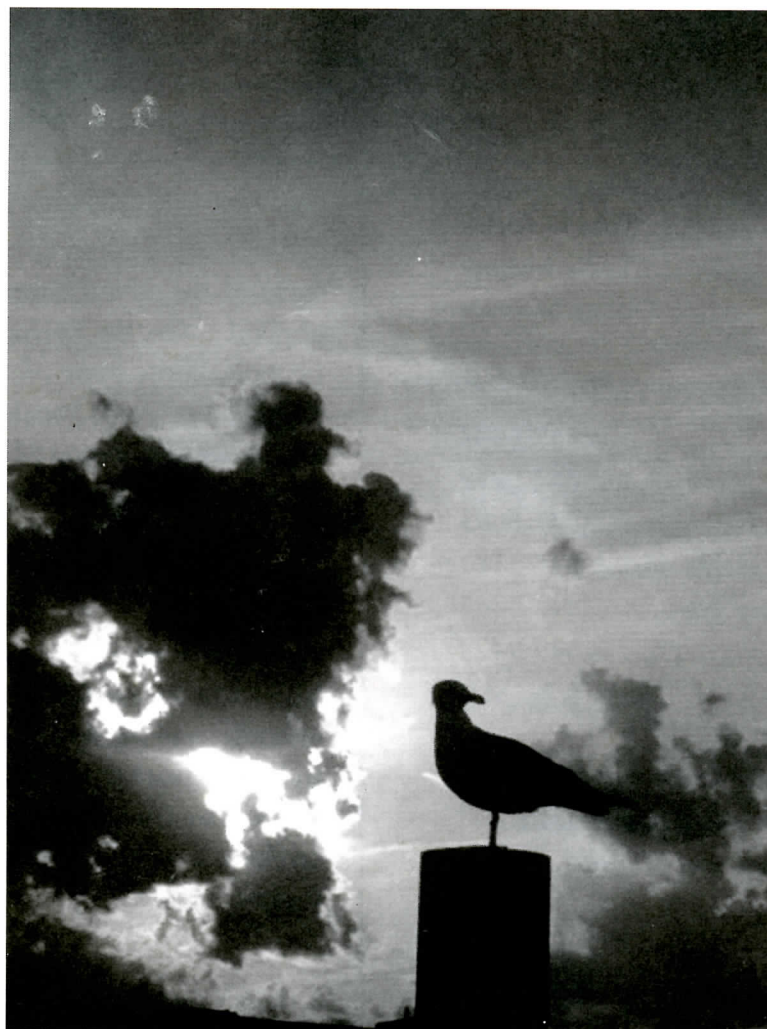


The
GREEN LIGHT

BULLETIN OF THE POINT ASSOCIATION
OF NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

SUMMER 2010



The GREEN LIGHT

LV No. 2 SUMMER 2010

CONTENTS

President's letter	3
The Road to Burma (Rhode Island, That Is)	4
The Bigelows, Mrs. Howe, and	
The Town and Country Club	5
How to Live in a Very Old House	6
The Benjamin Franklin Tree	7
New England's Best Roadside Rest Stop	8
Waterfront News	9
Battery Park Forever!	10
Harbor Management Plan for Newport	11
Villa Marina: The Sanford- Covell House	12
Earth Day Clean-ups	16
Pot Luck 3/10	17
Poplar Street Driftway Repairs	20

STAFF

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

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OFFICERS

<i>President</i> , Isabel Griffith	849-6444
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Meetings are generally scheduled for the first Monday of the month and are open to Association members. Please call Isabel for time, date, and location.

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



The Point Association

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

Cover:

Photo by Jane Hence



The Point has been busy this spring, as neighbors and the City spruced up its parks and addressed some of the critical issues confronting the area's physical space, the Poplar Street driftway, for example. While some of the work (e.g., the one illustrated by Andy Lavarre's photos of Third Street) may have seemed inordinately disruptive, hopefully the benefits will ultimately justify the inconvenience and lead to a more tranquil spell in our neighborhood.

Problems of another sort call for ongoing vigilance. The President's letter identifies some recent examples and gently urges Pointers to document and report such incidents. Let's hope that these, too, will be few and relatively benign and that we can look forward to a relaxed and enjoyable summer season.

Alice Clemente

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Lots going on in our neighborhood this spring:

The Point Association has arranged for a permanent grill to be installed in Hunter Park; that's the park with tennis courts and ball field next to the Van Zandt Bridge. We thank Beth and Mike Cullen for the suggestion. They live near the park and spend a lot of time there. Recently they happened to catch two girls marking on the freshly painted bridge abutment in the park. Mike chased them and Beth managed to get photographs of the girls "in the act" and running away. The girls were identified by authorities at Thompson Middle School from Beth's photos and spent a day doing community service with the Clean Cities Department of Newport. Just a thought...When you go walking on the Point, along with the bag you have for picking up trash you might want to bring a camera. You can never tell when you might come across a great photo op!

Pictures of Point volunteers led by Joan and Mike Simmons can be seen in this issue. Over thirty people turned out to fill bags with trash from the parks and driftways on April 24. Maintenance of the driftways has been so much better since an ordinance was passed last year requiring identifying stickers for the boats left there during "sailing season." Washington Street vistas are more enjoyable for everyone.

Arbor Day, May 1, found the whole fourth grade from Cranston-Calvert School planting three very large cherry trees in the grassy area next the pumping station at the edge of the Gateway Center parking lot. It was a beautiful day and we had a nice crowd. At about the same time I sent a message to the Point email list with the news that the beetle infested pines next to the Gateway bus parking area will be replaced by fast-growing "privacy" evergreens. The response from Pointers has been uniformly enthusiastic and positive. As it exists the Gateway Center will never be attractive; we appreciate efforts by the city to do the best it can with limited funds.



THE ROAD TO BURMA (RHODE ISLAND, THAT IS)

by Ed Madden

'Midway in our life's journey, I went astray from the straight road and woke to find myself alone in a dark wood.'

Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*,

Canto I – The Inferno

The U.S. Navy is the owner of approximately 260 acres of prime waterfront land spreading from Newport, through Middletown, to Portsmouth, all connected by the East Bay defense highway with the colorful moniker "The Burma Road". The name pays tribute to the supply road that the Nationalist Chinese built in the late 1930s, going from western China into Burma during the Japanese invasion of China. The Aquidneck Island Burma road carried supplies from the naval base to Melville and the tank farms.

The Navy land encompasses both sides of the Burma Road running along the eastern boundary of Narragansett Bay. Over the past 10 years, the West Side Master Plan has been developed for the northern end of Aquidneck Island. This plan encompasses the recommendations of the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission (A.I.P.C.) re: the development of the Burma Road area. Proposed land

use would include parks and picnic areas, ball fields and tennis courts, boat launch facilities, bicycle and jogging paths and camping sites. The Navy is about to declare this 260 acres surplus and available for development.

How about the inclusion of solar and wind farms? The town of Portsmouth and Portsmouth Abby School have already demonstrated the feasibility of wind power with their two functioning wind turbines. There would certainly seem to be more than adequate land available for environmental development without the Cape-Wind type N.I.M.B.Y.s having a nervous breakdown.

The good news is that the Navy Department has rejected the application of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to acquire the surplus Navy land. It does not require much of a leap of faith to envision this land going to the Indian bureau and the subsequent incestuous marriage with the Las Vegas gambling mob, following as the night the day. Then would come the blessing of the R.I. lobbyists and in-their-pocket lawmakers salivating over a destination resort casino on the shores of beautiful Narragansett Bay!

(Continued on page 21)



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THE BIGELOWs, MRS. HOWE, AND THE TOWN AND COUNTRY CLUB

by Tom Kennedy

After the Civil War fortunes were made by Gilded Age captains of industry and commerce. A good number of these moneyed moguls from New York, Philadelphia and Boston chose convenient Newport as a summer residence, and indulged in a luxurious and often profligate social life during the "season." However, not all summer visitors to the cooling breezes of Narragansett Bay were interested in the type of social events which characterized the Bellevue Avenue elite. In an article, entitled "The Season at Newport," which appeared on page 1 in the *New York Times* of August 2, 1875, we are informed that "the Town and Country Club, established to fill a social need, has been doing well... The receptions are held once a week. The last was in the garden of Mr. John Bigelow, whose cottage, being small, would have been unable to hold the crowd. He has, however, a very large garden, and his little *fête champêtre* was a great success." Again, on page 2 of the July 17, 1883

edition, the *Times* reports: "The first meeting of the Town and Country Club was held this afternoon at the residence of Mrs. J.W. Bigelow of New York. Mrs. Julia Ward Howe presided. The old officers were unanimously re-elected. There was a large attendance of literary and society people."

John W. Bigelow was a prominent businessman with mercantile interests in both New York and Boston. His wife, Hanna (*nee* Barton) from the Bartons of Worcester, was related to Clara Barton, head of the Red Cross Society. The Bigelows summered in a house they named "Bayside" at 94 Washington Street, located on Narragansett Bay directly across from the building that now houses the Nina Lynette Home. The Bigelows and their Point estate were apparently frequent hosts of the Town and Country Club meetings, which brought together prominent writers, artists, scientists, architects and others, mostly from academia. Membership in the Club was limited to fifty persons but was open to all; dues were two dollars a year. The Club was the brainchild of Julia Ward Howe, who presided over its affairs for over thirty summers. The story of the Club's origins involves both the Bigelows and their Point estate.

(Continued on page 18)

Nina Lynette

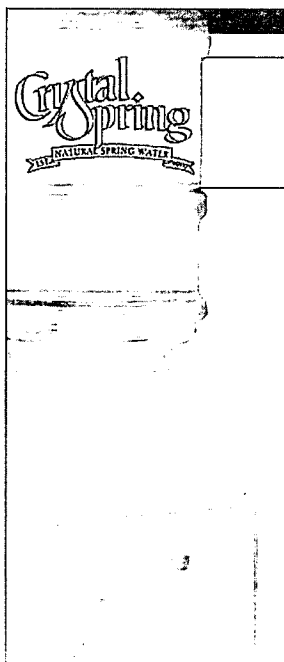
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HOW TO LIVE IN A VERY OLD HOUSE

by Isabel Griffith

In 1963-64 a new independent preservation organization, Operation Clapboard, was formed on the Point. The organization bought options on houses that were worthy of restoration and then held them until sympathetic buyers could be found who would agree to restore them. The average cost for a good house on the Point was about \$9,000.* I live in one of those houses. It was restored in 1966 and thanks to Kay O'Brien I have a "before" picture of it. It is believed to date from 1728 and probably was built just where it stands today on Walnut Street. I rented the house in 1997 just after it had been renovated, bought it in 1999 and have lived here ever since. Every very old house has its own story and "quirks;" we hope this is the first of a series of essays about living in very old houses on the Point.

My house is built on a huge pile of stone that forms the foundation and rises up to the second story as the base of a chimney that serves four fireplaces. The first thing to notice is that there is no level ceiling or floor in the house; they all tilt in one way or another. The most obvious tilt is in the large upstairs bedroom where a toy car placed on the floor at the top of the room will accelerate to the bottom and hit the wall with a satisfying "thump!" The tilt angle of the floor from top to bottom is over four inches. You can see this in the ceiling as well. I soon discovered why – the collapse of the northeast corner of the foundation is obvious in the cellar. Before I bought the house I had two or three building contractors/engineers take a look and tell me what might be done. Their observations, recommendations and estimates were so wildly different that I decided to do nothing. I figured the house has been here

for over 250 years and must have made its peace with gravity long ago. I have never regretted that decision. My first rule for very old houses is "don't touch it!" The problems you create by disturbing the house might outweigh any profit from your actions.

Insulation is a problem with old houses. About the only thing you can do according to the Historic District Commission is insulate the windows from inside or have custom-made wooden storm windows made to be hung by hooks over the windows on the outside. It's NOT a good idea to spray insulation into the walls of the house because then the paint on the outside will fall off. People who have made a study of such things tell me that old houses must be allowed to "breathe." Living in an old house is much easier if you are a fresh air fiend. A very old house is not for everyone but it suits me. As the wind gusts to 35 mph this afternoon I sit in my kitchen aware of the weather only through the thrashing of the trees I can see in my garden. I live in a rock solid house with a comfortable,

settled feel to it. It lends itself to a certain serenity; this is a very good thing in today's world.



* From "Restoration on the Point" by Jane Walsh, in *The Green Light, 1957-2007 a History of the Point Association Bulletin*, p.145.

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THE BENJAMIN FRANKLIN TREE

by Isabel Griffith

In 1765 King George III appointed John Bartram, a Pennsylvania Quaker and farmer, to the post of Royal Botanist for America, a position that allowed him to travel throughout the colonies to collect and preserve specimens of native plants. On one of their trips, Bartram and his son, William, discovered a small grove of beautiful little trees on the banks of the Alatomaha River in Georgia. In less than fifty years the trees had completely disappeared from the wild. No one will ever know the reason the trees vanished. One theory is that the plants were pushed south during the last ice age and were "left behind" when the climate warmed and the ice retreated.

Botanists in England recognized the tree as a new genus and member of the tea family that also includes camellias. In honor of their friend Benjamin Franklin, the Bartrams named the genus *Franklinia*; the species name, *alatamaha*, was chosen from the river where the tree was collected. All cultivated plants today descend from one or more of the specimens brought home to Pennsylvania by the Bartrams.

The Benjamin Franklin tree is a shrub or small tree, usually less than twenty feet tall. In the fall it produces large, white, fragrant flowers with bright yellow stamens; they look a bit like camellia flowers. When the foliage turns bright red to purple the combination of

flowers and leaves is stunning. I know this only from pictures. Alas, the Benjamin Franklin tree I planted in my garden last spring did not survive. *Franklinia* has a notorious reputation for being difficult to establish and it is not a particularly vigorous plant. It requires enriched, acidic soil but tolerates cold and subzero temperatures fairly well. The oldest documented specimens today are in the Arnold Arboretum in Boston. Locally, there is a *Franklinia alatamaha* at Blithewold Mansion in Bristol.

Will I plant another Benjamin Franklin tree? Of course I will! This is such a romantic story; how could anyone resist? The tree can be ordered from a local nursery or a plant

catalog and they are no more expensive than other ornamental specimens. This time next year I may have a happy ending to tell you about.



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NEW ENGLAND'S BEST ROADSIDE REST STOP

by Ed Madden

Driving northwest on I-89, after crossing over the Connecticut River from New Hampshire to Vermont, you soon come to the most amazing rest stop that I have ever visited. It is in the township of Sharon, VT. Beside the usual amenities of a visitor's rest stop, there are two unique features.

One is the Vermont Vietnam Veterans Memorial believed to be the first state sanctioned Vietnam veterans' memorial in the country. It was dedicated in 1982. A large granite monument, engraved with the names of 138 Vermonters who died in Vietnam, is located as the centerpiece in a circular stone amphitheater within a lovely landscaped memorial park. A geothermal snowmelt system keeps the area free of snow and ice in the winter.

The other unique and amazing feature is the "Living Machine", encompassing the geothermal heating and cooling system, combined with an innovative waste disposal technology that purifies all the waste water from the toilets, urinals, and sinks in the rest rooms. The Environmental Protection Agency has called this "the most energy efficient and environmentally sensitive of all space conditioning systems."

So what does this involve? The Living Machine is a biological system consisting of a series of biological and chemical reactors housed in 8 very large reinforced concrete tanks: tank 1 is an anaerobic (oxygen free) reactor collecting all of the previously mentioned water and waste. This tank removes a large amount of solid waste by filtration. The fluid then flows into tanks 2 and 3, which are closed anoxic and aerobic reactors, removing the odor while microbes consume organic debris. Bubbling air keeps the contents mixed to allow the microbes to work. The wastewater then flows to tanks 4, 5, and 6, which are open aerobic reactors housing a variety of tropical plants mostly native to Southeast Asia. These plants thrive on this watery milieu. The roots of the vegetation provide living spaces and oxygen for the microbes to continue consuming the wastes. Then the fluid flows to tank 7 where any remaining solids settle by gravity to the bottom of the tank to be subsequently pumped back to tank 1. The wastewater is treated with a hypo chlorine solution for



disinfection, then de-chlorinated and pumped to tank 8, a holding tank. Here the cleansed water is colored with a green dye to prevent anyone accidentally drinking from the sink faucet. Signs are everywhere to avoid this. The reclaimed water is then ready to be reused in the toilets, urinals, and sinks. Surplus water is discharged to a leach field.

Over 80% of the water pumped into the building is recycled.

All of this activity occurs in a large greenhouse attached to the visitors' pavilion. A metal catwalk leads around the inside of the greenhouse above this whole panorama. This gives a bird's eye view of the complete works. Visitors' information signs are dispersed around the catwalk, so that each of the above-mentioned scientific processes is explained to the viewer.

What you don't see are 24 wells each 420 feet deep which make up a geothermal system that heats and/or cools the complex. The temperature of the underground bedrock is a steady 55 degrees Fahrenheit year round. An extensive system of pipes connects the wells and a mixture of water and glycol is pumped through the pipes. In winter the fluid is warmed from the bedrock to heat the building and in summer it is cooled. Less energy is used than with traditional oil or gas heating/cooling and results in a third less greenhouse gases than conventional systems, reducing the building's carbon footprint.

So – the next time you cross over from New Hampshire to Vermont on I-89 stop and prepare to be amazed at this marvelous environmental wonder. Is there anything there that we could copy here in Newport?

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WATERFRONT NEWS

by Liz Mathinos

WASHINGTON STREET EXTENSION TRIAL

The long-awaited trial concerning the Washington Street Extension (WSE) began on April 7th with both sides presenting evidence and testimony before Superior Court Judge Stephen Nugent. City Solicitor Joe Nicholson said that the City never abandoned the street and presented evidence to support his case. "Abandonment," "unjust enrichment," and use of the property for a park are the issues.

On the second day of the trial, Judge Nugent toured the WSE site to have a clear picture of the piece of land in dispute — now a large expanse of lawn with no clear boundary to separate public from private property. He viewed the manholes from the sewer and water mains that service the Navy Hospital property and the public sidewalk.

Briefs were submitted in May, and a decision will be made in June.

Many citizens believe that it is very important that the

City retain this piece of land, worth an estimated \$125,000, which could be some much-needed revenue in the near future when the six acres of prime waterfront property at the Navy Hospital site are developed.

HARBOR WALK

Since the mid-1980s, Friends of the Waterfront worked on getting the City to develop a Harbor Walk, and finally were able to have the City Council's approval to post Harbor Walk signs in the past two years. With the help of the City's Scott Wheeler and crew, signs were posted from Van Zandt Pier south to King's Park. Recognition at two workshops, the most recent at IYRS, two years ago, defined the consensus between citizens, City planners and businesses that the primary waterfront issue is public access, followed by preservation of a working waterfront. Finally...recognition that a Harbor Walk would be a very good thing for Newport to have.

Fortunately for all of us, Teresa Crean, from the URI Coastal Resources Center (CRC), after the IYRS Charrette, followed-up with a survey of the wharves. Interest continued to generate, and along with Friends of the Waterfront, the City, and Chamber of Commerce, Alliance for a Livable Newport, AIA architects and landscape designers, have been working together on planning the future "look" of Harbor Walk. Along the two miles of waterfront, from Washington Street, Long Wharf, America's Cup, and Thames Street, in-and-out of public and private wharves, walks have been scheduled to introduce people to what is very public access to most of the waterfront. Brochures, a public survey asking for suggestions, and a workshop will bring new ideas through landscape design, signage, and business enterprise to develop the future of Harbor Walk.

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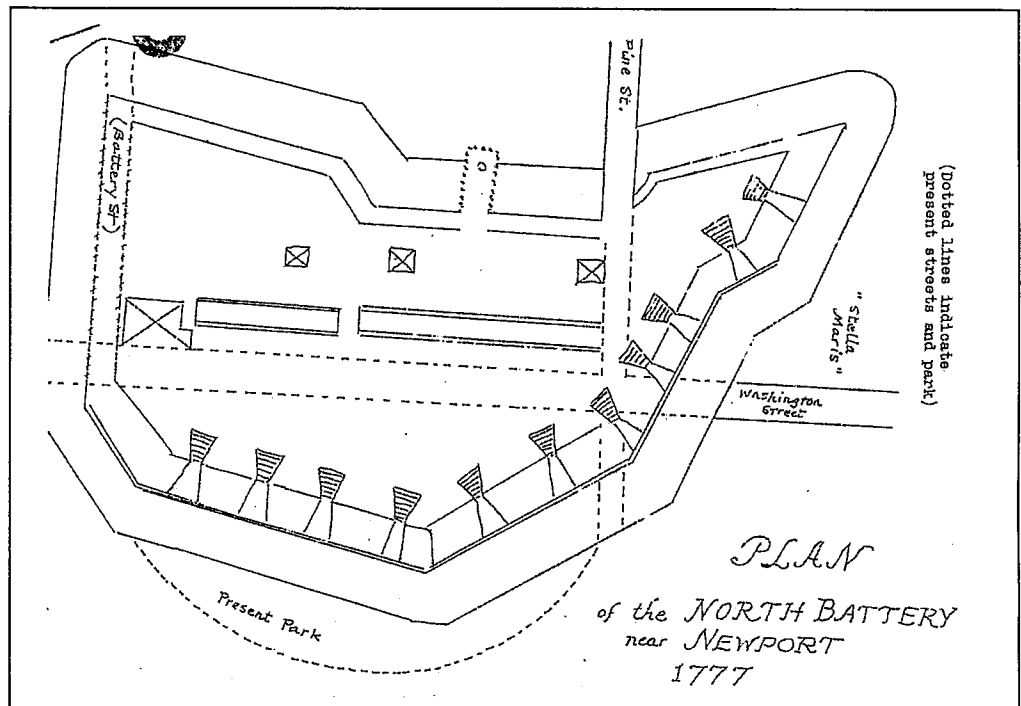
by Jane Marchi

What are *your* first memories of Battery Park, our year-round oasis on the Point? Mine date back to my childhood, when there were still a couple of old cannons hiding among the rugosa roses, and band concerts drew the whole neighborhood there on Sunday evenings. For a kid, this constituted night life on the Point—brass-buttoned musicians playing Sousa marches from a little round gazebo while parents chatted and we children lurked hopefully round the ice cream man who was sure to put in an appearance. During the day, of course, the Blue Rocks were a never ceasing source of fascination for us kids, while a bunch of old timers gathered on a bench by the driftway to keep tabs on the neighborhood and each other. Their memories went so far back that they even had the temerity to address my rather gruff grandfather as “Allie” (and he didn’t even mind!).

Today, of course, Battery Park is still a meeting place, though on a much more casual level, and one we all too often take for granted. Today I will meet neighbors walking their dogs year round, or, in milder weather, may witness a martial arts class at practice or couples picnicking on the grass. In summer, it offers a good vantage point from which to admire the sunset, if not fireworks exploding up or down or across the bay. Aren’t we lucky to have it? Have you ever wondered about how it came to be?

In the early days of Newport, the area was so rural that no one thought of public parks. All had yards and gardens and farms were not too far away. Looking through some of Louise Sherman’s scrapbooks, I was fascinated to learn that it was once situated so far into the “boonies” that it actually served as pasture land for one Thomas Robinson. Until, that is, one fateful

day in the spring of 1776 when a British man-o-war, *Scarborough*, appeared off Rose Island and gave the townspeople a fright. In the course of one night, local patriots, incensed, prepared to give battle by throwing up a fortification on Robinson’s land to forestall a military attack. Surprised by fire from the new fort, the *Scarborough* hauled anchor and retreated.



Nevertheless, feelings were running so high in the colony that spring that it was deemed prudent to expand the nascent fortification and establish a stronger, more permanent defense. This construction, called the North Battery, became an enclosed fort that extended across Water Street (now Washington) about 60 feet up Battery Street to the north, then east across to Pine Street on the south, where the entrance to the fort was located, and then extended across Pine into part of the grounds that we now think of as “Stella Maris.” This decision entailed removing a small house belonging to Daniel Austin situated on the latter property. Thus the “North Battery” was much larger than the site we know today (see map). Despite this substantial effort on the part of Newporters, later that year the city fell to superior British forces (December 1776), who used it for their own defense until being routed by the French a few years later.

The closest description we have of the fort appears in a
(Continued on page 15)

HARBOR MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR NEWPORT

by Isabel Griffith

A Revised Comprehensive Harbor Management Plan for Newport Harbor was adopted by the City Council earlier this year. By formally adopting the Plan, the Council has ensured that the City of Newport will have the advantages of Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Commission compliance and support on harbor planning initiatives and grant funding. What follows is from the Executive Summary of the Plan presented to the City Council in November 2009 by Hank Kniskern, Chair of the Waterfront Commission. A complete version of the Summary can be found at: <http://www.livablenewport.net/HarborMgmtExSummary.pdf>

Maritime Management – This section recommends that that City have a separate “Maritime Department” dedicated to managing and promoting the harbor, and renaming the Waterfront Commission as the Maritime Commission. The Plan suggests that we study other harbors, develop the Armory as a public asset, retain URI to do an economic study, prioritize capital projects, and develop a brochure, and co-promote with other harbors.

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References gladly made available.

Public Access – This section presents an array of practical recommendations for protecting public access and Rights-of-Way (ROW) to Newport waters. One recommendation is that the City have at least one designated employee who is the primary liaison for managing public access issues with civic organizations and government entities. As a strategic goal, the Plan implies that the City should make a concerted effort to increase/acquire public access and public usage of our waters.

CRMC Water Type / DEM Water Quality – This section has numerous thoughtful recommendations for protecting Newport waters and wetlands from pollution. For the harbor specifically, the Plan calls for public awareness, marina collaboration, and enforcement of the RI “no discharge” regulations, and the proper disposal of marine-related waste and contaminants. There has been much progress in this area, but there is always a need for improvement and constant vigilance. Working with a coalition of maritime businesses and forming closer ties with DEM is worthwhile.

Mooring and Anchorage Management – This section is rather detailed and deals with overall management of the harbor. The Plan encourages the ongoing quest for the most efficient use of the harbor, including enforcement of mooring regulations, discouraging misuse of moorings, safe management of the channels and moorings, and providing accommodations for transient vessels. The Plan elaborates on creating a “welcoming atmosphere” for transient boaters. The recommendations include a maritime visitor facility at the Armory, harbor brochure, additional dinghy docks, and loading/unloading facilities. Many of these recommendations have been accomplished, such as the revised mooring waiting list ordinance, the Elm Street Pier, the brochure, and additional dinghy docks.

Hazard Mitigation and Safety – This section discusses preparedness for oil spills, hurricanes, high water events, disaster incidents, and fire response. The Harbormaster and City departments have intensively worked with the Coast Guard, DEM and the EPA on procedures and actions to report and contain oil spills. The response to actual spills has shown these procedures to be effective. We do have a hurricane pre-

(Continued on page 14)

VILLA MARINA: THE SANFORD-COVELL HOUSE

by Alice Clemente

On that often glorious day in mid summer when Point Association members gather at Villa Marina for their annual cocktail party, how many ever notice the artistic detail of that distinguished historic mansion? Why they should take note, if they haven't already done so, becomes apparent on reading the following article by Larry D. Person in the April, 1985 issue of the Green Light.

Predating the grandeur of the Gilded Age's Bellevue Avenue mansions, the Sanford-Covell House was once Newport's fanciest "mansion". Newport and Boston newspapers reported the construction of "an elegant mansion which overlooks the harbor". Milton H. Sanford of New York commissioned Boston architects and builders to erect this manor in 1869 at a reported cost of about \$20,000.

Although the house is large compared to its colonial neighbors, the term "mansion" is appropriate not merely due to its size, but because the interior is surprising and elegant.

Antoinette Downing regards the "stairhall which is open and three stories to the roof, overhung by projecting balconies, and its walls decorated with flat, hard, and elegantly abstracted flower patters in warm colors" as the most distinguishing feature of the house... Visitors [to a Christmas in Newport open house the previous year] were unprepared by the house's exterior to discover such an impressively open stairway. The effect of surprise caused some to remark that it is "breathtaking".



The architectural surprise is just one feature of the "mansion on the Point". The frescoed walls and ceilings of the Sanford-Covell House exhibit an elegance usually found only in mansions.

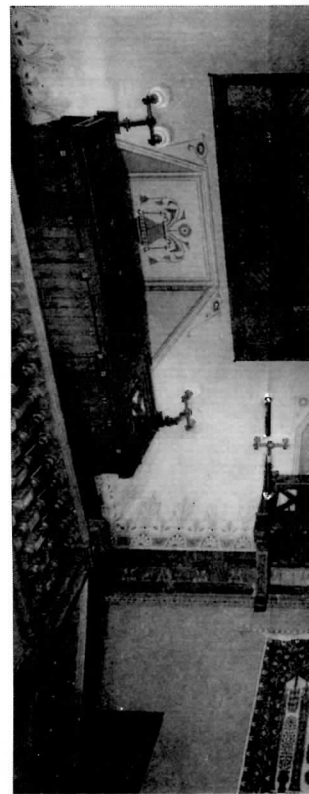
Nineteenth century newspaper accounts of the house agree that "the frescoed walls are one of its chief attractions, the designs and colors being of the most chaste and elegant description. It is frescoed in the Pompeian style and done in oil in the best manner, as is the whole house...the billiard and smoking rooms are perfect little gems. There are very few houses in the country finished as is this."

Mrs. Sanford's niece, well known artist Kate Field, often stayed in the house. The two women were the same age and a close friendship developed.

Mrs. Sanford named one of the bedrooms after Miss Field, who delighted in the "artistic...construction and adornment" of the house.

The July 1959 issue of the *Green Light* contained notes from W. King Covell detailing the early history of the house. He reported that the Covell family acquired the house at auction in 1896. When he died in 1972 the house was deeded to The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. A provision in the deed gave Covell family members first right of refusal should the Society sell the property. Funds to repair and maintain the house were scarce, so recently the Society had to relinquish ownership.

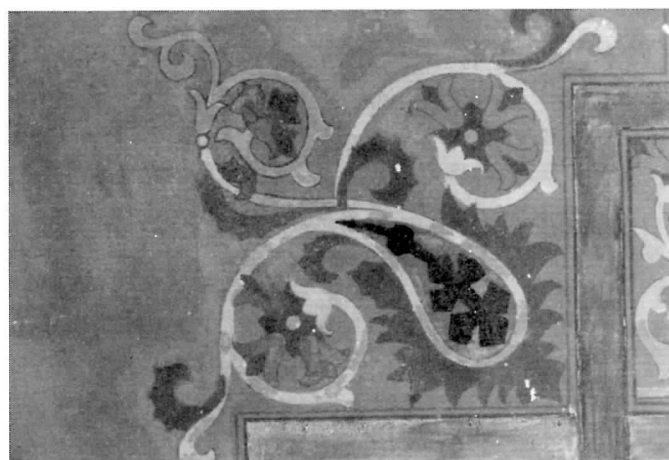
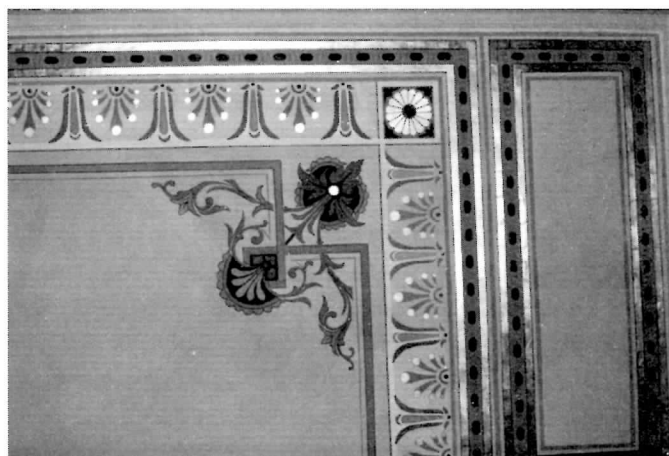
Richard and Anne Cuvelier (she is the daughter of Elizabeth Covell Ramsey) reacquired the house on behalf of the Covell family. They are currently in the process of restoring the beautiful frescoes. The music room, the sitting room, and the parts of the impressive entry hallway were completed before the Christmas-in-Newport Open House by Newport artist Jim





Rensch. Restoration of the frescoes and woodworking in the dining room by the husband-wife team of Merce and Ron Wilczek of Barrington is the current project.

These contemporary artists believe that the historic essence of the Sanford-Covell "mansion" lies in the frescoes. Jim Rensch also restored frescoes in Chateau-Sur-Mer. He says the Covell frescoes are precursors of the Chateau frescoes, and compare favorably to them. Rensch regards the extensive ceiling restorations as his greatest challenge and, therefore, the best "fresco al sicca" he has ever done.



When these artists finish all the lining, stenciling, banding, tracing, gilding, woodworking, plastering, and fresco restoration, the Sanford-Covell House will stand among its colonial neighbors as a surprising and elegant "Mansion on the Point".

The nineteenth-century newspaper account cited above appeared in the Boston Journal on August 9, 1870 in a series entitled "Newport Letters, 1869-1870". It describes the hall as "a novelty" that "surpasses any seen in Newport villas. It is 35 feet from floor to ceiling, and a grand staircase, with polished rail and panels, winds around it, each landing having a fancy piece laid in different colored woods. From each story are projecting balconies with bronze gas fixtures, and near the top is a beautiful stained glass window." This summer when you attend the cocktail party, do notice the chandeliers in each of the rooms on the main floor and when you wander into the front hall, look up. Your efforts will be rewarded.





PHOTOS BY ANDY LAVARRE

*Third Street shut down for ear-shattering sewer repairs in April.
Who knows what lurks beneath the pavement in a quiet Willow Street neighborhood?*

(Continued from page 11)

paredness plan. The Waterfront Commission did research the feasibility of a fireboat, but local resources and more dockside fire equipment were considered a more practical alternative. Flood-related planning is an ongoing effort involving City Planning.

Facilities – This concluding section of the Plan offers recommendations that are also presented in prior sections (such as public access and safety), and many intersect with initiatives being addressed in the current revision of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

Many of the recommendations in this section have been accomplished (pier safety ladder ordinance, boat ramps, Van Zandt pier, State Pier, improved lighting), while other activities are underway, such as planning for better use of the Stone Pier, signage, and waterfront building ordinances. Going forward, this section highlights the plight of the small boat user. The Plan suggests we should be attentive to planning that incorporates citizens with boats that are too small for a mooring and larger than a car-top rack.

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(Continued from page 10)

Board of Engineers Report (7 April 1820), in which it was described as:

"an elliptical barbette battery for 12 or 13 guns, with a palisaded gorge. The work has a development measured upon its interior crest of 240 feet. Its parapet is 21 feet thick, its rampart 26 feet broad, its scarp wall 20 feet high, has command of 29 feet above low water, and within the work is a brick barrack and guard house, a bomb-proof magazine, and a hot-shot furnace." Its final comment was that *"this is sufficient for its purpose."*

Some of these terms may sound a bit archaic to modern ears. For instance, a "barbette" refers to a protected platform from which the guns could be fired over a parapet, while a "scarp wall" merely meant an inner ditch that was located below the parapet for protection.

The fort remained a valued fortification not only during the war but in the years that followed. Eventually, in 1799,

President John Adams decided to purchase the North Battery on behalf of the federal government and renamed it Fort Greene, in honor of General Nathaniel Greene. Born in Warwick (RI) and raised as a Quaker, General Greene had been sufficiently drawn to the cause of independence to take up the study of military tactics on his own and formed a militia in 1774. He was expelled by the Quakers, who were pacifists, but went on to become one of Washington's most valued generals in the Revolutionary War, particularly in battles on Long Island and in New Jersey.

At the same time that the government purchased Fort Greene, it also decided to establish Fort Adams at the mouth of Narragansett Bay, as what was called a First System fortification, with 12 cannons, and was garrisoned to protect the harbor in the War of 1812. Thus there was no occasion for the use of Fort Greene in 1812, even though guns remained mounted there. Two years later, in July 1814, the Newport Artillery Company, under the command of Colonel Benjamin Fry, took possession of the fort by order of the Secretary of War; there they performed camp duty until the following February. But this was the high watermark of the usefulness of the old fort *as* a fort for the government decided to concentrate its energies on expanding and strengthening Fort Adams, which was located at the strategic entrance to the bay and harbor, while Fort Greene was allowed to lapse back into its former bucolic state and, for much of the nineteenth century, was leased to private parties with the stipulation that the site be kept in order.

Things began to change in 1853 when Agatha Mayer began to put together a large parcel of land needed for

(Continued on page 22)



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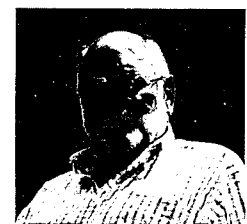
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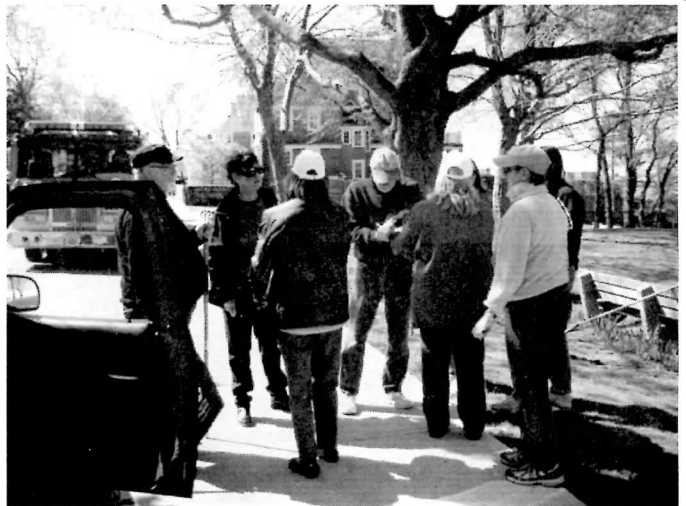
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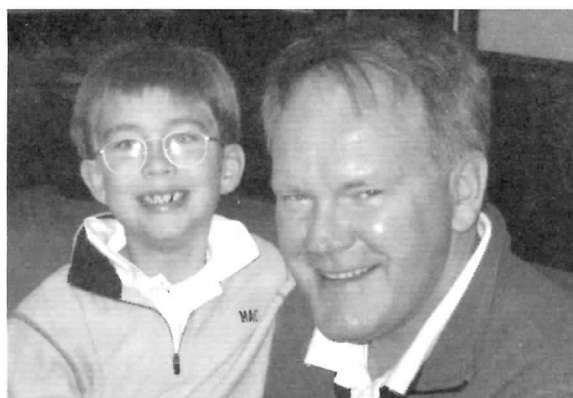
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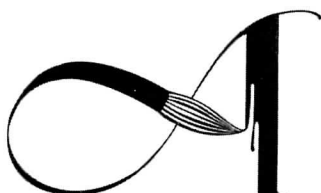
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(Continued from page 5)

"Bayside" as the author first remembered it – "the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Bigelow. Mr. Bigelow was a New York business man, who came and went as his kind do today from busy Wall Street to cool Newport. Though I rarely saw him at his hospitable house on the Point, I knew well his three interesting children: Willie, the architect, a handsome, shy young man; Marie, who married Professor Marsh of Harvard; and Annie, whose transcendent dark-eyed loveliness I shall never forget. Willie was a good skipper, and we enjoyed many a sailing-party in his catboat.

What feasts took place in this dear old house on Washington Street! – none was more striking than that of the marriage of Annie, the beautiful seventeen-year-



BENJAMIN CURTIS PORTER (American, 1843-1908)
Portrait of Maud Howe Elliott, 1877 Oil on canvas
Newport Art Museum: Purchased from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1993, Through the generosity of many donors, particularly R. Campbell James

old daughter, to Charles McKim, at the outset of the great architect's career. The union was short-lived. The one child surviving, Margaret Meloney, after a lifetime spent elsewhere, now lives in a charming house with a lovely garden – 'Casa del Sole,' on Hammersmith Road.

I can see Mrs. Bigelow, the handsome hostess, elegantly dressed in contrasting shades of purple and splendid with solitaire diamonds, welcoming her guests. Colonel Higginson, George Bancroft, Helen Hunt, Henry James [father of Henry and William], Bret Harte, and the benevolent face of the beloved pastor Charles Brooks, all smile at me from the 'bully piaz.'" (*This Was My Newport*, 103)

A special and memorable event marked the founding of the Town and Country Club at "Bayside." Maude Howe Elliot recalls some of the highlights from the summer of 1871. "In it [the room set aside for dramatic performances] was held the famous Mother Goose 'commencement' which celebrated the founding of the Town and Country Club. Mrs. Ritchie, daughter of Harrison Gray Otis of Boston; Albert Sumner, a younger brother of Charles Sumner; Bret Harte and his friend J.G. Holland, author of *Bittersweet*, Professors Lane and Goodwin of Harvard; Kate Field, author and lecturer; Fanny Fern and her husband James Parton, the biographer; the elder Henry James and George Bancroft, all had a part in it. A program in Latin was prepared by Professor Lane. My mother acted as president of the occasion, with Colonel Higginson as her 'vice.' The program opened with addresses in Latin, Greek and English. The Reverend Charles Brooks delivered a Latin oration. Colonel Higginson, who had just published his paper on the Greek Goddess, was assigned the theme 'How to Sacrifice an

(Continued on page 19)



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(Continued from page 18)

Irish Bull to a Greek Goddess.' Colonel George Waring discussed 'Social Small Potatoes; How to Enlarge the Eyes.' Fanny Fern gave an essay on 'Rhinosophy'; Professor Godwin a Greek version of 'The Man in the Moon,' and Bret Harte read a poem. Mother Goose costumes were not worn — but were they necessary, when nursery rhymes were recited in six different languages? Professor Godwin's Oxford gown, divided into two parts, was worn by my mother and Colonel Higginson." (*This Was My Newport*, 104)

Julia Ward Howe, herself, recalls: "... the delicious fooling of that summer [1871] was never repeated. Out of it came, however, the more serious and permanent association known as the Town and Country Club of Newport. Of this I was at once declared president, but my great good fortune lay in my having for vice-president Professor William B. Rogers, illustrious as the founder of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology." (*Reminiscences*, 405) Membership in the Club over the more than thirty years of its existence included many names that still resonate: Alexander Agassiz, Richard Morris Hunt, John La Farge, Henry G. Marquand, Emma Lazarus, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes and Edith Wharton. Among the Club's guest speakers was Mark Twain, who "furnished champagne with his witticisms." (*This Was My Newport*, 112) The final meeting of the Club is also of some interest. "At a meeting held on October 16, 1905, at the home of Mrs. Rogers, the Town and Country Club was formally disbanded, and its funds, amounting to nearly fifteen hundred dollars, were turned over to the Redwood Library as a permanent fund bearing the name of the Club." (*This Was My Newport*, 114)

John W. Bigelow died on August 23rd 1883. *The New*

York Times of August 28th contained the following rather strange death notice. "John W. Bigelow, of New York, was found dead in his bed at his cottage on Washington Street, Newport, on Sunday. He was recently rescued from drowning, at which time a quiet rumor prevailed that he had attempted suicide. The suicide theory has again been started, the alleged cause being financial difficulties, but the Doctor and the family deny that there is any foundation for the belief." (Page 5) Mrs. Bigelow died in 1906 in St. Louis, just a year after the Town and Country Club disbanded. The *Times* included the following remarks in her obituary: "In the days of the Town and Country Club, Mrs. Bigelow was an active member." (*N.Y. Times*, Dec. 18, 1906, 9)

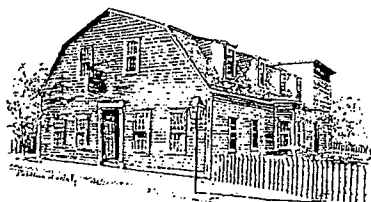
Traces of the Bigelows are still to be found on the Point, although their beloved "Bayside" was eventually demolished. John Bigelow's son, William, became a partner with Charles Follen McKim in his New York architectural firm. His sister, Annie, married McKim in 1874. The carriage house, rebuilt in 2006, that stands on the corner of Second Street and Pine was designed by McKim for his father-in-law, Mr. Bigelow, as an addition to his Washington Street estate. It was constructed in 1876 and is considered a significant early example of the American Shingle Style, which McKim later became known for. A sign on the building proclaims its history. For anyone interested, it is currently for sale.

WORKS CONSULTED

Covell, Virginia Galvin, "A Critical Examination of the Town and Country Club of Newport, Rhode Island". Thesis, MA, English, University of Rhode Island, 1964.

Elliot, Maude Howe. *This Was My Newport*. Cambridge, MA: The Mythology Company, 1944

Howe, Julia Ward. *Reminiscences* 1819-1899. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899.



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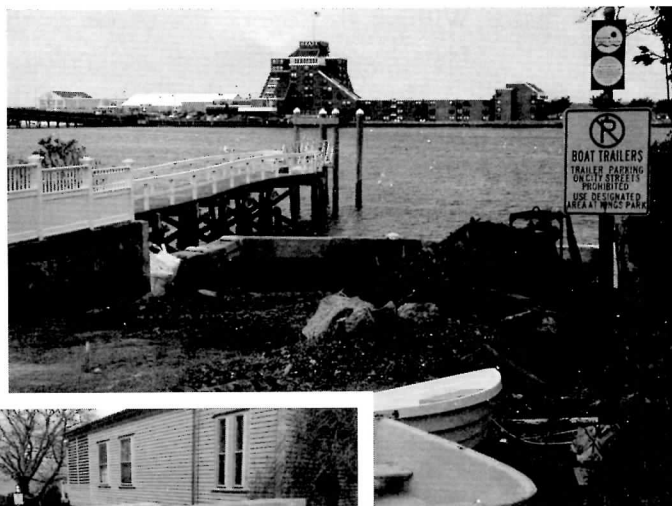
by Isabel Griffith

With photos by Tom Goldrick and Andy Lavarre

As the *Green Light* goes to the printer, the repairs on the Poplar Street driftway are complete. The project was paid for out of the Newport Harbor capital fund. Articulating concrete blocks were proposed to and endorsed by the Waterfront Commission last year. The surface is permeable and its articulating nature allowed it to be used over a drainpipe. The lower section of blocks was cabled together for easier and faster installation below the water line. The use of this modern technology is a test case for driftway repair but the product has been widely used for boat ramp construction throughout the USA and is significantly cheaper than traditional methods.

The restored ramp is intended for the launching of small dinghies and sailboats, as has been its traditional use. The height of the ramp did not change and the surrounding water depth is rather shallow. If this system works out, it will be considered as one possible solution for the Willow Street driftway.

Thanks to Scott Wheeler from the Parks Department for his comments about the driftway repairs and to Andy Lavarre and Tom Goldrick for the photographs.



(Continued from page 4)

Another hopeful bit of good news: the Saratoga Foundation, which has envisioned moving the mothballed aircraft carrier, *Saratoga*, from the Newport Naval Base, had a set back when permanent docking space at Quonset shipyard was recently lost. However, the members of the Foundation have come up with an alternative and, I believe, better plan – that is, to transfer the museum and the *Saratoga* to Portsmouth. Negotiations are in process as of this writing.

So let's consider two future possibilities for the Burma Road:

1. You drive onto the highway at the Newport-Middletown area and traverse a certain distance north. The landscaping is lovely, including many of the amenities previously mentioned. However by the time you reach Portsmouth, there is a huge waterside development with high-rise hotel, marina, convention center, massive gambling casino and monstrous parking lot. A brightly lighted sign welcomes you to "The Burma Road Fantasy Resort and gambling Mecca"!

2. You drive onto the highway at the Newport-Middletown area and traverse a certain distance north through landscaping as described above. Solar and wind

farms delight your pocketbook. Your destination is a vast landscaped park with modest facilities for cars and even a commuter railway station for the Old Colony and Newport Railway. A modern building houses the history of the aircraft carrier *Saratoga* and its exploits during World War II. A comfortable indoor-outdoor restaurant takes advantage of the scenic beauty with the berthed *Saratoga* as a focal point. There might hopefully be additional naval exhibits to complement the museum.

I don't have a problem deciding which of these roads to take. Do you?

ADDENDUM:

As this article was going to press, the following headline appeared in the *Newport Daily News*, May 3, 2010: "Navy Sinks Saratoga Project." The essence of this literary piece is that the Navy determined that the *Saratoga*, after 16 years of benign neglect at Pier One in Middletown, is no longer worthy of donation to the Saratoga Foundation and is possibly going to be scrapped. That is the bad news. The hopeful good news is that the *USS John F. Kennedy* aircraft carrier, presently being kept in "fully functional reserve status" at the Philadelphia naval maintenance facility, would be readily capable of transfer to a museum status. The Navy has indicated that it might be possible to substitute the *Kennedy* for the *Saratoga*. The long time association of the Kennedy name with Newport, R.I., makes this a nice fit. The additional bad news is that a Portland, Maine, group got wind of the *USS Kennedy*'s availability and is anxious to berth the aircraft carrier in a museum in Maine waters. As Sherlock Holmes would say, "The game is afoot." Let us hope that we have the clout to win this one because it truly is a win-win situation for Aquidneck Island, the aircraft carrier museum and the Burma Road.

*Two roads diverged in a wood and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*
Robert Frost

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(Continued from page 15)

her mansion (present Stella Maris) and gardens and wanted this property to extend from Cherry to Battery Street, and from Second Street (across Washington) to the water. For this to be accomplished, the Overseers of the R.I. Meeting of Friends agreed to convey to her "the lots on which Fort Greene stands," probably that portion on which Daniel Austin's house once sat. This amounted to rental, since the fort itself was still government property. At the time of her purchase, Washington Street ended at Fort Greene; however, just a few years later, in 1859, it was extended north to Battery Street.

During this time the old fort languished, to the distress of some of the townspeople. In 1879, an article in the *Newport Daily News* decried the fact that the site had reverted to pasturage for cows, while generations of Newport boys had found it a great place to trespass and peep into decaying buildings. It went on to state that "This picturesque old fort should never have been suffered to pass into the hands of private parties to be fenced off and the public excluded, occupying as it does a commanding position with one of the finest views of Newport Harbor."

It is said that Rome was not built in a day nor did Battery Park come into being overnight nor revert from federal to city ownership in a few years. But the seeds had been planted and the government was petitioned to remedy the situation.

So it was that by an Act of Congress (approved 23 February 1887 and ratified in July 1891), the Secretary of War authorized the City of Newport to use Fort Greene solely as a public park. The city was so quick

to act upon this permission that the *Newport Daily News* was able to report just a month after ratification that "the work of changing Old Fort Greene from an ancient shore battery into a Battery Park is progressing rapidly under the charge of the Committee on Parks and Public Property." Still it was not until 1926 that ownership would actually pass to the city. On June 7th of that year, the U.S. War Department announced the proposed sale of Fort Greene. At that time, Frederick Garrettson, a prominent citizen and former mayor, generously offered to put up the purchase price to acquire the site. Thus when the auction was held, on June 22nd, Newport Mayor Sullivan was able to bid for the city. Other bidders then withdrew in respect of the city's offer. The site was purchased for \$5,471.41 – and on the 30th of September, Frederick Garrelson was able to present Fort Greene Military Reservation to the City of Newport to preserve it forever as a public park. Our Battery Park. Forever.

[Sources: Louise Sherman was an indefatigable researcher, who relied heavily upon information from the Newport Historical Society and the help of Mrs. Peter Bolhouse. The description of the fort was contained in the "Historical Sketch of the Fortification Defenses of Narragansett Bay," by Bvt. Major-General George Cullen, US Army (ret.), 1884. Articles quoted from the *Newport Daily News* came from issues of 26 June 1879 and 22 August 1891, respectively]

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