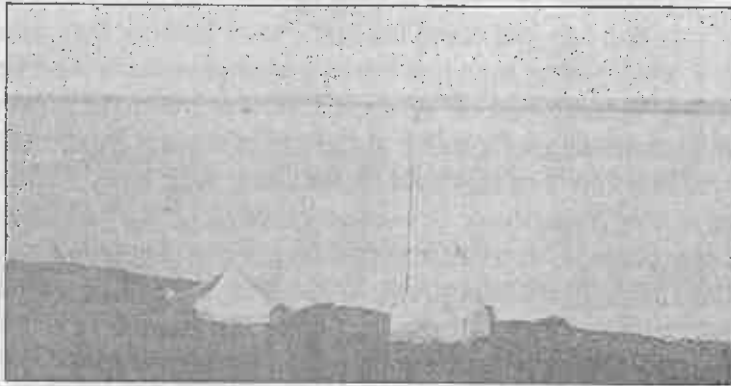
### Camping at Hazard's Quarry

Although so much has changed here in our fair town as the years have marched on; decades following decades, centuries ticking by one after another, some things remain constant – some things you can just count on, and one of those is that, whether it be 1728, 1800, 1904, or 2007, well, young men just love a grand adventure. And that's just what our tale is about today – young men off on a grand adventure in the summer of 1904; camping along the Saunderstown shoreline at the site of the old Hazard's Quarry.

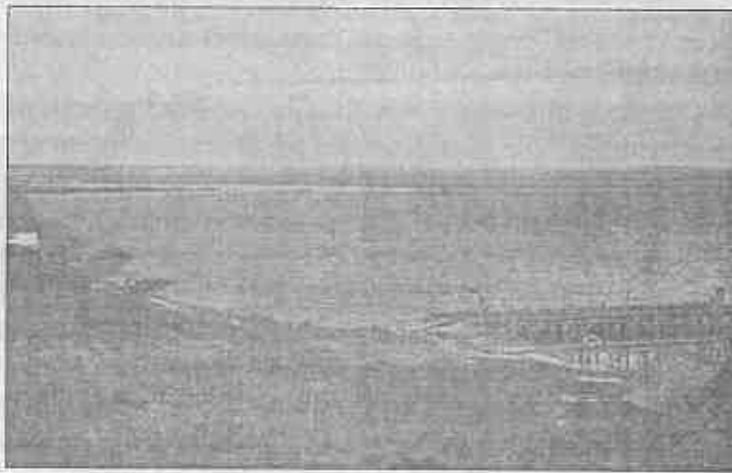
The principal characters of this bold undertaking were two Wickford boys; friends and neighbors their whole lives, Perry Peirce and Howard Lewis had spent the last few years off together at college, Worcester Polytechnical Institute (WPI) in nearby Massachusetts. They brought with them two WPI classmates, Dick Williams of Manchester Ct. and Fletcher Howe born and raised in Worcester, on a two week camping adventure along the shoreline of North Kingstown. Somewhere along the way during the planning of their trip they added two youthful members to the group, Perry's younger brother Raymond and Howard's cousin Harry. Who knows, perhaps the inclusion of the two younger boys was part of the bargain required to secure permission for the adventure from their respective parents, but whatever the case, on a fine August day, after much planning and the securing of all the necessary supplies, the six boys were off on the fishing vessel "Lewis Brothers" ready to begin their grand excursion along the wild shoreline of Saunderstown.

Actually the location, although it looked quite wild and remote was well chosen by the Lewis and Peirce clans. The shoreline they set their tents up on was well protected from the sea by a sandbar just to the north and by the massive remains of the Hazard's Quarry dock to the south. North of the sandbar away was Plum Point and south of the docks a piece was Casey Point offering further protection from the ravages of the sea. Just west of the boys campsite was the tracks of the Sea View Trolley line which not only allowed the boys to travel off on day trips far and wide, but also afforded the opportunity for their parents to journey down and check in on them occasionally, and finally just to the west of them a hundred feet or so offshore, was one of the large fish traps of the Lewis brothers, this was something that they would tend to on a regular basis and offered another opportunity to keep tabs on the young adventurers.

After getting dropped off, the boys got right to work setting up camp and generally having a grand time. They all got nicknames and specific assignments; Perry was the "Ye Woodsman", Howard "Ye Leader", Dick was "Ye Keeper of Ye Purse", Fletcher was "Ye Recorder" and the boys Harry, "Ye Maker of Beds" and Ray "Ye Youngster". They explored the area, which included the old Quarry site utilized to mine stone for the Point Judith breakwater and happily for the lads (and perhaps missed by their parents in the planning), the Holiday House summer camp for the Girls Friendly Society. They did the kinds of things that boys did back then, fished and hunted, swam and dug clams, told tales around roaring campfires, goofed around, wrestled, teased each other, and, in spite of the ever present watchful eyes of Holiday House camp leaders and Nuns – Sisters Morgan & Brunckow, flirted with the young ladies at the Girls Friendly



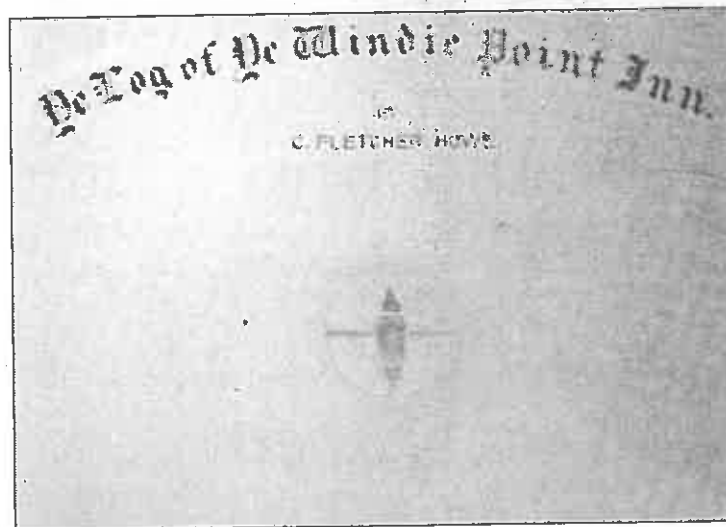
The above photo looks across the campsite east to Jamestown. The Plum Beach Lighthouse stands alone in the West Passage. Below is the view from the bluff above the campsite looking north; the tents can be seen on the extreme left and the ruins of the Quarry Dock to the right.





Camp. Luckily for us, 100 or so years later, at least one of the lads took his task quite seriously, as Fletcher Howe meticulously recorded the events of each day of their two week foray into the "wilderness" and carefully scribed them all into a wonderful journal complete with more than 65 photographs of their time together.

I'm certain, the two weeks of fun and adventure flew by for the six boys, just like their entire childhoods had for their parents. This indeed was their last fling as children and young men; the four older would graduate from college soon and then on to the world of adult worries and concerns. Ye Leader Howard Lewis would graduate from WPI and eventually become the lead power engineer for the Boston Trolley system. His pal Perry, Ye woodsman would graduate as well and return to Wickford to serve as NK's Town Clerk for decades. Dick Williams, Ye Keeper of ye Purse, graduated as well and then worked for Wheeler Steam Turbines for a time before joining a promising startup enterprise called General Motors where he became the regional director for South American Operations. Fletcher too, "Ye Recorder" graduated from WPI with a degree in Physics, but soon after graduation went down a different career path when he joined an Episcopal seminary and entered the priesthood, he would serve as a missionary in China, and a rector at St. Paul's in Portsmouth RI before settling into his final assignments in California and Honolulu. Even the two younger boys, before long would be men. Harry Lewis, Ye maker of beds, became an architect after studying at RISD. During his career he designed among other things, what is now the Wickford Middle School, the Rhodes on the Pawtuxet Ballroom, the old Coventry High School and numerous buildings at Quonset Point. The youngster, Raymond Peirce, eventually became a surveyor for the State of Rhode Island. Ahead of them, unbeknownst to them then, lay two world wars, a great depression, careers, marriages, children, and the worries and cares of the world. But none of that mattered in that wonderful summer of 1904; they were just boys, doing what boys did then, now, and before, having the time of their lives together with nothing more than a tent and a campfire to concern them.



Fletcher Howe, dubbed "Ye Recorder," kept a meticulous journal of the boys' adventures while camping at Hazard's Quarry in August 1904.



**Edwin Babcock founded Babbie's Lunch and Variety Store (top) in Saunderstown but is more famously known for riding out the Great Hurricane of 1938 inside the Plum Beach Light House (seen at right). Babcock and assistant keeper John Ganze survived the storm, which completely destroyed the Whale Rock Light (middle).**

PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

## The View From Swamptown

### Edwin Babcock, the Plum Beach Lighthouse, and the Great Hurricane of 1938

Countless amazing stories came out of the natural catastrophe we now call the '38 Hurricane. Houses were picked clean off their foundations and carried far inland, yachts and fishing vessels rode the great storm surge up the bay and were deposited intact well away from the shoreline, whole neighborhoods were wiped away and never found. The difference between life and death could literally be defined by a matter of a few hundred yards to the right or to the left. This storm not only changed North Kingstown and the rest of Rhode Island, it affected people profoundly for a generation or more; no one looked out at the sea and saw it in the same way after the events of that late September day in 1938.

One of the most incredible stories to come out of that maelstrom involved one of our fair town's own, Edwin Babcock, a 46 year old shopkeeper associated with Saunderstown's mainstay village market Babbie's, and a part time substitute lighthouse keeper on the Plum Beach Light. Babcock was filling in during that fateful week, because the principal keeper, Rueben Phillips was on vacation visiting family in Vermont. Babcock shared the lighthouse duties with John Ganze, assistant keeper who was in charge during Phillip's absence.

Around 2:30 that afternoon, Babcock, who had planned to row the dory ashore for a quick visit home, noticed that the wind was picking up and the seas were getting rough, so rough in fact that he gave up on his attempt to make it to shore and returned to the light. He and Ganze realized that a storm of some consequence was on its way and they began to secure the lighthouse for what was to come. The afternoon's high tide was 15 feet above normal levels and before they could think twice, 20 foot seas were lashing away at the lighthouse. Edwin Babcock, peering out the window of one of the upper levels, saw a yacht passing by at "60 miles an hour". Babcock and Ganze logging the incident, assumed the passengers of the vessel must have perished but they ended up surviving the storm and landed smack dab in the middle of Fox Island, just outside of Wickford. The seas got higher still and the keepers moved to the fourth level of the lighthouse and watched in horror as crushed boats and wrecked homes were being swept by them at a breakneck pace. Suddenly a 30 foot wave smashed into the light breaking open doors and windows and washing the entire contents of the structure out to sea. The two men retreated to the little room just below the lantern; a room that held the fog bell machinery and lashed themselves, back to back, to the main central column, a cast iron pipe that contained the counterweights for the clockwork mechanism that rotated the big lens of the lighthouse. They did this just in the nick of time, for just as they got themselves secured, the main hurricane surge engulfed the structure and it briefly was completely underwater as the sea raged by and the structure of the lighthouse shuddered and swayed against the extraordinary forces that Mother Nature was unleashing upon it. And then, just as quickly as it arrived, it was over. As darkness descended on the light, Babcock and Ganze untied themselves from the clockwork column and waited out the long wet night. At the first light of dawn, they ventured out to survey the scene. It was then that they first realized what they had been through and how lucky they were to be alive. They signaled south to the nearby light at Whale Rock Point and got no response,

and as they peered down the bay to the spot where the Whale Rock Light ought to have been, they realized it had vanished along with assistant keeper Walter Eberle. As a matter of fact, the remains of Whale Rock Light were only recently located by a team of underwater archaeologists. It had been smashed to the bay floor by the same enormous storm surge wave that had engulfed the Plum Beach Light.

So let's take a look at the question that most certainly haunted Babcock and Ganze for the rest of their days. Why did the Plum Beach Light survive the onslaught and the Whale Rock Light did not? The answer to that question has to do with two unrelated incidences in the history of the Plum Beach Light itself. Firstly, back in 1898-9 as it was being constructed, the caisson (the 33 foot diameter cast iron cylinder that forms the light's base) that the light sits upon was sunk 10 feet deeper into the mud due to a layer of soft sand found beneath the lighthouse site. Whale Rock Light, closer to shore, was not set in the mud as deeply, as ledge was encountered much sooner. The difference in the height of these two identical lighthouses is readily apparent by looking at the two accompanying photos. Secondly, 20 years earlier, the harsh winter of 1918, a year when the temperatures were so brutal that the upper bay froze solid, had caused damage to the Plum Beach Light. The pressure of the ice on the caisson was so great that it cracked the cast iron structure. To compensate for this problem in the future, the base of the light was surrounded by an additional 9000 tons of rip rap stone. Whale Rock Light, farther down the bay, was not affected by ice and was therefore not afforded the extra protection provided by this stone. So it was just the luck of the draw that saved Babcock and Ganze.

Edwin Babcock lived out the rest of his days in Saunderstown within a stone's throw of the Plum Beach Light. On occasion he could be convinced to tell the tale of that afternoon and evening of Sept. 21<sup>st</sup> 1938, a handful of hours that seemed to never end. He passed away in 1969 and rests easy now Elm Grove Cemetery. To learn more about the story of the Plum Beach Lighthouse, please look up the wonderful book "The Plum Beach Light: The Birth, Life, and Death of a Lighthouse" by Lawrence Bradner. This book was the source for much of this information.



Edwin Babcock (right) in a family photo from the late 1940s



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**The Vesta Underwear Company let Smith's Castle (above) fall into disrepair while under its ownership. The building was later rehabilitated thanks to a group of locals that would eventually become the Cocumscussoc Association.**



**The Vesta Underwear Company briefly owned Smith's Castle after Austen H. Fox used the land as collateral for a loan and fell behind in his payments. The company would sell the land just seven years later.**

## The View From Swamptown

### Smith's Castle & The Vesta Underwear Company

If a place stands the test of time for as long as Smith's Castle has, you can bet that there's bound to be an anomaly or two somewhere in its long record of ownership. With more than 325 years of history, Smith's Castle's anomaly certainly has to be the seven year period during the 1940's in which it was owned by a Providence textile concern, the Vesta Underwear Company.

This curious chapter in the Castle's existence actually begins a bit earlier in April of 1936 when Austen H. Fox, the son of the respected Austen G. & Alice Fox who had purchased the Castle in 1919, used the Smith's Castle property as collateral for a series of loans totaling \$37,500. Now while that doesn't sound like an awful lot in this day and age, it gains a whole lot more perspective when you run that figure through the US Dept of Commerce inflation calculator and come up with a 2008 comparable amount of just a shade over a half a million dollars. Now I have not been able to ascertain what Austen the Younger needed all that money for; he may have been utilizing it to start up the Fox family soft drink bottling plant sited on the property, as you may remember both Coca-Cola and Five-O sodas were bottled here, or maybe it had something to do with the Cocumscussoc Dairy Bar he ran at the corner of Post Road and West Main Street, this ice cream parlor eventually was obtained by another similar startup chain that went by the name of Howard Johnsons, or perhaps it was just a product of the times, after all it was the Depression. Whatever the case, a few years after the passing of his father, Austen the Elder in 1937, young Austen was in trouble, he was behind on his payments and the note was being called. And his family's enormous piece of property, which stretched from West Main Street in Wickford to just south of Camp Avenue in the north was going on the auction block.

The entity that was calling in Austen's note was not a bank as you might expect, you see Austen H. Fox borrowed his money, for some unknown reason, directly from the coffers of the Vesta Underwear Company of Providence, run by Ovide & Percival De St. Aubin. Again we have a mystery here, I can find no reason why a company that made fine ribbed cotton undergarments for ladies and children on new-fangled imported French and Swiss circular looms was in the loan business, and, for that matter, I can find no connection between the De. St. Aubin clan and the Fox family. Whatever the reasons, in July of 1940, Fox family ownership of Cocumscossoc ended and Vesta Underwear took possession of the Castle and all its property, including little Rabbit Island, and prepared to auction it off to the highest bidder.

It would appear, from an examination of the records, that that auction, held on July 16, 1940 was unsuccessful as Vesta Underwear retained ownership of the property. Business was business, and Vesta sold off parcels piecemeal from time to time, as a matter of fact, they even utilized the West Main Street piece that we now know as Wilson Park, in a little financial "shell game" of sorts when they sold it to a group of Providence and Cranston investors for \$10 in the morning and then turned around and bought it back for \$20,000 later that day. (I know what your thinking, yes that does seem a little fishy doesn't it.)

During those years, the Castle itself fell into disrepair, and was at risk of total collapse. This tragedy was averted when Vesta finally sold the remaining lands to John A. Lawson in 1947 for an undisclosed sum. A year or so later, Lawson turned around and sold the Castle and a small portion of the once vast estate surrounding it to a group of concerned locals who called themselves the Cocumscossuc Association. The rest, as they say, is history.

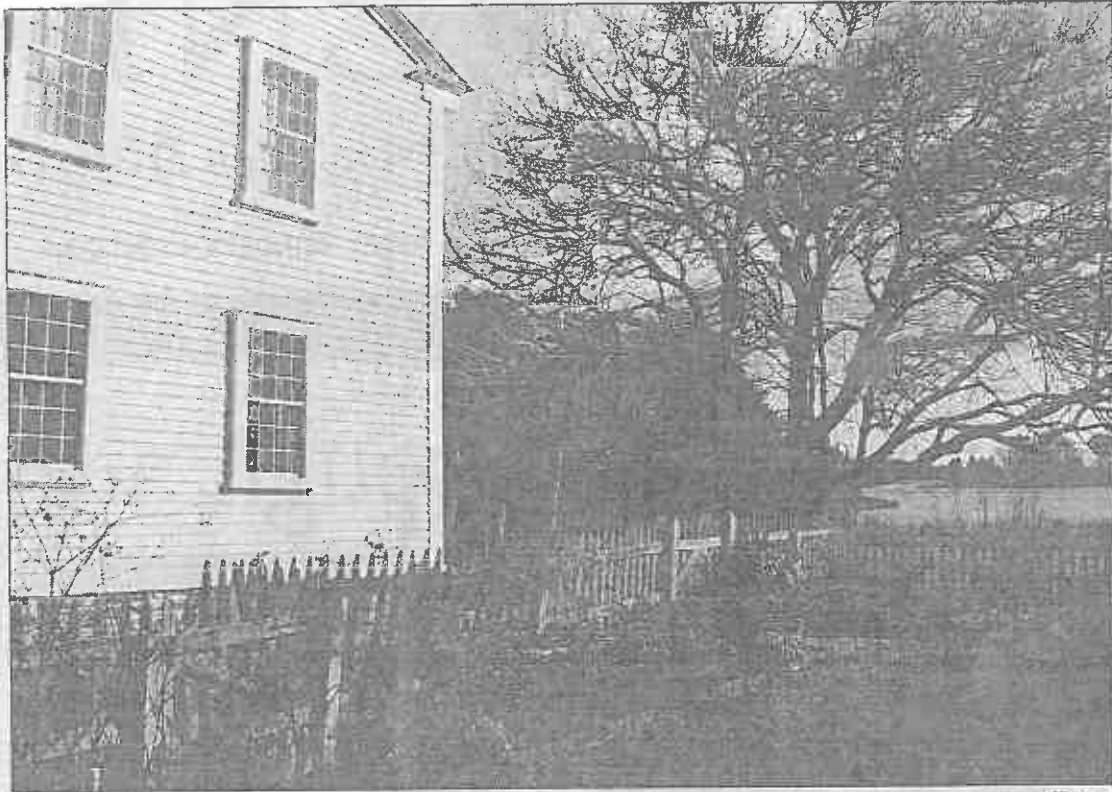


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Though the Updikes were lucky to have such a view from Smith's Castle, they weren't so lucky when it came to investing in the maritime trades during the heyday of sailing.



## The View From Swamptown

### The Updike's and the Risky Business of Maritime Investment

Truly one of the most intriguing aspects of my ongoing research into the long-standing relationship between our fair town and the sea, has been delving into the whole concept of vessel ownership locally during the "golden age of sail"; confined here in RI to the period extending through the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century through the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

I have come to the conclusion that there were three separate types of owners, at least here in North Kingstown anyway. The first group consists of folks already in the maritime trade, the ship captains or masters as they were known, their first mates, and occasionally even the builders of the sailing vessels themselves. These folks knew what they were getting into, understood the risks and rewards and had a multifaceted vested interest in the undertaking. In these cases, a ship's master could truly state "this be my ship!"; and mean it on many levels. The next group of vessel owners was from the merchant class and owned the ships, usually on their own or in partnership with other merchants and/or maritime folks. These folks were vessel owners because they needed the schooners, brigs and ships to move around the raw materials and wares that were required to run their businesses. What mattered to them most were the cargoes that these sailing vessels carried. Among this group were shop owners, coal and lumber dealers, textile mill owners and the like. These folks too, had a vested interest in what happened to their cargoes at the least. The final group of vessel owners were the investors; the "venture capital" folks of their day, they faced the possibility of either great financial rewards or extraordinary risk and financial ruin. Believe me owning a sailing vessel in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was truly a financial "crap shoot" on a good day.

A good case in point is the story of the Updike clan of Smith Castle fame. They fell into the third group of owners; straight investors willing to take on great risk for the promise of financial reward. Unfortunately they weren't very lucky at what they undertook.

Here's a quick synopsis of the Updike's maritime investments to illustrate my point. First in 1790 Daniel and James Updike purchased the 23 ton sloop "Iris" it was lost at sea in 1797. In 1805 Gilbert Updike purchased the 100 ton snow "Mary", in 1806 he lost it when it was seized by the French. That very same year in partnership with Lodowick, Gilbert then purchased the 101 ton Schooner "Federal", that vessel was lost at sea three years later in 1809. At the same time, Alfred and Lodowick purchased the 88 ton schooner "Olive" but by 1809 the "Olive" was declared unseaworthy and broken up for scrap in Newport. 1809 was a bad year for the Updikes, to be sure. In 1810 Gilbert turned around and purchased the 99 ton brig "Hiram" and James purchased the 93 ton brig "Union" The Hiram was sold to a group of Newport men in 1812 and the Union was sold off in 1815 effectively ending the Updike family's days as maritime investors.

It is quite possible that these series of bad investments by the Updikes in the "get rich quick" world of maritime vessel ownership played a large part in Wilkins Updike's decision to sell off Smiths Castle and end the centuries old ownership of this important structure. Gilbert in particular was deep in debt and the "piper had to be paid".

Whatever the case, this truly shows how risky the business of ship ownership was in the "golden days of sail". One final thought to add to this discussion is the cargo that the Updikes traded in while trying to make their mark on the high seas. After much research I have come to the conclusion that, with the exception of the sloop "iris", all of these venture capital schemes by the Updikes involved the Rhode Island Triangle Trade of Rum, Molasses, and Slaves. So maybe it was just "bad karma" that doomed the Updike boys, rather than bad investing.