

WESTERN RHODE ISLAND

CIVIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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PROCEEDINGS OF  
THE WESTERN RHODE ISLAND CIVIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Introduction

The Western Rhode Island Civic Historical Society was incorporated under the laws of the State of Rhode Island on August 10, 1945. As set forth in the Articles of Association, the Society was organized for the purpose of

"gathering and preserving early and present-day historical materials relating to the western area of Rhode Island; providing for the accessibility of such materials as far as may be feasible to the teachers, school pupils, and to the public; and cooperating with the churches, Granges, and patriotic organizations as well as with schools to promote the social and cultural life of the area."

The Society is a nonprofit corporation, and any funds received must be used for the purposes for which the Society was incorporated. There are no paid officers, and the work of the Society has been carried on entirely by volunteers. The Society cooperates with and supplements the work of the other historical, patriotic, and religious organizations of the State.

The original idea for such a Society had long been in the thoughts of a small group of people interested in the history and development of the western section of Rhode Island. Some lived in this section, others had been born here, and still others were interested because of their deep interest in the history of Rhode Island and their desire for its preservation.

A group of these people met in July, 1945, and at that meeting the formation of such a Society was discussed and plans laid for its organization. Under the active and enthusiastic leadership of Mildred E. Bassett, Professor of History at Rhode Island College of Education, this small group was rapidly expanded, and soon after the Society started its official existence.

Since its organization meetings have been held regularly except during the winter months in different sections of the western part of Rhode Island, and many learned and interesting talks and lectures have been presented.

In order that these lectures might have a wider distribution and might be preserved for future reference and study, the Society has decided to have these lectures reproduced and distributed to members of the Society and others who may be interested. A nominal charge will be made for copies of the lectures to help defray the cost of reproduction, and any profits will be added to the funds of the Society.

This is the first of such distributions and contains the very interesting lectures given at the first two meetings of the Society. "The Heritage of Western Rhode Island" was given by Daniel Howard at the first meeting of the Society in the Town House in Foster on August 28, 1945. It is followed by some additional material on the history of Foster supplied by Mr. Howard after his lecture at the request of the Society. This is entitled "Some Facts about Foster, Rhode Island."

The next lecture on the history of Coventry was given by Mrs. Edwin H. Arnold at the second meeting of the Society in the Greene Methodist Church in Greene on September 25, 1945. This is followed by an article on Coventry which was read at this meeting by Mrs. Helen Beaton from an old book entitled A GAZETTEER OF THE STATES OF CONNECTICUT AND RHODE ISLAND by John C. Pease and John M. Niles which was published in 1819.

It is planned to reproduce and distribute other lectures which have been given before the Society in the near future. It is hoped that the members of the Society and others interested in its objectives will approve this undertaking.

SAYLES GORHAM, Editor

Note: The Western Rhode Island Civic Historical Society assumes no responsibility for statements or opinions included in lectures given before the Society.

THE HERITAGE OF WESTERN RHODE ISLAND

By Daniel Howard

It is a genuine pleasure for me to be with you tonight for more than one reason. In the first place, I am glad that you are engaged in the building of a society that shall preserve and transmit to the generations to come the story of the civic and patriotic life of the men and women of Western Rhode Island. In the second place, it is always a pleasure for me to come back to my native town on any social or civic occasion and to participate with the good citizens of Rhode Island in any enterprise that has social value. In the third place, this old Town House is to me one of the dearest spots on earth. One of my ancestors was among the prime movers in building this house for religious worship almost 150 years ago, and still later two more of my ancestors were the prime movers in making this old meeting house available as a town hall and a community center for purposes of education and amusement.

In my boyhood this was the church, the town hall, the town courthouse, and the town theater, and how I appreciated the many privileges that I enjoyed here! I came here to Sunday School, to church occasionally--there was no regular pastor and only intermittent services in those days-- to town meetings for which my father always allowed me to cut school, to meetings of the town and district courts, which were to me a thrilling and exciting source of education, and then the traveling shows and lectures illustrated by the wonderful magic lantern as we used to call it; but best of all the shows and entertainments put on by home talent in which I was allowed to have an active part after I became old enough. And it has been a source of great delight to me to come back here almost every year during the more than half a century that I have been away. Tonight it is a special pleasure because you are engaged in an enterprise that appeals strongly to my nature and my instincts.

You have asked me to speak about the Heritage of Western Rhode Island. It is a worthy heritage and you do well to cherish it and seek to record it and preserve it for the generations that are to follow us. We are justly proud of the heritage of Rhode Island as a whole, for it was Roger Williams and his followers who established here more than 300 years ago some of those basic principles for which we and the liberty-loving nations of the world have just fought the greatest, the most costly in blood and treasure, and the most destructive war in the world's history--namely, the principle that kings and other rulers have no right to invade the territory even of an Indian and dispossess him of his land without his consent, and even then only after a just bargain and fair payment--and then there was that other basic principle now recognized by all fair-minded people that the civil magistrates have no authority over the religious convictions of their citizens so long as those citizens are law-abiding. These convictions of Roger Williams

caused him to be regarded outside of Rhode Island as the arch-heretic and arch-enemy of law and order. Indeed in 1643 when the four colonies of Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth, Hartford, and New Haven united to form the New England Confederacy for protection against the French on the north and the Dutch on the west, they excluded Rhode Island from their union because of her distrusted principles of government and religion.

Those early pioneers did not believe in congested settlements. As soon as their first communities, which were invariably situated upon the banks or shores of some navigable water, had grown to the dimensions of large villages, the more ambitious and energetic among the settlers began to feel the urge for expansion and more room and greater freedom and independence. Then they left the parent settlements and moved inland. Samuel Gorton founded Warwick, a part of which was later set off as Coventry. John Mathewson built a hut near Moswansicut Pond and became the first pioneer settler of Scituate, which received its name in 1710 when a band of emigrants joined Mathewson from Scituate, Massachusetts. Seven years later Ezekiel Hopkins made the first settlement in the western part of Scituate which is now Foster. He was soon joined by an influential group of emigrants from Newport, and about 1750 Isaac Howard with his large family came here from Rice City in Coventry. During this same period Glocester was settled by a succession of hardy pioneers led by Abram Tourtelotte, who built his first home about one mile south of Acote's Hill. Glocester had the most unfortunate reputation of all the border towns because the early explorers sent out from Providence by Roger Williams created the impression that the region was a howling wilderness whose soil was unfit for cultivation, and even as late as the time of the Revolutionary War, the colonial assembly designated Glocester as a place of banishment for some of the hated Tories who were not wanted in the city of Newport by the patriots of that place.

Taken as a whole, the settlers of these western towns were a hardy, a thrifty, and a patriotic citizenry. They heeded the call of the mother country for aid in her struggle with the French and Indians of the north and fought with Wolfe on the Plains of Abraham at Quebec. They responded with alacrity to the appeals for volunteers that followed Lexington and Concord and loyally supported the Continental Congress. They guarded the shores of Narragansett Bay and rendered distinguished service in the Continental Army. When the storm of secession broke and Fort Sumter was attacked, young men from all these western hills and valleys donned the union blue and marched away to the wild and thrilling music of war to protect and preserve the institutions of freedom and maintain a nation that should be one and indivisible. And more recently we know what happened in World War Number One and in the awful struggle just now coming to a close. Read the list of names on the honor roll but a short distance from this meeting house. Read also the story of their sacrifice and devotion as it comes home to us from the sanguinary battlefields of Europe, Africa, Asia, and the islands of the Pacific. The patriotism and the public spirit of the sons and daughters of our western towns have never been in doubt.

Some of these achieved national recognition. Esek Hopkins of Scituate was the first commander-in-chief of our infant Navy in the early days of the Revolutionary War, and his capture of ammunition and military stores from the British was of great help to the patriot cause. His brother Stephen was one of the immortals who signed the Declaration of Independence besides serving Rhode Island as speaker of the House of Representatives, chief justice of the Superior Court, leader among the incorporators of Brown University, and nine years as Governor. General Nathaniel Greene, though not a native of Coventry, made that town the scene of his business activities before the Revolutionary War, and his services to his country during the struggle for freedom place him next to Washington among the military heroes whose fame will endure so long as our country is proud to honor its founders and creators. Theodore Foster, who gave his name to this town and established here a bank and a public library, had been one of the first United States Senators during the presidency of George Washington and John Adams. In more recent years, Nelson W. Aldrich, born in Foster, had a long service in the United States Senate as the most distinguished and influential member not only from Rhode Island but of all the states in the union. Another United States Senator who could rightly claim to be a part of the heritage of Western Rhode Island was Elisha Mathewson, a lineal descendant of John Mathewson, the first settler of Scituate.

While we are speaking of the distinguished men who rendered public service to their state and nation, we must not forget the humbler citizens whose united efforts contributed mightily to the betterment of our civic and political fortunes. It was in Glocester around Chepachet and Acote's Hill that a storm of protest over the levy of heavy taxes and other unpopular exercise of state authority started a movement that culminated in the Shays' Rebellion of Western Massachusetts during the critical days that followed the Revolutionary War. Though this rebellion had elements of disorder that have received general criticism and severe condemnation, it grew out of an insistent demand for justice which was in line with progress toward more liberal and democratic principles of government than prevailed under Rhode Island's tolerance and veneration for its disqualified English charter or under the inadequate Articles of Confederation which served as our only national constitution from 1781 to 1789. At any rate, that protest and that rebellion became an important element in arousing the entire thirteen youthful states to the necessity of a more acceptable form of government which they organized in 1789 under the new federal constitution of 1787.

But Rhode Island was still without a constitution other than the outgrown royal charter inherited from colonial days. The government was still too aristocratic to suit the freedom lovers of these western hill towns as well as many others who were not in the favored class of land owners who alone with their oldest sons possessed the full right of suffrage. Therefore, half a century later Acote's Hill was again to figure in the struggle for greater justice and a more democratic form of government. This time Thomas W. Dorr was the leader of the movement. He was intellectually brilliant, well educated in the law, and a lover of liberty and

justice. He called for the adoption of a state constitution to take the place of the discredited charter. The political campaigns of the early forties are the most interesting and exciting in Rhode Island's history. Dorr's ideals appealed strongly to the majority of the residents of the state, but his revolutionary methods could not be accepted by many who favored his cause. By a revolutionary election he was chosen governor. By a regular election Samuel Ward King was also chosen governor. A short civil war followed. The final scene was Acote's Hill which the Dorrites had fortified and planned to defend with a few hundred of his followers. The regular state troops were sent against them. Troops quickly assembled from these western towns, met right here on these Town House grounds, and then marched northward toward Chepachet. Some of my family were among them. Probably some of you had relatives with them also. But none of them were called upon to sacrifice their lives at Acote's Hill. Most of the insurgents had fled and the rest surrendered without firing a shot. Dorr was sent to prison for life, but he was soon released, pardoned, and honored for his service. The state adopted a constitution in 1842 which went into effect in 1843, and my grandfather who had opposed the revolutionary methods of Dorr was reported to be one of the hardest fighters for the reforms which Dorr had advocated. He contended especially for an extension of the right of suffrage. He took the attitude ascribed facetiously to Benjamin Franklin in a story which may or may not be true. The aged philosopher was reported to have appeared before the registrars of voters with a petition to have his name placed on the list of voters. "Did you vote last year?" he was asked. "Yes," was the reply. "Has your status changed since then? If so, how?" "Last year," said Ben, "I owned a mule. He was worth \$134. That entitled me to vote. Since then the mule has died and with him died my chance to vote. Will you tell me who it was that had the right to vote? Was it I or was it the mule?"

The Constitution of 1842 was far from perfect, but it did give the right to vote in the general elections to registered voters who did not own real estate or pay a property tax. Western Rhode Island has an honorable share in this heritage. In every walk of public life, in every field of public service, the western towns have had their quota of honored names. We could hardly begin to name those whose services will adorn your records when your society has collected the material that will be available.

A few, partly because of personal interest, quickly present themselves to my mind. In education, which has long claimed a major part of my attention, there was Professor Solomon Drowne, who gave the name of Mount Hygeia to one of the highest portions of this town and named the broad highway through his farm the Appian Way. Incidentally he was a botanist and a horticulturist and gave to America its most famous apple, the Rhode Island Greening, which he developed only a few miles from here. Then there was the Honorable Pardon E. Tillinghast who taught school in this town and later had a long and honorable career as one of our state's highly esteemed judges. And there have been George S. Tillinghast, H. Lester Place, Lester Howard, Alonzo Williams at Brown University, and today Mildred E. Bassett, who trains and instructs teachers in the teachers' college of Rhode Island.

In the field of the law, I had two ancestors whose name I bear, each of whom, after serving this town as Town Clerk for 25 years, afterwards served the state as Judge of the Court of Common Pleas. Another Foster student of the law who not only served this community as District Judge but later became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the state was Clarke Howard Johnson. And this town today has a public servant in Benjamin G. Eddy whose ability and fidelity unite to give him an honorable place in the town's history. Going back to the last century, Lester Howard and George W. Phillips both rendered honorable service as Town Clerk for many years. Among lawyers Gloucester can point with pride to Walter Reynolds who for nearly half a century served as Clerk of the Common Pleas division of our Supreme Court.

The churches of Western Rhode Island have been mostly of the liberal and independent type which encouraged the search for new truth and did not hold to the view that all revelation had been delivered in the past.

Medical service has had few more devoted benefactors than Dr. Mowry P. Arnold of Foster Center, and his three sons, two of them physicians, all inherited and honored their father's devotion to the public welfare.

In business and industry these hill towns have never been spectacular, but they have been solid, reliable, and progressive. The factories that once furnished employment to thousands have largely disappeared, but the spirit of enterprise, thrift, and self-reliance have remained. From these towns our cities have attracted many who have become the leaders in business, in banking, and in the professions.

Nowhere has the spirit of brotherhood been more in evidence than here, and helpful cooperation rather than brutal competition has marked the daily lives of these rural towns. I recall many striking and worthy examples that I witnessed in my boyhood and youth in this town. One neighbor had his barn destroyed by fire. The neighborhood rushed to his aid. My father went into the woods, felled some of the magnificent chestnut trees for which Howard Hill was then noted, hauled them to the saw-mill where they were converted into lumber, and then donated the lumber to the unfortunate neighbor. Others donated material and money, and then at a community raising they assembled and erected a new barn. Another neighbor was ill and his grass needed to be cut. One morning his neighbors appeared with their scythes and rakes. That evening the new mown hay was in his barn. Another neighbor was ill at harvest time. His neighbors advertised a bee and in one day gathered his apples and husked his corn. These incidents were typical, and they are characteristic of the life of these communities.

The Farmers' Grange and the many literary societies and neighborhood groups have given stimulus to the social and intellectual life. Here have been preserved at their best most of those moral and civic virtues, the elements of good government, economic justice, good will, and fraternal conduct that the world has had to fight to maintain elsewhere.

May their influence and their example spread far and wide, and your society can do much to preserve their record and extend their blessings.

HISTORY OF COVENTRY, RHODE ISLAND

By Mrs. Edwin H. Arnold

It is with mingled fear and pleasure that I stand here planning to give you a few gleanings from the early history of Coventry particularly the western section. The fear is because I doubt my ability as a speaker, and the pleasure comes because I am about to expound on my favorite subject. Much of what I have to say comes from my own researching, but it is to my partner in crime, Mr. Charles M. Perry, I owe a large part of it and to Professor Frank Bates, now of Bloomington, Indiana, but a native of Coventry.

In 1643, the Indian chief, Miantonomi, sold to a group of men the large section of land called the Shawomet Purchase which includes the present towns of West Warwick and Coventry and most of the city of Warwick. The deed shows the names of twelve<sup>1</sup> men as the Purchasers, but by the time an attempt was made to divide the land, the number of Purchasers had increased to sixteen men, with one man, John Smith, owning two shares, making the total number of divisions to be made as seventeen.

The Purchasers kept a firm grip on the land. They had meetings to pass orders about allotting the land, about occupying the meadows and pasturing cattle, about highways and fences, and above all, to pass upon who should be admitted into the settlement.

One of the early attempts to divide the land was in 1672 when the line dividing it in two was ordered to be run. This line called the "7 and 10 line" was to run west from the head of Apponaug brook "due west up in the country unto the west end of the grand purchase." The line involved so many disputes that Professor Bates has written a special story on it and is engaged in further research to find the true story of all the land divisions. It is a complicated story and difficult to tell in a few words so that the divisions I am mentioning are only in the present town of Coventry.

North of the "7 and 10 line" seven of the seventeen Purchasers received all the land from the present Coventry east line to the Connecticut line, the other ten men having received land further east. Below the "7 and 10 line" there were two large divisions--one usually referred to as the "land below the River" was laid out to the east of the river called by the various names of Great River, Carrs River, and Big River. The other division was called "the land above the River." This upper section has mistakenly been called the ten men's land; instead it was divided among the seventeen Purchasers, each receiving two shares.

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1. Fuller's HISTORY OF WARWICK, pp. 11 and 48.

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The "7 and 10 line" may seem very uninteresting until one starts digging into land history and finds it mentioned continually as a boundary line. It divides Greene in two and Summit as well--in fact, I think it runs through George Chase's well and the blinker at Summit. Mr. Perry lives north of it and I live south, but we haven't decided which is the best side to live in.

Another addition was made to the seven men's land when in 1728 the Colonial line was finally fixed between Connecticut and Rhode Island. North of the "7 and 10 line," the land received by Rhode Island by the alteration of the boundary was divided among the seven men, each receiving two shares. These were called the "Head Lots," and Mr. Harrington last month suggested someone study this subject in Foster as Foster also had its "Head Lots."

After the Indian Wars, development of the land in the west could proceed, and by 1731 a few hardy souls had gone into the wilderness to carve their homes out of the forest in true pioneer fashion. The old maps show two main highways--one through the northern half and one through the southern part, both extending to the Connecticut line. The numerous brooks were utilized to run grist and saw mills to help the settlers live and house themselves. By 1741 there may have been one hundred families living within the bounds of what is now the town of Coventry, but most of them were in the eastern part. The seat of government was at the settlement on the shore of the Bay, and the residents in the west had to travel fifteen to twenty miles to record deeds and earmarks, as well as marriages and births--probably requiring two or three days to be away from home. A seat of government within easier reach became a necessity. Accordingly a petition for a separation from the town of Warwick was placed before the General Assembly in June, 1741, with the dividing line to run north and south at the head of Cowesett Farms. The petition was granted and the line was established where it is today. Thus Coventry became a town most stubborn and independent, as shown by the early records.

The road through the southern half of Coventry was called the "Eight-rod Highway," and it was actually laid out eight rods wide. It is the road called on present day maps Harkney Hill and Perry Hill roads. At Hopkins Hollow all signs of the original road have disappeared, for it was probably found to be a difficult route to use, and the course was changed to go south over Roaring Brook as it is today. The original lots were laid out seventeen on each side of the road, in orderly fashion, with the lines running north and south, the boundary lines for many pieces of property today. It does not appear to have been a through highway to Connecticut for travellers because of its lack of taverns. However, there was no lack of settlers and industry along this road, the first being a saw mill at Zeke's bridge where the road begins at Big River.

An early fulling mill was built by Israel Wilson on Quidnick Pond when he bought the land in 1770. It was built on the north side of the road and adjacent to it. Israel Wilson was a "clothier" by trade, as were his son Joseph and grandson Israel. The clothier of that day did not sell clothing but operated an establishment where wool was scoured and carded and where homespun cloth was fullled, dyed, and sheared.

A road turning south from the Eight-rod Road leads to the Great Grass Pond Cedar Swamp. This was a most desirable section, containing valuable virgin timber, mostly cedar, and was platted by itself into seventeen shares, one for each purchaser. When these trees were cut off, the water gradually receded and wild cranberries filled the area. There were people who claimed the land around the edge of the pond, but the Town Fathers had their own ideas. The Town Council appointed a committee to investigate the situation, and the report of the attorney selected by the investigating committee states that the right of the pond was a kind of mixed right of both town and state and that in every such case which had come within his knowledge, common land had been ceded to the town or city in which it was set by the legislature for some public improvement, and in this case, he had no doubt the General Assembly would cede it to the town for the support of the poor or for public schools. The committee's opinion was that the land was common land and that the yearly average proceeds obtained from the cranberries, when rightly managed, would amount to at least \$700. Finally, the town did take over the land and went into the cranberry business but in a few years sold the land at public auction. However, cranberries are still being harvested although the land has changed hands many times.

There were sawmills at early dates both on the east side of the Great Grass Pond and where Narrow Lane crosses Roaring Brook. Here also at one time was a grist mill and a cloth mill where "brown shirting" was made.

It was along the Eight-rod Road the Rice brothers, Richard and Randall, came. Richard had purchased the land now called Hopkins Hollow in 1741, building on Roaring Brook a grist mill and a sawmill. Roaring Brook is the original name of the stream, being called by this name on the 1728 plat. The early name for the hollow was Rice's Mills, and it was a very busy place. In 1792 John Rice, the son of Richard, sold one acre south of the sawmill to Jeremiah Hopkins, Jr., and Elisha Hopkins for a blacksmith shop. Gradually the descendants of Richard Rice drifted to other parts, and the Hopkins family came into control of much of the land, including the sawmill, with the consequent change of name for the hollow. At the present time, however, descendants of Richard Rice own the land whereon he lived and worked, and a grandson of Richard is responsible for the name of Rice City.

Randall Rice lived a short distance northwest from his brother Richard and on the other side of the Eight-rod highway. He is mentioned in a deed as living there as early as 1733. He was a Justice in Coventry for sixteen years, and his son John was Town Clerk from 1767 to 1789. When John Rice was replaced as Town Clerk, he was very reluctant to give up the records. A committee was appointed at town meeting to get the books and papers from John Rice, but it was a year later before they could report success. The result is that John Rice's records as Town Clerk are in separate books in the town house.

The road through the seven men's land was called the North Road or Warwick Road. It began at the bridge at the Coventry-West Warwick line and followed closely the present road through Anthony and Washington, turning on to the so-called Poor Farm Road or Bowen's Hill Road. The western end later became part of the Plainfield Pike.

Near the beginning of this road and in the bend of the Pawtuxet River, the Greenes had their forge where anchors were cast and later cannon balls. In 1699 the second sawmill on the river was built in the present village of Washington. The famous Waterman Tavern, where so many of the early town meetings were held, was on this road. The Waterman Tavern was also made famous by the encampment of the French soldiers in June, 1781. From the diary of a French soldier in Rochambeau's army, reprinted in the Rhode Island Historical Society's Bulletin in 1923, one reads, "On the 18, 15 miles, 24 kilometers. The army went from Providence to Waterman Tavern, very bad roads, the artillery arrived at 11 P.M. The troops did not march well, which always happens during the first days of route. On the 19th, 15 miles, 24 kilometers, from Waterman Tavern to Plainfield, very bad roads, the artillery and its equipments arrived very late." Thus we can understand the type of road.

Coventry's first town house was built but a short distance from the Waterman Tavern on a half acre of land bought for 12 cents. It continued to be used until 1879 when it was replaced by another building at Coventry Centre, now used on voting days only by the voters of District 1.

Further along the North Road is the Parker Woodland, given to the Audubon Society by George Parker, for many years Town Clerk in Coventry. Most of the land in this bird sanctuary is on the original right of Richard Waterman. It was here that Stephen Vaughn in 1815 had his sawmill on the Turkey Meadow Borrk, which later became known as Nigger Sawmill, run by a small settlement of Negroes, but never owned by them.

In 1734 Aaron Bowen bought his first land in Coventry, 20<sup>4</sup> acres on what was called in the deed as Chestnut Hill and gave the name to the section now called Bowen's Hill. He is said to have lived in the old house still standing near the junction of the Bowen's Hill Road and the Victory Highway. Aaron Bowen must have been a scholar, for in his will he bequeaths to his wife two thirds of his books to have during her widowhood, and he mentions it ahead of the usual cow and horse. Perhaps the love of books descended to one of his descendants, Tully D. Bowen, when he offered to give \$25 toward establishing a library at Bowen's Hill providing the inhabitants of that vicinity would raise in addition and for the same purpose the sum of \$75. It was the beginning of a very fine library and a large part of it still remained in the old Susan Bowen house on Bowen's Hill when it burned to the ground a few years ago. However, the original record book has been saved and is on display tonight.

The old road went through Rice City, but at the house of the first settler in that community, Adam Love, it branched off to the right from the present road, turning south again where the old meeting house stood on the

present Vaughn Hollow Road. There was a great deal of activity in Rice City in the old days. With at least three taverns it was the stopping-place for the stage coaches. Each tavern has its own special story--the McGregor Tavern noted for its temperance, the Gibbs Tavern for the murder of Sally Burdick in 1830, and the Rice Tavern whose owner, Samuel Rice, was described as a very noted gambler whose fame in this line of business had spread far and wide. Until he was converted in 1813, "his house had been a place of resort for men of like vocation."

The first reference to a church in Rice City is in a deed dated 1781 from William Love to the Anabaptist Church and Congregation, described as "at present under the care and pastoral charge of Elder Caleb Nichols of Scituate." A church was finally built on this piece of land but only after a great deal of bickering. It was the scene of a great reformation or revival that started in 1812. In November of this year Elder Douglas Farnum was invited to come to Coventry and began to preach the Gospel. An old report says he first pitched into the subject of the village near the meeting house, commonly called Rice City, a very noted place for wickedness. There had not been a reformation in the place for about thirty years, and "pride, rioting, and licentiousness were the general characteristics of its inhabitants." He made many converts of all ages from fifteen to even ninety, Samuel Rice among them. This was the beginning of the Christian Church in Coventry, and the reformation spread from Rice City to West Greenwich, Foster, and into Connecticut. In May, 1815, Samuel Rice and a number of other brethren were set apart as a branch of the church and moved to Ohio on the banks of the Sciota River near Columbus. A number of years later the diary of a traveller tells of his visit with the settlers from Coventry on the Darby Plain near Columbus.

Elder Farnum must have been a forceful preacher and a magnetic character, but trouble finally came his way with accusations of wrongdoing. He left Rice City with his family and a number of others to join those in Ohio. Later Elder James Burlingame became the leader of religious activity in western Coventry, and through his efforts the First Christian Church became a large and vigorous organization. The old church was replaced by the present building, and the old one went the way of all neglected buildings.

Before 1817 they built a school in Rice City, opposite the present church, and called it the Democrat School House, although it was very much of a private school. The third post office in Coventry was established in Rice City in 1828 with Benjamin Rider, Jr., as the first postmaster. The streams in the vicinity supported several industries. Where the Moosup River crosses the road now called the Vaughn Hollow Road, there was a grist mill and sawmill as early as 1738 owned by Francis Bates. Later it became the Eddy Mill and then the Vaughn Mill. Below Rice City on the Buckshorn was the Lewis Mill, a grist mill operated by the Lewis family for sixty-eight years. However, there was a grist mill and "boulting mill" on the property when John Lewis bought the land from Caleb Brayton in 1790.

On the turnpike where it is crossed by the Moosup, Randall Blanchard built a grist mill and a carding machine in 1810, and later added a fulling mill. This was sold to George Fairbanks in 1826, and he developed the woolen business much more. Here for many years until the middle 1860's, a farmer could bring his raw wool and have it woven into cloth and finally tailored to his measurement and in the latest mode. It was a complete local industry. George Fairbanks also had a blacksmith shop and a grocery store.

The coming of the railroad in the middle 1850's brought a change to Rice City and caused the birth of the village of Greene. The road through Greene was then called Coffin Road, and, so the story goes, when the railroad decided to locate its station there, the thought of calling it Coffin Crossing did not appeal to them; hence the selection of the name of Greene, supposedly after Nathaniel Greene. The name of the railroad was at first the Hartford, Providence, and Fiskill; then the New York and New England before it became the New York, New Haven, and Hartford. The early locomotives burned wood, and Greene became the "wooding up" station, a great source of revenue for the people in the vicinity. Other industries sprang up, and for a few years Greene flourished. During this time the name of one man, Whipple V. Phillips, stands out as the leader. He had come to Greene from Foster, having had a store at Moosup Valley. One finds his name connected with a good many industries in and around Greene as well as his having been the owner of a great many pieces of land. His grandson, Howard Phillip Lovecraft, became the author of weird, mystic stories--most hair-raising--and has been mentioned a number of times on the book page of the PROVIDENCE SUNDAY JOURNAL because of the reprinting of his books. After Whipple Phillips' failure in business, Greene gradually slid into the place it holds today as the post-office center for most of western Coventry and parts of Foster and West Greenwich.

I have not touched on the history of Coventry; there is enough known material to fill a book and a great deal still waiting to be discovered. Historical research and speculation never get finished--that is one of the beauties of them. As time goes along and you mull over things, you gather scraps of information from some little phrase or sentence in an old deed or will or stumble on to an old cellar hole or burying ground. It is like a great puzzle, never quite finished, and although it is hard for those not interested in historical research to believe, one gets a tremendous kick out of finding just a small part of this puzzle.

COVENTRY, RHODE ISLAND

Read by Mrs. Helen Beaton from an old book entitled  
A GAZETTEER OF THE STATES OF CONNECTICUT AND RHODE  
ISLAND by John C. Pease and John M. Niles, published  
in 1819.

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"COVENTRY is an interior manufacturing post township, situated in the northwestern section of Kent County, 10 miles southwest from Providence; bounded northerly on the towns of Cranston, Scituate and Foster, easterly on Warwick, southerly on West Greenwich, and westerly on the State of Connecticut.

"The length of the township, from east to west, is about 12 miles, and its mean breadth about 6 miles, comprising an area of 72 square miles; being one of the largest towns in the State.

"The principal section of this township presents primitive rugged features, being hilly and rocky. Some sections, however, are level, and possess a sandy soil. In the granitic sections the soil is a primitive gravelly loam, strong and fertile, being well adapted to grazing, and affording good crops of Indian corn, rye, potatoes, etc.

"The dairy business is the leading agricultural pursuit; and the town is celebrated for the excellent quality of the cheese made here. About three-fourths of the land is under a state of improvement, and the residue has been reserved for forests. The natural growth of timber is of the deciduous species.

"This town is not accommodated with any navigable waters, but is intersected by several small streams, the most considerable of which is the south branch of the Pawtuxet River. Besides this is Flat river and several other small streams. The Pawtuxet and some of the other streams afford numerous excellent sites for hydraulic works.

"This town is justly distinguished for its manufactures, particularly those of cotton. The number and extent of its factories rank it among the first of the cotton manufacturing towns in the State. It contains 12 cotton mills or manufacturing establishments, all of which comprise about 10,000 spindles. The largest of these establishments are the Washington, the Coventry and the Arkwright Manufacturing Companies. Besides the cotton factories, there are one paper-mill, two clothiers' works, and ten grain mills.

"There is considerable mercantile business in the retail line, there being 16 stores in the town.

"There is a flourishing manufacturing village situated on the south branch of Pawtuxet river. It contains 3 cotton mills, one of which comprises 1300 spindles. A large machine shop, for the manufacture of cotton and other machinery, and a weaving shop is established here, with water-power looms, on Gilmore's plan.

"It contains from 40 to 50 dwelling-houses, a Schoolhouse, 4 merchants' stores, and a number of other buildings. The bank of Kent is located here, being 13 miles from Providence.

"The population of the township, in 1810, was 2929; and there are 400 Freemen or Electors, about 350 Dwelling-houses, and 5 companies of Militia.

"There are five Religious Societies; four of Baptists and one of Methodists, all of which are accommodated with houses for public worship, 8 Schools and School-houses, and 1 Social Library.

"The town was distinguished for its patriotism and services during the revolutionary war. In General Sullivan's expedition upon Rhode Island, when nearly all of the militia of the State were called upon, the companies in this town rallied with great alacrity, there being in the whole town but five delinquencies, which were occasioned by religious scruples, the individuals being Friends or Quakers.

"The first settlement of Coventry is not known. It was incorporated in 1742." (The Rhode Island Manual gives the date 1741. Editor)