

"SAID TO BE BUILT"

By Agnes Arnold

A short while ago I happened to drive by our historical society house, the Paine house, — and noticed that a new sign had been placed on the building, perpetuating the story that the house was said to have been built in 1668. I began to wonder how this date is explained to visitors, — especially to school children. I knew that the original sign had been left on the building out of deference to the former owners, but it appeared to me rather inappropriate for an historical society to continue to use a date that cannot be documented. Now that the sign has been changed I decided it might be the proper time for me to bring all my facts together, — then speak up and have my say, — it being the thing to do these days.

The argument about the date of the Paine House goes back to the 200th anniversary of the Town of Coventry in 1941. At that time an effort was made to have as many of the older houses in the town show a sign with the date of the house, or as close as possible. These signs were made in the shape of a shield, giving the date of the building and a replica of the Coventry coat of arms. They were made by Alex W. Cook of the village of Washington, and cost of the sign was paid by the house owner. Whether these dates were exactly accurate in all cases I would hesitate to say now, over 25 years later, without more research. But in the short time the committee had to work a great effort was made not to have a date older than we could prove. Some of these signs can still be seen on houses in Coventry. There were a few owners who thought their houses older than what we could find, but they went along with us and used the date we suggested. The only place where they refused was at the house we now call the Paine House, and there they insisted on "Said to have been built in 1668". They made their own sign, attached it to the house, and there it remained until someone in the Western R. I. Civic Historical Society decided to put up a new sign, and continue the misleading date.

At the time of the Coventry anniversary we had no idea that this home of the Paines and Fosters would one day be the museum of an historical society. While working on local history some of the workers became so interested that the wish was several times expressed that we should form an historical society, and try to get the Town Clerk's office, the brick building in front of the Paine House, for a library. A new Town House was about to be built, and it seemed to us that the old building would be a good place, — especially as it had a vault for safe keeping of any valuable records. With the formation of the Western R. I. Civic Historical Society several of the Coventry group became charter members. Finally our Society became the owners of the now-called Paine House, the keys being turned over to the Society in July 1953. It was after this that the late Charles M. Perry made a great effort to get a true date for the house, and why the owners had believed in the date of 1668.

The last of the families to have connections with the Paine House was Mr. Charles Foster. Mr. Perry tried without any luck to have Mr. Foster produce some evidence to prove the date of 1668 was correct, but without luck. The question of

the date of the house was discussed so much that eventually a reporter for a Providence paper wrote an article in 1955 called "1668 or 1745 — Coventry's Two Charlies Disagree". When questioned by the reporter Mr. Perry said "Now, young man, there are two ways to look at history, hearsay and documentary, — I have gone entirely by records. — I may say I have had my experiences with hearsay". When told that Charles Foster had said there were old grave markers around the village of Washington showing that colonists had been around there in 1700, Mr. Perry did not deny that, — the only point he argued was about the date on the Paine House, and said it couldn't possibly have been built before 1745.

Fortunately during this period Prof. Frank G. Bates of Bloomington, Indiana, was doing a great deal of work on the original bountry lines of the Shawomet Purchase, which now consists of the city of Warwick and the town of Coventry. Living so far from Rhode Island presented some difficulty, but he had a great helper in Mr. Perry. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to work with both of these men. Without their work of copying old maps and plats, wherever they could be found, and then applying the old boundry lines to modern maps, it would be impossible for me to visualize where the original house, probably still a part of the Paine House, stood.

One day while I was doing some work at the Paine House, Mr. Charles Foster came into the building. By this time both Mr. Perry and Prof. Bates had died. I decided to bring up the question of the date on the house again, and asked Mr. Foster if he could think of any reason for it. To my surprise he said "Fuller's History of Warwick". That was all. He was well over ninety then and died when he was 98. I have tried to find something in my copy of Fuller's that would lead to the date of 1668, but have found nothing. However, I did begin to wonder if some of the information in Fuller's was misinterpreted, and applied to the village of Washington, when Fuller was writing about Warwick.

In his effort to get as much information about the Paine House as possible Mr. Perry was always asking questions. From one person he received the following, — "Ed Johnson (Nipmuc Plains) told George Foster he found in the records at Apponaug that there were thirteen houses in the village, all burned by the Indians except the Paine House". This bit of information is printed in the little booklet on sale at the Paine House. Fuller's History of Warwick does tell about the burning of the houses by the Indians, during the so-called, King Phillip's War. But that was in Warwick, and they burned all except one, and that was a stone built house which would not burn. Warwick at that time was a small settlement east of Apponaug, around the entrance to Warwick Neck.

It was the war with the Indians that prevented the surveying and laying out of lots to the original purchasers of the Shawomet Purchase. With the war over in the spring of 1677 people began to return to their desolated homes and commenced to repair and build. Prof. Bates wrote that it was not until 1689 that the purchasers got around to allotting land in the location of the Paine House, — and in his study of the records of Warwick he found no evidence of any settlers so far inland in this period.

The Hinterlander

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JULY, 1968

ANNUAL MEETING JULY 23, 1968, 8 P. M. GREENE CAMP MEETING GROUND

Come early and bring a picnic supper, arrangements have been made for members to visit the Greene Herb Gardens and Edwin Arnold's Grist Mill.

MINUTES OF MEETING

On June 25, 1968 at 8 P. M. we met in the Phillips Memorial Baptist Church, 565 Pontiac Ave., Cranston, R. I. The night was showery and oppressive.

William B. Spencer gave the invocation. Allegiance was pledged to the flag.

Secretary read the report of the May meeting which was approved as read. Treasurer, Pearl Spencer, reported the following balances: General Fund 825.86 and Building Fund \$865.28.

The president advised us of the passing of two of our members; W. Clarke S. Mays, Sr., and Mrs. William H. Buffum. The corresponding secretary was instructed to send a sympathy card to, Maxwell Mays, who served as our president July 1961 to July 1963.

It was announced that a "Lawn Festival" sponsored by the League of Rhode Island Historical Societies will be held Sept. 21st, 2:30 to 5 P. M. on the grounds of the Rhode Island Historical Society, 52 Power St., Providence.

Roll call of towns showed 47 persons present. Warming Pan collection was \$18.56.

A letter from the R. I. Foundation, to whom we had applied for a grant to help in repairs at Paine House, was read by Mr. Spencer refusing our request at this time.

Leaflets about the Rhode Island Yearbook were passed out by Mr. Walter Martin.

The president requests that all officers and chairmen of committees prepare reports of their activities for the Annual Meeting in July.

Webb W. Wilder introduced our speaker, Frank Weston. Mr. Weston is editor of the Rhode Island Yearbook and vice president of Gaspee II, Inc.

He said: Rhode Island has been short changed by historians. There is no reference to Rhode Island's part in the rebellion and thus no reference to the Battle of Rhode Island which drove the British out of New England for good. Rhode Islanders themselves have been lax in telling people of the deeds of our forefathers. Only two high schools in the state have a course in Rhode Island history.

The first blow struck by Rhode Island for freedom from England was the Gaspee Affair, June 9-10, 1772 which was 18 months before the "Boston Tea Party".

The "Gaspee" an armed schooner which had harrassed vessels in Narragansett Bay ran aground on Namquit Point, June 9, 1772. Men from Providence, in long-boats, attacked the "Gaspee"; captured the captain and crew, then burned the ship. This the first blow for freedom was the real beginning of the American Revolution. For five months a British Commission investigated to find persons involved, rewards were offered but the commission reported "no probability of us recovering further light on this matter".

March 13, 1773 Virginia called for a committee (Committee of Correspondence) to collect and exchange information from all the colonies. Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson were members of it. Of the colonies Rhode Island was the first to reply, May 15, 1773. Stephen Hopkins and Nicholas Brown were named to the committee. Massachusetts replied

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latter in May and Connecticut on June 25th. All but New Jersey replied.

Representatives of the colonies met together June 22, 1774 and called for specific and immediate action by the colonies thus the First Continental Congress was called (Sept. 5 to Oct. 26, 1774).

"What is being done to publicize this first blow for freedom from Great Britain?"

Gaspee Day was started three years ago and is held the first week-end in June.

On February 1, 1968, Gaspee II was incorporated as a non profit organization. Their purpose is to build a replica of the "Gaspee" to be anchored at a wharf in Pawtuxet, R. I. as a tourist attraction.

Plans and specifications have been prepared by Wm. H. Bailey, designer who reconstructed the Mayflower, and the naval architect of the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D. C. is also collaborating. The length on keel for tonnage 49 feet; extreme beam 19 feet 10 inches; registered tons 102 44/94; 68-68 feet deck length; her draft 8-9 feet depending on ballast. Bids have been placed with 6 shipyards for bids to build her. A money raising campaign will start in 1969.

Refreshments were served by Mr. and Mrs. Harold P. Williams and Mrs. Charles W. Anthony.

Elizabeth L. Mullins.

SAID TO BE BUILT

By Agnes A. Arnold

(Continued from last month)

While laying out the various sections of land to the purchasers, a road was laid out westward beginning at Apponaug. It went along the river bank, — the south branch of the Pawtuxet, — through what is known locally in Coventry as Anthony and Washington sections, and it is now part of Route 117. In 1791 the town of Coventry decided to resurvey and straighten this so-called North Road, or Warwick Road. Thomas Waterman was the surveyor and he made a large scale plat of the road, placing upon it all the houses along the way. On this map is found a house with the name of Francis Brayton, located at the intersection of a road "comes from the Furnace", — meaning the Hope Furnace, which is now Station Street. A short ways to the east or southeast of the Francis Brayton House is one labelled George Brayton.

The Paine House was at one time called the Holden Tavern, and the old sign is on display in the house. Knowing that the house had belonged to the Holdens it was simply a case of tracing deeds backwards to find the original owner of a house on that spot. Deeds tell a great deal, — sometimes one has to do a bit of imagining, — but it seems very definite that it was Francis Brayton of Portsmouth who built the first house sometime after 1745.

Francis Brayton of Portsmouth and Sarah Phillips of Newport were married in Newport on the 9th day of September in 1742. There are seven of their children listed in Coventry records, with a note saying that the 3 eldest were born in Portsmouth. The eldest child was Francis Brayton, Jr., born August 15, 1743. Francis Brayton, Sr. made his first purchase of land in Coventry in 1745, and he purchased it from John Warner of Warwick and John Tillinghast of West Greenwich. It was called "Addition lot No. 11", and bordered north on a highway, east on land of William Burlingame, south on Burlingame and west partly on addition lot No. 4 and partly on a highway. There is no mention of a house only the phrase "with all the appurtenances, privileges and commodities to the same belonging or in any way appertaining". Although Francis Brayton made other purchases of land in Coventry, this appears to be the land on which he built a house and blacksmith shop, bringing his wife from Portsmouth, so the fourth child was born in Coventry in 1748.

When the original purchasers of the Shawomet lands divided their land a line was run by surveyors leaving some divisions on the north side and some on the south. This middle line had various names, but through some sections it caused great confusion leading to arguments and lawsuits. Finally this middle line through the section where Francis Brayton's land was situated was rerun for the last time in 1733. These division lines still cause confusion when trying to read a deed. Francis Baryton, Sr. purchased his land in 1745, but in 1768 Francis Brayton, Jr. (also a blacksmith) purchased from the same two men "a small lot of land in Coventry in Cowesett, in the last division drawn in the right of John Warner, being an addition lot and is on the plat No. 11. This small lot, of about 6 acres, bordered on the north on the middle line, west on a highway and east on lot No. 10. There is no house on this land, but it appears to be a continuation of his father's land up to the middle line.

On August 13th, 1773 Francis Brayton, Sr. of Coventry, blacksmith, for "love, good will and natural affection which I have and do bare for and towards my son Francis Brayton, Jr. blacksmith" — and "for many other causes and considerations me hereunto moving, but more especially for the better settlement of my said son" deeds to him "a certain dwelling house in which the said Francis Brayton, Jr. now dwells with about one acre and a quarter of land on which the said house standeth, — "and is part of my homestead farm and is to be taken off adjoining to the highway that runs on the west side of my land". By this time Francis Brayton, Jr. was having his 30th birthday, and probably married to Martha, daughter of John Lavalley. Also, by this time Francis Brayton, Sr. had built for himself a larger house. Francis Brayton, Sr. died in 1784, and by that time he had deeded all, or most, of his land to his sons. It was in 1774 that he deeded to his three sons Francis Brayton, Jr., Freeborn Brayton and George Brayton, to be equally divided, "for the better settling them in the world" and for other considerations, "They having undertaken to satisfy and pay all my just debts" and also had taken upon themselves to help support him during his life, a piece of land containing about 160 acres. This land contained his "mansion house" and "lies on or near to the main Coventry Road, and is bounded north upon the middle line, east by a highway, from said line west by a highway in part and part upon my son Francis Brayton's

house lot and partly on a small lot my son Francis bought of John Warner". This was signed by Francis Brayton and his wife, Sarah. In a later deed Francis Brayton, Jr. blacksmith and his brother George divide the land given to them by their father March 23, 1774, and the division line begins at the middle of a smith shop, the west part belonging to Francis Brayton with a barn and other buildings. The so-called "mansion house" and other buildings went to George Brayton. This would be the house shown on the 1795 road map with the name George Brayton. In 1781 George Brayton and his wife, Marcy, sold to Francis Brayton, Jr. the other half of the blacksmith shop.

Francis Brayton, Sr. died in 1784, — his will made in 1783. It is presumed that he lived in his "mansion house" with his son George. His name occurs in the list of people buried in a cemetery on his property, which was probably near the present Methodist Church. His wife Sarah had died in 1779 and was buried in this cemetery. In the will of Francis Brayton, Sr. he mentions a wife named Susanna, and he bequeaths her all her household goods which she brought with her or was possessed with at the time of the marriage. In the will he mentions that his sons had received their shares, but he does give to George 11 acres of land on the Pawtuxet River, at a place wellknown as the "Canoe place".

The year of 1785 was the first year that Francis Brayton, Jr. was given a license to sell spiritous liquors at his house. This license was renewed yearly, the last time in 1796. Some Town Council meetings were held at the dwelling of Francis Brayton, such as "meeting held on Monday the 12th of March 1792. at the home of Francis Brayton, Innholder."

On April 11th, 1797 Francis Brayton, Jr.'s property was sold to Charles Holden, for 900 silver milled dollars. It was for a certain tract of land lying in Coventry, "on which I now dwell", containing about 22 acres, with a dwelling house and sundry buildings thereon standing, — "also a blacksmith shop on the rear highway before the dwelling aforesaid". Then on the 5th of June 1797 the Town Council voted that "Charles Holden be granted a license to retail spiritous liquors and keep a house of entertainment until the first Monday of September next by virtue of license granted to Francis Brayton, Esq., Sept. 1, 1796. The license continued in the Holden family until 1803. By this time Francis Brayton and his wife, Barbara (or Barbary) had migrated west to New York state, and in further deeds he calls himself Francis Brayton, late of Coventry, but now residing in the County of Herkimer in the State of New York, yeoman.

The Paine House is an interesting house, and we should be proud to have it. The various generations and families have left their marks on the house in many changes. If it could talk it would tell some interesting stories. Some time before Mr. Perry died I took a copy of ANTIQUES magazine to him to read, it which there was an article on preservation of old houses. This quotation had caught my eye, "We need to preserve buildings that speak directly to those of us whose families had callouses, as well as to those who had carriages". With this Mr. Perry agreed, — writing to me "Most of us come from ancestors who had callouses, — they were in the great majority. Lincoln said "God must love the common people, he made so many of them". The John Brown House is lovely, but is an example of how only a very few lived. The Paine House is of the common people, — Francis Brayton certainly had calluses on his hands, for he was a blacksmith. So, let us rejoice that we are being allowed to preserve something of the atmosphere in which common men and women lived and worked more than 200 years".