

ONLY A MEMORY

BY CORINNE M. RAFTER

ROCKLAND VILLAGE LIVES ON IN HEARTS OF ITS FORMER RESIDENTS

The village of Rockland brings back beautiful memories to a lot of people, although maybe not to you and me, for we were not here to remember it. To the best of my ability I will introduce you to the small village.

Rockland was a small mill village in the western part of Scituate. It was settled in the middle 1700's. Capt. Thomas Hill was one of the first people to settle in the village. Capt. Hill built a house in 1763. Rockland consisted of four mills, mill houses, and a few private residences, and some farms on the outskirts of the village. The two main mills were the Rockland Mill and the Red Mill. They manufactured cloth. The Rockland Mill was owned and operated by Alanson Steere.

The Remington Mill was a grist mill located at the lower end of Rockland, and the Capwell Mill was a small mill run and owned by David Capwell. This was a grist mill and a carding mill. Many sheep were kept at this time, and their wool was carded here. The price of wool went down, and it became impractical to keep sheep, so the farmers began dairy farming.

These mills were built on a stream because they were run by water power, and were forced to shut down for several weeks in the summer because of the lack of water.

Rockland was a long village bordering the north branch of the Pawtuxet River and its tributaries. There were about four hundred and fifty people in the village, including those on adjacent farms. The village itself was about a mile long. There were two grocery stores, the first was run by Richard Rounds and later by Henry Seamans. Walter Battey owned the last store in the early 1900's. The stores sold hay, grain, paint, kerosene, wall paper, cloth, buttons, hammers, nails, oil cloth, window shades, and medicine.

The stage coach made two trips each day, except Sunday, from Alton Hill's stable to Hope to meet the train, a distance of eight or nine miles. (A stage coach was owned by Alton Hill for many years.)

The cotton was brought to the mills from Providence in wagons drawn by four or six horses, and in the muddy season by eight horses. In the winter, both the stage coach and the teamsters resorted to sleds.

The goods for the stores were delivered by the same teams. Often a load would consist of hay, grain, coal and groceries. The manufactured products were shipped out by the same method.

Rockland had a blacksmith and wheelright shop owned and operated by William Rounds. "Nol" Robinson took care of shoeing the horses and doing other work such as welding, mending farm machinery, and making the iron parts for the wagons that Mr. Rounds built. Mr. Rounds took care of the wood work, repairing, and building of wagons.

There were two churches, a Christian Church and an Advent Church (later used as a hall by the Grand Army of the Republic).

The Red Mill was used for a dance hall after it had been abandoned as a factory. Later Dwight Keeney built and operated a dance hall at the beginning of the Kent Dam Road, now known as Tunk Hill Road.

Mail was delivered for Clayville, Ponagansett, and Rockland to the Rockland Post Office.

There were two schools in Rockland, a one room school at the eastern end of the village that accommodated about forty pupils. Some of the children came from the outlying farms, and some from the mill village. A two-room school stood north of the village of Ponagansett, (which was formally known as Bettyville).

There was a photographic studio operated by Mr. Briggs, in about 1892. A saloon was also operated in Rockland. In the early 1900's there was a hotel operated at the top of Rockland Hill. (The building is still standing and is used as a private residence.)

It has been years since the town folk have heard the shrill toot of the whistle, the rumble of the wheels, and the yelling of the conductor of the Providence and Danielson Train. * The first car ran from Providence to Danielson in November of 1902. Incidentally, the fare to Danielson was sixty-five cents, later raised to eighty-five cents.

At first the railroad ran from Hartford Avenue, Providence, to North Scituate. The next stops were at Saundersville, Ashland, South Scituate, Richmond, Rockland, Clayville, and then to Foster Center. Rockland was the busy section because the main offices and shops were located there. The construction started in June of 1901. The next year the line reached East Killingly. *

The physician in Rockland was Dr. Barnard Arnold. He also extracted teeth. Among those who operated a barber shop were Tim Lyons and Everette Wells.

The Joslin Manufacturing Company bought the mills, the water rights, and the mill houses in 1901. The Company built the power house and ran the mills with electric power.

Braid for shoelaces was made here, and shipped to Merino in the west section of Providence. Here it was dyed, cut into various lengths and marketed. The Joslin Company continued to operate the mills until 1925. Then the property was condemned and taken over by the city of Providence for the reservoir to supply the city with water.

The Hydro Electric Power Plant and car barn were located on the north branch of the Pawtuxet River and the one half mile coast of the village proper near the abandoned site of the old David Capwell Carding Mill.

A bandstand was situated between the Red Mill and the Rockland Mill, where the "Rockland Cornet Band" entertained the people and played in parades. The ball park was quite a popular place.

Rockland had an undertaking establishment owned and operated by Wheaton Luther and his grandson, Louis Patterson. It was located about opposite the Peabody Pond east of Clayville.

Most of the people living on farms were buried in a family lot on the farm.

In 1919 the City of Providence took over the village, mills shut down and the railroad was forced to cease operation. The people of Rockland sold very unwillingly.

Real estate agents began buying land as early as 1914 for the City of Providence.

There was one large cemetery at the east end of Rockland. Most of the bodies were exhumed and re-buried in the new Rockland Cemetery in Clayville which the City of Providence had prepared for this purpose. Other bodies were removed to family lots in various places.

The people who had earned their livelihood in the mills were forced to obtain employment elsewhere against their wishes. The store keepers and other merchants closed their doors. The farmers left the land that had been in the family for many years and sought new homes far from their former neighbors and friends.

Soon wrecking crews demolished the houses, mills, churches, schools, stores, and now Rockland lives only in the memories of former inhabitants.

The reservoir is now a beautiful and picturesque place to behold. In the fall, the beautiful colors reflect in the water.

In the summer, the dry season, you can still see some foundations of some of the buildings. It is a beautiful site all year round.

Reference given by - Mrs. Byron Hall
and from

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Editor's Note - Miss Rafter prepared this paper in 1958 in connection with her studies in English at Scituate Senior High School. She was 13.