



Barrington Preservation Society

DISCOVER • PRESERVE • RESTORE

Summer 2022

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Barrington Preservation Society Museum

Lower Level, Public Library

Hours

Currently the BPS museum is open only by appointment. BPS hopes to reopen with the new exhibit entitled *Ghost Properties*. Opening dates and times will be announced in the fall.

Please check our website at barringtonpreservation.org

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BROWN(E), WILLETT, MYLES AND THE EARLIEST ROOTS OF SLAVERY

RESEARCHING BARRINGTON'S PAST HISTORY OF SLAVERY: PART 4

By Stephen Venuti, *President BPS*

In 1770 at the first Town Council Meeting of the newly re-incorporated Town of Barrington, Rhode Island, a man named James Brown was elected to serve as the first Town Moderator. Four years later, the Colonial Census of 1774 listed Mr. Brown as one of the Town's largest owners of enslaved persons—including five Indians and three Blacks.

This James Brown was not the first member of the Brown clan (sometimes spelled 'Browne') living in the area to be associated with slavery. In fact, the Browne family along with the Willett and Myles families (each of them slave owners) were among the very first Europeans to settle in this area known to the Indian owners of the land as 'Sowams'.

By the mid-sixteen hundreds, the number of settlers in Plymouth Colony looking for land exceeded what was available within the settled bounds of the Colony. This spurred a push to expand the Colony all the way from the Atlantic coast to the eastern shores of the Narragansett Bay. In 1653, in a deed witnessed by Plymouth Colony Assistant Governor John Browne and his son James Browne, the Massasoit Osamequin and his son Wamsetto (a.k.a., Wamsutta or Alexander) sold "Sowams and Parts Adjacent" to Thomas Willett, Thomas Prince (for whom Barrington's Prince's Hill is named), Josiah Winslow and Miles Standish for £35.00.

Even before the Sowams purchase, John Browne had settled his family near Bullocks Cove and in the vicinity of what is now West Barrington. By 1660, Thomas Willett, who was married to John Browne's daughter Mary Browne Willett, had moved his family into the area as well.

Willett, whose family had emigrated from England to Holland before settling in Plymouth Colony was a skilled negotiator and businessman who spoke both fluent Dutch as well as English. He traded furs with the Indians, helped negotiate the transfer of Dutch control of New Amsterdam to the English (eventually serving as the first mayor of New York), owned a small fleet of ships and was involved in the Dutch West India Company. In 1647 he provided surety for the ship 'Amandre' bound for Boston with a cargo of slaves while docked in the port of New Amsterdam.

The Reverend John Myles was a Baptist minister who had emigrated to the Colony from Swansea Wales to escape religious intolerance following the reign of Oliver Cromwell and the

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Wanted Volunteer Social Media & Outreach Coordinator

If you enjoy using social media and share a love of history, BPS could put your skills to good use as our Social Media & Outreach Coordinator. As SM&O Coordinator you would help keep both members and the public informed of our news, events and other information by maintaining an up-to-date member email contact list using Constant Contact, Mail Chimp or similar program, creating Social Media posts using Facebook and/or other platforms, helping with our Newsletter and issuing an occasional press release. If interested, please contact Stephen at info@barringtonpreservation.org.

museum news

GHOST PROPERTIES by Julia Califano and Barbara Hail



Barrington is home to many ghost properties: buildings that no longer exist except in photographs, artifacts, stories and memories. The Barrington Preservation Society is planning a new exhibit this fall entitled “Ghost Properties,” which will feature locations of significance throughout Barrington which have vanished from our landscape.

The Evolution of Barrington’s Homes

The first residents of the East Bay were Pokanoket/Wampanoag Indians who built their shelters of bent saplings and woven mats so they could move with the seasons as they hunted, farmed and fished. In the winter they lived in permanent long houses covered with sections of elm and birch bark.

The first European settlers arrived at Nockum Hill in 1645 and built their houses of wood and stone. Those homes were probably destroyed during the King Philip’s War in 1675, and the settlers rebuilt on Tyler Point. For the next 200 years, Barrington would remain primarily a farming community until the railroad arrived in 1855 and turned Barrington’s extensive waterfront into a summer destination.

The Garrison House, 1750-1770, 306 Rumstick Point Road

Rte. 114 was built along an original Wampanoag Indian trail. When it was improved in the 1950s, Barrington was transformed into a commuter suburb. The town center boasted new strip malls, two car dealerships and three full-service gas stations. New schools were built; summer homes were converted to year-round use, and farms were subdivided.

Ghost Properties Across Barrington

The new exhibit was inspired by Emily Mathewson Roorbach Kelley’s recent donation of photographs and a plat plan on muslin of the elegant summer home of jeweler Allen C. Mathewson (1808-1878), built sometime before 1870 on what is now Mathewson Lane. The exhibit will also feature original blueprints and landscape drawings of Lewis Dexter’s and Lucien Sharpe’s Italianate homes on Nayatt Point.

Among properties presented in the exhibit will be the Nathaniel Smith House at 306 Rumstick Point Road, ca. 1750-1770, commonly known as the “Garrison House” because of its use during the



The steam train line between Providence and the East Bay allowed Barrington to develop as a summer destination.

Revolutionary War. It later served as a field hospital for small pox. It was demolished in 1981 due to termite infestation.

Further north at 93 Rumstick Road were the world-famous Llys-yr-Rhosyn gardens, Welsh for "Royal Court of the Rose," created by Karl Jones and opened to the public free of charge in 1951. The gardens covered eight acres and were for many years the setting for the Barrington High School Friendship Service, held the day before graduation. In 1985 the gardens were shut down and the property subdivided.

The old train station was situated across the tracks from a building currently housing Mott and Chace Realtors, along what is now the East Bay Bike Path.



Bay House Hotel on Nayatt Point

The former Bay House Hotel on Nayatt Point, run by Benjamin and Anna Viall, accommodated 50 to 60 guests and included a "grapery" to provide a fruit treat for those dining in. Nothing remains of the long wharf that extended off Nayatt Point and provided a berth for "Canonchet," a steamship that traveled between Providence, Barrington and Warren and carried guests to the hotel. All that remains of the once thriving Bay House Hotel are the brick walls of the grapery on Cedar Avenue.

Eager to encourage the town's growth as a summer community, Allen Mathewson built several homes along Mathewson Road on speculation, including "The Gables," which still stands at 41 Mathewson and once was a small hotel. He built a second small hotel called

"The Mathewson" in the Queen Ann Victorian style at the corner of Mathewson and Chapin. It was torn down in 1959.



The Mathewson guest house, corner of Mathewson and Chapin.

The exhibit will also feature schools, public buildings and businesses that have been repurposed or torn down, including the Hampden Meadows schoolhouse that became the Barrington School Administration Building and now is Temple Habonim. It also highlights the police station that was torn down to make way for Police Cove Park, the town's first high school on Hamilton Avenue, the James Bowen House at 24 New Meadow Road (ca. 1770) which served as a landing for a cable ferry across the river, and Belton Court, the sprawling mansion built by Frederick Stanhope Peck in the 1920s that became the centerpiece of Barrington College and Zion Bible Institute and is now slated for redevelopment. ~

Come revisit Barrington's history with the Preservation Society and decide for yourself how we can best preserve Barrington's past. During the summer, the Barrington Preservation Society Museum will only be open by appointment, but we hope to reopen in the fall with the Ghost Properties Exhibit and will keep you posted about dates and times.

museum news cont.

EXPLORE OUR COLLECTION! PAST PERFECT ONLINE

by Jean Douglas

Barrington Preservation Society is proud to announce that our collection is now available to research online. Jean Douglas has finished exporting information to the PastPerfect Online database. PastPerfect Online is a searchable catalog that provides access to information about our collection. Headings include local history, domestic and farming artifacts, photographs, books, documents, manuscripts, maps, textiles, landscape drawings, and other materials held in our archives. Our entire collection is available online and we welcome members of the public to view it by going to the menu at barringtonpreservation.org, then clicking Online Museum Catalog. The catalog will be updated periodically as new items are researched and accessioned. ~



Jean Douglas entering accessions on Past Perfect. Julia Califano (l) and Caroline Tortolani researching "Ghost Properties" and Dorr War participants. Barbara Hail checking catalog entries.



Recent Donations

by Barbara Hail

We have received some interesting additions to our collection. They include an American flag, donated by troop leader Sally Small, via Winifred Johannis, and used by her Girl Scout Troop in Barrington in the 1970s and '80s, (image) and a yearbook, *The Arrow*, from Beth Beaver Davis, whose father was a member of the 1936 graduating class of the Peck School. Among other graduates were Preston (Pret) Gladding of Gladding's Department Store in Providence, and Ray and Walter Chellel, of Chellel's Market, long a mainstay of the Barrington Shopping Center. ~



RESEARCH ON THE DORR WAR by Caroline Tortolani

The BPS Education Committee, chaired by Luther Spoehr, has been researching the political and economic interests of the Barrington Volunteers from the 4th Regiment who were involved in the “Dorr War” of 1842. As Thomas Bicknell wrote in his book *The History of Barrington*, “The Dorr War was an incident in Rhode Island history in the progress of the people towards universal, manhood suffrage.” Our research is directly related to the recent restoration of the Militia Flag carried by the Barrington Volunteers as they marched toward the 1842 conflict in Chepachet, Rhode Island. The flag and an accompanying interpretive booklet will be a part of the Museum’s new exhibit when it opens next Fall. ~

Slave History Medallion to be Installed at Barrington Public Library

On June 6th, 2022, with the support of BPL Director Kristen Chin — and following presentations by BPS President Stephen Venuti and RISHM Executive Director Charles Roberts — the Barrington Town Council voted unanimously to approve the installation of a Rhode Island Slave History Medallion (RISHM) at the Library. The medallion — a bronze plaque with a QR code atop a granite mount — will be installed outside the Library near the front steps. Anyone with a smartphone will be invited to scan the QR code to link to a local history page on the RISHM.ORG website to learn about Barrington and the important role the enslaved people of color (Indigenous and African) played in the Town’s history.

An installation ceremony is planned for some time this coming Fall (date to be determined). The celebration, to be hosted jointly by BPL, BPS and RISHM, will include presentations and images highlighting the research done by BPS members including Dr. Nathaniel Lane Taylor and Roger Williams University, Associate Professor, Dr. Charlotte Carrington-Farmer and her students. Stay tuned for further details.

Image: Example of Medallion atop a granite mount to be placed in front of Library.



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return of the monarchy under Charles II. In 1663, Myles and Willett's brother-in-law James Browne were each fined £5.00 for establishing a church in the Rehoboth home of John Butterfield without authorization and were ordered to move to some other place. The 'some other place' they chose to move to and build their meetinghouse, was across the Rehoboth town line into Sowams on what is now George Street Lot 3A in Barrington.

By 1667, Willett had persuaded the General Court at Plymouth to authorize the establishment of a new town in the Sowams territory. The purpose of the town was 1) to provide Willett with a major seaport into Narragansett Bay to facilitate his shipping interests and 2) to provide a home for Myles' congregation and meetinghouse. It was agreed that the new town would be named 'Swansea' in honor of Myles' former home and ministry in Swansea Wales.

Willett proposed that "no erroneous" persons or men "of evil behavior" be allowed to settle in the Town. Myles further clarified that to mean that Quakers were not welcome and that only Baptists and Congregationalists were to be allowed. Although both Baptist and Congregationalists were initially welcomed – a later split between the two groups led to the establishment of Barrington as a separate town.

Willett was a very rich man when he died in 1674. Among the hundreds of items included in his will left to his wife and children were "eight negroes" with a total assessed value of £200.00 (See Figure 1). While he was alive, Willett reportedly had a good rapport with the Indian population. We will never know if this rapport would have helped to avoid the conflict between the English settlers and the Indigenous population that erupted soon after his death. But tensions over land boundaries and usage within the Sowams territory were soon to erupt.

In June 1675 tensions between the English settlers and the Indigenous population flared when the settlers shot and killed a tribal member. In an attempt to avoid all-out war, James Browne met with King Philip (a.k.a. Osamequin's son and successor Metacom) twice, but reportedly found "Philip very high and not persuadable to peace." The war that did ensue, known as King Philip's War or KPW, had a devastating impact on both the settlers and the Indian population.

One of the earliest battles in the King Philip's War took place a mile and a half away from Myles' meetinghouse at the Myles Garrison. It is unknown how many Indians lost their lives during this battle. But a number of settlers were killed including one of Rev. John Myles' slaves. One contemporary account of the battle wrote "Mr. Miles his negro no hope of life."

Sometime later in the war, Thomas Willett's son Hezekiah was killed and Jethro, a negro slave of the Willetts', was taken and held captive. Jethro either escaped or was later rescued. He was then returned to the Willetts but given his freedom two years later as a reward for warning the settlers of an imminent (Indian) attack on the town of Taunton.

By the time the war ended sometime in 1676, Myles' meetinghouse had been abandoned, the congregation had scattered and Myles himself had temporarily moved to Boston. But by 1679, Myles and his congregation of Baptists and Congregationalist had moved to the end of New Meadow Neck near what is now Tyler Point in Barrington where a new meetinghouse was built.

Reverend Myles died sometime in 1683. The actual location of his grave is unknown. But a large memorial stone dedicated in his honor, was later prominently placed at Tyler Point Cemetery. His will, prepared in 1682, lists five negro slaves: Peter, his wife Mary and their two children – valued at £45.00, and Adam – valued at £27.00 (See Figure 2).

James Browne (Willett's brother-in-law and co-founder of Myles congregation) died in 1694 and is buried at Little Neck Cemetery (Riverside). In his will, dated that same year, he bequeathed "Matte my negro unto my son Jabez" upon the death of his wife Lydia (See Figure 3). Lydia's will, dated 1710, would later list "one negro man servant" valued at £2.00 (See Figure 4). It is not known for certain. But this negro servant in Lydia's will is likely the same negro man "Matte" listed earlier in James Browne's will.

By 1691 Plymouth Colony had been merged into the Massachusetts Bay Colony making Swansea part of Massachusetts. Sometime after the death of Rev. John Myles, his joint congregation of Baptists and Congregationalists had split into two factions. Then in 1717 after the Baptists had moved elsewhere in Swansea, Massachusetts established Barrington as a separate Town, giving a permanent home to the Congregationalists.

We do not know what became of the Negro men, women and children who had been enslaved by the Willett, Myles and Brown(e) families who established the first seventeenth century European settlement in the area. But we do know that slavery continued well into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. We also know, as evidenced by the aforementioned 1774 Colonial Census, that slavery was expanded to include – not just Negro men, women and children, but Indigenous (Indian) men, women and children as well. Many of the enslaved Indians were those captured during the King Philip war or their descendants – a sad legacy with ramifications continuing on into the present day. ~

Figure 1. The Will of Thomas Willett, dated 1674, listing 8 Negroes with a total value of £200.00

From 1 pair of iron bound wheels and an old Cart	00	10	0
From 1 pair of old wheels and an old Cart	03	00	0
From 1 Cart and a pair of wheels and an old Cart	01	04	0
From 4 yeares for corn	02	00	0
From a bell	00	08	0
From 8 Negroes	04	00	0
From the Smelling house out house to warehouse and Barn and all other	200	00	0
coffins of wood or cartage and all the land given by my Son			

Figure 2. The Will of Reverend John Myles, dated 1682, listing five negro slaves: Peter, his wife Mary and their two children – valued at £45.00, and Adam – valued at £27.00

From five Negro and 24 yearlings	17	00	00
From Peter Negro and Mary his wife and two children	45	00	00
Adam Negro	27	00	00
From four old humber	01	10	00
Edmund Laker			
John Butlerworth			
Thomas Eastbrook			
The sum total is 260 07 06			
Witnes this 18th March Anno 1682 Made			
In the presence of three Witnesses Before me James Brown Notary			

Figure 3. The Will of James Browne, dated 1694, bequeathing “Matte my negro unto my son Jabez” upon the death of his wife Lydia.

From 1 Give and bequeath to my Daughter Dorothy Kent two Cowes			
10 sheep			
From 1 Give and bequeath Matte my Negro unto my son Jabez			
after my wifes Decease			
From 1 Give all the Rest of my Estate to my Dear and Loving wi			
Lydia Brown for her to Dispose to my Children according to her			

Figure 4. The Will of James Browne’s widow Lydia, dated 1710, listing “one negro man servant” valued at £2.00

1000 sheep	01	05	00
To a young Mare	01	16	00
To five fowls	03	10	00
To Thirty bushells of Corn	02	00	00
To one Negro man servant	04	00	00
To one Ox	00	10	00
To a smelting Iron and five pounds Yarn	00	02	00
To one Hatthol	73	04	00