



Portsmouth Historical Society - Portsmouth, Rhode Island

President EVERETT B. CHASE 42 Church Lane	Vice-President HENRY W. WILKEY 28 Sprague Street	Treasurer ARTHUR H. FREEBORN 1715 West Main Road	Secretary Mrs. Charles L. Osborne 1578 East Main Road	Librarian MRS. WILLIAM A. CHASE Water Street	Custodian John T. Pierce 444 Park Avenue
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Sarah A. Birkett
1886 Highland Ave.,
Fall River, Mass.

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Fall River, Massachusetts
August 31, 1960

Dear Mrs. Hammond;

I was very happy to see you again at the meeting of the Society August the 29th, and I hope you enjoyed Mr. Patten's talk.

At the last business meeting of the Society it was voted to have an Historian who would be responsible for the keeping of the records of the Society as they appeared in the newspaper and to keep from time to time records of verbalized experiences of persons interested in the history of the town. The news clippings could be inserted in a large-sized notebook or copied in a lined paged notebook (whichever method was deemed better and more lasting).

The same body was of the opinion that you might be willing to take over the task. There has been a felt need for someone to do the work. So much valuable data, on the Society's activities, is lost. Such data, if kept in a notebook or scrapbook, would serve to record, more fully than the Secretary's records are able, the goings-on of the association.

Would you be willing to take over the work of Historian?

I would be pleased to have you consider this and let me know your decision when you have made it.

Yours truly

Sarah Alice Birkett, President
Portsmouth Historical Society

At the entrance to the path to Common Fence Point was a pond north of the present railroad. On the bank of this pond stood the home of Thomas Hicks, my ancestor, admitted Freeman at a meeting of the Town Council April 12, 1672 and deceased 1695. This house was completely destroyed by fire during the American Revolution by the British. A part of the farm formerly of William Alfred Chase was called "Hickies Meadow," a name which clings to it to this day. At one time I was requested to gather data relating to the establishment of public schools in Portsmouth, and I found this work very interesting and also pleasing because attached to every instrument relating to the subject was the name of a Thomas Hicks. Later in our family records we find the names of Samuel and Robert as descendants of the Thomas first mentioned.

I have always believed that the first settlers came in at the Town Pond. As evidence of this there is a string of wells along the Westerly side of the pond and

day, formerly belonging to Thomas L. Mitchell, David Gifford, Robert Hicks, Robert D. Hall and ending at a spring on land of heirs of William H. Cary. On Founder's Brook was the location of a sheep shearing ground, freely used by the settlers, where sheep were taken, washed and sheared. In Town Pond on the land of William Anthony, now owned by heirs of Horace Hicks, was the scene of small vessels going directly to the landing place, taking on loads of wood and sailing out.

My cousin Will Hicks of Providence built a center-board sloop with mast and sail, brought it to Bristol Ferry on the Fall River boat and launched it in Town Pond. Many an afternoon we spent sailing up and down, up and down. There are many interesting things relating to this particular section of the town of Portsmouth, but I will close here.

George R. Hicks



Our Rhode Island

by David Patten

Here a Great Book Was Written

Across the swamps from the Great West Road in Scunnett is a memorial that I doubt more than a handful of people has seen. Weeds grow around the intended boulder and in summer almost obscure the tablet covered with verdigris.

Long ago the house that stood on this spot disappeared from the face of the earth. No one knows just what it looked like.

It was the second house built in Scunnett by Col. Benjamin Church. He was the Duxbury carpenter who first settled the town.

He built his first house further up road but no one is sure just where it was. Scarce had he built it than the Indian chief, Philip, went on the warpath. Urging Awasauncks, squaw-sachem of the Sogkonates, to remain neutral, he went away in the service of Plymouth and finally killed Philip at the base of Mount Hope.

He did not at once return to Scunnett. He took part in the settlements of Bristol and Fall River, engaged in many land speculations. But when he came back there's no doubt he put up his second house where this boulder stands on the Benjamin Franklin Wilbour farm. There he lived with his wife, Alice, daughter of Constant Southworth, until they both died in 1718.

The Sea is Near By

The boulder is in the second meadow from the shore. The meadow has an upthrust against the southwest wind and the sea and that is probably the reason Benjamin built where he did, by a pond in the lee. He had a well in the pasture nearby. There must have been a barn and other out-buildings somewhere around.

It was a small house, for as late as the 1880s cross-lots wanderers saw the hole where the cellar had been. The second Benjamin Franklin Wilbour filled up the hole so that his cows couldn't fall into it.

Fremont Wilbour, wandering the fields as a boy, fell into the hole. Bessie Gray walked cross-lots many times to visit the spot. She said that the grass always grew greener around the old foundations.

Up on the Great West Road beside the rose gardens of Walter Brownell is another tablet showing the way to this stone. But it is a long walk through the pastures, the going is rough, so very few make the effort. It is a long walk.



Few persons cross Scunnett pastures and swamps to visit site of old Indian fighter's house.

Old Soldier, telling of the many Ran-Counters he has had, and yet has come off alive."

So, out of the little house under the lee of the meadow's shoulder, came one of the most important source books on our colonial history. A fine and exciting narrative, too! Few have read it, but as their number grows, more and more people will walk across the swampy pastures and stand wrapt before this neglected stone.

The End of a Fighter

Dr. Ezra Stiles, then a minister in Newport and later president of Yale College, edited one edition of the "Entertaining Passages." On the authority of a member of the Church family, he wrote this footnote on the manner of the Colonel's death:—

"The morning before his death, he went about two miles on horseback to visit his only (surviving?) sister, Mrs. Irish, to sympathize with her on the death of her son, Philip, in the Indian War."

Entertaining Passages

Relating to

Philip's War

WHICH

Began in the Month of June, 1675.

AS ALSO OF

EXPEDITIONS

More lately made

Against the Common Enemy, and Indian Rebels, in the Eastern Parts of New-England:

WITH

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He built his first house further up road but no one is sure just where it was. Scarce had he built it than the Indian chief, Philip, went on the warpath. Urging Awasauncks, squaw-sachem of the Sogkonates, to remain neutral, he went away in the service of Plymouth and finally killed Philip at the base of Mount Hope.

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When Church came back to S'cunnet, probably in 1705, to build his new house, he had slain Philip and Annawon and led five expeditions against the Redskins in Maine. S'cunnet lavished honors upon him, sent him twice to the General Court in Boston and — highest honor of all—elected him town meeting moderator.

A Book Is Born

He grew old, very fat, and knew death was approaching. Probably in 1715 he dictated to his son Thomas the tales of his exploits that were published in Boston the next year under the title, "Entertaining Passages Relating to Philip's War"; or he may have armed Thomas with the notes from which the son wrote the book. It is certain the old man himself penned the preface which said:

"And seeing every particle of historical Truth is precious; I hope the Reader will pass a favourable Censure upon an



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"The morning before his death, he went about two miles on horseback to visit his only (surviving?) sister, Mrs. Irish, to sympathize with her on the death of her only child. After a friendly and pious visit, in a moving and affecting manner, he took his leave of her, and said, 'It was a last farewell; Telling her, he was persuaded he should never see her more; but hoped to meet her in heaven.' Returning homeward, he had not rode above half a mile before his horse stumbled, and threw him over his head: And the Colonel, being exceeding fat and heavy, fell with such force that a blood vessel was broken, and the blood gushed out of his mouth like a torrent. His wife was soon brought to him; he tried but was unable to speak to her, and died in about twelve hours. He was carried to the grave in great funeral pomp, and was buried under arms, and with military honors."

Alice Southworth survived him by only two months and died here in the little house near the pond. She is buried beside him in the old cemetery at the Commons.

It is a lonely spot where the house stood. The rumble of cars

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Relating to

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WHICH

Began in the Month of June, 1675.

AS ALSO OF

EXPEDITIONS

More lately made

Against the Common Enemy, and Indian Rebels, in the Eastern Parts of New-England:

WITH

Some Account of the Divine Providence

TOWARDS

Benj. Church Esqr;

By T. C.

BOSTON: Printed by B. Green, in the Year, 1716.

Title page of the edition of Church's book published in Boston in 1716.

passing on the Great West Road is a far away sound. Nearer are the voices of the ocean beating without end on the shore, and the sou'west wind whining over the meadow upthrust against the wind and the sea.

Next Monday: History of Five Little Churches.

Motorist Fined \$50

Admits Leaving Accident, Driving Without License

William F. Degnan, 22, of 62 Nolan St., was fined \$25 each on charges of leaving the scene of an accident and operating without a license by Judge Luigi De Pasquale yesterday.

Youth Fined \$20

One of Four Held for Fight At LaSalle Football Game

Robert M. Thornton

YOU NEED A SQUIBB
ANGLE TOOTHBRUSH
BECAUSE YOUR MOUTH

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the United ^{thirteen} United States of America.

OBSERVANCE OF THE 186TH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE BATTLE OF RHODE ISLAND

THE BATTLE OF MOULDE ISLAND
The Portsmouth Historical Society
Portsmouth Rhode Island
Saturday August 29, 1964

PROGRAM

Master of Ceremonies Ernest F. Denomme

Ernest F. Denomme

Outdoor Ceremonies

Raising the Colors:

Colonel Clen S. Humphrey and the Newport Artillery Company represented by six uniformed artillery men. Muskets fired, short burst and reloading from powder horns.

Musketeers, Sgts. Jerry Morrison and James Brady.

Colonial Field Music: Newport Artillery Gun Crew: Three fifes and two drums. Cannon in charge of Capt. Larry Pelto

and Gun Captain, Capt. George F. Fife.

Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag: Scoutmaster Robert Silva and outstanding Troop 50 Boy Scouts of America

Benediction.

Indoor Ceremonies

Speaker of the Day:

The Reverend Gordon J. Stenning, Rector of Saint Mary's Church - Member of the Board of the Historical Society

Acknowledgments:

President Miss Alice S. Birkett

Outdoor Closing Ceremonies

Firing of Cannon

Retiring the Colors:

Newport Artillery Company Boy Scouts of America
Troop 50

Open House following closing ceremonies

"Switchell": Colonial punch or reasonable facsimile
(strictly non-alcoholic spirits).

June 1963 - Pro. Journal

Poison Ivy, Memories Share Butts Hill

BY JERRY STILKIND

If the Revolutionary War "Battle of Rhode Island" were fought today the Americans probably would stand a good chance of winning merely by letting the British occupy Butts Hill Fort in Portsmouth. There seems to be enough poison ivy there to incapacitate an army.

The earthwork ramparts of the fort were built by the occupying British forces early in 1777. When Maj. Gen. John Sullivan gathered a force of regulars and militia to attack Aquidneck Island, the British evacuated the fort on one of the highest points on the northern end of the island. They withdrew to their stronger defenses in Newport.

For three weeks beginning Aug. 9, 1778 the colonial troops occupied the fort. American troops, outnumbered by the British and the Hessians retreated from Honeyman Hill in Middletown to Butts Hill. A French fleet battered by a gale had left for Boston.

Aug. 29 and 30 — guns from the fort poured shot after shot into the enemy lines. But the

Revolutionary War Fort in Portsmouth Now in Decay

American position was untenable. On the night of the 30th and 31st the troops withdrew to the mainland. The British held the fort until they withdrew from Rhode Island in October, 1779.

Today the somewhat circular ramparts stand about 10 feet tall in places or ground down to about level in other places. The walls enclose an area about 700 feet long and 200 to 300 feet wide. Occasionally softball players use the fort.

Two old wooden benches — one sturdy, one rickety, can be found just to the right of the entrance at the top of Dyer Street. Between the two benches are a pile of boards which look like the remains of another bench or two.

Almost everywhere on the slopes and top of the earthen ramparts are poison ivy plants — some bright red, some a drooping deep green. Along the top of the wall is a path. The poison ivy discourages walkers.

From the northern rampart had not decided on what it

there is a magnificent view of Island Park, the Sakonnet River, Tiverton and a high silver-colored water tank of the Portsmouth Water District a few feet below the wall. The view from the western and southern walls probably would be equally superb if one could see through the bushes and trees growing on the outside of the ramparts.

For the last few years the Newport Historical Society, owner of the fort, and the Portsmouth School Committee, occasionally have discussed the five-acre site. Lloyd R. Nelson, committee chairman, said that the committee previous to this one which was elected in 1960 first asked about the possibility of acquiring the site.

The town about four or five years ago condemned land for a road — what is now Education Lane — belonging to the society but outside the town for its high school, said Richard B. Sheffield, the society's attorney. Mr. Nelson said his committee

would use the fort site for if it could get it.

At one time a road through the fort or a parking lot for the high school had been discussed. But the society said that by the terms of its deed to the land it could not sell the land, Mr. Sheffield said. Since then the road and parking lot have been planned for elsewhere. Converting the fort to an athletic field or a campus have also been mentioned.

When Dr. Roderick Terry deeded the land to the society he stipulated that:

The society shall forever keep and maintain the area as a Revolutionary War monument.

The name Fort Butts shall forever be used.

It shall never be used for pecuniary gain.

If the society fails to do these things the deed states the land shall be turned over to the state. Therefore, Mr. Sheffield said, the only way for Portsmouth to get the land is by condemnation.

Two weeks ago, when Sen. Thomas H. Levesque, the committee's lawyer, reported on negotiations with the society, a few committeemen said either the fort ought to be properly maintained or if no one cares about it it ought to be turned over for use by the schools.

Sydney L. Wright, society president, said this week much money had been spent over the years to clean out the poison ivy. It has been opened up for use as a baseball diamond, he added.

But of all the forts left to the society, Butts Hill is the hardest to maintain, he said. Funds to maintain the fort have been used up, he said. And the poison ivy comes back year after year. The bushes and trees which hide the earthworks in places probably have saved them from being eroded away, he added.

At its meeting two weeks ago the school committee took no action. So for the time being at least Butts Hill Fort will probably remain as it is. And no one seems to be happy about that.

Pipe Organ

There are indications that the old Portsmouth organ has been recased and it is known that the original Berkeley organ was kept in Trinity church and new "works" and pipes placed inside and upon it.

Neither Mrs. Borden nor her husband, member of the church for many years, knows anything definite of the early history of the organ. In them and other members of the church board, however, is vested full authority to dispose of it as they see fit. It was Rev. Russel Clem, pastor of the church, who first told Mr. Ford of its existence and suggested to the Detroit man that he buy it. Agents of Mr. Ford later examined the instruments and began negotiations for its purchase.

Hearing that Mr. Ford was after the organ old Newport residents who knew more of Rhode Island church history than the automobile magnate, began to inquire