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## Special Projects

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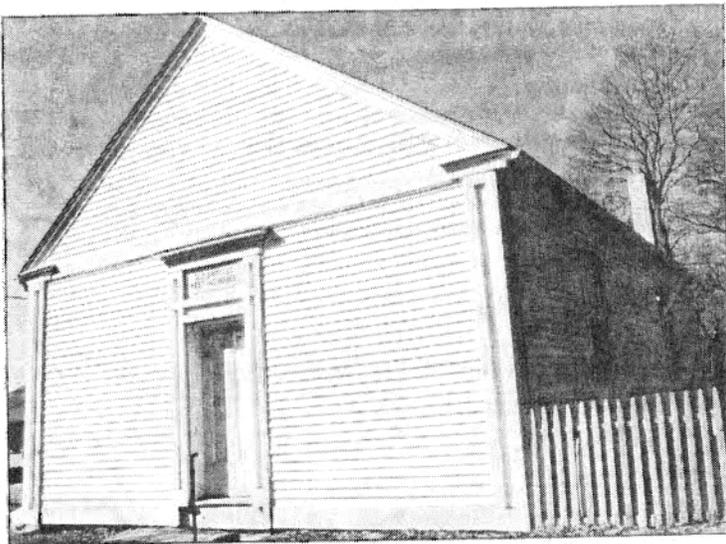
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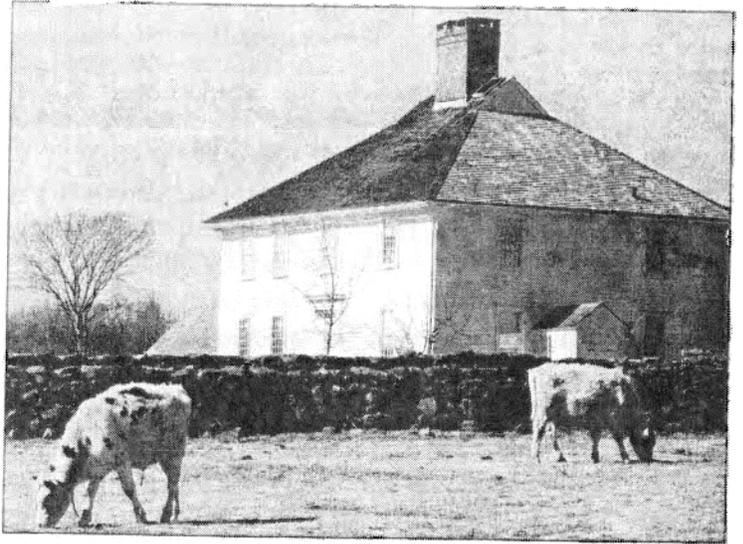
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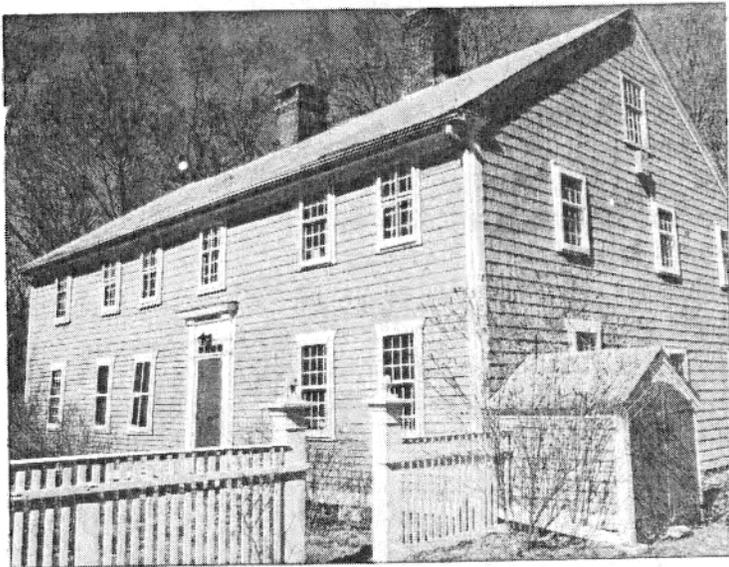
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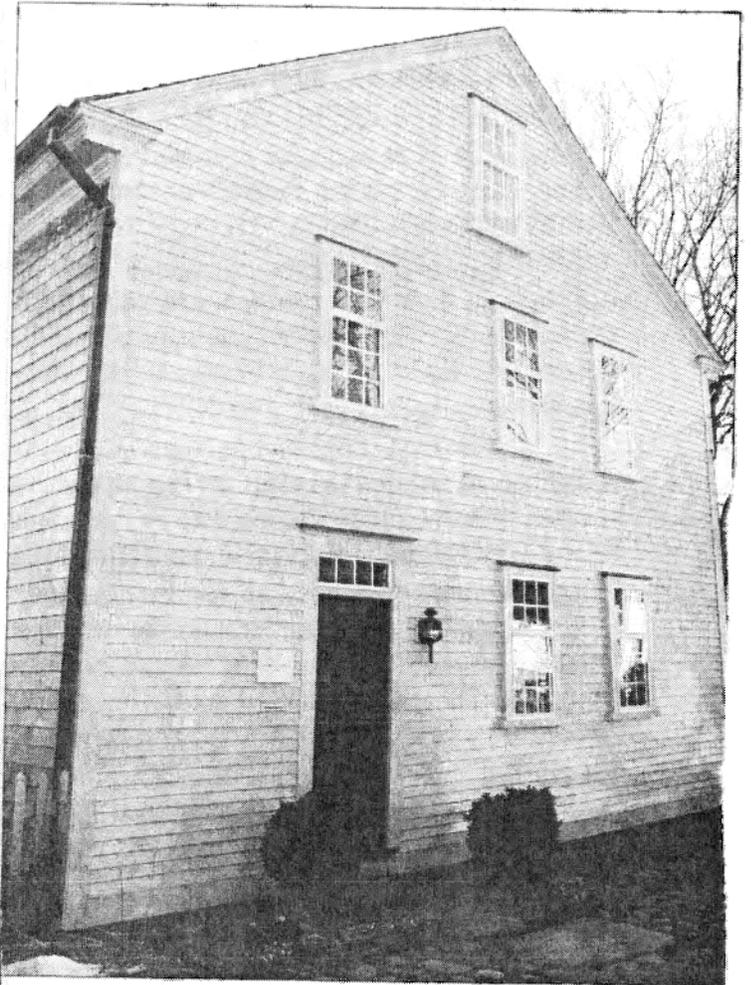
No. 8: The Stony Lane Six Principle Baptist Meetinghouse.



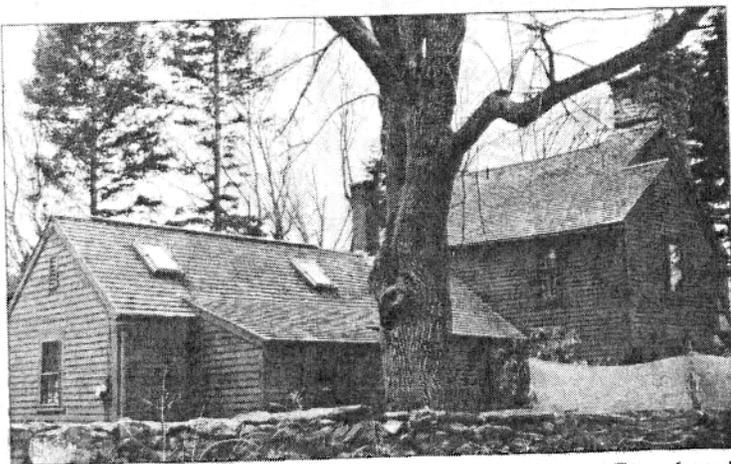
No. 12: The Silas Casey Farm on Boston Neck Road.



No. 10: The Davis Homestead on Davisville Road.



No. 14: "Old Yellow" in Wickford.

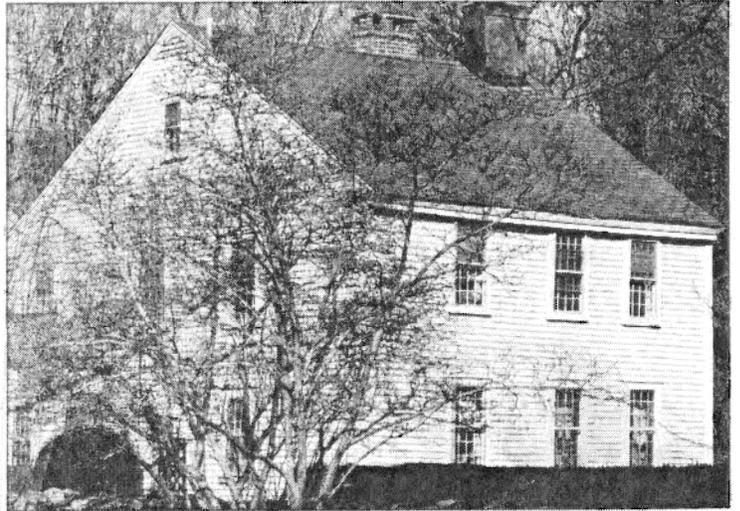


No. 15: The Douglas House at the corner of Gilbert Stuart and Tower Hill roads.

## North Kingstown's Oldest Places

As promised last week, today we are going to take another Swamptown gander at the oldest places in North Kingstown. As I mentioned some 4 ½ years ago when we originally took this journey together, due to a lack of concise documentation, this is not an exact science. Or, in layman's terms, I may be wrong! If you think I am, feel free to drop me a line, send me an e-mail, or stop me on the sidewalk and set me straight. Here we go again, in reverse order:

- 15) The Douglas House at the corner of Gilbert Stuart and Tower Hill Roads (1738)  
This wonderful old home features a massive stone chimney and a rare protruding bake oven.
- 14) The George Thomas House on Bay Street in Wickford (1735) – Old Yellow, once owned by a former slave family and Wickford's oldest home, barely makes the list when measured against the ancients of the entire town.
- 13) The "Tailor Joe" Northup House on Hamilton Allenton Road (1728) – As we learned last week this home's builder lived to the ripe old age of 103 and was born in another house on this list.
- 12) The Silas Casey Farm on Boston Neck Road (1725) – We're all familiar with Casey Farm, however many do not realize that among its many charms are actual bullet holes from a Revolutionary War skirmish fought on its grounds.
- 11) The Miller's Cottage on Camp Avenue (1720) – This home was built to house the family of the miller who ran the nearby (destroyed in the '38 hurricane) grist mill.
- 10) The Davis Homestead on Davisville Road (1715) – The ancestral home of the Davis family, founders of both Davisville and its predecessor Davis Mills, still has the original hand forged hardware on its front door.
- 9) Hillstead on Forge Road (1712) This remarkable oft-added-to house is the ancestral home of the Hill family, one of Quidnessett's original settlers. It is also associated with the Greene family anchor forge that operated here on the Hunt River.
- 8) The Stony Lane Six Principle Baptist Meetinghouse (1710) - The land for this meetinghouse was donated by Alexander Huling for use by a group of Roger Williams original followers. It may be even older than this accepted date.
- 7) The Himes Farmhouse on Hideaway Lane (1709) – This simple home housed generations of the Himes family; among the earliest settlers in the region.
- 6) The Old Narragansett Church in Wickford (1707) – This Anglican meetinghouse, the oldest in the northeast, once sat on Shermantown Road. For a time it had an attached steeple.
- 5) The Stephen Northup House on Featherbed Lane (1690's) - This is the original home of the patriarch of one of North Kingstown's most historically significant families.
- 4) The Wightman Homestead on Harrison St. (1690's) – Generation upon generation of George Wightmans lived and died in the older portion of this grand home.
- 3) Smith's Castle on Post Road (1678) – Both the Smiths and Updikes who lived in this home were firm believers in the idea that the colony of Rhode Island and



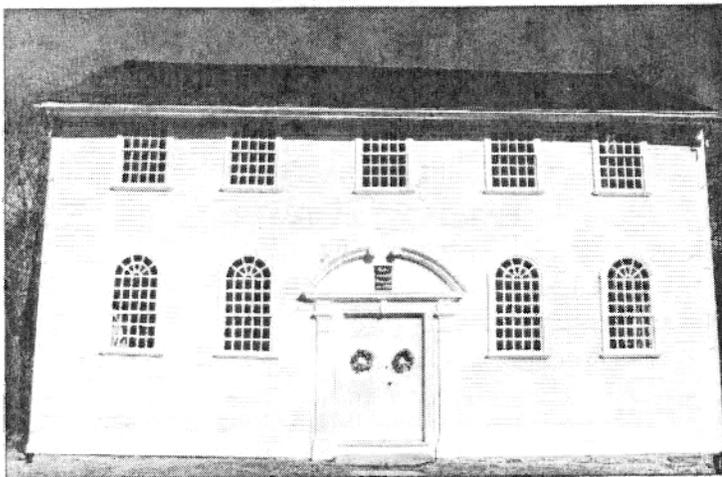
No. 1: The Hall/Northup House on Post Road.



No. 4; The Wightman Homestead on Harrison St.



No. 2: The Jabez Reynolds House on Austin Road.



No. 6: The Old Narragansett Church in Wickford



No. 3: Smith's Castle in Wickford.

Providence Plantations ought to be dissolved and the land west of the bay given over to Connecticut.

- 2) The Jabez Reynolds House on Austin Road (1676) – This house originally was located on Essex Road. During a 1977 restoration, portions of the home's structure, damaged by the fires of the King Philip's war, were uncovered.
- 1) The Hall/Northup House on Post Road (1676) – Some serious historians of the past date this extraordinary home back to 1638 and Roger Williams himself. If this is the case it would make this among the handful of the oldest buildings in all America. Imagine That!

A few other buildings are of sufficient possible age, although we can not with any certainty confirm the dates, to warrant serious study and consideration on this list. Among these are the main house at what was once Sauga farm, on Fishing Cove Road, a home that may date to 1682, The Pierce gambrel-roofed farmhouse on Gilbert Stuart Rd, which may also date to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and the Cooper/Brenton House at 15 West Main St., which dates to either 1728 or 1779, depending upon who you believe. Other unconfirmed ancients exist on Shermantown, Ferry, and Boston Neck Roads, all of which deserve a proper look-see. I must also give a Swamptown mention to the circa 1730 Ezekial Gardiner House, formerly of Pendar Road, of late residing disassembled in a box trailer awaiting an appropriate site and the circa 1705 Beriah Brown House that has been moved from its original Scrabbletown home to a prominent spot in downtown Newport, thanks to the beneficence of the late Doris Duke.

Speaking of Newport, you may wonder, as I have, how "Our Fair Town" stacks up against "The City by the Sea" and, for that matter, the Capital city, when it comes to possessing a representative collection of old houses. According to a list derived from the valuable new reference *Providence Preservation Society Guide to Providence Architecture*, a must read for the serious student, North Kingstown wins hands down over the big city up north. As for Newport, its much more of fair fight, but in the end, even with a borrowed NK house in the mix, we here in the former "Narragansett country" win out over Wickford's big sister across the bay.

So, all that said and done, what are we the undisputed Old House champions of "Little Rhody" doing about our remarkable legacy from the past. Beyond an exciting dendrochronology dating project, whereby tree ring data will be used to conclusively date a number of our ancients, and continued protection, through historic district zoning, of Wickford and its immediate vicinity, not enough as far as this old Swamp Yankee is concerned. We need to step it up a notch or two here in North Kingstown. We are blessed to have retained such a remarkable collection of ancient and important homes and public buildings. Increased advocacy and responsible stewardship is now more important than ever. Have you ever wondered why, when we in NK have such a valuable resource, there is no organization in place like The Providence or Newport Preservation Societies or Newport Historical Society here in town? Maybe its time for all of us to scratch our collective heads and ponder that for a spell.

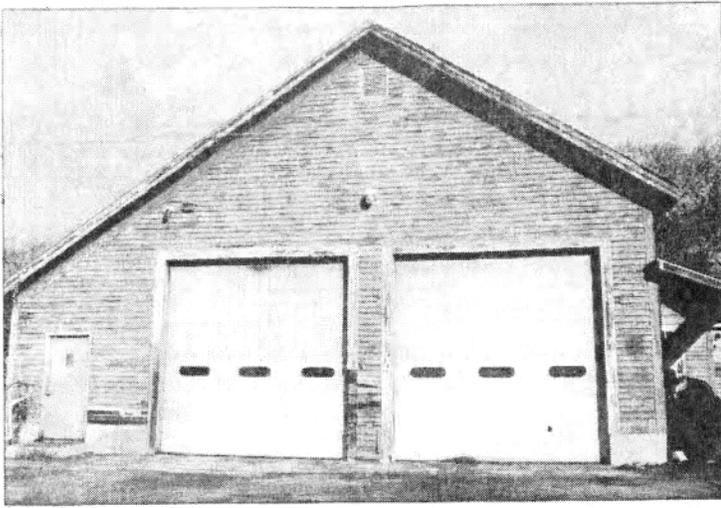


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

No. 3: No longer needed by the town, the future of the circa 1888 former Belleville Schoolhouse is unknown.

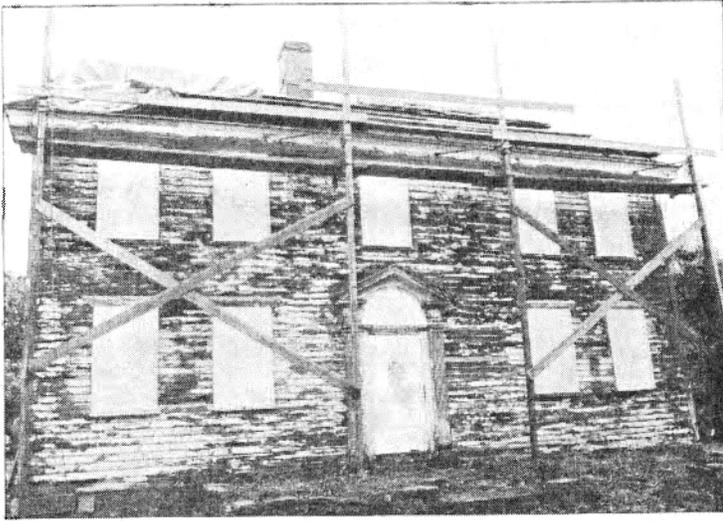


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

No. 5: A new roof is a start in preserving the Allen/Madison House in Davisville, but more work is needed to save the house from disrepair.



No. 4: The Daniel Fones House on Main Street was divided into apartments in the 1940s and since has been showing its age.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Five Most Endangered Sites For 2004

Well, here we go again loyal readers; its time to take a gander at this cantankerous old Swamp Yankee's choices for our fair town's most at risk historic places. Before we begin I must say that, all in all, it's been a good year for local historic sites in general. As noted a couple of months ago, many of our town's most important sites, from those in Ye Olde Quaint & Historic to Lafayette, Quidnessett, and everywhere in between, have been treated to some much deserved TLC. But not these five important buildings; so, crank your righteous indignation up a notch, pick up the phone or peck out an e-mail and let the "powers-that-be" know that here in North Kingstown we just don't stand still for this sort of thing.

Coming in at Number 5 we've got an old friend to this list. The Allen/Madison House out in Davisville has been on this ignominious tally every year that I've put it together. I expect everyone is familiar with her story so I shan't retell it today. I am happy to report that, in the last year, the efforts of her determined and tenacious supporters have been paying off. Prodded by the State of Rhode Island's Historic Preservation Commission, the home's owners, RIEDC, have buttoned her up tight and installed a much-needed new roof. Lots more is required here for this grand farmhouse to survive, most notably a purposeful future use for the building, but I'm cautiously optimistic and look forward to the day (hopefully next year) when the Allen/Madison House is no longer listed here.

Number 4 on the list is one of Wickford's grandest and least appreciated homes. The Daniel Fones House built on Main Street in 1770, financed by a Privateer's booty, and constructed to hold a large tavern and meeting hall, is slowly slipping into disrepair. This unique building was also home to a locally famous Newport trained cabinetmaker and craftsman named John Gladding. Sadly, she feel victim to the housing crunch of the early 1940's and, as the Quonset/Davisville base was being built out, this home was broken up into apartments. This distinctive building possesses perhaps, our fair town's most intriguing story and deserves to be maintained with the dignity its 234 years has earned it.

Number 3 on the list is another returning site, the circa 1888 former Belleville Schoolhouse and Town Garage on Oak Hill Road. No longer needed by the Town Highway Department she has now been relegated to the undignified task of "unheated storage space". This building, described at its opening as "a gem of architecture that adds much to the Village of Belleville" deserves better than this. The Town of North Kingstown ought to take a look at the definition of "stewardship" and then think long and hard about the Belleville Schoolhouse.

Number 2 on this year's tally is yet another returning site. Nothing at all has happened at the Franklin Rodman House in the last year other than 12 more months of



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

No. 1: The Reynolds Farmhouse on Post Road is threatened by a proposed development.

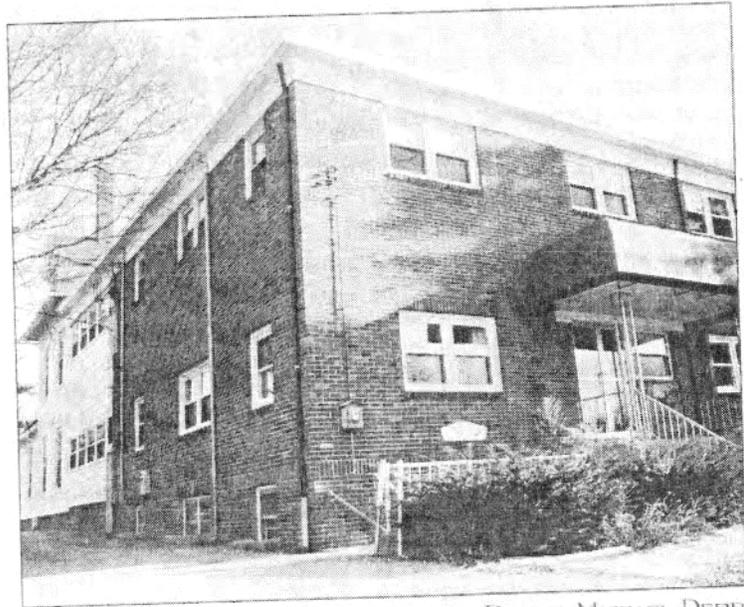


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

No. 2: With work, the Franklin Rodman House could be returned to its former glory.

decline. As stated last year, it's going to take someone with vision to save this grand Mill owners mansion. But all one must do is look next-door at the Walter Rodman House to see the possibilities.

This brings us to the Number 1 site on the 2004 list of North Kingstown's most endangered places. The Reynolds Farmhouse on Post Road was constructed sometime around 1790 by John and Sarah Reynolds, and is one of a very few surviving Federal Period small farmhouses. Specifically noted in the Town of North Kingstown's Comprehensive Plan as worthy of protection, the little time capsule is poised to fall victim to a prime example of Rhode Island legislative prowess. No piece of RI law better illustrates "good intentions gone horribly wrong" than the March 2000 amendment to the RI Low and Moderate Income Housing Act allowing private developers to milk the loopholes in this well-intended Law. The leaders of our Fair Town, hog-tied by the details of the amended Act, can do little to preserve this important home. Pick up the phone North Kingstown and call your state legislators on this one. We all share the blame if we stand idly by and let this continue.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

The Franklin Rodman mill owner's mansion (left) on Ten Rod Road tops the 2005 list of at-risk and endangered historic properties. In second place is the historic farmhouse at Reynolds Farm on Post Road.



2 1

## The View From Swamptown

### North Kingstown's Five Most Endangered Historic Sites for 2005

Well, here we go again loyal readers; it's time to take a gander at this cantankerous old Swamp Yankee's choices for our fair town's most at-risk historic places.

As was the case last year, I'm pleased to be able to report that it's been, all in all, a fairly good year for our local historic sites. Restoration of the George Fowler House on Bay Street and the Methodist Episcopal Parsonage on West Main has only added to the ambiance of "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic". A well-deserved pat on the back was recently acquired by the owners of the appropriately restored Reynolds Homestead on Essex Rd and the Town of North Kingstown has just completed the acquisition of the previously listed Hamilton Mill Pond property – bravo NK government! And these are just the highlights; all over our fair town, historic structures received a dose of well-deserved TLC. But not these five important buildings. So crank your righteous indignation up a notch, pick up the phone, or peck out an e-mail and let the "powers that be" here in North Kingstown know that we just won't stand for this sort of thing.

Coming in at No. 5 is a new addition to this ignominious list. The Turner/Bowen Farmhouse, just up Ten Rod Road a piece from its intersection at Collation Corner, used to sit proudly on the site of the grand Girard/Davis farmhouse back at the aforementioned intersection. Built in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was moved to its present location by local lumber king Henry Girard at the turn of the century to make room for his more elegant home. A Swamp Yankee's Swamp Yankee, Girard knew a good solid home when he saw one and wouldn't dream of demolishing something that still had such obvious value. Let's hope its present owners, the Catholic Diocese of Providence and St. Bernard's Church realizes this as well. I've got to tell you, I've got a real good feeling about the future of this icon of farming days gone by, you see, the good folks at St. Bernard's have always proven to be concerned and conscientious stewards of their, and North Kingstown's, historic heritage. My prayers will be answered when they find an appropriate future for this sturdy New England farmer's home.

No. 4 on the list is an old friend, the Belleville schoolhouse building on Oak Hill Road, used most recently as a town highway department garage. This, the oldest structure owned by the Town of North Kingstown, is no longer needed and has been relegated to the rather undignified task of unheated storage space. The Belleville Schoolhouse was once described as "a gem of architecture that adds much to the Village of Belleville", as a symbol of the district schoolhouse days of yore, this building is deserving of a much better fate than its present situation. Come on, do the right thing NK, and treat the old schoolhouse with the respect it deserves.

No. 3 is, like the Turner/Bowen Farmhouse, a new addition to the list, or perhaps I should say additions, as the Shore Acres Quonset Huts on Kingsley Avenue consist of more than one building. Quonset Huts, you might say- Quonset Huts, who cares about Quonset Huts! They don't matter! Well, this old Swamper says, you tell that to the literally hundreds upon hundreds of folks who labored to construct them right here within the confines of our fair town. You tell that to the thousands of Seabees who risked life



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

These Shore Acres Quonset huts on Kingsley Avenue are No. 3 on the list.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

No. 4 on the list is the former Belleville schoolhouse building on Oak Hill Road.

and limb to assemble these symbols of Yankee ingenuity all across the globe during WWII. And you tell it to all those returning veterans who ended up with a Quonset Hut inspired structure as their first home or place of business after the war was won. Taking all this into consideration one can then see how these, some of the earliest Quonset Huts ever constructed, are deserving of at least a call over to the good folks at the Seabee Museum to assess their value to that organization, before their present owner relegates them to the scrap heap as he has a want to do.

Coming in at number 2 on our list is another returning site. It appears that the fate of the Reynolds Farm on Post Road has already been sealed as of the writing of this column. Another development is poised to spring up “sore thumb-like” in the fields where generation upon generation of Reynolds farmed the land and tended their herds. Still a question though, is the fate of the circa 1790 Federal period farmhouse built by John Reynolds and one of the few surviving examples of its kind. The developer says he intends to relocate the ancient relic to a site at the back of the property and restore it. That’s all well and good as long as this time capsule of a home itself is not positioned in such a manner as to turn it into a “sore thumb” itself. Great care is needed here to be certain that the relocation and reconstruction is appropriate and not, in and of itself, a slap in the face to every long dead Reynolds and Reynolds descendant.

This brings us to the most at risk site in our fair town for 2005. It too, is unfortunately no stranger to this sad tally. The Franklin Rodman mill owner’s mansion, most recently utilized as the Lafayette Nursing Home, was once one of the grandest homes in all of Rhode Island. Saddled now with a zoning designation that makes utilization of this site difficult and an ugly brick canker where its stately front porch and entryway used to be, this building, according to my Swamptown network, is ready to go on the auction block and then possibly before the wreckers ball. Pick up the phone on this one North Kingstown, and call your Town Council members as well as the Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission (222-2678). Let them know how you feel on this one as well as the other four. We all share the blame if we stand idly by and let the inevitable occur.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

No. 5 on the list is The Turner/Bowen Farmhouse on Ten Rod Road.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**No. 5: The building that once housed the Rose Cottage Tea Room was to be restored but now is scheduled for demolition.**



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**No. 3: The Hussey Bridge in Wickford has fallen into disrepair and the state has been mum on plans to restore it.**

## North Kingstown's Five Most Endangered Historic Sites for 2006

Well, here we go again loyal readers; it's time to take a gander at this cantankerous old Swamp Yankee's choices for our fair town's most at-risk historic places.

As was the case last year, I'm pleased to be able to report that it's been, all in all, a fairly good year for our local historic sites. Restoration of numerous homes in the village has only added to the ambiance of "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic". And a well-deserved pat on the back should be administered to the Town of North Kingstown for their recent rehabilitation of the old Belleville Schoolhouse on Oak Hill Road, a former resident of this tally – bravo NK Public Works Department! And these are just the highlights; all over our fair town, historic structures received a dose of well-deserved TLC. But not these five important structures! So crank your righteous indignation up a notch, pick up the phone, or peck out an e-mail and let the "powers that be" here in North Kingstown know that we just won't stand for this sort of thing.

Coming in at No. 5 is a new addition to this ignominious list. The Rose Cottage Tea Room, which was originally a farmhouse, built in 1865 as the centerpiece to the 80-acre Barber family Farm, has had an interesting history during its 140-year existence. It was simply a farmhouse from its construction by the Barber family and continued occupation by farming clan of George Rose, but all that changed through the decade of the 1930's when Elsie Rollins, her son Russell and older sister decided to open a Tea Room here during the Great Depression. Elsie's vision of a quaint Tea Cottage set amidst the pastoral splendor of an authentic New England farm was a smashing success and it became known as "the place to go" when you were taking a leisurely ride down Tower Hill Road. The Rose Cottage had fallen on hard times as of late, but in 2002, a developer had come along who had grand plans for the old Barber/Rose Farm, including restoration of the lovely little farmhouse. Recently that concept seems to have changed, and the Rose Cottage Tearoom is scheduled for demolition. Now I'm no expert, but I do know that the retention of a historic structure within a development is nothing but a win/win situation for all involved, so lets hope this particular developer "gets with the program" and realizes that here in NK we don't take kindly to folks who neither stand by their word or attempt to hijack our heritage.

Number 4 on our list is an old friend, and the centerpiece, in my humble opinion, of the town's signature village. The Wickford Elementary School is now a 100-year-old building without a purpose, sitting on a site dedicated solely to education for these last 205 years. Now I won't linger on this noble lady's history for we all know what has transpired here. I'll just say that, in the case of my family, and a number of others like it, we've been attending school in this building for four generations and we really want that legacy to continue. I also understand that there are many out there, including a majority of the sitting school committee who beg to differ; who think they are doing the right thing for our community by closing the doors on a cherished tradition. I'd suggest a re-examination of priorities, as a representative of a community that holds on hard to history, before the next election does it for you.

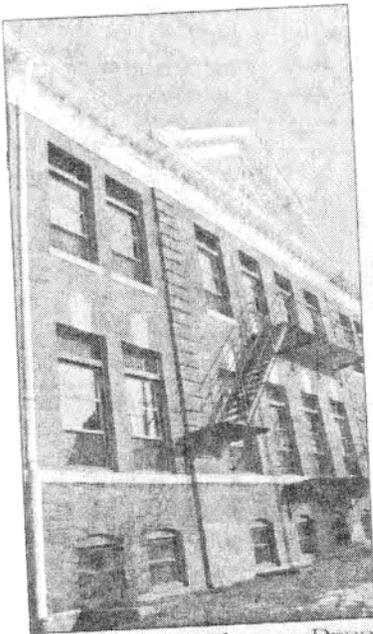


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

No. 4: The fate of the 100-year-old Wickford Elementary School, on a site that has been used for educational purposes for 205 years, is uncertain since it was closed this year.

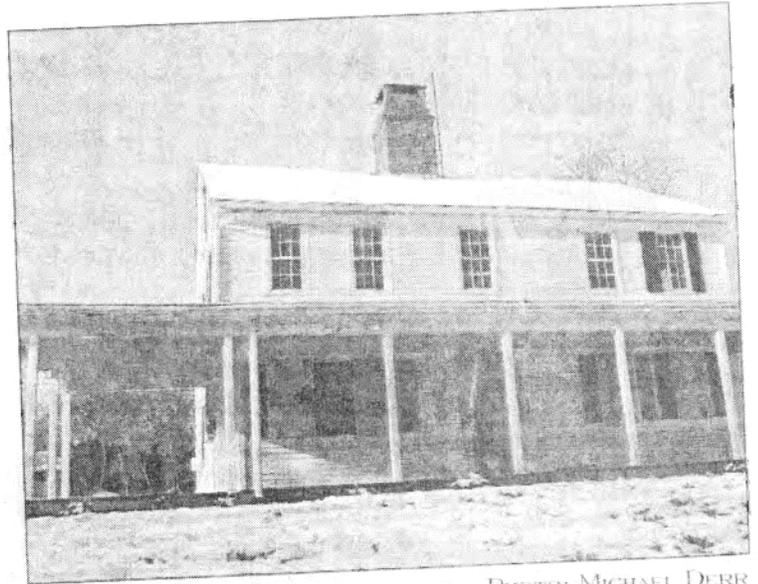
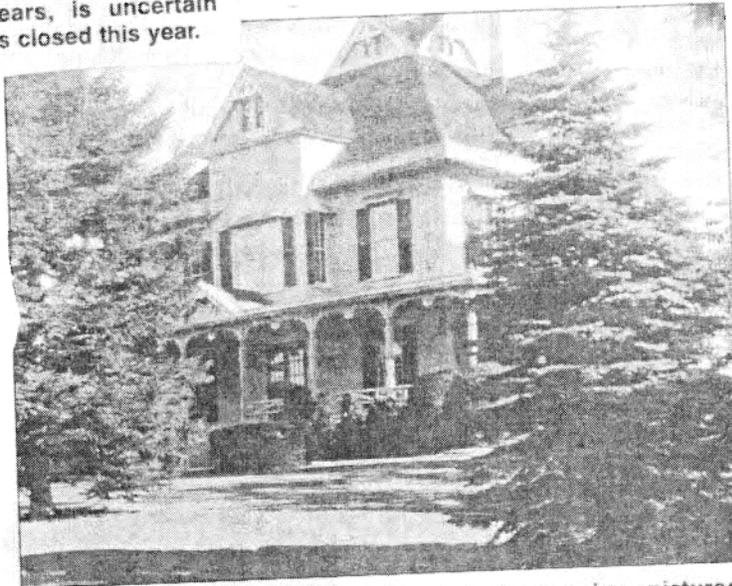


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

No. 2: The Reynolds/Updike house on Boston Neck Road was to be restored but recently was the victim of criminal vandalism.



No. 1: The Franklin Rodman mill owner's mansion, pictured above in its heyday, was most recently utilized as the Lafayette Nursing Home, as seen below. Once one of the grandest homes in the state, its fate is now uncertain.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

At number 3 we have another structure that has become a symbol of our community. Well, I don't know if you've noticed as you've driven up and down Boston Neck Road, but the noble arches of the Hussey Bridge have fallen on hard times as of late. A couple of years ago, the knowledgeable folks at RIDOT came to the Town of North Kingstown and suggested we might be better served by a replacement bridge that would be just as non-descript and anonymous as all the rest of the bridges across the state. Rightly, our elected and appointed officials showed them the error in their logic (Bravo to that!) and sent them back to Providence to come up with a plan to repair the existing bridge dedicated ironically to the state's first transportation engineer who died suddenly during its construction. And that's the last we've heard from them. The years have passed, and the bridge's unique concrete structure has continued to deteriorate and nothing has been done. So pick up the phone North Kingstown, and call RIDOT – Bridge Division and tell them exactly how you feel about the structure dedicated to Clarence Hussey some 80 years ago.

Coming in at number 2 on our list is the recently profiled Reynolds/Updike house located on Boston Neck Road near its intersection with Beach Street. As you may remember this home has a grand history recently capped triumphantly by the commitment of its owner to preserve and restore the circa 1805 structure. This news was tragically followed by a recent incident of criminal vandalism that has left the home boarded up, empty, and unheated; a deadly combination for a historic home facing a cruel New England winter. We must all keep our fingers crossed in hopes that this 200-year-old monument to two of our community's earliest resident families can survive this, its latest travail.

This brings us to the most at risk site in our fair town for 2006. It is unfortunately no stranger to this sad tally. The Franklin Rodman mill owner's mansion, most recently utilized as the Lafayette Nursing Home, was once one of the grandest homes in all of Rhode Island. Saddled now with a zoning designation that makes utilization of this site difficult and an ugly brick canker where its stately front porch and entryway used to be, this building, as noted last year in this same list, is ready to go on the auction block and then possibly before the wreckers ball. Pick up the phone on this one North Kingstown, and call your Town Council members as well as the Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission (222-2678). Let them know how you feel about losing one of the village of Lafayette's, and the Town of North Kingstown's, most important buildings. We all share the blame if we stand idly by and let the inevitable occur.

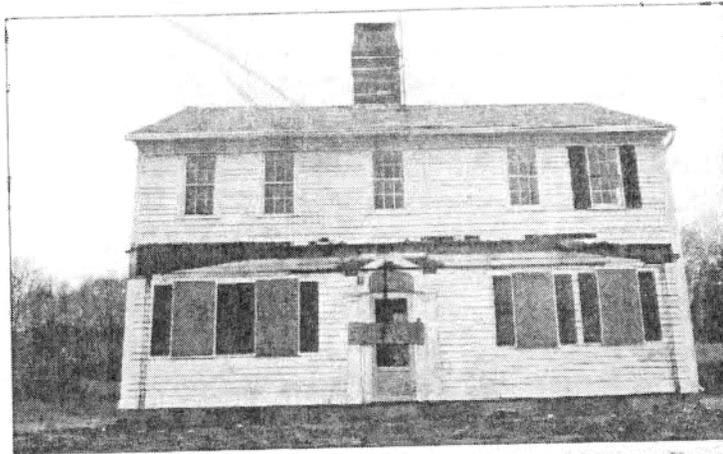


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

No. 3: The Updike/Reynolds house on Boston Neck Road near its intersection with Beach Street still sits empty and boarded up awaiting preservation.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

No. 4: The 100-year-old Wickford Elementary School is now a building without a purpose since its closure.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

No. 5: New to the list this year are farmhouses like this one on Stony Lane that might be demolished because of the state's lead paint laws.

## North Kingstown's Five Most Endangered Historic Sites for 2007

Well, here we go again loyal readers; it's time to take a gander at this cantankerous old Swamp Yankee's choices for our fair town's most at-risk historic places.

As was the case last year, I'm pleased to be able to report that it's been, all in all, a fairly good year for our local historic sites. Restoration of numerous homes in the village has only added to the ambiance of "Ye Olde Quaint & Historic". And a well-deserved pat on the back should be administered to EJ Ryan for his exceptional work on the former Rodman mansion on Ten Rod Road that has been his family's home for many a year – Bravo EJ! And these are just the highlights; all over our fair town, historic structures received a dose of well-deserved TLC. But not these five important structures! So crank your righteous indignation up a notch, pick up the phone, or peck out an e-mail and let the "powers that be" here in North Kingstown know that we just won't stand for this sort of thing.

Coming in at No. 5 is a new addition to this ignominious list. Actually this beautiful little farmhouse on Stony Lane is here as a symbol of sorts. I chose it because it is representative of an ugly little byproduct that is soon to raise its problematic head all over, not only North Kingstown, but everywhere in Rhode Island. You see this attractive representative of the bygone days of the small family farm, built in the middle of the 1800's by Edward and Frances Peirce, is now a multifamily rental property. Now there is nothing inherently wrong with that to be sure! In this day of exorbitant housing prices and skyrocketing rents we need places like this; affordable attractive functional homes for folks to live in. The problem here has to do with Rhode Island's well-intended but flawed lead paint policy. It seems that the structure of that state law makes it fiscally prudent to take a fine historic structure like this with its lovely details and attractive fieldstone accents and simply demolish it rather than comply with the law. Blame for this sad state of affairs should be placed equally upon the State and the landlords. Whatever the case, without changes soon, dozens of homes just like this one will soon be demolished. It raises my hackles just a bit to think about driving down a Stony Lane that does not include this fine little home.

Number 4 on our list is an old friend, and the centerpiece, in my humble opinion, of the town's signature village. The Wickford Elementary School is now a 100-year-old building without a purpose, sitting on a site dedicated solely to education for these last 206 years. Now I won't linger on this noble lady's history for we all know what has transpired here. I'll just say that, in the case of my family, and a number of others like it, we've been attending school in this building for four generations and we really want that legacy to continue. This building too, is a symbol of sorts as it represents, for me at least, the whole concept of the neighborhood school and its part as the heart and soul of a community. Now, my read on last month's election is, that a whole lot of other folks feel the same way about this place. Lets hope that the newly seated school committee can pull together as a team and do the right thing for North Kingstown's school children.

Coming in at number 3 on our list is the often profiled Updike/Reynolds house located on Boston Neck Road near its intersection with Beach Street. As you may remember this home has a grand history recently capped triumphantly by the

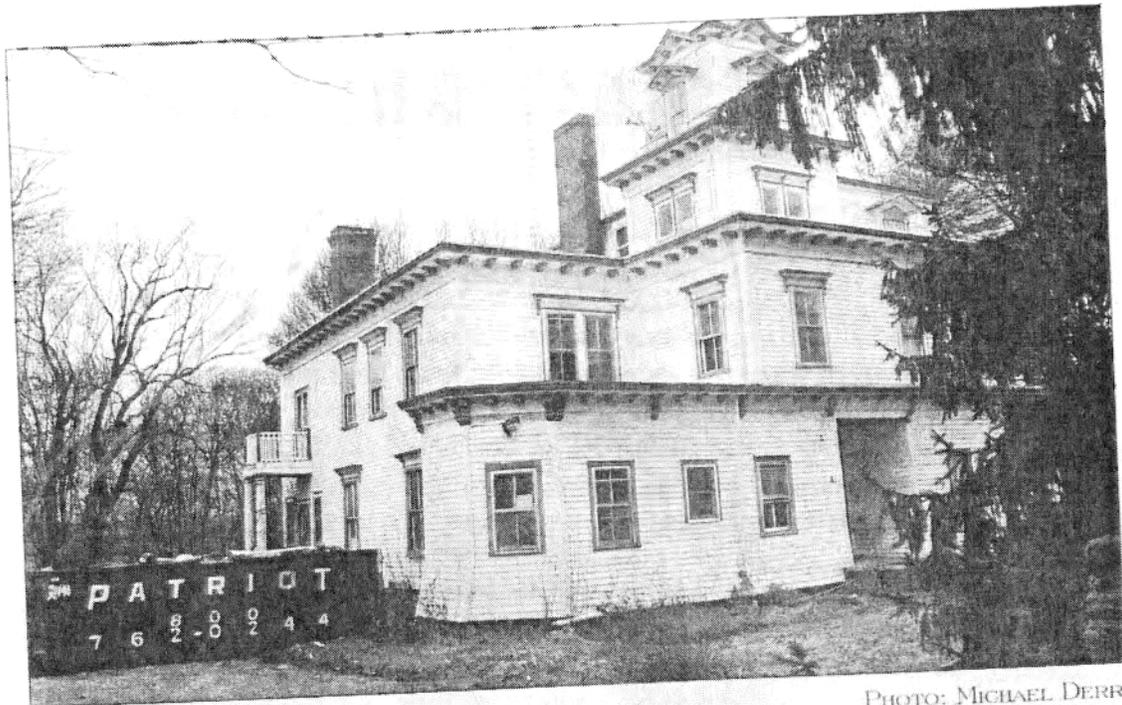


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**No. 2: The former Annaquatucket Apartments on Prospect Street, the circa 1881 David Sherman Baker summer estate, is at a crossroads. Partially gutted, its owners may put it back on the market.**

commitment of its owner to preserve and restore the core of this circa 1803 structure. Sadly she still sits there forlornly in the midst of a landscape that looks more like a war zone than a backyard. We must all keep our fingers crossed in hopes that this 204-year-old monument to two of our community's earliest resident families can survive this, its latest travail.

Number 2 on this unfortunate tally is the once grand "big house" at the Baker Estate. Now located on Prospect Avenue it was, until recently, known as the Annaquatucket Apartments. Built in 1881, it was not only the centerpiece of what was once the David Sherman Baker summer estate, it is also the finest example of the masterful craftsmanship of its builders, the Sherman Brothers of Wickford. This home, which once claimed what we now call Prospect Avenue as its driveway has fallen on hard times of late. Partially gutted, its present owners are ready to put it on the market again. Nothing is worse for an old home than a winter empty and unheated. Make sure to say a prayer or two for the "Big House".

This brings us to the most at risk site in our fair town for 2007. It is unfortunately no stranger to this sad tally, as a matter of fact this is unfortunately its third year in a row atop this list. The Franklin Rodman mill owner's mansion, most recently utilized as the Lafayette Nursing Home, was once one of the grandest homes in all of Rhode Island. Saddled now with a zoning designation that makes utilization of this site difficult and an ugly brick canker where its stately front porch and entryway used to be, this building, as noted last year in this same list, is now owned by an investment group motivated only by profit margins. Pick up the phone on this one North Kingstown, and call your Town Council members as well as the Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission (222-2678). Let them know how you feel about losing one of the village of Lafayette's, and the Town of North Kingstown's, most important buildings. We all share the blame if we stand idly by and let the inevitable occur.

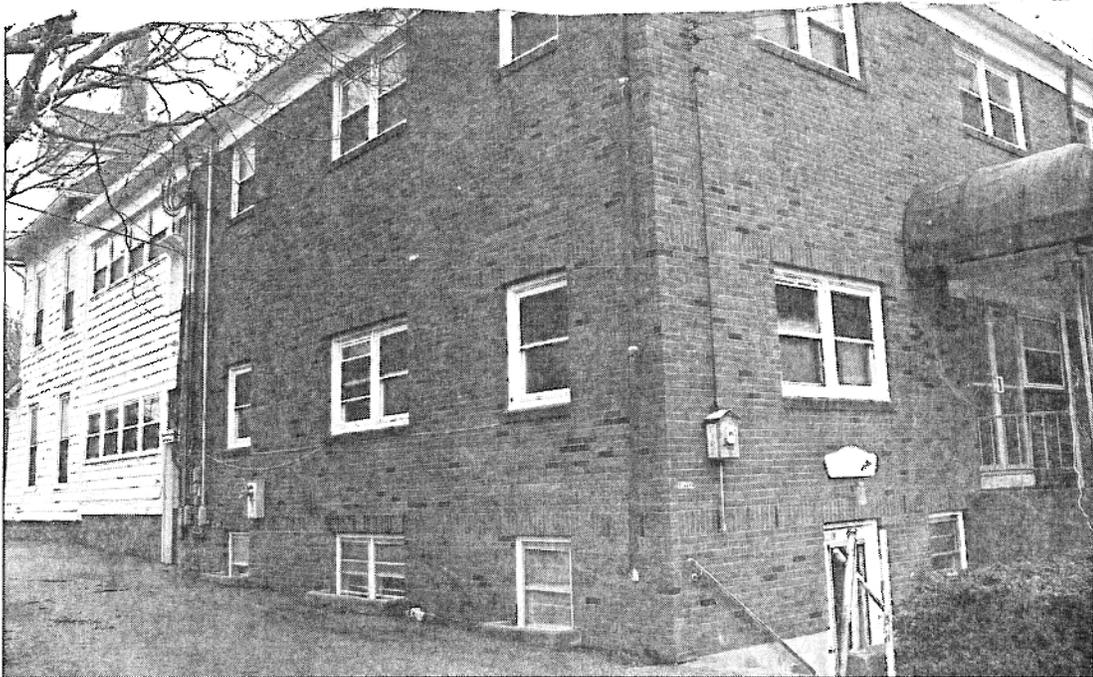


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

No. 1: For the third year in a row, the Franklin Rodman mill owner's mansion, most recently utilized as the Lafayette Nursing Home, tops the at-risk list.

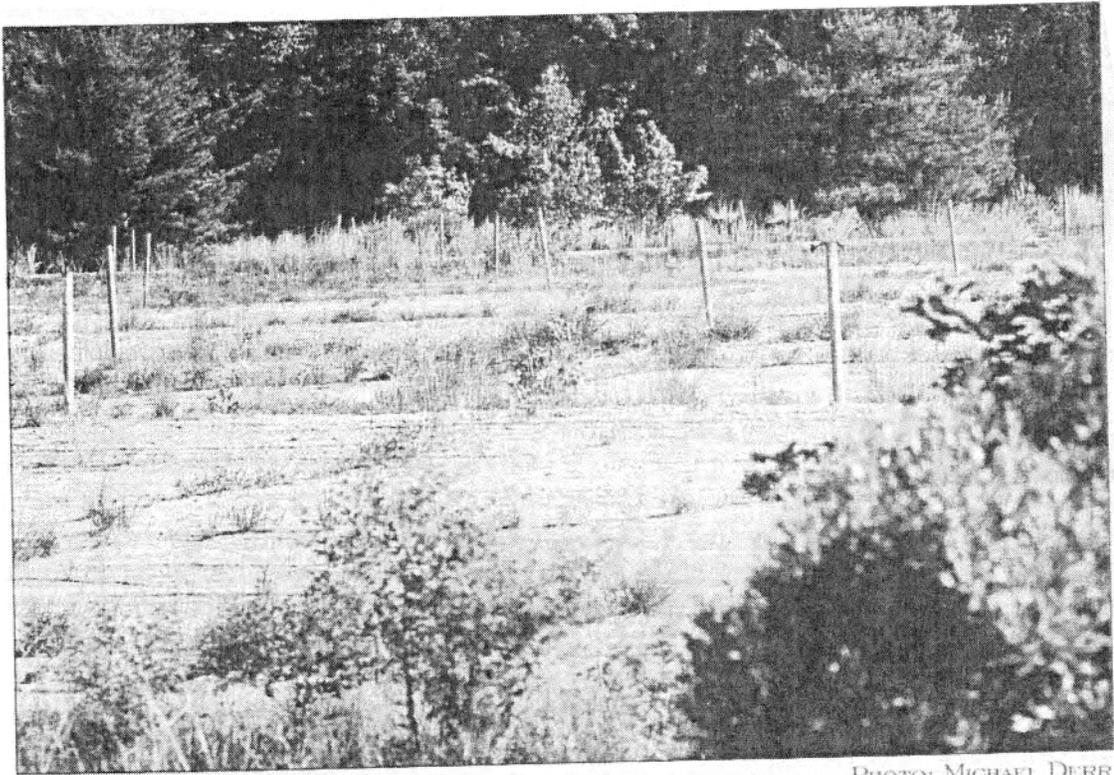


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Poles that used to hold speakers are all that remain at the old Quonset Drive-in site behind Dunkin' Donuts on Post Road in North Kingstown.



## The View From Swamptown

### A Look Back at Drive-in Movie Theatres

Yeah, it's me again. That Swamptown guy asked me to write another story about what kids do in the summer around here. Mom said it was good practice for school, so I told him, "What the heck, I'll do it . . . again. I thought for a while about what I was going to write about and then figured out the perfect idea. I'll write about going to the drive-in. That's definitely one of the coolest things we do in the summer.

Now there's two different drive-ins around here. One is the Quonset Drive-in and its right here in town, and the other is the Hilltop. The Hilltop is fancier than the Quonset – why it even has a big playground in front of the screen, but its in East Greenwich, so we usually go to the Quonset because its so close. Mom doesn't like to drive any farther at night than she has to. Besides, she likes the Quonset Drive-in; it opened in June of 1954 right when my mom and dad were graduating from high school. They went on dates there and even saw the big opening weekend feature, *The Long, Long Trailer* starring Lucy Ball and Desi Arnez. I saw that movie on TV once, it sure was funny.

Grandpa St. Pierre said that the genius who originally thought it up had planned to surround the entire drive-in movie place with houses and try to sell them. My grandfather's on the Planning Commission, now I really don't know what the planning commission does, but I do know that if you're on it, you know all sorts of junk about what is going on in town. I really don't think that Grandpa really thinks that that guy is a genius because the planning commission wouldn't let them do it that way. But heck, I sure wouldn't mind having a drive-in movie theatre in my backyard.

If you are going to go to the drive-in you've got to get ready beforehand. We usually pack up a cooler with sodas and snacks and put it in our car. We are lucky, because we have a big station wagon. That way, even if my mom's friend Sharon and her daughter Jill go with us, I don't have to sit in the way-back with all the little kids. I mean, gosh, I'm 9 years old; I'm not a little kid anymore. You know, one time one of my friends Marty, whose dad is in the Navy (they're from the south) asked me why everyone around here calls the back of their station wagons the way-back. I told him, Heck what else should you call it; there's the front, the back, and then the way-back; it only makes sense. One other thing about the way-back is that if you're staying back there while you're at the drive-in then you have to wear your pajamas. Not me anymore though, like I said, I'm 9 years old. Nobody really minds though, because all the little kids at the drive-in are in their pajamas. Mom says its because little kids usually fall asleep at the drive-in; this way when you get home you can just pick them up out of the car, carry them into the house and plop them into bed. Last time we went, I helped Mom by carrying my little sister Linda into the house. I woke her up though, when I tried to plop her into bed. Mom says, "that's a figure of speech, Timmy, she's not going to make a plopping noise no matter how you put her to bed". Man, how was I to know it was a figure of speech; I guess its sort of like when Grandma St. Pierre says she won't go to the drive-in with Mom and us because its just too "new fangled" for her. I asked Mom and Grandpa what the heck "fangled" was but they couldn't say. I wonder if something can be old fangled? Oh yeah, about those pajamas; one time I remember when we were at the Hilltop and I

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An advertisement for the Quonset Drive-in touts its panoramic screen and 1953 movies in Technicolor.

was taking my other sister Julie back to the car from the playground because she said she felt sick. Well of course she did, she was spinning around on that spinning merry-go-round thingy that they have there for like a half an hour. I looked back at the playground right there under the big screen and there were like a million little kids all in pajamas running around, laughing, playing, and swinging. Right over their heads I could see a whole parade of dancing hotdogs, sodas, and French fries telling us the movie was going to start soon. Sometimes Mom lets me watch that new show "The Twilight Zone" with her; and that's what I thought about, as I was looking at all those kids and those dancing hotdogs. Last time we went to a drive-in movie, when I walked with my little sister Linda down to the snack bar to buy our one snack for the night, she actually asked the lady at the cash register where the dancing French fries were; as a matter of fact, I think I heard her mumbling something about dancing French fries while she was falling asleep in the way-back next to Jill.

After I brought Linda back to the car, I went back down there to the snackbar building to use the bathroom. Sometimes after I'm done I stand out there for a while and listen to all those Navy and Seabee guys talking while they wait for their girlfriends to get done in the bathroom (ladies always take a long time in the bathroom). I like looking at all their tattoos and listening to them talk, although mom calls it colorful language that she better not hear me repeating. After a while I headed back to the car and on the way I saw someone who must have been having car troubles. I don't know what could have been wrong, but I noticed all the windows were all steamed up or something. I figured, how the heck are they going to be able to see the movie through those steamy windows and besides, they forgot about hanging the speaker in the window; they'd miss the movie when it started. I was just about to go over there and bang on the door, you know, to let them know, when mom grabbed me by the shoulder and told me to get back in the car right now. Jeepers, I was just trying to help. Mom, says she'd explain it to me when I'm older. She sure is going to have to spend an awful long time explaining all this stuff to me later; I mean she says that a lot. I don't even know if I can remember all the stuff we are going to have to talk about.

Well, anyway, drive-ins are really neat places to go in the summer and except for the mosquitos, I can't think of one thing about them I don't like. Well, I've got to finish this; Peter Crooker is coming over, he got a couple of packs of firecrackers and we are going to go out and blow stuff up.

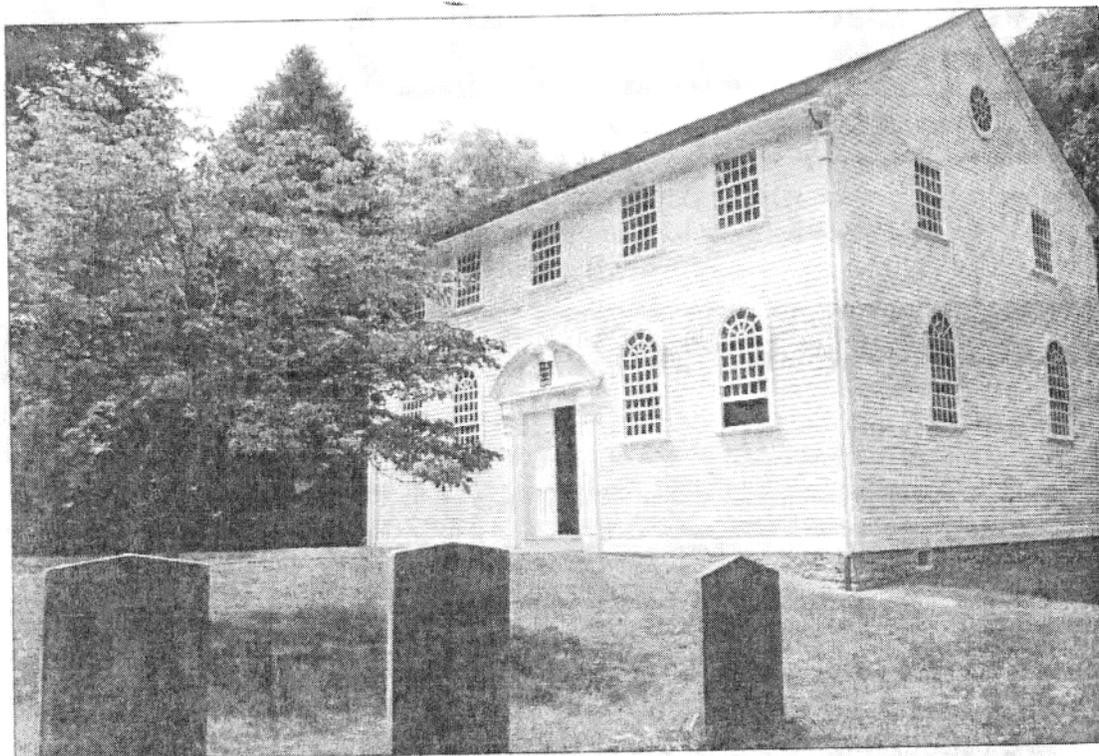


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The old Narragansett Church on Church Lane in Wickford will be celebrating its 300th anniversary next year. Part of the history of the building lies in its two pump organs, one of which some believe may be the oldest working pump organ in the nation.

## The View From Swamptown

### Powering the Organ in the Old Narragansett Church

*Just one year from now, the Old Narragansett Church will be celebrating its 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary. From time to time during the course of the upcoming twelve months we are going to stop and examine this venerable old relic of a bygone era. This is the first of these installments.*

I guess I felt like I had got myself a pretty sweet deal. It was the summer of 1970 and I was sure I had just discovered a goldmine. Back in a time when the minimum wage was \$1.60 and the best a babysitter could hope for was fifty cents an hour, I was going to get paid \$1.00 per church service to pump the bellows on the little organ at the Old Narragansett Church down on Church Lane in Wickford. Heck that's the same money I was being paid to mow a small lawn; how hard could it possibly be to pump a little bellows on a dinky little organ like the one that sat in the upstairs gallery at the old church? Besides, I had to be a Church every Sunday anyway, and this way my little twin brother and sister wouldn't be able to sit in my lap throughout the whole darned service making me all sweaty! I figured this was going to be a "piece of cake", I mean I almost felt guilty taking the money; after all this is a church.

Back then I think I felt like I got this "sweet deal" because my Choir Director, who was also the Church Organist, Mr. Bob Foreman felt bad for me. I was a thirteen-year-old puberty victim; once the up and coming star of the St. Paul's children's choir, I was now a vocal wreck, my voice lurching and cracking through every hymn and psalm. It was obvious to everyone, particularly the patient congregation that my days as a boy soprano were behind me. I think Mr. Foreman saw the dejected look on my face as I sat there that spring during my final choir practices. The reality of the situation had finally sunk in; I knew this was the end of my days in the Church Choir. It was then that he offered up this proposition. As I listened, my eyes lit up and I eagerly agreed. I felt like the "cat that had swallowed the canary" as I left choir practice that evening. I hadn't an inkling of what I had gotten myself into.

The first Sunday in July came quickly and I met Mr. Foreman a little bit before the service began up by the little organ as we had arranged. He explained my duties, "pump the organ bellows at a steady pace – speeding up or slowing down will change the way the instrument plays- you've got to keep the pace consistent."

Well that sounded easy enough, I figured. Before I knew it the opening hymn was underway and I was off and pumping. In the beginning, keeping an even pace was easy – no problem I thought, this is like money in the bank. But as the six-verse hymn continued I began to realize that this was not going to be the "piece of cake" that I originally thought it was. As the hymn continued, on and on in fact, my arms began to tire and my pacing got a bit erratic. A friendly nod from Mr. Foreman brought me back to my senses and I finished up with a flourish I thought. By the second hymn, a couple of flies had found me and seemed to delight in tormenting me as I pumped my way through "A Mighty Fortress is our God". I began to think, if he's "such a bulwark never failing" then why couldn't he make these flies go away while I was helping Mr. Foreman sing his

praises? Each time I'd slack off the pace a bit to swat one of them off of my nose Mr. Foreman's friendly nods gained a renewed sense of urgency. By the time of the Offertory Hymn the sweating had begun. I've got to tell you that little Church could get hot. I finally fully understood what my grandfather was talking about when he had told me that the upper gallery was reserved for slaves, indentured servants, native Americans and other souls not fortunate enough to have a box pew on the main floor. As the sweat dripped off my nose and stung my eyes I, pumping all the while, thought about heat rising and cool air falling as I looked down at my sister Julie with the twins sitting in her lap. She appeared comfortable and cool to me through the haze of my fogged up glasses which thankfully kept slipping down my nose and knocking the fly off its preferred perch there. As Mr. Foreman played delightfully appropriate background music throughout the communion, I realized that my entire body was soaked in sweat and was now calling out to every mosquito throughout all of the ancient "Narragansett Country" that this colonial meeting house once served. Mr. Foreman's friendly nods were by now heading towards the realm of glares as we lurched through the closing hymn, "Amazing Grace" including of course, as was the colonial tradition, all of the additional verses. By now, my arms felt afire, I was fully aware of how uncomfortable the hard bench next to the organ could be, I was dripping sweat from every pore that had not been affected by the unrelenting attention proffered by the mosquitoes, and I didn't even seem to care where the two flies perched themselves anymore. As the hymn ended I truly comprehended the phrase "a wretch like me" as I with damp hand extended, grabbed a hold of that fresh dollar bill offered up by Mr. Foreman, who said something about "good first effort". When I got downstairs my mother asked me "Did you have fun?" and then complained about the sweat-soaked condition of my church clothes.

I've got to tell you, my mother and I had a little bit of an argument later that evening after I had recovered my sense enough to fully grasp the magnitude of what I had just been through. In the end though, things worked out just as they always did between us. With a mention of the key family phrases of "you made a commitment" and "sense of responsibility" I realized I was in this for the long haul. It may have been the toughest eight dollars I ever earned.

*That very same late 19<sup>th</sup> century pump organ stills sits up there in the gallery of the Old Narragansett Church along with an extraordinary earlier organ that may be the oldest working pump organ in all of America. Stop by any Thurs-Sun afternoon in July and August and visit both of them and take a gander at this historical and architectural gem of a building sitting right here in Wickford.*

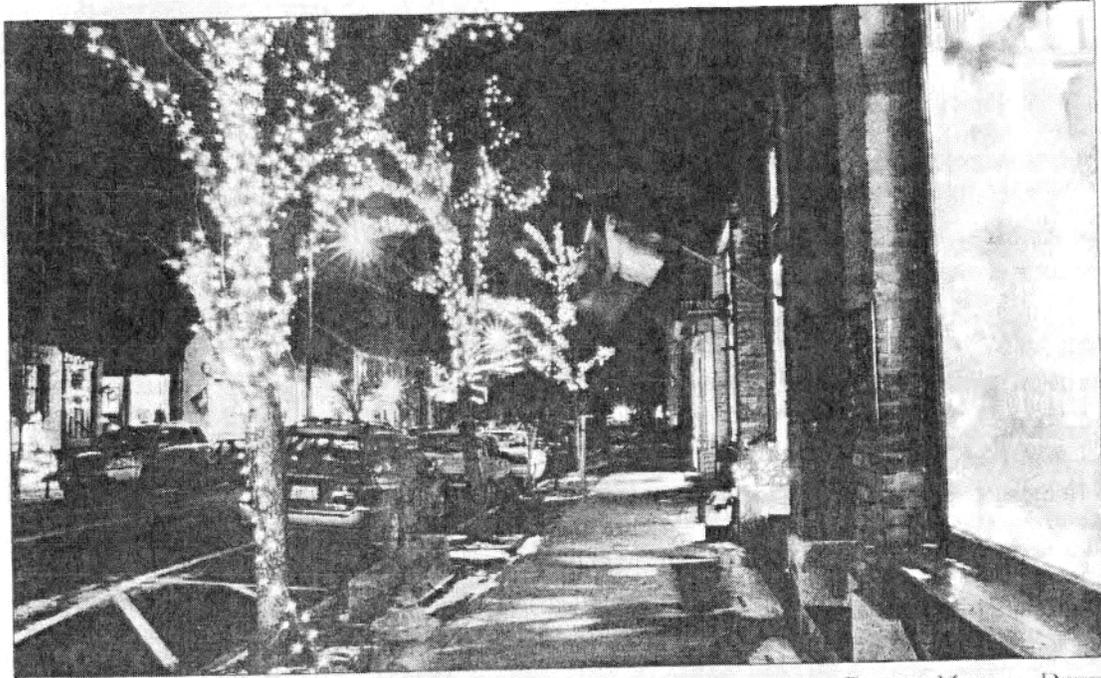


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Today, shop windows and trees on Main Street in Wickford are lit for the season. In earlier times in the village, families carried lanterns like these (pictured on the Plymouth Plantations Web site) to light the way. Each family's punched tin lantern displayed a different, unique pattern, and passers-by could identify the family by the lantern.



## The View From Swamptown

### Christmas in Wickford

Christmas in Wickford is a special time; indeed, a magical time. Folks hustling to and fro from the warmth of one familiar shop to the next, the sting of winter's chill upon your cheeks and the sounds of the season in your ears. Friends and neighbors passing each other on the streets and walkways exchange "how-do-you-do's", and loved ones embrace as they meet in a village lit up with both holiday lights and the warm glow of good cheer. This scene has played itself out with minimal variation year upon year, decade after decade, for literally centuries now.

As an old swamp yankee firmly rooted in the past and only begrudgingly existing here in the present, I try to look at the village across those centuries as I shop for Christmas stocking treasures each December. In my mind's eye, I can see my mother shopping in Wilson's for that special something, exchanging pleasantries with a much younger but still wise and kind Paul Wilson at the register. Perhaps she'll run across the street to the Wickford Shoe Store and pick up a pair of patent leather shoes for my sister to wear to Sunday Service at St. Pauls. Mr. Tessier will be as warm with her as he always was I'm sure. Hopefully, she won't notice my sister and I as we follow Mrs. Sharp back and forth throughout her little jewelry store as she patiently shows us, again, just what we might purchase with our hard earned allowance.

Skipping back another generation, I can envision my Grandmother Cranston and her best friend Margarett Rodman each selecting a Christmas Goose with the assistance of Ed Ryan at his market. Their husbands George Jr. and Gilbert are probably holding court outside the store, shaking hands with the familiar folks that pass by.

Back another generation and I can imagine my Great-grandfather George Sr. sauntering in to the Turck's Bakery to pick up something special for the holiday. After that he'll stroll over to Doc Young's drugstore and "chew the fat" with whomever might happen to be there.

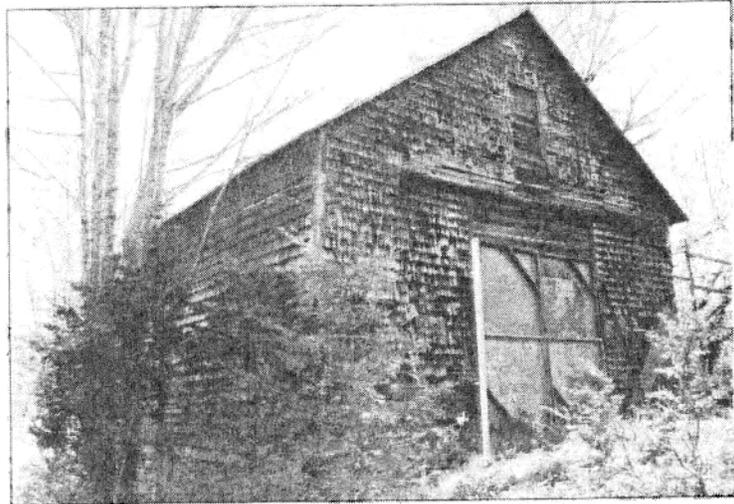
Back another generation still, and I can imagine old George T Cranston himself standing behind the counter at his popular General Store and Trading Post at the Collation Corner. Folks from far and wide are lined up at his counter waiting to deal with the old trader. Some come with cash in hand to purchase that special something, but just as many; farmers, backwoods folk, and the like, are here with an item or two to trade; a basket of dried wild cranberries for a bolt of calico fabric for the missus, or maybe three dozen eggs and a bushel of cracked corn for a silver-backed hand mirror for a fiancé. A warm fire blazes in the big coal stove and the grandfather clock chimes the quarter hour as folks patiently wait their turn.

Finally, my mind will invariably wander back to my favorite vision of a Wickford Christmas; this one occurring some two hundred years ago. Its Christmas Eve and the village residents are all leaving their respective churches after the Christmas Eve service. A light snow is drifting down all a-sparkle from the moonlight. Folks are bundled up against the December chill, each family group slowly shuffling back to their homes and the beginnings of the holiday festivities. In each family cluster, a trusted soul, perhaps a father or older brother holds aloft a punched tin lantern to light the way. These lanterns are special in that, as tradition holds, each family's lantern has a specific pattern punched into the dull tin and everyone in the close-knit community that was Wickford in the early 1800's could identify their neighbors by the warm cheery glow of that unique lantern. Even in the dark of that cold December night, there were no strangers in the village. I expect it was both a magical and comforting scene for all who witnessed it. Indeed it comforts me across the centuries; the image of a picture-postcard village lit up only by dozens of unique lanterns, their warm cheery glow only exceeded by the spirit of those that held them. The darkness of the world around them pierced by signature lights of those that called Wickford home. Happy Holidays, North Kingstown!



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

This building, now a private residence, once was Swamptown's district schoolhouse. Below, this early 19th century barn along the edge of the former Swamptown Road is the last of many that used to populate the area.



## The View From Swamptown

### It's Time to Stand Up for Swamptown

Some time in the next week or so, 46 registered letters will be sent out from the North Kingstown Town Clerk's Office to 46 families that live along the western half of Lafayette Road. That letter will inform them of the request made on behalf of generation upon generation of long dead residents of that same area; the farming community of Swamptown. The gist of that request is this; to right a wrong, to undo an unnecessary change, to return the name of that portion of the road to the name it possessed for nearly 250 years – Swamptown Road belongs on the maps of North Kingstown. Its time to stand up for Swamptown.

I write to you now on behalf of the long forgotten farming community of Swamptown. Prior to the late 1950's, Swamptown, a village even then long past its prime, was still remembered by North Kingstown's population. This is because, up until that time, it existed in the form of Swamptown Road; the main thoroughfare through that ancient village. The Swamptown Road or Highway, as it is occasionally referred to, is one of North Kingstown's oldest roads. It shows up in the historic record as far back as 1710. When Swamptown was a viable community, Swamptown Road was actually an entire roadway system, consisting of what we now call Lafayette Road, Hatchery Road, the upper portion of Oak Hill Road, and a number of unnamed and long forgotten cart paths through the deep woods of Swamptown. By the 1900's, with the renaming of many portions of the old Swamptown Road, it consisted of what we now know as Lafayette Road. As the 1950's drew to a close, the nearby village of Lafayette received some bad news, as the U.S. Postal Service decided to close its Lafayette Post Office, thereby ending Lafayette's "official designation" as a village. Lafayette's community leaders were fearful of the village's identity being forgotten, as so many were at that time, and approached the Town of North Kingstown asking them to change the name of Swamptown Road to Lafayette Road in order to preserve their village's memory. This request, combined with the idea that Swamptown was just a little too "country bumpkin" for the up and coming community of North Kingstown, spelled the end for Swamptown.

Now I know that this will certainly be looked upon by some of the folks in those 46 families as a temporary and unwanted inconvenience, and if enough residents of the area step forward and complain loudly enough it just won't come to pass. But the fact of the matter is that the retention of our community's many village entities is part of what makes North Kingstown the desirable place to raise a family that it is. And what was once thought of as "too country bumpkin" fifty years ago, is, in this cynical age, a step back, a breath of fresh air. To pick one example; there's character, a certain panache' to the address of "The Healey Farm on the Olde Swamptown Road" that its present address just does not possess. So I say again, it's time to stand up for Swamptown.

I'd ask all of you out there to drop a line or an e-mail to your favorite Town Council member and let them know how you feel on this issue. Tell them, you feel the same as "that Swamptown guy" and the good folks at the North Kingstown Chamber of Commerce and the NK Genealogical Society who have already lined up behind



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERIE

This historic cemetery is thought to contain remains of Swamptown's first settlers, father and son John and James Himes.

Swamptown by financially supporting this effort, and want Swamptown returned to the maps of state and community. (By the way, all Federally generated maps and charts {topo maps, USGS maps, etc} are already Swamptown compliant, its Lafayette Road that does not exist on the Federal level) And to those of you out there among the 46 families that really hold the key to making this happen, think about all those Northups, Arnolds, Rathbuns, Himes's, Campbells, Thomases, Roses, Browns, Greenes, and yes Cranstons that came before you and remember that Swamptown as a discrete entity existed for longer than the United States of America. Think about them before you decide what stance you want to take. Its time to stand up for Swamptown.

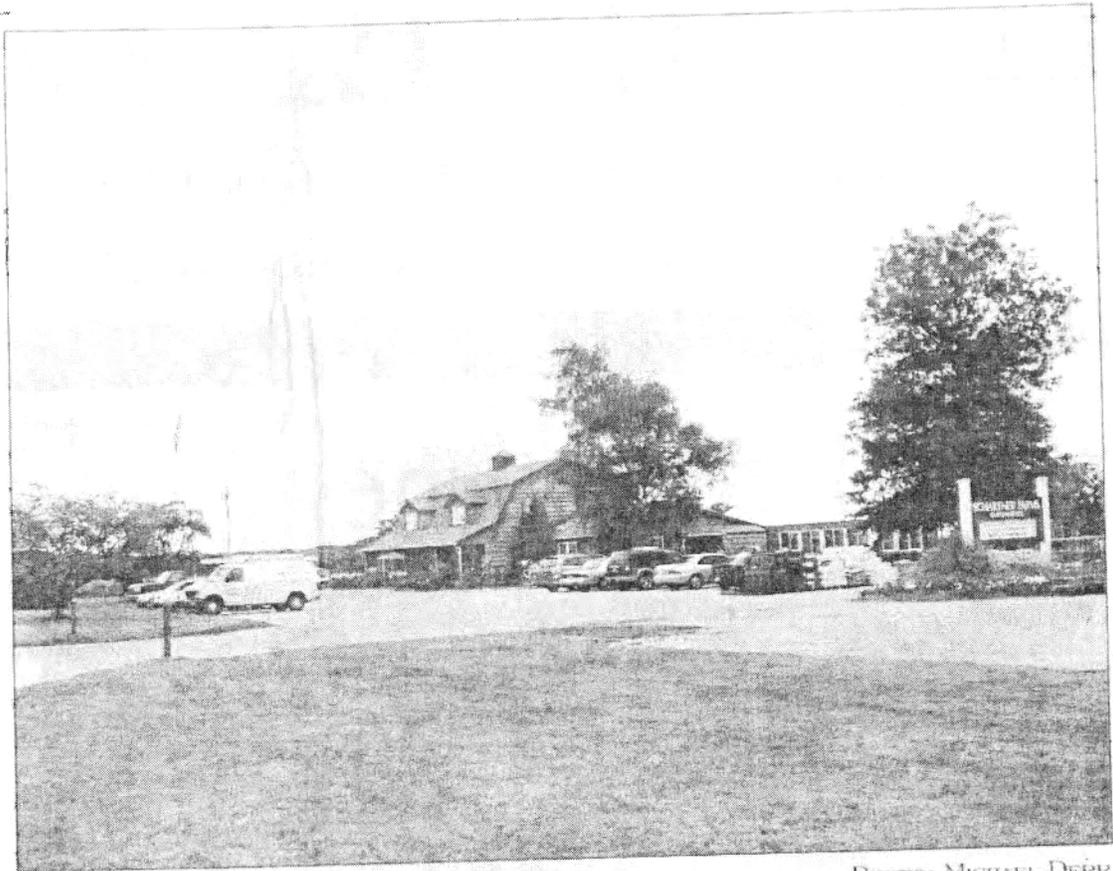


PHOTO: MICHAEL DEIR

It would be a different landscape in the southern end of town if farms like those owned by the Schartners (pictured) and others disappeared and were replaced by retail and office buildings.

## The View From Swamptown

### Thoughts on Farming

I've been thinking an awful lot about farming this past weekend. Actually, as those of you who read this column often are aware, I think about farming and its place in our history on a regular basis anyway; this week, however, it's really been on my mind. It all began Friday as I paid my respects to the Schartner clan as they celebrated the remarkable life of their family matriarch, Mary Schartner. The tangible evidence of her extraordinary legacy - 93 years of a life well led, was gathered there before all to see; generation upon generation of her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren together, bound by their love for this remarkable lady. You see, for those of you who may not understand family farming, the farmer's wife is the very glue that holds the whole enterprise together. And in the modern era, when farming in New England is a difficult enterprise at best, not only must she keep the "home fires burning", she often must, as Mary did, hold a job in the outside world to further "keep the financial wolves at bay".

You know our American lexicon is chock full of farming expressions that have, over time, taken on a different meaning than their original intent. Two of these spring to my mind as I reflect on the life of Mary Schartner and those like her. The phrase "salt of the earth" originally harkened back to that certain something that good farm soil possessed. A really knowledgeable farmer could just grab a handful of it and by the very feel, weight, and smell of it know that it possessed that certain essence that would guarantee the opportunity for success. Such is the soil of the land that the Schartners farm out in Slocum; it possessed that essence back in the 1700's when it was a Reynolds farmer who held it in his hand just as sure as it still does today when Rit Schartner breathes in that essence. Mary Schartner surely was the "salt of the earth". To "come from good stock" in the farming sense means that the crop or livestock in question could be counted on as dependable, reliable, and true. You could bank on it; you could literally set your clocks by it. Mary Schartner certainly came from good stock.

Life is a cyclical thing, as farmers and the rest of us are all too well aware, and the other event that caused me to think on farming revolved around a new soul entering this world at almost the same time that Mary Schartner left us. A new little niece in the Cranston clan (welcome to the world, Jasmine!) had me driving up to Kent County Hospital just a short time after seeing Mary off "this mortal coil". As I drove past the sad remains of the two small dairy farms that once populated the land now covered in medical office buildings and laboratories, I couldn't help but think about the contrasts between what this portion of Warwick once was; there was a time when I was a lad, that a ride up Route 2 in Warwick was as bucolic a trip as could be found in Rhode Island, and what it had become. Every community in New England has had to wrestle with this challenge, they've had to make a conscious choice between farming and development; between cows and corn and good folks like the Schartners and the often-unrealized visions of tax relief and development. It's as plain as the nose on your face in which direction Warwick went, but not so easy to figure out for North Kingstown. You see, that very crossroad for us is now - that important wrestling match for North Kingstown is today. We all need to clearly choose sides in this one. And the choice is clear cut; just

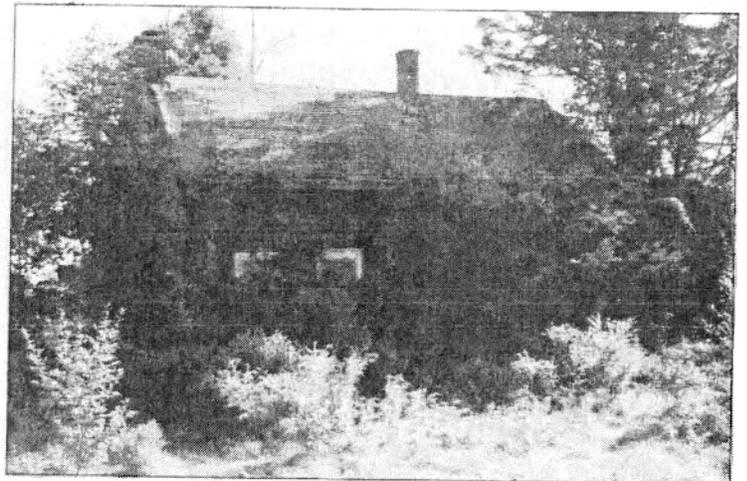
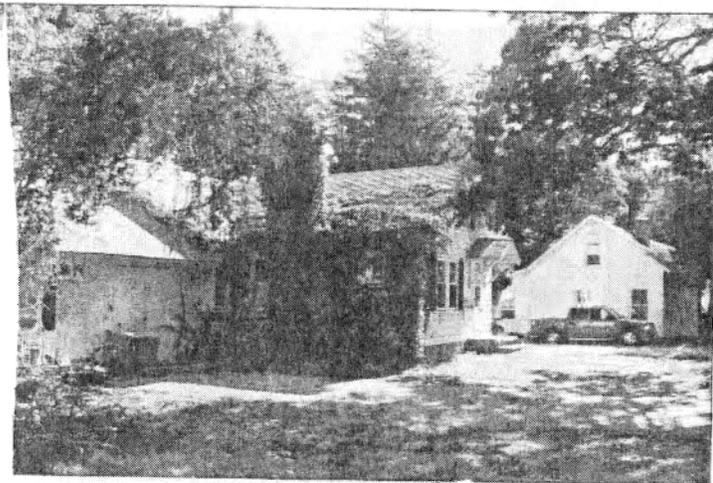
drive down Route 2 in Warwick for a mile or so and contrast that with a drive down Route 2 past the Schartners Farm or down Slocum and Indian Corner Roads past the farms of the Tuckers and the Schartners in North Kingstown. I certainly know which vista I enjoy more!

Once you've decided, you can let the world know in two ways. One, articulate how you feel about the contribution that farming brings to the table here in North Kingstown; talk it up, spread the word to your friends, neighbors, and yes, your council members regarding your feelings about this important topic. Secondly and of equal importance; buy local. Express your support for farmers by supporting them. Buy from the Schartners, the Healeys, the Hallene's, the Turco's, and all the other farmers in the area. And make a point to support the local markets that buy from them as well. Sure you can get a tomato cheaper at Sam's Club or a pumpkin at WalMart, although with the cost of gas figured in I'm not even sure of that anymore, but it'll be as tasteless as that drive down route 2 in Warwick was.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

North Kingstown buildings slated for demolition include (clockwise from above) a house at 310 Hamilton Allenton Road, a house on Prospect Avenue, a former tea room on Tower Hill Road and several houses between Staples and the highway overpass on Ten Rod Road.



## The View From Swamptown

### Thoughts on Housing

One of the most interesting aspects of the history of Lafayette village is the notion that so many of the buildings within the village have been moved from the original site where they were constructed. Over time, I've learned that more buildings than I can count on my fingers were relocated to fit into the vision that Robert Rodman had for his community. You see, Rodman, like all other folks of his day, understood that a good building, a good home, was a precious thing. Back in a time before dimensional lumber, power tools, and pneumatic nail guns the construction of a home was a major undertaking. When every board had to be cut with a handsaw, every hole drilled with a bit and brace and every nail hammered by hand, you thought twice, maybe even three times before you chose to demolish a home. Besides, the idea of demolishing a perfectly good house was contrary to every single aspect of Yankee sensibility; it was wasteful, it was even arrogant, it was wrong. So Robert Rodman moved stores, schools, boarding houses, homes and even churches. And he wasn't the only one; all across 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century America, buildings were on the move. Everyone knew then what we have forgotten now; a good home is a precious thing.

The idea that a perfectly good home is a disposable commodity is a strictly 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century concept. In the age of McMansions and "bigger is always better", it seems that houses have become as throwaway as an old packing crate. Robert Rodman and his contemporaries must be perplexed by all this, these disturbing contrasts between an age when single family homes are thrown away like so much rubbish at the same time when countless families are living in shelters, cars and, yes even packing crates, can't make much sense to those who have come before us. And it doesn't make an awful lot of sense to me either. The 19<sup>th</sup> century world may not have been high tech and cutting edge, but they did get this concept right; a good home is indeed a precious thing.

North Kingstown, like the rest of Rhode Island and indeed the whole of America, is dead center in the middle of a crisis; and it's more than just a housing crisis. It's a crisis of conscience – it's "I've got mine, so the heck with you" mentality locked in a fight to the finish with folks, who for the most part, through no fault of their own, haven't any hope of realizing the American dream of homeownership. In my mind, faced with today's reality, its unconscionable, to demolish a perfectly good home when so many are in need of a roof over their heads. You see, a good home is a precious thing.

Right now in North Kingstown more than a dozen perfectly good houses, some of which are shown in the accompanying photos, are scheduled for eventual demolition. They're not big enough, fancy enough or they're just in the way of someone's plans and so, they are poised on the brink of destruction. Good folks in North Kingstown and elsewhere are worrying about where and how they'll keep a roof over their heads and these homes are being destroyed simply because they don't fit into someone's plans. It's just not right; a good home is too precious a thing to be so disposable.

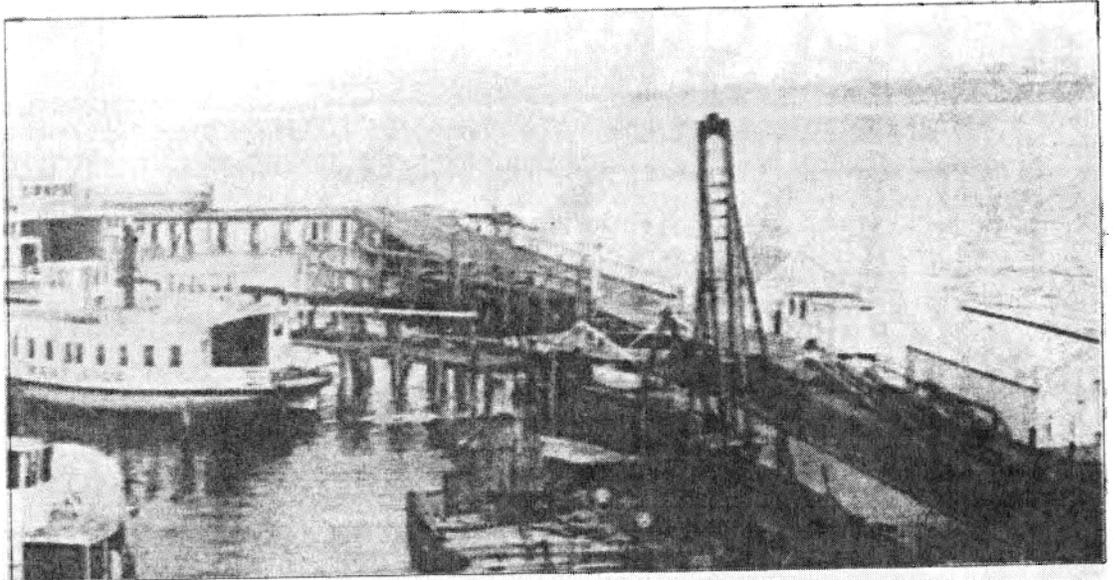
So what can we do you might ask? First, let's start by embracing two ideals; "North Kingstown - its citizenry, will not stand idle while folks are struggling to keep a roof over their heads and, while the State and the community's present affordable

housing plans are commendable, they are just not enough". Secondly, "We in this community, think it's wrong to demolish perfectly good homes when folks are in need". The town needs to first, encourage, through a program of incentives and disincentives, people to do the right thing with these buildings. The incentives could be a one-time tax break phased in across a set number of years as well as assistance in getting through the paperwork required to claim the donation of the home as a charitable contribution. The disincentive is simple; make the cost of a residential structure demolition permit more reflective of the value of a home. If a building's owner was faced with the options of either donating and relocating an unwanted home and getting a property tax and income tax break as well as the knowledge that they've done good by their fellow man or paying a say, \$35,000 demolition permit fee; well, I bet folks are going to be more inclined to do the right thing. The greatest problem facing this is, of course, the availability of land to move these homes to. This is a big obstacle to be sure, but its not insurmountable if the community as a whole gets behind this concept. For starters, the State of Rhode Island itself, particularly through its RIDOT Properties Division has land that could be utilized. Obtained as a part of road projects that went nowhere, this land is not only not being utilized, its also not providing a return to the community in the form of real estate tax income. Sure some of these properties may be less than perfect, but certainly compared to a shelter, car, or something worse they would be appreciated by folks in need. The town itself may have suitable properties as well, or they may be able to arrange for some in upcoming development projects and/or open space acquisition. And finally the community itself may and should step forward with possibilities. Developers, business owners, churches, private citizens, and civic groups may all be able to provide a place for one or more of these homes to be relocated to. The expertise and experience brought to the table via a partnership with a group such as Habitat for Humanity would go along way towards making these things happen. We in North Kingstown, our citizens and leaders could make a difference; its not an impossible task its just a matter of possessing the collective will to make it happen.

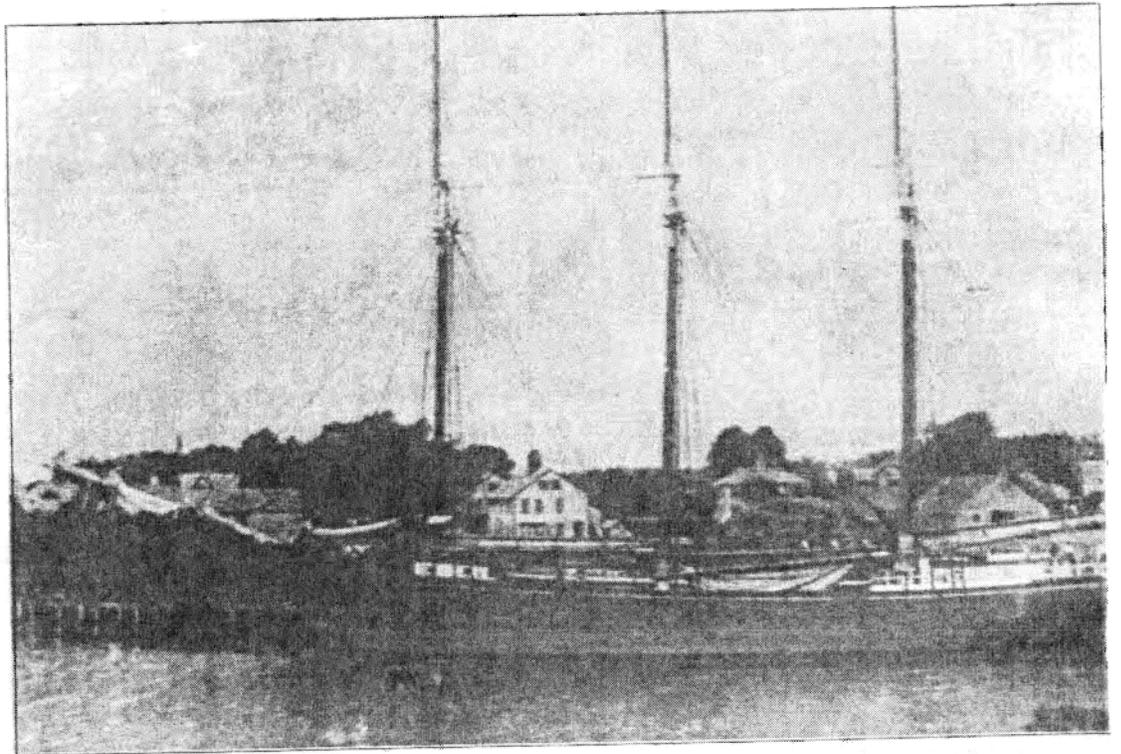
Perhaps the biggest obstacle to all of these good works though, lies within us all. It's that unspoken thought that "I'm not sure I want THOSE people living in my neighborhood." This tragic nagging doubt exists in each and every one of us, and expressed in the form of hard-nosed NIMBY-ism it has already put the breaks on a number of affordable housing projects. The unfortunate truth though, is that, for so many of us these days, with just one or two bad breaks, we would quickly become one of THOSE people, actually we are THOSE people. I, myself am a case in point, some sixteen years ago, already falling behind financially due to an injury that kept me out of work for a number of months, my family welcomed a new child, born though, nearly two months prematurely. The additional costs associated with caring for a child born so early was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. I found myself on the other side of the old adage "There but for the grace of God go I", and moved with my wife and a toddler and an infant into a pop-up camper for the next 7 months. I had, in the blink of an eye, become one of THOSE people – the working homeless, and it changed the way I look at things forever. I learned a lesson then; a good home is a precious thing.

As you're all well aware I'm a Swamp Yankee from the word go and I'm definitely not an advocate of having anyone tell a person what they can do with their property. But this is not about that. Folks can still build bigger and better houses if that's

their desire. We just need to set up a mechanism for folks to do the right thing with the homes they no longer need. Robert Rodman would be proud and North Kingstown, a community that has always cared about things that really matter, could be proud as well.



Above is a 1907 view of the docks at the Saunders shipyard. Dutch Island can be seen in the background. At right is a view from the 1890s showing an unidentified three-masted schooner of about 150 feet tied up at the end of Main Street. A great pile of coal, Wickford's leading import, can be seen forward of the vessel. On the dock behind the vessel is a large pile of lumber, a leading export of that time.



## The View From Swamptown

### North Kingstown and the Sea

There's just no getting away from it, North Kingstown, particularly through two of its major villages Wickford and Saunderstown, is tied inextricably to the sea. As a keen student of the area's history I keep coming back to that fact. The greater community is what it is due to our fair town's links to the Narragansett Bay and the greater oceans beyond. Over the course of the last 7 ½ years of our journey through time together, we've often examined one facet or another of the Town's connection to its maritime roots. But now, I'm pleased to announce that, through an exciting and unique partnership between the good folks steering the course at the North Kingstown Free Library and those at the helm of Swamptown Enterprises, the whole story of North Kingstown's symbiosis with sea will finally be explored.

And the centerpiece of this scholarly effort will be an exciting new listing of the many vessels constructed here during a timeframe spanning more than 100 years from around 1790 to the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the even more expansive list of the many vessels that called North Kingstown's many ports home. These listings, presently totaling 122 vessels constructed here, from the 117 ft long 3-masted ship "Grecian" to numerous small sloops and catboats, and nearly 200 hailing from NK's ports, were culled from more than 1000 pages of Rhode Island custom house records spanning a timeframe stretching from before the Revolutionary War right up to a time just before the beginnings of WWII. From these records I have been able to piece together a part of the stories of North Kingstown's four great shipbuilding families of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the McKenzies, Holloways, Vaughns, and Saunders. Additionally I've been able to compile a list of the countless ship's captains and vessel owners that have called North Kingstown home over the ages. Finally, utilizing these records, I have been able to make some real solid assumptions regarding the connections between the maritime trade, the town's extensive textile industry and its position as a regional center for banking and finance. For the library's part, the staff there is now going through the arduous and painstaking process of entering these reams of data into a digital format which will allow both scholars and interested folks alike to be able to search for information about the career of a particular sea captain or a particular vessel, even to be able to take a close look at ship owners and investors and the ins and outs of the risky venture of investing in the maritime trade in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The North Kingstown Library will also serve as the publisher of the final product; a book that will include not only the aforementioned listings, but a compilation of all of my previously published columns relating to the sea, and a number of other unpublished "gems" written by folks from our town's past. Finally, it will be chockablock full of the kinds of historic photos you've come to expect from a Swamptown Enterprises publication. I've included just a couple here to whet your appetite for more!

As the work on this continues, I am still laboring away on another book "A Walking Tour of Old Wickford" and am hopeful to bring that to fruition through the same partnership. This brings me to my challenge to you out there. Firstly, I am very interested in any information anyone might have on the shipbuilding trade here in North

Kingstown. So, all of you out there with Holloway, McKenzie, and Vaughn connections please check your old sea captains chests and steamer trunks for vital facts about the works of those good men. And, as the Saunders continued to build ships into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I expect somewhere out there lay lots of information about the goings on there in Saunderstown. Maybe a relative of yours even worked at the shipyard building the sailing vessels and steamers that made Stillman Saunders a “captain of industry” in the marine construction trade. Finally, efforts like this require a certain level of financial commitment that is often hard to come by. So if anyone out there is interested in contributing in that fashion, please contact myself or Susan Alyward at the Library. All donations to these important efforts will be tax deductible. So, with all that said, “haul in your mainsails North Kingstownites and standby for an exciting journey through time as we examine North Kingstown and the Sea.

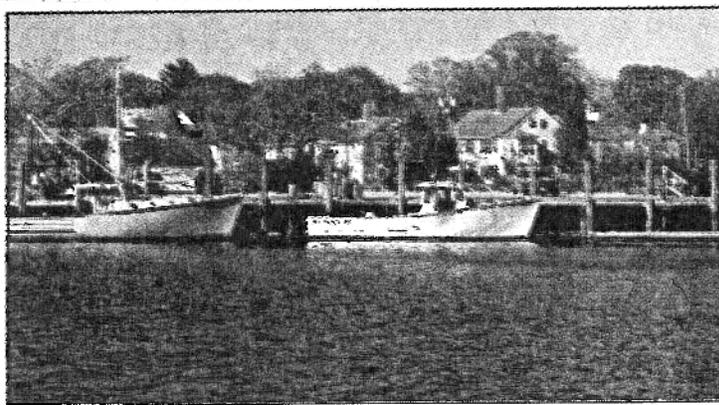


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Wickford Town Wharf is pictured as it appears today.



Each month through June, a View From Swamptown column will focus on members of North Kingstown High School's Class of 1905, the first graduating class. They are (back row, from left): Elizabeth Tully, Gertrude Cullen, Edith Gardiner, Luke Ward, Fannie Maglone, Augusta Francis, Mary V. Duffy (front row, from left) E. Beulah Gardiner, Viola Rigney, Mabel Spink, Malvina LaFreniere, Jessie Maglone, and Viola Fisk.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Class of 1905 – Part 1

As you may be aware, this year will mark the 100<sup>th</sup> time that a class of North Kingstown's finest students will don the "old mortar board", walk across a stage, and receive a diploma signifying their graduation from High School. While much has changed across those 100 years; for instance, that first group held their ceremony at the Odd Fellows Hall (now the Old Theatre Store on Phillips St.) and the 100<sup>th</sup> class will undoubtedly receive their diplomas on a stage set up in a modern football stadium, much too, has remained the same. The day still features dedicated educators, able administrators, proud parents, and hard working deserving students sharing a special and memorable moment together. In honor of all those who have taken that walk, have shared in that memorable moment across those 100 years we are going to take a closer look at the lives of those very first fourteen; the North Kingstown High School Class of 1905. Once a month, from now until the 100<sup>th</sup> class graduates, we'll stop in our rambles through the history of our fair town and shine the spotlight upon two members of that class. This month the Swamptown spotlight shines on Gertrude Cullen and the only male member of the graduating class, Luke "Lou" Ward.

Gertrude Cullen was born in 1887 and spent all but eight of her 71 years in the same home; Mount Maple at the end of Annaquatucket Road. Regular readers of this column will remember that Mount Maple operated as a boarding house for the many mill workers of the area and had for decades, even before Edmund Cullen, a recent Irish immigrant, purchased it and moved in with his big family which included youngest daughter Gertrude. The Cullens were devoted members of St. Bernard's Catholic Church and Gertrude remained such throughout her life. She received all of her education within the public school system of North Kingstown, and upon her graduation in 1905, went back to Mount Maple and eventually became its day-to-day manager. She never married and stayed on at Mount Maple after the days of the boarding house were over, to care for her other unmarried siblings. Gertrude died in September of 1958 after a lifetime of dedication to her family and her Church. She was 71 and is buried in Elm Grove under the very same cool green grass that shelters the countless mill workers that she cared for and the family that she loved.

Now Luke Ward's life is one cut out of a very different cloth than that of his classmate Gertrude Cullen. Luke was born in Bridgeport Connecticut in 1885 to recent immigrants Christopher and Annie (Marchent) Ward. Christopher Ward, too, was Irish and had come to America to work in the Textile industry, an industry in which he was a trained tradesman and in high demand. Sadly, not long after Luke had passed from boyhood to youth, a tragedy occurred and both Christopher and Annie succumbed to one of the countless maladies that swept periodically through the closely settled factory towns of the day and young Luke was an orphan with what might seem to be a dim future. Luck and the good lord shined down upon Luke though, as word got to his uncle and aunt, one state over, and before you knew it orphan child Luke Ward was on his way to



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

Gertrude Cullen spent nearly her whole life at Mount Maple at the end of Annaquatucket Road, above left. Her classmate Luke Ward was orphaned and later adopted by his aunt and uncle, Peter and Mary Byrne, who lived on West Main Street and operated Byrne's Greenhouse and Flower Shop next door, shown above right.

Wickford, RI and an adoption by Peter and Mary Byrne of West Main Street. Luke held on to his last name in memory of his parents, but in every other way he was a part of the Byrne family, eventually becoming an integral part of the family business, Peter Byrne's Greenhouse and Flower Shop, right next door to the big Byrne Family home on West Main St. Luke, like Gertrude, received his entire education within the public school system of NK and by the time he graduated in 1905, he was the well liked and respected President of that class. He was also somewhat older at 20, than his classmates, as his life's circumstances had caused him to have a later start in his schooling. After graduation Luke went right back to work at the Florist shop. Although he did later attend Bryant College to learn the business end of things. As a matter of fact, he listed his trade as Florist on the marriage application he filled out when he married Alice McElhaney in 1908 and with the exception of a 12 year stint as the Postmaster of the Wickford Post Office from 1922 to 1934 (the post office was ironically in the same Gregory Building where most of his High School classes had been held), it was in that Florist shop that he happily spent his days. Luke also loved the theatre; he was active in many local amateur theatre groups, and golf. In another ironic twist of fate, Luke Ward was one of the founding members of the Annaquatucket Golf Club, the golf course which existed for decades on the site of the present day North Kingstown High School. Luke and Alice had two children Mary and John. John Ward eventually became a newspaper man columnist and local historian. If any one person can be credited with much of what is in the South County Room at the Town Library, it is John Ward. Mary married Clarence Parker and stayed here in Wickford as well. Upon Luke's death in 1967 his shop was sold to another young man by the name of Russell Greene. Byrne's Flowers lived on as Greenes Flowers and the business with a tradition of nearly a century continues to this day as Schartners Wickford Flowers. Luke Ward was 83 when he joined his classmate Gertrude over at Elm Grove Cemetery. His story, that of an orphan boy who persevered and made something remarkable of his life, should act as an inspiration to those that graduate this year and every year after.



North Kingstown's first graduating high school class, in 1905, included Mary Duffy (back row, far right) and Malvina LaFreniere (seated, third from right).



Malvina LaFreniere and 17 relatives lived in the building pictured above left in Allenton.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Class of 1905 – part 2

As promised, we are going to continue our look at the group of young people who made up the Town of North Kingstown's first high school graduating class. This month, we are going to take a gander at the lives of Malvina LaFreniere and Mary Duffy.

What a proud moment it must have been for Malvina, her mother Rosalie and the entire Lafreniere clan, on June 20, 1905, the day that North Kingstown's first High School class graduated. Malvina was not only the first member of her family to graduate from high school, she was also awarded the William Hambly prize as the member of the senior class with the best rank in scholarship. This second generation American, the daughter of mill workers and grocery store owners was the very first valedictorian in North Kingstown. The Lafreniere's all lived in the big building in Allenton that also housed the family grocery store "Lafreniere's Market". When I say all, I mean all, the 1910 census shows that there were 18 interrelated Lafrenieres living in the building at the time of its enumeration. Most likely Malvina and all of her brothers, sisters, and cousins walked to school each day from the store, the majority of them would stop off at the Allenton district schoolhouse (now the Montessori school), but Malvina and her high school age relations would have to continue on all the way into Wickford and back each day. After graduation, Malvina continued going to school although not as a student. In the 1905-06 school year, she began a career as a North Kingstown schoolteacher that saw her teaching at the North Quidnessett district schoolhouse, the Swamptown district schoolhouse, the Rock Hill district schoolhouse (located on present day Tower Hill Rd south of its intersection with Shermantown Rd.) and finally in Wickford at the school building that still exists as Wickford Elementary School. Her annual salary that first year was \$324 and at her peak she was bringing home \$522/year. Sadly, towards the end of the 1918 school year, Malvina contracted Scarlet Fever. She never recovered sufficiently to returned to her career and eventually succumbed to heart and lung complications brought on by the original bout of fever. Malvina, an exceptionally bright woman full of promise, was the first of the class of 1905 to depart this world when she died at the age of 37. She, like last month's subject's Gertrude Cullen and Luke Ward, now rests eternal in Elm Grove Cemetery, within eyesight of her former home.

Mary Duffy, like her classmate Malvina Lafreniere, got a job almost immediately upon graduation from high school. The daughter of Hugh and Annie Duffy, she lived a whole lot closer to school than Lavina did. As a matter of fact, while going to school, she lived right next door to the popular establishment run by her father Hugh, Duffy's Tavern. That career path though, belonged to Mary's brother Frank; Mary began her career as a stenographer at the North Kingstown Town Hall. She stayed on there for more than forty more years, eventually rising to the position of Deputy Town Clerk. Mary Duffy was more than just a familiar figure at the Town Hall, after four plus decades there she was the face of town government. When anyone went to Town Hall to get something done they would, sooner or later, be dealing with Mary. Mary was so beloved by all in both the town government and the town in general that, by a unanimous vote of the sitting town council, the flags in front of the Town Hall were flown at half mast when she too, joined her classmates at Elm Grove Cemetery.



In this photograph of the Class of 1905, Ethel Gardiner is third from the left in the back row and Mary Viola Rigney is second from the left in the front row.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Ethel Gardiner, who later succeeded her father as superintendent of the Elm Grove Cemetery, spent her youth living in the caretaker's house on the cemetery grounds.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Mary Viola Rigney lived in this house at the corner of Shady Lea and Tower Hill roads through her high school and college years, and again after returning to town to teach in 1947.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Class of 1905 – Part 3

Welcome to the third installment of our seven part series on the members of the Class of 1905, the first graduating class at North Kingstown Senior High School. Our subjects for this week are Ethel B. Gardiner and Mary V. Rigney.

Now, those of you who are regular readers of this column know, that I have a certain penchant for cemeteries. With this in mind, you'll understand why I'm a bit jealous of the first member of the Class of '05 that we are going to examine today. For you see, Ethel Gardiner spent the vast majority of her life at Elm Grove Cemetery in the Allenton section of our fair town. Her father Alonzo Gardiner became the superintendent of the cemetery around 1899 and Ethel spent her youth living in the caretaker's house on the cemetery grounds. She began her long walk into Wickford to school each day from Elm Grove and more than likely walked alongside of her classmates and neighbors Malvina Lafreniere and Mary Rigney. An intelligent young woman, she had been the hands down winner of the senior English Essay contest at school, Ethel helped her dad out by assisting him in platting out the cemetery as well as writing up a record of all the previous internments. As a matter of fact, this high school girl was one of the people most responsible for the fact that today we know so much about Elm Grove's permanent residents. After graduating from NK High School, Ethel, who was also an accomplished musician, attended the Schneider Piano School in Providence. Throughout all that time Ethel continued to assist her father at the cemetery. Upon his retirement in 1914, the Board of Directors of the cemetery saw fit to appoint Ethel Gardiner as the new Superintendent of Elm Grove Cemetery. At that time, she was the only woman in all of New England to hold such a position. It was a position she held on to for the rest of her life. She, in fact, supervised the burial of a number of her classmates from the Class of '05 and joined them under its cool green shaded grass in 1965.

Mary Viola Rigney, like her friend and classmate Malvina Lafreniere, chose teaching as her profession upon her graduation from North Kingstown High School. She did not, however, begin teaching immediately upon graduation as Malvina did. Instead, she attended Rhode Island Normal School, the predecessor to Rhode Island College, and graduated in June of 1908 with a certificate enabling her to teach grades 1-9. Throughout her high school and college years Mary called the little house at the beginning of Shady Lea Road home where she lived with her parents and siblings. Her father, Edward, who was a lifelong employee of the Rodman textile empire, starting in the Shady Lea mill and eventually rising through the ranks to become the overseer of the Rodman farm, eventually purchased this house from the Rodmans, although during his daughter's school years it was owned by the company and was one of the perks that went along with the farm overseer's position.

Upon graduation from RI Normal School, Mary began teaching at the Lafayette School (now an antique store on Ten Rod Road just east of the rail underpass) and stayed there until the end of the 1913 school year. She then began teaching in the Cranston

School System as a Jr. High School teacher. She stayed there until 1947 when she returned to her hometown, and the little house on the corner of Tower Hill and Shady Lea Roads, and taught grades 4-6 at the Allenton School from 1947 to 1955. Upon her mandatory retirement in 1955 after a teaching career of some 47 years, the Wickford Standard ran a piece proclaiming Mary Rigney as one of the areas most experienced educators. For her part, all Mary knew was that she really didn't want to retire; teaching, and her students, were her life. She too, like Ethel Gardiner left this world in 1965 and now has joined so many of her classmates and her former students at Elm Grove Cemetery. There are still folks out there in our fair town who remember with fondness there days at the Allenton School under the tutelage of Miss Rigney.



Augusta Francis, second from right in back row above, lived in the house below on Annaquatucket Road in North Kingstown for most of her 95 years.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

## The View from Swamptown

### The Class of 1905 – Part 4

In this, the latest installment in our look at the members of North Kingstown High School's first graduating class, the Class of 1905, we are going to take a Swamptown gander at the life of Augusta Francis.

Augusta was born to Alonzo and Ella (Palmer) Francis in August of 1887. In 1894, she moved with her family, to the little poultry farm on Annaquatucket Road that her father had just purchased. Unbeknownst to her at that time, she would spend the rest of her very long life there, including the time frame that she attended High School in nearby Wickford. One could easily surmise that Augusta walked to school each day with classmate and neighbor Gertrude Cullen.

After graduating in June of 1905, Augusta returned to the family farm to help out there. She eventually married George Weigel in 1918 after he returned from service in World War I, and they both continued to work at the egg farm on Annaquatucket Road. Upon the death of her father, Alonzo, the farm was passed down to daughter Augusta and son-in-law George.

Things went well with the Weigel clan until 1939, when George died unexpectedly. Augusta was left with a farm to run, and in the days before Social Security Survivors benefits, little income to get by on. She was a resourceful woman though, and after arranging a partnership with local merchant and friend Oscar Lafreniere, whereby Oscar invested in the farm and in turn received a guaranteed dedicated source for eggs and other poultry products for his market in nearby Allenton, and securing a position with the state of Rhode Island as a certified poultry and egg inspector, Augusta managed just fine. She also moonlighted as an instructor for the Northeastern Poultry Council. All in all, Augusta Weigel was a busy woman and she remained such until her retirement from the State of Rhode Island in 1962 at the age of 75.

Augusta died in her little farmhouse on Annaquatucket Road in the summer of 1982. She had lived there in that same house for 88 years. She had not only outlived all of her relations during her 95 years of life, but also the entire class she graduated with. Her obituary proudly points out that she was the last surviving member of the Class of 1905.



Sisters Fannie Maglone (third from right in back row) and Jessie Maglone (second from right in front row) graduated together in North Kingstown High School's first graduating class in 1905.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Class of 1905 – Part 5

In this, the latest installment in our look at the members of North Kingstown High School's first graduating class, the Class of 1905, we are going to take a Swamptown gander at the lives of the Maglone sisters, Fannie And Jessie.

Fannie and Jessie were the daughters of John and Jennie (McCombs) Maglone and were long time residents of the village of Belleville. They lived on the Maglone farm on Oak Hill Road (seen in the accompanying photo) and had one of the longest journeys each day into Wickford for classes. The sisters, who were not twins, attended all of high school together and Jessie, who graduated at the age of 16, was the youngest member of the Class of '05.

John Maglone, their father, was not only a prominent local farmer, he was also the iceman and ran a large and successful business called the Belleville Ice Company. During a timeframe when those "new-fangled" iceboxes were showing up in everyone's home, John Maglone's ice wagon, with "Belleville Ice" emblazoned upon the side was a common sight along the highways and byways of Belleville, Wickford, and everywhere in between. I expect that Fannie and Jessie caught many a ride into Wickford aboard that rather chilly mode of transportation.

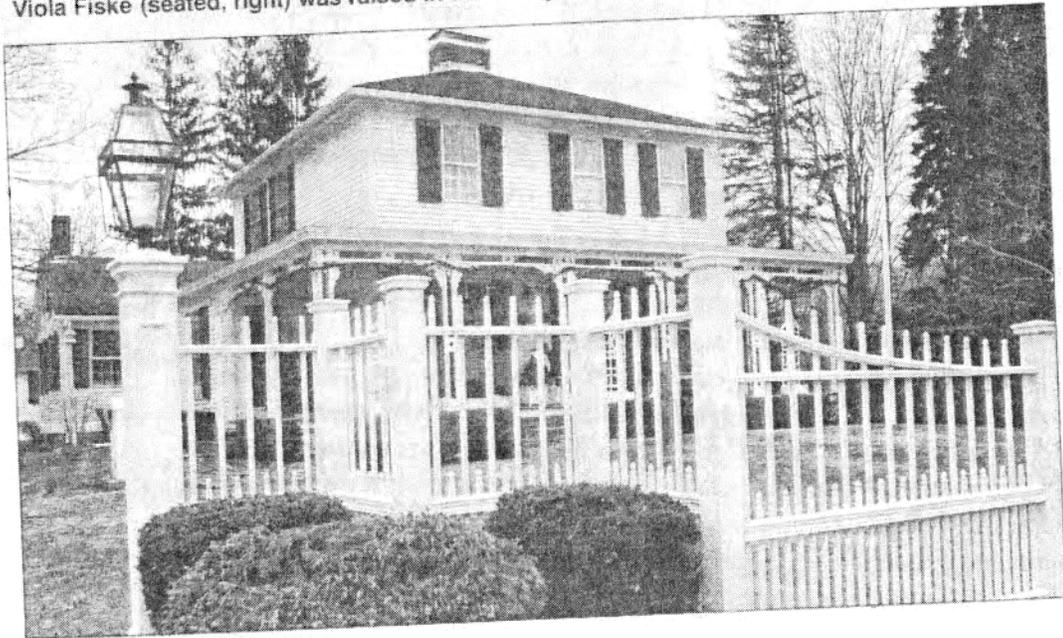
After graduation, the two sisters, who seemed to do everything together, courted; Jessie was rather taken with young clerk named Roger Rodman and Fannie had her eye on banker Henry Chadsey, and then married in quick succession. Jessie and Roger tied the knot in June of 1910 and Fannie and Harry (Henry's preferred nickname) followed in November of that same year. Jessie and Fannie were each other's Maid-of-Honor and Harry and Roger stood up for each other as well.

Before long, the two happy couples, along with parents John and Jennie, John having sold his ice business to take the position on the State Board of Public Roads, all bought homes within a stones throw of each other in the village of Wickford. Each day Harry Chadsey would board the SeaView Trolley on his way to his banking position in Providence. Harry was also well known as a watchmaker and repaired many a pocket watch owned by the residents of the village. Roger, who eventually was appointed to the part time position of Chief of the North Kingstown Fire Department, also ran a number of different eateries within the village including one in their home which was situated right next to the Wickford Station of the SeaView Electric Trolley Line.

Fannie and Jessie's lives were typical for the time. They were devoted wives and mothers and remained as close as only sisters can throughout their days. In the end, the two girls who seemed to do everything together shared one more thing. Widowed in rather rapid succession, they spent their last years, living within a loving extended family, in homes across the street from each other on Wampanoag Circle. Jessie lived until 1959 and Fannie until 1969. The extended clan that devotedly cared for them, their grandchildren and grand-nieces & nephews the Walsh's also carried on in the firefighting tradition begun by Roger Rodman, so many years earlier.



Viola Fiske (seated, right) was raised in the family's house on Tower Hill Road, pictured below.



## The View From Swamptown

### The Class of 1905 – Part 6

In this, the latest installment in our look at the members of North Kingstown High School's first graduating class, the Class of 1905, we are going to take a Swamptown gander at the life of Mary Viola Fiske.

Mary Viola was born in 1887 to Albert and Olive Fiske; she was the youngest of five children. Now Albert was a man of some importance in the Fiske's hometown village of Belleville. He worked at the Belleville Woolen Mill where he was the overseer of that large textile mill's carding department. The carding department, for the uninitiated, is actually the first stop for raw wool in a woolen mill. This is where the wool is cleaned and combed out; all the individual fibers are untangled in the carding department, so as to allow the wool to then be spun into yarn on its way to being woven into fabric.

As such, the Fiske's lived in a fine house along the Post Road (now Tower Hill Road) as it wove its way through the individual mill villages of Belleville, Allenton, Shady Lea, and Silver Springs. But Mary Viola too, like all the rest of the Belleville girls who attended High School in Wickford, had to walk the many miles to school each day. In school, she was known simply as Viola, to minimize the confusion brought about by the peculiar fact that she, Mary Viola Rigney, and Mary Viola Duffy all shared the same name.

Although, I'm certain that Mary Viola's graduation on that spring day in 1905 was a source of immense pride for the whole of the Fiske extended family, I'm just as certain it was a day that was also tinged with sadness, even for the graduate. You see, just 12 days earlier, Albert Fiske had succumbed to kidney failure. Mary Viola's graduation celebration had come right on the heels of her loving father's funeral.

Shortly after these momentous events in Mary's life, another one occurred when she married the young up and coming purchasing agent for the Belleville Mill, William Fullerton Blaine. By 1920, the Blaine family, including Mary's widowed mother Olive, were living on Pontiac Avenue in Providence, as Fullerton (the name he went by) had taken a position as a purchasing agent for one of the larger Providence textile mills. They spent the remainder of their lives there, only returning to North Kingstown to visit family and bury their dead in the Fiske family plot in Elm Grove Cemetery; first Olive in 1941, then Fullerton in 1959 and finally 93-year-old Mary Viola in 1981. She was the second to last of the Class of 1905 to join her classmates at Elm Grove. Only Augusta Francis outlived her.

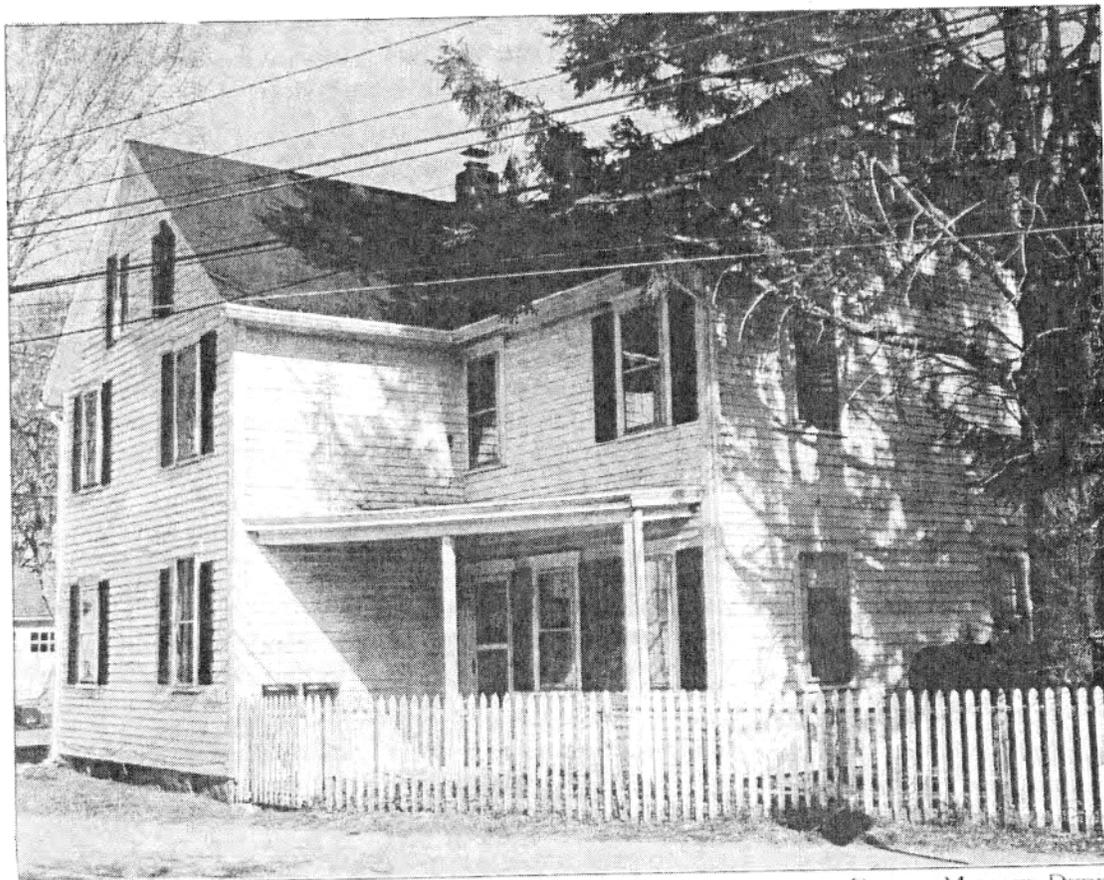


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

After the death of her parents, Mabel Spink returned to the family homestead at 35 Phillips St., where she lived with her sister until her marriage at age 47.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Class of 1905 – Part 7

In this, the latest installment in our look at the members of North Kingstown High School's first graduating class, the Class of 1905, we are going to take a Swamptown gander at the life of Mabel Spink.

Mabel Evelyn Spink, born in January of 1887, was one of the older members of the Class of 1905. However, at five years younger than her closest sibling, she was certainly the baby of the Spink family who lived in a comfortable home on the corner of Phillips and Champlin (now Elam) streets just a stone's throw from the site of the Wickford Academy where she had received her education prior to joining the Town of North Kingstown's first high school class. Her father Daniel was the village butcher, and her brother Daniel Jr., who went by his middle name Herbert to avoid the obvious confusion, was working along side him learning the family trade. Mabel's big sister Nellie, who was 7 years older than she, was an accomplished seamstress and dressmaker, and worked out of the family home mending clothes and making fine dresses for the ladies of the village. Although all the girls of the Class of '05 were great friends, I imagine those that had to "hoof it" for a half hour or more each day before and after school were a bit envious of Mabel's short jaunt home each day after classes let out.

By 1910, Mabel Spink shows up in US Census records as living in Providence; staying at the Washington Street YWCA building and working as a seamstress and milliner for a large Providence Church. I expect it is safe to assume that she trained for this profession under the watchful eye of her sister Nellie. Fate played its hand as it often does, and things changed quickly for Mabel, for with the death of her mother, Melissa (Whitman) Spink in 1913 and her father, Daniel in 1915, Mabel was back in her family's Wickford home and living again with Nellie.

By the time the 1920's and then the 1930's rolled around, Nellie and Mabel were set into their routines in Wickford. Nellie continued to work as a seamstress and Mabel had a new career as a bookkeeper at a local garage. Brother Daniel had long ago moved out of the family home and was now raising a family of his own while continuing to work as a butcher. I imagine local folks were beginning to refer to the two sisters as the Spink spinster ladies, as both were rapidly passing the marrying age and probably were resigned to living out their lives together, but alone.

Things changed for Mabel though in 1933. She began to entertain a "gentleman caller", the widower George Prentice, a retired employee of the Sea View Electric Trolley line that had run through the village for decades. In February of 1934 at 47 years old, Mabel married George Prentice. Never again would she be known as a spinster lady. Her Maid of Honor at the ceremony was her old classmate and long time friend Fanny



Mabel Spink, third from left in the front row, is pictured with her classmates in North Kingstown High School's first graduating class.

(Maglone) Chadsey who had lived around the corner for decades with her husband Henry. Mabel and George spent 20 more years together as husband and wife. She joined her classmates already resting in peace at Elm Grove Cemetery in 1953. Husband George, after burying his second wife, lived for five more years, cared for by his son G. Edward Prentice, a local historian who specialized in the tales of Rhode Island's small rail lines, until he joined Mabel at Elm Grove in 1958.

Next month, we'll wrap up our look at the lives and times of the Class of 1905 as we examine the stories of Lizzie Tully and Edith Gardiner.



Elizabeth Tilly (back row, left) and Edith Gardiner (back row, third from left) are pictured with their classmates from North Kingstown High School's first graduating class in 1905.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Edith Gardiner lived in this house at 650 Tower Hill Road, the home of her grandparents, Byron and Hannah Sweet, until her marriage in 1911.

## The View From Swamptown

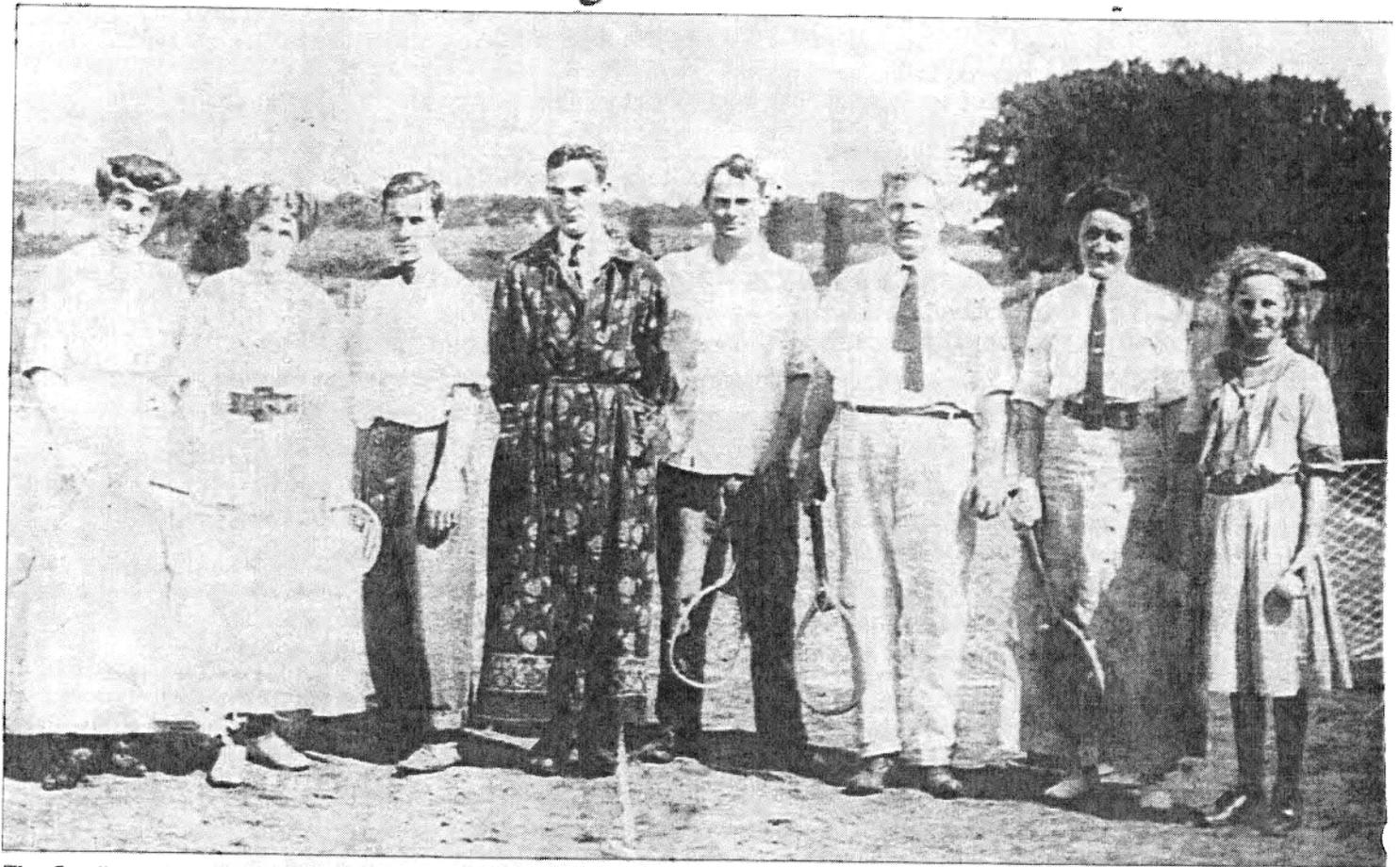
### The Class of 1905 – Part 8

In this, the last installment of our look at the members of North Kingstown High School's first graduating class, the Class of 1905, we are going to take a Swamptown gander at the lives of the two remaining graduates, Lizzie Tully and Edith Gardiner.

I'll begin with Lizzie Tully, and I'm sad to say, Lizzie was the most difficult subject of the entire group and I know little about her life. Much of this has to do with the circumstances of the life of Elizabeth Agnes Tully (her full name), you see, she was truly born into a working class family, a group of folks just getting by, but, like all Americans, parents John and Annie Tully wanted more for their children and public education was their best bet for a better future. Lizzie was their ninth child. John worked hard as a laborer at one of the mills in the Belleville/Allenton area of town where they lived and Annie tended to her family. In September of 1893 the precarious life of the Tully clan was rocked to the core when 47-year-old John Tully died unexpectedly. Lizzie was not quite six years old at the time of her father's death. The family, including John Tully's many brothers and sisters who also lived in the area, pulled together and Annie and her clan stayed here in North Kingstown long enough to allow Lizzie to graduate from high school.

By 1910, Annie and four of her children were living on Bergen Street in Providence. Her eldest daughter, also named Annie, worked in the city as a schoolteacher, another daughter Mary, worked in a Providence textile mill, a son named John, worked in a tool factory, and Lizzie, by then 23 years old, worked as a stenographer at a Providence attorneys office. The 1920 U.S. Census shows little change, an elderly Annie Tully still heads a household on Bergen St. in Providence, with four adult children, although by this time all but Annie the schoolteacher, are working in the textile industry; Mary and John on the floor and Lizzie working as a stenographer typing away in an office at the mill. This is where the trail goes cold, I don't know whether Lizzie ever married or when she died, I can only say that she, sadly, is the only member of the Class of '05 that was not ultimately reunited with her classmates at Elm Grove Cemetery. She is most probably buried somewhere in Providence with her mother, not back here in North Kingstown with John Tully and the rest of this impressive Irish-immigrant clan.

Edith Gardiner's life was quite different from her classmate Lizzie's, but they did share one thing in common. Edith too, had lost a parent when she was young, her mother Mary (Sweet) Gardiner died in 1900 when Edith was only 13 years old. Edith, from that point onward, grew up in the home of her grandparents Byron and Hannah Sweet on Tower Hill Road. She lived there, with her grandparents, and her father Henry and siblings, right next door to her other Gardiner relations. Being surrounded by family certainly helped her through the loss of her mother. The Sweet homestead was her home through her high school years and right up to her marriage in 1911 to Uldrich Pettine of Providence. Uldrich was just finishing his law degree, and he and Edith lived for a time



The Gardiner clan poses for the camera after a game of tennis on a court at the Sweet homestead, one of the area's first tennis courts. Edith Gardiner, a member of the class of 1905, is pictured second from left next to her fiancé, Uldrich Pettine. Next are brother Arthur, father Henry, stepmother Louise and sister Grace. At Edith's left is Arthur's fiancée, Susan Lake.

in Washington D.C. while he finished his studies at Georgetown. By 1920, they were back in Providence where Uldrich Pettine practiced law.

Edith and Uldrich had two children, Vivian and Uldrich Jr. Uldrich the son, eventually became a celebrated career Army officer who served in WWII and as a Colonel served on the War Crimes Commissions in Japan at the end of the War. Vivian married and had two sons Donald and William Haid. Edith's children and grandchildren were a great source of pride for her. She departed this life in December of 1954 and is buried with her classmates under the cool green grass of Elm Grove Cemetery, less than a mile from the Sweet homestead where she grew up. That house is, by the way, still owned by a direct Sweet descendant and is one of the only historic homes in our fair town still in the hands of the family that built it.



**Edith Francesca Gardiner is pictured soon after her graduation.**

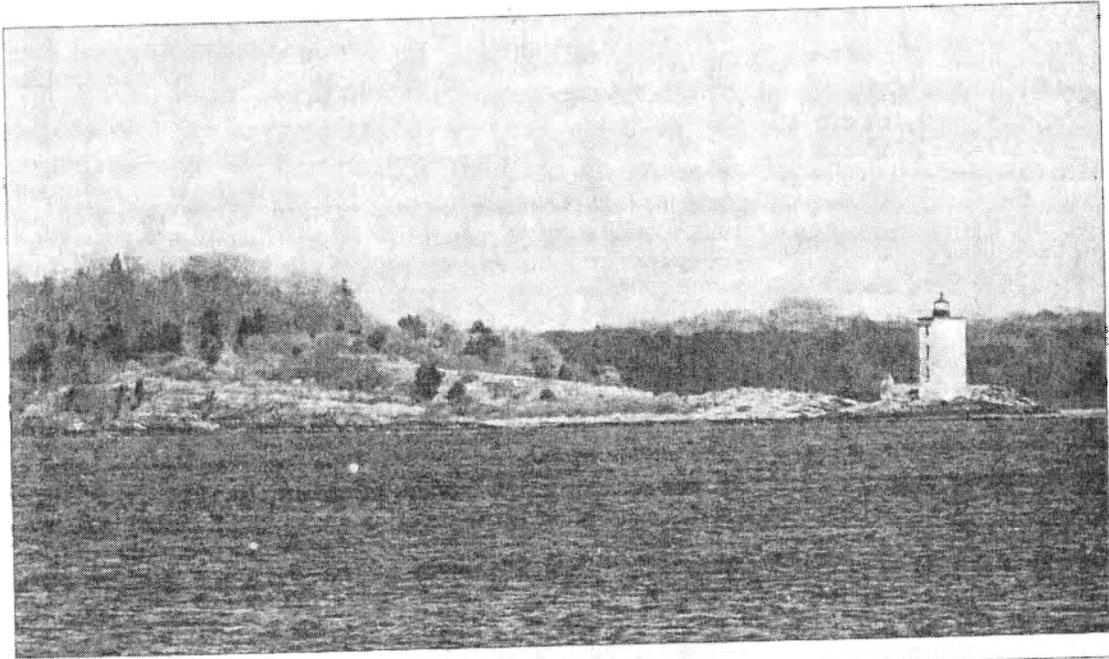
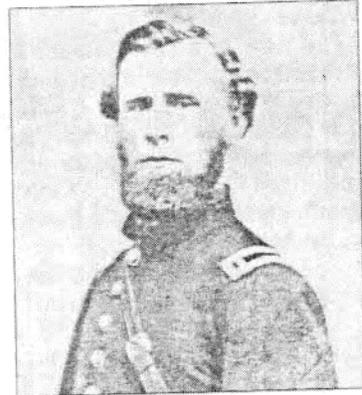


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Dutch Island, off Rome Point in North Kingstown, served as the training headquarters for Rhode Island's Civil War black brigade, the 14th R.I. Colored Heavy Artillery, which sent about 2,000 men, including the Roome brothers, James and John, south to fight the war.



Wickford's own Lt. John B. Peirce, who served in the Civil War as Quartermaster at Fort Jackson, in the Mississippi delta outside New Orleans, eventually became North Kingstown Town Clerk.

## The View From Swamptown

### Slaves to Soldiers – The Roome Family Part 1

Lately I've been taking a long hard look at the long ago lives of the folks that made up the Roome Family. The history of the Roome family goes back to a time before there was a state of Rhode Island, back to colonial days. The first folks who called themselves Roome's came here, like most folks of the time, from across the Atlantic. The difference was though, that these immigrants came against their will, and until the moment the gavel fell at the auction in Newport or Bristol they weren't Roomes, as a matter of fact they probably weren't even related at all. The real names of this group of folks who were loaded into the back of a wagon belonging to London-born Newport businessman George Rome (pronounced Room) are lost to us forever. But from that momentous day onward, like it or not, they were a family. A family made up of the slaves of George Rome.

You know, it's hard to track the lives of folks who were once thought to be of such insignificance. These slaves were of value to Rome for sure; they were an investment counted on to bring in a return of sorts, not unlike a draft horse or a team of oxen. But let's face it, one does not record the daily triumphs and tribulations of a draft horse, no one marks the births, deaths, and important occasions within the lives of a team of oxen, so, needless to say, there is little permanent record on these people. I'm not even sure I know the names of the entire family group, although I do feel real comfortable calling them a family even though, as I said, they probably weren't even related. These displaced souls could only count upon themselves for solace; there was no one else they could turn to in times of need. When they experienced the rare peaceful or happy moment whom else would they share it with. If that's not what family is all about well I don't know what is. So, for better or for worse, the slaves of George Rome, real people who until then had had their own identities and their own names, but who for now and forever more would be known as Cesar, Cato, Pero, Juba, and Elizabeth got to know each other as they traveled to their new home across the Narragansett Bay; the summer estate of their master, at a place we now call Rome Point.

As I mentioned, at the present time, I know little of their lives as slaves. What I can tell you is that they tended to Rome's summer estate here in Kingstown under the direction of a overseer who also lived on the enormous piece of property that Rome had purchased at the bankruptcy of fellow Newporter Henry Collins. And when the newly formed government of the State of Rhode Island seized Rome's assets after convicting him of treason during the early days of the Revolution, his slaves were part of the property eventually purchased by Ezekial Gardiner around 1778. I find it ironic to note that the proceeds of that sale, including the price paid for these slaves, went to help fund the war effort, the war effort to end British tyranny. And finally I can tell you that eventually these hard working folks too, got their freedom, when they were manumitted as required by Rhode Island law at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Cezar, Cato, Pero, Juba, and Elizabeth were finally free.

At this point in history, these folks start showing up in the historic record as real people. State and Federal censuses, beginning with 1800 call them free Negroes or free blacks. Town records record their living and dying, their births and marriages, and even

the rare instances of property ownership. Old Pero as he was known, becomes a local character of sorts and is noted in numerous 19<sup>th</sup> century narratives. Cato Roome is involved tragically, in one of South County's most notorious crimes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They marry within the local African American/Native American community and have children and grandchildren. Most of their descendants live very ordinary lives, but some have their moments of greatness and become witnesses of and participants in the history of our country. God willing, over the course of the next year or so, from time to time, we are going to take a gander at the life of a member of this remarkable clan. And now that you know a bit about the Roome family background, we are going to zero in on the lives of two of the descendants of these former slaves, brothers James and John Roome.

The year was 1863 and James and John Roome, descended of Pero, had no doubt, just heard the exciting news about the all-colored regiment being formed up in Providence, to fight in the War against the south. It would be called the 14<sup>th</sup> RI Colored Heavy Artillery and was to be run by white officers under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Nelson Viall. These were exciting times for African Americans in the north, the tide had not yet turned in the war and all over the free north, black regiments were being formed up and people of color were to be allowed to take part in the War to end slavery. Their older cousin George, who had moved to Worcester Massachusetts, had recently signed up in the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts (this unit was featured in the Hollywood movie "Glory", George Roome's story will be the subject of a future column) and was already training as James and John were making their mark on the enlistment papers in Providence.

Well, this may have been the north, and although there were no slaves here, things still weren't equal between the races and the first problem run into by Lt. Col. Viall was where was he to train his regiment of just over 2000 raw recruits. Many of the Regular Army, which trained in the capital city of Providence would not stand for the idea of training side by side with black men and so Viall needed to find another site. After conferring with the powers that be, he chose Dutch Island, just off the shores of North Kingstown, and ironically for the Roome brothers, within a stones throw of Rome Point for his training camp. It was to there that John and James headed in August of 1863. The moment was all the sadder for the recently married James as his wife Abby was seven months pregnant when he took the ferry over to Dutch Island that day.

After training, the 14<sup>th</sup> RI was assigned to the defense of New Orleans and the gulf of the great Mississippi River, just captured a year previous by the north under the command of David Farragut and David Porter as a part of a battle plan called "Anaconda". The idea was to squeeze the south by not only not allowing supplies up the Mississippi to the Confederacy, but also to constrict them financially by blocking the shipments of their only cash crop, cotton. The thinking was that if the south could not get its cotton to market their war machine would soon grind to a halt.

James and John's units were assigned to Fort Jackson, one of the two Forts stationed on either side of the Mississippi out at the very end of the delta. John, on a gun crew, was responsible for manning those heavy cannons and firing upon any Confederate flag or suspicious vessel attempting to run the blockade. James, had been assigned to the Quartermaster's Department, run by a white officer from his hometown, named John B. Peirce, a man who would one day be the Town Clerk of North Kingstown. Small towns

being what they were (and still are) it is not unreasonable to suspect that Lt. John Peirce was already acquainted with his new assistant Private James Roome.

One of the greatest risks of being assigned to the twin forts, Jackson and Plaquemine, out in the swampy delta land at the end of the Mississippi was not death by bullet, but death by disease. The swampy mosquito infected quagmire that was the delta claimed more Union troops than the guns of the Confederacy, and sadly, James Roome was among them. In August of 1864, just a year after enlisting and ten months after the birth of a son he would never see, James Roome died of malarious fever and was buried in an unmarked grave in the Fort Jackson Cemetery. The epidemic claimed many Union lives including a white officer whose body was transported back to RI for burial. James was 26. Brother John continued on alone, serving also within the city of New Orleans proper during its occupation, until the unit was mustered out in October of 1865.

Both John Peirce and John Roome returned to Rhode Island and lived out their lives here. They both, undoubtedly, told War stories to their families. I only hope that John Roome's tales of adventure were some comfort to young Henry James Roome as he grew up knowing that his father, descended from slaves, had given his life for the greater cause to free other slaves.

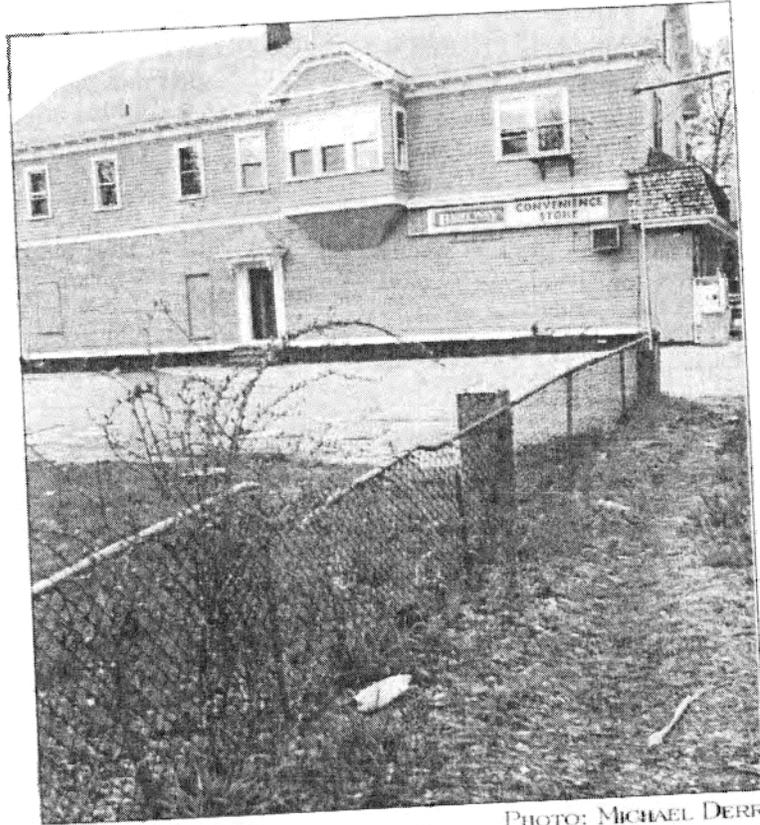


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Cato Roome and his wife, Dorcas, lived in a house, which since has been razed, at this property along Tower Hill Road in Allenton.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Death of Cato Roome

About two months ago, we began a look at the life and times of a remarkable family of sorts. Bound together by slavery, a group of probably unrelated Africans became the Roome family. They, and their descendants were residents of our fair town for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Last time around, we took a look at two brothers John and James Roome and the part they played in the great Civil War. This week, we'll examine the tragic death of their uncle, one of the group of original slaves, Cato Roome.

As I mentioned last time, the death of Cato Roome was considered at the time to be one of the most notorious crimes in Rhode Island history and it was talked about around the village of Allenton, where Cato lived, for decades after. This version of the events of winter of 1837-38 was remembered by mill-owner William Pierce and recorded for posterity in Cole's "History of Washington and Kent Counties" which was compiled largely in 1888-9.

Pierce sets the tale by describing the two protagonists Cato Roome, an old feeble man of color who was well-liked and highly respected in the village of Allenton; he had recently undergone a surgery by Old Doc Shaw and was weakened by the ordeal, and James Browning, a stout robust black man of more than 250 pounds who ran a small successful farm. Cato Roome lived with his wife Dorcas, in a small home on the corner of what is now Tower Hill and West Allenton Roads and Browning's farm, which he shared with his wife and three sons was located about a half mile up what is now Pendar Road. Pierce tells the tale thusly, "The circumstances of the murder are as follows. Mr. Browning had been to Providence with a horse team carrying a load of poultry and farm produce and returning with winter stores. On his return he stopped at the house of Mr. Roome, late at night, complaining of feeling very bad and asked the old man to drive his team home for him and unload it. Cato declined saying he was not feeling well himself on account of his recent surgery. Browning then left and went on by himself. Some two or three hours later the old man Cato and his wife were awakened by the wife of Browning asking him to come with her to her house as her husband was acting very strangely, and had driven her out-of-doors, threatening to kill her. Cato went reluctantly, and arriving at the house was met in the entryway by Browning, who pounded him to death against the sides of the door threshold. Not being satisfied with this, Browning pounded Roome's head to jelly with a stone that had been used to hold the door open. The wife immediately alarmed the neighbors, who flocked to the scene of the tragedy (Pierce was among this group) and by sunrise some 50 people or so were on Browning's Farm. Soon after the murder, Browning, with his gun and his dog, had fled into the woods. Within an hour or so, Browning returned and threatened to start shooting. People sought shelter in and around the house and other buildings. His dog got to fighting with another dog eventually. This distracted Browning enough to allow the people there to rush him and overpower him. They carried him into the house and lashed him to the bedstead, it took as many men as could possibly stand around the bed to hold him down while he was being tied up. Once lashed to the bedstead, his only weapon was to spit

which he did to anyone who entered the room. His mental health continued to deteriorate and he was finally carried off by the authorities to the jail in Kingston, where he died one month later, by then a complete raving maniac. He left behind a widow and three sons Samuel, Jonathan, and Daniel. Daniel, too, went insane and killed his mother in March of 1846. He spent the remainder of his life at the State Farm in Cranston.”

As is the case with most of the Roomes, no one knows now where Cato Roome is buried. No mention is made of how Dorcas Roome and her two grown sons, William and Ebenezer, dealt with this swirling maelstrom of tragedy, death, and insanity that had overcome their family and taken Cato. The tale does paint for us a picture of what life must have been like during a time when the only “law” around was a State Sheriff some ten miles away. Ironically, I also must note that the widow Dorcas Roome left this life in the same year and month that Daniel Browning murdered his widowed mother. In this manner too, the two families are forever tied together by tragedy. Next time we examine the life and times of the Roome family, we’ll take a gander at the life of “old Pero”, Cato’s brother in slavery.

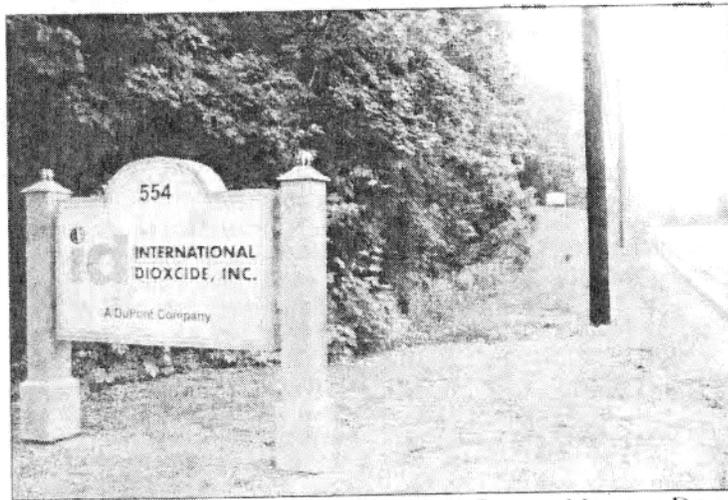


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Pero Roome's squatter's shack was on this piece of property, known at the time as the "Vale of Pero," on Ten Rod Road.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Roome Family – Part 3, The Story of Pero Roome

The last time we took a Swamptown gander at this, the extended family of a group of colonial era slaves from the George Rome estate (now known as Rome Point), we examined the life and tragic death of Cato Roome. This week's column will focus on the story of Cato's brother in slavery, Pero.

After obtaining his freedom along with the rest of his clan towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Pero apparently went where ever he could find work; drifting between North Kingstown and E. Greenwich according to census records. It appears that along the way Pero must have married, as he is recorded to have had a son John, a deaf mute who eventually worked as a domestic in the Abby Updyke Hotel in East Greenwich, and a daughter Elizabeth, who married a cook from Philadelphia named John Williams in 1851, during the second decade of the 1800's. It is not completely clear from the twice-burned records gathering dust in our town hall, what Pero's wife's name was, but it appears to have been Sarah. At that time, they, along with most of the African-Americans residing in Wickford, lived in a small group of homes off of Fowler Street near Bush Hill Pond.

It was here that Pero's existence was first chronicled by Mrs. F. Burge Griswold in her memoirs entitled "*Old Wickford – The Venice of America*" written towards the end of her life and published in 1900. She described him as "short, square, grizzly-haired, and thoroughly African in features" and noted that he worked for her grandfather, "Old Doc" Shaw as a stable hand and general groundskeeper. She describes his wife as a large dowager-looking woman chronically ill from the effects of a tapeworm infestation and also mentions with fascination, their deaf and dumb son. It is apparent by the general tone of this section of her book that African-Americans at that time, were still thought of as being quite a bit inferior to the average Wickfordite of the 1830's.

Somewhere along the way between the 1830's and the late 1850's Pero's wife Sarah passed away and left him alone. Elizabeth, his daughter who had had a number of children with Henry Fairweather, a member of another local slave clan, but never married until she joined up with John Williams, also moved on, as did Pero's deaf mute son John. Pero, had outlived all the other original Roome slaves and was now residing in a squatter's shack along the edge of the Ten Rod Road on land owned by Robert Rodman. No one, including Rodman, seemed to mind though. The area, a piece of land described as "less than desirable", eventually became known as "The Vale of Pero" and it was here that the old "grizzly-haired" gentleman lived his last days. His life was again chronicled, this time by Lafayette historian George Gardiner who described him as that "old Negro slave who was a relic of the Colonial days". As with most of the members of the Roome family, his death was not recorded and his final resting place is unknown. What is known however, is that two of Pero's grandsons grew up to fight in the ultimate war against slavery, the Civil War and in some way perhaps, avenged the injustices that Old Pero suffered. And the little undesirable plot of land along the Ten Rod Road, now largely filled in for an entrance road to an industrial facility, will always be known to some of us as the "Vale of Pero".

**TO COLORED MEN.**

**54th**

**REGIMENT!**

MASSACHUSETTS VOLUNTEERS.

**AFRICAN DESCENT!**

**\$100 BOUNTY!**

AS THE REWARD OF THE SERVICE RENDERED.

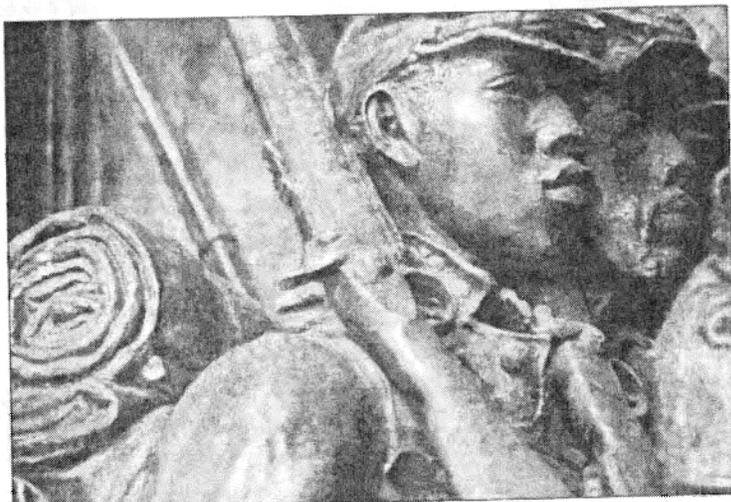
**PAY, \$13 A MONTH!**

**STATE AID TO FAMILIES.**

RECRUITING OFFICE.

Cor. Cambridge & North Russell Sts., Boston.

Lieut. J. W. M. APPLETON, Recruiting Officer.



Beyond the monument to the 54th Massachusetts in Boston, above, it's possible that the only testament to George Roome's existence are the stone walls, below, that memorialize the lives of his slave ancestors on their master George Rome's farm in North Kingstown. At left is a recruiting poster for the 54th.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

## The View From Swamptown

### The Roome Family – Part 4, The Story of George Roome

This being February, Black History Month, its only right that we take another Swamptown gander at this, the extended family of a group of colonial era slaves from the George Rome estate (now known as Rome Point). In the past year or so, we've examined the life and tragic death of Cato Roome, the story of Cato's brother in slavery, Pero, who was a long time fixture in both the villages of Wickford and then Lafayette, and the Civil War legacy of brothers James and John Roome and their experiences in the 14<sup>th</sup> RI colored Heavy Artillery. This time around we are again going to travel back to the time of the Great War Between the States and look at the remarkable life of George Roome, his wife Betsey, and the heroic unit he served with, the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts.

George Roome was born in 1835, one of three children of Nathaniel Roome and his wife Deborah. I have not yet been able to, with 100% certainty, connect Nathaniel to the original known group of George Rome slaves, but all evidence points to Juba Roome as being the most probable father of Nathaniel. The Nathaniel Roome clan next shows up in the historic record in the census of 1850. Nathaniel lists his occupation as a laborer and his three children's names are clearly indicated as George, Hannah, and Ellen. A decade later, in the 1860 Federal census, George Roome, now 24, is found residing on Millbrook St. in Worcester Massachusetts with his Rhode Island born wife Betsey and their one-year-old daughter Luella, who had been born in Massachusetts. One fact, which can be clearly gleaned from this 1860 document, is astonishing. Betsey is listed in this and every census henceforth in her long life, as a white woman and her child Luella, and all of George and Betsey's subsequent children, is listed as a mulatto. Now, a little aside about the word "mulatto". I'm sure most of you have come across it before and probably are aware that it indicates a person born of one white and one black parent, and was used extensively throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, showing up in that timeframe as an official race designation on all government documents, including the census. What you may not be aware of is the root derivation of this word. It began its life as derogatory slang word derived from the word mule; which as we all know is a sterile stubborn and somewhat slow-witted animal born of a horse and a donkey. Like many words that we now use without realizing their origin (the word denigrate also fits into this category), the passage of time has removed some of its painful sting, but believe me in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that label was not viewed so benignly. Getting back to George and Betsey, I have no idea whether the realities of being involved in a mixed marriage in the late 1850's had anything to do with their move from rural North Kingstown to the more anonymous metropolis of Worcester Massachusetts or if it was strictly an economic decision based on better employment opportunities. Whatever the case, George and Betsey must have had a "difficult row to hoe" no matter where they resided.

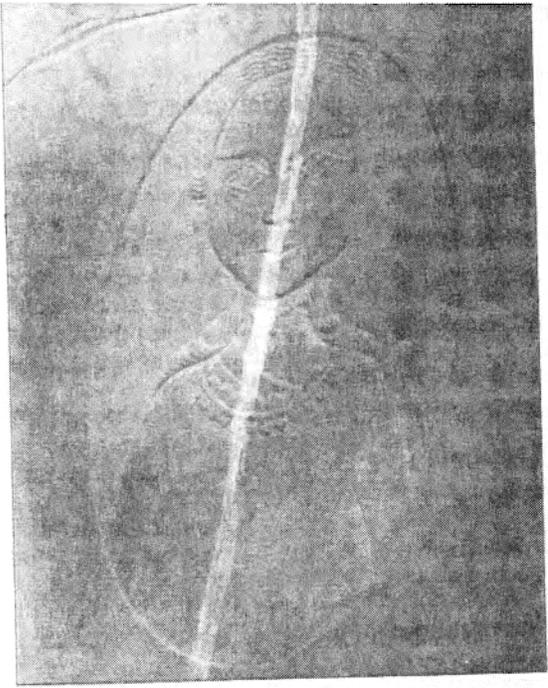
George Rome (he either purposely or through a US Army clerical error had dropped one "o" from his name at this time) next shows up in the historic record when he enlists, in May of 1863, in the 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Massachusetts Volunteer Colored Infantry. His enlistment was probably motivated at that time by a combination of duty to

his country, his people, and the enticements, as shown in the accompanying recruiting poster, of a \$100 signing bonus, a regular paycheck of \$13/month, and the promise (often never realized) of state aid for his family while he was gone. By the end of the month his unit was bound for battle, heading out of Boston Harbor on the steamer "DeMolay" off to Hilton Head, South Carolina.

Now, I won't go into a long description of the extraordinary accomplishments of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts. It's enough to say that it was often remarked, "that no unit, colored or white, fought more heroically than the men of the 54<sup>th</sup>". No one could tell their tale more powerfully than the Hollywood movie production "Glory" did, so if you're curious, rent this award-winning movie and see for yourself what these men accomplished. All that mattered to George, Betsey, and his children, is that he, unlike many of his comrades in arms, managed to survive the war, and returned in 1865 to their Millbrook Street home in Worcester.

According to census data taken after the war, George and Betsey's family grew to include 6 children. Beyond their first child Luella, I have identified a son Albert and two daughters Alice and Emma. After being a hero in the Civil War, George returned to his normal life, always listing his occupation as a day laborer. Two of his daughters seemed to eventually marry and leave home, as Luella's last name became Potter, and Alice became a Clark. George Rome must have left this world between 1900 and 1910, as he does not show up in the records after the 1900 census. I don't know if a gravestone marks his final resting place or not. It could be that, beyond the monument to the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts in Boston, the only concrete testimony to his existence is the same fine straight and true stone walls that memorialize the lives of his slave ancestors on their master George Rome's farm here in town. Whatever the case, he left his mark on the world none the less. His death, combined with the coming of the Great Depression seemed to bring his children back to their mother's side, as by 1920, Luella Potter and her daughter Olive, Alice Clark and her husband John and son Paul and the children of another daughter whose name is yet unknown are found to be living on Millbrook Street with 77 year old Betsey and her son Albert. Beyond 1920, I do not know what happened to George Rome's extended family, but I intend to find out. I can't help but admire this couple, a slave's grandson married to a white woman in the turbulent era of the Civil War. There must have existed a powerful connection between them to face what they must have and triumph as they did. Heck, this isn't just a Black History Month tale; it's a love story worthy of anyone's Valentine's Day.

I'll close this by revealing the last interesting detail of this remarkable story. As I said earlier, Betsey seems to have raised the children of one of her other daughters, one whose name I have yet to identify. The two children's names though are clearly \_\_\_\_\_ written on the census form; a grandson named Benjamin George Walker and a granddaughter named Alice R. Walker. Now if that last name sounds familiar, don't be surprised, as the novel "The Color Purple" was written by an Alice Walker as well. And although I have yet to be able to decipher whether there is any connection between these two Alices, I feel certain that if I could ask either of them they would assure me that whether they are truly related or not, they are most certainly connected; connected by the shared experience that binds every black child to another, whether they realize it or not.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

Some examples of 17th and 18th-century grave carvings are evident in the Six Principle Baptists' cemetery. Above left, Alsey Peck's image is preserved in stone; the carver worked from a portrait of the 32-year-old woman. Above right, a winged skull is carved into the stone of Capt. Alexander Huling, one of the church's founders. Below are the stones of Samuel (left) and Alice Albroy.

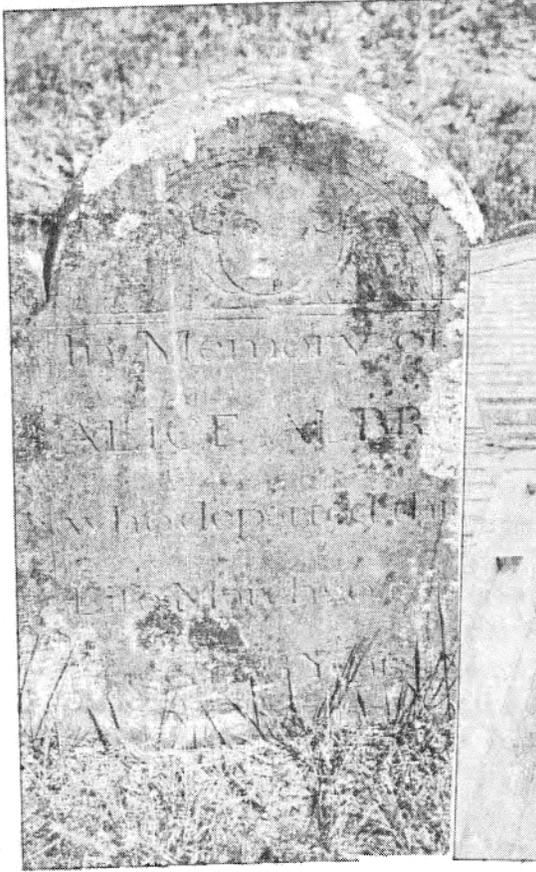
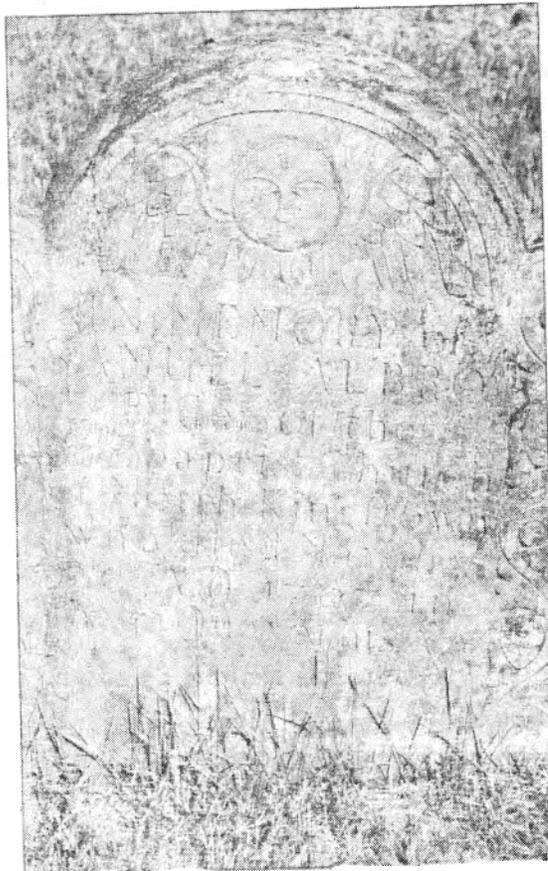


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The Stony Lane Six Principle Baptist Church is the last of its kind with an active membership.

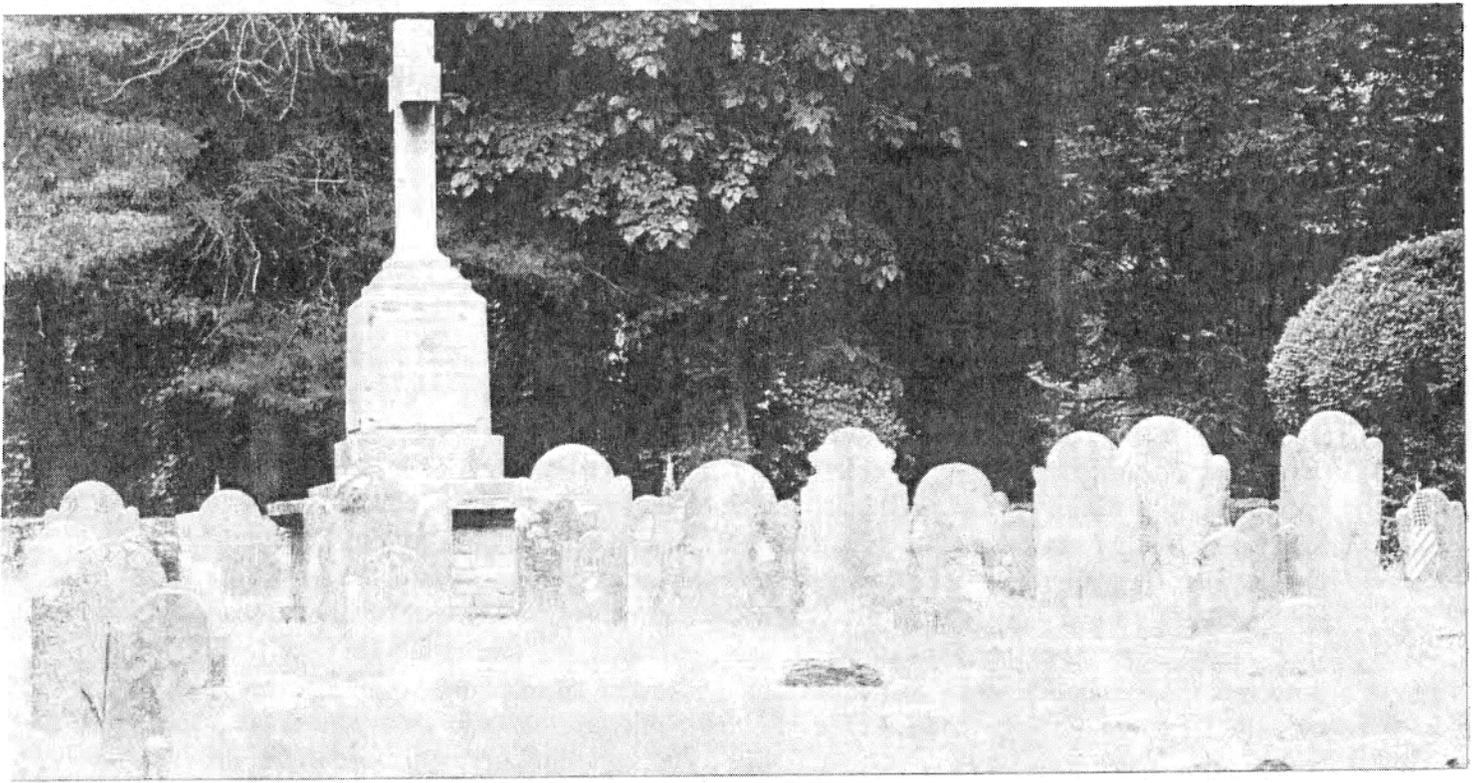
## The View From Swamptown

### The Burying Ground of the Six-Principle Baptists

As any regular reader of these musings knows, this son of a son of a son of a son of undertaker, born and raised in a funeral home, has a certain fondness for cemeteries. In the past, we've taken numerous respectful Swamptown ganders at the stories behind the stones in Elm Grove and Quidnessett; our fair town's two largest cemeteries. And now, from time to time, we are going to take an equally respectful look at some of North Kingstown's other cemeteries. Lumped together in a catchall grouping called "Historic Cemeteries" (I mean, really, aren't all cemeteries historic) these graveyards are both big and small, simple and elaborate, and hidden away in the deep dark woods or right in plain sight. Few folks (other than those who for some unfathomable reason feel the need to desecrate these sacred places – Shame on you!!) ever visit them anymore, and that's a tragedy, for they hold both the history of our community and beautiful examples of the stone carver's art. This week we'll "bide a wee" at the ancient burying ground of the Six-Principle Baptists on Old Baptist Road.

Now the first thing that you might be wondering about is what is this Six-Principle deal all about? Well the abbreviated answer to that is that in the 17<sup>th</sup> & early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Baptist movement was oft-divided over different interpretations of doctrine. As the old hymn mentions, those "*schisms rent asunder*" caused many different Baptist denominations to spring up across New England. Calvinistic Baptists (only the chosen have any hope of salvation), Seventh Day Baptists (the holy day should be Saturday {the seventh day} not Sunday) and the Six-Principle Baptists (the laying-on of hands {the sixth principle of faith}, whereby the Holy Spirit symbolically enters a new member, should be held as equally important as Baptism) are among the many Baptist sects that populated the numerous villages of the region. The Stony Lane Six-Principle Baptist Congregation holds the distinctive honor of being not only one of the very first Six-Principle Churches, it having been spun off from Roger William's Providence congregation during the last quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but also, the absolute very last Six-Principle Church with an active membership, although there has been a recent drive to revitalize the group in this the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The earliest burial in the graveyard is that of one of the founders of the Church, not to mention one of our fair town's earliest settlers, Captain Alexander Huling who died in 1725 and was buried here on land he donated for the construction of a "meeting house". His stone, carved at the Stevens Shop in Newport depicts one of the earliest gravestone images, that of a winged skull, representing the flight of his soul heavenward. Also in the graveyard are two of Huling's contemporaries, also founders of the Church, husband and wife, Samuel and Alice Albro. The side-by-side Albro stones show the later incarnation of that same imagery, however, the skull has been replaced by a more benign countenance; in the case of the Albro's, a man's face and a woman's face. Another wonderful example of the carver's art here at Stony Lane Six-Principle is the rare portrait stone of Alsey Peck. The stonecarver actually worked from a painted portrait of the 32 year old woman to create his extraordinary monument to a life far too short. These are just a sampling of the fine headstones that exist in this important burying ground.



Above, the largest marker on the site is the McSparran/Fayerweather monument. At left is a broader view of the cemetery. Below, a close shot of a headstone shows traditional gravestone images of the time.



## The View From Swamptown

### The Old Cemetery at the Platform

It's time to take another of our periodic Swamptown ganders at one of our fair town's historic cemeteries. This week we will be taking a respectful stroll through the burying ground of one of our nation's first Anglican Churches; the Old Narragansett Church site found on Shermantown Road just  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile west of its intersection with Tower Hill Road.

This graveyard is all that remains on the original site of the old Narragansett Church that has since the year 1800 been located in Wickford. Once this location, which was donated to the Church by Captain Benoni Sweet in 1707 and was situated in the very heart of the old Narragansett Plantation Society, sported the old Church itself and a small sexton's, or caretakers, cottage. The area for literally miles around this site, was cleared of trees and placed in cultivation by the great plantation owners of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and their servants and slaves, many of which are buried here in this graveyard.

The graveyard is organized into two sections. First, the uphill section of the yard, which was the area closest to where the old Church once stood, contains the graves of the plantation owners and their families and relations. The second section, downhill from the first, includes the countless graves of the indentured servants and slaves that worked the land. For the most part, these graves are marked only by the very fieldstones that these folks would have spent their lives removing from the path of the plows that they guided, year in and year out, across the lands surrounding this venerable site.

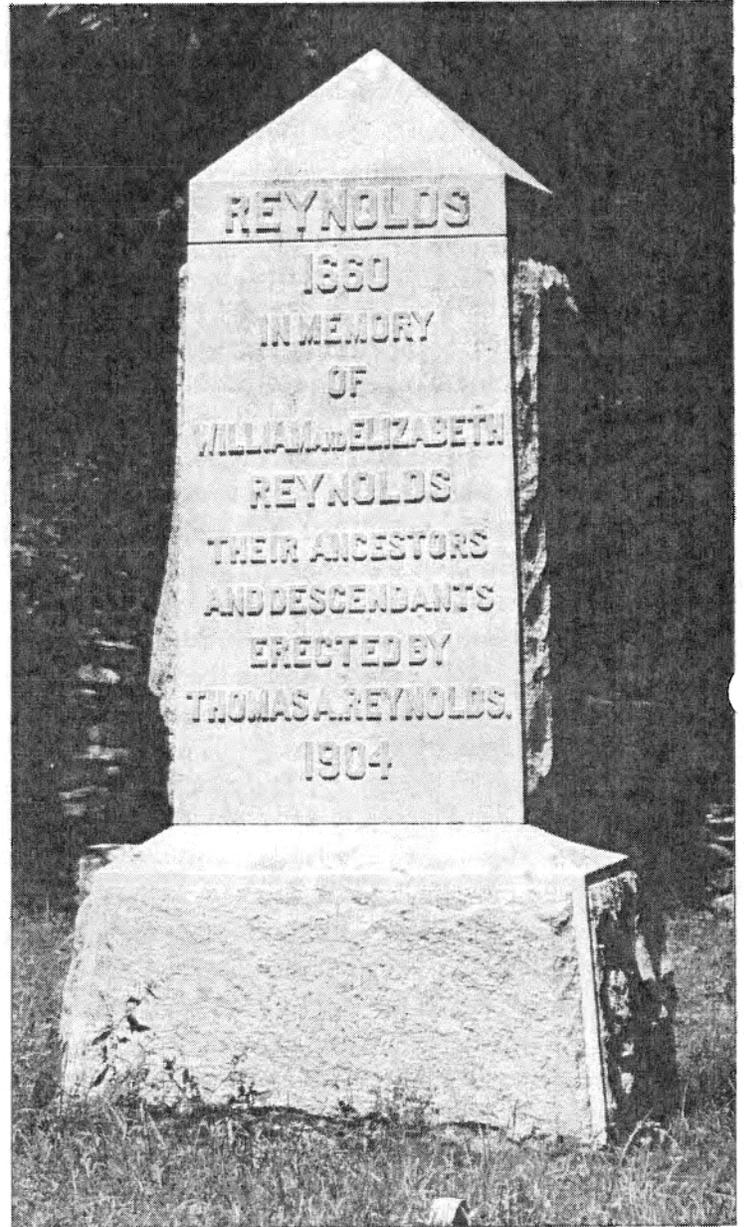
A great many of the ancient slate stones here in this yard, some of them are indeed nearly 300 years old, show the signs of the countless winters spent here and are difficult to decipher. But look closely and you can get a bit of a feel for the lives these folks led. For the stones tell us stories of lives cut short at home or at sea, of wives, husbands, and children dearly missed, and of important community members honored for their contributions. Prominent in the graveyard is the large granite memorial cross erected in 1868, commemorating the life and contributions of two of the earliest priests of this Church, James McSparran and Samuel Fayerweather. These two gentlemen led this congregation for 60 years between themselves beginning in 1721 with McSparran's appointment here as a missionary by the *Society For Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts* and ending with Fayerweather's death in 1781. The good Reverend Fayerweather was fondly remembered for his regular pronouncements that, "no matter how badly the winds blow and the snow falls you'll always have Fayerweather here at church" Another small granite stone nearby marks the actual burial site of McSparran and Fayerweather. Their burial location was said to be exactly under the spot where the church's altar once stood, as was the desire of the good Reverends.

So the next time you've got a half an hour to spare, stop out at the old Narragansett Church site and commune with its inhabitants. Close your eyes and listen to the wind in the trees, try to imagine what this place must have been like some 275 years ago when it was the centerpiece of the most elaborate plantation society north of the Potomac River.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

A gate and sign mark the entrance to the Reynolds/Essex cemetery on North Quidnessett Road. Thomas A. Reynolds paid to construct the gate and erect a large marker, seen at right, in the cemetery and helped create the Reynolds Family Association, the group that continues his legacy of caring for the cemetery.



## The View From Swamptown

### The Reynolds/Essex Cemetery

This week we are going to continue with our ongoing journey through the historic cemeteries of our fair town with a visit to the Reynolds/Essex burial ground adjacent to the intersection of Essex, Potter, and North Quidnessett Roads. The entrance to this ancient graveyard, which is marked by an iron gate and two stone posts, can be found on the west side of North Quidnessett Road just opposite a small pond. A short walk up this winding tree-lined lane brings you to the 325-year-old graveyard surrounded by a neat and well maintained stonewall replete with a hitching post, that has stood there as a silent sentinel since the days when a Reynolds relation wanting to pay his respects might have arrived on horseback. The graveyard and the associated entry right-of-way have been ably taken care of by the Reynolds Family Association for nearly a century now.

It wasn't always that way though; in 1883 when historian and graveyard enthusiast George Harris visited this lot, he described it as "walled in and neglected". Some twenty years later Thomas A. Reynolds changed all that when he, nearing the end of his life, decided to fix up the plot that included not only his parents and siblings, but also generations of Reynolds before him, including, perhaps even the original founders of the North Kingstown Reynolds clan, 17th century James and Deborah Reynolds. It was Thomas A. Reynolds who financed the installation of the main monument in the plot and the construction of the entrance gate on the road. He was also a driving force behind the Reynolds Family Association, the group that, to this day, continues his legacy of caring for the burying ground of his ancestors. A burying ground that is also shared by members of the inter-related Essex clan for whom the nearby road is named.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, the area we now call North Quidnessett was populated by the members of only a few families. The graveyards of those folks; the Reynolds, the Greenses, the Allens, the Hunts, the Hills, the Wightmans, and the Aylesworths are all within a short journey of this, the main Reynolds family burying ground. All can be visited by history lovers, descendants, and genealogists interested in learning about the past and these determined folks who made a life for themselves here. All that is, except for the Aylesworth cemetery which has been lost since 1883, when it was last visited by the one and the same George Harris who recorded the condition of the Reynolds plot that same year. It still out there though, hidden in the woods between here, Potter, and Fletcher Road. If you know anything about the location of this important cemetery please contact me.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

Generations of Smiths and Lawtons, who farmed the land off Stony Lane, are buried in this historic cemetery, at right, maintained by their descendants. Above is a detail of a hand-carved stone of a grave.



## The View From Swamptown

### The Smith – Lawton Burial Ground

This week we are going to continue with our ongoing exploration of the many historic cemeteries in our fair town with a visit to the Smith – Lawton Burial Ground located just off Stony Lane. The cemetery can be found just opposite Burnt Cedar Drive and is accessed by a grassy right-of-way. This graveyard continues to be wonderfully maintained through a fund set up by Smith and Lawton descendants.

The Smiths and Lawtons were two families bound together by numerous marriages and the fact that they farmed the land here on Stony Lane and Post Road side by side for generations. The Smith families farmed the land along the west side of Post Road between the Stony Lane intersection and Wickford itself. The homestead farm of the family group was the Benjamin Smith farm which was sited upon the land that now houses the main Post Office building. This farm featured a prominent stone windmill and one of North Kingstown's two large cider presses (the other being on the Rathbun farm out in Swamptown). Luckily for all who care about the past, the Smith Cider Press was preserved for posterity and can be seen at the South County Museum in nearby Narragansett. This press, like the Rathbun one, would have been operated using a horse or mule to turn the great hand carved wooden screw that squeezed cider out of countless tons of locally grown apples. The Smiths would have received a portion of the cider as payment for owning, operating, and maintaining the press.

The Lawton family farms were all located on Stony Lane and Old Baptist Roads and include the farm upon which the Stony Lane School is now located as well as the former Bed and Breakfast located just beyond the Stony Lane/Old Baptist Road intersection. It was at this home that a despondent Lawton hung himself, forever labeling the big farmhouse as "the suicide house" to generations of local residents. He too, is buried here in the Lawton portion of the graveyard.

So, if you've got a spare moment in your busy day, stop by here and commune with the Lawtons and Smiths, two farming families who made their mark in our community and are now only represented by these silent slate and granite stones.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

Descendents of some of Saunderstown's first residents can be found in the Willett-Carpenter Burial Ground off of Carrol Road in the village. Above is the grave marker for Frances Carpenter.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Willett - Carpenter Burial Ground

This week we are going to continue with our ongoing exploration of the many historic cemeteries in our fair town with a visit to the Willett - Carpenter Burial Ground located just off of Carrol Rd just outside of the village of Saunderstown. The cemetery can be found in front of a small playground and ball field and is accessed by a grassy right-of-way. This graveyard contains the earthly remains of the Saunderstown area's first residents; the families of Captain Andrew Willett, his son Francis Willett, and their nephew Francis Carpenter.

Captain Andrew Willett, who was the son of Thomas Willett, the very first mayor of New York City (1664-65), was the first permanent resident of what we now call Saunderstown. He lived here on land originally owned by his father from the early 1680's until his death in 1712. His son Francis carried on here after his father's death, until his own demise in 1776 at the age of 83. By then the Willett family was united by marriage with the Carpenters and Francis Carpenter inherited the land. The Carpenter's sold off portions of the property initiating the beginnings of a village that became known as Willettsville and then eventually, after the Saunders brothers purchased a large portion of the property upon the urging of the Carpenter family, finally became Saunderstown.

In the end, Andrew Willett was permanently memorialized by the naming of one of Saunderstown's main streets in his honor; Willett Road. Coincidentally, a street in Riverside RI, that runs very near to the final resting place of his father, Thomas Willett, the one-time Mayor of New York; who is buried in Little Neck Cemetery in what was once part of Massachusetts, is named Willett Avenue. Two of the "Big Apple's" earliest residents now rest eternal here in "Little Rhody".



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Francis Willett was the son of Capt. Andrew Willett, the first permanent resident of Saunderstown and the grandson of New York City's first mayor.



## The View From Swamptown

### The Thomas Phillips Burial Ground

This week we are going to continue with our ongoing exploration of the many historic cemeteries in our fair town with a visit to this Phillips Family Burial Ground located just off of Lafayette Road within the confines of Feurer Park. The cemetery can be found adjacent to a little league ball field at the top of a small hill. In it lie the earthly remains of a number of generations of this locally important family.

Over the course of the last few months, we have, from time to time, stopped a while and examined a number of well cared for and properly maintained historic cemeteries. Sadly though, this graveyard lies at the other end of that spectrum, for, since the opening of the Furer Park ballfield some twenty years ago or more, this Phillips family resting place has suffered through every possible humiliation and disrespect that could be imagined. As a result of the toll taken during this last two decades of very hard years, most of the headstones here have been destroyed and many of the shattered pieces thrown hither and yon into the brush, including the very unusual arched double stone for the twin infant daughters of Marinus and Mary (Phillips) Gardiner who died within days of each other well before their first birthday in 1848. Also destroyed is the headstone of 27-year-old Jimmy Thomas, the fireman on the Stonington Railroad Engine "Mat Morgan" which exploded in Providence in November of 1875. Jimmy's mother too, was a Phillips. All told more than 25 inter-related souls rest eternal here and regularly suffer through disrespect they certainly don't deserve.

Now's a fine time to right this wrong. Perhaps the local Little League or a Scouting organization would find the time to adopt this poor sad graveyard and work towards finding the gravestones of these fine folks and repairing them in some fashion. Lets set this right North Kingstown, these folks who came before us deserve no less.

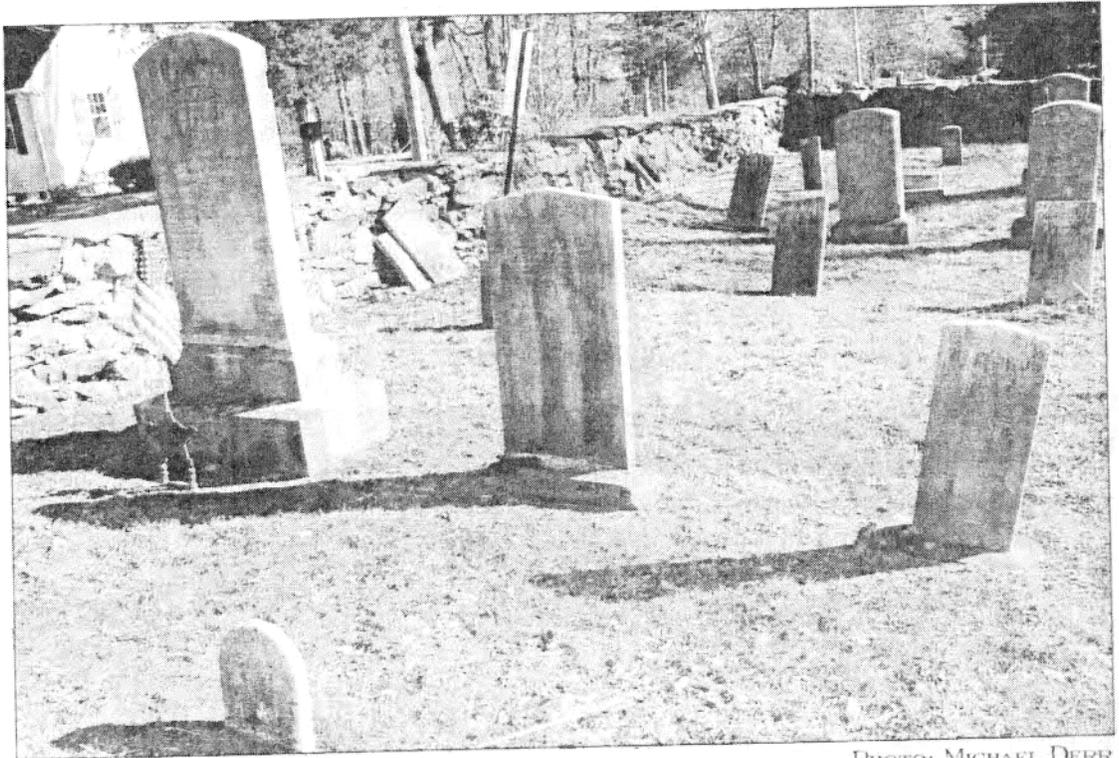


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The historic cemetery on South Road, near its intersection with Old Baptist Road, contains members of the Hunt, Hall and Corey families.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Hunt/Hall/Corey Burial Ground

This week we are going to continue with our ongoing exploration of the many historic cemeteries in our fair town with a visit to the Hunt/Hall/Corey Burial Ground located just off of South Road. This well-maintained cemetery can be found just a hundred feet beyond South Road's intersection with Old Baptist Road and is surrounded by a gated stone wall.

These three families were bound together by various marriages and their shared commitment to farm the lands they owned here in North Kingstown and just across the nearby town line in the neighboring community of East Greenwich. The cemetery that they all shared is now unique in that, in it rests folks with some of our fair town's most unusual names. There's Cinderrilla and Elvira Hall, Avis Celindia and Cemantha Hunt, not to mention distant cousin Sirkit Chadsey. Also here are unusual, but slightly more common names such as Rufus Hunt and Albertus Northup.

These gravestones also tell a tale of the tragedies that befell these three families. They sent a handful of cousins off to fight in the great Civil War and two of them returned not to the arms of their loved ones, but here to the family cemetery; Chester Hunt killed in Virginia in October of 1863 had sadly followed his cousin Benjamin Hunt, killed at the Battle of Fredricksburg just ten months earlier. Both had joined up hoping to find the excitement not offered on the family farm here in Scrabbletown. Beyond these two soldiers who gave their lives for their country, this graveyard contains numerous children that died far too young. A short while spent here reminds us all of the difficult lives these 19<sup>th</sup> century folks endured and brings to mind the strength of character possessed by those that were left to carry on. So the next time you've got a spare moment, stop by and pay your respects to the determined folks of the Hunt/Hall/Corey Clan.

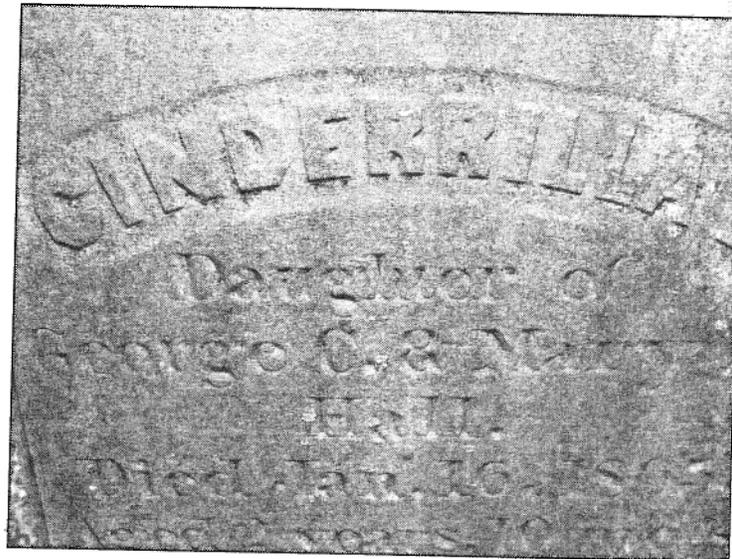


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Cinderrilla Hall, who died in 1865 at age 2 years and 10 months, is one of the people with unique names buried in the cemetery.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

**These gravestones, two of which are for stillborn children of the Lufrio family, are all that remains of the Lufrio/Wall burial ground on Ocean Avenue. The rest of the graves were washed away in the Hurricane of 1938. It's one of four lost historic gravesites in town.**

## The View From Swamptown

### Lost Historic Cemeteries

This week, as a part of our continuing efforts to chronicle the many historic cemeteries in our fair town, we are going to take look at six different family burial grounds that are, for various reasons which we shall also explore, lost to us.

Our first stop is to Ocean Avenue, just off of Fowler Street, in Wickford. Its here that the last vestiges of the once large Llufrio/Wall burial ground can be found. This family plot once measured 100' X 100' and contained the gravestones of dozens of Wickford folk. But then along came the Great Hurricane of 1938 and all visible elements of the cemetery were swept away by the wall of water that lashed the shoreline of the village. When the tides receded all that remained were the two small stones shown in the accompanying photo; the graves of two of the three stillborn children of Constantine and Elizabeth Llufrio. Their father, Captain Constantine Llufrio, had a memorial stone here in this yard as well. I say memorial stone, because Capt. Llufrio, a native of Spain who came to the new world at the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, died at sea in June of 1832, and was never buried here in his adopted hometown. I like to think that the sea came and took the rest of the Llufrio family to be with Constantine.

Next we are off to Maxwell Drive just off of Post Road in he center of our community. Here in the backyard of a single family home lies the burial ground of the inter-related Pearce/Watson family. A former owner of this home grew tired of having to mow around the dozen or so gravestones of this cemetery and layed them all flat, allowing the grass to cover them over. These largely forgotten folks include the 18<sup>th</sup> century couple Westgate and Dorcas Watson the first owners of the fine yellow home at the end of Elam Street, which has rightly been called the most painted home in Wickford, as it is popular with artists from far and wide. The present owner of the Maxwell Drive home, blameless in this sad state of affairs, affords the Pearce/Watson clan the respect they deserve; but their ancestors can't, as they cannot locate the gravestones.

From here lets visit the large soccer complex off of the ancient thoroughfare we call Stony Lane. Here, I'm sure unbeknownst to all involved, are hidden three completely separate burial grounds, gravestones layed-down and covered over in 1917 or so by a farmer who felt quite inconvenienced by these family plots. I expect that any present day member of the Jacoy clan searching for their ancestors might think otherwise though. For here, somewhere, is buried the extended 18<sup>th</sup> century family of John Jacoy; seven souls in all. Also here, somewhere on the vast soccer field, is the last resting place of an 18<sup>th</sup> century African American family named Brown and another separate plot, containing at least nine souls, belonging to a yet unidentified clan. All this under the feet of hundreds of soccer players and coaches, soccer moms, and various fans.

Finally we journey to the very northern boundary of town, to a traffic island at the busy intersection of Post and Frenchtown Roads. For it is here, that somewhere is located the burial ground of the inter-related Hunt/Letson clan. In 1883, 33 gravestones were noted here. Somehow though, some 85 years or so later, the RI Dept of Transportation, during its reconstruction of this intersection lost this large burial ground. Although, its hard not to conjure up a mental image of a bunch of hard-hatted gentleman standing around a bunch of running pickup trucks patting their pockets, scratching their

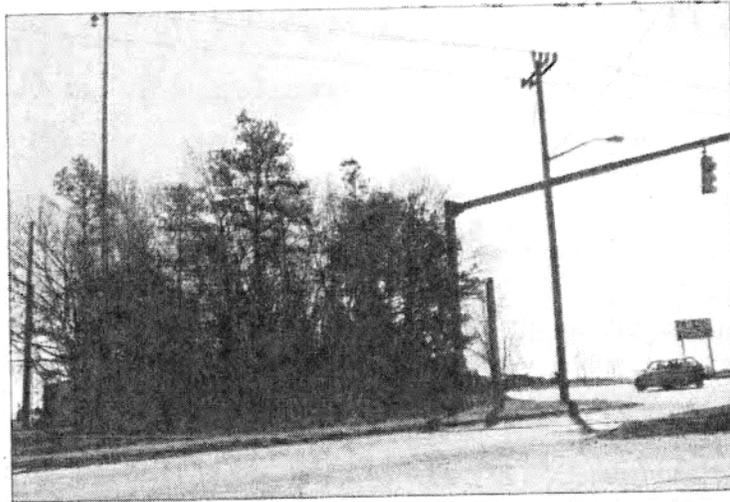


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

A historic cemetery was lost when the intersection of Post and Frenchtown roads was reconfigured.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Three historic cemeteries were located on the land now occupied by soccer fields on Stony Lane.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

A former owner of this house on Maxwell Drive laid stones flat in a historic cemetery here.

heads and remarking to each other, “do you know what happened to that graveyard, it was here just a little while ago, I just don’t know where I could have left it?”, its certainly no laughing matter to the ancestors of these hard working farmer folk buried here all those years ago.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

A bench sits at the entrance of the historic graveyard of the Austin family behind JT's Lumber on Post Road.

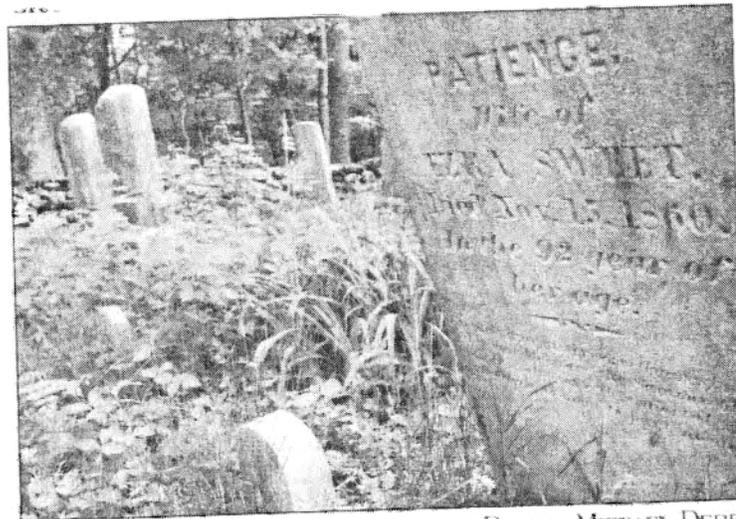


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Pictured is the headstone of Patience Sweet, who died in 1860 at age 92.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Austin Family Burial Ground

This week, as a part of our continuing efforts to chronicle the many historic cemeteries in our fair town, we are going to take look at the main burial ground of the Austin family; one of the northern portion of our town's earliest settlers. The earliest Austin, James, settled here around 1730 and built a home and farm just north of what is now J.T.'s Lumber; this early farmhouse survived 200 years until it was demolished in the 1920's. Other Austin farmhouses existed on either side of Post Road in both North Kingstown and East Greenwich. The Austin Burying Ground is located just behind the lumber store that now occupies much of the land once farmed by generations of this family.

One of the most important aspects of this venerable graveyard is evident as soon as you approach it - this is a place that is cared for appropriately and maintained with the respect it deserves. The good folks at J.T.'s Lumber have admirably continued a tradition begun by their predecessors, Grossmans Lumber, and provide both maintenance and security for the site. It's a pleasant sunlit spot boasting wildflowers and periwinkle set amidst the gravestones of long departed Austins and Austin relations. Among these good folks are Fones Austin, a prominent 19<sup>th</sup> century farmer and his cousin George R. Austin who, at the age of 19, gave his life in defense of the Union during the Civil War. Also here is Austin relation, Sea Captain Samuel L. Weeden who perished aboard the North Kingstown based schooner Paragon in December of 1831. All told, more than forty 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century residents of our fair town "rest eternal" here in the Austin graveyard.

This graveyard is not only important in that it holds the earthly remains of some of the hearty souls that contributed towards making North Kingstown the special place it is today, but also as an example of how simple and inexpensive it can be for a member of North Kingstown's business community to "adopt" one of these hallowed places and treat it to the respect and dignity that it deserves. Other examples of this policy in action also exist in front of the Washington Trust Bank on Post Road and at the Meadows Office Complex off of the Ten Rod Road. Even residential neighborhoods have adopted cemeteries within the confines of their streetscapes, why just this week I took note of the fact that some of the good folks in the "Poets Neighborhood" just off of Old Baptist Road had rolled up their shirtsleeves and tended to the old Huling graveyard that exists in their midst. So if you are a North Kingstown business owner or resident or civic group interested in doing likewise, why don't you contact me at [swamptown@msn.com](mailto:swamptown@msn.com) and we can talk about appropriate ways to honor these special places and the good folks whose lives they commemorate. Lastly I'd like to take a moment to remind everyone of the remarkable work done by my good friend Althea McAleer and her friends Beatrix Hoffius and Deby Nunes in this very area, which culminated in the important reference book "Graveyards of North Kingstown", the tome from which most of my knowledge of this subject springs. If you are interested in purchasing a copy of this hard to find work get in touch with me as well and I'll see what I can do.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

The graves of Abial S. Brown and his wife, Hannah, are among those from several generations of the Beriah Brown clan at a cemetery off Route 2 in North Kingstown. Below are some of the large number of graves marked only by fieldstones.



## The View From Swamptown

### The Burial Ground of Beriah Brown

It's time to take another of our periodic Swamptown ganders at one of our fair town's historic cemeteries. This week we will be taking a respectful stroll through the family burying ground of one of our town's first residents; the immigrant Beriah Brown, born around 1640 in England, he perished here, just across the road from his final resting place, during the Great Blizzard of February 1717.

The Beriah Brown Graveyard, which is located on a plot of land situated between Scrabbletown Road and Route #2 bounded on the south by Greggs Restaurant and on the north by the Buttons and Bows Daycare Center is perhaps the town's third largest cemetery; exceeded only by Elm Grove and Quidnessett. Generation upon generation of Browns and their relations rest eternal here in this historic plot that is larger than some of the nearby house lots. Burials have occurred in this lot throughout the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; few cemeteries anywhere in New England can make that claim. Beyond the dozen or so inscribed gravestones, there are anywhere from 100-200 fieldstone marked graves here in addition to the uncountable unmarked gravesites known to exist within the family plots of Quaker folks like the early Browns.

Buried here for certain are three generations of Beriah Browns, including County Sheriff Beriah Brown who ran the Washington County Jail out of the basement of his home, Beriah Manor which existed for more than 250 years on the present-day site of the National Grid facility on the west side of Route #2. That very house, destined for demolition, was saved by everyone's favorite poor little rich girl Doris Duke and reconstructed in Newport right next door to Trinity Church in the very heart of the "City By the Sea". Old Beriah Brown would most certainly be pleased to know that his home, built in the first decade of the 1700's still stands as one of the centerpieces of Doris Duke's vision for Historic Newport, but he certainly wouldn't feel the same about the respect given to his family's graveyard. Until recently, this piece of hallowed ground has been neglected and disrespected. Indeed, it is in fact, most assuredly, the largest parcel of land in town owned by absolutely nobody. Over the course of the years it was carved off from all of the surrounding real estate parcels and exists now in a sort of real estate limbo; owned by no one and cared for by no one; it has become a place for windborne rubbish and disrespectful vandals. Beriah Brown among the handful of North Kingstown's first resident's, seems to have been forgotten.

Until recently, that is. You see lately the neighboring homeowners around Beriah's burial site have gotten together and began a well deserved cleanup of this important site. Headstones are being righted, brambles, brush, and beer bottles are being removed, respect due is being given. Beriah Brown's legacy as a "founding father" of North Kingstown deserves no less. This swamp yankee is mighty grateful and hopes that this good work will continue until the graves of Beriah Brown I, II, III and everyone buried with them will see the light of day again.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The historic cemetery on Route 4, the resting place of the Thomas family, is maintained by the state.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Thomas Family Graveyard

This week, as a part of our continuing series on the Historic Cemeteries of our fair town, we are going to examine the family burial ground of the inter-related Thomas families of Swamptown. This well maintained graveyard can be found on the side of the Col. Robert F. Rodman Highway, just south of its intersection with Oak Hill Rd, and is taken care of by the State Of RI Dept of Transportation.

Buried in this family plot, under unmarked fieldstone graves, are numerous 18<sup>th</sup> century Thomas's including Revolutionary War veteran George Thomas. Sharing the graveyard with them are the families of five 19<sup>th</sup> century Thomas's; William, a farmer on whose land the graveyard once stood, Coggeshall, another farmer whose home still stands on the east side of Lafayette Road just past the mill pond, James still another farmer whose spread was once located adjacent to the Kettle Hole Pond, blacksmith Robert Thomas whose shop was featured in a recent column about blacksmiths in Lafayette, and finally George Thomas, the only family member to leave Swamptown.

George Thomas left with his family and moved down into Wickford where he eventually became a prominent grocer, selling, no doubt, the farm products grown by his brothers and cousins back in Swamptown. George's true claim to Wickford fame though was due to his generous and kind nature. You see, he took in an orphaned youth named Caleb Chadsey and eventually made him a partner at his shop. Long after George was reunited with his ancestors out at the family graveyard in Swamptown, his former partner, who by then owned the shop outright and went by the name C. Allen Chadsey, remembered the kindness bestowed upon him by George Thomas and the entire community and bequeathed to the Town of North Kingstown sufficient lands and funds to construct a fine library on Brown Street.

So, you see the little graveyard we all whiz by unknowingly each day on the way to work or to the beaches has quite a tale to tell us. Stop by one day and commune with the Thomas clan.

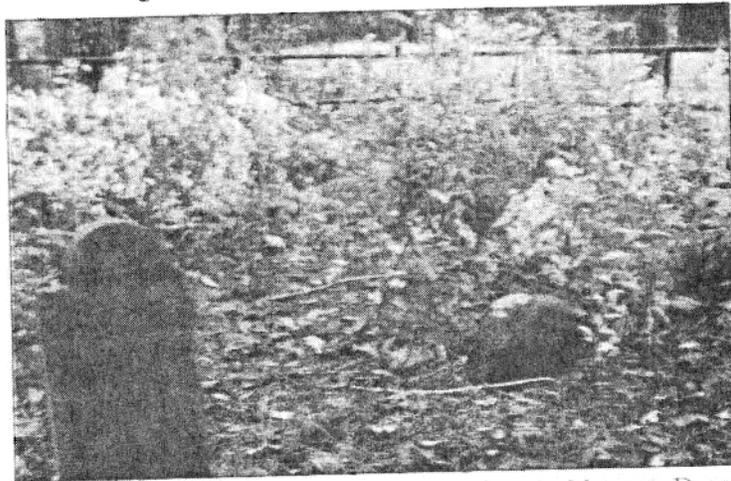


PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The Brown family is buried in this historic cemetery near the intersection of Autumn Drive and Ten Rod Road.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Charles Brown Family Graveyard

As most of us are all aware, we will soon have another supermarket plaza on the site of what was once a golf driving range on the Ten Rod Road. Regular readers will also remember that this driving range supplanted what was once a vital and important dairy concern, the farm run by the father and son team of Otto and Burt Froberg; the Maple View Dairy Farm featured in two columns a couple of years ago. Today we are, as a part of our on-going series on the historic cemeteries of our fair town, going to go back in time even farther in regards to this site, back to a time before the Civil War, when this land was owned by the family of Charles and Elizabeth Brown.

The family cemetery of this branch of the once large and important Brown family can be found just adjacent to the intersection of Ten Rod and Autumn Roads. It is enclosed within an iron rail fence and has seen better days. Buried here are the families of Charles Brown, his son Gideon, his grandson Ebenezer, and their respective wives and children. Also found here is the family of relations James and Georgeana Brown who ran another dairy farm on land now occupied by the Home Depot Plaza. This entire extended clan of Browns can be traced back to our old friend Beriah Brown himself as well as his widowed mother-in-law Abigail Phenix, who was perhaps the area's first female landowner back at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

So, come November when we are standing in the dairy department in the new Stop & Shop out on old Charles Brown's farmland, lets all take a moment and remember that this land, that now sports a modern supermarket, spent more than 250 years at the other end of the dairy experience; supporting the dairy cows of the Browns, Hendricks, and Frobergs.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Peleg Card's is the only marked gravestone in the Spink family cemetery on Newcomb Road.

## The View From Swamptown

### The Spink/Card Historic Cemetery

It's time to take another of our periodic Swamptown ganders at one of our fair town's historic cemeteries. This week we will be taking a respectful stroll through the ancient burying ground of one of South Quidnessett's first families; the Spinks, where we will focus on the remarkable military record of Peleg Card, hinted at on the only marked stone in the lot.

This particular Spink cemetery (there are at least 6 others, five of which were relocated to Quidnessett Cemetery when Quonset/Davisville was constructed) can be found on the north side of Newcomb Road about one half mile in from its intersection with Post Road. It's in rough and tumble shape right now, but is being tended to, after a decades long period of neglect, by a nearby homeowner. In it are row after row of unmarked field stone graves. It's unfortunately anybody's guess, at this point, as to who is buried under these simple stones, but my feeling is that this is the burying ground of the clan of Capt. Eldridge Spink of Quidnessett, a Revolutionary War veteran and officer in the Rhode Island militia. The only marked stones in the yard belong to Peleg Card and his wife Aylce. Aylce (pronounced Ale-cee) most probably was a Spink herself.

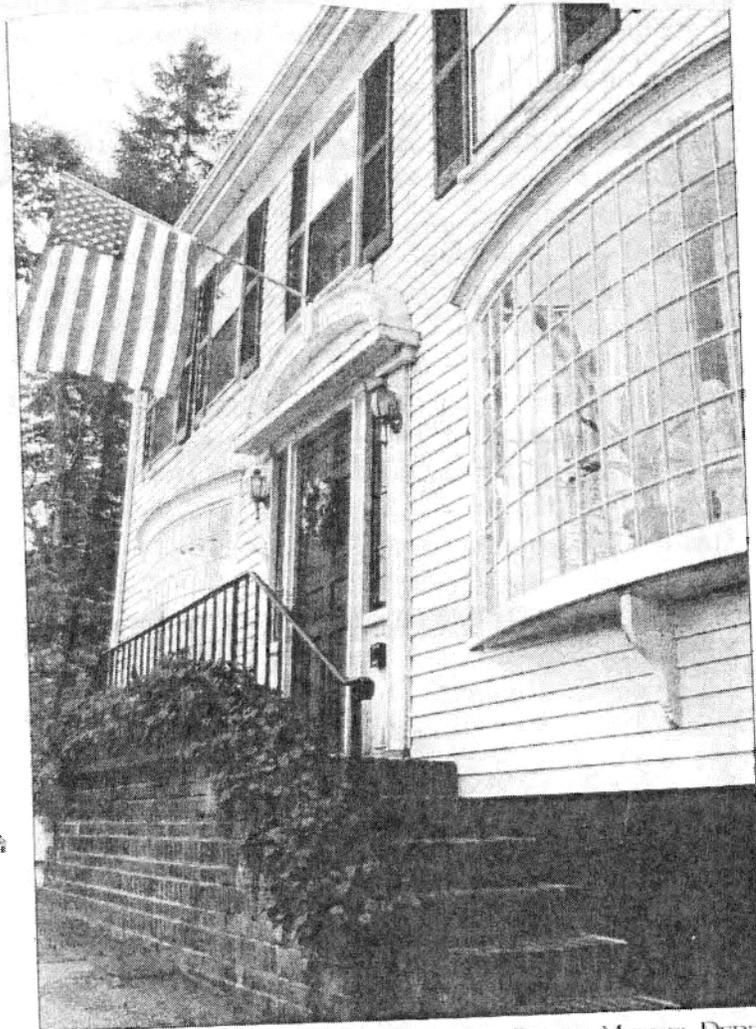
Peleg Card, born in March of 1755 to William & Mercy (Briggs) Card, was a Revolutionary War veteran as well, although his service was unremarkable except for one very exceptional fact. Peleg may be one of the only Revolutionary War veterans to serve his new nation as a member of three different state militias. You see from 1776 through 1777 he served in various Rhode Island companies and saw action on a limited basis patrolling and protecting the coastline. In August of 1777, while visiting family in Vermont, he enlisted for a two month hitch in the Vermont militia. He returned to Rhode Island and then was again called to service as a member of the Sullivan Expedition. Finally, Card also served as a paid replacement (rich folk of that time frame were allowed to hire someone to fulfill their military obligations, as long as someone showed up everyone was happy) for an unknown consignee to a Massachusetts unit in 1778. By the time Peleg Card passed away on October 19<sup>th</sup> of 1846, the 91-year-old Quidnessett resident was one of the State's last Revolutionary War veterans. His memory faded away though as the briars and brush slowly enveloped the Spink graveyard in which he was laid to rest. Now we can not only see his gravestone again, we can also learn of his amazing record as a member of three different state militias during the uprising that brought about the birth of our nation.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

The former St. Paul's Guild Hall, near the Hussey Bridge in Wickford, is now a private residence.

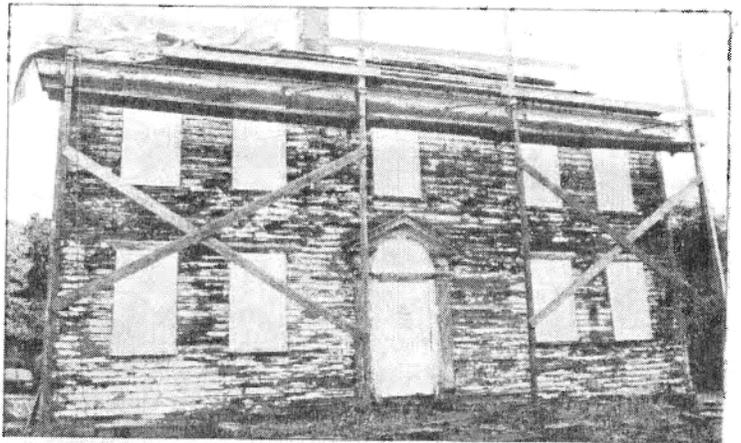
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PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

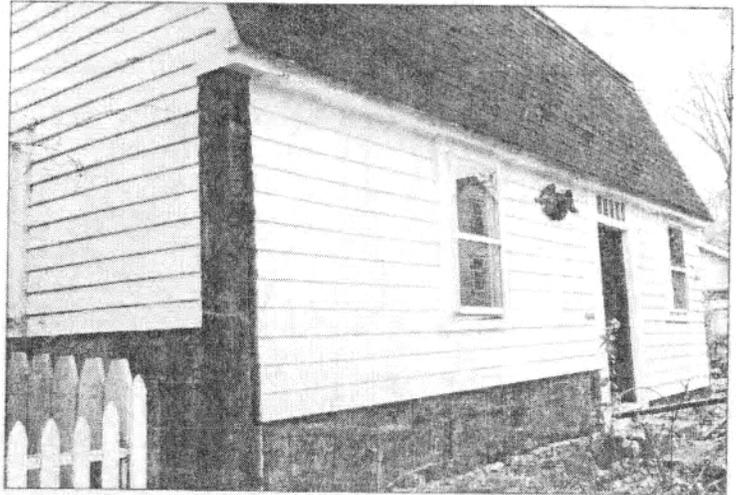
Wickford residents learned from the many storms they weathered. After 1815's Great Gale, houses like the William Brown House on Brown Street were built a few feet above ground level and serviced with front stairways in case another storm flooded the village.



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

The Allen Madison House (above) is finally getting a new roof and the owners of the George Fowler cottage on Bay Street also are doing some renovation work.

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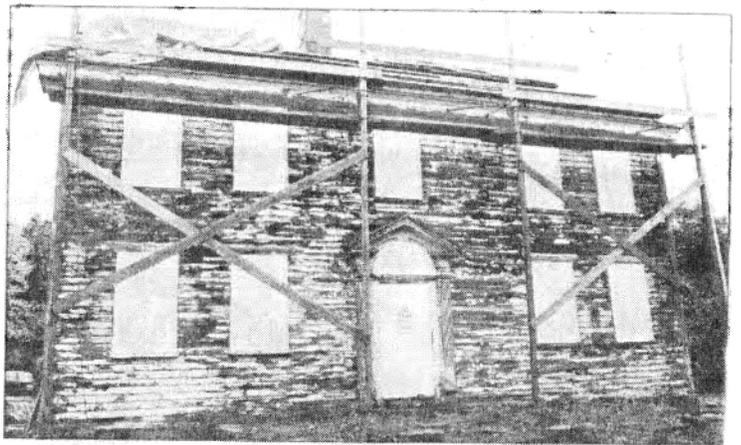
PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Former North Kingstown Postmaster Ralph Campbell built his dream house on a parcel of land he bought from the Tourjee family on Ten Rod Road in 1931. He lived there with his wife, Cecelia, until his death in 1973.



Nowhere in Rhode Island was the destruction more complete than at the summer community on the south-facing shore of Quonset Point.

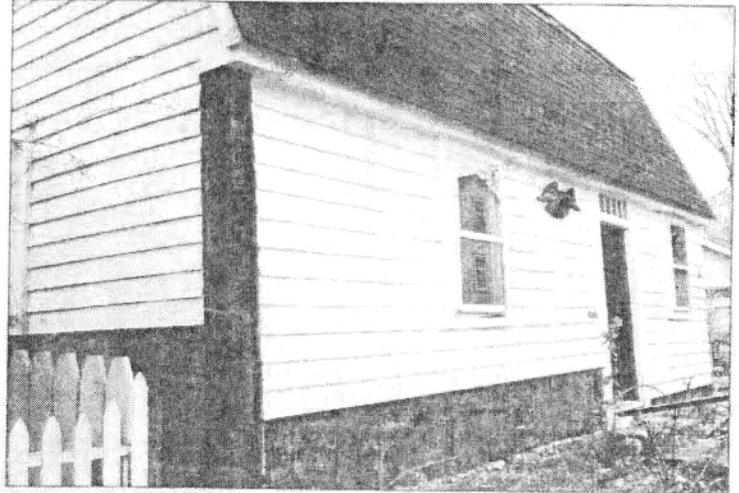
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PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

The Allen Madison House (above) is finally getting a new roof and the owners of the George Fowler cottage on Bay Street also are doing some renovation work.

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PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Former North Kingstown Postmaster Ralph Campbell built his dream house on a parcel of land he bought from the Tourjee family on Ten Rod Road in 1931. He lived there with his wife, Cecelia, until his death in 1973.