

South End Was Once Tiverton

Fall River's populous South End was once a part of Tiverton.

That all changed in 1862 when the towns of Fall River, R.I., and Fall River, Mass., with only a buttonwood tree for a boundary demarcation, were united.

The Massachusetts line, which for a time was in the vicinity of Cleft Rock at Central and North Main Streets, had gradually shifted to what is now Columbia Street.

When the two Fall Rivers merged, among much public celebration, the Massachusetts line was moved south to State Avenue. The current city gained 593 residents and nine square miles of territory.

Over the years, however, Tiverton, incorporated in 1692, won back that many residents and many more who decided to take advantage of its picturesque quality.

Prior to the Civil War, Tiverton established itself as a summer resort, with the Lawton House, now the Stone Bridge Inn, drawing guests from Providence, Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore.

It is said that Alexis Evestalhieve, the Russian counsel general in New York City, didn't miss a season there in 40 years. He was so fond of the Tiverton area that he reportedly asked to be buried on Gould Island. Circumstances, however, prevented that.

A newspaper article of the 1930s mentioned that many of Fall River's wealthier citizens were "reaching down" to Tiverton with their fine homes.

Home construction was particularly heavy after World War II, and although residences still continue to be built, the town's natural beauty remains evident.

The community didn't always welcome settlers. When the Pocasset Indians inhabited the area they showed themselves to be downright hostile to newcomers.

It has been said that their unfriendliness was among factors that delayed settlement of the area for some 40 years after the Narragansett Indians sold Aquidneck Island to the white men.

Tiverton, or Pocasset as it was known then, was actually a part of the Plymouth Colony until 1661 when King Charles II

to span the waterway separating the community from Aquidneck Island, was feasible.

They had a wooden structure built, but it was swept away two years later during a severe storm. The same thing happened to the replacement bridge, built a year later.

Until 1807, all thoughts of rebuilding the connector were put aside. In that year, plans for a sturdier, stone structure were advanced.

The new bridge weathered the gales better, but from time to time it too incurred damage. In the late 1950s, the span's closing generated much political controversy.

Although that is one of the town's more prominent skirmishes, it is overshadowed by what happened in 1675 in Almy's pea field.

There, in the area now known as Fogland, Col. Benjamin Church engaged the Indians, bit off more than he could chew, and had to signal for assistance.

Church, later portrayed by historians as an Indian fighter of some renown, was backed by about 20 men when he exchanged gunfire with 300-man war party.

Both sides took refuge among the pea vines, and Church, realizing he was getting the worst end of the deal, headed for the shoreline. By unknown means, the embattled officer signaled to the Portsmouth shore.

Persons in Portsmouth, at about Sandy Point, spotted the signal and rowed over to rescue the colonel and his band of Indian fighters.

Another of the town's early battles had nothing to do with either Indians or bridges. The trouble was with the colonial government on the question of taxes and a minister.

The government was determined that the town should support a minister, and the residents were equally determined that they shouldn't. The controversy flared until about 1746 when the Amicable Congregational Society was founded.

Later, during the Revolutionary War, Tiverton residents proved their mettle. They built Fort Barton, the earthworks redoubt that still stands on Highland Road. The fortification was the mustering point for 11,000

actually a part of the Plymouth Colony until 1661 when King Charles II granted Rhode Island a claim on the territory. However, one historian maintains that the state didn't actually get control of the area until 1746.

Things got underway in 1680 and it was only natural that settlers selected what is now the Stone Bridge area for Tiverton Village. Just a short distance away, Portsmouth was thriving.

When the community was laid out in 30 lots, two were set aside by the water for establishment of a ferry service. Daniel Howland took on the task, which was carried out by his ancestors for about a century.

Then, in 1794, town leaders decided a bridge,

The fortification was the mustering point for 11,000 troops.

They were also in on the destruction of The Kingfisher a British sloop of war that had been sailing in the Sakonnet River near High Hill, the community's southernmost point.

Early in the 1800s, Eagleville, a section of the town off Stafford Road, was developed. Two men purchased property there and set up a cotton and woolen mill, said by one historian to rival anything in Fall River.

And, although Eagleville proved to be a bustling site, Tiverton's nerve center remained the Town Hall on Highland Road.