

The
GREEN

LIGHT

BULLETIN OF THE POINT ASSOCIATION
OF NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

WINTER 2008-2009



The GREEN LIGHT

LIII No. 4 WINTER 2008-09

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STAFF

Editor.....	Alice Clemente
Advertising	Miles Chandler
Business.....	Tom Goldrick
Circulation	Marcia Mallory
Layout.....	Donna Maytum

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OFFICERS

President, Isabel Griffith	849-6444
First Vice-President, Andy Lavarre	339-7189
Second Vice-President, Tom Kennedy	849-8893
Recording Secretary, Matthew Tupper	619-0137
Corresponding Secretary, Peter Tea.....	847-5467
Treasurer, George R. (Jeff) Marshall	847-9979

*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: This issue's cover image is a reproduction of John Howard Benson's drawing of the Dennis House published in the December 1991 issue of the *Green Light*.



As we looked toward the holidays from within the unease caused by our current national, state and local economic crisis, the *Green Light* staff decided to reassure our readers by reviewing two of the major economic crises that have confronted Newporters in the past: the end of the Fall River Line and the S & L debacle. Newporters were unnerved by the unknowable dimensions of those threats as well. But we survived and, with luck, this too shall pass.

The Executive Committee of the Point Association also decided to return the *Green Light* to its roots. The original intent of the *Green Light* in the 1950s was to make public the minutes of the committee's meetings. With this issue, we will take a first step in reviving that practice.

Finally, we all wish you a hopeful and joyful holiday season

Alice Clemente

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

On November 9, the media are still gushing modifiers about a seemingly endless campaign, a National Election. We must be proud that so many of us survived with enough energy and determination to vote, in record numbers. And what of the future? I did not foresee that in my seventieth year I would find myself living in such "interesting times." "Unprecedented" is what we hear most often from economists and historians. I'm not so sure, and I might choose "extraordinary" as the perfect combination of informed wisdom to describe our current circumstances: fully aware of the dire situation in which we find ourselves, but unwilling to give undue weight to our plight in the face of all we have been able to deal with and overcome in this country's history.

Recently, a doctor complimented me when I told him I did not own a television set. "You will live a long life; television is not good for your health." And so, about the future I am optimistic, pessimistic, apprehensive, but mostly intensely curious, and determined to maintain some version of serenity. My advice? Read whenever you can; enjoy the weather whatever it is; count on art and music to sooth your soul; and prepare to be simply amazed!

Shortly before November 4 about seventy-five Pointers received an email from the PA summarizing the Ballot Initiatives for the City of Newport. Response was overwhelmingly positive; apparently, many people love to get information via email. Would you like to join our Point "email/info" list? To opt in please send your email address to shelleykraman@gmail.com using Point Association as the subject. Doing so will mean you get notification of events via email rather than postcard, and you will be on our list to receive other timely information of interest to Pointers. Your email address will remain CONFIDENTIAL at all times.

The Plant Sale returns! There will be a planning/brainstorming meeting for the 2009 Plant Sale in December. To make sure you are notified, contact Isabel Griffith, 849-6444 (just taking messages, NOT running the Plant Sale!).

We need volunteers for the Beautification Committee, Potluck Supper, Cocktail Party, *Green Light*, and we are always eager to welcome those interested in PA Committee work. Come to a meeting of the Executive Committee and learn more!

We have plenty of *Green Light 50th Anniversary* books. They make wonderful gifts! To purchase from the Point Association for \$10, contact Isabel Griffith.



Isabel

THE END OF THE LINE

by Tom Kennedy

The summer of 1937 found Newport regaining some of the traffic and prosperity which had made it prominent as a retreat and resort for the rich and famous and a goal for businessmen and vacationers of all stripes headed for New England prior to the market crash of 1929. Events of the day as reflected on the pages of the *Newport Daily News* during that summer evoke a sense of excitement and a vague anticipation of momentous events to come. Movie idols Harlow and Gable were rumored to be working on a movie together. Amelia Earhart, the daring aviator, had been lost at sea near New Guinea on her flight around the world. Joe Louis was the new World Heavyweight Champion and the object of much adulation and underlying racial tension.

Rookie sensation, Joe DiMaggio, had joined the N.Y. Yankee organization in 1936 and was already garnering comparisons with Ruth because of his power at the plate. At the end of July the America's Cup races would match the American entry, *Ranger*, skippered by Harold S. Vanderbilt, against the British challenger, *Endeavor II*, under the command of Thomas O.M. Sopwith. Balls, dinners and other events connected with the

races were in full preparation. Overseas, the Civil War in Spain was attracting much attention and some American volunteers had joined the International Brigades to fight against Franco's forces and support the republican cause. Hitler and Mussolini were acting and speaking

with ever-increasing belligerence. Japan had invaded China and Stalin's purges were attracting international attention.

The world was edging closer to a sustained period of warfare on many fronts, but Newporters were concentrating on a promising summer season and depending on the massive and elegantly appointed Fall River Line steamers to bring thousands of passengers and tons of cargo from New York City to Newport. For ninety years the Fall River Line had been the most dependable mode of transport between New York and Newport. In addition, the Line's extensive repair shops, located on Long Wharf and Washington Street, had employed thousands of Newporters since their inception in 1879. By the 1930s the repair facility covered more than a million square feet of space in



Aerial view of Long Wharf and Newport Harbor in 1934. The steamer Mount Hope is arriving. Two ferries are berthed at the pier on Goat Island, where the principle landmark is the Torpedo Station. The Fall River steamboat Plymouth and the freight boat Pequonnock lie at Long Wharf.
(Newport Historical Society)

which a power plant, storehouses, repair shops, offices, steamboat docks, a two-story passenger station, rail connections and a vast array of heavy equipment

(Continued on page 21)

WATER OFF, NEWPORT

by Ed Madden

This is a sequel to "Lights Out, Newport" in the Fall issue of the *Green Light*. Scientists throughout the world agree that one of the most critical, pressing issues facing this planet is an adequate water supply for its millions of inhabitants. Some strategists have predicted that the next series of major wars will be fought over water rights – the have-nots rising up against those who control the source and distribution of water for both drinking and irrigation. Oil seems like the big guy on the block right now but it takes a second place compared to the life-sustaining properties of H₂O. Shift from the world stage to the local Aquidneck Island arena. Very few issues respond to the mantra of CONSERVATION as readily as water. Yet very few issues suffer the abuse of humankind that water does.

On a personal level, one of the best moves that I made in recent years was to join the Sierra Club. Their monthly magazine, full of thought provoking articles, roused me from a lethargic stupor in terms of my own use/abuse of water, e.g., running the hot water continuously while shaving, tooth brushing, etc, watering the garden a few hours before a predicted thunderstorm, running the hose continuously rather than intermittently while washing the car/boat/patio, etc. One of the great mindless spectator events is to watch a large formal lawn being watered automatically by preset meter from in-ground piping during a rainstorm!

Adults of a certain maturity – male more than female – have to respond to the call of nature during the night. In my household, this could result in 4 or more flushings of the toilet. Each discharge uses approximately 1.6 gallons of potable water. Seems innocuous enough but if you multiply this by thousands/millions of households, you could fill a small lake in no time. One of the great mnemonics that I learned as a boy scout/camper and relearned as an adult is: "If it's yellow, let it mellow." Seems simple enough to flush once in the morning.

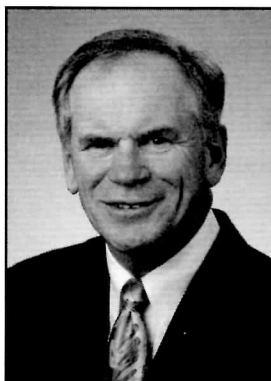
Modern technology and building codes are leading to a not too distant future when household water will be conserved and reused with simple filtration techniques,

e.g., the water from sinks and tubs entering separate plumbing collections to be reborn again watering the garden and cars. Also rain water from roof tops can be drained into rain barrels strategically located around the perimeter of the house to be born again as reusable irrigation in the home and garden.

In my estimation, one of the worst examples of water abuse takes place in the bathroom shower stall. This was brought home to me in spades at my local environmentally dysfunctional health spa. One day on returning to the men's room after a workout, I heard the shower running with occasional low pitched groans and sighing noises emanating from the stall. I stripped down, entered my shower stall, took my usual 3 to 4 minute shower, came out, dried off with my *one towel* [more about towels in the next issue], dressed, combed my hair, packed up and started out the door when I realized the other shower had *never shut off!* The same grunts and groans were heard. There had to have been an elapsed time of at least 15 minutes or more as I left.

I hope that was an atypical, egregious abuse of Mother Nature by a mindless lout but then again I wonder. Does the fact that the water bill doesn't come out of his/her pocket make it ok to get your money's worth? Is this how some people carry on in their own homes?

When I am appointed Energy and Water Czar by the new administration, all showers will automatically shut off after 5 minutes. Nobody is that dirty that they require any more time than that. If the individual insists on his unalienable rights to self indulgence, then the water meter will be turned back on at a rate of \$5.00 per minute. Let's see how they like them apples!



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THE CHRISTMASES OF YESTERYEAR

by Jane Groff Marchi

*"Christmas is coming, the geese are getting fat,
Please to put a penny in the old man's hat."*

Once again the Christmas season approaches and, presumably, we are each, in our separate ways, getting ready to celebrate with friends and family. Christmas is now so identified with this time of year that we seldom stop to think how relatively recent it is as one of our national holidays.

While Christmas has a long history in England, as the fragment of Mother Goose above attests, its celebration has taken almost as many forms as the various countries observing it. It is easy to forget that the original Puritan settlers of New England, in their zeal to reform the established Church of England, not only refused to observe Christmas as a special day in the religious calendar, but went out of their way to outlaw any form of observance. Bolstered by the rise of Puritanism back in England, they succeeded in banning it in Boston – from 1659 to 1681 – at least for a while. But Cromwell did not last in power indefinitely, and the ban was eventually lifted when the monarchy returned to power and supported the complaints of its Anglican adherents in the colony.

Still Christmas remained an optional event, certainly not a holiday, in the century that followed, particularly here in the New World. Though immigration continued, slowly but surely, it did little to alter the official attitude that Christmas was "just another day," despite whatever personal tribute individuals may have paid in private. Washington's famous raid across the Delaware on Christmas Eve of 1776, when his troops captured more than a thousand Hessians, owed much of its success to the latter's lowered guard due to their festivities. So when did this perception regarding Christmas start to change?

There is no question that as diversity entered the body politic, differences and divergences in religious beliefs and practices became known. One reference cites the experience of the Reverend Ezra Stiles, minister of the Second Congregationalist Church in Newport, Rhode

Island. Although an avowed Calvinist and thus indifferent to the idea of celebrating Christmas, he recorded in his diary that he was curious enough to attend German Lutheran Christmas services at the local Moravian Church in both 1769 and 1770. Then, the Baptist Church of Newport made history by observing Christmas for the first time on December 25th, 1772. Initially the Reverend Stiles viewed this departure with apprehension though, by 1782, he could write that he did "cordially joyn with the greater part of christendom this day in celebrating the nativity of a divine savior, altho' I well know from Ecclesiastical History that this is not the true day of his Nativity ..."

This interest and willingness to explore of the Reverend Stiles represents a tendency that would be multiplied many times over in the century to come. Henry Ward Beecher later confessed in his memoirs that, as a boy, he had been fascinated by the practice of a local Episcopal Church that celebrated Christmas by decorating the nave with greens and lighted candles, and singing special Christmas music – all in great contrast to his own Calvinist upbringing. These experiences and opportunities only accelerated as the nineteenth century advanced. In the stories of Sara Orne Jewett, that chronicler of small town New England life, it is apparent that Christmas remained a rather austere celebration, even when officially recognized. However, it became another story in the cities where many different ethnic groups, customs and religious practices were thrown together and could not fail to take note of one another.

The great watershed was the Civil War. So many young soldiers, away from home for the first time and thrust into proximity with those from states and regions far removed from their own, were forced to confront unfamiliar ways of thinking and doing. As both civilian and soldier sought to relieve wartime stress, they idealized home and family, which came to be symbolized in the celebration of Christmas. Even before the war, different regions of the country had been moving in that direction. By 1865, at least thirty-one states and territories had taken it upon themselves to pronounce Christmas a legal holiday. In 1870, Congress finally declared it to be a federal holiday, though primarily in the regulation of fiscal matters.

(Continued on page 19)

Point Association Executive Committee (PAEC) Meeting Minutes –

11/3/08

1 Call to Order

The Point Association Executive Committee (PAEC) meeting convened at 7:00 PM Monday 3 November 2008. Attendees included:

Isabel Griffith	President
Andy Lavarre	1st Vice President
Tom Kennedy	2nd Vice President
Jeff Marshall	Treasurer
Peter Tea	Corresponding Secretary
Mike & Joan Simmons	Beautification Committee
Shelly Kraman	Events Committee
Alice Clemente	Green Light Committee
Hillar Sarapera	Past President, Finance Committee

1 Minutes

The October PAEC meeting minutes were approved.

2 Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer's Report was approved.

3 Committees

3.1 Membership

No report

3.2 Beautification Committee

The fall cleanup took place but participation was low. A discussion ensued regarding the purpose of the cleanup. It should be to do things the city will not, including plantings and trash removal. Having it immediately after the fall membership meeting may tax "disposable time", so the committee will consider moving it to another date and avoid conflict with other community events.

3.3 Membership Committee

No report.

3.4 History and Archives Committee

No report.

3.5 City Council Committee

There was a brief overview of election issues, in particular the city charter proposals. It was noted that the vote is simply one of whether or not to change the charter to reflect current practices, not a vote on the actual practices themselves.

3.6 Green Light Committee

Deadline for the next issue is this week. Concern was expressed regarding the Newport Historical Society (NHS) charging \$45 per picture. The consensus was that while in general a cooperative relationship with the NHS is preferred we should pursue some kind of agreement limiting the costs.

The next issue shall contain several articles on prior times of financial difficulty in the city. Additional sources are needed to finish some of the articles.

3.7 Events

In general there has been a marked decrease in membership participation on committees and in activities. The Committee agreed to start publishing the PAEC meeting minutes in the *Green Light*. Peter Tea agreed to write an article appealing for more participation. The following are some high priority needs:

(Continued on page 9)

THE S & L FLASCO: THE CRISIS OF THE 90s

by Alice Clemente and Isabel Griffith

Having weathered the demise of the Fall River Line and the departure of the Fleet, Newport was hit with an economic blow once again in the 1990s: the collapse of the Savings and Loan institutions (S & L). The S & L collapse was a national phenomenon that hit RI particularly hard. Enabled by the 1981 St. Germaine-Garn bill that passed in the U. S. Congress and deregulated those institutions, the crisis ran its natural course. Early on, deregulation brought with it a real estate boom but property values began to decline by the end of the decade. This, combined with an incipient recession and the closing of the RI banks due to corruption and lax regulation, came with a high cost to taxpayers and to the many businesses and individuals who experienced severe revenue loss due to inaccessible capital.

In true RI style, the catalyst for the debacle was the work of an individual, bank president Joseph Mollicone, Jr. His embezzlement of \$13 million from his own Heritage Loan and Investment Company drained the funds of private bank insurer Rhode Island Share and Deposit Insurance Corporation (RISDIC). RISDIC's collapse in turn left 44 banks, savings and loans, and credit unions without insurance and, under state law, unable to operate. Mollicone fled RI but surrendered 17 months later to stand trial and conviction for his misdeeds which included ties to organized crime and to the Colombian drug cartel. All of this was discovered when an investigation ordered by then-Governor Edward DiPrete uncovered numerous irregularities and determined that

RISDIC had not audited the bank in three years, though supposedly required to do so every 15 months. The trial also revealed questionable withdrawals from the bank just before the collapse.

The collapse of bank insurance was the first problem to greet Governor Bruce Sundlun when he took office on January 1, 1991. He immediately ordered the close of RISDIC insured banks (among them some of the largest banks in the state) until such time as they could obtain federal insurance. \$1.7 billion in deposits in those banks were frozen but Sundlun also called for and secured legislation that created the Depositors Economic Protection Corporation (DEPCO) to restore funds to depositors as soon as possible. All of this took time, however, and in the interim much hardship ensued. Among the banks hardest hit was the Marquette Credit Union in Woonsocket in which more than half of the city's 48,000 residents had deposits. In a city with an 11% unemployment rate, the consequences were devastating. Throughout the state, bankruptcy filings increased 62% in a year – the “trickle-down effect” of the credit union crisis.

Newport did not escape the effects of bank closure entirely but it was not impacted as greatly as communities like Woonsocket that relied heavily on credit unions for their banking needs. Real estate prices fell and many houses on the Point sold for less than their mortgages. Speculative development on the Point and elsewhere was curtailed (some might say, happily). The proposed Steamship Landing and a proposed Thames Science Center failed to materialize; the shipyard went into bankruptcy. Transfer of funds between banks for ongoing projects was interrupted but only temporarily.

The happy ending to this story is that in time most de-

(Continued on page 17)



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- Completion of the sales campaign for the *Green Light* 50th Anniversary book
- Planning and executing a holiday party
- Planning and conducting the Potluck Dinner
- Fostering larger turnout for the fall and spring cleanups
- Planning and conducting a winter music series

The appeal article should ask what types of events the membership might want.

Event notification methods were discussed. Shelley has an email list of approximately 40 people to whom she can quickly forward event announcements. But the membership is around 300 so some other method is required. Posting on the website concurrent with an RSS feed to broadcast the posting is a possibility.

3.8 ByLaws Committee

Hillar passed out a copy of the existing bylaws. Andy agreed to convert to text (attached). PAEC members are asked to review the existing bylaws and suggest possible revisions

4 Continuing Business

None

5 New Business

Hillar Sarapera and Matthew Tupper were appointed from the Executive Committee to the Nominating Committee.

Submitted: C. A. Lavarre, 1st Vice President

FEED A FRIEND

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center's *Feed a Friend* often makes all the difference for those vulnerable members of our community whose resources are severely strained. In November the Center's *Feed a Friend* food pantry, which is the highest volume food pantry in Newport County, provided groceries to 92 distinct households. This unduplicated number includes senior citizens and families with children. The Center provided Thanksgiving baskets to 131 households and will also provide Christmas baskets to 152 households.

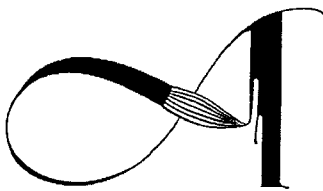
Donations are accepted Monday through Friday from 10am until 4pm. Needed items are canned meats, soups, fruits, and vegetables; spaghetti sauces, peanut butter and jelly, bottled juices, cold and hot breakfast cereals, pasta, dry and canned beans, and evaporated or powdered milk. We also accept turkeys for the Christmas baskets, fresh vegetables and fresh bread.

In 2007 the Center provided nearly 70,000 meals to families in need. Your donation to us makes a difference in our community!

NOTE: Consider developing a new habit for the coming year, once each quarter or even once a month fill up a bag or two with buy-one-get-one-free items or even raid your own cupboard and drop it by the Center.

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GIANT "SLOTS" SIGN: AN AFFRONT TO THE CITY'S IMAGE

by Ed Madden

On October 7, 2008, the *Newport Daily News* published my letter to the editor concerning the new sign that now crowns Newport Grand. I now submit it to the *Green Light* with a final thought.

"Britain considered India to be the "jewel in the crown" during the 19th and 20th centuries. I think a majority of the visitors who come to Newport think the same way about our lovely city. Having been in the bed-and-breakfast business for nineteen years, I certainly have developed a feel for the tastes of our guests, especially those from overseas. The world's sailing fraternities, it seems, have to make a pilgrimage to Newport sometime in their lifetimes.

Besides our wonderful marine history, sailing opportunities and coastlines, our guests are aware of the Preservation Society of Newport County and its stately mansions, the one-of-a-kind Cliff Walk, our tennis heritage and museum, our artistic and architectural history and much more. We have much to be proud of and thankful for: In their great wisdom, our forefathers set in place mechanisms to protect and preserve our heritage. We don't want to be another Las Vegas or Coney Island.

I recently was returning to Newport from Jamestown in the evening over the lovely Pell Bridge. This is an inspiring entrance to Newport, with the bridge's necklace of lights offering a warm welcome to visitors and natives alike. The harbor and city lights on the right and the illuminated naval base on the left added to the ambience.

Then I saw it. North by northeast from the Newport exit was, at first glance, a hodgepodge of colored light which quickly metamorphosed into a gigantic sign: SLOTS.

What is going on here? Where are Newport's watchdogs and protectors? Isn't anybody concerned about crass commercialism in our city? Could the next step

possibly be to convert the Newport Grand parking lot into a NASCAR track? So much for the development and beautification of the north end.

I'm afraid the jewel in the crown has a great big crack on its surface.

Shame on you, Newport"

My final thought: I think SLOTS has got to be one of the ugliest sounding words in the English language. It certainly conjures up none of the beauty and romance that one associates with the city of Newport and requires only a small vowel change to conjure up an image that is anything but beautiful or romantic. Does anyone know a patriot with a high powered rifle?



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DEBUNKING OLD HOUSE MYTHS

Lisa Dady, Newport Restoration Foundation

People trust museums to provide truthful information about history. Thus it is vital that professionals in museums and similar institutions remain vigilant about the public's misconceptions about the past. For this column, I will address three common myths associated with old houses.

Myth 1: "They were shorter back then"

Many people who enter historic house museums see the low ceiling height and period beds and exclaim "they must have been shorter back then." Evidence tells us that Americans of the last few centuries were not significantly shorter on average (gaining at most $\frac{1}{4}$ inch over the last 300 years.) How do we know this? By examining records of soldiers' height in the Revolution and of sailors on merchant ships, records between tailors and their clients, runaway slave ads, and coffin-makers' records. Beds appear short in historic houses, causing people to conclude that their occupants were also short. But curators at Winterthur and Colonial Williamsburg measured every bed in their collections only to find that some period beds were longer and some shorter than ours today. Ceiling heights are lower in early homes because wood was expensive. Larger spaces required more timber to build and more wood to heat. Given today's heating prices, I think we can relate to that.

Myth 2: Windows and closets were taxed in the colonial period

Though glass was relatively costly in the 18th century, the number and size of windows in the old homes of Newport have more to do with fashion and function than with the need to hide one's wealth from the tax collector (or to flaunt one's wealth to the neighbors). The origins of this myth probably come from the fact that there was a window tax in England in the 1700s, but no evidence exists of similar taxes here. The 1798 *property* tax in the U.S. did take into consideration the number of windows along with lot size, number of enslaved people in the household, and other considerations, but this lasted for just one year. As for clothes closets,

they simply weren't needed. People had fewer clothes than we do now and their wardrobes were adequately stored in chests and on pegs. Perhaps these myths persist because taxes are a part of our current reality and we enjoy comparing the "then-and-now" of the government's role in family economics.

Myth 3: The leading cause of death for women was catching on fire from the hearth

Since colonial towns kept death records, this is a fairly easy one to debunk. Historians have determined that the leading cause of death among women was disease. Though a few women did die of having been burned at the hearth, complications from childbirth, for example, was a much greater concern. Women knew their way around their own hearths. Perhaps the myth persists because the drama of a lady on fire is so compelling and the large hearths of Newport's historic houses seem so daunting. This story fills an important need for us – thinking about how hard or dangerous life was "back then" allows us to appreciate the comforts we enjoy today.

Is it a travesty if most Americans retain these misapprehensions about aspects of colonial life? No, but to let them go unchallenged is to miss the opportunity to help people hone their logic skills. Most of these myths persist because of common mistakes in historical reasoning. Moreover, then-and-now comparisons are one way in which the study of history is eminently useful for our own lives. Indeed, this is why getting our historical facts straight is so important, because we use them to inform the present and, hopefully, to guide our future.

A GIFT IDEA!

*Our fiftieth anniversary book
is now available
at the following places:*



*Island Books
Only Rhode Island – Long Wharf
Newport Historical Society Shop –
Brick Market
Preservation Society's Mansions
and Museum Store
Redwood Library
Bucci's*

A FEW POINT CATBOATS

by Jane MacLeod Walsh

I've often been asked by newcomers to Newport and New England, "Just what is a catboat?" In general terms, it's a very beamy (i.e. wide) gaff-rigged sloop, usually with a centerboard (but keel versions did exist), with a single large sail (no jib), and a mast stepped way forward in the bow. The small Beetle cat that became so prevalent from the 1940s on was a later, more widely-known example of a cat rig, but in Point parlance, a catboat was one of the big heavy 19th century sailboats, most often built here in Newport, that many of us who lived on and around Washington Street owned and sailed during the heyday of wooden boats.

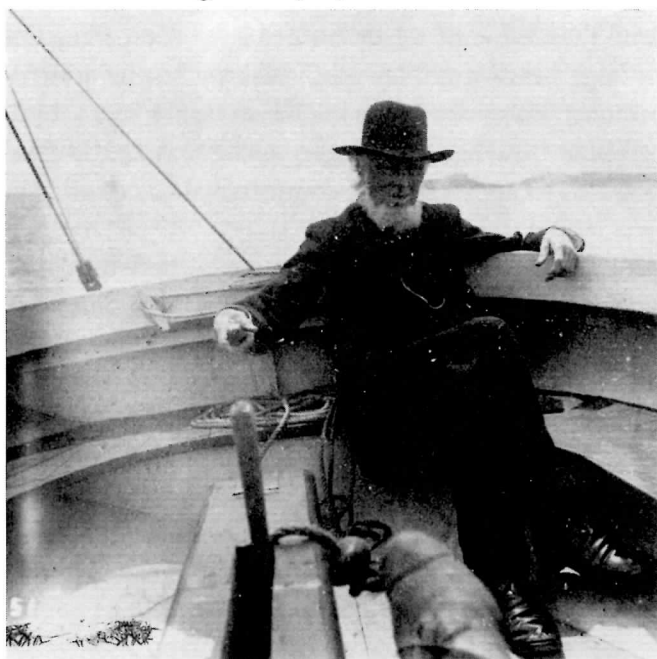


FIGURE 1

The earliest photograph I found (fig.1), kindness of Anne Ramsey Cuvelier and the Covell collection, of a Newport cat was taken in 1885 by William Walton Covell of his grandfather, the first William King Covell (1802-1890), sitting in a catboat which he built in his boatbuilding shop on Long Wharf. The centerboard box is visible in the foreground, and the wooden seats and high coaming are typical of Newport cats. Note the elegant sailing attire!

The next photograph (fig. 2), from the collection of the Seamen's Church Institute of Newport, obviously taken long before the 1938 hurricane, shows a typical early view looking out to Goat Island and the Green



FIGURE 2

Light (nearly obscured by its lighthouse) from the Willow Street driftway, with 3 different catboats at anchor. Fud Benson identified the closest dark-hulled one as a Button Swan cat. Button Swan was also a Long Wharf boat builder, and built the original *Kingfisher* cat for Benjamin Smith of 64 Washington Street in 1872.

For anyone who wants to delve into the history of catboats in Newport, I highly recommend reading *The Catboat Era in Newport, Rhode Island*, by the late John M. Leavens, who was a co-founder of The Catboat Association in 1962. The book was edited by Judith Navas Lund, copyright 2005 by The Catboat Association. In it, among other things, he speaks to the claim that the distinctly American catboat may have originated on the Point in Newport. He does concede that "the Newport catboat deserves to be considered as a true prototype of catboats every-where." (op. cit. p.4)

A more recent picture of the Willow Street driftway (fig. 3), but still taken sometime before the 1938 hurricane,



FIGURE 3

judging from the intact piers to the south - No. P-33 from the Wilfred E. Warren Collection at the Seamen's Church Institute of Newport - shows a typical winter view of a catboat hull, minus her spars and sail, drawn up on the brow for winter storage. We think the cat may be *Althea*, which was owned by a diver at the Torpedo Station. Her hull is typical, but the makeshift bowsprit is not.

We usually kept our old Newport cat, the *Jack Rose*, on the Willow Street driftway for the winter as well. We had always heard that she was one of three "Rose" cats that were built on Long Wharf around 1890, the *Rose*, the *Primrose*, and the *Jack Rose*, but I discovered in John Leavens' book that there were four "Rose" cats, including *Wild Rose*, and that they were said to have been built by George and Harold Barker on Long Wharf (ibid. p.76 and p.128) I was unable to unearth a printable picture of the *Jack Rose*, but there are two very good photos of her in Leavens' book, one by Harold Arnold and one by Ralph Arnold. She was a classic Newport cat, and a wonderful boat for learning to sail. Although she had a bit of a weather helm, there was only one sail to handle, and because catboats are so beamy, they're practically impossible to capsize, a fact that always reassured us as kids.

At boat launching time in the spring (usually around Memorial Day), both the Willow Street and Poplar Street driftways were hives of activity. All the old salts, boat owners and boat lovers would congregate whenever the word went out that one boat or another was due to be re-launched for the season. Everybody pitched in and helped each other. Often several boats were launched at the same time, once all the manpower and equipment was assembled. This photograph from Fud Benson's archives (fig. 4) shows just such a scene on the Poplar Street



FIGURE 4

driftway, taken sometime between 1936 when his father, John Howard Benson, bought the *Penguin*, and 1954, her last summer on the Point. In the center at the foot of the driftway and partially in the water already, sits *Penguin*, (formerly *Hattie*) said to be one of the last of the old catboats built at Long Wharf by T.D. Stoddard. The tall figure in suit and cap is John Howard Benson. The boat to the left is the *Ethelyn*, which belonged to William King Covell (great-grandson of William King Covell I, boat builder, mentioned and pictured above).

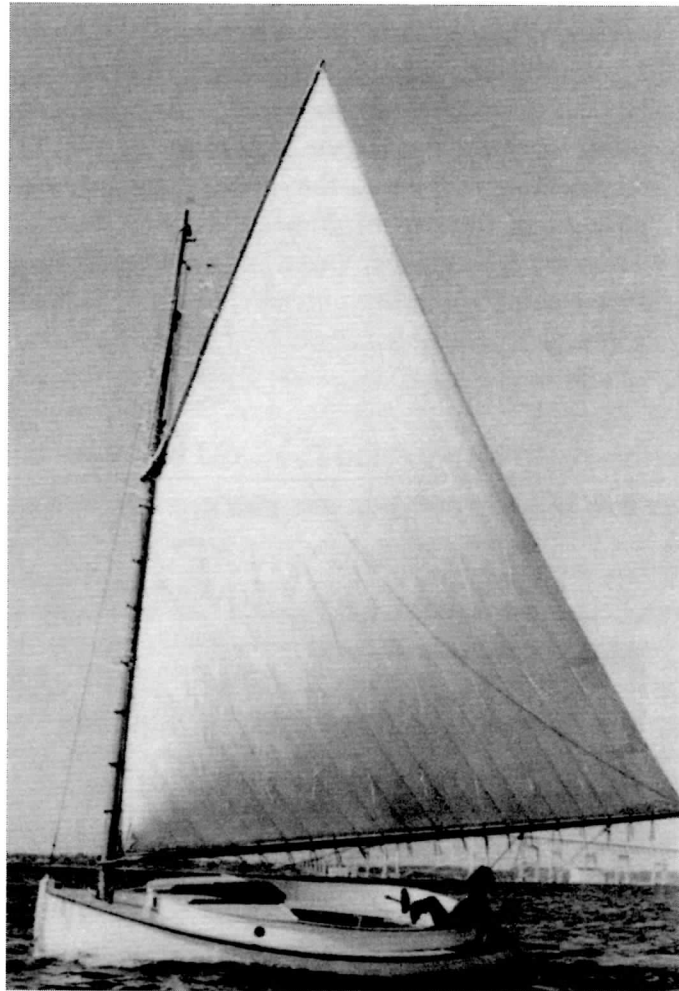


FIGURE 5

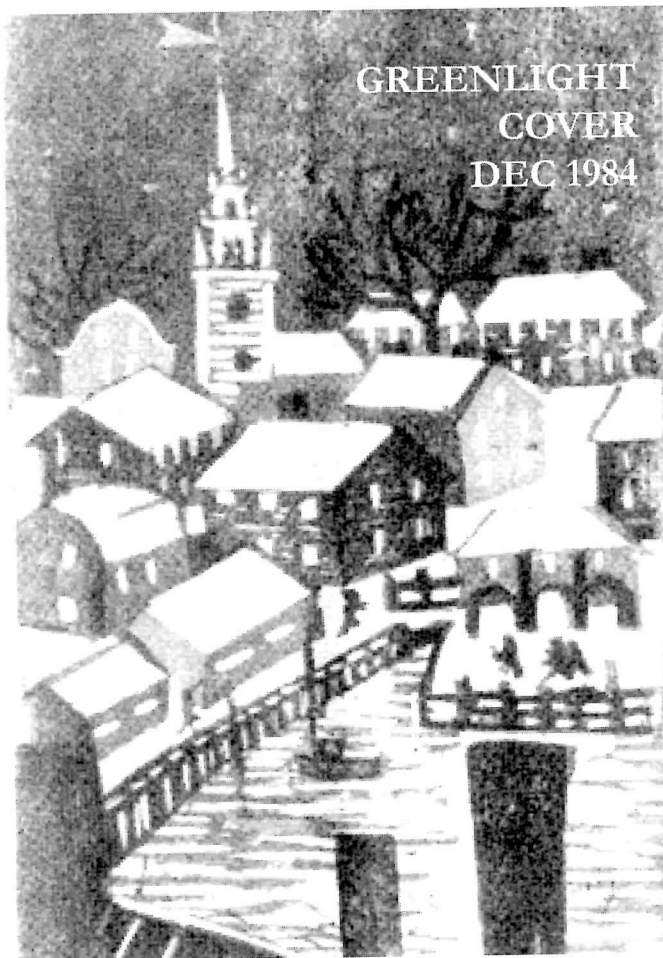
I love this picture of Fud Benson sailing his Newport catboat, *Kingfisher II* in 1969 (fig. 5). She was built in 1895 by the Barkers for Fud's grandfather, Edward W. Smith, but he later sold her to Lars Larsen, who made several changes to the boat, including moving the mast farther aft. As a result, her point of resistance was changed, according to Fud, so that she always wanted to turn up into the wind. Hence we see Fud's typical

(Continued on page 18)

GET IN LINE TO HELP US GET ON-LINE

by Peter Tea

In order to better communicate with our members, the Point Association has created a basic website, www.thepointassociation.org. We are looking forward to enhancing this site with a calendar of events, recent photos, back issues of the *Green Light*, and other valuable information of benefit to all. But in order to do so we need your help. So please consider joining the web team. Be part of this exciting move into the internet era and help strengthen the organization. Training will be provided. Please contact Jack Maytum at admin@thepointassociation.org to join the team.



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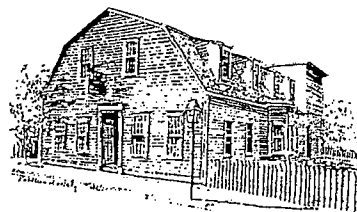
by Alice Clemente

On June 13, 2007, an environmental initiative was launched by Point Councilman Charlie Duncan: the Newport Goes Green Task Force constituted on that day by a resolution of the Newport City Council. After some six months of deliberations, in February of 2008 the task force issued an 8-page report: "Recommendations for Energy Savings and Environmental Responsibility for the City of Newport". One of these recommendations was the formation of an Energy and Environment Commission. That committee was duly constituted and, at its first meeting, the members of the Newport Energy and Environment Commission were introduced: Jane Dyer, Beth Milham, Al Lowe, Kara DiCamillo, Anne Colella, Cathy Coyne, SSJ, and Marty Grimes. The Commission meets regularly on the fourth Thursday of each month, at 7 p.m., at the Newport Public Library. The meetings are open to the public and information on the agenda is available on the Library's website.

In an article entitled "Newport Goes Green" that she submitted to the Natural News Network (www.naturalnews.net), Susan Genett reported:

"I asked Charlie Duncan what inspired him to launch the Newport Goes Green task force, which had started the ball rolling in the city. He said, 'My generation is not leaving you and today's children with as pristine an environment as I once knew. I first noticed a negative effect when visiting the Adirondack Mountains many years ago. I was a tow captain on the Ohio River, watching smoke plumes from coal operations bend over in stiff West winds (flowing Eastward), and observing crystal-clear Adirondack streams with nothing living in 'em. That's when I realized the impact from pollution.'"

Happily for the city of Newport, he then did something about it.



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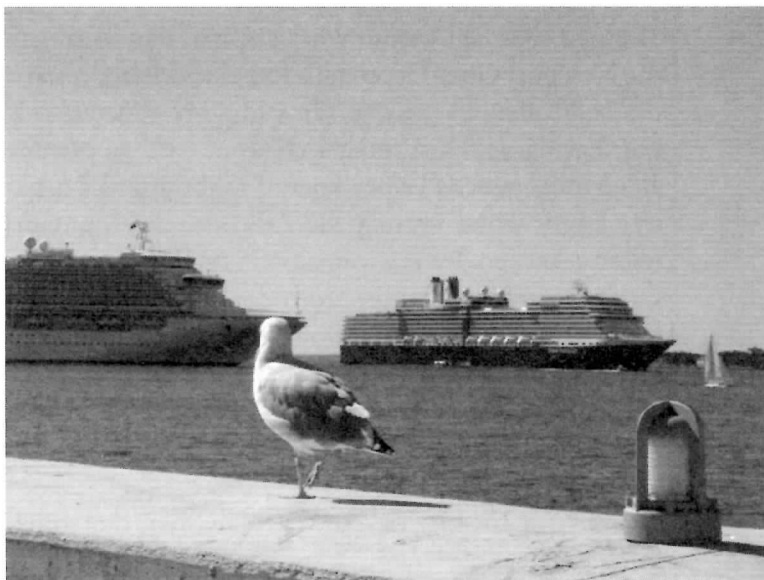


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(Continued from page 8)

positors got their money back. By the late 1990s, the devastated housing market began to turn around and the state's economy – with diminished unemployment – recovered significantly. Rhode Islanders and Newporters settled into an apparent prosperity – a sense of well-being that would inevitably be shattered by the next crisis, the one that we are facing now in 2008. The parallels between the two crises are notable, though their causes are very different. Given the ultimately felicitous outcome of the earlier one, we have reason to hope.

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HOW DO THEY DO IT?

by Peter Tea

The Point Association runs many events each and every year. Pot luck supper, general members meeting, summer cocktail party, new members party, spring and fall park clean up, planting and maintaining many flower pots in public spaces, not to mention the plant sale. Add to that sales/distribution of the 50th anniversary book, oh and let's not forget the process of publishing the *Green Light*. With over 300 members this must be easy, correct? Well, not exactly; you see all of these activities that are enjoyed by so many people in the neighborhood are coordinated by only a few dedicated people year after year. Yes, occasionally we get a new volunteer, but it seems like each year we get less. Please think about these events that you enjoy and consider volunteering for one. How do they do it? They do it with your help!

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- Beautification
- Assisting with event planning/set up
- Selling the 50th anniversary book.

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(Continued from page 13)

sailing position, sitting on the leeward side of the boat and pushing the tiller with his foot to keep her sailing off the wind. Note the three rows of reef points, necessary because she was so overcanvased. Fud took possession of *Kingfisher* in 1968 and sailed her off the Point until 1975, when she was donated to Mystic Seaport.



FIGURE 6

The final picture I include is a view of *Virginia* (fig. 6), from astern, taken in 1930, with Harold Arnold at the helm. (Seamen's Church Institute Collection, P-46) Although *Virginia* may not have been a Newport-built cat, Harold Arnold, who lived on Poplar Street, sailed her off the Point for many years, and she was a familiar catboat in our harbor. I like this picture because you can see how beamy a catboat is, and how long the boom has to be to support such a big sail. It displays the rigging very well too, showing clearly the wooden hoops that kept the sail attached to the mast, and how the gaff was supported with lines and pulleys. There's an extra bonus in the background. If you have very good eyes (or a magnifying glass) you can make out the roof of the Gull Rock lighthouse building (now gone) just above the end of the boom.

The author wishes to thank Jack Grant of the Seamen's Church Institute, Fud Benson and Anne Cuvelier for the use of their great catboat pictures.

NEW FOSTER CARE PROGRAM

by Denise DiGangi

Child and Family's newly formed Foster Care Program is seeking to provide temporary homes for RI children ages 6-18 who have been removed from their homes. Many of the children we currently care for (in 10 group homes throughout Newport and Middletown) are eligible for foster care. These children need families to provide support, nurturance and guidance while they are separated from their families.

Foster parents receive intensive support including pre-service and ongoing training, in-home visits, service coordination, advocacy and a daily stipend to help cover their foster child's living expenses.

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(Continued from page 6)

The post Civil War period ushered in an explosion of expansion: geographic, industrial, and financial. The increase in new states, new inventions, and new ethnic groups (with their languages and customs), as well as the advent of mass media (newspapers, magazines, a widespread postal service), rise of department stores and other attributes of a broader and increasingly homogenized society all helped to introduce and establish many of the Christmas customs that we now take for granted. Each of our ethnic groups made its own Christmas contribution to the holiday practices that we know today, but mass media publicized them to all segments of society while industry and commerce combined to enable everyone who wished to adopt them. Thus it was in the so-called Gilded Age, the years from 1870 to the First World War, that Americans found themselves exposed to that vast cornucopia of symbols and practices that have come to represent this nation's idea of the elements desired, if not needed, to celebrate Christmas: lights, trees, decorations, Santa Claus, wreaths, greeting cards, carol singing, a multiplicity of gift-giving and charitable giving, public and communal as well as personal and private.

All of this was manifest even in my own family. My father, born (in 1898) and raised on the Point, reported that his family viewed the holiday primarily as a religious occasion, with modestly festive overtones. While there was no Christmas tree, there was carol singing and a Christmas "feast," memorable for such unusual treats as oranges and bananas, then as now not native to this region. The children received small gifts, though most had a practical application (new underwear?). Nor did he feel deprived, which suggests that this was not unusual. However, his eyes were considerably opened when he married my mother, a city girl born and raised in Manhattan who grew up assuming that Christmas would include not only a "huge" tree (i.e. to the ceiling), lighted by real candles (with a bucket of sand prudently nearby), but also Christmas stockings, toys and books as gifts, supplemented by boxes of candies, nuts and candied fruits.

Thus my own childhood Christmases, despite the Depression, benefited mightily from my mother's upbringing. Decorating the house and the Christmas tree were

exciting events, as was hanging up stockings on Christmas Eve and never failing to leave Santa Claus his ration of milk and cookies. While my mother claimed that, in her childhood, the Christmas "season" began about December 15th, by my childhood, it had already advanced to the day after Thanksgiving. Only with the beginning of the Christmas season did we begin to hear, or to sing in church or Sunday school, the carols held so dear – and never, as now, before Thanksgiving! Anticipation was a seductive part of the season – acquiring (or making) a wreath for the front door, seeking out last year's ornaments for the tree (if not making new ones). Last but not least was another practice, now fallen on hard times since the advent of the computer and the rise in postage, of sending and receiving Christmas cards, by which greetings of the season could be extended far and wide.

When we look back upon the early days of the Point Association, we see that many of these private rituals or practices assumed a public face as a way of uniting the neighborhood in a communal celebration. The *Green Light* reported that, back in the 1960s, the Association planted a Christmas tree "near Grafton House and the Rectory" (does anyone know its exact location?). The lighting of the tree (courtesy of local electrician Harry

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(Continued from page 19)


Groff & Company) provided the occasion for neighbors to come together to open the season by singing carols, followed by cocoa and cookies in St. John's Parish Hall. This was so popular that the *Green Light* reported that "over one hundred people of all ages" assembled for the carol sing in December 1971. The following year caroling had to be held inside the hall because "it was too cold outside"; while in 1973 they opted not to light the tree at all due to the energy crisis.

Under such rubrics as "Twilight on the Point," "Christmas on the Point," and, latterly, even "Christmas in Newport on the Point," the Point Association also encouraged such local beautification efforts as sponsoring a Christmas house decorating contest and suggesting that Pointers place white candles (presumably electric) in their windows. Another community effort was sponsoring a Christmas pageant or play ("The Feast of St. Stephen" was featured for several years), with adults making the sets and scenery and providing the props while children played the various roles. While performances were initially held in St. John's Parish Hall, in later years they were moved to St. Paul's Methodist Church on Marlborough Street.

This, of course, was the generation of the "baby boomers" and their parents, energetically engaged in recreating a sense of community that had been interrupted by the war and for which there was so much nostalgia. However time took its toll as members of this founding generation grew older, often moving away, so that the earlier child-friendly forms of celebration gave way to more adult-friendly activities, such as an open-to-the-neighborhood "Holly Tea," which again used St. John's Parish Hall as a venue, served by hosts and hostesses in colonial dress, as well as the post-Christmas "Candlelight House Tour," which is still with us.

So there has never been just one way of celebrating Christmas nor has it always been the ubiquitous holiday season that we know today. Change has been a consistent theme throughout the years. However, as we look forward to this Christmas season, the desire to keep Christmas in our hearts will undoubtedly remain and even inspire new modes of observance and celebration in the future.

Sources for this article were Penne L. Restad, Christmas in America, Oxford University Press, 1995, and the Green Light archives.




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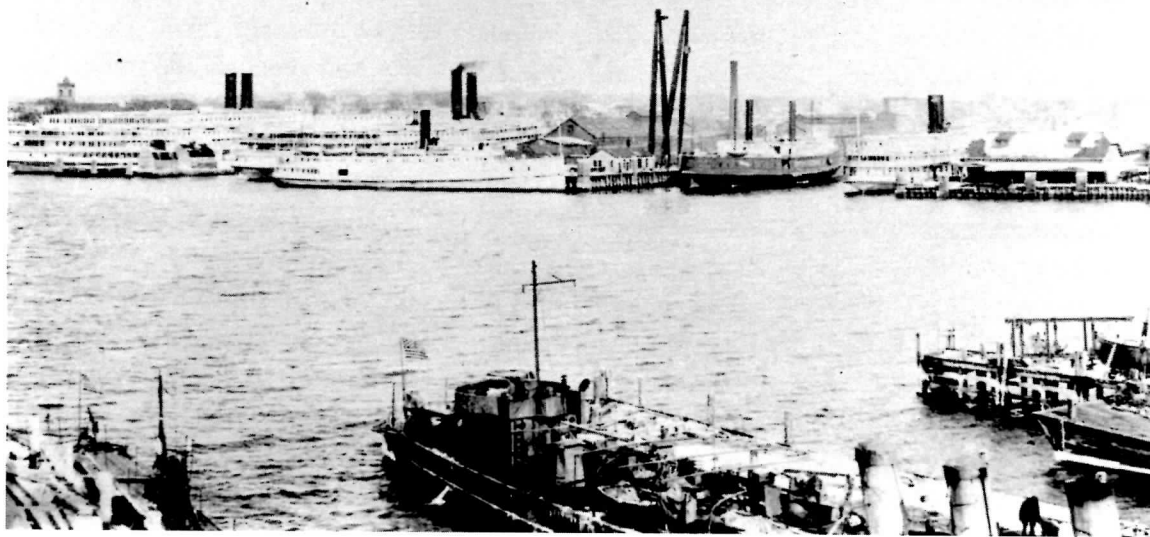
were located. The New England Steamship Company shops employed hundreds of Newporters, who could walk to work from the Point or the center of the city. Men and women who worked in the N.E.S.S.Co. repair shops did everything necessary to keep the Fall River Line supplied with well-designed and well-maintained steamboats. They even built most of the Line's freight-

ers, whose hulls were towed from Maine or Pennsylvania and finished in Newport.

Boilermakers and blacksmiths installed, replaced and maintained the boilers on board. Machinists made replacements for every part of the engine. Carpenters built and repaired the wooden superstructures of the boats, and joiners fitted out the elaborately carved and decorated interiors. Painters painted the boats at least once a year fore and aft, inside and out. Other carpenters and upholsterers worked together with the joiners to keep the furniture and floors in the best of repair...

All of the supplies used on board the boats, with the exception of food, water and fuel, were kept in storerooms on the wharf, and the storekeepers were logistical experts of the first order, keeping more than a thousand people a night supplied with linen, washcloths and dishes. There were draftsmen who helped work out the design ideas of [the Supervisor of Marine Construction]. And, finally, the office staff supplied administrative support for the entire operation. (*Newport History*, 182)

The sudden end of the Fall River Line began with an innocuous sit-down strike by crewmembers of the Line's



Steamboats in Newport Harbor during the 1920s.

The view is from Goat Island. (Newport Historical Society)

flagship, the *Commonwealth*, in New York on the 30th of June 1937. The nine hundred disgruntled passengers who had boarded the *Commonwealth* had to be hustled into special trains to continue their journey to New England. The *Commonwealth* finally sailed from New York about the time it was due in Newport. Intermittent strikes continued during the next few days leaving tons of cargo piled up and many irate passengers stranded at the dock. Six days later the New York, New Haven and Hartford railroad, the parent company of the Fall River Line, which had already filed for bankruptcy in 1935, suspended all sailings on the Line. There were protests. People were upset and appalled, but the giant ships, the largest of which was 460 feet in length and was licensed to transport 2,000 passengers and 600 tons of cargo, were never to sail again. These "floating palaces" which had hosted presidents, Vanderbilts, Astors, Belmonts, Rockefellers and millions of ordinary passengers were to be sold for a mere pittance and scrapped. The prospect of these elegant ships ending their days in such ignominy was almost incomprehensible. The emotional impact of the demise of the Fall River Line on Newporters was palpable. "The town was heartbroken." (Warburton, 83)

(Continued on page 22)

(Continued from page 21)

Newport's mayor and city council worried about possible "isolation." They joined with forces from New Bedford and Fall River to contest the shutting down of the Line. They demanded increased ferry, bus and rail service and searched for an entrepreneur who would invest in a new steamship enterprise. America's Cup visitors, who had been promised two of the largest vessels, the *Priscilla* and the *Commonwealth*, from which to view the races, had to scramble for other venues. In Court, the facts were laid out for all to see. The Fall River Line had been losing money since 1930, and the losses had increased from \$18,000 in 1930 to \$522,000 in 1936. In addition, the ships, though seaworthy and opulent, were old and would soon need replacing, which would cost millions. In fact, the labor problems merely ended service early. The Line probably would have been terminated at the end of the summer season in any event, since there was little prospect of improvement in the company's financial condition.

There were many reasons for the Fall River Line's demise, including the effects of the Great Depression. But competition from cheaper railroad and bus lines, and an increase in the number of trucking companies and in the use of automobiles played a significant role. In addition, the decline of the mills in Fall River hurt the freight business, which had thrived on bringing raw material up from the south and finished cloth products to New York for distribution. The Long Wharf area, where the docks and repair shops were located, was closed down swiftly. By October 15th only three employees remained. The N.Y., N.H. & H. railroad had leased most of the property until 1992, and despite efforts by the city, the company would not give up its lease. This enormous facility lay abandoned until the Navy took it over in 1941 because of a worsening international situation.

Oddly, the closing of the repair shops and the discontinuance of the steamers did not have the devastating effect on the economy and employment situation in Newport that one would have expected. Of the many people thrown out of work by the closing of the repair shops, some old-timers were pensioned by the railroad, some moved away to other New England shipyards, and some went to work on the federal projects like

WPA. A number of skilled machinists, however, went straight to work at the Naval Torpedo Station [on Goat Island] which had been expanded since 1933. Through the Depression the station was one of the town's bulwarks against economic collapse. For almost a decade it had operated on a single shift at employment levels of just under 1,000 workers. After a lean year early in the Depression, when salaries were cut and the work week was reduced, the station began to build up again. In 1933, the nadir of the Depression, 70 new workers were hired. As the station was expanded over \$4 million in new federally ordered construction in 1935 gave a tremendous boost to local builders. By 1936 there were 3,000 employees on station, working three shifts. Another \$2 million expansion occurred in 1938, "streamlining" production methods with \$500,000 in new machinery and, by 1939, in expectation of involvement in the overseas conflict, the station had reached its maximum of 3,800 full time workers. (Warburton, 85)

Ironically, the infamous hurricane of 1938 also increased employment roles in Newport. It caused a good deal of damage in and around the city, which was in the process of preparing to celebrate its 300th birthday in 1939. The WPA stepped in and gave hordes of workers jobs repairing the damaged city and sprucing it up in preparation for the celebration. Ultimately, the War effort and the build up of military facilities would keep many Newporters employed for years to come, until the transition to a peacetime economy and the gradual evolution of Newport and the Long Wharf area into what we see today.

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