

150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of  
Town of Westport

1787-1937



**1787**

**1937**

**150th Anniversary of the  
Incorporation of the**



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**JULY 2nd, 1937**

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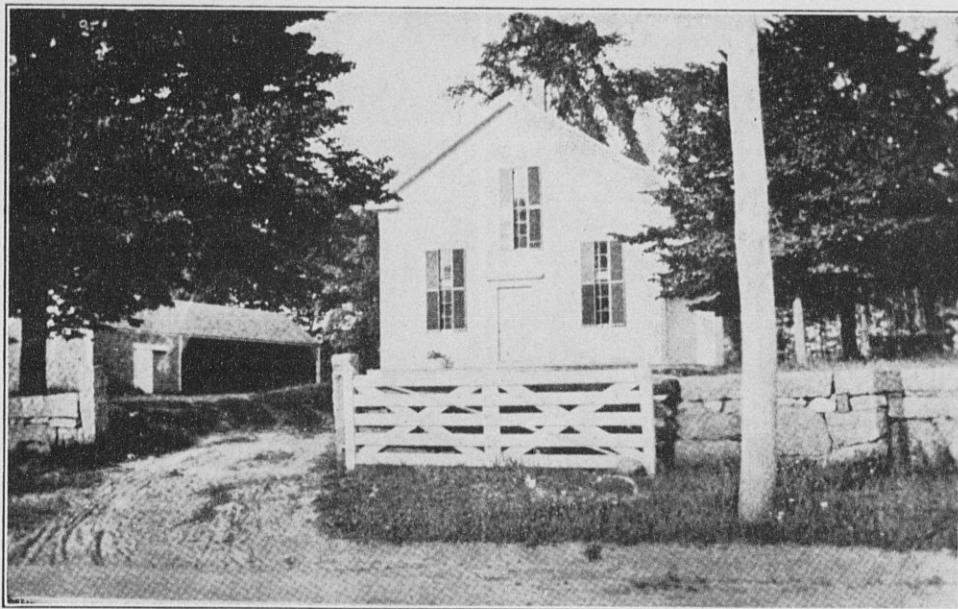
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## 1787 Town of Westport 1937

July 2nd, 1937 marks the 150th Anniversary of the incorporation of the town of Westport. It was in the year 1787 that Westport withdrew from the Township of Dartmouth which at that time comprised what is now known as New Bedford, Dartmouth, Westport, Fairhaven and Achushnet.

From 1692 until 1747 the western boundary line of the town was continually changing as the boundary line between the Massachusetts Bay colony and the Rhode Island colony was ever a source of argument between the colonies and was decreed by the assemblies to be first in one place and then in another.

The Dartmouth Records state that in 1736 the boundaries between Dartmouth and Little Compton was settled by the selectmen of the two towns and records the matter as follows: "We began where the bounds between Little Compton and Dartmouth ended, and renewed by a range of marked trees until we came to a tree fallen down near the pond and so to the pond, which book is the bounds to Watupa pond, the west side of said pond to a white oak tree, and from thence over said pond to a stump of a tree fallen down, and by a range of old marked trees, and marked them anew with a blaze, with three chops of an axe over said blaze until we come to a peaked rock, which is by a path that leads from Dartmouth to Plymouth and ended there. Dated 30th of the month, called December. Joseph Anthony, Philip Taber, jr., Isaac Wood, Restcom Sanford, Selectmen, and by order of selectmen of Dartmouth and Tiverton.

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In 1764 a part of Dartmouth and a part of Little Compton were given to the town of Tiverton.

In 1787 Westport and New Bedford withdrew from Dartmouth, each becoming a separate town. Dartmouth in 1793, 1795, and 1805 ceded additional territory to Westport along its eastern boundary line. Finally in 1828 the boundary line between the two towns was permanently established.

In 1861 a part of Portsmouth, R. I. was annexed to the town-lands lying east and south of a certain line described after the entry of the decree of the Supreme Court concerning the Rhode Island and Massachusetts boundary line shall be a part of Westport."

In 1894, the boundary line between Fall River and Westport was defined.

Feb. 23, 1899 the State Line between Massachusetts and Rhode Island was re-located. It was marked with thirty-nine stone and the old 'Joe Sanford' bound which was marked by a bolt in a small boulder was firmly reset in concrete masonry. The old state line stone at the Adamsville Dam was reset in concrete. The line was marked in 138 different points and is well established." Since this date the boundary lines of the town have remained the same.

The territory of Achushnea, Apponegansett, and Acoaxet, which was purchased in 1652 from the Indians, was first settled at Acushnet by the families of Jenney, Hathaway, Cooke, Shaw, Palmer, Culbert and Delano and next at Apponegansett by the families of Earle, Tucker, Howland, Russell, Sherman, Briggs, Smith, Akin, and Slocum. These hardy pioneers dared to face the hardships of life in the forest, but were unwilling to add to these hardships, the dangers and perils of Indian attacks, so with one exception no settlements were made away from the coast until after King Philip's War. This notable exception Richard Sisson, who came from Portsmouth, R. I., in 1671, and settled at Head of Westport at a spot just west of the present landing. The town of Dartmouth was of little importance till after King Philip's War, when the hostile Indians of this section had, been effectually subdued by Capt. Church and his band of brave followers.

Settlers came to this region for two reasons. Those who came from the Plymouth Colony, wished religious freedom. Many of this number had been often arrested, fined, and punished for not conforming to the doctrines of the established church of the colony. These dissenters were Anabaptists and Friends. Those settlers who came from Rhode Island colony believed that this region afforded better opportunities for earning a livelihood than did the now crowded island of Rhode Island, and they at the same time knew that their religious freedom would be unencumbered. Here like at their former abiding place they could continue the practices and doctrines of the Friends' Meeting.

After King Philip's War, Lawton, Waite, and Tripp migrated from Portsmouth and settled near the Head of Westport to engage in the mill business. They were soon followed by the Wilcox, the Mosher, the Howland families and later by many others, but it was not until after the Revolution that the village attained any importance.

This condition was equally true at Westport Point, but that village was not worthy of the title, "village," till several years after the Revolution. The first families to settle there were the Hicks, Macomers, Whites, Soules, Howlands, and Giffords.

## INDIAN NAMES

The Indian names of the Westport section of Dartmouth make a most interesting study. Some of these are heard daily while others are practically forgotten. First we shall consider those most familiar:

Noquochoke—"the land at the fork"—

Acoaxet—"the land on the other side of the little land."

Quansett—originally spelled Nutuquansett and means "at the burnt woods" or possibly "the place of fishing by fire" and is part of Horseneck.

Paquachuck—the name once given to Westport Point and means "at the lear or open hill."

Hassanegk—has been corrupted to Horseneck and means "cellar dwelling."

Watuppa—great ponds between Westport and Fall River and means "they draw water."

## THE OLD DARTMOUTH BLOCKHOUSES

The principal blockhouse was called Russell's Garrison named for John Russell, a prominent man of the town. According to one authority this structure was not originally built for a fortification but was the said John Russell's dwelling house, and at the time of King Philip's War was converted into a fort. It was built near the shore on the east side of the Aponagansett river in a swamp pasture. This fort was commanded by Captain Samuel Eels of Hingham. Nearly opposite this was a rude Indian fortification. A very interesting old story has come down to us concerning the Russell Garrison in the King Philip War days. One day during this period of slaughter, an Indian appeared upon the "Heath" or "Heathen Neck." This is a place on the opposite side of the river, lying in a southwesterly direction from the fort, at a distance of about a half mile. The Indian began to defiantly gesticulate at the English in the fort and while thus engaged, was killed by a musket ball. The story has a later incident connected with it, which goes to prove, that such a thing may have happened. In the inventory of the estate of an Abraham Sherman taken in 1772, there appears the following item: "A gun which is said once killed an Indian across Apponagansett River from ye old castle on Russell's land to Heathen Neck." This tradition would now immediately become history, if we could prove, that the musket of 1676 had an effective range at so great a distance.

The white settlers had a second garrison on Palmer's Island in New Bedford harbor, nearly opposite Fort Phoenix and today there is a lighthouse located here. The third blockhouse was located in Oxford Village, in Fairhaven, about a quarter of a mile from the house of John Cooke for whom the garrison was named. This John Cooke was the last survivor of the Mayflower and one of the purchasers of Dartmouth.

It would appear that all the white settlers of the Coaksett section (Westport) who escaped destruction from the Indians must have taken refuge in Russell's Garrison. The greatest loss of property and life was suffered in the Aponagansett section as this was most densely populated. We find that because of needing so many men for home defenses, Dartmouth was excused from furnishing men for military service in other parts of the colony. So poor was the town from losses suffered during the war, that



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for the period of the war and for several years later, the town was omitted in the tax rates of the colony. During this time of poverty and suffering, "contribution was made by divers Christians in Ireland," so the record states, "for the relief of such as are impoverished, distressed, and in necessity by the late Indian War."

Their next move was to the windmill on Rhode Island where they stayed until a garrison with more strength came to them and a sloop to transport them to Fall River in order to visit Weetamore's camp. Next day they proceeded to Weetamore's camp. but were discovered by one of the enemy who ran in and gave the information. As one lusty Indian heard the news, he remarked, as he left his meat cooking upon the spit, that he would kill an Englishman before dinner. As it turned out, he was killed instead of the Englishman. The Indians were chased into the cedar swamp located in Fall River between south South Watuppa pond and the heights that look down on Mt. Hope.

Their pursuers were ordered back to Dartmouth, as the distress there was so acute, immediate assistance was needed. The most of the Plymouth garrison were ordered to Russell's Garrison, where they met a number of the Indians who surrendered themselves to capt. Eels and Ralph Earl, who was the first settler in Dartmouth. These two men wished the Indians treated fairly. If this had been done, the war would have probably ended sooner, but others who had more power than they, had the Indians taken to Plymouth and sold into slavery, then transported from the country to Cadiz. While all this was going on Philip escaped.

THE FATE OF PHILIP AND HIS TRIBE

On August 12, 1676, Capt. Church ordered John Alderman, a friendly Saconet Indian,—the same John Alderman who had revealed Little-Eyes' identity to Church at Dartmouth—to shoot Philip who was wandering in the swamps near his old home at Mount Hope. After Church's order had been obeyed, it is said that he would not allow Philip to be buried as Philip had not permitted many of the Englishmen to receive proper burial. The body of the slain chief of the Wampanoags was cut into quarters by an Indian. The head was sent to Plymouth and there placed on a pole, where we are told it remained as a warning to hostile inclined Indians for twenty years. Philips hands were sent to Boston and his quartered body was hung on the trees near the spot where he was killed.

The colonial soldiers returned to Plymouth after this gruesome work had been accomplished and received as their pay 30s. for each Indian, whom they had killed, and **strange to say** no extra price was paid Alderman for killing Philip. The exact fate of Philips wife and child is not known. Some authorities hold that they were sold as slaves and later died from overwork on a rice plantation in the Barbadoes. Other authorities say that they were placed on a vessel in Boston harbor was bound for the West Indies and as this vessel sailed along the coast of Rhode Island passed their former home, the mother with the boy clasped to her bosom jumped from the side of the vessel into the sea.

SOME OF THE RESULTS OF KING PHILIP'S WAR IN DARTMOUTH

During the two years of the war, no town meetings were held in Dartmouth and this territory was abandoned. After Philip's death and the subsequent suppression of the Indians, the inhabitants gradually returned and rebuilt their homes.



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In June 1678 a town meeting was held and from that date the town appears to have started on the road to prosperity. The Achushmet river was no longer the western boundary of the town. Ferries were established over the river where bridges could not be built. At about this time some of the voters began to demand a more central location for a town house. It was voted to have one "at the mills," meaning Smith Mills. This structure was built at the head of the Slocum Road.

At this time the inhabitants of Apponegansett and Acoaksett greatly outnumbered those who lived on the east side of Acushnet river. Howard's neck where Cooke's garrison is said to have been built was no longer needed as a place of refuge from the Indians. Those who settled west of the Acushnet were in the majority and these people were Quakers hence not in harmony with the religious practices of the Pilgrims and had their separate meeting houses. The first one was built at Apponegansett in 1699.

#### INDIAN RELICS

After King Philip's War Capt. Church deeded land to them which was later known as the Fall River Reservation. From this town was a road leading directly to the reservation, which came to have and still retains the name, Indian Town Road. We find a record dated 1764-5 which states that there were fifty-nine Indians then living at the reservation. At later dates records were made of the number of Indians then residing on the reservation. From the stories handed down to us, we find they continued to live in a semi-civilized state for the most part until the last one left for the happy hunting grounds. However some of them inter-married with the white settlers and some of their descendants are living in that section now.

One Westport family, who lived near the reservation, was one of the numerous Gifford families. There are in that family today, baskets owned, which were made by these Indians. In 1907, as there were no Indians at the reservation and had not been for several years, the reservation was by special act, transferred to the city of Fall River.

There are two Indian cemeteries in the town, one on the Drift Road and one on the east bank of the Noquochoke River about a mile and a half north of Hix's Bridge. The one on the river has tomb stones on which are cut Indian pictures.

There is probably no farm in town which has not had arrow heads plowed from beneath its surface. Occasionally a tomahawk is unearthed, as happened not long ago.

#### DEED OF STEPHEN'S NECK

The land designated in this old deed given by the Indians describes land now within the bounds of Westport, in that part of the town named Acoaxet, but which in 1700 was a part of Little Compton. This deed is now in the possession of G. Fred Davis of Fall River whose ancestor Benjamin Davol came into possession of Stephen's Neck in 1786. The neck is owned by G. Fred Davis, the Acoaxet Club, George H. Brayton, George W. Kirby, Mrs. James B. Springer and the heirs of Asa R. Howland. From this rather lengthy document much history can be learned.

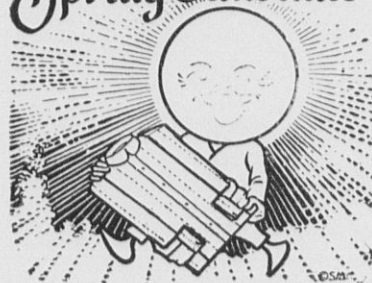


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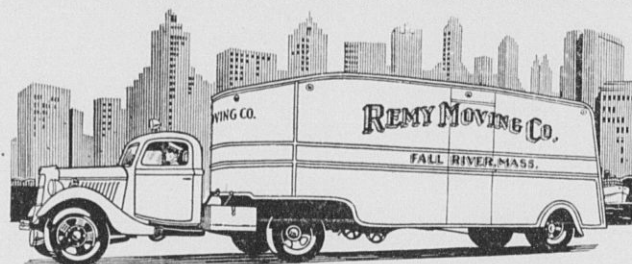
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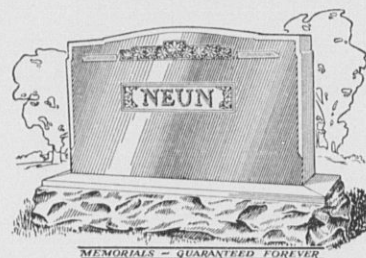
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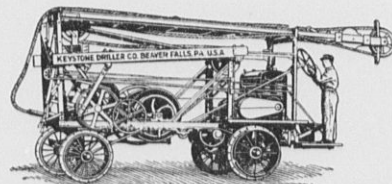
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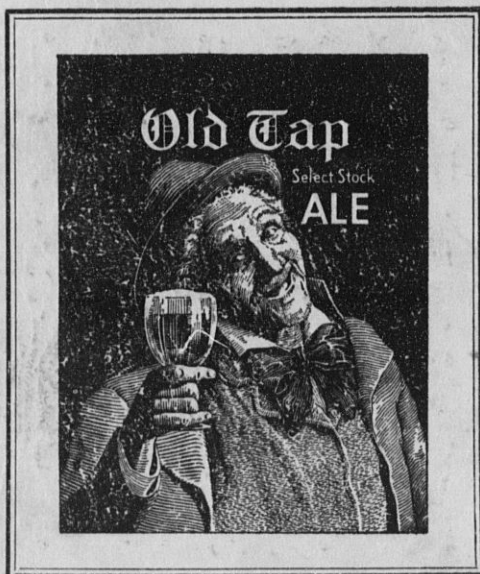
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