

Providence Institution for Savings

Established 1819

A Mutual Savings Bank

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Olneyville Square

EMPIRE-ABORN BRANCH
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Open all business days and Tuesday evenings
5 to 8:30. Olneyville Branch open
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"The Old Stone Bank"

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Providence Prepares for War



Presented by

"The Old Stone Bank"

Providence, R. I.

February 27, 1933

Providence Prepares for War

NO news from the front during any war engaged in by this nation filled the inhabitants of Rhode Island with greater terror than did report of the Battle of Bunker Hill that took place on June 17, 1775. There was reason for grave concern on the part of local patriots because the enemy was present here, at the very door to the Colony, apparently ready to strike at a moment's notice. The discouraging news received from Boston convinced Rhode Island inhabitants that a peaceful adjustment of grievances between the Colonies and England was now impossible. They knew that a war was upon them, further diplomatic negotiations were of no avail, and that they must now prepare to defend both life and property. Continental Congress made it clear to the Colonies, particularly to the inhabitants of seaport towns, that they must immediately fortify these ports and take every precaution that was regarded expedient. The General Assembly of Rhode Island indorsed these injunctions and the Colony prepared for war.



The first measure of precaution taken at Providence was the erection of a lofty beacon pole which was installed as a signal alarm for the surrounding country should the enemy approach the town. This historic beacon was set up on the summit of what is College Hill or Prospect Hill somewhere near what is now the corner Prospect and Meeting Streets. A small tablet placed on the fence that surrounds Prospect Terrace today commemorates the erection nearby of the beacon by order of the "Honorable General Assembly". This early "SOS" signal was a simple affair, consisting of a tall, slender mast, about eighty feet high, securely braced at the bottom. Wooden pegs were inserted in the spar at intervals similar to the spikes driven into telephone poles, and, on these the beacon keepers were able to ascend to the top where they could conveniently reach the "kettle" that hung from an iron crane or mast-arm. This "kettle" was filled at all times with a supply of inflammable material that would burn brightly when fired.

The beacon was given an official test on August 17, 1775, in order that inhabitants living in the surrounding territory might make observations of the bearings of the signal. Previous to

this test handbills were printed and distributed containing complete information regarding this measure of precaution. Warning was given that "we intend to fire the BEACON and discharge cannon to notify all to look out for the BEACON. Be it carefully observed and carefully remembered that the discharge of cannon **alone** is not an alarm, but the firing of the BEACON itself, even without cannon, will be an alarm in all cases, excepting on Thursday, the 17th inst., at sunset, when the BEACON will be fired not as an alarm, but that all may ascertain its bearings and fix such ranges as may secure them from a false alarm, and that they may know where to look for it hereafter. Whenever you hear a cannon look out for the BEACON". The test proved the efficiency of the device. The warning light was observed over a wide area of country, extending from Cambridge Hill to New London and Norwich, and from Newport to Pomfret. Besides, many who misunderstood the meaning of the glare in the sky, hurriedly left their homes and rushed to Providence all armed and equipped for battle.

By the middle of the previous June, Paul Allen had made cartridges from the Town's stock of powder and lead

and many of the military companies in the State had been furnished with muskets made by Stephen Jenckes. Soldiers were drilling, tavern keepers and others were enlisting recruits, a saltpetre mill was being operated in East Greenwich by Richard Mathewson, and everyone was diligently engaged in preparations for the long struggle that was destined to involve them. Late in July came the news of the presence of the British fleet in Newport waters. Bombardment of the Town was expected momentarily but the enemy commander changed his mind, sparing Newport for future occupation by his own compatriots. Newport was left unharmed for the time being, but no one knew when the enemy would return and carry out the threat to demolish the homes and public buildings. Consequently, the inhabitants of Providence resolved to take immediate steps to strengthen the fortifications of the Town. A stronghold was ordered built on Fox Hill, at Fox Point, and intrenchments were ordered "to be hove up between Field's and Sassafras points of sufficient capacity to cover a body of men ordered there on any emergency." The Fox Hill fortification can be located on an early map of Providence made by

Daniel Anthony but the exact location is now somewhat uncertain. Edward Field in his "Revolutionary Defences of Rhode Island" describes the point within the "square now bounded by Brook, Thompson and Tockwotton Streets." Nothing remains today to remind us of military defence activities near Fox Point in the days of the Revolution. Records pertaining to this fort and to the organization of its garrison have been preserved and are most interesting to examine.

In addition to the Providence beacon, a similar one was erected on the Island of Rhode Island. Another was in Cumberland, on the hill called Beacon Pole Hill. Yet another was reared on Chopmist Hill in Scituate and here Squire Williams was stationed as guard and keeper during most of the time while the British were stationed within the borders of the Colony. An observation post was established on Tower Hill in South Kingstown for the particular purpose of warning people to the north should any British ships be seen coming into the Bay.

Nothing happened until October, 1775, when the British invaded the Bay and threw a few cannon balls into the Town of Bristol causing little damage but considerable consternation among

its inhabitants and those of nearby communities. Following this appearance of the enemy, earthworks were thrown up at Kettle Point and Pawtuxet, batteries were located all along the shoreline near Providence, and guards were stationed at many points. Next, a fort was built at Field's Point, a fort that some have called Fort Independence. This was more than one hundred feet long, and varied in width from fifty-three to sixty feet inside of the embankment. The construction was superintended by Captain Barnard Eddy and his bill to the Town for labor and materials remains as a treasured historical relic.

The following year, 1776, the British army occupied Newport and remained on Rhode Island soil for nearly three years. It should be easy to imagine the tension under which local inhabitants lived with an enemy just a few miles away ravaging unprotected homes on the shore, burning and destroying property. Although this news about the fleet in Newport was disheartening, nevertheless there was no let up in the program of preparation in Providence and elsewhere in the Colony. A strong fortification was quickly built on the summit of what is now College Hill near the site of the

previously described beacon. It has been described as "three hundred by one hundred and fifty feet within the parapet". It was surrounded by a moat or ditch, and was capable of mounting more than fifty guns. Fort Sullivan, probably named after the distinguished General John Sullivan, was said to have been located between what are now Broad and Friendship Streets near Chestnut Street.

The military defences on Fort Hill have always been the subject of considerable inquiry. This eminence was in the Town of Rehoboth, Massachusetts at the time of the War for Independence and the authorities of that town took steps to fortify Hog Pen Point, the point of land that juts out into the water at the base of the hill. This was done in November, 1775 after an attempt to cooperate with Providence in the matter had apparently failed. Thus the Town of Providence and nearby sections were protected adequately if the British had ventured into the headwaters of Narragansett Bay. Regardless of the size and strength of an attacking force it would have been checked with a warm reception from the guns that bristled on both sides of the entrance to the port. The days of preparedness before and

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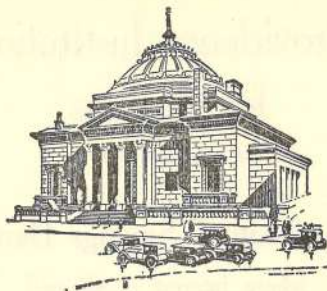
during the early stages of the World War can be distinctly remembered by a large proportion of present-day citizens of Rhode Island. How much more intense those days would have been, how much more concerned over the danger of it all, men and women would have been if they knew that a strong, well-equipped enemy lurked just a few miles away in the waters of Narragansett Bay or on the very shores of Rhode Island.

Additional Copies of this Booklet sent upon request.

ADDRESS

"THE OLD STONE BANK"
86 South Main Street, Providence

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THE PROVIDENCE INSTITUTION FOR SAVINGS, familiarly known as "The Old Stone Bank", is in its own right a historic institution of Rhode Island. Founded in 1819 as one of the first mutual savings banks in the country, it has since contributed vitally to the development and life of this community.

Proud of its own historical significance, "The Old Stone Bank" has adopted this method of educational advertising to bring to light much that is of value and significance in the colorful annals of Rhode Island and national history.

The sketches and vignettes of old-time Rhode Island and Rhode Islanders that are broadcast weekly and then printed in this form are selected from local historical records which are full of the picturesque, romantic, and adventurous. In the hope that these glimpses into the lives, customs, and environment of our progenitors may be both revealing and inspirational to young and old, this booklet is presented with the compliments of

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