

G. Timothy Cranston 's

# **The View From Swamptown**

Volumes I and II

April 1999 to March 2001

## **Library Note**

The North Kingstown Free Library is pleased to present "The View From Swamptown" in this electronic format and thus make it available to a larger audience. The articles that make up this publication are in their original unedited form. They appeared in an edited form, and with photographs, in "The North East Independent" between April 1999 and March 2001. Tim Cranston then published the articles in a bound volume that is no longer in print.

This is the library's first installment of "The View From Swamptown". It contains the articles from the section on Wickford in "The View From Swamptown, Volumes I and II". You can use the Find feature on your web browser to search by a word or phrase. More installments will be added in the near future. Please contact the library if you have any questions or comments.

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## The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

### The Wickford Light

November 1, 1882 was an important day in the history of Wickford Harbor. For it was on that day, that the lantern in the fifty-one year old Poplar Point Lighthouse was extinguished and in its place, the light was lit in the recently constructed Wickford Harbor Lighthouse. After more than a decade of abandonment and neglect, the Poplar Point Lighthouse was sold, at auction, in October of 1894 to Albert Sherman, who began the process of transforming the light and keeper's house into the magnificent private residence that it is today.

The newly built Wickford Lighthouse was a picturesque Victorian structure painted white with a red roof on the keeper's house and a black lantern area and roof atop the tower. It perched, precariously, upon Old Gay Rock, which was located about 300 yards northeast of the previous light on Poplar Point. The light was situated there, rather than on either Poplar or Sauga Points, the two land masses which define the entrance to Wickford Harbor, to better delineate the rather narrow navigable entrance to the channel, which was the common junction to Fishing Cove, Mill Cove, and Wickford Cove. The lighthouse's fixed white lantern stood fifty-two feet above sea level and could be seen, on a clear night, from a distance of twelve nautical miles. The narrow navigable channel was just to the north of the lighthouse.

The new light was a Godsend for the men who sailed out of busy Wickford Harbor during those days long before Loran and radar. But even its presence, no matter how valuable, did not bring to an end the sad sight of a ship run up on the shoals on either side of the channel. Even the most experienced local sea captains were subject to the will of their ultimate master, the sea. It is known that Wickford's own, Captain David S. Baker, the master of a ship which ran between Wickford, Newport, and Providence, during an especially nasty winter storm, ran his famous and locally built sloop "Resolution" right up on the rocks surrounding Old Gay Rock and the lighthouse. Thankfully, the "Resolution" survived the mishap and lived to sail again. But others were not so fortunate.

1930 was a great year for progress, but not for manned lighthouses such as the Wickford Light. It was in that year that the light was replaced by an automatic signal placed adjacent to it. Sadly, the attractive landmark, which had defined the harbor for nearly fifty years, was

demolished later that same year.

The former location of the Wickford Lighthouse is very near to the Poplar Point end of the breakwater which now defines the channel and protects the harbor. The breakwater, too, was a Godsend to the men and women who now sail in and out of the harbor and whose boats are safely anchored therein. Captain Baker and his cohorts would think it a marvel of modern construction and truly appreciate the protection it affords, but I feel certain it would not stir their hearts the way the welcoming sight of the Wickford Harbor Lighthouse did as they ended each day sailing towards home.

(November 16, 2000)

## The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

### The Hammond House

Loyal reader, Larry Ehrhardt, E-mailed me recently to ask about his new place of residence, the William Hammond House at 49 Main Street here in quaint historic Wickford. His request fits in nicely with my on-going project to tell the real story behind the wonderful homes of this picturesque village. Much has already been said about the architectural details and the construction dates of the fine collection of colonial homes that make up N. Kingstown's showcase hamlet, but little has been recorded about the stories behind the houses. For these buildings are more than just a collection of dates and architectural adjectives, each house is a home, and homes always come with a tale to tell, courtesy of the people who lived and died there. So on with what we know about the Hammond House.

The William Hammond House was built in 1798 by William Hammond Jr. Hammond purchased his lot on the corner of Main and Gold from the Brown family. One can tell from the slightly asymmetrical- look of this center chimneyed colonial that the Hammond family, over the years, required more room and added on to the original home more than once. William Jr. who was born on March 3, 1766, spent most of his early years at the Hammond Homestead on Hammond Hill (the present-day intersection of Tower Hill and Gilbert Stuart Rds.) in the southern part of town. The Hammonds had settled there some two generations earlier when Joseph Hammond had moved from Swansea Ma, via Newport to the land in the King's County which would forever bear his family name. William Jr., the second son, had to move from Hammond Hill when his older brother Joseph's family got larger, and he chose Wickford as the home where he and his bride, Alice Tillinghast would raise their seven children. William was a merchant and banker by trade and kept a general store in Wickford for many years. He stocked his establishment, in part, through the fruits of his engagement in the West India trade, a venture which was speculative at best but which often brought great rewards to those who invested their capital in it. Hammond's experiences in this type of trade were highly regarded, so highly in fact, that in 1816, he was appointed by President Madison to be the Customs Surveyor for the Port of Wickford and its surrounding areas. Around about the same time, he became a partner with Benjamin Fowler, another Wickford merchant, and others and opened the first financial institution in the area, The Narragansett Bank, which they operated out of Fowlers home at nearby 99 Main Street. He was also a partner with Noel Freeborn and others in the formation of the area's second bank,

The North Kingstown Bank, which ran out of Freeborn's home also on Main Street. The two banks were eventually combined into the Wickford National Bank, under the guidance of Fowler, Hammond and the rest and ultimately (although it was well after Hammonds demise) ended up housed in the building now occupied by that other local paper; the banks original home having been destroyed by fire during a bungled burglary attempt. But that's another story for another time.

Hammond died in his home in Wickford, on September 24, 1827. He and Alice were buried at the Hammond Hill Homestead, which by then he owned and ran as a gentleman's farm, in the family graveyard. His large estate was settled by his eldest son, Pardon Tillinghast Hammond, who eventually lived, with his family, in the Wickford "mansion house" built by his father. Pardon was required by his father's will to keep a room available for each of William and Alice's children as long as they remained unmarried. A specific room was appointed to each child and Pardon kept true to his parent's request. The old saying in the Hammond family lore was that the latch string always hangs on the outside of the door at the Hammond house, for any Hammond, and the old time hospitality dwells within". This house was, until fairly recently, always in the hands of a Hammond descendant. So, Mr. Ehrhardt, should you hear a peculiar knock on the door one lonely night, a knock which seems to come from an unseen hand, you'll know that you ought to have the latch string out for the spirit of a Hammond come to claim his birthright.

As a final aside to the story of the Hammonds, I find it interesting to note that William Jr. 's brother Benjamin, married a lovely woman by the name of Sarah Cranston, of the Wickford branch, they were so proud of their combined heritage that they named their first-born son, Cranston Hammond; a name which descended through the Hammond family for three more generations. Now can you think of a better name than that!

(December 14, 2000)

## **Clarence L. Hussey and the Hamilton Bridge**

Prior to 1843, if you needed to go the short distance from Wickford to Hamilton, you were required to take the lengthy route up Phillips Street to the Post Road and then down Annaquatucket Road to Boston Neck Road and Hamilton itself. This long roundabout way to go, what was, as the crow flies, a very short distance was a source of aggravation to the good citizens of our fair town who lived on the south side of Wickford Cove. So, in 1843, a group of well-to-do Wickfordites, headed by Judge Pitman and his son General Joshua Pitman (The die-hard loyal readers among you will remember that the Pitmans were the founders of Duck Cove Farm at the end of present-day Earle Drive.) and including; Alfred Reynolds, John Sherman, William Brown, and Beriah Lawton raised the then princely sum of \$1,000 to fund the building of a bridge over the channel, adjacent to the Gregory Mill, between Wickford and Hamilton. The resulting bridge would come to be called simply, The Hamilton Bridge.

The construction of the sixteen foot wide wooden bridge, which rested on numerous pilings sunk into the mud of the channel, caused quite a little construction boom along the edges of the Boston Neck Road. Many of Wickford's wealthier residents purchased large lots along either side of the road and had fine homes constructed there. The new Town Hall and the St. Paul's Guild Hall were built as a direct result of the ease of passage the bridge afforded. In 1849, the town assumed control of and responsibility for the bridge from the Pitman's. They widened it slightly and repaired it as needed until 1889 when the road and the bridge, by then the responsibility of the state, were rehabbed and rebuilt. The resulting iron bridge can be seen in the accompanying photograph taken a short while after the bridge was rebuilt.

Unfortunately, in 1889, the folks at the state department of roads and bridges, like everyone else at the time, never dreamed of the impact which that new-fangled invention, the automobile would eventually have upon, among other things, the lifespan of the state's bridges, and by 1912, when Clarence Hussey, the other focus of our story entered the scene, most of the state's bridges were bordering on unsafe, and the Hamilton Bridge was no exception. Hussey was a hot shot engineer, straight out of M.I.T., when he was hired on by RI as its first state bridge engineer. He was given a tiny office in the basement of the Capital building and virtual carte' blanche to get the state's bridges up to snuff. He decided that the first

thing he needed to do was photograph and evaluate each and every bridge in the state of Rhode Island and that is just what he did, and the resulting collection of 45,000 images, which is still existent to this day in the state archives, is universally acknowledged to be the most complete record of period bridge construction in the world. Hussey used his photographic inventory to prioritize his bridge rebuilding schedule and quickly got underway with it. He personally designed each bridge as he went and for the most part, used his favorite construction material, concrete, for each of them. Hussey, in fact, loved concrete so much that he had an all concrete home built for himself in North Providence, the house still stands today at 100 High Service Avenue.

By 1925, when Hussey's priority list brought him to the rapidly deteriorating Hamilton Bridge in little Wickford, he had already compiled for himself a long and impressive list of bridge building accomplishments, chief among them were; the Barrington and Warren Bridges along Route 114, the Elmwood Avenue Bridge in Cranston, the Washington Bridge in Coventry, the Oakland Bridge in Burrillville, the Centerdale Bridge in N. Providence, and the Sprague Bridge on Boston Neck Road in nearby Narragansett (torn down in recent years). For the Hamilton Bridge he decided upon a reinforced concrete through-arch design, the only one like it in the state. It is 84 feet long and 38 feet wide. Sadly, this was to be Hussey's final bridge, for in 1925, just prior to its completion, Hussey died at the age of 42 years old. His obituary noted that he was known across America as a premier designer of bridges. It also spoke of the fact that, due to his untimely death, the formulas for concrete mixing, which were known only to him and which allowed him to build bridges which lasted much longer than the rest, were carried to his grave. In honor of Hussey, the state of Rhode Island forever changed the name of his final project, the Hamilton Bridge to the Clarence Hussey Memorial Bridge, and rightly so.

Unfortunately Clarence's bridge is looking a little shabby now. He would definitely not approve of its condition and would have a few ideas about how to straighten it out. This columnist hopes that the state of Rhode Island will get on the ball and treat the former Hamilton Bridge a little less like an insignificant little bridge and a little more like the viable monument to an extraordinary man that they deemed it to be.

(February 8, 2001)

## The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

### The Fischer/Hainsworth House

One of the questions I am most often asked is, "What's the story with that big cellar hole next to the library?" Many people erroneously assume that it is the foundation to a house. But, the truth is, it is all that remains of the great barn that, along with a carriage shed and a fine two story home, Alfred Chadsey had constructed for his youngest daughter, Deodata and her new husband Joseph Fischer, and this is the story of that home.

The name "Deodata" means "gift from God" and I am sure that that is how Chadsey and his wife Susan looked upon their youngest daughter, as they had tried for a very long time to have another child after their first daughter Ellen. Ellen had grown up and married well, her union with the son of Lt. Governor *J.J.* Reynolds surely must have made the Chadsey's proud. And now, in August of 1886, Deodata, too, was marrying a man of great promise, for Joseph Fischer was the priest at the Wickford Methodist Episcopal Church (now occupied by G. Willakers, a gift shop), just down the hill from the Chadsey's great home at the top of "Quality Hill" (West Main Street). He had been born in Germany, but had immigrated with his parents to the United States and had grown up and been educated in and around Scituate, Massachusetts. How he met and courted the daughter of one of Wickford's most devout Baptist's is unclear, but whatever the circumstances, it must have made the very religious Chadsey's happy to know that their daughter would be assisting in God's work. Rev. Fischer was already well liked in the community, and since his recent arrival at the Wickford M.E. Church, attendance had increased dramatically and the church, which had been considered likely to fail soon, was having a renaissance of its own. Chadsey had the grand house constructed for his daughter and son-in-law shortly after their marriage. The building of the house also entailed the design and construction of an access road to the property, and anyone who has walked up to our present day library from West Main Street and taken note of its construction can see that this was much more than a simple driveway. But Chadsey, the gentleman farmer and agricultural scientist, loved a challenge, he was more than up to the task and before long the house, barn, and drive were completed. Alfred Chadsey retained ownership of the property until 1895, at that time he transferred it to his daughter and son-in-law. Perhaps he was doing them a favor and not subjecting the newly wed couple to the burden of paying the taxes on their home. One can imagine the young priest and his wife

entertaining church vestry members, as well as, their families in the fine home. It was just a short walk, each day for this "preacher of the Gospel" (as he described himself on his marriage license) to get to his parish; it must have been the perfect home for them. They lived there until 1909, when Fischer's successes at his small church caused him to be reassigned to a new and larger church in Burrillville, RI; the Laurel Hill Methodist Episcopal Church. I'm sure, it was with great reluctance, that they left their home of twenty years, but they were doing God's work and it would not be the last time that the up and coming priest would be reassigned. Just two short years later, he would be writing his former parishoners in Burrillville from his new church in Ducor, California; a town in the northern part of that state.

In 1910, the Fischer's, who were already living in Burrillville, sold their home to an up and coming local plumber, pipefitter, and sheet metal worker from Wickford, John W. Hainsworth. Hainsworth was married to Sarah Milner and eventually had two children, Albert and Ethel. John can be seen in the accompanying photo with his children in front of the business he purchased from John Congdon. John and Sarah had a good life at the Fischer's old home. Their children grew up and went to school nearly right next door, John's business grew and was quite successful. All that changed in 1922, when Sarah died suddenly and left John to raise their son and daughter alone. John was devastated, but he had a business to run and children to raise and he carried on. Son Albert, had a love of music and a god-given natural ability to go along with it, and he grew up to be a musician of some note locally. Daughter Ethel fell in love with another local boy with the unusual nickname of "Skitty". Skitty Wilson, a Rodman mill worker, had a dream to run his own clothing store in town and he and his wife Ethel Hainsworth fulfilled that dream. They passed their store "Wilson's of Wickford" down to their son Paul, and the rest is, as they say, History. John Hainsworth died in 1938, and his family home became the property of his son Albert. Albert lived in the home for a time, but eventually found it too big for a single man and too full of memories and moved out.

This marks the third and final phase of the house's existence, and brings it to the point where your loyal columnist remembers it. We children of Wickford of the fifties and sixties grew up knowing nothing of the house's storied past; to us it was the "haunted house", a place of mystery up on the hill behind the grammar school. By then the house stood alone, the

carriage house and barn long gone; burned down somewhere near the turn of the century, by the look of the huge trees which grew up in the foundation. The gardens of Deodata Fischer and Sarah Hainsworth had long gone wild; each spring the ground was a virtual blanket of flowers, mostly lilies of the valley, which did well in the cool shade of the tree-covered property. Many a mother's day bouquet were hastily picked from these very grounds. None of us could imagine why a house so big and wonderful had been abandoned there in the middle of town. Few of us could resist carefully walking in and imagining what must have transpired there. Sadly, this fact was the final nail in the coffin of the Fischer/Hainsworth house. You see, Paul Wilson, the house's owner at the time, knew full well that the house was a magnet for the local younguns; he also knew that it was a dangerous place, unmaintained for many years, it might have cost a child an injury or worse. So some time around 1972, he had it burned by the town fire department, who used it for training purposes. With that the house that Alfred Chadsey had lovingly built for his daughter, his "gift from God", was gone. But the "gift" part of this story lived on; for in 1973, Paul Wilson, North Kingstown's greatest philanthropist since Robert Rodman himself, gave the parcel of land to the town for the construction of a new library. In one of the town's greatest ironies, the old library, built by a donation from C. Allen Chadsey, was to be replaced by a library built on the land of his cousin, Alfred Chadsey.

If your kids are anything like mine, they can't resist running down into the old foundation of the barn built for Deodata and Joseph. Some day when you're sitting there in the cool shade of the trees which sprang up from the barn floor tell them the story of this place. It's easy to see that it is essentially a story about gifts and giving and there is nothing more important you can pass on to your children than that.

(March 22, 2001)

## The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

### The Cold Spring House

Back in 1881, fifty-two year old Thomas Peirce, against the advice and counsel of his many friends, decided to risk it all in a daring new venture. Pierce figured that the many well-heeled individuals who passed through Wickford on their way to Newport on the Newport and Wickford Rail Lines train and steamship transportation system would be more than happy to take a break from their long travels; some journeying from as far as St. Louis and Chicago, as well as New York and Boston, to spend a night or two in a comfortable bed in the almost idyllic setting of Cold Spring Cove in Wickford. After all, the train station/steamship dock was just around the corner. With that in mind, he gave up the farming game and began construction of a wonderful hotel at the end of Beach Street, just west of Beechwood - the summer home of Governor Elisha Dyer (present day N.K. senior center), he called his new hotel simply, The Cold Spring House.

Tom Peirce was no stranger to risk taking. Back in 1849, Tom and his older brother John, dropped what they were doing and joined the many men who took the somewhat dangerous voyage around South America to participate in the Great California gold rush. He came back to North Kingstown some two years later, richer only in the experience of the adventure that he and his brother had undertaken, and began a more mundane life as a farmer. Along the way he gained the respect of many, serving in town government as well as a stint in the RI General Assembly. But, I guess by 1881, Tom was ready for some more adventure and although he was a failure at gold mining he was an unmitigated success as a summer resort operator. It was said that his seventy-five rooms were booked twelve months in advance; not only was the hotel a way point for people travelling to Newport, it became a destination unto itself. This columnist wishes that the guest register books from those days were around for perusal; imagine the signatures which might be found within those pages, everyone who was anyone spent time in Newport during those years and many probably spent a moment at the Cold Spring House.

In 1909, a now eighty year old Peirce, decided to lease his successful enterprise to three young private school teachers, who had decided it was the perfect enterprise for someone with his summers off. The teachers, Henry Carpenter, Ray McOrmand, and Stephen Wright, were just as successful as Peirce was and Carpenter and Wright, minus Mr. McOrmand, re-leased the property each summer from then until 1913. In 1914, they purchased the property outright from Peirce. By 1933 Carpenter, with the assistance of his son, Henry Jr., was the sole proprietor of the hotel, as Mr. Wright, who continued to live nearby, retired from the hotel business to more fully devote his time to his first loves, education and travel.

During his forty-three years at the helm of the Cold Spring House, Henry Carpenter made many changes to his charge. In order to bring the resort up to the modern standards of the day, (when he took it over it had only one inside bathroom which guests had to pay an extra quarter to use) he reduced the number of rooms from the original seventy-five down to a manageable thirty-six. He also presided over the full electrification of the facility as well as the installation of a screen porch to placate his mosquito tormented guests. But he didn't change what continued to bring guests back year after year, Yankee hospitality and good home cooked food made fresh each day. As a matter of fact, Carpenter continued the tradition begun by Tom Peirce and had his own garden for use by the hotel. He made a tradition of getting the hotel open at the same time each summer, that is except for the summer of 1941 when he opened it a few months early to help alleviate the housing shortage caused by the influx of workers who were rushing into the area to construct the Quonset/Davisville base.

At the end of 1957, Henry Carpenter sold his hotel to the family of Loring Records. The Records family intended to continue the long standing traditions which had made the hotel such a success; they also hoped to cash in on Wickford's burgeoning reputation as a summer art colony to help fill the rooms. They were successful at this for another decade, until the inevitable time when, due to changes in the travel habits of America's citizens and increased operating costs, especially during the winter when the big building was not generating an income, the doors closed for the last time. It was during those last years that your faithful columnist developed an affection for the Cold

Spring House which outlasted the venerable old building. As a friend of the Record's youngest son I spent a good chunk of time roaming the stairs and hallways of the "grande dame" of Wickford Hotels. I was convinced it was the biggest and fanciest place I would ever see. We concocted a plan to skip school the day that the town of North Kingstown, the buildings final owner, planned to have it torn down, but we chickened out at the last minute. As I look back I'm glad I wasn't there to see her go; this way I'll always remember her the way I should, as the biggest fanciest place of my childhood.

The Cold Spring House sat just about where a concert-goer might like to sit as he listens to the Lafayette Band play at the town band shell on Beach Street. The hotel does live on in a fashion, as the hotel's carriage house has been converted into the N.K. Community Center. So the next time you are down there, close your eyes and try to imagine the Astors or the Vanderbilts sitting in big rocking chairs on a grand porch waiting for the steamship to whisk them to Newport.

(August 24, 2000)

## The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

### The Doctors Shaw and The Shaw House

Throughout most of the 1800s the medical needs of North Kingstown and its surrounding communities were met by the father and son team of Doctors William G. Shaw (Doc Shaw) and William A. Shaw (young Doc Shaw). Between them they practiced medicine locally for more than seventy-five years. The "Doc Shaw" era ended in 1879, when young Doc Shaw joined his locally famous father in the great beyond.

The practice of medicine in those days was quite a bit different than it is today. Doctors then generally travelled from house to house on horseback or in a horse drawn buggy. They collected their fees in cash when they could, but many times offered up their services for bartered payments. The account book of William G. Shaw for 1807-08 notes many instances of this type. For instance: Huling Gardiner paid on his account - 1 load of black heart Walnut, Philip Tilinghast by 1 barrel flour - \$6.75, Nicholas Northup credited for 9 chickens at 9 cents each. It even appears, by the entries in the good doctor's log, that regular patients even built up credit on account during the good times to be used when needed in this fashion. In these early days of medicine, a country doctor was also the dentist and the pharmacist. Doc Shaw pulled many an aching tooth and mixed up many medicinal potions which, according to his prescription book went by exotic (and foul-sounding) names such as aniseed cordial, hemlock liniment, syrup of sarsaparilla, and wine of aconite. As a matter of fact, most physicians of the time grew their own herb garden to be used for the preparation of these concoctions. The historical record also shows us that Doc Shaw was not without a sense of humor, an attribute which would be a requirement in a profession such as this. Witness the dear physician's prescription for pickling cucumbers for an example of his wry sense of humor.

Peel rather thick. Slice not too thin. Soak in cold water for an hour. Pour off water and add vinegar, salt, and pepper. Throw the whole mixture to the hogs.

Obviously, Doctor Shaw was more fond of his many patients than he was of

cucumbers.

Both of the Doctors Shaw lived their lives in the Shaw House which could be found at 39 Brown Street in the village of Wickford. The two story central-chimneyed colonial home was built in 1803 and was one of the first homes built in the new portion of the village known as Elamsville. With its gardens and lawns running from Brown Street all the way to the cove, it had to have been a delightful place for the tired doctors to come home to each evening. Over the years, though, with the change of the village's business center from Main Street to Brown Street, the fine home was virtually surrounded by commercial establishments. Thankfully, due largely to the sensitivity of its final Wickford owner, J. Paul Wilson of Wilson's of Wickford, and the vision of local contractor Dean Saglio, the house did not meet the fate of its many neighbors along Brown Street. It was not demolished; rather it was disassembled and painstakingly rebuilt at a new location in nearby Charlestown. It has resided there, delighting and sheltering another generation of Rhode Islanders, with an altered roofline to allow for a third floor, since 1972. The land which the Shaw house had rested upon for more than 170 years is now occupied by the large addition on the east side of Mr. Wilson's popular clothing store. Although, he probably would have liked to see it stay in his beloved-Wickford, Doctor Shaw, a practical man, would doubtlessly be pleased.

(September 21, 2000)

## The View From Swamptown by G. Timothy Cranston

### Cornelius Island

The next time you take a stroll through Wickford, swing by the end of Pleasant Street and take a gander at the little stone building across the harbor on Cornelius Island. This unassuming little stone house was a part of the smelliest business in the history of North Kingstown; a business which was closed down by a vote of the citizenry who considered it a public nuisance.

In November of 1865 a company known as "Wilson Bros. of Fall River" purchased Cornelius Island from the then owners, the Gray family, and opened up a new business called the "Wickford Oil and Guano Company". This outfit purchased "junk" fish caught by local fishermen and ran them through a fish press to extract fish oil. The fish residue was then incorporated with guano (bird droppings, for the uninitiated) and sold to the local farmers as fertilizer. Both products of this odiferous enterprise were in high demand back in the late 1800s. Fish oil was used for the manufacture of soap and as a base product for paint. It was also considered to be a "poor man's" whale oil and lit many a home in those pre-electricity days. Wickford fish oil was also casked up and exported to Germany where it was used for the tempering of fine German steel.

The fish mash/guano fertilizer, a recipe which harkens back to the days of Squanto and the Pilgrims, was excellent for growing crops and was in such demand that a road, of sorts, was fashioned from the mainland to Cornelius Island. This road was only passable at low tide, and the farmers would line up during planting time at each low tide and hurry across and back with a cart load of this precious commodity before the tide came back in and closed the road.

As you can imagine, this operation was not a pleasant one to reside next to, and the complaints were both numerous and loud. I'm willing to bet that the yearly procession of horse and oxen drawn carts of fish and guano fertilizer traversing the roads of our

fair town didn't help the company's cause when, in 1873, the local residents of the area voted it a public nuisance and demanded its closure. The owners of this noxious, but profitable, enterprise were incensed at being forced out of business. It was said at the time that they refused to sell the island to anyone, for many years after that, strictly out of spite. But finally fiscal sense prevailed and in 1897, Cornelius Island passed out of the hands of the fish oil people and into the hands of a local Wickford owner, Captain Rollin Mason, thus ending the saga of Cornelius Island - the smelliest place in North Kingstown.

(April 6, 2000)

## The View From Swamptown by G.Timothy Cranston

### The Bogert Place

For a fifty year period or so, stretching from the 1880's into the 1930's, Wickford was one of THE places to have a summer home along the east coast, for folks who couldn't quite afford Newport or the Hamptons, but were a financial step or two beyond summers at the Jersey shore. Our quaint little village, along with her sister community, Watch Hill, to the south, were happening places back then and proudly claimed many "movers and shakers" of the time as loyal summer residents.

One couple who proudly called Wickford home during the warm months was Alice W. (Danielson) and Theodore P. Bogert. Mr. Bogert was the vice president of an up-and-coming new enterprise known as the Providence Gas Co. His wife was a socially active woman who had a hand in the formation of Pembroke College as an early member of the "Society for the Collegiate Education of Women". The Bogerts main place of residence was on beautiful Blackstone Blvd, but in 1905 they purchased a sizeable chunk of land on Hamilton Avenue (now Boston Neck Road) from Wickford matriarch, Abigail Updike Reynolds. Perched on the peak of the hill of Miss Reynold's "orchard lot", as it was then commonly known, the Bogerts built an extraordinary 5000 sq ft summer home which rivaled many of the smaller mansions across the bay in exclusive Newport. Their spacious wrap-around porch was second to none in the village and many wonderful summer parties must have begun on the expansive front lawn with it's view of the nearby bay. The location, right between the combined Sea View Trolley and Newport/ Wickford rail station and the placid shores of Cold Spring Beach with its wonderful nearby hotel and restaurant made travel to and from Providence easy and a trip to the beach a lark. The Bogerts even cut a unique deal with their neighbors on the orchard lot hill and had a windmill-powered deep well installed to supply a never-ending supply of cold fresh water to all of their homes.

Life at "The Bogert Place" must have been wonderful each of the 35 or so summers that they lived there. But with Theodore's death in 1940, Alice sold the place to Eastman and Addie Page.

During the time that the Page's owned the Bogert Place it was split up into a main family residence and a number of apartments. This was largely due to the opportunity and the need for housing for the rapidly expanding Naval Base just up the road at Quonset/Davisville. The government put out an emergency call for housing in the area and as an incentive gave respondents to the call larger shares of certain necessities like coal, gasoline, and heating oil during the wartime rationing program. During the war, the Page's sold the house to William and Rose Morin, who turned around shortly after the war, in 1946, and sold it to long time owners, Melville and Elizabeth Davey.

The Davey's tenure as owners of the home saw its name changed from "The Bogert Place" to "The Spinning Wheel". "The Spinning Wheel" was a combined boarding house and apartment house that the Davey's operated out of the old summer home. Additional renovations occurred during this time and a great kitchen with a giant cook stove and spacious refrigerator was installed to aid in the feeding of the Davey's family, residents, and guests. The Davey's ran the place like that for nearly twenty years, until 1966 when it was purchased by the McCrae Family.

The McCrae's owned "The Spinning Wheel" for nearly ten years and ran it as an apartment house with four apartments and two single rooms rented out, primarily, still to military folks and their families from the nearby base.

In the beginning of 1975, the house was again sold, this time to an association of active and concerned members of St. Paul's Church in Wickford. The Spinning Wheel now became sort of a halfway house primarily for women and their children in need of shelter and a sense of community. So, in an ironic twist of fate, the house that was built, in part, by a woman who played a role in assisting

her fellow women in getting a college education was now being run by another woman, Jean Cranston, as a place to help her fellow women to get a leg up on life. My mom, and her partners, ran the Spinning Wheel in this fashion for three years and I was able spend some time in the house built by the Bogert's. It's a memory I treasure.

The Bogert Place/Spinning Wheel is now a private residence and apartments.

(March 15, 2001)

## The View From Swamptown by G.Timothy Cranston

### The Westgate Watson House

As any local artist will tell you, Wickford is a "paintable" place. From its beautiful harbor scenes to its seemingly unending supply of classic colonial architecture, there is no shortage of subjects for the painter to tackle. The Westgate Watson house, as seen from West Main Street, is probably North Kingstown's most "painted" piece of property.

The house, built in 1806, was the fourth home built in this new area of town, then known as Elamsville. Watson's substantial home, at that time, was equipped with a large central chimney. Unfortunately, the chimney was subsequently removed in a later remodelling (as was the case in many homes throughout New England) and replaced with two smaller ones, in order to increase the home's interior space. The house, like its neighbor across Champlin Street (now Elam Street) the James MacKenzie house faced the approach to the now destroyed Champlin Street bridge which connected the road to West Main Street some five years prior to the construction of the still remaining Brown Street Bridge. Even without its central chimney the house is a fine example of its period and worthy of every artistic rendition ever done of it.

So the next time you are at an art festival, show, or gallery keep your eye open for a piece of art which includes a view of Mr. Watson's "humble" home. Purchase it, and you'll own your own little piece of Elamsville. Now how many people can say that.

(September 14, 2000)

## The View From Swamptown by G.Timothy Cranston

### Wickford's First Home

As we have noted in a previous article, the oldest home still standing in Wickford is the house at 6 Bay Street; fondly known as "Old Yellow". But, it is important to remember that this was not the first house built in Wickford, it is most likely among the first seven or eight, but it was not the very first one. So, that begs the obvious question of where was the first house in Wickford located and what do we know about it?

Along about 1709, Lodowick Updike, of Smith's Castle fame, decided to found a town on the piece of land he owned, a little south and east of his blockhouse. With that in mind he had the land surveyed and platted out; he then commenced to market these lots in the new town which he called both Wickford (in honor of the birthplace of the wife of Governor Winthrop of the colony of Connecticut) and Updike's New town (Newtown) in honor of himself. He had somewhat limited success; many of the first sales were either speculative in nature or commercial purchases for wharves and warehouses, his new town having a splendid natural harbor. But a few brave souls actually purchased lots and began to construct homes on them. Individuals known to be in this group include Samuel Aborn, Benjamin Mory, and William Hall. William Hall, it appears, according to early town records, was the first to complete his home sometime in 1711, and to him goes the honor of being the first permanent non-Native American resident of what we now know as Wickford.

Hall built his home on the south side of Wickford, along the shore of its south cove in a spot which corresponds with the location of the circa 1803 house at 33 Washington Street. Details about the house itself are non-existent but some sketchy records do exist about its ownership and eventual demolition. It appears that Hall eventually sold his home to a gentleman by the name of Joseph Atherly, sometime before 1737. Atherly, in turn sold the house to Robert Potter sometime later. In 1769, Silvester Pearce purchased the lot from Potter, but the deed of transfer only mentions the frame of a house. It is uncertain whether this is the remains of the Hall house or the start of a new one, but it is obvious that whatever the case, Wickford's first home had ceased to exist by this pre-Revolutionary time frame.

The house that now stands on William Hall's original lot was built in 1808, by a descendant of Sylvester - John Pearce. Although this lovely home is not, by any means, the oldest in Wickford and it sadly, did suffer the loss of its central chimney in a remodeling later in its life, it can lay claim to a connection to the very beginnings of the town; for one day, long, long ago, a proud and probably apprehensive young William Hall took a step back from his labors there on that very same scrap of land, wiped his brow and admired his new home nestled along young Wickford's south cove.

(July 20, 2000)

## The View From Swamptown by G.Timothy Cranston

### The Story Behind Friend Street

Many of the streets of our fair town are named in honor of someone or something who had a hand in shaping the history of the region. As my predecessor, Mrs. Simister, so succinctly pointed out, the streets all have their own story to tell, if only one takes the time and effort to listen. Friend Street, which runs between Pleasant Street and Fowler Street in the village of Wickford, is no exception to this adage.

Friend Street, as one might mistakenly think, is not named in honor of some mysterious unnamed companion or a lofty virtue. It is, in fact, named in honor of a building which, at one time, existed on the northern corner of its intersection with Fowler Street. This building, in turn, can be considered as a symbol of one of the most important groups in the founding- of the colony of Rhode Island. In September of 1797, the Quakers, or "Society of Friends" as they preferred to be known, purchased this lot and constructed the "Wickford Meeting House", and platted out a Quaker Burial Ground. Although the "Wickford Meeting for Worship" was not an overly large congregation, the Quakers themselves played a pivotal role in the very early history of the colony of Rhode Island. As a matter of fact, virtually all of the leaders of the colony, from its inception up until around the start of the eighteenth century were Quakers. Roger Williams, one of the few non-Quaker governors in the 1600's, took his ideas of religious tolerance and personal freedom very seriously; and the Quakers, who were virtually reviled throughout the rest of the New England colonies, settled within his "lively experiment" in great numbers. They brought with them their personal acumen, many thriving businesses, and an understanding of the value of knowledge. Their legacy, if you will, is the Moses Brown School in Providence, the last great bastion of Quaker values extant in the state; although a few meeting houses still remain.

The Wickford Meeting House was, as was usually the case, a plain wooden building measuring thirty four feet by twenty four feet. The local members of the "Society of Friends" met there for forty four years, until June of 1840, when the two remaining members of the congregation - Beriah Brown and Howland Vaughn were transferred to the East Greenwich Meeting for Worship. Brown and Vaughn had been attending the meeting for quite a while up to that time, alone, with no speaker and no other "Friends" with which to worship. It was said that "they sat together in silence , for the usual length of time, and then shaking hands, closed the meeting and returned to their homes." This

somewhat sad scene was playing out all across the region at that time, as an important part of RI history was coming to an end.

In August of 1845, the meeting house and land were sold separately. The building was relocated to Hamilton Allenton Road where it was remodeled into a tenement house. From there, its history is unknown, as of this writing, it appears to no longer exist. But back in Wickford, the old Quaker Burying Ground and the street sign on the corner of Friend and Fowler stand to testify to all those who care to know about the remarkable Quakers of Rhode Island.

(July 6, 2000)

## **The Immanuel Case House**

In 1786, after a long career as the Innkeeper/Tavern owner of a tavern located in Old Tower Hill Village (near the site of the present-day intersection of Tower Hill Road and Route 138), Immanuel Case had his retirement "Mansion House", as he referred to it, built on "The Grand Highway" (present-day West Main and Main Streets) in the bustling little village of Wickford. This post-Revolutionary War period was a busy one for the little village. At the beginning of the war there were perhaps twenty homes in the entire village, by the start of the new century, as many as forty more homes graced the streets of the little hamlet. Case had purchased his house lot from the reigning real estate tycoon of the period - Richard Phillips. Phillips had purchased the inheritance lands of two of the five daughters of Lodowick Updike outright. Sarah Goddard and Katharine Updike both sold him their entire ten acre parcels. He later purchased portions of Martha Updike's ten acres in a piecemeal fashion. Lodowick's other daughters, Abigail and Esther's portions eventually ended up in the hands of Peter Phillips (a relation of Richard's) and George Fowler respectively. The outcome of all this land swapping and real estate speculation was that, Wickford, which was once owned in its entirety by the Updike family, now was basically the property of the Phillips and Fowler families. It was into this atmosphere of speculation and construction that Immanuel Case plunged when he made the decision to retire to Wickford. His double interior-chimneyed home, situated on the corner of the Grand Highway and Gold Street was built in the Georgian style, a popular motif for the time. The home also featured elaborate and extraordinary interior woodwork and paneling which signaled to the world of the late 1700's that Case was a man of substance and style. His home has survived quite nicely in its long journey from the eighteenth century into the twenty-first. As a matter of fact, in 1934 it was chosen by the U.S. government's Historic American Building Survey as one of a handful of representative houses for its time frame. As a by-product of that nomination, a complete set of measured drawings were made of the house; one of the few in Wickford at the time to be so well documented. The accompanying photograph, taken in 1978, shows the home in near original condition; if Immanuel Case himself, walked up to the front door during that time frame he would be hard

pressed to notice any difference. Let's hope that his Mansion house survives for another three centuries to honor his legacy.

(May 25, 2000)

## The View From Swamptown by G.Timothy Cranston

### Duffy's Bar and Grille (No Grille)

This week's column is dedicated to the memory of my dad, Cy Cranston. He loved Duffy's and all the guys there who he hung around with, all those years ago. No names need be mentioned, you all know who you are.

No serious study of the history of North Kingstown can be undertaken without taking a look at one of its most beloved (at least by the male half of the population) institutions, Duffy's Bar and Grille (No Grille). More friendships have been made and more deals cemented here than anywhere else in town. It was always, just simply, a place where a man could go and have a cold beer and enjoy the company of other men. My first memories of Duffy's, which date back to 1963-4 when I would stop there with my dad on a hot afternoon, can be summed up in one sentence. The floor was dirt and the root beer was cold and served up in exactly the same glass as my dad's beer; and never did a seven year old boy feel more like a man than right then and there sitting at the bar trying to sound knowledgeable talking about the Red Sox. And that dirt floor thing - What a great deal - no one ever even gave it a second thought when you spilled something at Duffy's. I've got to tell you, something intangible was lost when they finally installed a wood floor in 1966. Women, although not actually barred from the establishment, were not exactly welcome at Duffy's either. I'm not certain how old I was before I noticed that although the men's room sign was posted on a bathroom door, the only ladies room sign evident was prominently displayed above the exit door. Well, enough reminiscing, on with the history.

The land that Duffy's sits on originally belonged to the Thomas family, a prominent local family with long ties to the area. Along about 1869, George Thomas died and his widow, Sarah lost the land when she couldn't keep up the mortgage. It appears that part of the land was purchased by the Pierce family and turned into the picturesque farm which still exists to this day just south of the tavern. The portion

that Duffy's is now on was picked up by Horatio Reynolds, a member of another prominent local family, who held it for a time and then sold it to Henry Moore. At the time of the transaction between Reynolds and Moore (around 1894) the property was described to include a home and a small barn. This small barn is more than likely the same twenty foot by twenty-seven foot horse barn which eventually became Duffy's. Some time around the turn of the century Mr. Moore sold the property to Annie Duffy, the first in a long series of Duffys to own the land and the horse barn which has immortalized their name for this last century or so. The "official" word was always that the Duffy's opened their drinking establishment immediately after the repeal of prohibition in 1933, but, if you ask the right old-timers they will regale you with stories of how they waited in wagons and under trees outside of that same little barn while their dads attended to pressing business within, throughout the 1920's. So the truth of the matter appears to be that Duffy's was a busy little "speakeasy" during the days of prohibition as well. The Duffy most associated with the tavern was Frank Duffy, he owned and ran the tavern for many a year, until around 1951 when he gave up the day-to-day running of the bar to Norman "Duffy" Lamoureux. Mr. Lamoureux spent nearly thirty years behind the bar, outlasting even the Duffys, who sold the bar to the Andersons around 1960 or so. He also began an amazing friendship around that same time with the man who would eventually become sort of the "patron saint" of Duffy's, Ted Williams, who happened into the tavern after competing in a fishing tournament at Galilee. Ted liked what he saw, and came back occasionally to visit. He also lent his name and presence to another facet of the Duffy's legend, its prodigious fund raising capabilities. The boys at Duffy's have, over the last sixty years or so, raised literally hundreds of thousands of dollars for various charities ranging from the Jimmy Fund (Ted's favorite) to college scholarships for local deserving students. Ted Williams and Norman Lamoureux kept in touch for years, all the way up until Norman's death in 1979. The death of Norman "Duffy" Lamoureux nearly spelled the death of Duffy's as well. The bar closed and the Andersons wanted to sell, but the town would not allow the transfer of the "grandfathered" rights to operate from the Andersons to anyone else and things looked bleak for Duffy's- But then along came Frank Cain, who had promised Norman he'd keep the bar open no matter what. Through the deft use of statesmanship and with the help of his friend Stu Tucker, who he somehow convinced to take on the task of rehabilitating Duffy's, the deed was done and Duffy's,

although it appears to be quite a different animal at first glance, was preserved to head on into the next century. The rest is, as they say, history.

I say "appear" because, although the bar is all fancied up, with nice level floors and two rest rooms and furniture that matches, the old Duffy's is still there just beneath the surface. It is still a place where most everyone knows everyone. It is still a place where caring people give back to the community. It is still a place where a man can go and have a cold beer and enjoy the company of his friends.

(March 23, 2000)

## The View From Swamptown by G.Timothy Cranston

### The Odd Fellows Hall

In 1884 a coalition of fraternal organizations got together and decided to erect a hall large enough to suit their needs and those of the community at large. The "Odd Fellows", "Masons", "Redmen", and "Tall Cedars" would all use the hall for their meetings and varied social functions. Numerous dances, concerts, teas, and strawberry socials would be held here, as well as the regular meetings of these fraternal societies. The hall was known as The Odd Fellows Hall, as Beacon Lodge Number 38 of the International Order Of Odd Fellows was the prevalent fraternal organization of the time. The building was a two story affair, complete with kitchen, dining, and reception rooms as well as offices for each of the involved organizations. As time went on most of the groups either disbanded or opened their own meeting halls and by the early 1900's the hall became the sole concern of the Beacon Lodge of the Odd Fellows. This by no means meant that Odd Fellows Hall stood empty, on the contrary, it was rented out for wedding receptions, luncheons, and dinners. It was also, for a time, the home of the North Kingstown High School Basketball Team, who played their home games in its cavernous main hall; the Wickford Schoolhouse across the street did not, at the time, have a gymnasium of its own. This same fact led to Odd Fellows Hall becoming the preferred site for the school's graduation ceremonies; many a proud graduate received his or her diploma on its stage. Eventually the Odd Fellows, too, disbanded their lodge and the hall was empty for a time, but in the early 1950's the building was reopened as a movie theatre. Contrary to common belief, the Wickford Theatre was only open for a few years and all that remains of it is the familiar sign which graces the front of the building to this day. After the demise of the movie house the building was used as an auction hall. It was the auction business which attracted its present owner, Mr. Chris Mercurio, when he purchased the building in 1955. The Mercurios have used the building as an auction hall, a museum, and an antique store, as well as their own home in the forty five years they have owned it. Thousands of curious tourists and locals alike have wandered through the building marveling at the collection of antiques and memorabilia that they have assembled. Why, it is rumored that the collection even

includes the baby buggy belonging to the great-grandfather of a certain Swamptown Columnist. North Kingstown owes the Mercurios a debt of gratitude for having preserved this remarkable building, which is "chock" full of history in more than one sense of the word.

(March 2, 2000)

## Samuel Elam and The Washington Academy

Somewhere around 1800 the leading citizens of Newport, Providence, Warwick, and North Kingstown decided that an institute of higher education was needed, where a young man could be trained to be a teacher. This was the beginning of the Washington Academy which stood on the present day site of the Wickford Elementary School. The Academy, which was conceived as a non-denominational liberal arts school, was an almost immediate success. It wasn't long before its name was spoken in the same breath as Brown University. Among other things, young men at the Academy were schooled in English, Higher Mathematics, Navigation, Surveying, and Astronomy. Its first graduating class numbered only seven, but before long it had an enrollment of more than one hundred and was turning out qualified teachers by the dozens. A driving force behind the formation of the Academy, as well as its first president was Samuel Elam, a wealthy and well-known banker who hailed from both Newport and New York. Elam was the president of the Rhode Island Union Bank in Newport and lived in a princely mansion near the city-by-the-sea known as "Vaucluse". His personal library there at "Vaucluse" was nearly as renowned as the Anthaneum's. Samuel Elam was a vocal proponent of education and was known to lend his books to any willing student, rich or poor, who expressed a desire to learn; although he expected their punctual return in perfect condition. Elam also kept a home in North Kingstown near the mill village of Annaquatucket, this undoubtedly played a role in the town's selection as the site of the Academy. Samuel Elam was a man who was used to getting his way, but in one case he did not prevail. It was his desire that the school which he championed and presided over be named in his honor, but local mogul Daniel Updike, a man who possessed his own share of clout, would not hear of it; the school should be named in honor of the founder of our country and it was he who ultimately prevailed. To placate the beneficent Elam the town did eventually change the name of the street nearest the school from Champlin Street to Elam Street and the tiny hamlet which surrounded it was known as Elamsville. Samuel Elam, one of Rhode Island's champions of education died on October 24, 1813. The Washington Academy, which he had had a hand in founding, outlasted its president, surviving until 1848. Upon closing, the Academy's building was

leased to the town of North Kingstown and used as the schoolhouse for Districts Three and Four. But sadly, the impressive Federal style building burned to the ground in 1874. Although the Academy and its home are long gone, the legacy of educational excellence attached to this location continues, and as we enter Academy Hill's Bicentennial year with the town government contemplating changing this spot's longstanding educational tradition; it is appropriate to stop and ponder, "What might Sam Elam and Daniel Updike think of all this?"

(February 17, 2000)

## The View From Swamptown by G.Timothy Cranston

### The Bullock-Thomas House

In 1825, Jabez Bullock built a magnificent Federal style home on land he had recently purchased from Robert Eldred. The two-and-one-half story home was easily one of the grandest in the village. Its five bay design with a monitor-on-hip style roof was unique in the village then and still is today. Bullock, his first wife, and his family lived there until 1839. Jabez was, at that time, a recently remarried widower and his new bride was uncomfortable taking over the home of her predecessor. With that in mind, Jabez Bullock sold his home to a successful local merchant, Allen M. Thomas, and moved into his new home around the corner at 30 Brown Street. The growing Thomas family extended their new home later in the century, adding on the large wing which is visible behind the home to this day. The home's location, across the street from St. Paul's church was fitting, as Allen Thomas' son, Elisha Smith Thomas, was the second Bishop of the new territory of Kansas. Elisha, in turn, had a son Nathaniel who became the Bishop of the Wyoming Territory. By 1910, the last of the Thomas family had left Wickford and the home fell into disrepair, until 1927, when it was purchased by R.G. Clarke, the heir to the Singer Sewing Machine fortune. Mr. Clarke wanted the house for his summer home; he, like many other wealthy New Yorkers, had fallen in love with Wickford as he passed through on the train and steamship to Newport. Clarke, like his contemporary A.T. Cross, hired renowned architect Norman Isham to supervise the restoration of the fine old home. Isham took great pains, as he had done with Crossholme, to accurately bring the home back to its original grandeur. It stands that way today, in its 175th year, a grand Wickford home with its own unique story to tell.

(January 27, 2000)

## **The Narragansett Tavern House**

In 1773 David Potter and Timothy Dean built this large two-story house with its western wall made of brick on the corner of Wall and Main Streets. During much of its early existence this house was used as a tavern and hotel run by the Congdon family. Its sign, which hung near the front door, was a large bunch of grapes, carved out of wood. Many notable individuals of the colonial era, including, it has been said, Benjamin Franklin took advantage of its hospitality. Local men who volunteered for service during the Revolutionary War were mustered into service in the tap room located in the northwest corner of the house. Later, the Providence to New York stagecoach made the Narragansett House its first nightly stopover point on the long journey to New York City via the old New London Turnpike. Passengers received rest and refreshment here, as well as made connections with other coaches travelling to different locations. As the times changed, so did the character of Wickford and the majority of the little taverns and inns closed and became stately homes for the local residents of Wickford, such is the case with the Narragansett Tavern House.

(December 23, 1999)

## **The Wickford Gun**

In March of 1776 the General Assembly of the new State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations ordered that one of the field cannons that it had previously sent to the town of South Kingstown be transferred to Wickford to protect it from an attack by the British, who were firmly entrenched just across the bay in Newport. This cannon went down in Revolutionary War lore as the "Wickford Gun".

Early in 1777, a company of British regulars was sent across the bay on a barge from the fleet anchored there, to burn the village of Wickford which was thought, by them, to be undefended. The British proceeded, without incident, to the mouth of Wickford Harbor, where they were surprised by a retort from Wickford Gun which was stationed at the present location of the Popular Point Lighthouse. The local defenders managed to score a direct hit upon the barge, killing one man, and causing the British to beat a hasty retreat and abandon their plan of burning down Wickford.

Later in the year, news came from the southern reaches of the state that a British man-of-war had ventured to close to shore and had run aground off Point Judith. Excitement ran high and the crew of the Wickford Gun made ready to haul it down to the point and attack the British sitting duck before they could free her. As they were making the gun ready it was, luckily, noticed that Tory sympathizers had sabotaged it. This problem was quickly rectified by a local Samuel Bissell and in a few hours, drawn by a team of four oxen, the gun was on site at Point Judith. The gun was set up behind the rocks along the shore and after firing off a number of rounds, many of which hit their mark, the 166 man crew of the twenty-eight gun frigate "Syrene" surrendered to the assembled local militia and were carried as prisoners to Providence.

(December 2, 1999)

## The View From Swamptown by G.Timothy Cranston

### The "Steamboats" of Steamboat Avenue

Some of you may have wondered about the origin of the name of the street which runs from Beach Street down the spine of Poplar Point until it reaches Wickford Harbor. This street name, along with an abandoned trestle and a few pieces of railroad track hidden beneath the asphalt of some of our town's roads, are all that remains to remind us of the "golden age" of Wickford and the trains and ships which took the well-heeled elite of the day from New York to Newport.

Around 1870 it became apparent to the City of Newport and a number of investors that a more elegant and reliable way of getting the New York aristocracy from their inland estates to their "summer cottages" in the city by the sea was required and stock was raised to do just that. The railroad from Wickford Junction (near the site of the present day overpass on Ten Rod Road) to Wickford Landing (the site of the marina on Steamboat Avenue) was completed in June of 1871. The train ran between these two points for more than fifty four years, ending its service at the end of September in 1925. But, more about the train in another issue.

The other half of this transportation marvel was the steamship which carried the Astors, Vanderbilts, and their contemporaries across the bay to Commercial Wharf in Newport. The first steamer on the line was the "Eolus". The ship, built in the 1860's and christened the "Calypso" had seen service in the Civil War under the Union flag as a coastal patrol boat out of Norfolk, Va. It had captured two Confederate blockade runners, and had had quite a career when it began the Wickford to Newport run in June of 1871. The "Eolus" made the many daily round trips until she was replaced in May of 1892 by another side-wheeler, the "Tockwogh" which, tragically, had a very short career. On April 11, 1893 the nightwatchman at the Wickford Landing where she was tied up discovered a fire on board. Despite all efforts, the "Tockwogh" burned to the waterline. In May of 1893, her replacement and the final ship of the line, the "General" began her career on the Wickford to Newport run. The "General", a propeller-driven steamship, was the most luxurious and popular ship of them all. Her cabins, decks, and hallways were outfitted with every luxury of the day. The cabins were comparable to an elegant hotel. A

brass band played on the upper deck on the evening return trips to Wickford. Sadly, this romantic relic of a bygone era was dealt its death blow by the one thing which struck down so many standards of its time - the automobile. In the fall of 1925 the train and the steamship made their last runs due to a decline in usage.

(December 9, 1999)

## The Church and The Carousel

Starting in 1938, and running yearly after that for more than two decades, the parishioners of St. Paul's in Wickford held a grand village fair, which was to the people of North Kingstown and its surrounding communities as important an event as the Art Festival is today. It began, innocently enough, as a rummage sale held in July the year before. The sale's success got church Rector Father Harold Whitmarsh thinking about what a wonderful community occasion it had been; perhaps it could become a yearly event, something for the whole church and town to look forward to. He handed his vision off to the right man, Walter Rodman; local businessman and, in this case as in many others, a visionary in his own right. His self-proclaimed slogan for the Village Fair, as it became known, was "Bigger and Better Every Year" and he and the legion of fellow organizers who assisted him held true to this motto as the years progressed.

As the years went by many new and exciting events were added to the three days of festivities. There were concerts and contests, games of skill and games of chance, fireman's musters and marionette shows, dinners and dances, and demonstrations that ran the gamut from sewing skills to flower shows to an exhibition of "modern electrical cooking equipment". In the early years, all the children of the more urban villages enjoyed the pony rides which were an instant hit right from the first. But the advent of World War II and its subsequent shortage of young men made this popular attraction more and more difficult to pull off. Therefore, in the early summer of 1943, St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Wickford became the proud owner of a 36 horse 2 sleigh merry-go-round. Word of this wonder spread quickly, and in a short time seven thousand nickels a day were plunked down to bring joy to young and old alike. The popularity of Wickford's merry-go-round spread quickly and before you knew it Kate Smith (yes, THE Kate Smith) was discussing it with Ted Collins on his popular Radio Show. Money raised by rides on the carousel, for the most part, paid for the construction of the parish house which still sits to this day next to the Greenway on Main Street.

From 1943 to 1952 the church operated the carousel every summer to the delight of the

local children. For a time it was even run each Saturday afternoon and evening. In 1952, the church vestry, in response to the increasing costs and time involved in running the popular amusement, voted to sell its merry-go-round and hire an outside concern to provide rides at the fair. With that vote an era ended, but the parish hall's existence serves as a reminder of a time before movie multiplexes, video games, and the internet; to a simpler time when a ride on a painted pony brought a smile to a child and temporarily eased the worry of a mother or grandparent concerned about young men fighting a war a world away.

(November 18, 1999)

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

### **The House Saved by a Pen and Pencil**

This week's column concerns the John Updike House on Pleasant Street in Wickford. This fine home, the second oldest in Wickford, was built in 1745 by John Updike; the grandson of the village's founder, Lodowick Updike. The land was platted out in 1709 and, prior to the construction of the house, held a wharf and warehouse. John Updike's house was, and still is, the grandest house in Wickford built in the style of some of Newport's smaller mansions; a house truly worthy of the richest family in the area.

After being sold by the Updike family the house eventually came into the hands of Thomas Cutler. He owned it until the time of the Revolutionary War when, because he was an ardent Tory, the house and its properties were confiscated by the fledgling Rhode Island government and sold at auction.

One hundred years later the house was in the hands of the Westcott family. They in turn sold the home to Alonzo T. Cross in 1920. The house had, sadly enough, fallen on hard times. Mr. Cross, the inventor of the famous Cross pen and pencil, came to its rescue like a knight in shining armor. He hired renowned architect Norman M. Isham to supervise its restoration and had it moved from its original location right on the sidewalk back to where it sits today. The house has since been known as Crossholme, a fitting name which reminds us of the man and his world renowned writing instruments - the saviors of this beautiful colonial gem.

The John Updike Home (or Crossholme, take your pick) is now run as a bed and breakfast inn.

(August 5, 1999)

## The View From Swamptown by G.Timothy Cranston

### Old Yellow

This week's column concerns Wickford's oldest home, The George Thomas house, fondly known as "The Old Yellow", on Bay Street, built in 1735.

What makes an old home truly unique is not the architecture or the number of years it has managed to survive; it's the stories and the history which has happened within its walls. Old Yellow, has built up an interesting history in its 264 years. Prior to the construction of the house the land was owned by Thomas Newton and James McSparran. It was then a portion of a parcel of land upon which John Mumford built a wharf and a warehouse. In 1735, George Thomas purchased the land and built the house which stands there to this day. Coincidentally enough, the next two owners of Old Yellow were the great grandsons of two different colonial governors of Rhode Island. The first, Samuel Brenton Esq., great grandson of Governor William Brenton of Newport eventually sold his home to Thomas Cranston (yes, that's right another Cranston story) great grandson of Governor Samuel Cranston also of Newport. Although the exact time frames are unclear it is quite probable that the following little piece of Revolutionary War history may have happened in Old Yellow. It seems that Thomas Cranston's father, also named Thomas, of Newport was a bit of a Tory sympathizer. Many men of rank in the colony wanted to run him out on a rail or worse. But, in deference to the memory of his grandfather, the very popular Governor of 29 years, a deal was cut which allowed him to stay in the colony under house arrest. So on the first Wednesday in May 1778 it was voted by the General Assembly of the colony that Thomas Cranston of Newport post a cash bond of 2000 pounds sterling and be removed to his son Thomas' home in Kingstowne to remain there until further orders be given. There he remained until the second Monday in June 1779 when it was further voted that Thomas Cranston be permitted to move about the colony as long as he behaves himself as a "good friend to the American cause". Obviously the elder Thomas had a change of heart about his allegiance to his new country.

Samuel Brenton, who died in February 1797, is buried at "The Platform", the former site of the Old Narragansett Church", on Shermantown Road. Thomas Cranston II

died at sea in 1792; his body was not recovered.

(July 22, 1999)

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

### **The North Kingstown Fire Department**

Nothing brought more of a sense of dread to the inhabitants of a closely constructed community like Wickford, Davisville, Belleville or any other of the local villages than the thought of a fire racing out of control and consuming homes and businesses one by one. There was no greater agony for a family and their neighbors than to stand by helplessly and watch all they possess being devoured by flames; and, short of hurriedly formed bucket brigades, watch was all the population of these communities could do in the 17th and 18th centuries. With that in mind, the populations of these and many villages like them began to form fire districts and organize themselves against the inevitable - fire.

The origins of the North Kingstown Fire Department can be traced back to April of 1805 when the community leaders of Wickford and its immediate surroundings incorporated the Wickford Fire District and assessed a fire tax against all village property to be used to purchase fire fighting equipment. The all volunteer company elected George Tennant of 180 West Main Street as its first fire chief and purchased a hand engine complete with buckets, ladders, hooks, and ropes. In November of 1806 a vote of the Fire District required all property owners to purchase two leather fire fighting buckets within ninety days. Subsequent votes required residents to clear the streets of all lumber and stones to allow clear passage for the engine, as well as to keep stray livestock off the roads so as not to impede the passage of the hand pumper. In 1847 the district purchased their third engine, a handpumper which some believe is the "Narragansett" which is now housed at the South County Museum. In 1885, the Fire District purchased the handpumper "Washington #1" which was until recent time housed in the Fire Fighting Museum in the building which once was the Methodist Church on West Main St. At some point around that same time the company opened the West Main Street Fire Barn in a building it purchased from Charles Stafford the town treasurer and village blacksmith. The building was next door to his blacksmith shop (now the site of the Wickford Mobil Station) and served the town as its fire station for many years.

At the financial town meeting in December of 1916 the town voters cast their ballots to purchase the equipment of the Wickford Fire District and to use it as the beginnings of a true "town-wide" fire department. This transaction officially occurred on June 1, 1917. The town subsequently absorbed the Saunderstown, Davisville, Quidnessett, and Slocum Fire Districts into this new North Kingstown Fire Department. At the same December meeting it was also voted to purchase the town's first motorized pumper, an American-LaFrance model which cost around \$8,000. Later in 1917 the newly formed Fire Commission voted to pay all callmen (volunteer fireman) \$2.00 for the first three hours of a fire attended and \$1.00 for each subsequent hour. The 1917 financial town meeting voted to approve the expenditure of \$10.16 per month to the Providence Telephone Company for a fire alarm signal system which rang a bell in each callman's home as well as a few prominent businesses such as Ryan's Market to alert the volunteers of a fire. The bells all rang continuously until a callman unlocked the Fire Barn and disengaged the system. Interestingly enough the fire barn's water needs were partially fulfilled by a rain water collection system which gathered the rain which fell on the roof and funneled it in to a huge iron tank on the ground floor of the building. The all volunteer system operated in North Kingstown until 1950 when Arthur Selley, the fourth North Kingstown Fire Chief became its first permanent paid employee, although the majority of its firefighters were still volunteers for many years to come.

(September 30, 1999)

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

# The North Kingstown Police Department

In June of 1941 the town of North Kingstown appointed its first full time police officer. Up until that time police protection had been provided to the citizens of our fair town by the newly opened (1935) state police barracks on the Post Road. The Wickford Barracks of the RI State Police housed the fledgling South County Patrol formed in the early 1930's to, primarily, patrol the burgeoning state highway system that was rapidly being established throughout the southern part of Rhode Island.

North Kingstown's police presence at that time consisted of a Town Sergeant who also served as the Town Clerk; in 1941 that man was Elmer Edwards. Mr. Edwards, in June of 1941, became North Kingstown's first Chief of Police presiding over a department consisting of one man. Elmer Edwards served as North Kingstown's Police Chief until December of 1948. The retiring chief was replaced by his assistant, Deputy Chief Chase, who, in turn retired in September of 1949. At that point, Lt. Burton Moon began his long and effective reign as the North Kingstown Chief of Police. At the beginning of Chief Moon's tenure the Department consisted of six men, including himself.

The Chief's mobile fleet consisted of two police cruisers and his own personal car, all of which were equipped with a new-fangled two way radio recently installed in 1947. At that time the police, fire, and ambulance departments of the towns of North Kingstown, South Kingstown, and Narragansett all shared the same radio frequency, giving all these departments a unique opportunity to communicate amongst themselves. In 1952, the N.K. Police connected themselves with the police departments of New England, New York, and Pennsylvania when it installed a Teletype machine, the 1950's version of the world-wide-web. The department also acquired its first photographic equipment in 1954 for the preservation of evidence found at accident sites and crime scenes.

All the police work required in a town as large as North Kingstown could not have been accomplished with a department which, for nearly its first two decades, rarely exceeded ten men, without the help provided by the assistance of the auxiliary police, later to be known as the police reserve. This group of part-timers and volunteers filled in where needed in those early years and did so in an exemplary fashion.

A typical day patrol for an officer in those days might consist of traffic and parking duty on Brown Street in Wickford or maybe doing the rounds of the vacant house checks to assure that no vandals or transients had done their work. At night a patrolman would be responsible for checking the doors and windows of all business establishments on his beat. This practice was carried out in Wickford up until recent times. Night patrolmen would also man fixed traffic posts and stop and check suspicious or erratic drivers.

When Chief Moon retired many years later, he left a police department ready to face a modern world.

(October 7, 1999)

## The Temple of Honor

Long before Alcoholic's Anonymous was even thought of, there was the Temple of Honor. The Temple of Honor, along with its sister organization The Women's Christian Temperance Union, were the spearheads of the Temperance/Prohibition Movement which swept across the country during the end of the 1800s. During the 1880s, Temple of Honor Halls were springing up all over the country, and Rhode Island was no exception. The metropolitan Providence/Pawtucket area was serviced by Prosperity Temple which was located on Kenyon Avenue in Pawtucket. The Reliance Temple in Fiskeville served the populace in its immediate area, and the temperate and God-fearing population of southern Rhode Island met regularly on the first and third Wednesdays of every month at the Annaquatucket Temple of Honor #16 which was located on Phillips Street in our own quaint and historic Wickford.

You can bet your bottom dollar, that the Temple of Honor Motto, "Prohibition by the strong arm of the law, maintained and upheld by public sentiment" was not only posted prominently on the wall inside the hall, (the large white building in the accompanying photograph) but was practiced fervently by all its many members. As a matter of fact, every member was empowered to "go out and pick up their fallen (code word for drunken) brethren again and again, even if it is a dozen times, and reform him. Such a man would be a better advertisement for the cause than taking in a dozen non-drinkers." If this philosophy does not remind you of the important work of the present day AA then I don't know what would. Ironically enough, the Temple of Honor and the W.C.T.U.'s unmitigated success, with the passing, in 1919, of the Volstead Act which brought prohibition to the nation, was also their downfall; as the loss of their rallying point meant the end of the very reason for their existence. Prohibition's general unpopularity and the resultant backlash against everything associated with it were the nails in the Temple of Honor's coffin and it ceased to exist.

After the end of The Temple of Honor organization, the Annaquatucket Hall on Phillips Street, fell into private hands. It and its surrounding land was owned by the Gardiner family, who then sold it to the North Kingstown Democratic Party. They used it as their headquarters until the end of the 1950s when it was purchased and demolished by the telephone company so they could construct their new building which still sits on the site of the old temple to this day.  
(November 2, 2000)

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

## When Train Tracks Crisscrossed North Kingstown

On June 17, 1899, when the first trolley car of the Sea View Railroad rolled up the tracks from Narragansett into Wickford Station, located on the corner of West Main Street and what is now Newtown Avenue, North Kingstown already had its share of rail lines. The main line of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad cut diagonally across the north western half of the town. At the rail line's intersection with The Ten Rod Road was the hustling bustling train station known as Wickford Junction. From the Wickford Junction Station the branch line of the Newport and Wickford Railroad and Steamboat Company ran south through the woods and swamps down to the Wickford Landing, on what is now Steamboat Avenue, with stops at Belleville and Wickford Depot (located near the site of the small park across from the town hall). This, in fact, was the point where the Sea View's tracks crossed the "Wickford to Newport's", and the 640 rail lines shared the use of this station. This is the place where the "high-rollers" of Newport Society crossed paths with the common folk who used the Sea View as people today use the buses; to get back and forth to work or school, or to go shopping or on a weekend holiday to The Narragansett Pier where the Seaview originated. By September of 1900, when the Sea View's line was completed up to the station on the top of Bleachery Hill in East Greenwich, a North Kingstown or Narragansett resident could get on a trolley near his home, travel to the East Greenwich Station, switch to a Union Street Railway car, which shared the East Greenwich Station with the Sea View, and travel all the way to Providence for a college education or a job in the big city. Both lines also had very successful freight businesses. The Sea View hauled coal to a number of mills along its route, as well as produce, dairy, and other farm products up to the Providence Market Terminal. The Newport to Wickford was the major artery for all rail freight and mail going into Newport and its surrounding communities.

The routes of both lines can still be easily seen today. To find the route of the Newport to Wickford, one only has to drive down Lafayette Road; it crosses just after you pass

over the Shewatuck Brook at the Rodman Mill Pond, to the north the tracks ran up to the main rail spur, the right-of-way is now used as the entrance to Feuer Park and the baseball field, to the south the tracks ran through the woods behind and parallel to Ten Rod Road until they crossed Tower Hill Road near the sites of the present day State Garage and Wickford Lumber. They then ran through the woods behind Wickford Lumber and crossed the cove on a trestle near present day Loop Drive. They then continued southeast until they crossed Updike Street between what is now the old radio station and the dentist office (formerly Agway). Finally, they went through the park across from the town hall and down what is now Beach Street and Steamboat Avenue.

The tracks of the Sea View entered North Kingstown in Saunderstown, parallel to and east of Boston Neck Road. The tracks crossed Salisbury Avenue, near the site of what is now Hamilton School, the Hamilton Web Company Road, and branched off at the Sea View Rail Car Barn near Annaquatucket Road (now an auto repair shop). From there the tracks ran through the woods until it crossed the "Newport to Wickford's" tracks at Wickford Depot, it then ran across causeways over South and Academy Coves, crossing Phillips Street in between, up to the Wickford Station situated adjacent to what is now Wickford Mobil. From there north to East Greenwich the right-of-way can be easily discerned by looking for the power lines which run in the woods parallel to and just east of Post Road.

The Sea View Railway closed down first, at the end of 1920. Five years later the Newport to Wickford line shut down as well. North Kingstown was not alone, though, in losing its rail and trolley lines; all across Rhode Island the trolleys were shutdown, sabotaged by a powerful cartel of bus line owners. But that's another story.

This Swamp Yankee agrees with many who think that these, and other, old rail and trolley right-of-ways deserve a new life. Imagine, if you will, a bike path running from Ryan Park, through the woods to Wickford and the town beach recreational area, then through Wickford over two beautiful coves up to Wilson Park and then on north past Smith's Castle and a branch down through Quonset/Davisville to Allen's Harbor, all the way to East Greenwich. It would rival, no, surpass the East Bay Bike Path with its ability to seamlessly connect so many town recreational facilities together. Impossible you say; that's probably what the locals said when they were told about the dream of trolley service from Narragansett up to

Providence. Why, I even have a catchy name for it - The Swamptown Bleachery Hill Bike Path; it has a nice ring to it, don't you think?

(January 13, 2000)

## The View From Swamptown by G.Timothy Cranston

### Who, What, and Where

Greetings, Readers! This week's installment of local history comes in the form of a "who", "what", and a "where". The following tidbits are about Wickford Village.

#### Earnshaw Drug

Our "what" concerns the enterprises of the brothers Earnshaw and their fine drugstores. These were old-fashioned shops with soda fountains and roasted peanuts, as well as every item a well-stocked pharmacy ought to have. Every child within walking distance was very familiar with the contents of the comic book rack as well as the menu at the soda fountain. (I even conned my mother out of a cherry Coke and a Lime Rickey in both stores during the course of a single day.) Sadly, the East Greenwich store eventually closed, but they both live on in memory and on these two promotional postcards. Look closely at the Wickford card and you can see the penny scale that still sits in the corner of Earnshaw's today.



Earnshaw's Drug Store on Main Street in East Greenwich (above) and on Brown Street in Wickford.

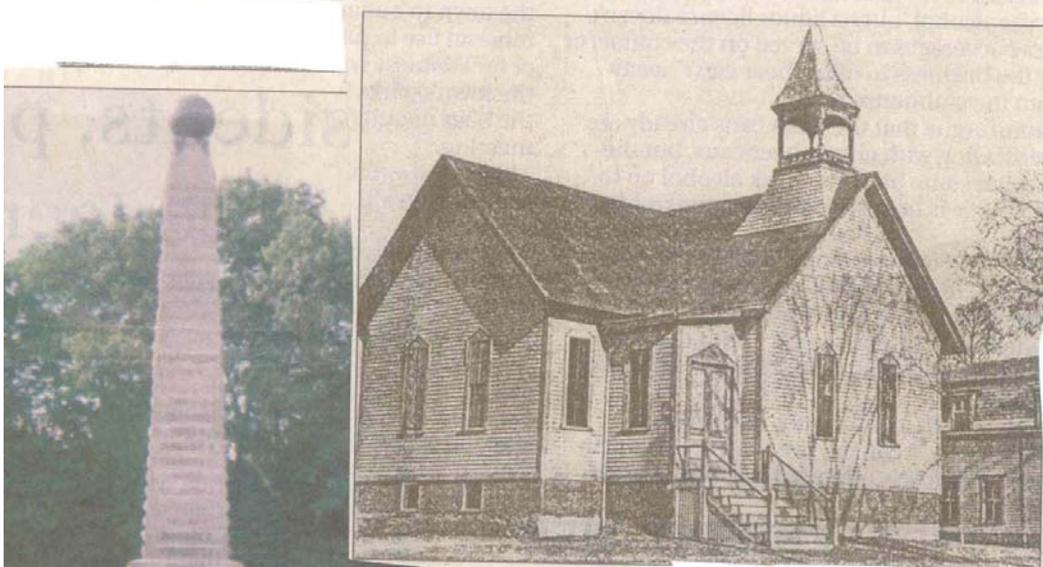


## The Methodist Episcopal Church

Our "where" for the month is the former Methodist Church building at 31 West Main Street in Wickford. It was built in 1885 by the Sherman Brothers of Wickford and, as you can see by the postcard view, possessed at that time a small bell turret and steeple. For a time this building was the home of the North Kingstown Ambulance Association and then a museum housing firefighting memorabilia including the "Fearless and Faithful Washington 41" an antique fire engine which many times was a winner in her class at the New England Firemen's Muster. Its former home, the old Methodist Church, has now been converted into small shops.



Methodist Church building today (above) and circa 1900 (below).



## **Elamsville Bridge**

Our "What" for the month is the long forgotten Elamsville bridge. The bridge, which predates the Brown Street bridge by four years, was built in 1808 and connected Elam Street (then known as Champlin Street) with West Main Street (then known as the Grand Highway). The hurricane of 1815 was probably responsible for the bridge's ultimate demise. For years the remnants of this bridge was known as "The Broken Bridge".



**The site of the former "Champlin Street Bridge."**

## **The Stephen Cooper House**

Our "Where" for this month is 15 West Main Street. This is the location of, depending on what you believe, the Stephen Cooper or the Samuel Brenton House. You see, in 1728 Stephen Cooper built a house on this lot; the problem is that the vast majority of historical architects do not feel that the present house is indeed that house. Most attribute a date of 1779 to the building, making this still one of Wickford's oldest homes, but if the 1728 date could ever be conclusively proven it would move ahead of "Old Yellow" and become the granddaddy of them all.



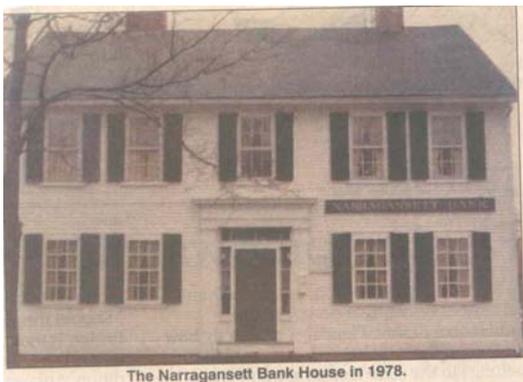
**15 West Main St.**

## **The History of Today's Bank Buildings**

Our "Where" is actually two places this month, 30 Phillips Street and 27 Brown Street, the homes of, Fleet Bank and (for now) Bank Boston. The Fleet Bank building began its life in 1916 as the home of Bell Telephone's local office. It housed the operators and equipment necessary to run the telephone system in the area until 1959 when more modern equipment and more local phones necessitated a move up the street to 266 Phillips St. Soon after that, Fleet's predecessor, Industrial National Bank, took up residency and has remained ever since. The Wickford Savings Bank opened its doors at 27 Brown Street in June of 1855. It served the residents of Wickford and surrounding villages for nearly 110 years, at which point it was absorbed by the Rhode Island Hospital Trust National Bank which in turn became part of Bank Boston and now is poised to become the local branch of Sovereign Bank.

## **Narragansett Bank House**

Our "Where" for November is the "Olde Narragansett Bank House" on Main Street in Wickford. In 1768 Samuel Bissell built his home on this property on the corner of Main and Fountain Streets. A portion of his original home is incorporated into the house that you see today. A subsequent owner, Deborah Whitford, ran a bakery there. In 1805, Benjamin Fowler, the president of the Narragansett Bank, built a combination banking house and private home on the lot using the 1768 house as the ell of his new home/bank. In 1837 Peleg Weeden purchased the living quarters section of the building for his daughter, Hannah. After the bank relocated, the Weeden's took over the entire building. In 1853, Nicholas Spink, purchased the home and remodeled it into its present configuration. This was also the home of local historian Col. Hunter C. White.



The Narragansett Bank House in 1978.

## **The Thomas Store**

This building on Main Street in Wickford was the home of the Thomas store in the early 1800's. The store was located in the lower level of the western half of the building, the Thomas family lived above the store. At some time in the middle 1800's the store was relocated up the street to a building located where the Avis Block stands today. This building was destroyed in the great New Year's Eve fire of 1850.



This building, on Main Street in Wickford, was the home of the Thomas Store in the early 1800s.

### **Avis Block**

The Avis Block rose Phoenix-like from the ashes of the 1850 fire. Built in 1851 by the Shippee family to replace the many lost shops and stores, it housed the Thomas Store, which in 1898 became Peckham's Dry Goods until it eventually closed in the early 1960's.



Built in 1851 by the Shippee family to replace the many lost shops and stores after a fire on the site, the Avis Block housed the Thomas Store.