

City Erected On Landmark

Long before there was such a place as Fall River, the area this city occupies was a noted landmark in Plymouth Colony.

This was because of two distinctive features—the Fall River, as the Quequechan was known, and Cleft Rock.

Cleft Rock was a huge granite pile which stretched across what is now North Main Street in the vicinity of Central Street.

That it was extremely high is evident from the fact that it is mentioned in the Plymouth records of the early 1600s.

These facts were brought out in a paper read by the late Atty. Arthur S. Phillips before the Fall River Historical Society in June, 1940. He called his paper, "Fall River's West End."

What an important part that Cleft Rock played in the city's physical makeup was stressed by Mr. Phillips, who told the society:

"The Post Road (Main Street) for at least a part of its present width, passed through the cleft in the rock. Bedford Street was then known as Central Street, and to the west of Main Street, it was called West Central Street.

"Prior to 1826, Central Street was a 'Proprietor's Way'*** In 1826, the Town of Troy*** was re-surveyed and platted and extended Central Street easterly on each side of it from the Fall River on the south to Elm Street on the north and west to the Fall River stream was called the 'West End.' This land was soon acquired by the organizers of the Fall River Iron Works Co. and they sold several lots along the way to private individuals and several sections of it to the Anawan and the Pocasset Mills,

Company Building

"At the southwest corner of the four corners was the company's store building, a two story building with a barn roof. The northwesterly corner could not then be fully utilized because the Cleft Rock was near to the street which was laid out around the edge of the rock.

"Just westerly of that corner was then the house of Major Bradford Durfee. The rock had been somewhat cut down by that time at this point and the Major's house was elevated, double long steps or stairs leading up over the rock to the front door."

Atty. Phillips refers to "Cleft Rock" again as he discussed the

"West End" as it was in 1834. He said:

"Between the house of Major Bradford Durfee and the corner, Dr. Nathan Durfee had erected a brick front drug store. On the corner was a store of B. W. Chace and between that and the drug store was a building, the basement of which was used as the Congregational Meeting House.

"There also was Nathan Borden's small burial ground. Next west of Major Durfee's substantial residence which he maintained as a boarding house (the best in town) was Stone Lane, on which several stone cottages had been erected, a large part of the material of which came from the widening of Central Street and the cutting down of Cleft Rock. These stone houses were chiefly used by mill workers or for boarding houses.

Again Mr. Phillips in recounting his story says:

"The store at the northwest corner of Main and Central Streets, operated by Benjamin W. Chace, was edged into the big Cleft Rock without any cellar. Here hardware and pots and kettles and some groceries were sold."

Recalls Chace Store Site

The famed Fall River historian noted, too, that the Chace store was located on the dower land of Widow Mary Borden. She had sold the land surrounding the corner to Samuel Sanford in 1843, but Sanford couldn't make the business go and it was sold to William Morton in 1857.

Morton held it briefly and sold it to Solon Richardson. The latter constructed the Richardson House and the Central House upon it. In 1886, Richardson sold both lots to William Durfee and Robert Cook.

Mr. Phillips recalled that the Richardson House was one time known as the Exchange Hotel or the City Hotel and all stage coaches passing through the city made it their stopping place.

Cleft Rock appears again in his paper as he notes that William Durfee bought the corner lot measuring 30 by 44 feet in 1803 for \$200 "due to the fact it was covered so completely with this granite boulder."

"His grandson tells me," the attorney informed the Historical Society members, "that the neighbors said this purchase was 'crazy'—that it was fit only for the purpose for which lovesick Indian maidens used it—to throw themselves from the cliff into the falls below."

The \$200 land today is one of the most valuable locations in Fall River.