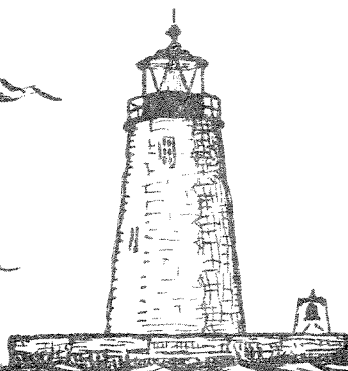


The GREEN

LIGHT



BULLETIN OF THE POINT ASSOCIATION OF NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

VOL. X

APRIL 1966

NO. 2

APRIL GENERAL MEETING.

The next general meeting of the Point Association will be held on Thursday, April 28th, at 8 o'clock at Mumford School. After a business meeting, the Reverend Henry G. Turnbull, Rector of St. John's Church, will show his slides, and talk about his trip last summer, mostly around the Mediterranean. Bring your friends - they are always welcome.

JANUARY GENERAL MEETING

The January general meeting had to be postponed because of snow, and was finally held on Thursday, February 10th, at Mumford, with a small attendance.

Miss Ade Bethune is going to compile a book for the Association, called "Houses on the Point," with both exterior and interior illustrations. It was voted she be authorized to go ahead with this, using her own discretion. Redevelopment was discussed, especially the vista from Long Wharf to the Old State House, and it was voted that the Point Association urge all authorities connected with redevelopment to do everything possible to retain this vista.

Patrick O'Neill Hayes gave a most interesting talk about the French in Newport during the Revolution, and especially their social life, and how they fitted into the community. Everyone enjoyed it, and the longer he spoke, the more fascinating it became. We understand he can give this talk equally well in French.

Mrs. James and Mrs. Barton served refreshments.

REPORT ON SOME OF THE HOUSES BEING RESTORED

The Kings Arms Tavern, owned by Mr. Prince, Chicago, is having the whole outside fixed this year, all repairs done, and new clapboards, doors, and windows put in.

The Fentons' house, mentioned in the last issue, was the Captain Weaver house, moved to Elm Street from Bridge.

The house at 1 Elm Street (Elm and Cross), owned by Gordon Douglas, III, with no history discovered as yet, looks very fine, and is nearly ready for occupancy.

The small house at 22 Walnut Street, owned by Mrs. Mary Micou, Detroit, had all the sills replaced. The stone foundation walls are 30 inches thick. Under the plaster, there is a very old wallpaper, a kind of paisley with olive green and magenta.

Dr. Arnold Frucht, owner of the James Davis house on 42 Second Street, expects the house to be ready soon. It has one fireplace $5\frac{1}{2}$ by $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet with two ovens.

The Matthew Perry house, 2nd and Walnut, has been bought by Mrs. Van Pelt and given to the Preservation Society for restoration. Experts are now trying to reconstruct the original floor plan.

Mrs. Sarah Ferris, Weston, owns the two small twin houses on 2nd between Bridge and Elm Streets. The north house, where they will live, is nearly done.

OPEN HOUSES ON THE POINT -- SATURDAY, JUNE 25, 1966.

Dear Members:

With the opening of some of our Point homes, Saturday, June 25th, 11 o'clock A.M. to 5 o'clock P.M., we request your loyal support and interest for this particular occasion in order that we may achieve a most successful day.

Those who are opening their homes for this event will be well taken up with the various arrangements which must be made to ready their homes for our visitors on that day.

For the rest of our members, please stand by with us by sending donations of food - namely, bread, rolls, gingerbread or cookies, which will be sold along the line of tour, attractively wrapped with a seal of the Green Light attached to each package. The committee feel certain that our visitors would like to take away a little remembrance of their visit with us, and what could be better than food made by "Cooks of the Point!" A Committee is being formed to acquaint our members with the necessary details, and please support them when you are called upon.

The results with your assistance should be most rewarding to all of us and furthermore will show that the funds derived from these foods will meet our expenses incurred in connection with this project. If you are not a "Cook", perhaps you would like to send a contribution. Any check may be made payable to the Point Association and mailed to Mrs. Arnold (Chairman) or Rear Admiral Henry Eccles (Treasurer).

Philippene M. Arnold, Chairman.

Under the supervision of Mr. M. Joseph Sullivan, the proceeds of this affair will be allocated toward the beautification of the Point, as well as a clean up program.

Flower girls under the direction of Miss Carrie Ericson will make old-fashioned nosegays to present to our visitors.

There will be an exhibition of pictures by Dorothy Holt Manuel on the porch at William King Covell's house at 72 Washington Street.

The houses open will be:

The Dennis House, 1750, St. John's Rectory, 59 Washington Street.

The Sheffield Huntington House, 1719, Commander and Mrs. Walter J. Whitley, 43 Elm Street.

The William Claggett House, circa 1710, Lt. Cdr. & Mrs. George Ackley, 16 Bridge Street.

The James Davis House, 1731, Dr. Arnold Frucht, 42 Second Street.

The Bennett House, circa 1710, Mrs. J. H. N. Potter, 44 Thames Street.

The James N. Utter House, 1854, Lt. and Mrs. Steven H. Edward, 40 Walnut Street.

The George Irish House, 1769, Professor and Mrs. Hiram M. Stout, 96 Washington Street.

The Abraham Rivera House, 1750, Mr. & Mrs. Thomas E. McLaughlin, 53 Washington Street.

The Christopher Townsend House, 1725, Mrs. H. I. Goddard, 74 Bridge Street.

The Hunter House, Washington Street.

Third and Elm Press

Alexander Nesbitt and Ilse Buchert are both formerly of the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence; Mr. Nesbitt is now at the Southeast Massachusetts Technological Institute in North Dartmouth.

These two craftsmen have opened a studio at Third and Elm Streets, where most of us remember a barber's shop, and then a carpenter's shop, where Fran Chase worked on boats and accessories. They will print small editions of fine books, pamphlets, certificates, citations, and also do bookbinding, woodcuts, calligraphy, murals, etc. Beside the modern electric press, Miss Buchert has an early hand lever press, called an acorn press from its shape. This was probably built about 1800, once belonged to John Howard Benson, and was rescued from a warehouse.

This shop will be open on June 25th, the day the Point houses are shown, and woodcuts and books will be exhibited.

POINT BEAUTIFICATION

Since the city has decided to plant the small park between Thames and Cross Streets, The Point Association will be able to use the money we collected for that purpose, for the general beautification of the Point. Mr. M. Joseph Sullivan, the beautification chairman, has reports from many cities on their tree planting programs, and they all agree that trees planted on sidewalks do not grow as well as those in private yards. The Point sidewalks are unusually narrow as well as the streets, so that the trees are hit frequently by cars, and subject to vandalism.

Mr. Sullivan is concentrating on the area between Third and Washington Streets, and from Van Zandt Avenue to Bridge. He has chosen places where trees will look well, in people's yards rather than on the sidewalks. He is now asking householders for permission to plant a tree or two in the yard near the street -- the response has been most gratifying, as many people welcome smaller trees.

This year about fifty will be planted, some smaller varieties, and some flowering. And here is a real find -- shad bush, which the Pilgrims found growing at Plymouth when they landed. (When the shad bush flowers, the shad run.) Mr. Sullivan hopes to do some matching trees to streets -- thus elms (blight resistant) on Elm Street, walnuts on Walnut Street, etc., and on Van Zandt Avenue, once Hawthorne Street, hawthorns. But NO poplars or willows.

Last year Mr. Sullivan did all the work himself, even to digging the holes and protecting each tree, but this year he is empowered to hire men to help him. The trees already planted, that are doing so well, will be pruned back drastically and fertilized, so that they will continue to flourish.

THE LIBERTY TREE (Conclusion).

The Liberty Tree was dying. By 1850 it was apparent to even the most adamant protectors of the Liberty Tree that the tree was indeed dying. Since the day of its planting there in the triangular lot at the junction of Farewell and Thames Streets, it had become a familiar and beloved landmark as well as a symbol of the struggle for American independence and the ultimate victory. To some of the old-timers the tree was much more. As children, they had played beneath the branches of the sturdy young oak. Some still living at that time, might have witnessed the planting or have heard the story and passed it on to their children. As the years passed, they had marvelled at its growth. In later years, they had found comfort in the shade of its leafy branches; it was an old friend in danger, and must be protected.

It was during this period of indecision that it might truly be said, "The trustees' lot was not a happy one." The trustees of the Liberty Tree were badgered on the one hand by city officials, who were mainly concerned with public safety, and on the other hand, entreated and abused by Newport citizens, who would not hear of any action that might deprive them of their Liberty Tree for any reason. The trustees of the tree became anxious for the safety of the lives and limbs of people, who daily passed beneath its aging branches. The intentions of the trustees to fell the tree were violently opposed by many Newport citizens though it was evident that the venerable old tree was dead and liable to be blown down at any moment should a sudden wind spring up.

The following bitter article was written and published at the suggestion of the then Mayor of Newport. "Several officious characters have made two or three attempts to cut down the old Liberty Tree at the head of Thames Street. This tree was planted at the time the colonies declared themselves free, and it has been regarded as a sacred monument of those perilous times, which gave us our liberties. The tree has been looked upon by all the present generation as a sacred relic, and it is absolutely revered as one of a few remnants of a trying age. The cutting down of that tree would be a sacrilegious act, and he who would strike an ax at the trunk of the old monument of the Revolution would be guilty of any mean and dastardly act. The tree is probably dead, but it is large and will yet stand for many, many years to come. It is in fact, the monument of the men who were conspicuous in the American Revolution in this town, and it has ever stood sacredly to their memories. Why should it be taken away, and a new one substituted? There would be nothing sacred or venerable in the new tree, and no one would respect it any more than any other tree in a different part of the town. We say, let the tree stand until it rots away; let no innovating hand destroy its venerable form; let no mousing upstarts be permitted to demolish that tree which has endured the wild storms of three quarters of a century, and which commemorates events through which they would never have the courage to pass, as did those veterans who planted this tree. Let the people of Newport guard and protect the noble old Liberty Tree, and keep it where it has ever stood so long as it can possibly remain one of the last beacons of the Revolution."

This appeal and argument would doubtless have been very much more effective had it not been generally understood that it was only the result of a personal quarrel with one of the trustees at which it was aimed. The trustees, however, were not to be frightened out of their project, for they had the law on their side, as the following letter will prove:

Newport, December 6, 1850

W. A. Clarke, Esq.:

Dear Sir:

Having carefully examined the original deed of trust of Liberty Tree, and the lot upon which it stands, and also the several original acts of the trustees, making appointments to fill vacancies in the Board occasioned by death, I see nothing therein, which by any reasonable construction should prevent the present trustees from removing the tree that now stands there in a state of decay, and substituting another in its place. In practise and in effect the thing has already been done once, as the tree which stands there now is not the same that stood there in 1766 when the deed of trust was executed.

Very truly yours,
George Turner

The next day the following was written:

As the present Board of Trustees of Liberty Tree have it in contemplation on account of its presented blighted and decaying state, to cut down and remove it, and to plant another in its place, they have thought proper to publish the original deed of trust, and their appointment as trustees in evidence of their right to do so.

Newport, December 7, 1850

(Signed) John F. Townsend
W. A. Clarke
William Gardner

Defences to the actions of the trustees came in from numerous quarters, which somewhat encouraged them to persist in their original purpose. They saw, however, that bloodshed would be the result if the tree was taken down, and desisted insofar as the actual felling was concerned, but at an appointed time they met and with axes in hand thoroughly girdled the tree, which had stood the blasts of so many winds, but which was now unsafe. In a little history of Newport and its curiosities, the Liberty Tree is noticed; the description of it closing with the following lines:

"They are gone, all gone, it seemed to say.
They are all in their graves, and why should I stay?
The stout old hands that planted me here
Have been mouldering now for many a year.
Their children and children's children I've seen
Laid down in the shade of my branches green;
Their stalwart race is gone from the land,
And why should I any longer stand?
My royal equals too, of the wood,
Who in other days around me stood,
The brotherly elm and the fatherly oak,
Have bowed to decay, or the woodman's stroke;
The poplar, the beech, and the dark green ash,
Have startled the fields with their farewell crash.
They have left me here in my solitude,
O'er the memories of the past to brood
And over my present misery,
A poor old, naked, and useless tree.

O! men that have hearts of flesh (I pray)
That the woes of a poor old tree can feel
Come to my help with the merciful steel!
Come with your axes and lay me low;
They are gone, and 'tis time I too should go.
Prepare the chimney, my funeral pyre
And let me mount on the wings of fire,
To crown with deathless green the shore,
Where the fathers are gathered forevermore."

When the reunion of the Sons and Daughters of Newport took place in August of 1859, a poem was delivered by the then Vice-President of the Redwood Library. The preparations for it entailed a great amount of labor and time, but withal the poetic eye did not escape the Liberty Tree, for this was one of the verses:

"As you piously turn toward the head of the town,
Curt chronicler still of her ancient renown,
Tho shattered by time, the old marksman you see,
Bare blasted, yet upright, the Liberty Tree."

The protectors of this precious trust were constantly abused, whenever the question of removing the dead tree was hinted at. Threatening letters, outspoken imprecations and violent language was their portion, besides any quantity of doggerel. The following published for the benefit of the trustees is amusing even if it does lack poetic merit.

The Newport Liberty Tree

A very thrilling ballad description of the recent futile attempt to "girdle or cut down the old Liberty Tree at the head of Thames Street."

There stood a group of so-called men,
Under the Liberty Tree,
And they looked around and "round agen"
To see what they could see.

If other eyes than theirs might view
The deed they were about,
For not an "anxious mother" knew
Her hopeful "son was out."

Upward they gazed to the branches high
Stirred by the midnight air.
Is it a voice from the graveyard nigh
Moaning "Beware, beware"?

And they looked around and round once more
To see what they could see,
While with an axe and knife they cut and tore
The bark from the old oak tree.

They belabored the trunk with might and mind
And round they carried the ring
And they hacked and hewed to the innocent rind
As if it were a noxious thing.

But why do they suddenly pause in fear?
And why do they start and stare?
Again 'tis the voice from the graveyard near
And it mutters "Beware, beware."

"Have you no dread of your ancestors' shade
Flitting yon tombs among?
Under these boughs your grandsires played
While your grandams knit and sung.

Tho' withered and weak 'tis the oldest oak
Of all in yon olden town;
It has stood unscathed the lightning's stroke,
And why should you cut it down?"

The voice it ceased, and those laborers then
They counseled under the tree.
And they looked around and "round agen"
To see what they could see.

And they saw a ghost with eyes all set,
At least they thus declare.
So they took to their heels, thank heaven, and yet
That oak is standing there.

During the mayoralty of Mr. Cranston, he ordered the tree to be cut down. It was thought best to preserve one part of it, and orders were given to saw it just above and below the plate, over nearly the whole of which the bark had grown. A few days prior to the celebration of the "Reunion of the Sons and Daughters of Newport, R. I." on

August 23, 1859, the accumulation of bark and wood that had grown over the copper plate to the depth of almost three inches, was cut away, the plate was polished, and on the morning of the 23rd it was beautifully decorated with a wreath by the ladies of the neighborhood.

The tree was dismantled about 1860 or 61. The trunk about six feet high was left standing. This contained the tablet. In 1874 or 75 the trunk was cut level with the ground and was sent to George H. Norman, a noted amateur carver in hopes that he might be able to carve some memento from it as a memorial of the tree, but it was found to be too badly decayed. The tablet remained with Mr. Norman until his death and then passed to his son, Bradford, who presented it to the Newport Historical Society.

On August 28, 1876, the centennial year of the Declaration of Independence, a fine oak tree, presented by Mr. Galvin, was planted and dedicated with appropriate ceremonies. Upon a platform erected for the occasion sat many dignitaries; an organ provided accompaniment to a choir. The platform and tree were draped with flags. William A. Clarke, a trustee, exhibited the original deed to the audience. Prayers were offered and a poem read by its author, Reverend C. T. Brooks. The choir sang a specially composed hymn "The Liberty Tree" to the tune of the Star Spangled Banner.

By virtue of an Act passed at the January session of the General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island in 1895, Henry Audley Clarke of Jamestown, R. I., and Dumont Clarke of Schraalenburgh, N. J., heirs of William A. Clarke, deceased, did grant, bargain, sell, and convey to the Newport Historical Society, the Liberty Tree and the triangular lot on which it stands "it being the same lot of land heretofore conveyed by William Read to William Ellery, John Collins, Robert Crook, and Samuel Fowler and their successors by deed bearing date the 14th day of April, A.D. 1766, the said William A. Clarke being the last surviving Trustee in succession to the said Trust under the said deed," to which deed Henry Audley Clarke and Dumont Clarke set their hands and seals on "this day of September, A.D. 1896."

Sad to say the oak tree planted in 1876, having failed to flourish, was removed, and a healthy young fern leaf beech was planted in 1897 under the auspices of the Newport Historical Society, with an inspiring and beautiful ceremony. At this time the tree was enclosed by an iron railing in a six foot square area. Soon its growing branches overhung the highway on either side, interfering with the flow of traffic, its branches bruised and injured by passing vehicles. Here it remained for many years.

On March 17, 1920, the Newport Historical Society as trustee of the Liberty Tree, took steps to have the tree moved into the park area, as its roots were unable to find nourishment in the small enclosure at the apex of the triangle, or what was left by the encroaching highway. An article in the Newport Daily News of Wednesday, May 5, 1920, gave this account of the progress of removal: "The highway department is engaged in digging out the Liberty Tree at the junction of Thames and Farewell Streets, preparatory to removal to its proposed location on Ellery Park. Digging was started Monday and this afternoon is still continuing, a pile of earth collecting. It is not a big tree, but the underground section is proving quite difficult to handle, the root ball having grown so as to grip the granite posts of the fence. These posts are more rugged below than above." The tree was finally placed inside the city-owned Ellery Park by May 10, 1920, and here it remains to this day - a beautiful fern leaf beech, the fourth Liberty Tree in honorable succession.

The words spoken on the occasion of the deeding of the Liberty Tree to the Newport Historical Society as reported in the Newport Mercury, March 25, 1899, cannot be improved upon, so we close with the sentiments which were expressed at that time. "The Liberty Tree - May it put forth its branches until it shall meet the sun in its coming, and may the light of departing day linger among its branches; may the young child be taught to venerate the principles of liberty and the men who planted the first tree here. Let no rude hand molest it; may it resist the storms of winter, and under the mild influence of spring put forth the new buds of promise; may this spot be always held sacred for the same purpose, and when this tree shall decay, may another be put in its place."

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Editor: 22 Bridge Street
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