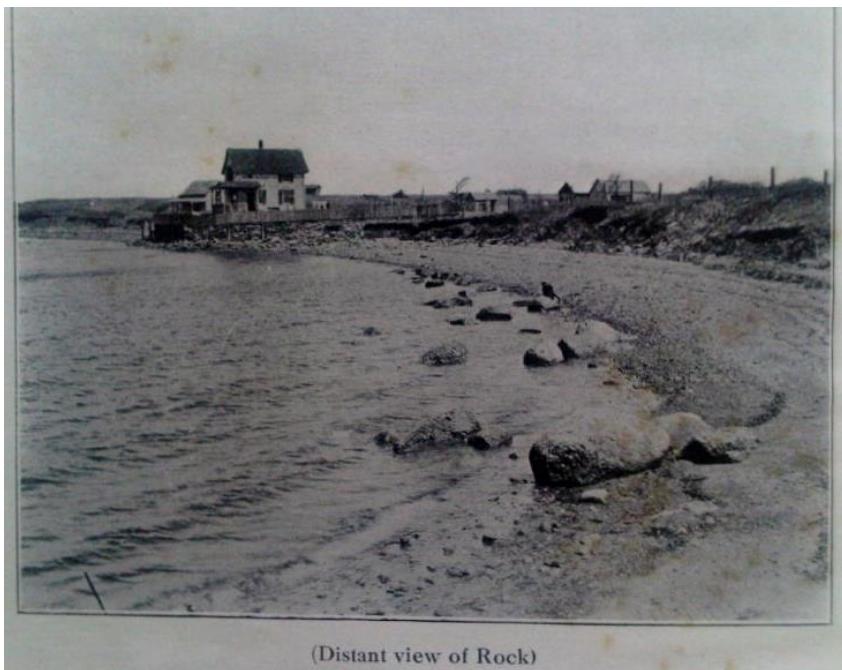


Arnold's Point Cup Stone, Inscribed Rock

(Located outside between our town hall and church buildings)

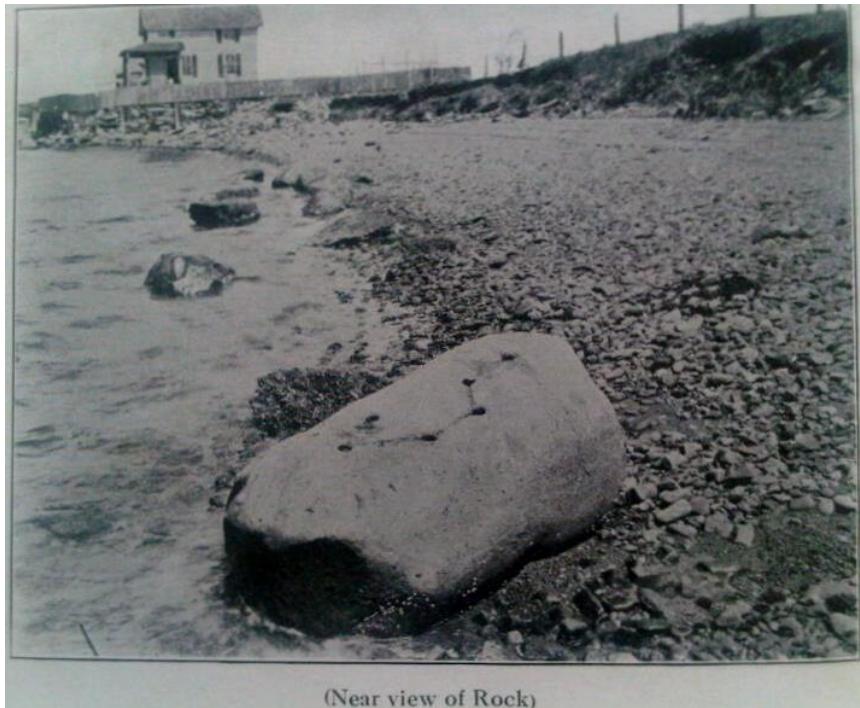
Arnold's Point Cup stone is the only Portsmouth 'Inscribed Rock' known to still exist. It is one of three mentioned in Delabarre's 1929 article, The Inscribed Rocks of Narragansett Bay. Other inscribed stones, all located on the beach, were at McCorrie's [variant spellings McCoy McCurry used] Point also known as the Fogland Ferry Rock and at Melville Station. In 1929 the several once located at Melville and one located on the shore just south of McCorrie's Point could not be found.

Our rock was relocated from the shore just south of Arnold's Point. The photo shows a young girl sitting on the rock at its Arnolds Point location. The photograph was taken looking northward from a dilapidated wharf in 1929.



Girl Sitting on Arnold's Point Stone 1929

In its original location it was at the edge of the beach at low tide and not visible at high tide. The markings on the predominately sandstone rock are artificial in nature and unique to the other inscribed rocks found in our region. In the 1929 article they describe the holes in the rock as appearing "to have been drilled, and are not circular, but more like triangle with rounded angles. The holes range from 2½ to 3¼ inches in depth. The edges of the holes are described as "not smooth-cut, but broken and roughly beveled. The channels are described as "pecked in, and like the crudely pecked lines of other rocks of this region". The article also describes the channels as being of varying widths most 3/8 to 5/8 inches and depths usually 3/16 to 3/8 inches.



(Near view of Rock)

Since 1929 the Arnold's Point Stone has weathered further giving a rounder appearance to the holes and a smoothing to the channels. As early as the 1929 article there was the impression that in the conglomerate part of the stone there may have existed an additional curved channel leading to a seventh shallower hole. This conglomerate channel would have been near the first and second hole. A half ring depression appears near hole number 2. Delabarre thought this "half-ring" more likely natural than artificial.

What are the makings? Theories abound.

A speaker who is an expert in Rhode Island geology examined our stone and stated that the marks were definitely manmade through an apparently time consuming process. He could not give further information on it without further research.

David Hutcheson of Washington D.C., examined the stone in 1910. His first thought was that it was the Big Dipper but missing the seventh star. Delabarre refers to a consultation with Washington anthropologist by Mr. William H. Babcock. He believed it was an Indian Cup Stone. Other cup stones were attributed to the Wampanoag but experts were not as certain of the work on the Arnold Point Stone.

A similar stone in Kensington Minnesota speculates that it dates to the 1362 westward exploration from Vinland. Their stone has runic letters and it is believed the rounded triangular hole, along with a triangular pole, was used to secure a water craft to the shore by means of a withy (a rope made of slender twigs). Delabarre contends that while the holes in our stone are similar, he discounts they can be attributed to the Norsemen. He points out that age cannot automatically be attributed to the holes. He found he could use a cold chisel to recreate triangular holes easier than round holes. He also states that the triangular shape is more functional for wedging a stake or bolt into the hole.

Is it an authentic cup-stone? Most cup-stones have broader, shallower holes but one found on the shore in Scotland has narrow holes of similar depth. The cups can be surrounded with concentric rings but ours is not. In some regions the cups are found without the connecting grooves. Grooves consistent with ours are found in the stones from Sweden, Ireland and England. As with attempts to explain Dighton Rock, confusion surrounds the meaning of these sculptured marks. In Europe the most widely accepted view is that they are symbols connected with religious rites or beliefs. In our country they are attributed to the Native Americans using a flint drill or gouge but it is not known if they were used as part of their religious symbolism. But Delaware contends that the Arnold Stone was only first mentioned in 1910. If it is truly a cup stone, why was it never mentioned in earlier writings. Since the holes are deeper than traditional cups, could it be that it was created by miners in their idle moments? Was it meant to deceive? The connecting grooves pose a problem in this interpretation as they are cruder and of considerable age, distinctively characteristic of other cup stones. Delabarre hypothesizes that it may well be that the Arnold's Point Stone is a true cup stone that was altered by miners in the late 1800s.



*In original location before move to grounds at Portsmouth Historical Society
March 17, 1991*

Source: Rhode Island Historical Society, Vol. XIV January 1921 No1
The Inscribed Rocks of Narragansett Bay, Edmund B, Delabarre
The Article was donated to the society by Al Daniels about 2010
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