DISCOVER • PRESERVE • RESTORE

Exploring History

Barrington Preservation Society Newsletter

Barrington Preservation Society Museum
Lower Level, Public Library

Hours
Open Wednesdays 1:00 - 4:00 pm
or by appointment

Phone
(401)289-0802

E-mail
info@barringtonpreservation.org

BARRINGTON AND THE DORR REBELLION OF 1842

By Luther Spoehr, BPS Board Member,
Senior Lecturer Emeritus, Brown University

"In Barrington, as well as throughout the state, the excitement was intense, and personal hatred was bitter between members of the two parties. Family ties were broken by the strains of partisanship. Personal danger, more real than fancied, led many Dorrites of Barrington to secrete themselves or flee from the town."

–Thomas Bicknell, *A History of the Town of Barrington (1898)*

Royal Charter of 1663. For the full annotated text go to www.sos.ri.gov/assets/downloads/documents/RI-Charter-annotated.pdf

It's a complicated narrative. To recognize the players without a scorecard, you need to know that in 1842 Rhode Island's Constitution was the ancient Royal Charter of 1663. Although it provided for the most liberal suffrage in the colonies, by the 1820s its property and other requirements for voting were the most restrictive in the United States. The controversy that came to a boil in the 1842 pitted "Charterites" (led by the aptly named Governor King) against "Dorrites" (named for reformer Thomas Dorr), a "People's Constitution" against a "Landholders Constitution." For a few months, Rhode Island had two constitutions and two rival governments. The resulting military, political, and constitutional confrontation had national reverberations.

Barrington in 1840

Barrington contained 549 people in 1840, a DECLINE of about 20% since the 1790 Census recorded 683. This offered a sharp contrast to industrial centers such as Providence, which by 1840 had almost quadrupled its 1790 population to 23, 172. Barrington was a town of farmers and tradesmen; its village centered on what is now the intersection of County Road and Federal Road, where the "White Church" still stands.

Town politics was dominated by members of families whose surnames are still familiar, including Allin, Bicknell, Drown, Heath, Humphrey, Martin, Peck, and Smith. Most of these leaders—but not all of them—seem to have been sympathetic to the "Charterite" cause in 1842.

Cont. on page 4

museum news

Recent Aquisitions

by Barbara Hail

- Hand-colored lithograph of Thomas Dorr by James S. Baille, NYC, printed 1844-47. Gift of Richard Donnelly. On exhibit.
- Wicker baby carriage used by the mother of donor Linda Bainer in 1906. On exhibit.
- Quilt, Log Cabin Design, hand-stitched, ca. 1860-70. Gift of Julia and Nick Califano. On exhibit in baby carriage.
- Scan of 1866 Map of Barrington from James Mason survey. Original in John Hay Library, Brown University.
- Scrapbook of Sarah E. Tiffany Bowden, 1844-1942, containing photos and clippings of Barrington. Source unknown.
- Model Sailboat. Ca. 2000. Gift of Nick and Julia Califano
- Box with tackle used by Edward G. Hail for fishing in Narragansett Bay, 1970-2000. Gift of Barbara Hail.
- Book, "Little Girl Blue," by Josephine Scribner Gates, 1910. Source unknown.
- Camera, Ciro-flex, twin lens reflex, c. 1950. Donated by Barrington photographer Paul Darling and used by him to take multiple photographs of the town over a 50 year period.

DOCENT INTERPRETERS IN THE GALLERY AS THE MUSEUM REOPENS WEDNESDAYS 1-4 PM

After a long break due to Covid, the Museum has again opened its doors to the public. Helping you to understand and enjoy the new exhibit, "Ghost Properties," will be two returning Docent Interpreters, **Prudie Bishop** and **Janet Sparfman,** and one newcomer, **Mariko Shiga.**

Prudie Barton Bishop is a longtime resident of Barrington, with deep roots in its past. Her grandfather was Harold Gibbs, naturalist and Director of Fish and Game for the State of Rhode Island. He and his daughter, Barbara Gibbs Barton, as well as Prudie and her brothers and sisters all attended Barrington schools, and she later attended Mt. Holyoke College with a major in French.

Janet Sparfman attended Barrington schools and received her BA from the former Mt. Saint Joseph College in Wakefield, Rhode Island. She was a Middle School Teacher with the Bristol-Warren Regional School District from 1970 to 2004.

Mariko Shiga grew up in Yokohama, Japan and came to this country as a teenager. She is an alumna of Salve Regina University, with a BA in Psychology in 2012 and an MA in Holistic Counseling in 2016. She has trained at The Providence Center, taught at the Japanese Language School in Medford, MA, and volunteered at the Coggeshall Farm Museum in Bristol, RI. We welcome all of our dedicated docents as they help us show off our exciting new exhibition.

Mariko Shiga and Prudie Bishop interpret the Ghost Properties exhibit every Wednesday from 1-4 pm at the museum.

HOUSE PLAQUES MIRROR WORLD EVENTS

by Maria Bruce

The Giuseppe and Maria Codega house at 31 Maple Avenue, built in 1910. Photo courtesy of Maria Bruce.

The Giuseppe and Maria Codega house at 31 Maple Avenue was recently recognized with a historic plaque during this year's Plaque Program. Built in 1910, it reflects Barrington's changing landscape and population, beginning in the late 1800's through the early 1900's, and typifies Barrington's new residents: immigrant Italians establishing their homesteads, families, and roots, shortly after their arrival in Barrington.

While approximately 4 million Italians came to America between 1880 through 1920, they were part of the much larger Italian Diaspora, during which 14 million Italians left their homeland, due to untenable hardships and uncertain futures.

As about 200 of these immigrants made their way to Barrington, most of them depended upon the brickyard for their livelihoods. And, as the brickyard industry expanded, so did the need for housing- prompting the development of Maple Avenue and the surrounding neighborhoods during the early 1900's. Usually built for multi-generational and extended families, these homes often lacked ornate exterior and interior design features, instead exhibiting the efficient and practical use of space and resources. Most properties contained vegetable and flower gardens, fruit trees, grape arbors and a small assortment of livestock and pets: all necessities for the typically large families that originally established these homesteads.

While not all historic plaque applications immediately meet the 100-year-old requirement, their stories and histories are noteworthy none-the-less, and also reflect impactful world events, as seen through changes to Barrington's landscape and population.

Such is the case with one sweet, beach-side Bay Road summer bungalow. While built in the late 1920's amid a flurry of other beach-side development, this house soon became part of a much larger summer colony, primarily owned by Providence residents seeking cooler environs, (in part) as an attempt to stave off the insidious polio virus. And, while this beach-side colony flourished, polio essentially ran unchecked during the first half of the 20th century, with infections seeming to peak during the warmer months. It was not until 1955, with the development of a vaccine by Dr. Jonas Salk, that this dreaded disease finally began to wane.

In her personal recollection entitled "Reminiscences of Barrington Beach" current property owner and life-long summer resident Caryl-Ann Miller Nieforth, recounts her "halcyon days of youth and summer." They were carefree, and Caryl-Ann was always surrounded by family and friends of all ages. Originally built and owned by Ilie and Annie Berger, and then eventually by Caryl-Ann's parents, Meyer and Beatrice (Wattman) Miller, the still unheated beach bungalow is lovingly maintained and holds wonderful memories. To this day it continues to be thoroughly enjoyed by both family and friends alike.

Caryl-Ann Miller Nieforth's Bay Road bungalow. Photo courtesy of Caryl-Ann Miller Nieforth.

The Dorr Rebellion

In the early 1840s, smoldering discontent over voting rights and representation in Rhode Island once again burst into flames. The Rhode Island Suffrage Association, organized in 1840, demanded that the right to vote be expanded to include the 60% of men excluded from it. Thomas Wilson Dorr, a Harvard graduate and well-to-do lawyer, soon became the leader of the movement to replace the Charter of 1663. A "People's Convention" drew up the "People's Constitution," which in turn was voted on in December 1841. All white male citizens were eligible to vote. (Dorr and other organizers objected to barring Black voters, but they were outvoted at the Convention by reformers afraid of alienating more conservative white voters.)

In the statewide referendum, the People's Constitution received 13,944 votes (including almost 5,000 landowners). Opponents boycotted the election, so "no" votes numbered only 52. (A Constitution drawn up in the General Assembly that made only a few concessions to the reformers (but did enfranchise Black males) was then voted down in that body.)

In March 1842, a second, "official" statewide referendum was held on the so-called "Landholders' Constitution," which had been drawn up as an alternative to the People's Constitution. It expanded suffrage to all native-born white males (note the anti-immigrant restriction) with 2 years' residence, but only taxpayers with property worth more than $150 could vote on financial matters. The property requirement was retained for naturalized (i.e. foreign-born) citizens. Both Dorrites and Charterites went to the polls to vote on this compromise proposal, which was narrowly rejected, 8,689 to 8,013. Anticipating future trouble, the General Assembly then passed what became known as the "Algerine Law," making it a treasonable offense to take office under the People's Constitution.

In April 1842, the Dorrites and the state government each held an election. Dorr was elected governor by the former; Samuel Ward King, by the latter. When each side refused to accept the other's Constitution, King appealed to President John Tyler for military aid, then declared martial law and called out the State Militia. Rhode Island now had two governors and two General Assemblies.

Dorr and his followers then made the fateful decision to resort to violence, a tactic that cost them considerable support statewide, including in Barrington. After the Dorrites failed to seize the State Arsenal in Providence (because cannon failed to fire) on May 18, 1842, Governor King called out the Militia. ("Charterites" who dispersed the rebels included Dorr's father and uncle.)

The subsequent showdown between Dorr's "army" and the Rhode

Hand-colored lithograph of Thomas Dorr by James S. Baille, NYC, printed 1844-47.

Island Militia contained elements of comic opera. Dorr took refuge in New York, then returned in June 1842 with plans to regroup in Chepachet. The battle that both sides expected never quite materialized, and Dorr again fled the state. As Erik Chaput, the most thorough researcher of the Rebellion, notes,

There were no military casualties for the simple reason that only one shot was fired. The only recorded deaths were Robert Gould, who was shot in the face by his deranged brother-in-law over a matter that had nothing to do with the military campaign, and an innocent bystander, who was killed the next day in Pawtucket. The majority of prisoners taken into custody between June 28 and 30 were curious onlookers who were simply in the wrong spot at the wrong time. (Chaput, 158).

In November 1842, unnerved by the upheaval, the General Assembly held another Constitutional Convention. The resulting document somewhat expanded white male suffrage. Landowners needed only one year's residence to vote in all elections. Landless citizens with two years' residence who paid taxes on $134 worth of property could vote in all elections. Native-born citizens who paid at least $1.00 in taxes or performed at least one day of volunteer service ("registry voters") could vote in most elections (but not in Providence's city council elections, nor on financial matters in any

municipality). Naturalized citizens could vote only if they fulfilled the $134 real estate requirement. This time the Dorrites boycotted, and the "Law and Order Constitution" was approved, 7,024-51. With amendments, this Constitution remained in effect into the 1970s.

In 1843 Thomas Dorr turned himself in. He was tried, convicted of treason, and sentenced to solitary confinement for life, at hard labor. Although he served only a year, his health was broken and he died in 1854.

Barrington in the Dorr Rebellion

Barringtonians argued over voting rights and reapportion-ment just as the rest of the state did. A subsequent Congressional report disclosed that 52 Barrington men—28 of whom met the property qualification for voting under the Charter, and 24 of whom did not—voted in favor of the People's Constitution in December 1841. Included in the relatively well-to-do group were some familiar family names: Heath, Peck, Martin, Drown, Smith, and others. In other words, Dorr's support in Barrington, as in the rest of the state, did not come only from the disenfranchised, but from men motivated by what can aptly be called "idealism." It seems clear, however, that "conservatives," who wanted to preserve their own power and the power of the small towns within the state, outnumbered the "rebels" in town.

In June 1842 Barrington's Militia didn't get to Chepachet in time to see even limited action. Historian Russell DeSimone, who has studied the Rebellion in detail, identifies only two Barringtonians (Charles Kimbell and Wilmarth Heath) among the 250 prisoners taken there, probably because there was no organized Dorrite militia from Barrington. Heath (whose home still stands on County Road, just west of Middle Highway) was one of only three men to receive a jail sentence and a $500 fine—the other two were Thomas Dorr himself and Seth Luther of Warren.

The Barrington Militia that answered the Governor's call and marched under the flag now preserved in the town Museum included 32 officers and men from the town. Many of those militiamen were from the same families and neighborhoods as those who had voted for the People's Constitution. Barrington's resident historian, Thomas Bicknell, whose history was published in 1898, did not mince words: "In Barrington, as well as throughout the state, the excitement was intense, and personal hatred was bitter between members of the two parties. Family ties were broken by the strains of partisanship. Personal danger, more real than fancied, led many Dorrites of Barrington to secrete themselves or flee from the town."

This article is excerpted from a longer essay that can be found on the Barrington Preservation Society's website: https://barringtonpreservation.org/barrington-and-the-dorr-rebellion-of-1842/

Thanks to generous support from the Heritage Harbor Foundation, the Barrington Militia flag has been restored and is now on display in the Barrington Preservation Society's Museum in the Peck Center. Designed and produced during the 1820s, it was most famously deployed during the Dorr Rebellion.

Barrington Militia Flag, Prior to Restoration

Because Barrington's past might help inform the future…

by Julia Califano

The Carmelite Monastery

Three nuns in the cloistered and contemplative order of Discalced Carmelites arrived by train from New Orleans in 1930 to establish a Carmelite Monastery at Stoneleigh, a Newport mansion donated by a granddaughter of Cornelius Vanderbilt. In 1957, the order built new quarters and a chapel at 25 Watson Avenue in Barrington.

By 2020, the last six nuns of the Carmelite order retired, and the Providence Diocese put the building up for sale for $3.5 million. Concerned about possible redevelopment, the Barrington Town Council asked the 2021 Financial Town Meeting to purchase the property, which was approved by a single vote. The Council then appointed a study committee to consider options for the property, including elderly or affordable housing, open space and razing or remodeling the building, but no recommendation has been made.

Belton Court

Massasoit Ousamequin sold 500 acres of land at the north end of Barrington to Joseph Peck in 1641, and for the next 300 years, Ousamequin Farm remained in the Peck family.

In 1866, Asa Peck (1812-1890) lived at Ousamequin Farm, raising cattle, pigs and trotting horses while founding Asa Peck and Company, a company purchasing and selling wool waste products, with his son Leander (1843-1909).

Leander Peck lived in Providence but spent summers in Barrington. When his father died, he moved into a turreted farmhouse on Primrose Hill Road, served on the Barrington Town Council and was well known for his charitable acts. After his death in 1916, his wife Sarah donated the land adjacent to Town Hall and the building of a school named in his honor.

Leander Peck's son Frederick Stanhope Peck (1868-1947) began his career as an office boy for Asa Peck and Company but became treasurer and a principal stockholder by 1903 and then invested in the Lymansville Company, a wool worsted manufacturer, served as vice president of the National Exchange Realty, as director of the Industrial Trust Bank and as a member of the Barrington Town Council, the Rhode Island General Assembly where he served as Finance Chair and as a member of the Republican National Committee.

In 1905, Fred Peck purchased property west of Middle Highway to build Belton Court in the Arts and Crafts style and began collecting art, manuscripts, rare books and historic documents. In 1927-28, he built extensive additions to house his growing collections and entertain his friends, but by the 1940's Peck's textile investments had moved overseas, and he began subdividing Ousamequin Farm. By 1944, Peck sold his books and manuscripts at auction and bequeathed Belton Court to the Providence Homeopathic Hospital. Determining that the building was inappropriate as a hospital, Providence Homeopathic sold Belton Court to Edgewood College and eventually Barrington College (1950-1985). In 1985, Barrington College sold the property to Zion Bible Institute, who sold off 110 acres to support the school's mission.

In 2009, Zion Bible put the remaining 39.56 acres, including Belton Court, up for sale for $13,000,000. Several redevelopment proposals for mixed housing failed, and in 2011, the property sold at auction for $3,400,000 to Shine Harmony. Originally planning to redevelop the property as a boarding school, Shine Harmony recently submitted proposals to develop mixed housing and applied for permission to demolish Belton Court.

Barrington's elementary districts

The earliest European settlers in Barrington taught their children at home, but by 1770, Barrington had three school buildings at the north end of town, on New Meadow Road and at Nayatt.

When the steam railroad connected Providence to Barrington in 1855, the town grew with an influx of summer visitors and small manufacturing businesses in West Barrington, and the town built a fourth school on Alfred Drowne Road.

With its changing populations and needs, Barrington built, refurbished and reconfigured schools and consolidated the four districts into three, each with two buildings: Primrose Hill and West Barrington in District 1, Sowams and Hampden Meadows in District 2 and Maple Avenue and Nayatt in District 3.

With declining enrollment in the 1980's, West Barrington School was razed; Maple Avenue School was consolidated with Nayatt and its building redeveloped as an emergency center and office space, and Sowams was mothballed but later reopened.

In 1916, Sarah Peck, wife of Leander Peck, donated land and the Leander R. Peck School. Initially constructed as the town's high school, the building became a Middle School when the new high school was built on Lincoln Avenue in 1951. When a Middle School on Middle Highway was built in 1959, the Peck School continued to serve grades 6-8 until 1982 and then was remodeled to become the Town Library and Senior Center.

Barrington's first high school, the Prince's Hill Family and Day School, opened on what is now Hamilton Avenue in 1870 and was privately owned by Isaac F. Cady, former principal of the high school in Warren. Cady served as Superintendent of Barrington Schools from 1872-1882, and his private school became Barrington's first public high school and library in 1884. In 1888, the high school and library moved into the newly built Barrington Town Hall.

Brick remnants from Barrington's first brickyard at Johannis Farm Wildlife Preserve.

BEAUTY AND THE BRICKS

by Maria Bruce

An October 16th guided walk through the Johannis Farm Wildlife Preserve provided attendees with a chance to view and learn about Barrington's first brick-making operation, set in its beautiful and original environment on the property. Co-sponsored by the Barrington Land Conservation Trust (BLCT) and the Barrington Preservation Society (BPS), the event was organized by BLCT's Board of Director's member and Education Chair, Cindy Pierce; and led by BPS Trustee Maria Bruce, and Johannis Preserve land steward, and Board of Director's member Bill Kirkpatrick. Cindy Elder, BLCT's new Executive Director, provided opening remarks, and concluded by stressing the importance of volunteer participation, which serves as the backbone of critical preservation and stewardship efforts. Dr. David Weed, Sowams Heritage Area Coordinator, also provided a comprehensive overview of the property's significance and early history.

Traversing through the Preserve, participants viewed claypits, brick piles and transport canals: all remnants of the site's long brick-making history, first established in 1673 by William Cahoon, an early Swansea resident. While Mr. Cahoon was killed in June 1675, at the outbreak of King Philip's War, brick-making continued on the site, under various names and owners, for almost 250 years. In 1919, while conducting business as the National Brick Company, all brick-making at this site finally ceased, thus ending Barrington's earliest brick-making operation.

Johannis Farm Wildlife Preserve's claypit remnant, with the Palmer River in the distance.

Photos courtesy of Maria Bruce

Barrington Preservation Society
P.O. Box 178
Barrington, RI 02806

become a member or renew today

Please complete this form and return with dues.

*** Be a member and help preserve Barrington's rich history.
2023 dues cover from January 1 to December 31.

Join the Barrington Preservation Society!

Name _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____ e-mail *_____

New member ____Renewal _____

*Stay connected and help BPS reduce costs by giving us your email address. Dues are tax deductible.

Membership Catagories

High School Student	☐	$5	Supporting	☐	$100
College/University Student	☐	$10	Patron	☐	$250
Individual	☐	$35	Business Member	☐	$250
Family	☐	$50	Life Member	☐	$1000

Join or renew online at barringtonpreservation.org/membership, or clip and send this form with a check payable to:

The Barrington Preservation Society
P.O. Box 178, Barrington, RI 02806