

Wickhampton

TIVERTON HEIGHTS

ITS HISTORIC SURROUNDINGS,
AND
ITS BEAUTIFUL SCENERY.

1884

TIVERTON HEIGHTS:

TIVERTON, R. I.

ITS HISTORIC SURROUNDINGS,

~~By J. W. Brown~~
~~Headquarters~~
AND "

Surveyed and laid out A.
W. C.

ITS BEAUTIFUL SCENERY.

(Fall River, Mass.
1854)

FALL RIVER, MASS.

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TIVERTON HEIGHTS:

TIVERTON, R. I.

AFTER an absence of many years, it was my privilege, a few days ago, to return to this quiet Rhode Island town, to climb the steep but not difficult path that leads up to these famous Heights, and to stand once more upon the commanding summit.

In my youth, when Nature and works of Art had fewer charms than today, I thought it the most picturesque and delightful spot that could be found; and now, after roaming over nearly every state and territory in our broad land, having observed Nature's handiwork everywhere, I can say truly that I have found no place in this country that can equal it in beauty, and I have heard many who have viewed the beauties and wonders of the Old World say, "we never found a more lovely and charming view in all our travels." I learn that "The Heights" have recently been purchased by Mr. Thomas Kirkpatrick, the well-known jeweller of Twenty-second street and Broadway, New York, who intends, it is said, to erect a summer residence thereon.

“The Heights” have an historical interest, as well as being attractive to the lover of beautiful scenery. During the revolutionary war with England, a portion of the American army was encamped here, while just opposite, on the Island of Rhode Island, the British forces were stationed on Butts’ Hill. Both armies constructed what in those days were quite extensive earthworks, which still remain in a fair state of preservation.

From “The Heights,” on a clear day, the view is superb. It extends to the north, west and south for twenty or twenty-five miles, overlooking a wonderful distribution of land and water, rivers and points, bays and islands, thriving cities, modest villages, summer resorts, or quiet nooks celebrated by events of the revolutionary or old Indian wars.

Directly to the west, at the foot of the hill, is the “Stone Bridge,” from which the village takes its name and by which the locality is generally known. This bridge connects the mainland with the island of Rhode Island. The history of this bridge is not generally known, and it may be interesting: The first bridge constructed here was built of wood, nearly a century ago, 1794, but it had only a brief existence, being carried away by an extraordinary rise of water in 1796. It was immediately rebuilt, but in the following year it was again swept away, and for a long time the idea of maintaining a bridge here was abandoned and the old way of ferrying was revived. The place was then known as Howland’s Ferry. In 1807 a proposition to build a stone bridge was mooted, and

a subscription of 800 shares, at \$100 each, was soon filled, and its construction commenced in the summer of 1808, under the superintendence of Major Daniel Lyman. The structure was completed for travel in July, 1810, but in the great September gale of 1815 some 200 feet of it was carried away. To repair this and other damages an assessment was made, and the bridge was reopened in the fall of 1817. For half of a century it withstood the shock and breaking of the waves, but in 1868, in another severe September gale from the south, another breach was made. Repairs were made as soon as possible. The bridge was greatly strengthened, and it now seems of sufficient strength and solidity to withstand any attack of the elements. It is over 2,000 feet in length, with walls of heavy split stone, railing, and sliding draw. Some 280,000 tons of stone have been used in its construction, and the cost has been over \$200,000. Formerly a toll was exacted, to provide for its maintenance, but it has since become the property of the State of Rhode Island, and is now free. It spans the Seaconnet river, a beautiful sheet of water twelve miles long and a mile wide, which forms the easterly boundary of the island of Rhode Island, and connects Mount Hope Bay with the ocean. Over this bridge is the only carriage way to the Island, and no more charming or interesting drive can be found, in summer, than from Stone Bridge to Newport.

On the mainland, at the east end of and fronting the bridge, stands the "Lawton House," for many years called the "Stone Bridge House," and consid-

ered as one of the most famous resorts for the aristocracy and *elite* from Boston, Providence, Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York City. Here a former Russian Consul-General to New York City, Alexis Evestaphieve, spent some forty summers, and was considered one of its attractions, as he was a most cultivated and genial gentleman. Shark fishing then was a favorite sport, and many an evening the writer has seen forty and fifty ladies and gentlemen at a time, fishing from the bridge with large shark hooks, made fast to clothes lines by a chain. Many times the excitement ran high, as one after another hooked to a shark and lines became entangled in landing them. The proprietor of the hotel used to take the dead fish away by the wagon load, the next morning. In the summer of 1849, G. W. Butts, a gentleman from Providence, caught a shark below the bridge, which measured 11 feet 6 inches in length, and weighed over 500 pounds. It was sent to Providence, where the skin was taken off and preserved, and it is now to be seen in the Boston Museum, as I learned a few days since. The Russian Consul-General and Mr. Butt were considered "high hook" men, and many were the contests between these gentlemen over the day's catch of bass and blue fish, as they came in evenings.

The days of shark and bass fishing seem to have died out; not because the fish are not here, but from the fact that the hotel men failed to furnish boats, bait, tackle, etc. I learn that the old time sports are to be revived the coming season.

A short distance south of the House, midway in

the river, is "Gould Island," a most wonderful phenomenon of Nature. It rises, almost perpendicularly, 75 or 80 feet out of the water. It is nearly round and contains about six acres, and upon it are more earthworks, thrown up by the Americans to prevent the English from crossing the Neck into Tiverton. It is covered with a goodly growth of almost every kind of vine, shrub, and forest tree, the red cedar predominating. In the early spring the small birds take possession of it, and live together in harmony. * Woe to the hawk or crow that attempts to encroach upon this ground. I cannot say why, or by whom it was christened "Gould Island," but I am satisfied "J. Gould" knows nothing of it or he would have "wrecked" or "pre-empted" it before this late day. The Consul-General seldom missed a day without spending an hour or two here, always expressing his intention of being buried upon its highest peak. He even made arrangements to erect his monument here. But "Man proposes and God disposes." When one considers its monumental-like elevation, rising nearly 200 feet from the bottom of the river, he must wonder at the freak Dame Nature took when she formed it.

Standing upon "The Heights," my mind going back over a period of thirty years or more, I ask myself the question: "Where are the many patrons of 'Stone Bridge House,' in these days?" How memory brings back their well-known forms and genial faces! A few steps from this spot, one of them, Judge Job Durfee, Supreme Judge of this State for many years, was born. General Howland, ex-Member of Congress,

was also from Tiverton. Geo. Lawton, father of Moses and Theodore, who kept the "Stone Bridge Hotel" for twenty years or more, was favorably known. Captain Samuel Seabury, Major Hambly "the genius of the village," and Captains George and Albert Gray! Steven Grinnell, (who don't know "Steve?") the God of the Stable! No gentleman ever left his horse in charge of "Steve" who had occasion to grumble at its not being cared for; and many were the sly "perques" "Steve" received in those days. He still lives, and heads a family of some thirty children and grand-children. Captain Joseph Church, now living just below "The Heights," close on to an octogenarian, who may truly be considered a wonderful man. He walks to and from Fall River, six miles north of the bridge, and during the winter of 1883-84 he walked 14 miles while his horse was standing in his stable. He is father of seven sons, six of whom are living and reside here, all owning beautiful villas. All of them are hardy, enterprising and most worthy citizens. For forty years Captain Church followed the fishing business. He can name every species of fish ever caught; knows every rock and ledge along the coast from Cape May to Kennebec river, and knows the hour or time of tide fish will bite at certain locations. Few men, too, are better informed as to the history of this country or have a better general knowledge of the old world. "He is genial, mirthful and reliable"—so say his many friends, "Jim Anthony" of Fall River included. He bids fair to live many years and furnish enjoyment to those who hear him

relate his adventures of the past. From Providence came the Hon. John Whipple, Senator Anthony, General Amos D., and James Y. Smith, Attorney-General Blake, George W. Butts, William Green, the Mantons, Winches, Francis, Eatons and others. From Fall River, Hons. Edward and James Buffington, Hon. Charles J. Holmes, William Davol, Andrew McCourier, James M. Anthony, W. B. Durfee, Franklin Gray, William Brayton, Captain Joe Comstock, and not least, Oliver Hawes, whose surviving sons are "goodly representatives," and others, all fond of fish and clam dinners. Newport sent Governor Collins, Capt. Benjamin Palmer, Ed. Hazard, Dr. Tennant and hosts of others in the summer, when her aristocracy required a pleasant drive.

To give a detailed account of the many from Taunton, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York City, who patronized the "Stone Bridge House" then, would require too much time and space, but their name is legion. All proclaimed that it was a wonderful spot, as the beauty and grandeur of the surroundings grew upon them and became interwoven with some of the pleasantest associations of their lives.

The old "Stone Bridge Hotel" was destroyed by fire in 1847, having stood for more than fifty years. A new house was erected and opened July 4th, 1848, the main portion of which is now known as the "Lawton House." Some years later, the late Asa T. Lawton, a native of the Island of Rhode Island, having spent many years in California, where he amassed a large fortune, returned to his native heath.

The "Stone Bridge House" being an old resort and favorite spot to him, he conceived the idea of purchasing it and making such improvements as would induce his many friends and others to patronize it. After completing the purchase, he expended some \$80,000 upon it, and made it equal to any summer resort then in existence, and opened it as the "Lawton House" in 1865, he himself being the host. Having managed it successfully for two years, he sold the house to thirty of Fall River's "noblest sons," who ran it until the panic of 1878, when it was sold at a great sacrifice.

I learn it has recently been purchased by Colonel George Alexander of New York City, who is putting it in first-class condition, with all the modern improvements, and who will re-open it about the middle of May or first of June, as the "Stone Bridge House" again. The Colonel should know how to cater to the wants of the public. Having been an extensive traveler himself, he knows what a good house is, and his guests will be sure of food well cooked, and cleanly served. The house is capable of accommodating 150 guests. The halls are wide and airy, the rooms large and well ventilated, and the establishment can easily be made the equal of any summer resort. The bridge affords an opportunity of fishing without a boat, as thousands of pounds are caught from it yearly.

The Old Colony Railroad passes through the town and crosses the river about a mile above the "Stone Bridge," on another solid structure, similar to the old bridge, forming a perfect land locked basin of nearly two miles, the most beautiful and safe sheet of water

for sailing, rowing or fishing to be found anywhere. Oysters, lobsters, clams, scollops and all kinds of fish are abundant. This basin is only a step from the hotel, and its attractions and benefits are innumerable for the pleasure seeker. The eastern shore rises quite rapidly and the beautiful homes that have been built upon this hillside by the permanent residents of the village, who are an intelligent and generally well-to-do people, besides many handsome villas that have been erected by the citizens of Fall River and other neighboring cities, form a handsome village, which is generally known as "Stone Bridge," though the railroad station retains the name of the town, Tiverton. The west shore of the basin is low land, and it is broken by an arm of the river in which are some of the prettiest small islands that eye ever beheld.

No place from Cape May to Nova Scotia presents the attractions for comfort and pleasure that are to be found at "Stone Bridge" during the summer. Bathing, sailing, fishing and driving cannot be surpassed. Every day in summer the southerly winds come up the Seaconnet river, from the ocean, between the high lands of Tiverton and the island of Rhode Island, which drives off the raw sea damp, so unpleasant at most seaside resorts, and makes the breezes soft and balmy. Sleep woos one readily and sweetly at "The Bridge." Its power is not to be resisted, and one awakes in the morning with new, fresh life running through every artery. Weariness gives way to strength for new labors, and man is better prepared to meet his lot of toil. I cannot now say all I would,

but when the new proprietor opens its portals for the public, I may say a few words more of the "Stone Bridge House" and its surroundings.

From "The Heights," the island of Rhode Island is full in view, $14\frac{1}{2}$ miles long by $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles in width, almost every acre a garden spot. There is much of historical interest to remind one of beings and actions long since passed away. Yet, as slumbering tombstones loom up like reefs of the eternal shore, to show us where many human barks have struck and gone down, a still richer growth of civilization has sprung up on their ruins. Their perished forms have made room for ampler institutions, greater enterprises and nobler ideas, for sweet and kind are all the appliances of Nature.

Newport, the "Baden Baden" of this continent, is on its southern point, and Newtown, Portsmouth and Bristol Ferry are its northern villages.

On July 10th, 1777, Colonel Barton of Providence, learning that the English General Prescott had fixed his quarters near Newport, set out one dark night with forty men to capture him. Rowing across Narragansett Bay and passing the sentinel they soon reached the house where he was lodged. Finding the door locked, "Tuck Sisson," a negro, forced it open with his head, and Barton seized the General half dressed and hurried him to the boats. The alarm was sounded, and the British fleet fired upon the brave party, but they were beyond the reach of shot or pursuit. Congress promoted Barton to the rank of Colonel and presented him with a sword for his gallant act.

Butts' Hill, already referred to, where the English were quartered, is also full in view, about two miles distant. With the modern improvements in the art of warfare at the present day Johnny Bull and Yankee Doodle could "make it warm" for each other, but with the old appliances both armies must have been pretty safe so long as they kept in camp. Beyond the island is Narragansett Bay, the beauties of which are too well known to require any comment. Almost every day in summer, scores of steamers and hundreds of sailing vessels are to be seen upon its surface. The islands of Prudence and Patience, both garden spots, and beyond Rhode Island, are in full view. In the distance is East and West Greenwich, Apponaug Village, the Young Button Woods, Warwick Neck and the Light House, Rocky Point, Providence River and Providence, Warren and Bristol. At the latter was the summer house of the late Gov. Burnside. It is also the home of the Herreshoffs, the famous boat builders, and its harbor is full of the best modelled small yachts in the world. Years ago the town was noted for its "gals and onions," as the principal articles of export, as was "Taunton, Good Lord" for bricks and herring. Passing a little more to the north one may see Mount Hope, the favorite abode of the famous Indian warrior, King Philip, and near which he was shot by a friendly Indian. So much was Philip feared that his body was quartered, his head cut off and sent to Plymouth, and carried around the Colony in triumph. The Indian who killed him received one of his hands as a reward for the act.

Looking up the river is Mount Hope Bay, five miles long by three wide, into which empty Kickimuit, Cole's, Lee's, Taunton and Fall rivers. Upon its surface may be seen the Old Colony steamers, plying between New York and Boston, via Fall River, like immense floating palaces, which they really are. No line of steamers sailing out of New York City has been as successful or has met with so few accidents as this, and no line furnishes such comforts and elegance to its patrons. It has been the favorite route since the day when Capt. Joe Comstock was in command. Many were the gay parties of excursionists which left New York, at 5 P. M., to spend the next day at Newport and return with "Capt. Joe" the following night. Now the new steamer Pilgrim, the most elegant boat afloat, provided with all modern improvements, electric lights, elegant furnishings, etc., is acknowledged to be the queen of the Sound and of the fleet, though her sister boats are unequalled. For a flying trip, no more healthful or pleasing excursion can be made in summer out of New York City, than by the Pilgrim to either Newport or Fall River, and then by train over the Old Colony Railroad to Tiverton, arriving at 6, 8 or 10 A. M., with complete time to take in "The Heights," "Stone Bridge," the beautiful and picturesque views, and return the same evening if desired, to New York.

While looking north the eye rests upon the beautiful little village of Swansea, the home of the Hon. F. S. Stevens, one of Bristol County's millionaires and Nature's noblemen, whose ear is ever open to the distressed. In the days that tried the souls of men in

and around Fall River, the panic of 1878, when the clouds of defalcation and distrust lowered above that city and many were at a loss what to do, he, with one or two others, stepped to the front, and by an indomitable will and endurance, worked amidst wreck and shadow, cheering the downcast and helping the needy, until confidence and progress were again restored. Last fall, at the solicitations of many friends, he allowed his name to be presented for State Senator for Bristol County, and was elected by an overwhelming majority, showing the high appreciation of the people, who eagerly honored him with their suffrages.

Still north, on the same side of the river as "The Heights," is seen Fall River, the largest cotton manufacturing city in the United States. It has many good drives, and much that is worth seeing, including one of the handsomest buildings in the United States,—the new post office. The city contains between 50,000 and 60,000 inhabitants, and though skilled labor at times feels oppressed, and "strikes" are not uncommon in times of depression in business, still energy, perseverance and "capital" rules the city, and the din of hammers and hum of spindles is heard at every step.

To the east, the outlook is over a wide stretch of diverse country, hills, dales, rocks, rivulets and forest lands, interspersed with evergreens, making the view more than charming to the eye. Nothing can equal the handiwork of Nature, which makes the richest of dyes look pale. Nature seems to spread out here simply to touch the sense of joy, and help to add to the measure of boundless life. Upon these "Heights"

the morning stars' first glimmer can be seen, and who can doubt this is where they "sang together." Here flash the first tints of the morning sun, and here shine the last rays from the gates of sunset. Here rises a low, deep murmur from the sea. A light ripples along the firmament, as if Nature herself knows the council of all things, and for the moment seems to confess her glorious purpose.

To the south, and directly below "The Heights," is another lovely little sheet of water, which is about two miles long by one-half a mile wide, called "Nanie Quaket," into which the tide "ebbs and flows regularly twice every twenty-four hours," through a channel 50 feet wide. Oysters, clams, lobsters and fish are abundant in this basin. Farther on, over the high lands of Tiverton and Little Compton, the eye beholds many villas and farms, the latter under a high state of cultivation. Full in view, about two miles from here, stands the house where Lafayette made his headquarters, and on the river, perhaps a quarter of a mile to the west of this house, one of the most brilliant naval exploits of the revolution was performed. An English man-of-war, the "Pigot," a vessel of 200 tons burthen, had been stationed here to prevent the escape of the privateers that constantly annoyed the British merchantmen. The "Pigot" carried eight twelve-pounders, and was defended by strong boarding nettings and a crew of sixty men. On the night of October 28, 1778, Major Silas Talbot of Providence, with seventy-five picked men, including Lieut. Helme from Popham's regiment, sailed slowly down upon the "Pigot," which

was lying off Fogland Ferry. The attacking party were in the little sloop "Hawk," but the night was so dark that it was necessary to send out a boat, with muffled oars, to find the object of their search. Having located the "Pigot" all sail was crowded upon the little sloop, and before the British captain could bring his guns to bear upon her, her jib-boom had torn through the nettings of the "Pigot" and caught in the fore shrouds. Immediately a line of boarders, with Lieut. Helme at their head, leaped upon the deck of the enemy, and after a short but decisive struggle the Britishers were driven below and the "Pigot" was taken without the loss of men on either side. The "Hawk" and her prize immediately got under way, and both reached Stonington in safety. For this gallant act Talbot was made a Lieutenant-Colonel, and the Rhode Island Assembly voted swords both to him and Lieut. Helme.

Capt. Benjamin Church, the famous Indian fighter, was from Little Compton, and was respected and feared by the Indians who dwelt about him. By Church's arguments these Indians, the Awashonks, were induced to espouse the cause of the English in the war with Philip, and this defection sealed the doom of that hardy warrior. It is said that the old Sachem was never known to smile after the news of their defection from his cause was received.

In the distance is Seaconnet Point, and a little way from the shore West Island, noted for its bass fishing, where the West Island Club have their *rendezvous*, and entertain their friends in a most sumptuous and

aristocratic manner. This is the spot where President Arthur caught his fifty-pound bass last summer. Beyond is seen the Atlantic and Long Island Sound. To say much of either, would be a waste of time on my part. Yet

“The ocean is beautiful lulled to rest ;
 The pictured stars that gem its breast
 Are epitaphs, written upon the deep,
 Over the places where loved ones sleep.”

Here the Seaconnet river connects with the ocean, Seaconnet Point on the mainland and “Sachuset” on the island. The entrance is easily made, with nine or ten fathoms of water well up the river, and ample room for the whole New York yacht fleet to come direct to “Stone Bridge.” There is only one obstruction, which is a rock north north-west of “Gould Island, which Mr. Lorillard’s yacht struck two years ago. The draws are of ample width to allow any vessel to pass, and no more lovely cruise can be made than through the Seaconnet river into Mount Hope Bay, Narragansett Bay, Providence River and back to Newport.

And now as my hour of meditation closes, I must predict a brighter future for Tiverton and its surroundings. The beauties and advantages are unknown to the many who are seeking healthful suburban summer homes. Within the next decade, or two at least, every desirable villa site will be occupied. It only requires a careful investigation of its beauties to satisfy any one what the result must be. The inhabitants are peaceful, honest, law abiding and God praising people.

Drainage and all local appointments are perfect, taxation moderate. This sublime architecture, these vast spaces, all peopled with human beings and blessed with light, should feel how great the benevolence and how extensive the care of that power who has spread out before them this beautiful "Baca."

The soft touch of these breezes, coming we know not whence, these shadows and changing views from north, south, east and west, so pleasing, are revelations of beauty; and through the changeful phases of alternating seasons, every person who visits "Tiverton Heights," must exclaim, with uplifted hands:—"This is the beautiful, this is the wonderful, the long sought, now found 'Utopia' of the world." Now let me ask the reader, where on this earth can such picturesque, historical and natural views be realized? 'Tis Nature that satisfies our thirst. It feeds the hungry and finds them clothing. It wraps us around with a watchful care in sleep, and at last takes us to its great bosom to mingle with kindred dust.

In conclusion, as the shadows of the past flit before me, and the recollections of the many genial personages who were here in days of yore and who have "paid the debt we all owe," arise out of memory, let me say, "Peace be to their ashes." And to those who have not viewed this wonderful panorama and these historical surroundings, I would say, come, when the "Stone Bridge House" opens, and enjoy a peep from "Tiverton Heights."

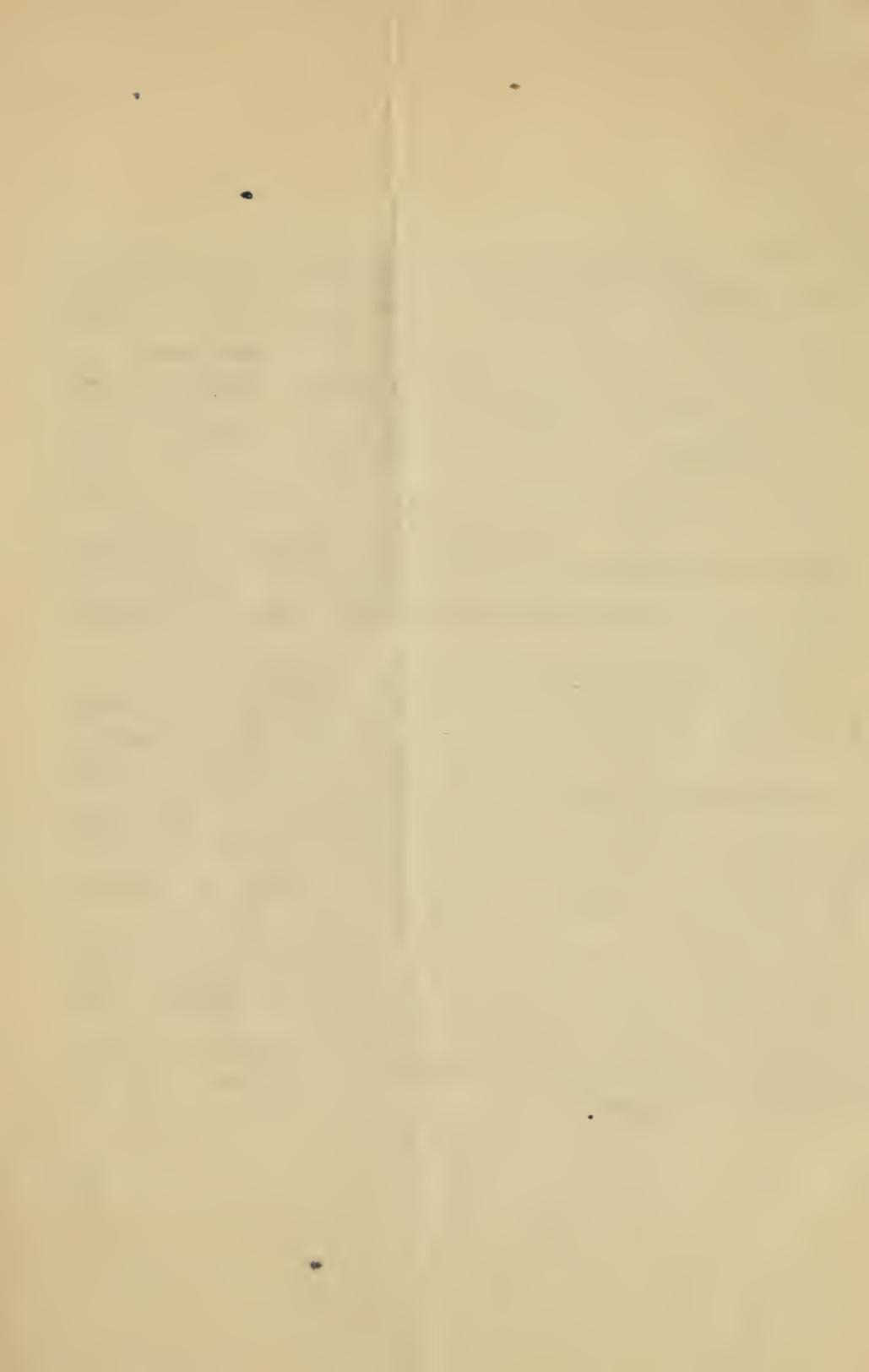
The distance from "Stone Bridge" to Boston is 54 miles, Taunton 20, Fall River 6, Newport 12, Providence 24, Bristol 20, Warren 16, New Bedford 17, Little Compton 10, Seaconnet Point 12, Westport Harbor 15 miles.

The "Stone Bridge House" will open on Monday, May 26, or Monday, June 2d, 1884.

SINCE writing "Tiverton Heights," among subjects inadvertently omitted there is one which I am unwilling to let pass without special notice. In a quiet shady avenue, a few steps from the Hotel, stands "Whitridge Hall and Free Public Library," owing their existence to the wise liberality of the late THOS. WHITRIDGE of Baltimore,—“a man whom but to name is to praise,”—gifts to his native town. The Hall is of unusual beauty and capacity for the purpose for which it is intended and used, viz., Lectures, Concerts, Social Parties, &c., and has a fine piano.

The Library contains over 1000 volumes, and is yearly increasing in interest and value through appropriations from the state, and donations from friends and patrons who have enjoyed its well selected treasures. Those who are curious to know, can find in the volumes of Colonial Records there, what Rhode Island did when she was little. Connected with the Hall, but yet apart, “so near but yet so far,” according to the old theology, is a small chapel, with well cushioned seats, in which religious services are held each Sabbath in the year, where we have listened to discourses from some of the finest minds in the “Clerical Squad.”

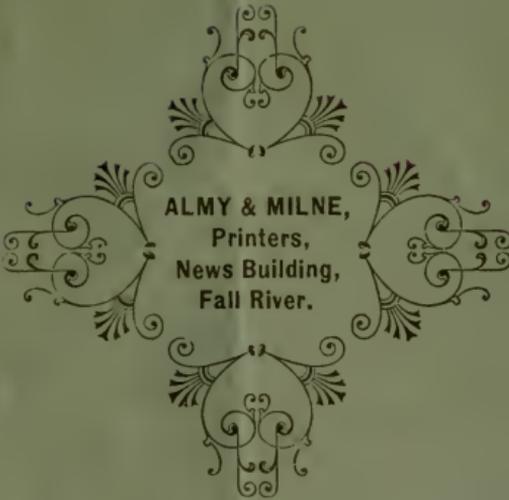
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