

The  
GREEN

LIGHT



BULLETIN OF THE POINT ASSOCIATION  
OF NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

SUMMER 2007



# The GREEN LIGHT

LII No. 2

SUMMER 2007

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*Meetings are generally scheduled for the first Monday of the month and are open to Association members.  
Please call Isabel for time, date, and location.*

Copies of *The Green Light* may be purchased for \$1.00 at Bucci's Convenience Store, Poplar at Thames.



## The Point Association

The Point Association is a group of neighbors working together to improve the quality of life in our neighborhood by getting to know each other; preserving our historic heritage; maintaining the Point's residential character; beautifying our parks, streets, and piers; and promoting public policies that strengthen all of Newport's neighborhoods.

Cover Image: Courtesy of the Newport Historical Society.

In 1909, John Horgan opened this store at the corner of Third and Walnut Street. From 1918, Max Gillson owned the store until it was sold to Edward Martins who kept it open until his son, Jack, took over in 1968 and ran it until his death in 1986.

Of course, there were many earlier stores on the Point, but Jack's was special for his care and concern for all ages. Every summer, he organized a cleanup of the Point all done by children; workers were rewarded with prizes and a cookout. The thin strip of land along the waterfront south of Van Zandt pier is named John J. Martins Memorial Park.

Thanks to Joe Baker of the *Newport Daily News* for featuring the store in "Then and Now" in the Thursday paper. Photographer David Hansen discovered this old photo at the Newport Historical Society. by Kay O'Brien



Just a brief note this time to congratulate all those who had anything to do with planting the daffodils in our public spaces. The "show" this year was truly spectacular!

I also want to put our readers on to two new books about Newport. One is the *ALA Guide to Newport*, written by Ron Onorato, Professor of Architectural History at URI, with photographs by architectural photographer Warren Jagger, and advertised by the AIA as "the most up to date and comprehensive guide ever published on Newport's architecture". The other, *Newport: A Lively Experiment, 1639-1969*, by Rockwell Stansrud, is a beautifully designed book published by the Redwood Library and Athenaeum. It is of special interest to the Point in that in its broad ranging view of the city's social history, it gives due attention to Doris Duke and the work of restoration that so directly concerns us here. Happy reading!

Alice

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

At our April 19 membership meeting we gathered to the theme of "What's on Your Mind?" topics of interest to Point residents. The discussion was lively! Tall Ships; Goat Island and Belle Mer; the concept of a one-way road along the RR tracks all drew comments, often strongly worded. Pointers do have opinions and they often disagree.

I think newspaper comments and opinions sometimes leave the impression that the Point is a homogeneous, elite community where everyone thinks we are better off isolated from the offenses of greater Newport. Certainly, our ability to pull together as a community is the envy of other neighborhoods. But, one of the most attractive features of the Point is the broad diversity of our population. And, many Pointers spend a lot of time working for the City as committee members and volunteers. Their contributions to Newport make a difference that often goes unnoticed.

\*\*\*\*\*

Location, location, location! That's the whole problem about the Point, isn't it? It's an ideal location – close to the water, purely residential, full of interesting architecture and attractive parks, sidewalks and gardens. But, it is also the natural funnel for traffic from the Pell Bridge to Newport, and a convenient shortcut to and from the naval base. Noise from expanding harbor attractions easily finds its way to the Point, bouncing along the water on prevailing winds. For some people in Newport and for many tourists, the Point is an inconvenient obstacle – to traffic, to development, to entrepreneurial endeavor. We are literally in an awkward position, one that puts us at risk. In my opinion, we must understand that and deal with it, without becoming intimidated by those who do not live here and cannot resist making comments based on misinformed perceptions.

\*\*\*\*\*

As I write this on May 4, we look forward to an unusual run of gorgeous spring weather. I have been here ten years and can't recall such a spring. By the time you are reading this letter we may have been hit by another vicious nor'easter, probably on the day of the Point Plant Sale! Until then, be happy living on the Point. Life is always full of "trade-offs." It seems to me that for now, we Pointers are ahead in the game.



## THE BOOKLIGHT

Summer Reading . . .

### Wherever You Are

Suzanne Varisco

With those long and “lazy, hazy days of summer” fast approaching, the Point Readers have decided to take some time off, read for personal pleasure, and return to discussion groups in the fall.

Instead of our usual capsule descriptions of two books (one fiction and one non-fiction), therefore, we present a summer reading list of 15 varied selections—most new, a few old favorites, and a couple of classics. As usual, all are available in soft cover.

#### Non-Fiction

Robert Kurson, *Shadow Divers: The True Adventure of Two Americans Who Risked Everything to Solve One of the Last Mysteries of World War II*

Kati Marton, *The Great Escape: Nine Jews Who Fled Hitler and Changed the World*

Charles Rappleye, *Sons of Providence: The Brown Brothers, the Slave Trade, and the American Revolution*

R.A. Scotti, *Sudden Sea: The Great New England Hurricane of 1938*

#### Fiction

Jane Austen, *Emma*

Gerald Durrell, *My Family and Other Animals*

Irene Nemirovsky, *Suite Francaise*

Richard Powers, *The Time of Our Singing*

Mary Lee Settle, I, Roger Williams: *A Fragment of Autobiography*

Wallace Stegner, *Angle of Repose*

Tobias Wolff, *Old School*

Carlos Ruiz Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*

#### Detective/Suspense

Anna Quindlen, *Rise and Shine*

Robert B. Parker, *Early Autumn: Spenser Series #7*

Alexander McCall Smith, *Espresso Tales: 44 Scotland Street Series #2*

In the September 2007 *Green Light*, we will resume with two book reviews and discussion dates.

## TALL SHIPS 76

by Kit Weiss

The summer of 1976 was one of those times you simply must be involved in. Ralph Weiss was one such volunteer. Tall Ships '76 came to RI and Ralph was assigned the four masted training ship from Spain, the tall ship Juan Sebastian de Elcano. As the ship started the Tall Ship race from Bermuda, the Argentinean ship, Libertad, barged the line, had a collision with the Juan Sebastian and brought down its fore mast. As the liaison officer for the ship, Ralph immediately contracted the largest crane in New England, reserved a huge work space, hired steel workers and was standing at Navy Pier 1, when the Juan Sebastian limped into port. Five days later the Juan Sebastian miraculously joined the largest fleet of Tall Ships ever assembled and cruised out Narragansett Bay headed to NYC for our country's biggest birthday party, our Bicentennial. The honor of Spain was saved and for it the King of Spain, Juan Carlos, awarded CDR Weiss the Spanish Navy Cross of Merit. The US government acknowledged the importance of the award and forwarded it to CDR Weiss to be worn with his uniform. During the 2000 Tall Ships, here in Newport CDR Weiss was the liaison to the Russian ship, Krutzenstern.



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## CALLING THE POINT ELDERS TO ELDERHOSTEL

by Ed Madden

For most of us the Point is not only home but an ideal spot to spend the summer. If, however, this summer's "invasion" by tall ships, music wafting over from Goat Island, traffic and other as yet unforeseen intrusions become too much for you, there is a solution: leave! A suggested destination: Elderhostel.

In 1975, an interesting experiment was undertaken. Two men from the University of New Hampshire who had done some backpacking in the USA and Europe, staying in hostels, conceived of the idea of starting a hostel program in America for "the older folks". The initial scope was limited to summer travel utilizing empty dormitories on college campuses. They felt that an educational theme should be incorporated whenever possible. Well, great oaks from little acorns grow. From New England the program spread nationally by the early 1980s and internationally by the late 1980s. Under the banner of "Elderhostel...Adventures in Lifelong Learning", with a home office in Boston, the organization now has participation in all 50 states, 90 countries and all the Canadian Provinces. Last year, over 160,000 hostelers took part in their programs. The mission of Elderhostel as the world's largest not-for-profit educational travel organization is the belief that learning is an enriching lifelong pursuit. Anyone 55 years of age or older may join.

My wife, Dorothy, and I love classical music, and I will relate our involvement the past two years in a superb program run by Elderhostel at the Peabody Music School/Johns Hopkins University. Peabody is one of the top music schools in the US, on a par with Juilliard and New England Conservatory. Elderhostel has its own four-story Inn on the Peabody campus with two lecture rooms (You literally live on campus with the student body and the food in the cafeteria is surprisingly good!) There are morning and afternoon lectures by Peabody professors and every evening a concert by members of the school. Courses run 4 ½ days with a wide choice of subjects from strictly classical to Broadway musicals. There is ample free time to visit Baltimore, a very lovely, reasonably well-preserved metropolis. The school is in the his-

toric district, across the street from the Walker Art Museum and a few miles from the Baltimore Art Museum, with the famous Coyne sisters' Impressionist collection. Last year we took a course on Mozart and Brahms and this past February, a course on "What Makes Grand Opera Grand". We are already anticipating next year's course on whatever.

If any of this information whets your appetite for some cultural enrichment, I would recommend that you write to: Elderhostel, 11 Avenue de Lafayette, Boston MA 02111. Or register toll free at 877-426-8056 or on-line at [www.elderhostel.org](http://www.elderhostel.org).

Happy hunting.

## HISTORY AND ARCHIVES

by Kay O'Brien

Looking back and looking forward at the summertime is a challenge the *Green Light* staff faces as the seasonal deadlines roll around. This year is special as it's the *Green Light*'s Golden Anniversary, and we have 256 *Green Light* Bulletins in our files to prove it. Also, we have a large and varied collection of clippings, photos, stories, etc. telling how the Point has changed over these fifty years.

One goal is to organize our collection to make it more accessible. Another is to encourage you to share your photos and stories. We can set a time and place if you'd like to join us. Please telephone Liz Mathinos, 847-3977, or Kay O'Brien, 847-7311.



The 50th anniversary book committee (r to l: Alice Clemente, Jane Hence and Kay O'Brien) meets with Anne Ewing (far left) of Newport Life. Photo by Suznne Varisco

# SARAH BARKER PLUMB REMEMBERED

by Kay O'Brien

Sarah was the fifth generation of her family to be born on the Point and how she loved it. On April 28 Sarah died at the John Clarke Nursing Center and would have reached the century birthday on Christmas Eve.

How lucky my husband and I were to move to the Point in 1981 where our backyard joined the property of Sarah and Ralph Plumb. At that time, Ralph, Jr. and Pat, plus their Airedale, Holly, lived upstairs and were

looking for a place to start a restaurant. That's history, and the Brick Alley Pub speaks for itself. Later, *their* young sons, Matt and Ralph III, came in from Portsmouth to be trained in sports by their grandfather in the backyard. Over the years, Sarah and Ralph took in all the boys' games with great enthusiasm.

Sarah loved company and a visit meant catching up with her extensive doll collection, a cup of tea and many stories. She was on the staff of the *Green Light* and always shared her recipes. At Christmas, Ralph put up their white lights on the trees between our houses. We did have fun and many happy memories.

## GIRLS OF SUMMER 1925 (Below)

The picture of the girls sitting on the seawall in 1925 was used in the August 1997 issue of *Yankee Magazine* and found in their archives. The photo was taken by King Covell at the Villa Marina when the girls celebrated Betty Ramsey's birthday.



1925  
Sarah Barker, fourth from left  
Betty Covell, fifth from left

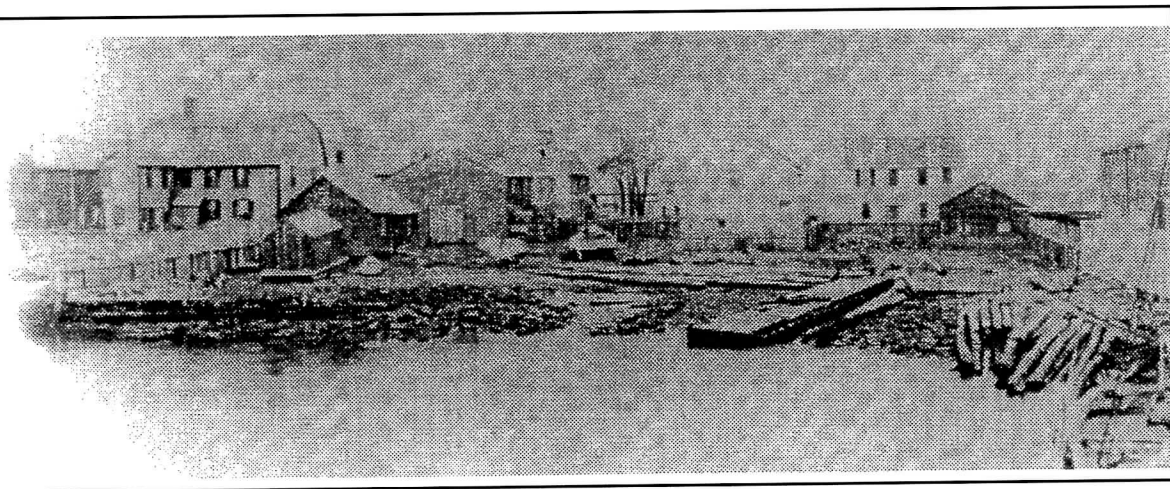


1997  
Sarah Plumb on left  
Betty Ramsey on right.

As noted in our Spring 2007 *Green Light*, Betty Covell Ramsey died January 17, 2007

Washington Street  
shoreline  
in the 1880s

photo courtesy of  
The Newport  
Historical  
Society.



# REMEMBERING THE COLLEENS OF SUMMER

by Loretta F. Goldrick

They came to Newport from all across the Emerald Isle. From counties Donegal and Down in the north, to Kilkenny, Dublin, Meath and Carlow in the south. They usually arrived in early June, and stayed through mid-September on J-1 visas that allowed them to live and work here and in other Northeast resorts for the summer, and to see America up close, warts and all.

Oonagh, Breda, Helen, Kerrie, Amanda, Lorraine, Niamh and Hillary were some of the young Irish students who worked summers at our B & B from 1995 to 2002. Each year, my husband and I would cross our fingers and hope that this year's crop would be as wonderful as last's. Generally they were, sometimes proving to be even greater.

If you went to the beach early in the season you would see them there, turning pink under the blistering unfamiliar sun. And, despite sunburns that often laid them low, the beach was still their favorite place to spend a day off.

They were, on the whole, a fashionable group. And, the casual trendy styles they wore to work wouldn't appear in our stores until a full year later. We soon learned that trainers were sneakers, jumpers were sweaters and crisps were potato chips. "Shall I Hoover?" meant did we want them to vacuum. Things that met with great enthusiasm were either brilliant or grand.

We often lunched with them in the garden before they

set out for their next job. Amanda Greaney fondly recalls the tuna sandwiches we served and said she makes hers the same way. I was flattered. Looking back, we DID make lots of BLT's and tuna sandwiches.

Generally, they worked an average of 3 jobs a day and in the course of a season, we would often remark on how well-mannered and poised they were. They spoke, too, with a wisdom well beyond their years. Most were familiar with politics in America, were up on world and Irish news and kept in close touch with family and friends back home, thanks to the Newport Public Library.

Remembering all this, we wrote earlier this year to some of our young former employees asking them about their lives now, and their memories of the summer they spent in Newport.

Amanda Greaney, who recently returned to Dublin after working in London for six years as a fire engineer for an international firm, recalled her summer in Newport in 1995. "I helped out at three guest houses (B & Bs), a kindergarten summer camp, and picked up other random jobs. I certainly didn't make my fortune in Newport, but I still worked hard, made enough money to have a good time and spent a few weeks traveling to New York, New Jersey and Florida before returning home."

She added: "One of the great things about Newport is its size and its accessibility, especially if you had a bicycle. Evenings, we went regularly to bars and restaurants that ran specials: all you can eat pizza for ten dollars.


*(continued on page 22)*



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## RICH THOUGHTS ON A RICH LIFE: glimpses of Sara and Dick Weiss

by Jane Hence

A random sampling of Sara and Dick's accomplishments and interests could range from being involved with equipment used on the first mission to the moon (Dick), to defending the thesis for a Master's degree in one's eighth decade (Sara). Or it could include advising and counseling students with disabilities for seventeen years at Rhode Island College (Sara), serving during World War II in San Antonio, Texas, and being recalled to active duty during the Korean Conflict (Dick), or contracting polio while pregnant with their son, Richard (Sara, of course).

Buying a house on the Point during the fifties, when conditions and buildings were far different from what they are now, was rather a risky decision. Houses were often in bad repair and most were divided into two; three; and four-family dwellings categorized as substandard. Reasons for deciding to live here certainly did not include expectation of making a killing in real estate. However, there existed then as now a strong sense of welcome and community.

Dick and Sara moved to Newport in 1953 and bought their house on Walnut in 1956. It was a two-family then and a deed, dated 1840, indicates that the lot had been purchased by a Henry Huddy from Elizabeth Richards, who describes herself in that document as: "singlewoman"; the price was one hundred and fifty dollars. At the closing, the Weiss' most loyal and honest lawyer suggested to them that it was not too late to

change their minds, as they had not yet signed anything, gently warning that "it really isn't a very good part of town and it's only going to get worse". That viewpoint was borne out when a Point resident told of offering her yard to her volunteer group for a social event. A discussion ensued, and it was decided not to have the tea on the Point as the members did not wish to "have it in that section of town".

Dick describes Newport during the early fifties as being reminiscent of a "city in the mid-30s, before the war.

Nothing at all was open on Sunday and almost everything closed at five during the week."

Dick and Sara soon became involved in the fledgling Point Association, and Sara can name most of the families initially involved and described to me exactly in which house each lived and which person had what idea about the early association. It was Joe Weaver (who lived at Cherry and Second) who initiated the idea for the first *Green Light* which consisted of the



Photo by Jane Hence

front and back of one sheet. Sara wrote the entire bulletin for a few years. Edith Ballinger Price, a prominent writer and artist, drew the logo, still used, of the Goat Island lighthouse. She was a Newport native who moved to Battery Street, and Sara was happy to accept Edith's offer to be editor. Other names of the "inventors" of the Point Association and the *Green Light* are Eleanor and George Weaver (9 Chestnut), Ned and Janet Brownell (the beautiful three story house with dormers currently being restored on Bridge Street), David and Betty Smith (living then in the Pineapple House) and David Nemtsov (who was born on the Point), Mabel and Harold Watson, Gladys and Bill McLeod and Phillipine and Harold Arnold (who owned and used a very old cast iron stove and were fa-



mous for their - milk version – chowder). The Point Association met at St. John's Rectory and numbered around 50 or 60.

Not surprisingly, many of the issues of that early period remain at the forefront today. Clean-ups, creating Storer Park, tree plantings, the plant sale and lovely old-fashioned gatherings, among which were "Days on the Point". Kay O'Brien and I discussed this during an interview last year, and both she and Sara remember these occasions with fondness. The section of Willow between Second and Washington Streets was closed to traffic, and booths for baked cakes and bread, homemade foods, flowers from Point gardens, art and sewing and probably white elephant stands were arrayed along both sides of the street, and everyone came to the Street Fair and had a happy day.

Dick and Sara met in San Antonio, where Sara grew up and Dick was stationed during World War II and served from 1942 to 46. As Dick mentioned with amusement, naturally, having a degree in mechanical engineering, he was assigned to the supply division! Dick had graduated from Cornell, and after the war's end, they moved to New Jersey where he was an engineer in liquid fuel rocket development in an experimental lab until he was called again to serve in the Air Force, from 1951-53.

After that ended, he left Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, in Ohio. When he noticed an advertisement in an aviation trade magazine, he responded and was hired by Avica Corporation as vice-president of engineering and remained with the company almost twenty years. The company developed and manufactured high alloy metal flexible connectors for aerospace applications. Some of these remain on the moon today - left behind when the astronauts returned to their mothership.

After returning from his first trip to Europe, on business, he said to Sara, "You have no idea how bad the bread is here!!" This led, unsurprisingly to those who know these two remarkably diverse, curious and energetic people, to an investigation of flours, to finding the best of other ingredients, and experimenting in the baking of bread in pursuit of the goal of enjoying similarly wonderful bread here on the Point. As one might expect, they succeeded in this quest, and for many years their

bread, made in their kitchen, was a favorite at the Street Fairs and most other gatherings.

I would like to include much more history and other stories, but space prevents. Suffice it to say that Dick became the tax assessor in Newport for thirteen years, Sara was at Salve Regina in the Financial Aid office. Both returned to college. Dick earned another Bachelor's degree in 1994 and his Master's in 2001 in American History. Sara resumed her long-interrupted college career, entered Rhode Island College, and earned her degree with a triple major in anthropology, history and sociology. And she just recently earned her Master's in history, several weeks ago defending her thesis on the subject of the "Evolution of Special Education in Providence, 1800-1900".

Their son, Richard, who was six when they moved to Walnut Street, now lives in Twin Lakes, Wisconsin. Sarah and Dick have three grandchildren, and a great grandson, who is one month old.

One wonders, with great interest and admiration, what their next adventure will be.

## HARBOR HOUSE STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL



Saturday, June 16. 1 – 3 p.m.

Please join us for strawberries, biscuits and cream on the porch at Harbor House for our annual fundraiser!

Homemade biscuits, strawberries and cream - \$4.00

Chocolate dipped strawberries – \$1.00

Iced tea or bottles of water - \$1.00

For more information, contact Pat Glazzard, Chair, 848-2706



# LOVE YOUR HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION (WITH HEARTFELT PASSION)

by Pieter N. Roos

In these days of governmental over-regulation how can I ask you to love a government commission? Well, I can, and you should. The Historic District Commission (HDC) has been in existence for about 40 years in Newport and has made a crucial difference. It is a body about which many have griped and complained from time to time (including me); yet I will maintain to my last that it is one of the most important commissions in Newport. It regulates the way historic structures look, whether you can modify or restore them, and how the job should be done. I know what you're thinking; too much control over personal property; to which I say, a guard dog isn't always the friendliest of beasts, but I feel safer with one around.

Without the HDC there would have been no official guidance for preservation and perhaps more importantly nobody to prevent demolition. Newport is the

last remnant of the wooden cities of 18<sup>th</sup> century America. Nearly 400 structures in the city predate 1800, arguably more than anywhere else in the U.S. That is a national treasure, indeed our World Heritage nomination contends that it is an international one.

Think about what the Point, indeed all of Newport, would look like right now if the Historic District Commission had never existed:

- The Travers Block on Bellevue would probably be gone
- Through hundreds of small decisions, the character of whole streets and neighborhoods would have been compromised. Property values would be significantly lower.
- Indeed it is fair to say that without HDC protection probably 25-30% of the buildings that we know on the Point would have been demolished. (In fact if that had come to pass there might be no Point and no *Green Light* to read.)

For those of you who were around here in the 50s and early 60s, both the Hill and the Point had major potential to be razed. Behind the sad facades they also had a wealth of amazing buildings. Individuals with real vision saw to it that preservation occurred through Operation Clapboard, through private efforts, and later through NRF. Some of those same people also had the vision to push for a body that would protect both the buildings that had been restored and those that had yet to see any improvement. The HDC was the result. Towns and cities that never created such a commission are all around us, places with great historic resources that were not protected with such diligence; New Bedford is probably a pretty good example. I imagine that most readers on the Point would rather live here, than there.

Neither the federal nor state government can do a great deal to enforce protection of our priceless legacy. That work is left up to us. Our volunteer HDC does that hard job and they should all get a hearty round of applause for it. Along with an excellent city planner and historic planner in the city administration, this is how historic Newport is protected. Support them, through large actions and small; they made our city what it is today.



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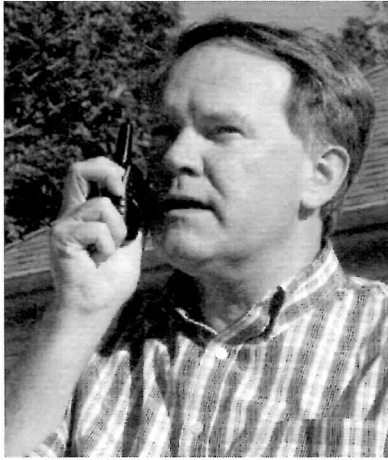
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# STAY IN TOUCH DURING THE “BIG ONE” VIA RADIO

by Mike Cullen

Living on Narragansett Bay adds much to our quality of life, but it comes with risks. As hurricane season approaches, it is time to plan ahead — for that “just in case” scenario. Forecasters say our luck may be coming to an end; Newport has been hurricane-free since 1991. Will this year bring the “Big One”? State and federal disaster response officials have been busy preparing, and so should you.



Point resident Mike Cullen has tested and put on the shelf a citizen friendly backup radio system called the *Newport Community Emergency Radio Network* that can quickly spring into action to address the Doomsday scenario of no phones and no cell phone service. Built around the use of plentiful, low cost Family Radio Service (FRS) radios, volunteers have established an operational footprint and run practice sessions every Thursday night at 8:30PM on FRS Channel 3.

One of the toughest issues facing public safety officials is how to receive 911 type requests for help should telephone/cell service be unavailable due to storm, accident, or terrorism. A sizable percentage of the U.S. population has already canceled their traditional “Ma Bell” phone service and rely solely on cell phone or cable-based telephone services. A recent survey stated that “one out of eight American homes did not have a landline telephone” during 2006. The newer technology phone services are vulnerable to storm conditions and can leave the user helpless.

Kids have had fun with walkie talkies for decades. In 1994, Radio Shack petitioned the FCC to establish a family radio service. Thanks to their foresight — and keen business sense that families were spending more time and money on recreational activities, skiing, boating, hiking — there was a market for low cost, easy to use radios. To date one hundred million FRS radios have been sold.

The radios do not require any license, can be used by anyone, and are available for as little as \$10 each from Radio Shack, Staples, Walmart, and Job Lot. Given their affordability and widespread availability, these radios make a solid addition to every home’s emergency kit.

While these walkie talkies are small in size, they can be heard out to a fair distance. Of course, range is a function of many factors. In recent tests, users were able to talk out to five miles, but this was the extreme; a one mile range was common. In a densely built up area, from inside a house, range could be under ¼ mile, but still there is a good chance that your signal would be heard by other stations in the network.

The local radio network uses FRS Channel 1 as the emergency communication channel and uses FRS Channel 3 for practice sessions and non-emergency communications.

Local ham radio hobbyists and others conducted two regional tests last fall. The network is augmented with a number of Newport area ham radio operators who can operate for a long period of time using 12 volt car batteries and can rapidly send messages to local and regional public safety authorities.

Newport’s police chief and fire chief were recently briefed on the effort and have been supportive. Since this radio network supplements the city’s emergency plans, project leaders have been working with the city to refine operational processes such as how to pass radio messages to police dispatchers should phone service become impaired.

Cullen and his wife, Beth, have lived on the Point since 1992. Since his birth in 2003, their son Mac has kept them very busy. Now, approaching four years old, Mac is handy with the FRS radio — so no excuses all you non-techies out there!

Phones may be out for days, but those with FRS radios will stay in touch. For more information consult the NCERN web site at [www.ncern.org](http://www.ncern.org) or send an email to [point@ncern.org](mailto:point@ncern.org)

# THAT WAS THEN . . .

## HISTORIC BATTERY PARK III

by Ralph Weiss

On a cold fall morning, after the last lawn cutting for the season and just after the first frost you can see on the grass at the west side of Battery Park the outline of the transverse rails and the pivot points for the guns that were housed in Fort Greene, Figure 1.

According to George Cullum, an elliptical stone-scarp battery was constructed for 12 or 13 guns in 1798.<sup>1</sup> It is assumed that the gun in position number one, was a single gun as its use would have been limited to defending the north flank of the fort from a land attack. A configuration of the gun placement, based on data taken in the field, has been superimposed on Cullen's plan<sup>2</sup> of the



Figure 1 -- West lawn area

parapet is twenty one feet thick; its rampart 26 feet broad; its scarp wall twenty feet high; having a command twenty nine feet above low water; and within the work is a brick barracks a guard-house, a bomb-proof magazine, and a hot-shot furnace.

The term "barbette" means a raised platform enabling guns to fire over a parapet without an opening being cut in the parapet.<sup>4</sup> A typical gun arrangement has the pivot point at the front of the gun point A, Figure 3.

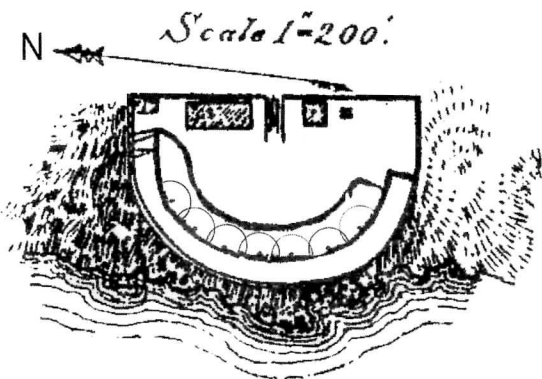


Figure 2 – Cullum's fort with 7 gun rings drawn in

1798 fort. Figure 2. The transverse rails are laid out on a radius of approximately 75 feet and each rail system is 20 feet in radius with a 2 foot overlap. The pivot points are about 24 feet back from the fence on the west side of the park.

The North battery had a commanding view of the mouth of the Narragansett Bay well into the 19th century; all the way from the southern tip of Coaster Harbor Island to the Beavertail light. Bear in mind that Goat Island was 1400 feet south of where the Green Light stands now. Cullum provides a detailed description of Fort Greene.<sup>3</sup>

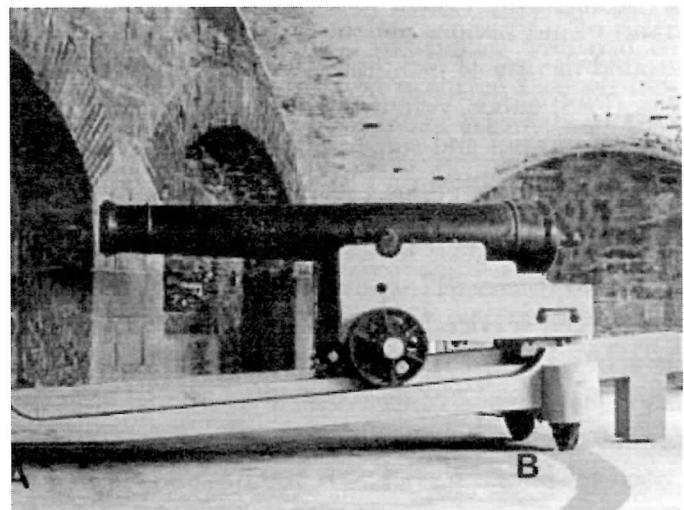


Figure 3 — Typical gun carriage and platform

This holds the gun platform in a fixed position when the gun is fired. The rear of the gun platform rides on two wheels that ride on a semicircle rail usually of granite, that is embedded in the floor support by a good foundation. A typical 12 pound gun weighed 3000 pounds.<sup>5</sup> To this add powder, shot and platform and you have a weight in excess of 2000 pounds resting on the back rail at Point B, Figure 3. What we see on the grass at Battery Park are the places where the pivot points and the trans-

verse rails were before they were removed. There may have been a lower tier at Fort Greene. In the 19th century, the children of the Point called this area the “dungeon”. The dungeon entrance was at the southwest corner of the Battery Park area. Figure 4. It is a mystery as



Figure 4 — Entrance to dungeon at Fort Greene — looking south

to where this entrance goes. Does it lead to a lower tier of the six guns. This is highly possible. The exact configuration of the 12 guns is unknown. There are at least six semi-circles on the grass today.

Whatever lies hidden beneath Battery Park will remain a mystery until sometime in the future. Perhaps using modern techniques, the true origin of the hollow areas on the ground can be explored. For now, we have a visible link with the past, a beautiful lawn to enjoy and a view that cannot be surpassed on a sunny day.

<sup>1</sup> Cullum, George W., *Fortification Defenses of Narragansett Bay*, Washington, 1884, page 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* plate I, Figure III

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Walker, P.K., *Engineer of Independence, A Documentary History of the Army Engineers in the American Revolution 1775-1783*, Superintendent of Documents, Washington.

<sup>5</sup> Coggins, Jack, *Ship and Seamen of the American Revolution*, Stackpole Books, Harrisburg, 1969, p 152.

See also:

“That Was Then...Historic Battery Park I” *The Green Light*, Summer 2004

“That Was Then...Historic Battery Park II” *The Green Light*, Summer 2006

## FROM PAST ISSUE: Summer 1997

### Evening of Restoration Stories Part II

by Nancy Esperson



Did you know that the railroad station on America's Cup Avenue has been moved four times from its original location on Warner street? The saga of this building and other moving stories were shared on Thursday evening, May 15 with a large crowd gathered at St. John's Guild Hall for *An Evening of Restoration Stories*. The program, hosted by Anita Rafael, featured Kay O'Brien's description of the station's many moves, Bryan Babcock's account of the changes Sarah Kendall made in the Elm and Washington Street area, Herb Rommel's tale of the Pitts Head Tavern, and Anne Reynold's story of the John Tripp House. Following the presentations there was time to chat with the speakers and view the displays highlighting Point houses which had been moved.

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# SPRUCING UP THE POINT ON A GLORIOUS SPRING DAY

*photos by Joan Simmons*





## LOCAL DRAWERS OF WATER

by Jane Groff Marchi

Once water was a precious commodity, much less taken for granted than it is today. At the corner of Battery and Third Streets, where I live today, my father could remember where the well had been, from which water had to be carried laboriously to the house. Even in the Thirties, when I visited as a child, water was valued and its use rationed with care – dishes washed and rinsed in dishpans and that wastewater then used to water plants in the yard.

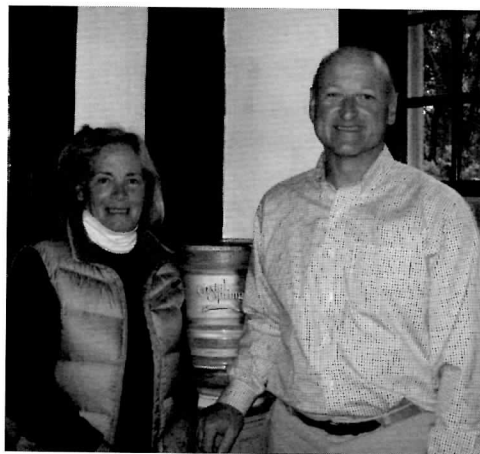
It was within the context of this attitude toward and experience with water, particularly drinking water, that Crystal Springs Water had its origins. In 1907, when the company was founded, most of Aquidneck Island's water for household use was "hard", i.e., full of minerals that made it difficult for soap to dissolve, left a scum around basins and bathtubs, and had a "funny" taste that natives took for granted but which outsiders or visitors noticed at once.

So it was that William Swan decided that there must be people on the Island who would appreciate, and be willing to buy, the pure natural water that rippled from the spring on his farm in Middletown. By the end of 1907 ("ought-seven" in the local parlance of the time) he had the water analyzed. It was found to be pure and free of the odd-tasting minerals, so the trademark "Crystal Spring Water" could be approved and applied. Initially, Mr. Swan sold his bottled water along with the fresh produce from his farm, much of which went to Scott's Market on Thames Street. From here it often went to estates on Bellevue Avenue and Ocean Drive. Then, in 1927, Mr. Swan decided to move to California. Henry T. Scott, owner of Scott's Market, decided to buy the Crystal Spring Water Company.

The Roaring Twenties were about to end and the Great Depression was soon to intervene. These became difficult times for all businesses. The spring from which the water bubbled was a quarter mile from the house. Every day the new owner had to drive down in his small truck

bringing a 20-quart bottle of hot water with which he washed the bottles. These were then reloaded and filled. In winter the bottles had to be carried to and stored in the cellar of his house to prevent freezing. The standard water dispenser of the time was called a "20<sup>th</sup> Century Water Cooler," which required blocks of ice to cool the water.

In 1951, Henry T. Scott retired and the business was taken over by his son "Bud", as Harry M. Scott was known. These were the postwar years when a number of changes began to take place. First, by this time distribution of Crystal Springs Water went to all three island communities. Second, Bud purchased the Hyergrade Water Company, combining the delivery routes of both companies under the new name of Crystal-Hyergrade Spring Water, a name that was to last for twenty-five years. Last but not least, an automatic bottle washer was acquired and the water began to be available in plastic bottles (both gallon and quart sizes) for resale in grocery stores.



Joy and Ian Scott Photo by Suzanne Varisco

In 1981, the third generation of Scotts took over running the company in the person of Ian Scott. By this time, bottled water was becoming much more common and popular among people of all ages, a trend that is still with us today. Ian Scott oversaw a five-year modernization program that included (1) a new bottling plant, (2) a pipeline to bring water from the spring directly to the plant, and (3) installation of state-of-the-art bottle-washing and filling equipment. Soon five-gallon plastic bottles replaced the earlier glass bottles. As the company expanded, Crystal Spring joined the International Bottled Water Association for technical assistance, purchased regular beverage delivery trucks, and began to rent water coolers to homes and businesses.

Today Ian Scott and his family live on the Point here among us, in the John Goddard House on Second Street – which they have frequently opened up for the Candlelight Tours during Christmas week – and from which they continue to provide those of us lucky enough to live here with the same crystal pure drinking water first offered to the public a century ago.

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## WATERFRONT IMPROVEMENTS ALONG WASHINGTON STREET

After having previously reported much bad news about the condition of the Elm and Van Zandt piers and the seawall at Battery Park, it is great to be able announce progress in these areas. The wall and sidewalk approach to the Elm Street pier has been attractively repaired, and the pier is now open. The Preservation Society is now making plans to restore the part of the wall and sidewalk behind Hunter House. It collapsed last summer and has been closed since then.

Further along Washington Street, R&E Masonry has continued the repair of the seawall at Battery Park. They have removed some of the bulges along the wall, put in drains where possible, and repointed the loose mortar.

As to the Van Zandt pier, a contract has been awarded to Atlantic Masonry to do the first three stages of the pier reconstruction project. These would include repair-

ing the blocks holding up the pier, replacing the T section at the end of the pier, and repairing the concrete pad on the rest of the pier. It is hoped that additional funding can be secured, either through grants or a reallocation of capital funds, to complete the remaining two stages at the same time. These are to replace the decking and benches and to build a handicapped access along the south side of the pier. Although the contractor has scheduled the work for this construction season, the City is waiting for the completed drawings from the engineering firm, which then have to be approved by CRMC. Because the design is essentially the same as the original pier, the City does not expect any objection from CRMC.

Since the Point waterfront is such a vital part of our neighborhood, it is good to see the City is making sure it is maintained.



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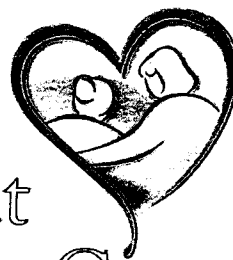
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## DISCOVERING ALICE

by Jane Hence

From broadsides, telegraph and telephone, to radio, television and now the internet, people and their thoughts and deeds have made up the news. Thus it is fitting that a "virtual interview" of our editor, Alice Clemente, finds a place on the pages of a twenty-first century *Green Light*. Here follows our electronic interview.

Q. You are supposed to be retired, I believe. However, you do not appear to be? Is this a surprise, or did you suspect that might be the case?

A. I am officially retired but, in fact, I have an appointment as Adjunct Professor at Brown where my duties are primarily to be Managing Editor of Gávea Brown Publications, an academic press based in the Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies. I am also on the Board of Directors of the Portuguese American Scholarship Foundation, the Cumberland Land Trust and the Blackstone River Watershed Council. The *details* may have surprised me but the big picture - what can I say - "tis the nature of the beast". Being part of a community *is* what it's all about, isn't it?

Q. I think most of those who have met you since you became editor of the *Green Light* know you have been a professor (and are now professor emeritus??). I would like to know a bit more: where? what did you teach?

A. For 32 years I was Professor of Spanish and Portuguese and of Comparative Literature at Smith College and am now Emeritus Professor there. While I occasionally taught Spanish and Portuguese language, the bulk of my work was in literature with a focus on medieval and Golden Age Spanish literature and comparative literature. One of my favorite courses was "Words and Music in Medieval Lyric" which I team-taught with Paul Evans, Professor of Music. We started with the Provençal troubadours, moved on to the "troubadour of the Virgin Mary", Alfonso X of Castile, and from there to the secular love lyric of the Iberian Peninsula, both Galician-Portuguese and Hispano-Arabic. We situated all of the above within the context of its historical moment.

Q. How do you feel about the Point?

A. I have really come to love the Point. As a native Rhode Islander and lifelong visitor to Newport, I've always been attracted by the Point's architecture and often walked the streets looking at the houses, but never did I imagine the quality of life, the warmth, that I have found here. It is so unlike American suburbia in this respect.

Q. I would like to know a bit more about the house on the Point, which has been moved, then moved back and is now nearly finished. What is your story and the story of the house? When will it be finished?

A. The little yellow house on Elm St. belongs to my niece and nephew, Joanne and Michael Dufresne. They began searching for a second home in Newport two years ago, considered a number of options on the Point, but were drawn to this little house in such a sad state of disrepair. Of course, we never suspected the *extent* of that disrepair because, inside, the floors and stairs were good and someone had begun to remodel the second floor. It was only when the asbestos shingles were removed that the powder post beetle damage became visible. Needless to



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say, the experience with "official Newport" has often been harrowing. My role in all of this? Moral support, basically. Joanne and Mike have set aside a room for me to share their home with them, their two little daughters, and Mike's father when he comes up from Florida.

Q. Have you always lived in the Northeast? Where else?

A. Fresh out of Brown, I moved to New York, the West Side (Seinfeld territory), and worked as a translator on Wall Street for a year. Between my MA and PhD, I lived for two years in Lynchburg, VA, and taught at Randolph Macon Woman's College. I spent a year in Spain as director of Smith's Junior Year in Madrid program, and later spent several sabbaticals in Portugal, mainly in Lisbon.

Q. What is your favorite thing to do? Or favorite several things?

A. READ.

Q. In the spirit of the phrase "we are what we eat", I would venture that a far more accurate thought would be: we are what we read. Therefore, I would be pleased to know if you can choose a title or two among what is surely an extensive list of your current favorite books, both fiction and non-fiction.

A. In recent years, my "leisure" reading has turned towards some very depressing books: on Iraq and Afghanistan (e.g., *Fiasco* and *Ghost Wars*), Chalmers Johnson's books on the fragility of our Republic (*The Sorrows of Empire* and *Nemesis*), the latter confirming something that I began to observe 25 years ago as I taught a course on the ideological framework of Imperial Spain. Our Point reading group has provided a welcome antidote, as do mystery stories (my favorite authors: Tony Hillerman, Donna Leon, Robert Parker and, of course, the Brits who have mastered the genre).

Q. How would you describe being the editor of the *GL*? Have you ever edited a small publication before? If yes, how is the *GL* different? Or isn't it?

A. Editing the *Green Light* is different from what I've done before. It is a bit unnerving at times because the whole community has a stake in it, but it is thoroughly enjoyable. I've met so many fine people. Their engagement with the life and history of the community is contagious.

#### A BRIEF NOTE FROM JANE:

Dear Alice, I greatly enjoyed this version of an interview and I hope you did also. One reason for my enthusiasm is that it allowed many unknown and interesting details to emerge which may not have done so were we sitting face to face in a room somewhere having tea. Thank you for letting us explore this format and for being such an intrepid and knowledgeable person and editor. The one thing missing by using this method is a picture to accompany this but I think I am safe in saying that most of us are well aware of your expressive face and energetic self.

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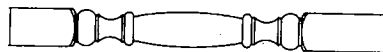
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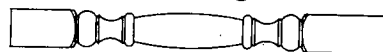
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Photos by Jane Hence



*Lisa Elliott and Roger Devlin, counting up the proceeds from the sale.*



*Marcia Mallory and Isabel Griffith. Clean up almost complete.*



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# MYRA DUVALLY AND THE SECRET GARDEN TOUR

by Mary Jane Rodman

Much has been written over the years about one of the Point's most welcome and festive events – the Secret Garden Tour – but relatively little about the remarkable woman whose vision has so consistently held the key to its success.

Myra Duvally's own love of beauty – as expressed through art and music – was translated some 28 years ago into a project that would enhance programs in the schools on Aquidneck Island in myriad ways. Initially supported by such like-minded friends as James Thompson Douglas, Sally Blackett, Ron Matchley and Mary Rommel, Myra founded the Benefactors of the Arts as a non-profit organization dedicated to providing cultural enrichment to the children of Newport, Middletown and Portsmouth.

After a couple of years' modest fund raising efforts, a visit to the gardens of Boston's Beacon Hill inspired Myra to launch a similar endeavor here – the Point being a convenient and walkable location. Approximately 100 people participated in the first tour, in June, 1984. Average attendance now is 1,600 – mostly represented by the states of RI, MA, CT and NY – and as much as \$35,000 is raised annually.

Together, Myra and the 135-140 volunteers who participate each year have managed to establish a tradition second to none, recently expanding it to include other magical Newport gardens. The fall of 2002 initiated several gardens on the Hill, soon followed by others on Bellevue Avenue and Ocean Drive, attracting as many visitors as June's Point tour and grossing approximately as much money. The success of both tours, according to our dedicated and tireless neighbor, is thanks also in generous measure to the cooperative participation of the Preservation Society of Newport County which extends the use of some of its houses to this effort, notably Hunter House, the Elms and Kingscote.

When I asked Myra how she determined which gardens would be featured each season, she deferred modestly to her associates, reminding me that there are always two

or three "core" gardens (Ilse Nesbitt's, Mary and Doug Riggs' and Hunter House), adding the fact that four new gardens will be introduced this June and a Master Gardener stationed at her home to answer questions. She expressed particular gratitude for the help of Donna Maytum and Al Lowe, whose graphic and marketing talents, respectively, are crucial to the success of each venture.

Because she declined to provide me with information that would segue into the kind of personal accolades she so well deserves, I turned next to one of the Benefactors' major recipients: Loren Palmer, Music Director for Newport's elementary schools – he had absolutely no problem praising Myra to the max! He told me that she has literally never said no to a request for support; and that – in addition to such important contributions as the Yamaha Keyboard Classrooms provided by the Benefactors to most of the schools and the state-of-the-art lighting system for the Rogers High School auditorium – she has established a scholarship program for both private and group lessons via the After-School Piano Workshops. Similarly, working in close conjunction with Charlotte Heineken, she has ensured the rehabilitation of many used instruments gathered via the Jennifer Hudson Fund, thus enabling students of limited means to study and play the instruments of their choice. (Jennifer Hudson was a gifted young flautist who died of a heart condition when she was only thirteen; Charlotte Heineken established this fund in her daughter's memory.)

While we've yet to learn of a Carnegie Hall concert given by an Aquidneck Islander, we certainly have every reason to anticipate that among the many "student-works-in-progress", inspired by Myra's continuing leadership and our community support, such a reality is not only possible but entirely probable.

This year's Secret Garden Tour (#24!) will take place on the Point June 15-17 and the fifth autumn tour, elsewhere in Newport, on September 7-9. Further information may be obtained by calling 847-0514 and by tuning into WADK (AM Radio) on Saturday mornings at 8:00 to hear Ralph Sabetta's Secret Garden Show.

Meet you in the garden!

(continued from page 7)

Dublinite Lorraine Corrigan recalled living in a two bedroom apartment on Pelham Street with six other girls. She worked in a sundress shop and met for the first time a girl from her hometown in Kilkenny. To this day, they remain close friends. "Sunshine and fun would sum up my memories of Newport," she said.

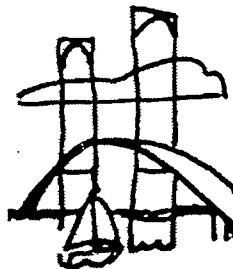
Helen O'Reilly, now studying for her masters in Neuropsychology in London wrote: "the great thing about Newport was the fabulous weather and the warm local hospitality offered to us." She added: "Although we had a lot of trouble with our landlord (not a very pleasant or honest person) there were lots of students staying in the same house and we had fun."

Helen and her roommates were not alone. Often, Newport landlords treated these students shabbily, charging outrageous rents for substandard housing often in violation of the fire code.

"Affordable housing in Newport was probably one of the biggest difficulties for J-I students," Amanda remembered. "We were six girls in a small four room shed (for want of a better word) in the rear garden of our landlord's house on Burnside Ave. He was strange, and we had to argue with him constantly to have things fixed. It was cramped but we made the best of it."

Sadly, 9-11 has changed the pattern of summer work for most Irish students. Today, applicants must undergo family background checks, as well as interviews before qualifying for a U S visa. As a result, most Irish students are bypassing us, and traveling to jobs on the continent, and to Canada and Australia, and Newport is the poorer for it.

It's almost lunch time now, so I'll make myself a tuna sandwich, brew a cup of Barry's tea and wish with all my heart that our young Irish friends were planning to come back to Newport for another summer.



## FIREHOUSE THEATER OFFERS DISCOUNT TO POINT ASSOCIATION MEMBERS

The Firehouse Theater has scheduled another exciting summer season. *Steel Magnolias* runs through June 10<sup>th</sup> and provides a bouquet of comedy and tears with six Southern women who share life's secrets in a small-town beauty parlor. Performances of *Steel Magnolias* are at 8PM on Friday & Saturday nights, 4PM on Sunday. *Breaking Legs* takes a hilarious look at disorganized crime as the mob decides to go legit and produce an original Broadway play. *Breaking Legs* runs from June 28<sup>th</sup> through August 25<sup>th</sup>, Thurs, Fri, Sat nights at 8PM.

Special discount is available to Point Association members. Mention the Point and get \$5 off on up to 5 tickets. Groups of 6 or more can purchase tickets for \$10 each. That's 50% off the regular admission price.

Firehouse Theater is located at 4 Equality Park Place, "Off Broadway". To make reservations and get the discount call 849-FIRE (3473). To check the schedule visit [www.firehousetheater.org](http://www.firehousetheater.org).

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LAZY DAYS OF SUMMER Photo by Helen Byrne



**The Point Association Membership Form**

*Please make check payable to The Point Association and mail with form to PO Box 491, Newport, RI 02840. A subscription to The Green Light is included with all memberships.*

\_\_\_\_ Individual \$10      \_\_\_\_ Family \$15      \_\_\_\_ Subscriber \$25      \_\_\_\_ Patron \$40

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**COMMITTEES AND ACTIVITIES**

Your participation is welcome. Please check the categories for volunteering.

- Beautification     Waterfront     Green Light     Plant Sale     Membership
- Event Planning     History and Archives     Activities for children     Communications

# SAVE THE DATES

SECRET GARDEN TOURS – Friday – Sunday, June 15-17

HARBOR HOUSE STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL – Saturday, June 16, 1-3:00 p.m.

POINT ASSOCIATION PICNIC – Monday, June 25. 6:00 p.m.

Lawn of Peggy & Lyn Comfort, 62 Washington Street

MEMBERS' COCKTAIL PARTY – Thursday, August 16, 6:00 p.m.

Villa Marina, 72 Washington Street

## THE GREEN LIGHT

The Point Association

P.O. Box 491

Newport, RI 02840

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