

# The GREEN

# LIGHT



## BULLETIN of the POINT ASSOCIATION

NEWPORT

NOVEMBER 1959

RHODE ISLAND

THE ANNUAL MEETING of The Point Association took place on the evening of October 28 at St. John's Guild Hall, with the president, Edwin H. Brownell in the chair.

After the reading of the minutes of the last meeting by Mrs. Watson, Recording Sec'y, the Treasurer, Mr. R.S. Weiss, reported a total balance of \$2488.38.

Committee reports followed:

**TREE:** Mr. John L. Murphy reported a survey made of all trees; 12 re-placements and 5 new trees to be planted soon; all extant P.A. trees weeded at a cost of \$20.00

**BEAUTIFICATION:** In the absence of the chairman, the president told of the successful August 8 event at the Covell house, and the garden tour.

**MEMBERSHIP:** The outstanding drive on Aug. 5 under the leadership of Mr & Mrs S. Joseph Weaver gained 128 new members. Sample copies of The Green Light were distributed, posters placed, and a house-to-house canvass made. The membership as of October 28 stood at 406.

**PROTECTION:** Dr. David Nemptzow told of 50-60 written complaints during the year, which have been handled or are being studied. He stated that two illegal businesses had been closed, a Poplar St. house which had become a fire and rat menace razed and the property beautified. Dog and refuse ordinances are studied. He deplored the fact that the lack of our incorporation papers hampers the activities of his committee, and reiterated his request for written complaints.

**PUBLICITY:** Mrs. R.S. Weiss praised the cooperation of The Daily News, The Providence Journal, Radio WADK and the Newport Radio Express. She exhibited montages of many clippings giving coverage to our activities. Mrs. Weiss also noted the helpfulness of City Manager Geo. A. Bisson.

**BULLETIN:** Miss Price reported a total circulation for The Green Light of 3026 - 1789 mailed, 1237 delivered by "sea-gull or what-have-you"; 37 out-of-town members in 11 states, 21 courtesy recipients. Circulation for Nov. 1958 was 200; for Oct. 1959 was 352. Expenses for the year were \$113. Balance on hand from the various events, \$185. With the greatly increased circulation, a budget of \$200 was suggested for the Bulletin. A great deal of extra detail handled by the Editor has kept expense at a minimum so far.

**PROPERTIES:** The president reported for the chairman, Geo. D. Weaver, jr., over 20 available old houses in the Point area, in need of sympathetic purchasers.

**CLEAN-UP:** The president spoke of the appointment of Mrs. Eleanor S. Weaver as chairman of this new committee, and read her report, in which she stated that the initial plans are to concentrate on areas which are considered the responsibility of the City and in which conditions exist at present which are in violation of City ordinances.

She named present members of her committee as Mrs. Evelyn Kent, Mrs. Francis Goldie, Miss Annie Vaughan,

and Mrs Joseph Flowers. Eventual representation from all sections of the Point is planned. Large photographs showing improper maintenance of streets and sidewalks, weed, litter, garbage conditions, etc. were displayed. Mrs Weaver's report recommended that the Executive Board arrange for a meeting with City Manager Bisson, presenting these problems and asking immediate relief.

Coöperation from private owners and tenants will be solicited later.

OLD BUSINESS: The smoke nuisance will continue to be studied.

Work on the seawall progresses.

Papers of incorporation are still lacking, owing to the insertion of a deadline, unknown to the officers of the Association, in the final printing of the Bill. The procedure must be gone through once more.

#### NEW BUSINESS:

Mrs William Mac Leod, chairman of the Nominating Committee, presented the following slate, which was duly elected:

First Vice Pres : G.D.Weaver, jr.

Treasurer : Richard S. Weiss

Corr. Sec'y: Mrs. Gary Sullivan

(other officers are completing unexpired terms)

Members of the new Nominating Committee were named as Miss Marion Galvin, Mrs Harold P. Arnold and Capt. C.J.Harter. Two other members are appointed later by the Board.

The president told of a recent meeting of the Board with Chief of Police Joseph Radice, who was asked if he felt we had a juvenile problem on the Point, and how we might help. Chief Radice was most understanding, and revealed an intimate knowledge of every problem in the city. He stressed the point that no one should ever hesitate to call the police station in the case of any situation, however seemingly slight; it might well fit into the picture of a larger whole. He wished it understood that names of those reporting any difficulty are never made public. Request to the Council for more men on the police force would be a helpful step.

Mr. W.King Covell proposed two resolutions, which were voted in.

1. A note of approval and commendation to Mr & Mrs S. Joseph Weaver on their assuming responsibility for the historic Prescott house.

2. A letter of appreciation to City Manager George A. Bisson for completion of long-needed and much desired repairs to Willow, Poplar and Elm Street brows.

The business meeting was adjourned and the versatile Dr. Nemptzow took on a new role as announcer and performer in the Middletown Community Orchestra, known to its intimates as "Charlie Sherman's Orchestra". The group delighted the audience with old-fashioned dance tunes and songs, rendered with great spirit and infectious enjoyment. Among the audience feet were tapping and voices were lifted in song.

A fairly impromptu house-plant exchange, presided over by Mrs. Henry E. Eccles, netted \$8.90

Refreshments were served by Mrs. William F. Kitts, assisted by Mr. Kitts, Miss Evelyn Eastwood, Mrs. Herbert McWeeney and Ethel Kitts.

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#### ITEMS:

A letter received from the Division Engineer of the NY NH & H Railroad informed us that in reply to our request, the Walnut St. bridge was repaired as of Oct. 9 and the grade crossings improved by Oct 23.

Repairs to the crossings are not as substantial as could be wished, but there is definite improvement, and we are gratified that our request was so promptly met.

More powerful lights have been installed on Washington Street at Cypress, Sycamore and Battery, improving a very ill-lit section of that thoroughfare. Better lighting of the whole Point will come in time, we trust.

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Thanksgiving Thought: "If you don't have everything you want, be thankful for the things you don't have that you didn't want!"

HOW ARE WE DOING ?

Membership renewals keep trickling in quite steadily, and we are so happy. However, about seventy-five of our old members have not yet let us know that they are still with us.

Remember - if we are to retain that wonderful figure of over 400, we need to keep ALL the old as well as to welcome all the new. Won't you renew right now if your membership is due, and give us something to be thankful for, this Thanksgiving?

THE EDITORIAL from the August GREEN LIGHT was reprinted in its entirety in The Newport Gazette, the organ of The Preservation Society. The Grist Mill in the Daily News also quoted it extensively.

CHRISTMAS PLANS will undoubtedly be discussed at the November meeting of the Executive Committee, which occurs a little too late for this issue. The December GREEN LIGHT will report whatever plans have been made for "Christmas on the Point".

THE CONFUSING STORY of the Caleb Claggett House is on the next page.

OUR PREDECESSOR !

Mrs. Peter Bolhouse has come across the following fascinating bit, which she kindly passes on:

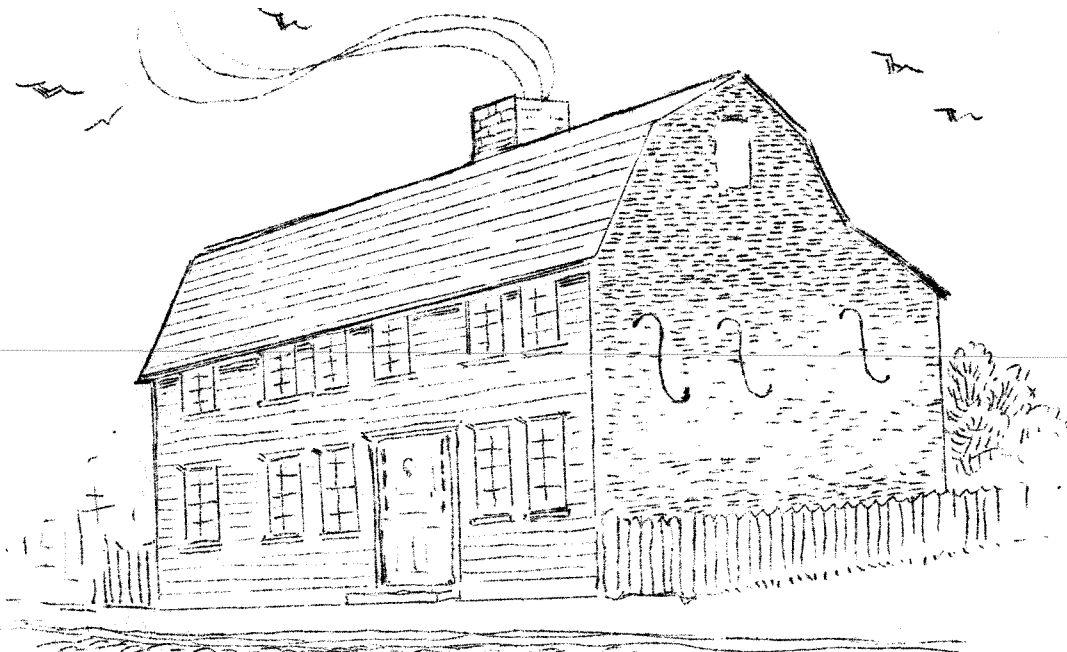
(From The Newport Daily News, February 6, 1879)

"Newport Breezes

"Newport has a newspaper which solicits no new subscribers; its readers are limited by editor and publisher, and it depends on no advertisers for support. To take this paper is a privilege not to be bought, and yet it is bright enough and good enough to merit a wide circulation. It is very sectional, and emanates from the 'Point'. It is edited by a well-known New York lady spending the winter here, and has among its contributors, now and then, some Bostonians of note. It is not printed - only written, and goes into just thirteen families. . ."

-Margery Deane (Mrs. T.T. Pitman)

Our elite predecessor intrigues us. But personally, we are proud of our 410 readers (and are glad we don't have to write out 410 Green Lights by hand !)



*Caleb Claggett - His House*

THE CLAGGETT HOUSE  
INVITES YOU TO SEE  
ITS RESTORATION

Saturday, November 21, 3 - 5 p.m.

*Esther Morton Bates*

22 Bridge Street

+ + THE CLAGGETT ENIGMA + +

Who really did build it - and when? If the fine old brick-end house on Bridge Street could only speak, it would solve some puzzling points in its origin.

Caleb Claggett, Welshman, baker by trade, came to Newport from Bristol in 1717. His daughter Hannah had already married George Gibbs of Froome, Somerset, and the young couple apparently came with him, for by and by we find George Gibbs, who was also a baker, setting up house-keeping in the house on the corner of Chestnut and Second, now restored and occupied by George D. Weaver, jr.

Edward Thurston, sea-captain and tanner, probably lived in the house we know as the Peter Simon House, now the home of Edwin Hammond Brownell. Thurston stood surety for Caleb Claggett in 1717 - and if he was even then a neighbor on "Shipwright" (Bridge) Street, this would seem to put a very early date on at least part of the Peter Simon House.

Caleb, who was made a freeman of Newport in 1722, took up residence and trade there on Bridge Street, with his wife Ann and son William. Now William was, of course, the clock-making, organ-building, electrical genius known to fame. By the time he was 30, we find him acting in a manner more befitting the head of a household than a son. For a shilling a year, he leases to his father, Caleb, for 25 years, a lot of land adjoining his own on Bridge Street - with the stipulation that a dwelling-house 36x18, a bakehouse 40x20 with two ovens, and a tremendous wharf, be built within the 25 years, and that said Caleb - besides allowing William to land goods at the wharf - should keep everything in order: locks, keys, bolts, staples, latches, hooks, hinges, windows, doors, and glass.

This provocative deed is dated March 25, 1725, eight years after the Claggetts' arrival in Newport. Two years and five months later, August 16, 1727, Caleb Claggett was dead at the age of 57, and lying under a John Stevens stone in the Common Burying Ground.

Records indicate that Caleb had apparently been living with William before 1725. Did Mary, William's first wife, tire of baking going on in what should have been her own kitchen? (Trade was increasing; ships were to be supplied.) Did Caleb himself lay down the terms of the deed as business prospered? (He was already in "tenure and possession" of the land his son leases to him!) The two years between the drawing of the deed and his untimely death gave him barely opportunity to complete house, bakehouse, and wharf. Yet evidently they were built. In 1728 we find Dr. Wigner sending a bill for "Bleeding y<sup>r</sup> Indian at the bakehouse." Who was doing the baking? The Indian? George Gibbs? Certainly not William, who was half the time in Boston building organs. He had far too many irons in the fire to include bread in the ovens.

At any rate, there it stands - the fine old house with its brick end; no longer with a wharfhead on the Cove nor a bakehouse bigger than itself. The gambrel, of course, came later. But part of the construction is so old - so much like the Wanton-Hazard House - that one can only wonder whether Caleb Claggett built its original four rooms when first he came to Newport - or found that early part already here.

If the reader is confused - so are we. But that is part of the fascination of the Point and its houses. Esther Morton Bates has saved and made delightfully livable this most interesting and tantalizing dwelling - and we are all invited to come and see its restoration on Saturday afternoon, November 21.

