



The March, 1888 Split of Narragansett from South Kingstown **by Richard Vangermeersch**

It is surprising that the split of Narragansett from SK in March of 1888 is a story never told. I should have told this story in Marc 2013 during the Narragansett 125 Celebration. Let's do this now as a part of SK 300.

There were two local papers then: The Narragansett Times (NT), 1855 – present; and Irving Watson's Narragansett Herald (NH), 1876-1898 (on microfilm, but it apparently ended about 1902). The NT supported the split. The NH didn't and basically ignored it. I believe there was animosity between Irving Watson and the very dominant Hazard family leader Rowland Hazard (1829 – 1898).

I have the impression that Irving Watson believed the split was a power move by Rowland Hazard to grab the most developed SK villages, thereby leaving only the agricultural villages in SK.

An historian ultimately makes a judgement as to the time periods involved in his story. Here are my time periods for this story:

- 1) 1881
- 2) 1883
- 3) 1885
- 4) 1886
- 5) 1887
- 6) Feb. 1888
- 7) March 1888

I hope that the readers will challenge my seven time periods by presenting their different periods to as to develop a different scenario.

Villages also change over the years. I used the 1870 Beers' SK map. There were 21 villages in this map:

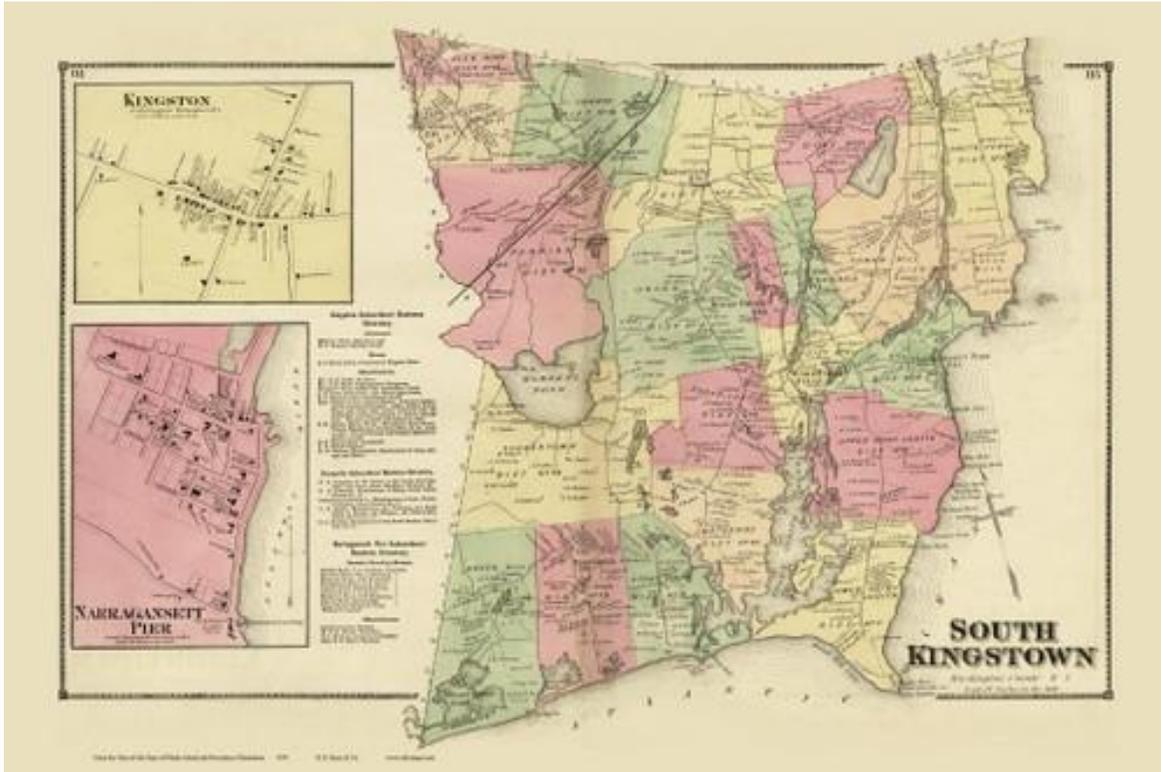
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|----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1) South Ferry | 7) Lower Point | 11) Stony Point |
| 2) Tower Hill | Judith | 12) Perryville |
| 3) Kingston | 8) Upper Point | 13) Green Hill |
| 4) Union | Judith | 14) Tuckertown |
| 5) Rocky Book | 9) Sugar Loaf | |
| 6) Wakefield | 10) Matunuck | |



15) Perkins
(Great
Swamp)
16) Yawgoo

17) Usquepaug
18) Glen Rock
19) Narragansett
Pier

20) Peace Dale
21) Mooresfield



Note: The names, spellings, and boundaries of these jurisdictions changed through local customs.

The historian also selects the people involved in the story. I've chosen these persons:

- Dr. Charles Hitchcock
- William C. Clarke, Sr.
- Nathan F. Dixon, III
- Rowland Hazard (1829-1898)
- R.G. Dun
- H.O. Havermeyer
- George P. Sherman
- Narragansett Pier Hotel owners

An historian will select various institutional forces. I have chosen these:



- Narragansett Pier Improvement Association (NPIA)
- Narragansett Pier Railroad (NPRR)
- Social connections
- NH, NT
- Narragansett Pier hotels

1. 1881

A meeting to form the Narragansett Pier Improvement Association on September 10, 1881 was announced in the NT of Sept 2. In the NT of Sept. 9, the leaders of the NPIA were W.A. Nye, Edward Austin, James G. Burns, W.G. Caswell, S. Coates, and C. Hitchcock. The NT editorialized “First and foremost then we say Roads above all things, a good stretch of shore road is absolutely needed.” ...”They (tourists) want to ride or drive, or walk close along the margin of the sea. If the Pier prospers all the neighborhood around shares the prosperity.”

Of these six people, I have chosen Dr. Charles Hitchcock as the most vocal leader. Also, I am much more familiar with the Hitchcock family – always an important factor in choosing a key figure to write a history.

As noted in the NT of Sept 18, Hitchcock was Secretary and Treasurer of the NPIA. Of the other four persons mentioned, William C. Clarke was noted. He was by far the most vocal supporter of the split.

Charles Hitchcock came from a very prominent Providence family. He graduated Brown in 1869, when he met Fanny Lapsley, a Narragansett resident from Philadelphia. Charles graduated from Columbia Medical School in 1872. Charlie and Fanny married soon after and summered in the Pier at Howell at about 1875.

William C. Clarke (1841 – 1902) was a distant descendent of John Clarke, the chief RI negotiator of the Charter of 1663 from King Charles II. I did not realize this when I originally theorized that William C. Clarke was a spokesman for Rowland Hazard. However, I soon realized that William spoke for himself as a member of a significant RI family. William was what today we would call a “change agent.” William had property both in SK and (soon to be) Narragansett. In 1890 he built the Clarke Block just off Beach Street at the Pier. He joined Dr. Hitchcock as the leaders of the split.



2. 1883 – The Old Orchard Beach Model

The NT of March 30, 1883 editorialized that an attempt at the split was unsuccessful. “The opposition claim that... if Narragansett Pier wants improvements they should be made by the citizens of that place.” “Good roads, sidewalks, and drainage... must be secured before the wealthy will bring their fine carriages.”

The NT of August 17, 1883 continued on with “Lighting Old Orchard Beach by Electricity.” Old Orchard Beach broke away from Saco, Maine in March of 1883. “The people of Old Orchard were anxious to improve the place, but they could not on account of opposition with which they met.”

While this split off of the Pier did not happen, the NT of Nov. 30, 1883 reported on the macademizing of the new Point Judith Road.

In its Sept. 19, 1884 edition, the NT reported that about \$8,000 had been spent on 2½ miles off Point Judith Road, all of the money being raised by the NPIA. On Oct. 3, the NT printed the 18 “subscribers” (contributors) for \$6,725 with the Town of SK giving \$1,325. In its Oct. 15, 1884 paper the NT listed 76 contributors at \$1,169.50 donated to the NPIA for police protection, improvement of roads, and for various other purposes.

3. 1885 – NPIA Committee on Division

In the Oct. 2, 1885 NT, the sixth annual meeting of the NPIA, Charles Hitchcock and William C. Clarke were on the seven person council with Pres. Edward Austin, W.A. Nye, W.G. Caswell, J.C. Tucker, and S.W. Mathewson. It was noted that “The committees on the removal of the railroad station and the division of the town reported progress.” In the Oct. 9, 1885 NT there was a list of 59 donors to the NPIA for keeping the streets and walks in good shape, watering the streets, and supporting the police.

4. 1886 – Two Drives

The Aug. 20, 1886 NT referred to 2 other villages in SK that were of great interest of summer guests. They were:



- 1) The road to Matunuck with the opportunity for return through the great rhododendron swamp and
- 2) The road through Boston Neck (Boston Neck Road).

The Oct. 26, 1886 NT noted 65 NPIA donors for \$1,098.75 for maintenance. SK contributed \$32 of that amount. No wonder why interest in the split was maintained. Apparently there was interest in the NPIA at expanding the division.

5. 1887

The Sept. 2, 1887 NT included a very long article “The Legislative Hearing on the Prospect Division of the Town.” What I had read many times, but not connected to Charles Hitchcock was that his Brown classmate of 1869, Nathan F. Dixon of Westerly, was one of the four RI Senate members of the Judiciary Committee holding the Division Hearing in Wakefield. RI Lieutenant Governor Honey was also there. There is no doubt in my mind that the Dixon-Hitchcock connection played a significant role in the split (division).

William C. Clarke gave a lengthy introduction, published verbatim by the NT.

Clarke talked about the 1881 start of the NPIA and the 1883 attempt at division. SK balked at this attempt. Point Judith Road was felt to be a solution by SK. Clarke then proceeded to argue to add the SK villages of Wakefield, Peace Dale and Rocky Brook to the Pier and Point Judith (Upper and Lower). The three villages were different than the agricultural villages of SK. Many residents of these three villages found work at the Pier during the winter months.

Clarke noted the great rise in property values in these villages. There were opposers to Clarke’s views but their visions were tame at this point as they were seemingly taken by surprise.

George P. Sherman did make a significant point.”If there is to be a division it should be a line through the center of the pond and river to the NK line.” Whether it was this comment that caused the ultimate boundary lines or not is unknown but this speaker was at least able to see the future.



William C. Clarke then gave a slew of statistics on the division. Thomas G. Hazard spoke positively about the division. E.C. Tefft argued that most of Wakefield is opposed to being moved from SK.

6. February 1888

The NT of Feb. 24, 1888 discussed the Judiciary Committee meeting at the Providence State House. (The current RI state capitol opened in 1905. Until then there were five state capitols in which meetings were rotated.) The desired lines included “the villages as far west as Curtis Corner and in the direction of Matunuck to the northerly line of E.F. Watson’s property.”

William Clarke argued that the Pier will not rule the division. Four of the seven members of the new council will come from outside the Pier.

The opposition this time was more vocal and prepared than at the 1887 hearings. Daniel Whaley from Wakefield argued that the labor class could not afford to support the Pier. “It was not right to tax the poor for luxuries of the rich.” He stressed the town farm and town hall would be in Narragansett. All 90 of his family opposed this. Benjamin Curtis from Rocky Brook said no one in his village of Peace Dale supported being in Narragansett. Thomas A. Gould and Thomas J. Champlin also noted no support to their neighborhoods.

B.F. Robinson of Wakefield requested that this issue be decided by an election.

Daniel Sherman of Wakefield stressed SK would be left with 15 school districts but with a much lower tax base. E.H. Hazard also requested an election on this issue. John Babcock said the proposed new town left SK with a “large, illy shaped town and it will be a poor town too.”

The people of Upper and Lower Point Judith were largely happy with the proposed division.

Providence City solicitor Van Slyk, the counselor for the proposed town, said the Pier would be willing to go it alone. He also indicated the proposed town (or district) would demand a RI Senate or RI House seat (hence, Narragansett became a district).



The hearing was well attended and included Dr. Charles Hitchcock of New York, the opponents' petition was attached. This document stressed that Wakefield, Peace Dale and Rocky Brook are not interested in being a part of Narragansett.

7. March, 1888

In the March 9, 1888 NT an editorial stressed the strong opposition from the residents of Wakefield, Peace Dale, and Rocky Brook was effective. The dividers left these three villages out of the proposed district of Narragansett.

In the same NT issue was an article entitled "The Hearing of the Bill Establishing the District of Narragansett."

The proposed bill now included the Pier and Point Judith in a district. There was question raised about the entry to Point Judith Pond, which was then in Matunuck. B.F. Robinson said the District of Narragansett put too much of Point Judith Pond in Narragansett. William Clarke again gave his statistical analysis. Some Wakefield residents argued for joining Narragansett residents.

The division bill was included in that NT issue. Both Narrow River and Salt Pond were divided in the middle. With that, the South Ferry Village (including Boston Neck) became a part of the District of Narragansett. Since the Point Judith Pond breachway was then in Matunuck, what is now Jerusalem became a part of Narragansett. Since the breachway long ago shifted between Jerusalem and Galilee, Jerusalem is an oddity.

Whether the 1888 decision followed the 1887 advice of George P. Sherman is not known. The Point Judith Pond parts left Matunuck in SK but the Narrow River boundary drove South Ferry (including Boston Neck) into Narragansett.

Narragansett became a District on March 24, 1888. In the NT issue of March 23, 1888 (Supplement) is a letter signed "Potter." "Potter" wrote a "sour grapes letter." He labelled the split as being caused by land speculators. Potter felt a 3/5 majority of voters should have been required for the split.



According to the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission's "Historic and Architectural Resources of Narragansett, R.I.," published in 1991, "the character and economy of the Narragansett area with its extensive commercial and resort development prompted the General Assembly to incorporate the district of Narragansett in March, 1888."

Although Narragansett was separated from SK in 1888, it was not incorporated until 1901. This required approval by the legislature and Governor, and resulted in Narragansett having a state senator and a state representative. Pushing for this earlier would likely not have been politically successful due to the finite number of senators and representatives.

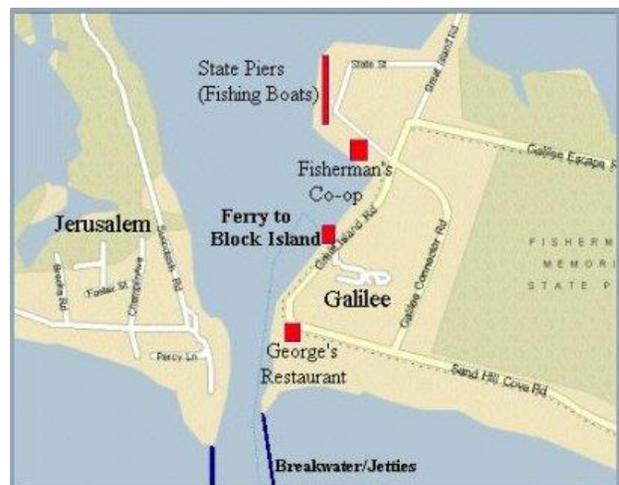
Some Time Later

The issue of whether Jerusalem was in the wrong town was considered:

Dec. 5, 1974 - The NT raised the question: "Is Jerusalem in the wrong Town?"

Sept. 1, 1983 - The NT endorsed Council president Loontjens' idea of transferring Jerusalem to SK.

Sept. 22, 1983 - The Narr. Town Council voted 4-1 NOT to transfer Jerusalem to SK.



Conclusions 134 Years Later...

Obviously, Jerusalem would be in SK today if the legislators knew a breachway would be built off the breakwater – the one side being in Galilee. Councilman Maury Loontjens tried to change this by offering Jerusalem to SK but that vote lost 4-1 in Narragansett Town Council in the early 1990s. In my view it should have passed.

I can understand the Point Judith Pond being in both SK and Narragansett. I believe that Narragansett should have been given SK's land from Tower Hill east to Narrow River. This makes much more



sense to me than what they did, which was to leave all of Tower Hill to SK.

District 2, that is east of the old Post Road, on the 1870 map, fits better with Narragansett than SK. I wonder if the South Ferry decision was greatly influenced by the 1887 comments of George P. Sherman.

Did it hurt Narragansett to have Nathan F. Dixon III and Charles Hitchcock to be Brown 1869? It did not. We forget that there was a mere handful of graduates in the class of 1869. Dixon (1847 – 1897) later on was a member of the U.S. House, 1889 – 1895 as a Republican His father (Nathan F. Dixon II, 1812 – 1881, Brown 1833) also was a member of congress (1849 – 1851) as a Whig and 1863 – 1871 as a Republican. His father, Nathan F. Dixon I (1774 – 1842, Brown, 1799) was a U.S. Senator (1839 – 1842, when he died) as a Whig.

I am still trying to do a search of the Dixon files a Brown for a possible clue as to the Dixon dealings with Hitchcock.

Certainly William C. Clarke deserves some notice, if only for his boldness. He certainly shared the same fate as his distinct forebearer, John Clarke.

I was unable to judge the impact of Rowland Hazard in the split. I originally thought William C. Clark, Sr. was a “mouthpiece of Rowland Hazard.” I now believe that I was wrong. However, if Peace Dale, Rocky Brook, and Wakefield would have been added to the villages that became Narragansett, I believe Rowland Hazard would have gained much more power.

I believe Narragansett Pier would have happily become a district of Newport. We forget how connected Newport and Narragansett Pier were socially and geographically with water connections. The influences of the societies of New York City and Philadelphia had on both Narragansett and Newport. I have no doubt where Narragansett Pier’s heart was: It was with Newport, Philadelphia, and New York City and not with the agricultural villages of SK.

I believe NK, SK and Narragansett have worked well together on Narrow River matters. SK and Narragansett also have done well with Point Judith Pond.



I believe that Narragansett would have been ill served if it didn't split from SK. I do believe that more study should have been done on the Point Judith Pond and Narrow River division. I would be happy to exchange Jerusalem for the part of SK east of the Old Post Road, but if not, I would move Jerusalem to the town that best serves it – SK.

I hope others will add their comments about this piece. This piece should have been done for Narragansett 125 in 2013. However, better late than never.