
THE PHILLIPS HISTORY OF FALL RIVER

* Fascicle III *

Physiography and Natural Resources
Early Life of Inhabitants
Civic and Political Developments
Judicatures Calamities
War Times

by
ARTHUR SHERMAN PHILLIPS
With additions and interpolations
1941

PRIVATELY PRINTED DOVER PRESS FALL RIVER, MASS.

1946



Permission to abstract and quote, with proper acknowledgment is granted.

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The author had outlined the subjects to be considered in the first two fascicles. He died while his plans for the third volume were under consideration. He left completed manuscripts, which are here presented along with chapters prepared largely from his notes or a knowledge of his intentions. Charles D. Davol, at the request of the editor has contributed the chapter on "Post Roads, Stage Lines and Taverns."

It has been said, "every history we read is perhaps a better history of the historian than of the subjects he has chosen to tell about." If this be true, it will enable mutual acquaintances of the author and the editor to distinguish the contributions of each.

In addition to those previously mentioned, the editor is indebted to the librarian and employees of the public library for their courteous services and to H. J. Harvey, George W. Rigby and R. F. Haffenreffer, Jr. for their assistance in preparing illustrative material. To George Dover and Miss Ethel M. Thomas of the Dover Press, for their patience with an inexperienced writer and editor and for their painstaking review of manuscripts and proof sheets, the editor is indeed grateful. Acknowledgments will be found in the text for many other favors received.

The third fascicle is the last of the series and covers all but two or three of the topics which the author had evidently planned to discuss.

NORMAN S. EASTON,

Joint Author and Editor

November 14, 1945.

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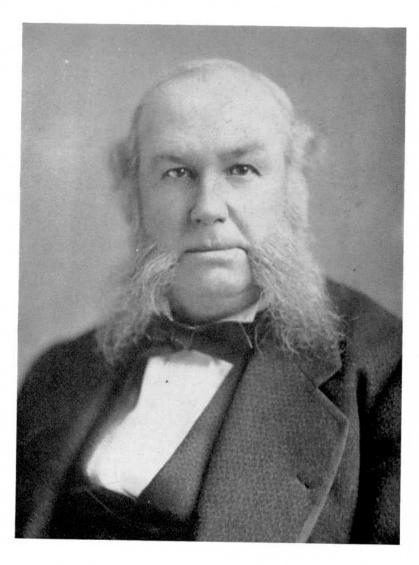
FASCICLE III

THIS PART TRACES THE GROWTH OF FALL
RIVER AND DEALS WITH RESULTANT
GOVERNMENTAL CHANGES. IT NARRATES VARIOUS INCIDENTS OF
HISTORIC INTEREST

It includes chapters on the physiographic features and natural resources which affected the life of local inhabitants. It traces governmental processes from the incorporation of Fall River as a town to the present time and reviews briefly the history of various municipal departments. It considers the origin and organization of courts of law and reviews notable murder cases. It gives accounts of the great conflagrations and storms which have devastated the community and portrays the reactions of the citizenry in war times.

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HON. JAMES BUFFINGTON 1817 – 1874



HON. JAMES BUFFINGTON

The First Mayor of Fall River

The "Friend's Meeting House" on North Main Street was dedicated December 12, 1836. On the morning of its dedication, a large gathering listened to the preaching of a minister of the denomination. As one historian relates, the afternoon session was "enhanced" by the funeral of John Buffington, a member of the "Society of Friends." Mrs. Buffington was also a member of the "Society" and an approved minister.

The Hon. James Buffington, the son of John and Mary Buffington, was born on Chaloner Hill, in the town of Troy, on March 16, 1817. The family moved to Swansea, where he spent his early childhood and attended school. The family returned to his native town and James continued his studies until he was fifteen, finishing his schooling at the Friend's Boarding School (Moses Brown School) in Providence. He was a skilled athlete, fond of out-of-door sports, popular with and a leader of his companions.

After leaving school, he studied medicine with Doctor Thomas Wilbur, a prominent physician of his home town, but lacking funds to continue towards a degree, he obtained a position as a teacher. He taught in Westport and Dartmouth and while employed in Padanaram, he became interested in navigation and went on a successful whaling voyage as ship's doctor.

On his return, he settled in Fall River and engaged for a time in the drug business; then established a drygoods and millinery store.

Mr. Buffington was early interested and active in public affairs and was as popular with his fellow townsmen as he had been with his boyhood companions. His abilities as an organizer and manager were recognized and he received appointments to positions of importance and trust.

Previous to the granting of the first city charter, he was the chairman of the Board of Selectmen and on May 6, 1854 was chosen the first mayor of the city. He was re-elected in 1855 but resigned before the expiration of his second term to represent his district in Congress.

¹ Mr. Buffington evidently signed his name at times with and at times without the letter "g". It is said that when he used the "g", it had a special significance, which his political followers understood. His descendants have always included the letter which is good evidence of the correct spelling.

Benjamin Cook, father of the present Judge of the "District Court", was for a time the private secretary of Congressman Buffington. Mr. Cook was later a member of the Fall River School Committee and at the time of his death was principal of the George B. Stone School.

Valuable as were Mr. Buffington's services to the city as mayor, they were of even greater value to the community as a member of the National House of Representatives. When he returned home from Washington in 1861, he helped organize a company of volunteers. He himself enlisted as a private in the Seventh Massachusetts Regiment and while in camp near Washington became the regimental adjutant. His constituents insisted that he return to Congress and his resignation from the army was approved.

Mr. Buffington was not an orator but he had great influence with his fellow members in Congress and his advice was often sought by ranking executive officials. There were many enlisted men in the army from his congressional district. He gave no thought to his own welfare whenever he could render assistance to them or their families.

Mr. Buffington married Miss Sarah Perkins of Taunton. Their daughter Sarah married Charles M. Horton for a number of years employed in the local Post Office. Their daughter married Frank B. Williams and they now occupy the former residence of Mr. Buffington, on the northeasterly corner of June and Locust Streets. Mr. Buffington's daughter Mary married Charles H. Robbins, an accomplished organist and music teacher. His son Joseph L. Buffington was a prominent mill supply man and religious worker. He married Sarah Louise Davol, daughter of Stephen Davol. Their son, James Buffington, president of the Fall River Trust Company, erected the Buffington Building on Purchase Street.

One of the authors of "Fall River and Its Industries", published in 1877 knew James Buffington intimately. His tribute will be a true summary of his character for posterity. He was "dignified, affable, of commanding presence." He "seldom failed in accomplishing the things he undertook. Quick to discern, he was prompt to act. He had a quiet persistency, the calm self-possession, that achieves success."

Mr. Buffington declined a renomination for Congress in 1864. In 1870, he was again elected, served two terms and was elected for a third term when death intervened. He returned home after the adjournment of Congress in 1874 and died a few hours after his arrival on March sixth.

THE PHILLIPS HISTORY OF FALL RIVER



Chapter I

THE FALL RIVER DOMAIN PHYSIOGRAPHY NATURAL RESOURCES

From north to south, not distant from and paralleling the estuarian waters of Mount Hope Bay and the Taunton River, runs the escarpment formed by the contact between hard granitic rocks and the softer sediments of the Rhode Island coal measures. A mile and a half or more to the eastward lies two of a chain of lakes, extending nearly the length of the area, the waters of which find their outlet by the Quequechan River, westward, over the escarpment, to the bay. East and northeast of the North Watuppa Lake lies the Watuppa Reservation, and Indian Town, with acres of swamps and woodlands, with settlements near the Westport line and a few homes near the Doctor's Mill and in Copicut.

The basal granitic rock, outcropping in numerous localities, is for the most part overlain by glacial sand, gravel and hardpan, intermixed with innumerable boulders above and below the surface.

The principal constituent minerals of the granite are quartz, feldspar and hornblende. In the processes of decay, the hornblende is the first to disintegrate; the feldspar turns to clay, leaving the quartz only with its original chemical composition. The result is what is known locally by excavators as "rotten rock," scientifically arkose clay. It occurs at Steep Brook (Fascicle I, p. 90) and in thinner layers at other localities on the western hillside. In some places, notably, in Metacomet ledge and east of the southern reaches of Bay Street, it occurs in the solid state, interbedded with the carbonaceous and ferruginous slates, grauwackers and conglomerates of the coal measures.

The rock in the Assonet ledge, in Freetown, which was worked in past years by local contractors (See Fascicle I, p. 96) may be classified as "arkose granite". Here the original granite was evidently subjected to

¹ One half of the original Indian reservation is now a part of Watuppa Reservation.

some decay before the glacial period and the remaining mineral constituents consolidated. There is no evidence of interstratification with rocks of the carboniferous period. It seems likely however, that there may be deposits, similar to those at Steep Brook to the west, which are now covered by glacial gravels.

Fossil ferns² have been found at Steep Brook and indication of im-

pressions of plant tissues at other localities.

Until 1659, all the territory lying along the easterly shore of Narragansett Bay was part of a beautiful and wild area which was broken only by a path or trail which passed along its shores and connected the settled towns of Plymouth colony with Newport and Portsmouth settlements, on the Island of Rhode Island. To reach these settlements, the Sakonet River was crossed by a ferry operated by hand, from a shore that is now submerged but was located a hundred yards or more northerly from the present "Stone Bridge" in Tiverton.

The most scenic spot along the path was at the location of our City Hall under which the Quequechan or "falls river" formerly flowed.³ There the waters of the river, which is the outlet of the Watuppa Ponds, collected in a pool, the banks of which were adjacent to the north line of what is now Pleasant Street and south of Bedford Street and extending from Troy Street on the east, to the fording place and the stepping stones which crossed the river at the easterly side of Main Street. From this point the waters dashed over the hillside, from a height of one hundred and fifty feet, to the lower basin at the foot of Central Street. Among the lily pads, in this upper pool was a resting place where game birds found a hiding place in the reeds and bushes along the banks and in the spring, the fish could be seen leaping up the falls. Indeed the Indian word quequechan conveys the meaning of "leaping waters" or "flying fish".

The land described above, covered by the primeval forest, occupied by wild beasts and none too friendly Indians, did not attract early settlers whose chief occupation was farming. The more fertile and level areas to the west and south, with soil overlaying the softer carboniferous rocks of the Narragansett Basin, provided far better opportunities for agricultural development. The Fall River region did however provide an abundance of fish and game, for which nature had provided mast in abundance and

3 When City Hall was reconstructed in 1886, the stream was diverted through a sluiceway under Market

Street.

² "Of all the plant bearing fossiliferous areas in North America, the region of Henry County, Missouri, presents the most points of interest to students of the coal flora of Rhode Island." Edna M. Rounds in Botanical Gazette for March, 1927.

an ideal environment. Very early also there was a demand for wood and tanbark which could be easily obtained and shipped.

The life of the early settlers of this region, we must surmise, was one of uninterrupted toil and hardship. They had to clear and prepare the rugged soil for planting and pasturage. The town records of nearby settlements indicate that wolves were a constant menace to livestock. Some food and materials were undoubtedly obtainable from the older settlements.

The diet of the settlers was supplemented by fresh meat, fish and berries. The red deer, black bears, raccoons, hares and rabbits together with wild turkeys, ruffed grouse, and the smaller game birds were abundant. Prodigious flocks of swans, geese and ducks visited the swamps, ponds and estuarian waters. To this day, the followers of Izaak Walton need go no farther than the South Watuppa Pond to enjoy excellent sport and "oldtimers" remember hours of enjoyment spent on "North Pond" before it was "closed", to protect the water supply. About seventy-five years ago the local lakes were stocked with small-mouthed black bass, pound for pound the gamiest of fish for light tackle. In more recent years pike-perch and crapies, (an excellent pan-fish) have been introduced. The landlocked white perch, the yellow perch, pickerel and horned pout were native.

The shores of Mount Hope Bay formerly abounded in shell-fish. Here as elsewhere along the coast, the menhaden, sometimes called pogies, were the most abundant of salt water fish. Trawlers from fish works located on Long Island, Portsmouth near Common Fence Point and Swansea on the Cole's River shore (Fascicle II, p. 168) visited Mount Hope Bay following the schools of fish. Dr. Goode, in describing the habits of the fish wrote, "The menhaden's place in nature is not hard to surmise; swarming our waters in closely packed, unwieldy masses, helpless as a flock of sheep, near to the surface and at the mercy of every enemy, destitute of means of defence and offence their mission is unmistakenably to be eaten." As food for man, menhaden are of little use, although the local residents, during the period when there was trade with the West Indies, dressed, salted and shipped them in considerable quantities. The schools were frequently followed by the carniverous bluefish and squeteague.

In 1878, the firm of Joseph Church and Sons built a factory at Common Fence Point, to manufacture menhaden oil and fertilizer. The business

^{4 &}quot;Several hundred thousand have been taken in a single draft of a purse-sein". "American Food and Game Fishes", Jordan & Evermann.

prospered and for a time employed two hundred and fifty men during the fishing season. Since 1900 the menhaden have forsaken local waters. The fish works have ceased operation. "It's an ill wind that blows no one some good"; the people who dwelt to the wind-ward no longer have to endure the foul odors from the factories when in operation.

Before dams barred the upper reaches and factory debris and city sewage discouraged fish from entering the lower reaches of the Taunton and Assonet rivers, there were yearly runs of shad and herring so abundant, that the herring (alewives) were used for fertilizer. The fishing privileges' were sold at auction by the towns, bringing in considerable revenue. Few of the herring were eaten fresh but were corned for future use. During the "herring-run" every grocery and general store had outside the doorway, a rack of corned herring, which were hung from sticks thrust through the eyes and were sold for a few pennies each. Scup, tautog, striped bass and frost-fish (tomcods) were abundant in season, before the traps of commercial fishermen were so numerous in Seaconnet River and the lower reaches of Narragansett Bay.

In the early days, the common sturgeon which at times weighed several hundred pounds, ran up the bays and inlets to brackish or fresh water to spawn and were speared by torch light, by the settlers. The meat was not highly valued and the roe which now becomes the caviar of commerce was used only for bait or to feed the hogs.

Eels unlike andromous⁶ fishes work their way up the rivers to feed, not to spawn. They have remained fairly abundant. They are caught by hook and line during the warm season and when the river above Steep Brook freezes over in the winter, by spearing through holes in the ice. They are occasionally shipped to the New York market.

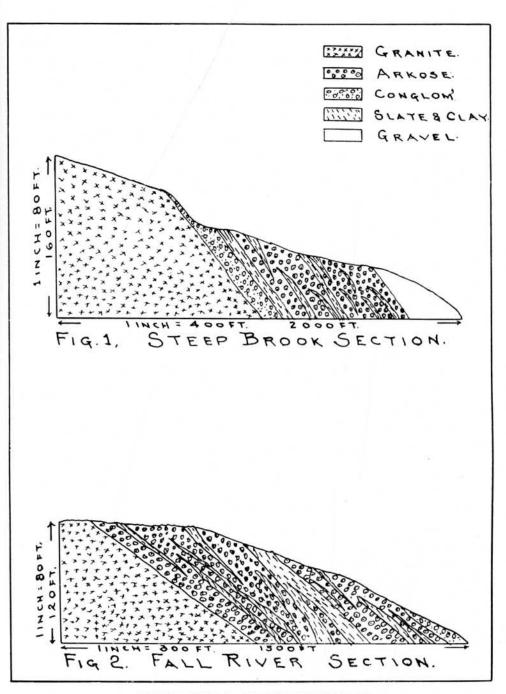
Fish has supplied the protein for many a family, who could not obtain it otherwise. Struggling against what would seem to be overwhelming odds, the first settlers, from the Pilgrims on, were able to supplement their diet and at times were saved from starvation, because they were living in proximity of the shore.

As a means of gaining a livelihood, neither fishing nor whaling ever became of industrial importance in Fall River, but we should bear in mind,

⁵ There seems to have developed a necessity for conservation or control of the oyster beds in the harbor, for in 1849, B. W. Miller, Horace French and Samuel V. Bliffins were appointed "Oyster Wardens." Oyster privileges were granted and brought additional revenue to the town.

⁶ Eels are catadromous. Their natural habitat is fresh water and they seek the ocean to spawn.

⁷ Cotton Mather wrote:—"And how content they were when an Honest Man, as I have heard, inviting his friends to a Dish of Clams, at the Table gave Thanks to Heaven, who hath given them to suck the abundance of the Seas, and of the Treasures hid in the Sands" "Magnalia," book 1, chap. 5.



GEOLOGICAL CROSS SECTIONS



the profits from both in neighboring communities supplied considerable capital for textile manufacturing.

The physiographic feature which contributed most to the growth and development of this community was the contact-escarpment which gave rise to water power, as streams from the east flowed over the steep incline to tide-water. (Fascicle II, pp. 117-118.)

When the mills on the "Quequechan" used water power, there were eight falls and the following facts compiled by the former city engineer Philip D. Borden apply to them.

"Troy Cotton & Woolen Manufactory:—Fall, 10-15 feet (depending upon the height of the pond). Horse Power 150.6.

Pocasset Manufacturing Co.:—Fall, 21.67 feet. Horse Power, 225.4.

Quequechan Mill: Fall, 21 feet. Horse Power, 218.4.

Watuppa Mill:-Fall 15.38 feet. Horse Power, 160.

Fall River Print Works:-Fall, 10 feet. Horse Power, 104.

Fall River Manufactory: Fall, 14.46 feet. Horse Power 150.4.

Anawan Manufactory: -Fall, 14.46 feet. Horse Power 153.2.

Metacomet Manufacturing Co.:-Fall 16-18 feet (depending upon the tide). Horse Power, 148.2."

Total Minimum Fall: -129.24 feet. Total Horse Power, 1310.2.

The power used by the mills on the Fall River stream, which at first was derived entirely from the waterfalls was later supplemented by steam power. The Metacomet Steam Cotton Mill was erected just north of the outlet of the "Quequechan" in 1843. The first Corliss engine was operated in 1859 and from then on, the use of steam power rapidly increased.

The first compound condensing engine was installed in the Globe Yarn Mill No. 2 in 1887, with high and low pressure cylinders. This type of engine has since been in common use, requiring approximately two thirds of the steam by single cylinders. Electricity, when first introduced was produced by direct connection between the steam engine and generator and from the generator, the current was sent over the wires or cables to motors in various parts of the mill. When the low pressure turbine was connected with the compound engine, a further economy of nearly 20% was realized. In the modern factories as much as three thousand horse power is developed, whereas in the earlier factories which relied on the fall of the water, not much more than two hundred horse power was used.

Geologists maintain that the Taunton River because of its "marked adjustment to the stratigraphy" had a well developed pre-glacial channel. We can assume that the river was a branch of a larger stream, the mouth of which was well south of Block Island. Since that period, the land area

has sunk and the tides have entered the lower reaches, giving to Fall River the material advantage of an excellent harbor. Physiographers would classify all the streams between Fall River and Providence as "drowned rivers".

In the "Memoirs of Samuel Slater" is a description of the village of Fall River as it appeared to outsiders in 1833. Passages are here reprinted.

"Situated on a rather abrupt elevation of land rising from the northeast side of Mount Hope bay, distant about eighteen miles from Newport and nine from Bristol, R. I., stands the beautiful and flourishing village of Fall River, so called from the river, which, taking its rise about four miles east, runs through the place, and after many a fantastic turn, is hurried to the bay over beds of rock, where, before the scene was changed by the hand of cultivation and improvement, it formed several beautiful cascades, and had a fine imposing effect. The village is now only picturesque from the variety of delightful landscapes by which it is surrounded; the background presenting a variety in rural scenery — where neat farms and fertile fields show themselves here and there between hill and dale, and rock and wood."

"The fall originally was through a deep black gulf, with high rocky sides. Across this gulf most of the manufactories are built."

"There are besides a number of machine shops, &c., which, stuck about on the jutting rocks, many of them in the very bed of the stream, have a most singular appearance."

"The number of inhabitants in 1833 exceeded five thousand. It is to be supposed, that among the heterogeneous variety of character, as well as of creeds; occasionally some difference of opinion as well as clashing of interests will be found; yet for the most part crime has been unknown there. It has often been the boast among the inhabitants that, living as they do, on the borders of two states, (part, and by far the greater part, is in Troy, Mass., the other in Tiverton, R. I.) the laws of either were seldom called to punish anything except venial transgressions."

⁸ "Memoirs of Samuel Slater, The Father of American Manufacturers, Connected with a History of the Rise and Progress of Cotton Manufacturing in England and America." Philadelphia, 1836.