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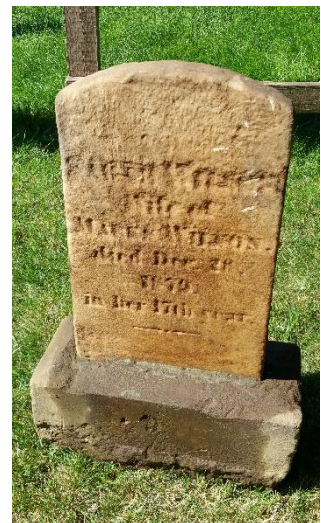
NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2015

Regretfully, Summer is drawing to a close once again.

We were fortunate not to sustain any damage to our house in spite of being surrounded by devastation during the storm of August 4th. A tree branch fell on our storage shed and caused some minor damage and we were without power for two days but that was all. We were indeed fortunate. Many of the historical cemeteries around the city were not as lucky. Quite a few that volunteers have worked so hard to clean up are full of downed trees that are blocking roadways. We fear some gravestones have been damaged or knocked down but cannot be reached or assessed due to the fallen trees. More volunteers with chainsaws will be needed to clear away the debris as the city does not maintain our historical cemeteries.

On a more positive note, we are thrilled to announce that **another lost cemetery has been found!** John Sterling's book of Warwick's Historical Cemeteries listed lost cemetery A7 Wilson Lot and stated "James Arnold visited this lot 15 July 1894 and commented 'on the Plains beside road west from burial yard of the Low's family yard, fenced and in good order, 2 graves, one a soldier's, not marked'; a lone grave was last observed in 1936". A property owner called the Warwick Historical Society in July and said he had recently purchased a home and had dug up a gravestone while transplanting a bush and wanted to know what to do about it. We immediately referred him to Pegee Malcolm of the Cemetery Commission who in turn had her colleague Mark Brown begin the research to determine the authenticity of the stone after visiting the site. The lost cemetery has been verified



and is now officially Warwick Historical Cemetery #166. The only existing stone is that of Sarah Wilson b. 1863, d. Dec 28, 1879 age 16 years and 8 months.

Additional research determined that Sarah was a servant girl of color who died of complications of child birth. She was married to Markus Wilson at the Shawomet Baptist Church on Sept 28, 1878. Markus was a fisherman from Baltimore, Md. and Sarah's parents were William and Ledia Gibbs. In addition to the headstone her footstone was also found, but at the present time there is no evidence of a soldier's gravestone. We are not providing the exact location of the cemetery since it is on private property and cannot be visited without the owner's permission.

## **DONATIONS**

Since our last newsletter we have acquired several very special items.

Thomas Enoch Greene [former WHS president] presented us with a bound copy of Volume 2 [*The Book With Clasps*] of the early records of Warwick as well as an original copy of Marshall Morgan's typewritten translation of that volume. The translation has been scanned and entered into our digital database. He also gave us a 2 ft X 8 ft section of the original wall from the first Potowomut one room wooden school that has carvings made by children at the school.

Another Warwick resident gave us the 3 ft X 6 ft framed aerial photo of Pawtuxet that once hung in Cameron's Pharmacy for many years.

Elsie Williams' daughter gave us a box of her mother's slides that contain, among many others, slides of the first Open House at the Arnold House in 1965 50 years ago. That is Elsie in the mob cap. These have been converted to digital format and are now in our database.



She also gave us a butter churn, two child's chairs, and a child's desk and table.

## **CITY HALL**

In connection with our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary at the Arnold House our display has been restored at City Hall in our repaired case. Our thanks to Mayor Avedisian and the city Maintenance Dept. for getting the work done.

## LEGISLATIVE GRANT

Steve Silva, Computer Doctor, one of our business sponsors, has installed our new computer network. We are currently investigating software to use for our in-house database.

## SEPTEMBER 3RD OPEN MEETING WARWICK LIBRARY, SANDY LANE, 6 PM

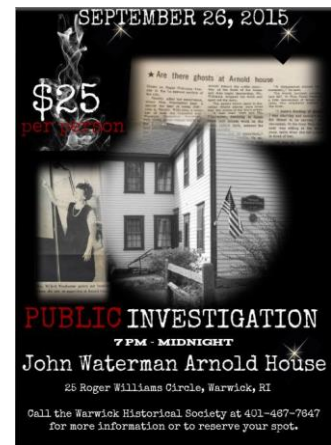


Jeff Howe will present a slideshow/talk about the possibility that Warwick's Sachem **Pomham** had surviving descendants from King Phillip's War, 1675-76, that can be traced until the name disappears from records in the 1850's. The Pomham name is remembered in the Pomham lighthouse in Riverside and the monument erected at Pomham's Fort in Warwick Neck.

## SEPT 26<sup>TH</sup> PARANORMAL EVENT AT ARNOLD HOUSE

At our last session we had "contact" with several entities. Join us next time to learn how that came about and perhaps meet with them again.

Contact us for more information and make a reservation to save your place for this evening event. Space is limited. 467-7647 or 737-4617.



Also on Sept 26th we will participate in **Smithsonian Museum Day**. The Arnold House will be open for tours from 10 am to 2 pm.

## OCTOBER 14<sup>TH</sup> OPEN MEETING WARWICK LIBRARY, SANDY LANE, 6 PM

### "Unfortunate Events"

Author Robert Geake will discuss his findings from obituaries in early Rhode Island newspapers with a compendium of accidents, tragedies, murder and odd deaths, and the prurient way they were written for the reading public.

## 200<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE GREAT GALE OF 9-23-1815

Before the great hurricanes of 1938 and 1954, hurricanes Bob and Sandy and others, as well as this month's storm of August 4<sup>th</sup>, there was another little known storm that devastated our state.

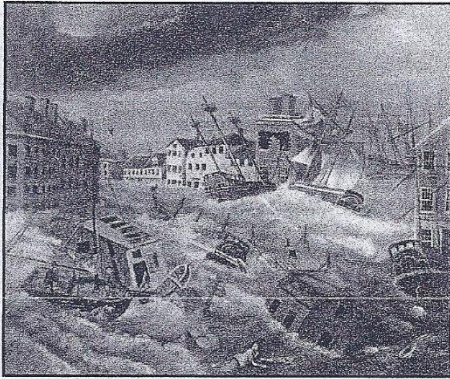
See article by Charlie Vacca that follows.

*"There is no present or future just the past being played over and over."—Eugene O'Neil*

## THE GREAT GALE OF 1815: Awful Storm, Tremendous Storm

By Charles M. Vacca Jr.

Recently, Rhode Islanders have had their fill of tropical storms; and then came this winter's daily blizzards, causing record-breaking snow accumulations, much damage and angst. But apparently few storms compare to the Great Gale of 1815.



“ It is our painful task to give an account of the most awful and calamitous storm which has ever occurred in this place, within the recollection of the oldest inhabitants, and it is believed has never

been equaled since the first settlement of the town,” reported the *Providence Patriot and Columbian Phenix* September 30, 1815, describing the storm's aftermath in Newport on Sept. 27. “It commenced on Saturday morning last (i.e., Sept. 23, 1815) at about 9 o'clock... The damage sustained is incalculable — houses and buildings demolished or unroofed, chimneys thrown down, trees, fences, &s. laid prostrate and ruin; sad desolation presenting itself in the most hideous forms...”

David M. Ludlum, in “*Early American Hurricanes 1492-1870*” accorded the Great September Gale of 1815 “first place” opined by historians in the region in its ferocity and damage. Noah Webster, a lifelong observer of weather, noted in his diary that the “Storm was a proper hurricane” when passing through his Amherst, Mass. residence. The path of the storm cut southern New England in half as it roared through northeastern Connecticut, Rhode Island, central Massachusetts and New Hampshire on the morning of Sept. 23, 1815. Few local histories fail to mention a significant incident of devastation and horror left by the most powerful storm since 1635. Only the Hurricane of 1938 would approach its intensity and widespread havoc.

The Gale of 1815 was one of a family of severe sum-

mer and fall oceanic storms that struck the North Atlantic shipping lanes during the first season of peaceful commerce following the end of the War of 1812 and Napoleonic struggles. Historians and meteorologists believe this storm started in the central Atlantic Ocean, close to the Cape Verde Islands off the African coast. Initial reports indicated that the storm caused great destruction on Sept. 18 at St. Barthelemy in the Leeward Island group. By Sept. 20<sup>th</sup> the storm smashed into Turks Island of the Bahamas.

On Sept. 23d, the Gale reached the south shore of Long Island, NY. An ominous ship report at 7:00 AM indicated that a dead calm existed off Bernegat Inlet on the central New Jersey coast, between “severe gales of great violence” (the apparent eye of the Gale). Within one hour, the fast moving storm showed its ugly head in New England where it rushed north at 50 MPH.

The greatest wind damage occurred in eastern Connecticut, all of Rhode Island, east-central Massachusetts and southeastern New Hampshire. Similar to the Hurricane of 1938, Narragansett Bay, with its many inlets of northward-jutting fingers, bore the full brunt of the wind-driven storm tide. The area lay east of the center track of the storm but in the zone of maximum southeasterly wind speeds, while the period of peak winds coincided with high tide.

Providence merchant Moses Brown conducted a survey of meteorological conditions attending the hurricane. According to his log, the wind set in from the east at 9:00 AM having been in the northeast with rain during the previous 24 hours. Soon it veered to east-southeast, howling straight out of the southeast by 10:00 AM. Brown described the storm during the next 90 minutes as “tremendous”. Historians estimate Brown alone incurred economic losses of about \$1 million in 1962 values. The storm delivered a 12-foot surge funneling up Narragansett Bay, destroying about 500 houses and 35 ships. Providence, the mercantile center of Rhode Island, was flooded with waters

(continued on page 2)

Rhode Island, was flooded with waters that were unsurpassed until the Hurricane of 1938 which measured 17.6 feet. In Matunuck, sediment studies have identified the overwash in Succotash Marsh, where the *Gale of 1815* surge overtopped the barrier beach. Reports from Newport at the time stated that tides rose 4 ½ feet above any previously known high tide (“...about 8 feet above the usual tides”). Besides the “...great destruction of property on the wharves, and lots contiguous to the water...the most awful dispensation of Divine Providence was evinced in the calamity which befell Mr. Andrew V. Allen, his amiable wife, three lovely children, and a very promising young girl (April Spooner, aged 14, who resided with the family) when they were swept into the flood without the power of man to save them!” Following the storm, local militia was called into Newport to restore order and prevent looting.

In neighboring communities, the *Providence Patriot and Columbian Phenix* reported “considerable damage has been done to the buildings, corn, fruit trees, &c. the particulars of which we have not learned.” At South Kingstown, four workmen were reported drowned, but further south, the Pt. Judith Lighthouse was “blown down and the keeper’s house injured”. Charlestown reported Brownwell’s factory and mill “considerably injured”; while Wickford was “nearly overflowed, the wharves much injured, and all the stores, &c. were destroyed — all the vessels carried up the beach.” Other communities reported similar destruction and havoc, especially along the coast.

The “great and remarkable Bridge” connecting Rhode Island with the mainland, which had been laboriously built and fortified with stones deep set in the abutting waters, was nearly destroyed, as “...only a few scattered portions [still] appeared above water.”

Observers believed that had the Gale “...continued its rage thirty minutes longer, all the buildings below Whitman’s corner to the river (in Providence) must inevitably have been swept away; and...that every house from the Theatre, east, situated between the cove and the harbor, must have shared the same fate.” Many foundations had been washed away; and four large vessels driven ashore by the storm surge threatened more destruction and havoc, with some threatening havoc at the doorsteps and in

gardens of local residents. A committee was appointed to clear the streets of the vessels; and to rebuild the destroyed bridge on Weybosset Street. Attempting to escape the 12 foot surge, local residents felt “consternation and dismay...all were eager to fly, but knew not where to find an ark of safety.”

In 1891, Sidney Perley in *Historic Storms of New England*, wrote that the aftermath of the *Gale of 1815* was just as horrific, as nine vessels were salvaged from the destruction in Providence, “...but more than thirty were totally lost...The owners of the stores, wharves, and other property of the inundated district exerted themselves to the utmost to save all they possibly could from destruction, but with little success on account of the violence of the gale. “It eventually became a matter of salvaging lives rather than property. Despite the destruction, the *Providence Gazette* went to press on Sept. 23 amidst “the most afflictive scenes which ever visited our part of the country. A most tremendous Gale has desolated our Town and harbor in a manner which begates all description.”

Within two weeks, reports from Newport on Oct. 7, 1815 stated that, “Our citizens are still busily employed in repairing the damages sustained by the Storm of the 23d...” adding that the streets had been cleared and much personal property had been collected to be returned to its claimants.

Although there are no accurate estimates in financial losses nor lives, the *Gale of 1815* had one lasting effect. Shortly afterwards, John Farrar, a Harvard professor of mathematics and natural philosophy, developed the concept of a hurricane with a “moving vortex”, which he used to observe the veering of hurricane winds and the variable timing of their impact on Boston and New York in later years.

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**Bibliography:** 1815 New England hurricane, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1815\\_New\\_England\\_hurricane](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1815_New_England_hurricane); Hurricanes: Science and Society, <http://www.hurricanesociety.org/history/stoirms/pre1900s/SeptemberGale/>; *Newport Mercury*, Sept. 23, 1815; *Providence Gazette*, Sept. 30, 1815; *Providence Patriot and Columbian Phenix*, Sept. 30, 1815, Oct. 7, 1815.

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