

## CURATOR'S CORNER

### OLD PAWTUXET

Prior to 1638 the Narragansett Indians under their Sachem, Soconoco, lived in the area around Pawtuxet (which meant little falls). The long point of land to the east of the cove below the falls was a favorite place for their pow-wows and was known as Washouset Point. Up the Great Fresh Water River above the falls they cultivated corn fields.

When this section was sold to Roger Williams as part of the Pawtuxet Purchase and shared by him with the original Providence proprietors, the Providence settlers called the section the South Woods. It held many advantages of easy water transportation, water power, thatch beds for construction and salt marshes of fine hay for sheep and cattle as well as fish, shell fish and game in abundance. So William Arnold and his family, with his son-in-law, William Carpenter, and William Harris, decided to leave their homes in Providence and settle in this new and promising location.

William Arnold settled to the east of present Eddy Street nearest Providence. His sons located around the falls on the south side of the river and William Carpenter chose, or perhaps drew as his share, a site on the old Pequot Trail at "the fording place" where it crossed the Great Fresh Water River, about where the present bridge on Warwick Ave. spans the Pawtuxet River.

William Harris went farther inland to a site around present Garden City and Blackamore Pond.

Mr. Arnold was soon joined by his son-in-law, Zachariah Rhodes, who had been banished from the Massachusetts Colony for "his belief in dip-pings". He was apparently a Baptist. He and his brother-in-law, Steven Arnold, built a grist mill at the falls on the south side of the river which functioned for nearly two centuries. They also cut a road through the wilderness to their "corn mill" which was the beginning of present Broad Street.

In 1642 Samuel Gorton and his followers joined the little community. He was a man with strong convictions about religious and civic matters. He had caused dissension wherever he settled and had moved from place to place since his arrival in America. History repeated itself here until Arnold and his friends offered themselves and their lands to the jurisdiction of Massachusetts, which was only too glad to obtain a foothold on a portion of Narragansett Bay land.

Shortly afterward Gorton made the Shawmut Purchase and moved across the river with his followers and founded present Warwick, but controversy over boundaries plagued these early settlers for years until 1696 when the Pawtuxet River was made the boundary line between Providence and Warwick by the Legislature.

In 1647 Newport, Providence, Portsmouth and Warwick were incorporated as Providence Plantations in Narragansett Bay which left the Arnold contingent as foreigners among their former neighbors. It was not until 1658 that by their petition and for "reasonable conditions" they were discharged from fealty to Massachusetts and free again to become part of Providence.

On the whole they got along well with their Indian neighbors until the Narragansetts were drawn into King Philip's War in 1675 and 1676. Then as Indian raids increased many fled to the islands and to a settlement in New York, previously settled by one of Zachariah Rhode's sons, for safety.

After the war when they returned it was to find their homes burned and their cattle driven off. But with courage they made a new start. They rebuilt their homes, cultivated their farms and turned to trades of various kinds in small shops on their premises. John Sheldon had a tannery at Pawtuxet. Some lived by the tide and became fishermen and harvested the shellfish that abounded off the coast, making as much as \$1000 a year we are told. Others turned to boat building at the Cove and a Rope Walk was established there. Mariners took the boats and traded along the coast and, as the boats grew bigger, sailed as far as the West Indies with their cargoes.

The Cove became the mecca of boat builders, merchants, mariners and farmers who brought their surplus commodities for trade. Wharves and warehouses sprang up at the mouth of the river.

The boats returning from the West Indies brought cargoes of molasses to be made into gin, and the Rhodes family was the first to build a distillery at the head of Long or Pawtuxet Neck. They opened up a street to it from the Country Road (Broad Street) called Distill Lane (later Ocean Street).

All this expansion and growth had led to the need for a bridge to join the south and northern parts of the village now called Pawtuxet. Peleg Rhodes had been commissioned to erect one in the most convenient place as early as 1711, but it was 1714 before it was completed.

In 1754 the Town of Cranston was incorporated and Pawtuxet had the distinction of being the oldest settlement in the new town.

All thought was not for business in the little community. Peleg Arnold and Abraham Sheldon gave land on which to build the Baptist Church in 1764. About the same time Pawtuxet men favored dividing Cranston and making Pawtuxet a separate township, but it was voted down by the majority in the town.

Taxation by the Mother Country was making war inevitable. When the Gaspee was burned off Namquit Point (later named Gaspee Point) it was to Joseph Rhode's house that the long boat brought the wounded commander, Lt. Dudingston, and it was Joseph Aborn of Pawtuxet who was commissioned to recover the guns and stores remaining on the burned vessel.

The store in these troublous times was kept by Anthony Aborn and, because of the scarcity of food, it was voted in town meeting July 12, 1777 that the ten barrels of flour in Anthony Aborn's store "be sold at auction in 25 lb. lots to the inhabitants of this town, Cranston only". Salt was scarce, too, and thirteen proprietors formed West's Salt Works at Distill House Cove and made salt from the river water.

After the bombardment of Bristol, Oct. 7, 1775, forts were ordered to be built on the west side of the river and one was erected at Pawtuxet about where 52 Fort St. is now located. It was manned by the Pawtuxet Rangers, Col. William Rhodes, Commander. A watch house was ordered built on the Neck the following year and was furnished with a Battery of two 18 inch guns. Mr. Crandall, the boat builder, allowed his house to be used as barracks and as a store house for gun powder. Fortunately the fort was never attacked, but the stones of which it was built in after years were used in the foundations of the numerous houses erected as summer and later permanent homes on the Neck.

The next period that succeeded the Revolution brought the industrial boom. The Rhodes built a cotton factory on the site of the old Zachary Rhodes Corne Mill and started one of the large textile empires of the state. They made cotton cloth and later wove the first broadcloth made in R.I. at another mill erected at Bellefonte. Other mills and industries succeeded as the 19th century advanced.

Disasters came in the form of the Gale of 1815 which made an island of the Neck and swept a house and its occupant out over Great Rock and up the river. Fires in 1859 and 1873 destroyed the old mills and many of the old houses, 28 burning at one time in the former. But prosperity of this industrial era opened up new streets, brought the horse cars to Pawtuxet in 1870 and the electric cars in 1890 and these, in turn, brought more people. Pawtuxet was flourishing as it entered the 20th century!

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