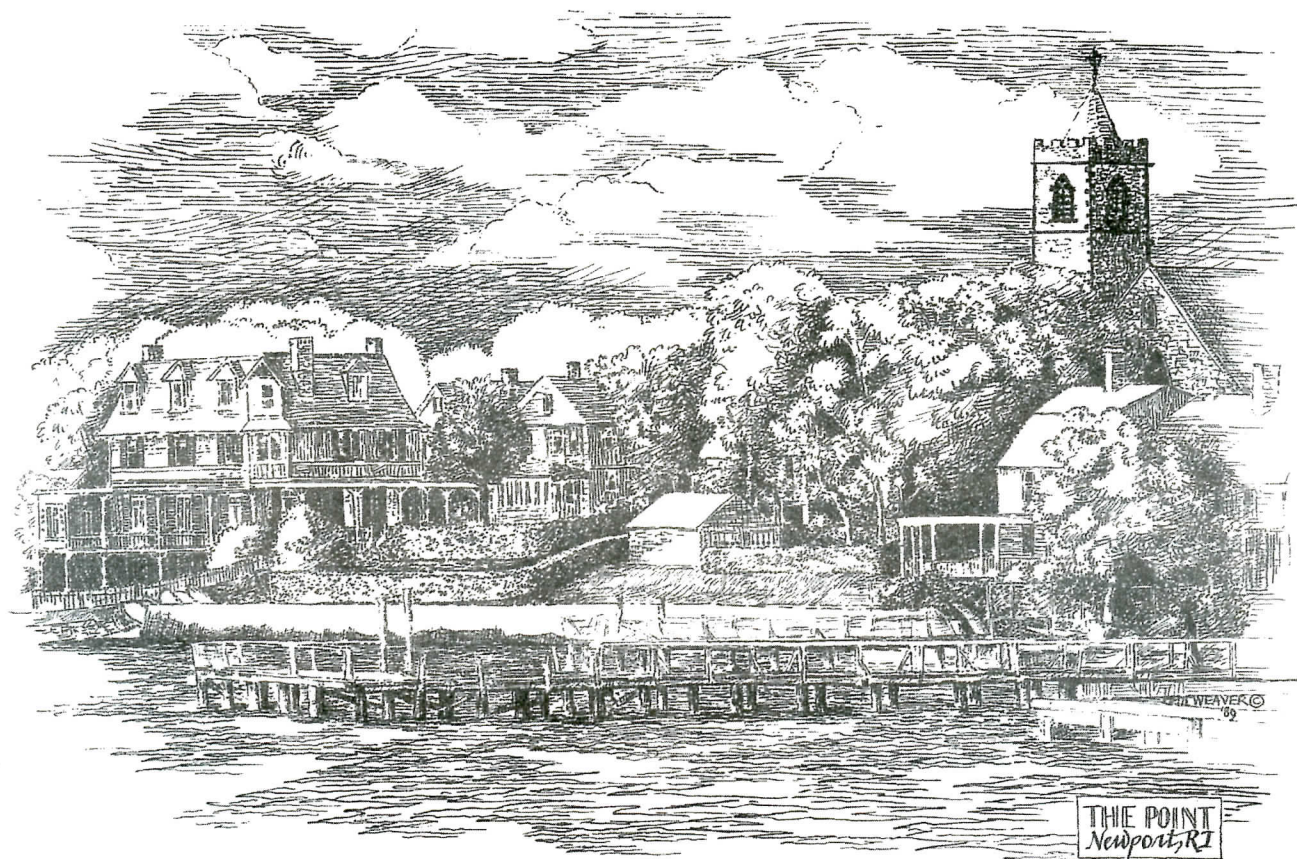


# The GREEN LIGHT



BULLETIN OF THE POINT ASSOCIATION  
OF NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

SPRING 2010



THE POINT  
Newport, RI

# The GREEN LIGHT

LV No. 1

SPRING 2010

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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:

Weaver print, courtesy of Ann Bidstrup



Two things this time around:

On behalf of the Point Association, the *Green Light* wishes to thank all those who support our efforts, not least of all the subscribers and patrons whose names are listed further along in this issue. We could not do it all without your help.

Second, we also want to once again invite the writers and photographers out there to join us on the *Green Light* staff. We who currently produce the articles, photographs and other art work for the journal remain totally enthusiastic about what we do, but at the same time, we recognize the value of great new ideas or even occasional suggestions. Wouldn't you like to join the staff or at least become an occasional contributor? If so, please send an email to [aclemente156@cox.net](mailto:aclemente156@cox.net) and we will invite you to our next meeting.

*Alice Clemente*

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## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Many of you will already know about the Point Association's successful efforts to amend the language about Storer Park in the Newport Harbor Management Plan. There were emails flying back and forth in Mid-January between the Point email list and myself.\*

On page 255 of the plan, Recommended Actions were:

- *Create a low-impact marina that would be available to City of Newport residents on a seasonal lottery basis.*
- *Petition CRMC for a water type designation change in order to facilitate the siting of a marina at Storer Park.*

The deed executed in 1972 when the park was donated to the City states that Storer Park may be used only for recreation purposes. A marina would constitute commercial use not in keeping with the deed. In the early 70s the Point Association owned the largest parcel of the park and was instrumental in its donation to the City. We have been the "watch dog" for the park ever since. Emails were all bitterly opposed to the idea of a marina on the park waterfront. Fortunately, the situation turned out to be a misunderstanding on the part of the authors of the Harbor Management Plan. With the help and support of the Chair of the Waterfront Commission and the entire City Council the recommendations were simply eliminated from the document. Thanks to all of you who responded with your input when we needed it!

\*\*\*\*\*

When you read this it will be spring on the Point. However, I need to warn you about a possible snow removal alert. This is especially important to Point residents who live here only in the summer months. After the December 19-20 storm dropped 20 inches of snow on the area, many residents complained that the City was too slow to plow the side streets and wasn't enforcing the ordinance requiring people to clear sidewalks. On January 28 the City Manager held a forum to address the snow removal problem.

An ordinance exists that requires sidewalks to be cleared within five daylight hours after the snow stops. Newport is **considering** passing an ordinance that would allow the City to write tickets for property owners who do not clear their sidewalks. **This is all very preliminary** and would require notification of property owners before the change. But, should this happen, being "out-of-town" would not be an excuse to have snow-covered sidewalks. If you are away in the winter months, best stay tuned to the snow removal situation through your friends who spend the winter out there shoveling!

\* Not on the Point email list? It's the best way to keep up with the latest (often sudden) Point news. Your email address will be kept confidential! Please contact Shelley.Kraman@gmail.com

## ALL THAT GLITTERS...

by Isabel Griffith and Jane Hence

Books mentioned in this essay:

*Gilded – How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*

by Deborah Davis, Wiley, 2009, 309 pages.

*Gilded Mansions – Grand Architecture and High Society*

by Wayne Craven, W. W. Norton, 2008, 383 pages.

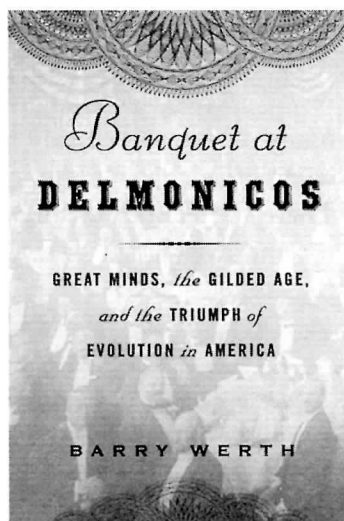
*Banquet at Delmonico's – Great Minds, the Gilded Age, and the Triumph of Evolution in America*

by Barry Werth, Random House, 2009, 362 pages.

The Gilded Age – from approximately 1895 to 1918 began with the close of the Civil War and ended with the beginning of World War I. The term “Gilded Age” came from Mark Twain who published a novel by that name in 1873. “Gilded” refers to a bright, shiny veneer that thinly covers a plain, common base. During that era America’s first millionaire society created an extravagant, sometimes vulgarly rich life style criticized by Thorstein Veblen in 1899 as “conspicuous consumption” and by others since then as “wretched excess.”

In *Gilded* Deborah Davis gives us an enjoyable, light history narrowly focused on Newport. Her book is full of gossip, especially the relationships, marriages and divorces among the people who built palazzos and castles and marble mansions they called “cottages.” She relates quirky little stories accompanied by interesting black and white photographs showing the private lives of “who’s who” in Newport right up to the present. The mansions were a gaudy way of life full of mind-boggling collections of European art and furniture. The sense of ostentation displayed in clothes, decoration and lavish summer parties was the measure with which families were able to gauge where they were in the race to keep up with the neighbors. This is a fun and easy read with lots of references to familiar names and places – Bailey’s Beach, the Clambake Club, tennis, coaching and the flower show.

Wayne Craven’s *Gilded Mansions* is a beautiful coffee table collector’s book with 250 illustrations, mostly in color. It provides a broader perspective with chapters about NYC mansions where gilded age architecture began as well as the Biltmore mansion in Asheville, NC, and European architecture that so strongly influenced this era in America. Craven’s short “Introduction to the Gilded Age” is an invaluable summary of the historical context of



manners, art, furniture, clothes and architecture and the people who created the elaborate collections supported by fabulous new wealth.

There are three chapters about Newport: *McKim, Mead and White – Origins of the Firm and Early Work at Newport*; *Newport – Vernacular Versus Grandeur*; and *Newport Revisited – Rosecliff,*

*Crossways, and the Elms*. The satirical cartoons and drawings of Charles Dana Gibson of “Gibson Girl” fame appear throughout the book to great effect. Craven’s is a balanced approach to an era that lends itself easily to criticism.

In November, 1882, the elite among America’s politicians, businessmen, and scientists gathered at Delmonico’s Restaurant in NYC to celebrate the triumph of Social Darwinism. Herbert Spencer had spent the last 30 years extending the doctrine of evolution to history, society, politics, economics, philosophy, psychology, and morals. America’s elite embraced evolution in a unique form, regarding millionaires as the product of natural selection. Capitalism was seen as ratifying nature’s and God’s plan. For Charles Darwin, evolution was directionless and morally neutral. Spencer’s version was goal-oriented and purposeful, allowing mankind to survive, improve and progress though unfettered competition. It was Spencer, not Darwin who coined the phrase “survival of the fittest.”

Barry Werth begins *Banquet at Delmonico’s* in 1871, and focuses on the great thinkers of the time in places like Cambridge, New York and Washington, DC. Spencer and Darwin have key roles but others include Andrew Carnegie, William Graham Sumner and Henry Ward Beecher – all strong supporters of Social Darwinism. The lives and thoughts of sixteen “great minds” summarize highlights of America’s history in a time of turmoil. Werth’s book is well written and a wonderful introduction to a fascinating intellectual battle. Although Spencer’s version of evolution is no longer taken seriously, his ideas about the benefits of social competition still exist in some form and in some venues to the present.



# THE DAYS OF WINE AND ROSES – THE AMERICAN SONGBOOK

by Ed Madden

“Here with a loaf of bread beneath the bough,  
A flask of wine, a book of verse, and thou”

Omar Khayyam, Persian poet

How does a twenty-something beer lover become a thirty-something wine aficionado? I asked my friend Len Panaggio this question. Len is the corporate beverage director of Castle Hill Inn and Resort, the Newport Restaurant Group – including The Mooring Restaurant, the Newport Yachting Center, Blackstone Caterers – and four off island restaurants spearheaded by Hemenway’s Restaurant in Providence.

Len developed his taste and knowledge of wine in the 1970s working as a waiter at the Newport Chart House – a California restaurant group that spread from California across the country to Newport. They had an extensive wine list and mated choice wines with fine dining – an idea whose time had come. This exposure to

wine allowed Len to develop an ever-expanding expertise in the knowledge and selection of wine. When he moved to The Mooring Restaurant in 1981, he had the opportunity to put his knowledge to work. He grew the fledgling wine list of some 30 selections to about 150 by the end of that decade. It then exploded to about 700 labels in the early 1990s. In 1995, the Mooring wine list won the “Best of Award of Excellence” from the *Wine Spectator* – one of the top 800 lists in the world! Today the Castle Hill Inn, 22 Bowens, and The Mooring all have the Best of Award of Excellence.

Len feels that the culinary scene in Newport is vibrant. The influx of young, energetic, well trained chefs from such schools as Johnson and Wales and the Culinary Institute of America has fostered the pairing of good food and good wine. It is a given that wine enhances the dining experience in many ways. Wine should make the food taste better and vice versa.

(Continued on page 16)

## Nina Lynette

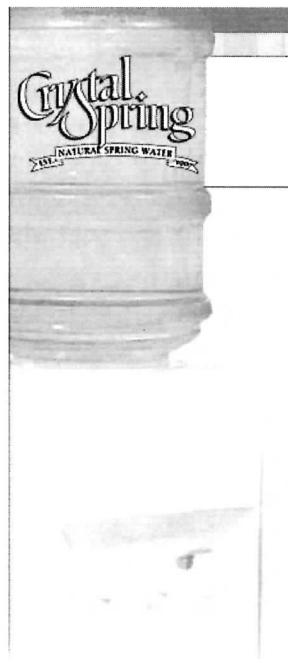
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# THE LITTLE OLD SCHOOLHOUSE

(from Louise Sherman's Scrapbook)  
by Jane G. Marchi

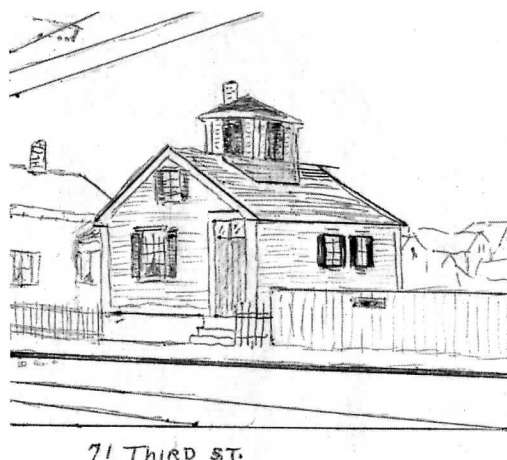
Diagonally across from my house, at 71 Third Street, sits the little old schoolhouse that my grandfather attended when he was a boy. Since he was born in 1871, this would put his attendance somewhere in the latter part of that decade. This always seemed very exotic to me. How delightful it must have been to open the gate in the picket fence, slate in hand, and skip across the street (was Third Street even paved at that time?) to a tiny house even smaller than one's own – to go to school! My own experience in far off New York City had involved big brick, multi-storied buildings surrounded by cement school yards.

I was not the only one in the neighborhood to be fascinated by the little old schoolhouse. The quaint little building had always piqued the interest of Louise Sherman, self-appointed historian of all things Point-associated, who could view it daily from her front porch. From an architectural standpoint, it was obviously older than the surrounding buildings. Why? Where did it come from? How did it get there? Who would know?

One of her absorbing interests was looking up and drawing diagrams of the early land divisions of the Proprietors of Easton's Point, including who lived where and sold what to whom and when. Her scrapbooks are full of these hand-drawn plots and notations of land ownership. This had led her inevitably to the Newport Historical Society where she became a familiar figure as she shared their interests and sought their help. Taking her questions about the little house across the street to their librarian, she was able to write in the January 1962 issue of *The Green Light*:

Mrs. Gladys Bolhouse, of the Newport Historical Society, believes it could be the Barney Street schoolhouse of Eleazer Trevett, which property he sold in 1828 and, later in the same year, purchased Lot #39 on the Cherry Street side of the present Stella Maris grounds.

This led to more questions. What was the Barney Street schoolhouse? Who was Eleazer Trevett? What was the



significance of 1828 or, for that matter, the purchase of Lot #39 on Cherry Street? Finding the answers led her into some early history regarding Newport schools.

From Newport's earliest days, the city's "freemen" sought a way to provide schooling for its young people. The problem, then as now, was how to pay for it. There were always individuals who opened private schools or academies for a fee, to teach reading, writing and "the arithmetick." Providing schooling for those who could not afford a fee was more difficult. As far back as 1661, the town had purchased one hundred acres in Middletown for a tract of land that they called Newtown, or school lands. This was then parceled into lots that could be leased to acquire funds for that purpose. However, time and politics took its toll; after the Revolution much of this had to be sold to pay off the town's debts.

(Continued on page 15)

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# THE PINEAPPLE: SYMBOL OF WELCOME AND SHELTER

by Anita McAndrews

*We've all seen the ubiquitous Newport symbol of hospitality but do you know how this fruit acquired its symbolic value? This article by Anita McAndrews, reprinted from the June, 1989, issue of the Green Light explains.*

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, that fruit we now call pineapple was known as the Annanus or pine cone, and later Pine Apple. The pineapple was, first, the emblem of confectioners. A painted or carved replica of the fruit hung above sweet shops throughout Europe.

Pineapples came originally from the West Indies. The fruit's tough outer rind protected it during sea voyages. A pineapple picked when it is green can be kept a long time. A cool storage area slows the fruit's ripening.

Oliver Cromwell, in 1657, was presented with a European pineapple grown under glass. The hothouse was a Dutch invention; formerly these fruits were fruited in a pineapple stove. Samuel Johnson, in 1775, described the fruit in his dictionary: "I first saw ye famous Queen Pine from Barbados presented to His Majesty Charles II."

This fruit has always been considered a delicacy. In Europe, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there was a pineapple "craze"; the fruit was idealized by the elite in the same manner in which Greek temples or Pompeian ruins were esteemed. It was called "Jove's Feast" by one poet. Pineapples were the costly and complimentary gifts given to kings and queens. The graceful shape of the pineapple was embroidered on velvets, carved in ivory and wood, cut from marble and alabaster. Painters and poets immortalized the fruit.

The pineapple was the "in" gift. It became the crowning ornament for revolving willow platforms, or silver epergnes, on the banquet tables of Europe. Windsor Castle, in England, has an intricate sterling epergne topped with a magnificent silver pineapple. The fruit symbolized wealth and perfection. In the English play, *The Rivals*, Mrs. Malaprop speaks of someone as the "pineapple of politeness".

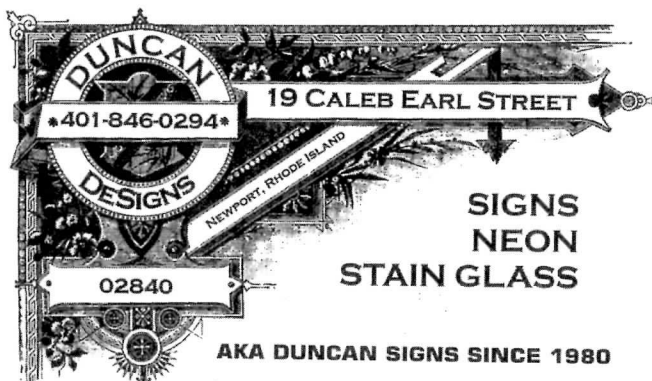
The "pineapple passion" accelerated. In America, the fruit was carved on furniture, stenciled on glass, painted on pottery, and stitched on quilts. When they could afford it, lovers exchanged pineapples because a gift of the fruit meant "You are perfect!"

Sea captains brought pineapples home to New England. A West Indian pineapple weighing 21 pounds was displayed in Boston in 1841. Throughout America, the pineapple became a food kept for special guests. Preservation of the fruit was tedious work: "Much boiling, and changing of syrup...it will keep for years and will not shrink."

If one was not lucky enough to have the real thing, pineapples could be contrived by following a recipe called Salomon Gundy (salmagundi). This recipe calls for "one inverted china bason, one pound of butter, and bones of pickled herrings. This whole is raised above chopped roast chicken, turkey, ham, parsley, and herring."

New Englanders set carved pineapples on hitching posts, bed posts, and gate posts. Hunter House, the Colony House, and St. John's Rectory are just a few of the landmarks in Newport that have pineapples over the doorways. Newport's Preservation Society incorporated the pineapple in its seal designed by the John Stevens Shop.

*(Continued on page 14)*



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# DOMINIC CHARLES VARISCO 1933-2010

by Alice Clemente



On January 30, a large number of people came together at Ochre Court, Salve Regina University, to celebrate the life of Dom Varisco, public servant, skilled fund raiser, devoted family man and friend. Dom passed away on January 17 after a long struggle with brain cancer.

Those who spoke on that day, as well as the written tributes already in print, have testified to an extraordinary list of achievements, *any one of which* would have made him noteworthy. Dom was Director of Development at Brandeis University in the crucial early years of that then-fledgling institution. He left Brandeis in 1974 to become Associate Dean of Harvard's Graduate School of Education and then moved on from there to become Associate Director of Development for Boston's Museum of Science. Eventually, in 1995, he moved to Newport (and to the Point) to become Executive Vice-President of Salve Regina University. In between all that, he also co-founded the Foundation for Rhode Island Public Radio and was instrumental in getting Rhode Island its own station; served as a Trustee of Nichols College from which he will receive a posthumous honorary degree this coming May; and served on the boards of numerous organizations, among them the Touro Synagogue Foundation, the Newport Hospital Governors, the International Yacht Restoration School, the Newport Historical Society and the Cape Cod Museum of Art. As if that were not already more than a lifetime of work, he was also Senior Consulting Vice-President for Grenzebach, Glier and Associates of Chicago, in that capacity providing invaluable advice and direction to schools, colleges, museums and hospitals throughout the country, from Davidson College in North Carolina to the Campaign to Save Ellis Island.

Dom's work in Newport encompassed not only the institutions already mentioned but the presidency of the Newport Public Library. In that capacity, he oversaw the renovation of the library and the building of the new addition – privately raising the funds to underwrite the entire project.

In light of all of this, could one not expect that the *Green Light* would also benefit from the gifts of this exceptional man? Of course it did. When the time came to celebrate the *Green Light*'s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and produce the commemorative book, the writing, editing and layout were well covered but where would we get the funds to pay for it all? With someone of Dom's background right here on the Point, where else would we turn? On our first meeting to discuss this thorny issue, Dom and I drew up a list of foundations and business donors that might be approached, but by the second time we met – this time in the Variscos' living room with Tom Goldrick – we had faced the fact that this wasn't exactly a foundation-level project. What to do? We stared at each other for a minute and then Dom said: how about each of us kicking in \$200; then we go to the Point Association board and get them to kick in \$200 each; *then* we go to the rest of the Point. The rest as they say is history.

What has struck me most about Dom Varisco's storied career is not simply the magnitude and stature of his accomplishments but the fundamental nature of his work. Whether it was a deliberate move or by chance, Dom chose to devote his life to education and community service. In so doing, not only did he himself serve but he inspired and enabled others to do likewise; many who worked with him would in turn come to lead non-profit organizations. Such was the testimony heard at his memorial service. It was also there in the words of some of the 84 friends and family members who contributed pieces to the parody of *Time*'s man of the year issue that Suzanne, Dom's wife, so imaginatively and lovingly put together as a final Christmas gift to him. His mentoring manifested itself formally in a course on governance and philanthropy that he was asked to teach at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

We also learn from the "Man of the year issue" that, with all this, Dom never failed to have time for the family and friends that he so obviously treasured. I came to know Dom only late in his life when I became editor of the *Green Light* and worked with him on fundraising for the anniversary book. I will remember him as a man of rare charm and "noble spirit", to borrow the words of my old friend and Dom's cousin, Vincent Pollina, always there, always ready to take on a daunting task with consummate skill and good humor. Dominic Varisco's legacy will continue to enrich and inspire this community for many years to come.



# DANA TITCOMB, OUR NEW HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLANNER

by Mary Jane Rodman



Four years ago (February 2006), the City of Newport welcomed Shantia Anderhaggen to the newly designated position of Historic Preservation Planner, a post that she held until her resignation in November 2008. At that point, there were serious reservations about continuing the position. However, after considerable debate during the early months of 2009 – and in response to the persuasive influence of some of the city’s more significant preservationists – it became evident that the need for a full-time professional liaison between the City Council and the community remained strong. Ultimately, funding was budgeted, and by October 2009, Shantia’s successor, Dana Titcomb, had been hired from among some 80 or more applicants.

Seated high above all the clamor and debate attendant upon some of the more controversial aspects of Ordinance fine-tuning, Dana’s office on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of City Hall is a veritable haven of quiet and order. And that, I believe, is because the current occupant of that lofty chair is, herself, a calm, competent and very committed young woman.

Born into the seventh generation of a Wilton, CT, family, Dana’s predilection for matters historical is endemic to her New England roots. (Her 91 year-old grandmother is still quite capable of “setting the record straight” when it comes to discerning between architectural styles and periods in that part of her world.)

Fortified by a goodly heritage, Dana extended her preservation instincts across the state line to attend Roger Williams University where she received a Bachelor’s degree in Historic Preservation. From there, she traveled south to earn a Master of Fine Arts degree in Historic Preservation from the Savannah College of Art and Design. Then, back to the northeast for a period of time with Historic New England, working to preserve and maintain some ten of that organization’s properties, including four in Rhode Island. And now, she is pleased to return full time

to the Ocean State where she has already found ways to share her many gifts and talents with the residents of Newport.

Recent efforts by the Historic District Ordinance Review Task Force, in conjunction with the Planning Board, to define and refine recommended changes to the Historical District Ordinance continue, as Dana develops her unique *modus operandi*, working with them as well as in compliance with the current Ordinance. She indicated that in order to “fine press” ordinance details, additional interaction will ensue between city staff (i.e., city solicitors; her supervisor, Paige Bronk – Director of Planning, Zoning, and Inspection; Dana) and John Shehan, chairman of the Historic District Commission and the seven members of the HDOR Task Force, chaired by Mark Horan.

Meanwhile, Dana emphasizes the need to simplify the education process for home-owners while at the same time guarding the integrity of the current Ordinance – even as it is being reviewed. Accordingly, she has initiated “new home-owner packets” addressing both the privileges and the responsibilities of purchasing property in an Historic District. (Considering the fact that more than 50% of all buildings in Newport fall under Historic District ordinances, this is no small project!)

She has also undertaken the task of over-hauling the web site to include everything from documents on window repair to tax credits to applications to links to the National Park Service to zoning plat maps (in order to determine whether one resides in an historic district). When I asked her what constitutes a designated historic building, she said that the 50 year rule now applies – behold your venerable split-level!! It was interesting, too, to learn that Newport’s Historic District Commission, founded in 1965, predates the national one by exactly one year.

Expressing both pleasure in her work and gratitude for the support she has been given during her first four months “in office”, Dana acknowledges some challenges as well. She would like to alter the image of the HDC by creating greater accessibility (e.g. streamlining applications) while maintaining a vital respect for good stewardship of our properties: “We must remember that we are merely a glimmer of the life of a house”.

*(Continued on page 12)*

## OLDPORT DAYS

### OF THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON (1823-1911)

by Tom Kennedy

In a recent web notice to members of the Redwood Library, Thomas Wentworth Higginson is described as a “19<sup>th</sup> Century Renaissance Man.” He certainly revealed a deep love of nature, art, literature and humanity during his long and varied life. The Redwood has presently on display items and gifts from its collection that describe Higginson’s life and interests. After graduating from Harvard, Higginson served as a Unitarian minister and had contacts with the transcendentalists, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Parker. However, his radical views on abolition soon estranged him from the church. During the Civil War Higginson was promoted to the rank of colonel in the Union Army and led the 1<sup>st</sup> South Carolina volunteers, the first federally authorized African-American regiment. He authored and edited numerous books of fiction and non-fiction, and mentored many aspiring authors, notably Emily Dickinson. “After Dickinson died, Higginson collaborated with Mabel Loomis Todd in publishing volumes of Dickinson’s poetry – heavily edited in favor of conventional punctuation, diction and rhyme. In *White Heat* (Knopf, 2008), an account of Higginson’s friendship with Dickinson, author Brenda Wineapple credits Higginson with more editorial sensitivity than literary historians have assumed.” (Wikipedia, Thomas Wentworth Higginson) Higginson devoted much of his life to fighting for the rights of freed slaves, women and other disenfranchised people. He lived in Newport from 1864 to 1877, where he became a shareholder of the Redwood Library and served on its Board of Directors. He was also elected to the Newport School Committee and was a member of the Town and Country Club, a literary society founded by Julia Ward Howe.

In 1873, Higginson published a book of essays entitled *Oldport Days*, which describe in various ways life in Newport during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It appears that Higginson coined the term “Oldport” as a pet name for Newport to better convey his view of the old city by the sea. This appellation has a continuing history up to the present day, associated, in general, with preserving Newport’s old buildings and traditions. An Oldport Association was founded in 1929 “to beautify the Point

and perpetuate its old time greatness in maritime tradition.” (*Green Light*, Feb. ’93, 12) Its immediate purpose was to save “the Faisneau” boarding house on the corner of Chestnut and Washington Streets. A second Oldport Association was formed in 1965 as a non-profit offshoot of Operation Clapboard, again with the purpose of saving 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings on the Point. “Later, the Oldport Association became the ‘Oldport Committee’ of the Newport Historical Society, which now holds the files and records of the Oldport Association and Operation Clapboard.” (*Green Light*, Summer ’96, 11)

“Oldport Days,” celebrations of Newport’s history and traditions, display another application of Higginson’s invented name. These celebrations were held in 1929, 1932, 1936, 1938 and 1964, and served as fundraisers for the Newport Historical Society and, later, the Point Association. To accommodate the festivities, Washington Street was roped off. Those attending were treated to music, marching, costumes, games, contests, house tours, dancing, artillery fire, prizes, displays and exhibitions, boat rides, and food and drink. The 1936 celebration (the tercentenary year) was especially elaborate and included the appearance of “Jenny Lind” and “P.T. Barnum,” riding in a horse-drawn carriage. (*Green Light*, Aug. ’86, 8-11 and Oct. ’86, 14) The name Oldport lives on today, of course, in Oldport Marine, a company that provides services to boaters in Newport Harbor and builds much acclaimed passenger launches.

For Higginson, Oldport was a comfortable seaport town, which housed and catered to wealthy members of privileged society from Philadelphia, Boston and New York during the “season” and reverted to a sleepy, tranquil fishing village in September, whose most interesting and busiest inhabitants were its fishermen and elderly ladies. In one essay Higginson describes Newport’s wharves, and comes to an old building on a remote wharf to which a sterner tradition clings. “For men have but lately died who had seen slaves pass within its door for confinement.” (Higginson, 25)





*The wharf in those days appertained to a distillery, an establishment then constantly connected with the slave-trade, rum being sent to Africa, and human beings brought back. Occasionally a cargo was landed here, instead of being sent to the West Indies or to South Carolina, and this building was fitted up for their temporary quarters. It is but some twenty-five feet square, and must be less than thirty feet in height, yet it is divided into three stories, of which the lowest was used for other purposes, and the two upper were reserved for slaves. There are still to be seen the barred partitions and latticed door, making half the second floor into a sort of cage, while the agent's room appears to have occupied the other half. A similar latticed door – just such have I seen in Southern slave-pens – secures the foot of the upper stairway. The whole small attic constitutes a single room, with a couple of windows, and two additional breathing-holes, two feet square, opening on the yard.*

*It makes one sick to think of the poor creatures who may once have gripped those bars with their hands, or have glared with eager eyes between them...It is almost forty years since this distillery became a mill, and sixty since the slave-trade was abolished. The date '1803' is scrawled upon the door of the cage, - the very year when the port of Charleston was reopened for slaves, just before the traffic ceased. A few years more and such horrors will seem as remote a memory in South Carolina, thank God! as in Rhode Island. (Higginson, 25-6)*

Higginson spent the summer "at an old house in that old suburb of Oldport called 'the Point.' It is a sort of Artists' Quarter of the town, frequented by a class of summer visitors more addicted to sailing and sketching than to driving and bowling, - persons who do not object to simple fair." (Higginson, 35-6) His house "stood just above what were commonly called (from their slaty color) the Blue Rocks; it seemed the topmost pebble left by some tide that had receded, - which perhaps it was. Nurses and children thronged daily to these rocks, during the visitors' season, and the fishermen found there a favorite lounging-place." (Higginson, 37) He further describes his dwelling and his surroundings in some interesting detail.

*Near my summer home there is a little cove or landing by the bay, where nothing larger than a boat can ever anchor. I sit above it now, upon the steep bank, knee-deep in buttercups, amid grass so lush and green that it seems to ripple and flow instead of waving... On the right side of my retreat a high wall limits the view, while close upon the left the crumbling parapet of Fort Greene stands out into the foreground, its verdant scarp so relieved against*

*the blue water that each inward bound schooner seems to sail into a cave of grass. In the middle distance is a white lighthouse, and beyond lie the round tower of old Fort Louis and the soft low hills of Conanicut. (Higginson, 110)*

Higginson loved the waterfront, and spent many hours rowing in a small boat along the shore. His descriptions are quite idyllic.

*When the sun grows hot, I like to take refuge in a sheltered nook beside Goat Island Lighthouse, where the wharf shades me, and the resonant plash of waters multiplies itself among the dark piles, increasing the delicious sense of coolness. While the noonday bells ring twelve, I take my rest. Round the corner of the pier the fishing-boats come gliding in, generally with a boy asleep forward, and a weary man at the helm; one can almost fancy that the boat itself looks weary, having been out since the early summer sunrise. In contrast to this expression of labor ended, the white pleasure-boats seem but to be taking a careless stroll by water; while a skiff full of girls drifts idly along the shore, amid laughter and screaming and much aimless splash. More resolute and business-like, the boys row their boat far up the bay; then I see a sudden gleam of white bodies, and then the boat is empty, and the surrounding water is sprinkled with black and bobbing heads. (Higginson, 83-4)*

Higginson apparently spent a good deal of his time on the Point. His essays are full of references to familiar areas. For those who wish to savor a brief taste of 19<sup>th</sup> century Newport, Higginson's Oldport is the dish.



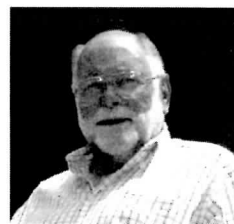
Higginson, Thomas Wentworth.  
*Oldport Days*. BiblioBazaar. 2008.

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## PLANT SALE 2010

*Planting the  
spring bulbs*

Photo by  
Jane Hence



## FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY

This spring the Point Plant Sale will happen on May 15 in the parking lot of St. John's Church on Willow Street. It was so successful last year that we plan to try and duplicate our efforts this year: lots of locally grown herbs and traditional perennials from Point gardens. We sold out early last year and would love to have a larger selection. You can help us by donating plants from your own garden. It's best to divide and pot early in March and April. That way the plants can become well established before the sale. Think you are not really a gardener? We will provide pots, soil and advice about how to prepare your plants. In some cases, we will even help with the digging! New ideas include having top quality organic fertilizer and mulch for people to shovel into reasonably sized bags – perfect for small Point gardens.

Join us for the fiftieth anniversary of the longest running Point event! Please volunteer to help with the Plant Sale. Proceeds go to buy the bulbs and trees planted in Point parks as well as the flowers in the park planters. There are lots of jobs to do and most of them take just a couple of hours on one day. We will be sending out updated information about the sale via email. If you are not on the Point email list and would like to be, contact: [ShelleyKraman@gmail.com](mailto:ShelleyKraman@gmail.com)

For more information about donating plants or becoming a Plant Sale volunteer, contact: [Marye3@cox.net](mailto:Marye3@cox.net) or [igriffith38@verizon.net](mailto:igriffith38@verizon.net)

*(Continued from page 9)*

In reflecting upon the larger aspect of Newport as a city which is at once dependent to a large extent upon tourism, and yet transcends that reality – “my life is not your vacation” – she observes the need to gracefully integrate the two as essential interdependent components. All of this is indeed a large order; but when filtered through the enthusiasm of this very capable new planner, Newport's distinguished past is certain to be respected in the present and grafted with sensitivity to the future.

And so, Dana, it is with great pleasure that we join our city neighbors in welcoming you – not really to Newport at large but to the Point, hoping that you will visit with us soon and often in the months ahead. *Cead mile failte.*

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# WATER OUR MOST PRECIOUS RESOURCE: CONSERVATION REVISITED

by Ed Madden

**Question:** Which is more important for mankind's survival, food or water?

**Answer:** Mankind can survive for a month without food. It can only survive for a week or so without water. Human beings rendered to their basic elements are 70% water.

**Question:** World War III will be fought over

- a. oil
- b. population explosion
- c. water rights

The answer, according to economic and military strategists will unequivocally be water rights!

History has been replete with border wars fought by folks at the dry end of the water chain when the tap has been turned off by folks living upstream. To make matters worse, mankind has been indiscriminately and thoughtlessly draining the planet's water table with no thought to the potential consequences of those actions to the survival of younger generations.

What two things do the following great rivers of the world have in common – the Nile, the Congo, the Tigris/Euphrates, the Amazon, the Yangtze, the Ganges, the Mississippi and the Colorado? Answer 1: the headwaters all arise essentially within one state or country and flow to the sea through one or more states or countries. Answer 2: All these rivers have shrinking aquifers from the indiscriminate, selfish abuse of Mother Nature. Think of aquifers as underground rivers flowing at varying depths freely across national boundaries around the planet. Man has used and abused them without any thought that they might possibly dry up at some point in the future. Water demand world wide tripled between 1950 and 1990; it is expected to double again by 2025. The problem is that in many instances the future is now.

The Ogallala Aquifer is a case in point. It stretches underground from Texas north through Kansas and the Midwest to South Dakota covering hundreds of miles. It lies deep in the shale and gravel of the Great Plains and has been mercilessly mined for its water resources for years and systematically depleted – almost 14 million acre feet of water per year has been taken out and not replenished. The depth of drilled wells has increased

*(Continued on page 18)*

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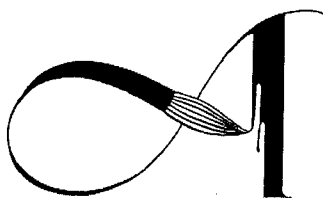
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(Continued from page 7)

New Englanders and southerners proudly displayed their pineapples, keeping them for many months as centerpieces on dining tables.

The pineapple was set on the Barbados penny and on New England jelly and butter molds. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the image of the fruit in or on the house symbolized shelter and a warm welcome. Today the carved and painted pineapple is an adornment, a reminder of exotic places, sugary confections, sea voyages, homecomings, and hospitality.

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**25 Years in Business 1984-2009 On the Point**

(Continued from page 6)

However, private pedagogy continued. In early 1799, the *Newport Mercury* advertised a request for estimates to build a new schoolhouse with the following dimensions: forty feet long by twenty-five feet wide, to be topped by a tower and belfry. From its description, this became the Barney Street schoolhouse, originally opened by Jason Sprague and Rowse Taylor in 1801, and subsequently sold in 1806. The purchaser was one Eleazer Trevett, who had opened a school of his own the previous year. Ruth Franklin wrote, in the *Bulletin of the Newport Historical Society* (January 1936), that "In the same year 1805, Eleazer Trevett opened a schoolhouse on Clarke Street but soon moved to a school on Barney Street, a one-story building with a belfry, later used as the first Catholic Church in Newport when the school was discontinued in 1830."

In the meantime, the Newport freemen soldiered on. In 1825, they voted to establish a free school, recommending two schools be erected. In 1827, the town established a School Fund, administered by three appointed commissioners to receive donations and bequests, including one from Constant Taber, who had bequeathed

property to the Six Principals Baptist Society, as well as to sell off any remaining Newtown lots and use the proceeds for this purpose.

This set in motion a train of events by which the Barney Street schoolhouse MIGHT have been moved to the Point, and be our little old schoolhouse on Third Street – or – could it have remained behind on Barney Street, as Ruth Franklin assumed in her account written a hundred years later?

In 1828, Eleazer Trevett, Schoolmaster, sold a lot on Barney Street to Bishop Benedict Fenwick of Boston in trust for the Roman Catholic Church in Newport. Previous owners of said lot had been John Trevett and, before him, the Reverend Caleb Greene. At the same time, the Six Principals Baptist Society bestowed on Eleazer Trevett a 999-year lease to a lot it had inherited from Constant Taber. This Lot #39 was located on Easton's Point, on the north side of Cherry Street, with a dwelling house already on the premises. Some years later, however, an 1850 map showed two build-

(Continued on page 17)

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(Continued from page 5)

The choice of red vs. white wine has evoked many an interesting discussion over the years. According to Len, the marriage of wine and food is first and foremost a personal decision – if you like it, then it works! He does feel that Prime Ribs and/or Filet Mignon – rich, heavy fatty foods – need a rich, heavy red wine to enhance the taste. An interesting tidbit that I garnered from him is that all grapes, red and white, when squeezed give a clear juice. When the white and red grapes are crushed, the liquid that results looks the same. The red skins are left in contact with the liquid for one to several weeks, depending on the type of red wine being produced. The skins are then removed, yeast is added to the juice and the fermentation process begins. For the white wine, the skins are *not* added to the juice, the yeast is added and the white wine fermentation begins.

The evocative French term “sommelier” suggests a wise, imperious figure with a prominent medallion hanging about the neck, steeped in the mysteries of the wine cellars of the world. He or she can be an intimidating presence hovering over the unwary diner, already flustered by too many choices on the wine list with too few bargain prices! The original sommeliers were charged with catering to the taste of royalty. Over the years, as the number and types of wines proliferated, the sommelier became the in-house expert with the knowledge to pair the proper wine with the proper food, as well as how to properly serve and if necessary decant the nectar of the gods.

To become a Master Sommelier requires a total commitment of a year or more of study at a recognized Court of Master Sommeliers. An exam must be passed before the Master Certificate and medallion are conveyed. The Culinary Institute of America in New York State and its

sister institution in Napa Valley, California, are renowned teaching centers which convey this certificate.

The National Restaurant Association has had a program called Serv Safe in effect for some 20 years. Len has been involved in this program training younger wait staff in the responsible service of alcohol to customers.

A sidebar to the above story: A recent reading of the Gospel of John in church told the story of the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee. A large crowd was assembled at the reception enjoying themselves when the wine steward announced that the wine was nearly gone. Jesus Christ and his family were guests of the wedding party. Mary, his mother, prevailed upon him to help solve the problem. He had the servants fill 6 large stone water jugs to the top with water, blessed the jugs and then told the servants to have the chief steward test the liquid. When the steward tested the water-turned-wine, he complimented the bridegroom, telling him that ordinarily the best wine is served first at a reception but in this case the best wine had been saved until the last. My curiosity was aroused – whether the wine was white or red? Pinot Grigio or Merlot? As far as I can determine, scripture scholarship has not addressed this point. Sounds like a good topic for a Ph.D. dissertation! Prost.



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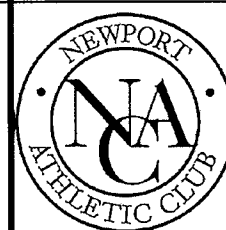
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(Continued from page 15)

ings on the lot. Could the smaller one have been a schoolhouse? Trevett remained in possession until August 1853, when the lot was sold to Edward and Agatha Mayers, who were engaged in acquiring all the property on that solid square block from Washington to Second Streets, between Cherry and Pine, in preparation for constructing the house and garden which we have come to call Stella Maris. But they wanted the land cleared. The buildings had to go.

In 1852, while the Mayers acquisitions were just getting started, the Proprietors of Easton's Point decided to sell off their last remaining parcel of vacant land, running from Third Street east to Long Lane, and from Walnut Street north to the so-called Hunter Property. An early purchaser was Clarke Weaver, who bought up the tract of land that lay on the east side of Third Street, from Walnut Street up to what is now LaSalle Place, and extending east to John Braman's property (now Braman's Cemetery), in January 1852. A year later, in July 1853, this property passed to his son Thomas Weaver. Coincidentally, this was just about the time that Trevett was selling his lot to the Mayers couple (August 1853) and needing the buildings there cleared.



Since the little old schoolhouse still stands on what was then the Weaver property, it was the conviction of Louise Sherman that this had once been the smaller of the two buildings on the Trevett lot, subsequently sold to, and moved by, the Weavers. Given the close resemblance between the description of the original Barney Street schoolhouse and "her" schoolhouse across Third Street, they could easily be one and the same. For, despite Ruth Franklin's report that the schoolhouse had become a Catholic Church, there was no mention at the time of the Barney Street sale in 1828 that any more than a lot was being conveyed; there was no mention of a building.

As for me, whether or not the little old schoolhouse is or is not that original Barney Street schoolhouse, I know that it was my grandfather's school, at least until he was old enough for Callender School, and that is all I need to know.

(sources: *Peterson's History of Rhode Island*, 1853; *Newport Mercury*; *Bulletin of Newport Historical Society*, January 1936; multiple sources of land transactions in Louise Sherman scrapbooks)



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(Continued from page 13)

from 450 to 1400 feet as the water table shrinks. West Texas alone has gone from 100 irrigation wells in 1914 to more than 75,000 by the year 2000. A high percentage of USA's grain and about 50% of our beef comes from this area of the Great Plains. It is a given that the water of the Ogallala at some point in time will run out if present consumption continues. In the case of the Colorado River, the U.S. has literally stolen the water from Mexico and used it to irrigate the deserts of California and Arizona and fill the swimming pools of wealthy Americans. The only sensible answers are vigorous conservation, population control and abandonment of marginally sustainable agricultural land.

The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in Iraq present interesting dilemmas. Both originate in the mountains of Turkey and then flow south to the sea. The Tigris River supplies Baghdad and environs and the Euphrates River traverses desert to the east of Baghdad supplying Syria. They join at the Persian Gulf. The Sumerians, the early settlers of Baghdad, were the first people to invent irrigation. They turned the desert into an agricultural oasis. The "Fertile Crescent" and the fabled "Hanging Gardens of Babylon", one of the early wonders of the world, flourished under their rule. Modern day trials and tribulations arise from Turkey's control of the watershed of those two rivers. Syria receives its major supply of water from the Euphrates and Iraq, from both rivers. Add to this cauldron the Kurds, the dispute over oil rights, the Sunni-Shiite hatred, the shadow of a nuclear Iran over Israel and the ingredients all point to the possibility of World War III and Apocalypse Now.

"Water should not be anyone's exclusive property. Water belongs to the planet. It is ours to use and pass on. It returns to us only to be recycled again. It should never be hoarded and mankind should never be denied its beneficial uses. Water, which is vital for life, costs almost nothing, whereas diamonds, which are useless for life, are valued highly."

The above paragraph is taken from a fascinating book: *Water, the Fate of Our Most Precious Resource*, by Marq De Villiers, Stoddard Publishing Corp., 1999. It is not for the faint of heart but is a real eye opener for anyone who loves our earth and believes that we all play a part in its stewardship.

The news is not all bad. Congratulations to the Providence Water Department! It was recently ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> nationwide by an environmental group for having the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest level of common pollutants out of 100 city water supply systems in the U.S.! Q.E.D.



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

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

## COMMITTEES AND ACTIVITIES

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

- |   |   |   |                                     |
|---|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beautification | <input type="checkbox"/> Waterfront     | <input type="checkbox"/> The Green Light      | <input type="checkbox"/> Plant Sale |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Membership     | <input type="checkbox"/> Event Planning | <input type="checkbox"/> History and Archives |                                     |

*Pot Luck Supper Harbor House Washington St.*

**Sunday March 21 6 pm**

*Again This Year — A True Pot Luck — Call 849-4395 if you are coming*

Beverages (Coffee, Tea & Milk) will be provided

*You may bring your own wine, beer, cider etc.*

**EVERYTHING SHOULD ARRIVE PIPING HOT WRAPPED IN NEWSPAPER & PAPER BAGS**

~ Every container and serving utensil should be labeled ~

**In order to assure some variety and some of everything we ask the following:**

If Your Last Name Begins With **A-F** ~ Please Bring: MAIN DISH which serves 10

If Your Last Name Begins With **G-M** ~ Please Bring: A DESSERT which serves 12

If Your Last Name Begins With **N-Z** ~ Please Bring: A SALAD OR VEGGIE which serves 12

*If you're coming ~ Just call and leave a message at 849-4395 and tell us how many guests & what you plan to bring*

*if you would like to rsvp via email*

please send your name, number of guests & menu item to:

[potluck@thepointassociation.org](mailto:potluck@thepointassociation.org)

**SAVE THE DATE:**

**Driftway Cleanup – Saturday, April 24**

**PLANT SALE: Saturday, May 15 ~ St. John's Church Parking Lot**

**THE GREEN LIGHT**

The Point Association

P.O. Box 491

Newport, RI 02840

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