

Twentieth Century (1900-present)

The opening of the twentieth century in Warren witnessed the electrification of the Providence, Warren, and Bristol railroad which ran trains every hour. 1900 also saw the beginning of the suburban trolley line which ran right down Main Street. The September 21, 1938 hurricane disrupted passenger rail service, and buses replaced the old trolleys. The tracks to Fall River were eliminated and only a single daily freight line to Bristol remained in use. Today, rail service is abandoned and the future use of the railroad right-of-way for construction of a modern public East Bay transit system very much in the news. The feasibility, cost, and utilization of such a system from Bristol through Warren to Providence are under study by state, local, and railroad officials.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the location of the railroad right-of-way cutting a north/south arc through Warren has structured the growth of the town. Land east of the tracks is predominately industrial and commercial in use; west of the tracks remains a densely built up residential, commercial, and industrial waterfront-oriented historic community.

By 1900, growth within the waterfront section completely stabilized. The Waterman Manufacturing Company continued to operate the great mill complex on North Water Street until 1920; in 1934 Berkshire Associates obtained the complex and also the old Parker Mill built in 1899 on Metacom Avenue. By the 1950's, with loss of the textile industry to southern states, the Warren Manufacturing Company's great mill complex became the home of American Tourister Company who now also occupy most of the old Cutler mill on Cutler Street. Demand for more space has recently led to construction of an unattractive huge cinder block addition by American Tourister located on prime waterfront land on North Water Street.

Demand for industrial land remains a constant pressure along the waterfront. Ship building, a major industry in Warren from Colonial days, is thriving today. The Anchorage, Inc. operates on the old wharf of John Throop Child at the foot of Miller Street. Tallman Yacht occupies the Oyster Shack constructed in the late 1880's on Stubb's Wharf, which was Caleb Carr's ferry landing in Revolutionary times. On the south end of Water Street the Blount Marine Corporation is today one of Warren's most

progressive industries constructing modern ferry boats, cruise ships, restaurant, hospital, and oil exploration vessels, and with a corresponding need for more land.

The decade following World War II saw economic depression and modernization of the Town of Warren. Commercial structures replaced many historic buildings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. To cite a few, the Sequino Block replaced the magnificent Early Victorian mansion built by Dr. Otis Bullock on the east side of Main Street in the early 1860's; a modern store stands on the site of historic Burr's Tavern on the southwest corner of Main and Washington Streets; a contemporary medical building recently replaced the early eighteenth century home of Captain Wheaton Cole at 634 Main Street; and a "Dunkin Donuts" and large asphalt parking lot claimed the Turner Cottage built in 1753, the Barton Mansion, an Italianate villa built in 1863, and the Saugy Building, an excellent Academic Revival commercial structure constructed in 1913 on the northwest corner of Main and Miller Streets.

Demolition for parking claimed the important Waterman House, formerly on the southeast corner of Water and Broad Streets (built by James Maxwell in 1820), with its famous eagle door frame. The interior of this outstanding mansion was chosen for reproduction as one of the Thorne miniatures by the Art Institute of Chicago. Parking for industrial needs also claimed the Factor's House (c. 1860), an Early Victorian, cross-gable house with excellent bargeboard, which stood at 95 Water Street.

Disregard for the architectural and historical heritage of Warren has until lately been unchecked. Conversion of eighteenth century and early nineteenth century structures to business use is common. In addition, modernization of store fronts with loss of original details has created a visually chaotic streetscape along Main Street. Trees which once lined Main and Water Streets are today non-existent. Many of the fine sea-captains' homes on Water Street have been mutilated, sub-divided, and stripped by landlords unaware of either the historic or true economic value of their properties. Mill housing dating from the middle of the nineteenth century along Westminster Street and just south of Sisson Street has been allowed to deteriorate; the surrounding landscape became barren, and the residential environment needlessly compromised. No restoration of these properties, with recognition of their

architectural value and proximity to both the water and the town center, has to date been undertaken on any appreciable scale.

Very little twentieth century architecture exists in the older part of Warren except for the Old Stone Bank (1967), and St. Mary's of the Bay (1970). Outside the town center, residential development in East and South Warren has been limited to reproduction colonial homes and contemporary ranch houses that have little historical or architectural value in terms of this survey. A few contemporary houses are to be found on Touisset Point and Asylum Road. Construction of a modern school complex off Asylum Road is noteworthy. Development of Touisset Neck is limited by lack of town water, restrictive zoning, ledge rock, and large farm holdings.

In summary, the town of Warren presents three distinct faces: the Waterfront District, an architectural treasury which contains over 200 buildings reflecting the town's social, economic, and architectural development; Northeast and East Warren, including Touisset, a rural area with large farms and open space suitable for conservation and recreation plus a growing number of year-round residences which have replaced the summer colonies of the early twentieth century; and South Warren, a section rapidly changing from a rural highway linking Warren with Bristol to a center for upper and middle-income multi-family housing. Construction of condominiums here will greatly alter the social, economic, and political fabric of the future Warren community.

FOOTNOTES:

¹"Standards of Quality for Classifications of Waters of the State, 1973." Department of Health, Division of Water Supply and Pollution Control, State of Rhode Island:

SA — Suitable for all sea-water uses including shell fish harvest for direct human consumption (approved shell-fish areas), bathing and other water sports.

A — Suitable for water supply and all other water use; character uniformly excellent.

²Dutch traders called the Warren River the "Klips Kill." Relics of Dutch origin were found among the important Indian artifacts removed from Burr's Hill in South Warren in 1913, and are now in the Museum of the American Indian of the Heye Foundation in New York City and the George Hail Library in Warren. The movements of the Dutch around Narragansett Bay during the settlement period were of grave concern to the English, who were at war with Holland in 1653.

³A hospital for inoculation was set up on the north bank of the Kickemuit under the direction of Colonel Nathan Miller near the present pumping station.

⁴Both these homes have been documented in *Early Homes of Rhode Island* by Antoinette F. Downing (Illustrations XII-XIII).

⁵By 1886, the Warren Manufacturing Company included three five-story mills containing 1,400 looms and employing about 850 people. The complex included: the old mill, opened in 1847, 224 x 56 feet containing 10,000 spindles; mill No. 2, erected in 1860, 180 x 76 feet, plus an ell 64 x 49 feet, with 18,000 spindles; and mill No. 3, erected in 1872, 216 x 76 feet with an ell 90 x 66 feet and containing 30,000 spindles.