



The Independent Man

NEWSLETTER OF THE RHODE ISLAND SOCIETY OF
THE SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION
131 SPENCER WOODS DR, EAST GREENWICH RI 02818



President's Message from the Annual Meeting:

Let me begin by welcoming you all, to the 122nd Annual Meeting of the RI Society of the Sons of the American Revolution. In an era that is fraught with other diversions such as television, the internet, and many other things that occupy us, it is impressive that we still find time to honor our commitment to our forbearers who sacrificed so much to establish our wonderful nation. As we enter the election year of 2012, the inevitable political diatribe, as obnoxious as it is, can serve to remind us that we still live in the land of the free; free to criticize without fear of retribution, free to vote for the candidate of our choice, and free to support whichever political party we feel will represent us in the manner we want. For this we should be eternally grateful.

In the past 100 years, we have taken up arms several times to support and defend these principals on our own shores and we have rallied to the defense of others in their own struggles for the type of freedom we sometimes take for granted. While these external causes sometimes result in internal friction, never the less, as a free nation, we have an obligation to assist those in peril from forces that would deny them the same freedoms we have. 2012, much like 2011, will have challenges and opportunities for all organizations such as ours. In a few moments, I will be outlining my goals and objectives for the upcoming year and I hope you will all join with me in making 2012 a banner year for the RI Society.

It is an honor for me to stand here today to present the President's Report of the RI Society. 2011 was another remarkable year for RI and I feel we have much to be proud of. The obvious hallmark of 2011 was the compilation and publication of the Regimental Book of the 1st RI Regiment 1781 &c. This comprehensive listing of the members of the 1st RI Rgt has been lauded and received with great acclaim. It shows the RISSAR in a most positive light and our hats off to its author, our own Past President Bruce C. MacGunnigle. We thank him for his hard work and for donating ownership of this to the RISSAR. We also owe a great debt to Past President Jon Crocker Eastman for his stewardship of the book during its inception and to Compatriots Don Harrop and Henry Brown for their most generous donations to help insure the publication.

Other highlights were the June Flag Day luncheon at the Dunes Club, The Veterans Ceremony in Exeter and luncheon at 1149 in E. Greenwich, and the Christmas Party, also at 1149 where we were serenaded by Carolers. If I have omitted anything, my apologies.

For 2012 and as I outlined in the most recent newsletter, I have several goals in mind.

First, I would like to have the society involved with the RI Historical Association as it commemorates "RI in War". I think this is right down our alley and something we can accomplish with not too much effort.

Secondly, I would like to develop a strong working relationship with Narragansett Council, Boy Scouts of America in order to get more applicants for our NSSAR Boy Scout Scholarship program.

Thirdly, I would like to move forward with the idea of providing a SAR marker for the grave of the wife of John Peck Rathbun, located in South County. Since he is buried in an unmarked grave in England, it seems appropriate to honor his life and service here at home.

And lastly, in conjunction with Compatriot MacGunnigles' Book and to pursue the goal set forth by Past President Eastman, I would like to see if we cannot improve the diversity our of society via interaction with the Newport County NAACP.

Later on this year we will be publishing another Membership Roster, the first since 2009. Anyone with changes needs to contact our Secretary Ron Barnes (revwarman@aol.com) who has the most up to date roster and which will be used to publish the next booklet.

I am a little concerned by our drop in membership numbers during the past year. This could be just a cyclical thing but as our society grows older, we do need to explore ways of increasing our membership. If you know of anyone who could possibly be eligible for membership, why not bring them to a meeting such as the Steam & Wireless Museum or other events where guests are welcome? Help us to grow.

In conclusion, I hope you will join with me in moving the RISSAR forward. Remember, it's your society also.

Presentations from President Collins:

One of the perks of being the President of this society is being able to reward those who have made a positive impact and provided something of value and high regard to the members of the RISSAR.

Since its inception, the Regimental Book of the 1st RI Regiment has reflected positively on the RISSAR and received high praise from those who have seen and read it. None of this would have come about had not one person taken the initiative to labor and work to organize and compile the lists and descriptions contained herein. Having seen the original documents he had to work with, I am amazed at details he was able to uncover. At the risk of his eyesight and probably his sanity, Compatriot and Past State President Bruce Campbell MacGunnigle has provided a valuable tool for future historians and brought great credit to the RISSAR. Since Bruce already has nearly every medal the SAR give out, it was agreed by the Board of Managers that such an extraordinary undertaking should receive an extraordinary acknowledgment. To that end, we are pleased to have Senator Jack Reed honor Bruce with a proclamation.

Along with the effort expended by Compatriot McGunnigle was the encouragement and support (both financial and emotional) offered by Past President Eastman. Through his stewardship, the RISSAR has benefited by being able to bask in the reflected glory of this fine publication. It is with a great deal of pleasure I am able to honor this commitment with the Silver Good Citizenship Medal presented to Jon Crocker Eastman. At the same time I would like to present PP Eastman with the Past Presidents Pin as a testimony to his guidance and leadership for 2010 and 2011. He leaves behind big footsteps for me to follow in.

Likewise, due to their individual financial support, Compatriots Dr. Dan Harrop and Henry Brown helped make it possible for the society to go forward with the publication at a time when the society's finances were on shaky ground. By their contributions, we were able to publish the book and make several charitable donations that would not have been otherwise possible while maintaining our fiscal integrity. As a token of our appreciation for their efforts, we hereby present the Bronze Citizenship Award to both Dr. Daniel Smith Harrop and Henry Anthony Lewis Brown.

In conclusion, I feel we are truly blessed to have such men who have shown such a high level of commitment and integrity as our members. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,
John "JC" Collins

Upcoming SAR events:

RISSAR Board of Managers – Saturday, April 7 (Pawtuxet Rangers Armory)

NEDC – Saturday, April 14 (Concord, MA)

RISSAR/RIDAR Flag Day Luncheon – Sunday, June 10 (Dunes Club)

RISSAR Board of Managers – Saturday, July 7

RISSAR Fall Luncheon – Monday, September 10 (Cooke House)

RISSAR Board of Managers – Saturday, October 6

RISSAR/OFFPA/Dar Veteran's Day Memorial – Sunday, November 11 (12:00PM Veteran's Cemetery)

RISSAR Veteran's Day Luncheon – TBD

RISSAR Christmas Luncheon – Friday, December 7 (1149 Restaurant)

RISSAR JPR memorial CPT Thomas Cole – Saturday, December 8 (Elmgrove Cemetery)

RISSAR Board of Managers – Saturday, January 5 2013

On the book shelves:

The War Without a Loser - By John B. Hattendorf



The Gallery Collection/Corbis

'Tracherous Attack on Capt. Broke.' Detail from a British engraving representing the capture of the USS Chesapeake by the HMS Shannon.

The War of 1812 used to be called the forgotten war. The bicentenary of the three-year conflict between the United States and Britain, now upon us, has finally begun to inspire historians to shed more light on it. For even after 200 years it is not agreed who won—or, rather, there are still significant differences in national viewpoints.

Among the participants, the Canadians have typically seen the war as their heroic stand against American aggression, during which they turned back repeated invasion attempts by President James Madison's army and American militiamen. The British, when they have not overlooked the conflict entirely because of their preoccupation with the concurrent Napoleonic wars, have seen the war as a British victory that prevented America from incorporating Canada. American historians have often looked back on the war as a glorious naval event, highlighted by a series of frigate victories under the leadership of heroic captains such as Joshua Barney, Isaac Hull, John Rodgers and Thomas Truxton and by the two fleet victories in miniature on the Great Lakes led by Thomas Macdonough and Oliver Hazard Perry. Indeed, the War of 1812 was long regarded by Americans as a victorious second war of independence from Britain.

A stream of recent books on the war shows that each of these viewpoints contains some truth, but the books also suggest that the re-evaluation of "the forgotten war" is just beginning. A sampling of new research and interpretation shows some clear development and progress toward a broader and deeper understanding of the war and its place in history, but it will be years before historians establish an accepted interpretation of the war as a whole.

President Madison's war message to Congress in June 1812 accused Britain of a series of hostile acts against the United States: illegally searching American ships, impressing American seamen into British service, harassing American commerce, cutting off legitimate markets from American trade and even inciting Native Americans to attack settlers in the west.

Digging Deeper Into Roots With Spruced-Up Ancestry.com - By KATHERINE BOEHRET - WSJ

When my great grandfather signed his World War I draft registration card in 1917, I'm pretty sure he never imagined I'd be examining it 95 years later with a touch screen sitting on my lap.

This week, I took a fresh look at this and several other gems from my family history with help from a company that has led the charge in online genealogy for 15 years: [Ancestry.com](#). Thanks to mobile apps, other users and a new ability to synchronize content between the Web and desktop software, Ancestry has grown into a robust tool.

The image shows a World War I draft registration card for Clarence W. Chapman. The card is titled "REGISTRATION CARD" and contains the following handwritten information: name "Clarence W. Chapman", address "72. 11th St. Phila. Pa.", date of birth "Oct 5 1897", and occupation "Student Pa. State College". The card also includes fields for race, citizenship, and employer's name. The card is signed by Clarence W. Chapman at the bottom.

The World War I draft card for the author's great grandfather.

Since I last tested Ancestry in 2006, the company has revamped its desktop software program, Family Tree Maker, so the program can synchronize with Web-based data on Ancestry.com. It's now available as a mobile app for the iPhone, iPad and Android phones. And the site holds over eight billion records, including content from a partnership with the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

The addition of mobile apps plus the syncing feature make Ancestry.com more useful and will bring me back to the site more often. I found several new things on Ancestry this time around, including more census data, ship manifests for two cruises an aunt took, and more suggested family-tree data from other users.

I tested Ancestry.com, its iPhone and iPad apps and the Family Tree Maker desktop software on a Mac. I found a computer to be the best tool for inputting family information like names, birth dates, death dates and locations using Ancestry.com and the Family Tree Maker software. The iPad app was the most enjoyable way of exploring my family-tree records. The site's pricing can be confusing given the various membership and access levels.

The World War I draft card for the author's great grandfather.

A simple right-to-left swipe on the iPad screen shifted my view of the tree from one branch to the next. In four swipes, I dove back in time to read about my mother's father's mother's mother, Florence Antonia Ford, and her family in the 1910 Census record. Using the iPad on my lap, related records from Ancestry felt more personal than seeing them on a computer. A pinch-to-zoom gesture let me clearly read names and details in each record. (Records can be magnified on a computer screen as well, which is helpful when studying small cursive writing or type, like a 1935 passenger list for a cruise to Bermuda that included my Great Aunt Romayne's name.)

I was delighted to find data I entered on Ancestry.com six years ago was still in my account, which saved me the trouble of inputting everything again. A new feature called TreeSync let me synchronize all of my family-tree information over to my Family Tree Maker desktop software, and vice versa. After using the Ancestry app on my iPad and adding records to my family tree, I easily synced that data with my desktop software by clicking a top-right button when I next opened the Family Tree Maker.

Users who have spent years on Family Tree Maker software, which has been around for 23 years, will be able to sync data from their PCs to the Web version of their family trees. They can now opt to make their trees public for all Ancestry users to access, thus growing the online database.

I found the desktop software to be more heavy-duty than the website and mobile apps, but its interface is a bit antiquated in comparison.

Whenever Ancestry.com has a "hint" to show you about a name you entered on your tree, a green leaf appears beside that name. Selecting that leaf lets you see anything in the Ancestry database that may be associated with that name. These could include paper records scanned in by Ancestry.com or content entered by other people. You can view these hints and, if applicable, merge that data with your own after viewing a side-by-side comparison of your information and the new information.

You can share your findings with friends via Facebook, Twitter or email. When I saw my grandfather's signature on his World War I draft card, I clicked one button and shared this digitized memento from 1917 with friends and family on Facebook. Content shared from Ancestry.com can be seen by other people, even if they don't have an account, for up to 14 days. You also can keep everything private.

I know quite a bit about my family history, thanks to work my grandfather did years ago, and this helped me with entering names and knowing which hints were relevant or not. For example, an Ancestry-suggested hint that a record for Florence Ladley was for Florence Antonia Ford in my tree wasn't accurate. I made the most progress when I called my parents for more names and dates. (Right: Winston Churchill's family tree seen via Ancestry.com's app on the iPad)



Ancestry.com offers a free 14-day trial, after which fees range from \$13 to \$35 a month, depending on six-month or monthly memberships and whether a person is paying for U.S. Discovery (all records in the U.S.) or World Explorer (unlimited access, including records from other countries) access. The Family Tree Maker software, which starts at around \$32, can be downloaded to Macs or Windows PCs or bought in stores. Combined pricing for the desktop software and access to the website starts around \$40.

Correspondence from RISSAR:

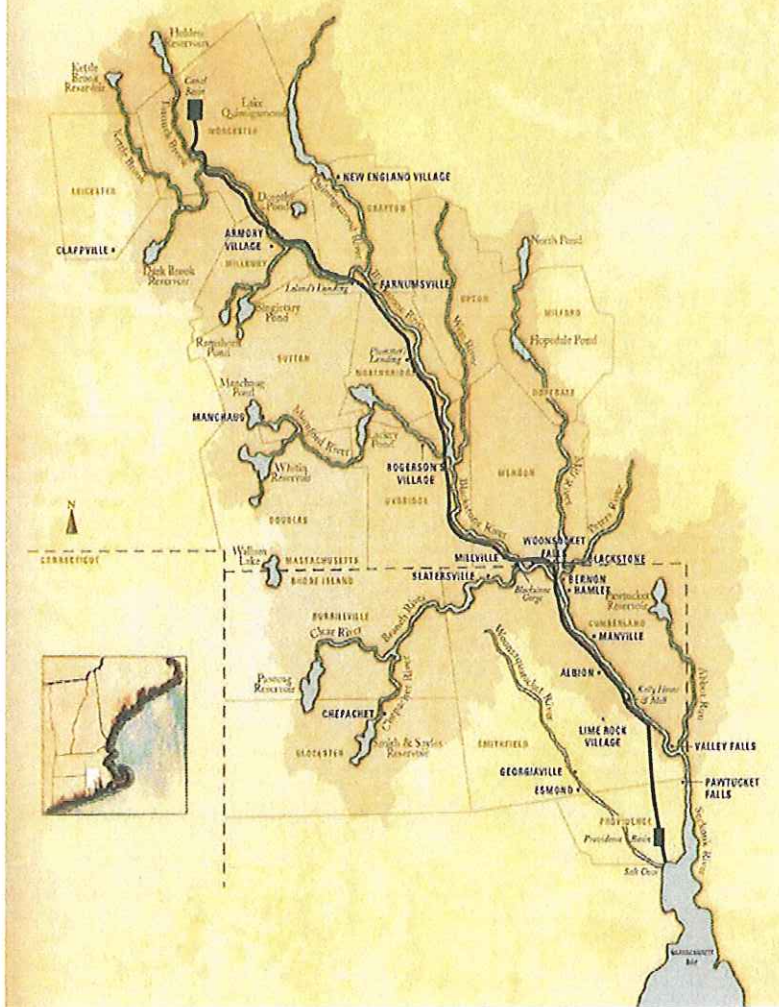
In an effort to streamline communications, we would like to offer the option of electronic correspondence (emails) for members. Invitations and newsletters are currently emailed to those members whose email information we have. Subsequently those same invitations and newsletters are then mailed via postal mail. We would like to offer the opportunity for members to receive only emails (with the exception of the Annual Meeting notice). Ron Barnes, Secretary, will be sending out an email in April asking those members to reply who would like to receive only email. Also, if you do not currently receive emails from RISSAR and you wish to do so, please email Ron at revwarman@aol.com.



Mr. Blackstone's River by Albert Klyberg

The Blackstone River, which rises in the hills north of the Massachusetts city of Worcester, is a curiosity among American rivers. It is formed, over its course, by the twisting together of many small streams as if produced by a braiding machine, one of the many devices designed and produced in its valley, the birthplace of the American textile industry. It is relatively short as rivers go, some 46 miles long. It is narrow in some places, barely what would be called a creek in some parts of the U.S. It disappears in some places, flowing unseen underneath the City of Worcester. It seems to come unraveled in other places, and it enters Narragansett Bay at the end of its journey under an assumed name. Yet, in spite of all this, it is a river of great importance to America and one that really should have been included in the magisterial series of books begun in the 1930's, called the "Rivers of America."

BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY CANAL MAP, CIRCA 1830



The series, started by Carl Carmer and Constance Lindsay Skinner, with Stephen Vincent Benet and Hervey Allen as editors, produced some 65 titles about the major streams of our country including the Hudson, the Ohio, the Mississippi, the Colorado, and the Columbia. The books, published by Farrar and Rinehart and successors, were not about ecology or riverine geography, but were the literary counterpart to the great WPA post office murals which depicted sweeping stories of popular history and the landscape that fashioned them. Editor, Constance Skinner envisioned them as a kind of "folk saga."

There are several reasons for telling the great saga along the rivers. We began to be Americans on the rivers. By the rivers the explorers and fur traders entered America. The pioneers, who followed them, built their homes and raised their grain and stock generally at, or near, the mouths of rivers. As their numbers increased they spread up the valleys, keeping close to the streams, since water is an indispensable element of the sustenance of the soil and all animal life. The rivers were the only highways of communication and commerce between solitary hamlets. Settlement expanded from the rivers. To repeat, the first foreigners on these shore began their transition from Europeans to Americans as River Folk.

The Blackstone River belongs to the group of rivers in the series that includes the Merrimac, the Monongahela, the Passaic, the Chicago and the

A watershed map of the Blackstone River Valley, circa 1830. Photo courtesy of the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor/National Park Service. From *Landscape of Industry: An Industrial History of the Blackstone Valley* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2009), 9.

Cuyahoga: the industrial rivers, the nubile sinews and sewers of our steel towns, the once well-oiled linkages that were allowed to atrophy into our rust belt Brown Fields. However, to think of the Blackstone today as an oily, rusty remnant of a by-gone machine age, is to make a great misjudgment and to do a great disservice to the modern ecological and historical preservation movements in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Mr. Blackstone's River is a shining stream with verdant, wooded banks, teeming with wildlife, tumbling over natural waterfalls and man-made mill dams. It is a National Heritage Corridor with more than 30 natural and historical sites in 24 cities and towns. Parks, an inter-state bikeway, and canoe and kayak put-ins are faint reminders of its first users, the Native American tribes of Narragansett, Wampanoag, and Nipmucks. It is a model of a re-visioned and revitalized valley that is a "whole." It is a complete entity where historical origins are recognized, present-day uses blend its past with a conservationist's sense of saving the useful and the attractive, and a visionary's perspective of a place that can be both work and play

So, who was Blackstone, and why was the river named for him?

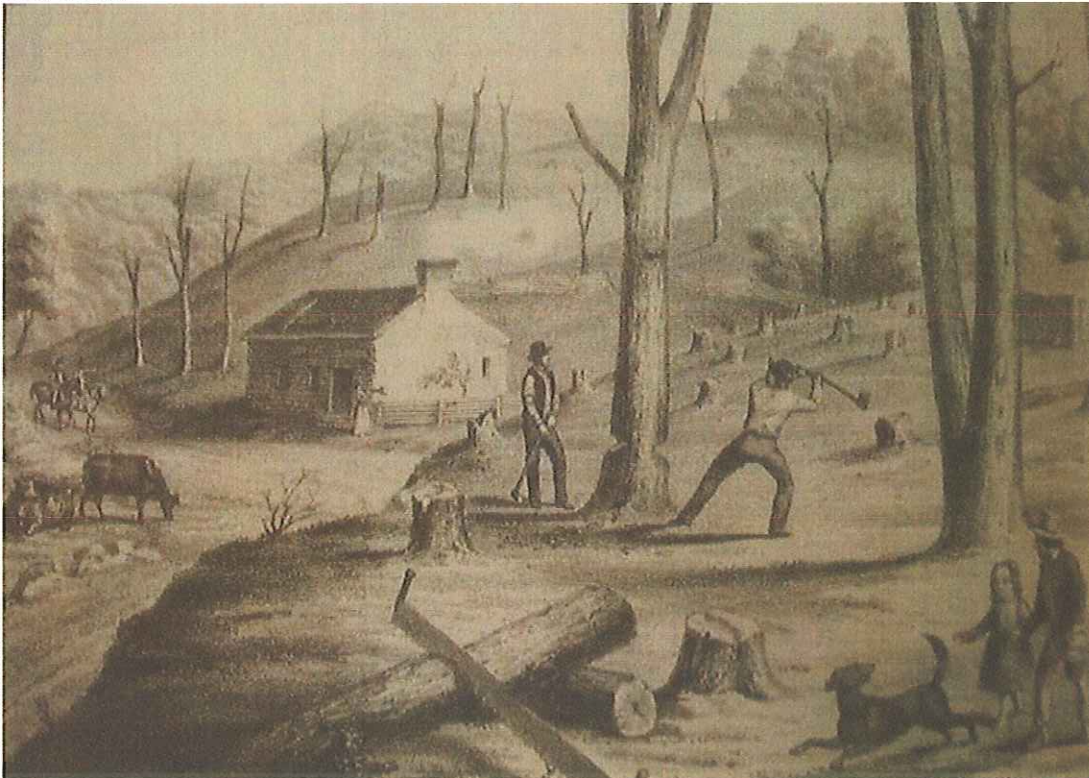
Like so many other people and events associated with the Rhode Island end of the valley which bears his name, William Blackstone almost defies characterization. He was certainly the first settler of record in the region which was to become Rhode Island, except his home was in Massachusetts until one hundred and twelve years later, when his part of Massachusetts became Cumberland, Rhode Island. Even then, he couldn't be proclaimed as a "founder" of anything. While not exactly a recluse, he preferred a solitary life, though late in life he married and had a family. He lived secluded

in a place called Study Hall on the brow of a slope overlooking the stream that bore his name. He had come to this spot in 1635, the year before Roger Williams began a settlement at the river's mouth and called it Providence. In later years Blackstone often visited Providence astride a great white bull, distributing his original strain of apples, the Yellow Sweeting, to the children while preaching in the Anglican tradition to the settlers who had fled Massachusetts to pursue their own views of "Soul Liberty," which had a decidedly Baptist cast. Yet, because they held an open view that each person was entitled to their own opinion in religious matters, and that coerced religion "stincts in the nostrils of God," they welcomed Blackstone, his religious preaching, his white bull, his apples, and his roses.

Although, in one sense, Blackstone's religious tastes ran to the tradition that nearly all the inhabitants of Providence had left England to escape, The Church of England, he shared with the "other-wise minded" settlers of the Narragansett Country their disdain for the Puritans at Boston. Blackstone had been the original settler of the Shawmut peninsula that eventually became downtown Boston. He even invited the Puritans, who had first landed in Charlestown, to join him on Shawmut where the springs of water were more plentiful. After getting a good dose of their "holier than thou" attitudes, however, he decided to pick up lock, stock, and library and relocate to a more remote spot of the colony, opining as he left that,

I left England to get from under the power of the lord bishops, but in America I am fallen under the lord bretheren. I looked to have dwelt with my orchards and my books, and my young fawn and bull, in undisturbed solitude. Was there not room enough for all of ye? Could ye not leave the hermit in his corner?

So, he was more comfortable with his little plantation seven miles upstream from the town of Providence at what would later be the Cumberland village of Lonsdale. Sometimes he traveled deep into the Narragansett Country to preach at Richard Smith's trading post, called Cocumscussoc, or Smith's Castle, near the present North Kingstown village of Wickford on Narragansett Bay. Roger Williams also had a trading house nearby. At Lonsdale, under the spreading branches of a great oak tree, that later, after 1843, came to be called the "Catholic Oak," Blackstone preached to any and all who would listen.



Deforestation began as soon as European settlers arrived. This is a lithographed plate by Augustus Kollner depicting nineteenth-century deforestation. In *Country Sights for City Eyes* (Philadelphia: American S.S. Union, 1858). *Photo Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.*

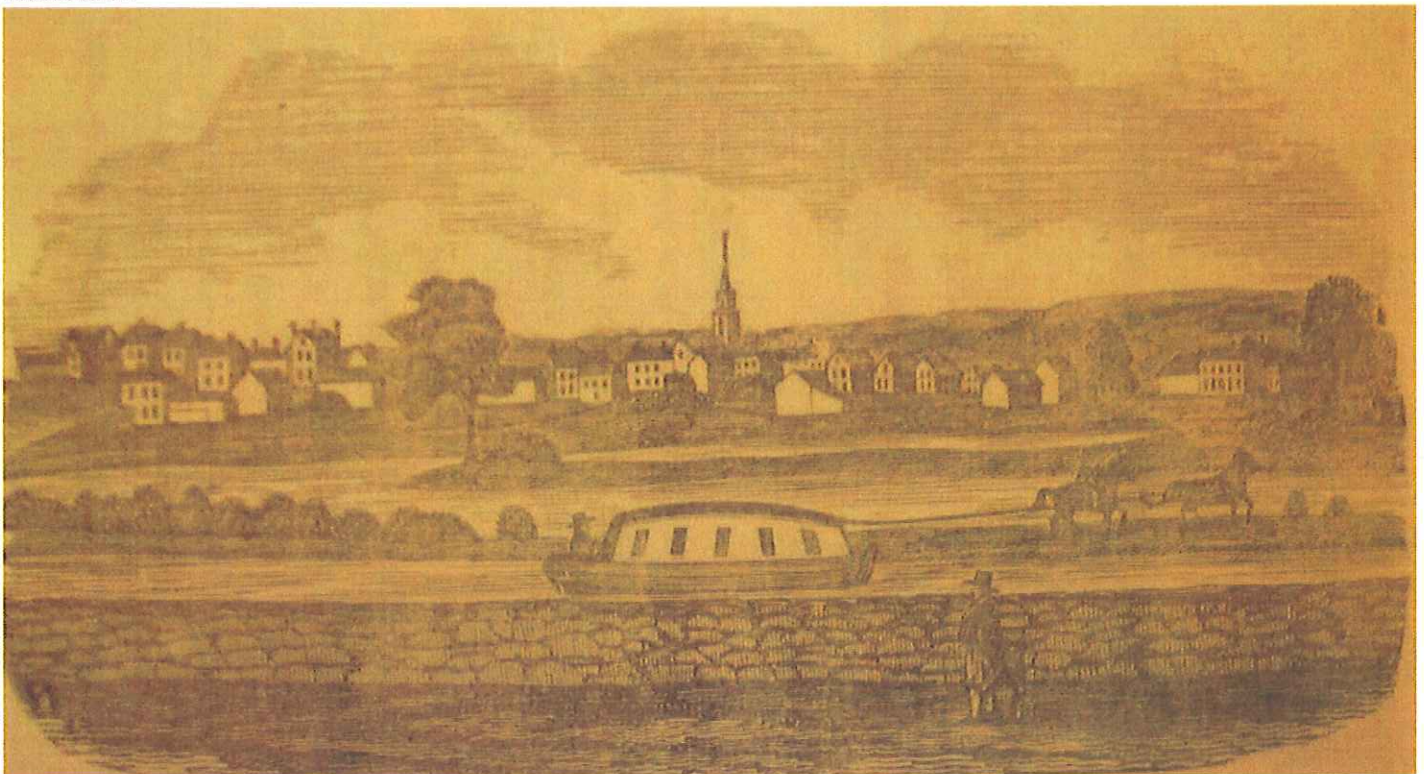
Like an Old Testament patriarch, William Blackstone took a wife, Sarah Stevenson, when he was about sixty six. She was 48. They began a family. After 14 years, in 1673 she died, and he followed shortly in 1675, when he was about 80. Mercifully for him he didn't live to see his home, his orchards and all the settlements along his river, from Providence to Mendon, to Worcester go up in smoke during the Indian uprising known as King Philip's War. His library, said to be the most extensive in all America, some 200 volumes went up in a blaze of flame and smoke, too. All that was left of this

interesting character were his name on the river, the seeds from his apples, and the acorns from the Catholic Oak. William Blackstone, the “loner,” is hardly a typical “founding father.” Most early settlements in the American colonies were accomplished by groups, not individuals. Even the true “settlements” that followed Blackstone’s little plantation on the brow of the ridge at Lonsdale were established by dissidents from the Massachusetts Bay Puritans. While Puritan towns were laid out in a prescribed order with respect to the distance from a central common and meeting house, the Rhode Island towns were laid out in linear fashion, with no central meeting house on public land. Religious meetings took place in private homes. Later, church buildings were erected by religious societies without financial support of the community as a whole.

Unlike riverside development in other parts of America, where the stream provided navigability and access to fecund fields and farmlands, the Blackstone was never navigable, except in a few stretches, and then, for only a part of the year. Its banks were largely sandy and gravelly. The best farm land was on the hilltops, not the river bottom lands. When the mills came to the rivers, the mill dams created ponds in some places and revealed a shallow, stony bottom in others, compounding the river’s non-navigability. The outcry of the local farmers about the new ponds created by the dams had more to do with cutting off of their fish supply than the ruining of rich meadows. In many cases the devoting of river bank land to manufacturing was seen as a good use of marginal wasteland.

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, these mills transformed Mr. Blackstone’s River into America’s “hardest working river.” Dropping 438 feet from central Massachusetts to tidewater at Providence, the Blackstone’s descent is greater than the Colorado’s through the Grand Canyon. Beginning with Samuel Slater’s use of Pawtucket Falls to harness the water driven spinning machines at America’s first successful cotton mill in 1791 and continuing with the utilization of the natural drop in Woonsocket, the Blackstone was not only the cradle of the cotton and woolen textile industry in this country, but also became the workbench for machine tools, and many other products of importance to the American nation.

Some of William Blackstone’s legacy of independent, other wise-minded view points contributed to an environment where people, who were free to follow their consciences, also felt free to follow their creative curiosities. Into this free marketplace of ideas came Samuel Slater of Belper, England in 1790. Two centuries had passed since the death of Blackstone. Familiar with the textile making technology of Richard Arkwright and other British pioneer manufacturers, with the initial financial help of Quaker Moses Brown of Providence, Slater not only energized the awkward thread making machines at Pawtucket, but also hammered out the essential template for factory production all along the Blackstone.



A postcard of the Blackstone Canal District depicting the northwestern view from Millbury, circa 1830s. *Photo: The Blackstone Canal. From Pictorial Views of Massachusetts: For the Young (Worcester, Mass.: Warren Lazell, 1847). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.*

Much of the Slater story to date has emphasized his role at Pawtucket falls to the detriment of his contributions to the industry and the idea of manufacturing in Slatersville, Webster, and numerous mills in the Worcester area. Fine tuned and adapted by others, with their own variations and permutations, Slater's work led to the birth of the American Factory system. Before his death in 1835, Slater, along with 90% of the first generation of manufacturers, had suffered defeat and disappointment in the ups and downs of the free market economy. Political conditions in England and Europe that kept competing cloth manufacturers out of the United States for a decade or more had given Slater and his allies a free hand to get up and going. After 1815, when foreign goods began to flood the American textile market there was a great shake-out of marginal mill operations. The market was depressed for four or five years. Slater by this time had bid farewell to Pawtucket and had a their joint operation in Slatersville. He aspects of production when he had an entire Webster, Massachusetts, carved out of the fringe of the Blackstone Valley. Around 1828 development by creating a steam power-when manufacturing would no longer be particularly important and prescient for the power was not available.



William Blackstone

decade of work already in place with his brother at achieved his personal goal of total control over all town to himself. Slater created the new town of towns of Oxford and Dudley, just on the western Slater had heralded the next phase of industrial driven mill in Providence. It anticipated the day tethered to a waterfall. This development was growth of industries in Worcester where water

The Blackstone Valley's efficient transportation solution for industrial needs explains how the Valley made products totally dependent on resources that were not indigenous. The Valley specialized in products that required large supplies of cotton, wool, iron, coal, steel, oil, precious metals, and rubber. None of these items were native to the region. Overcoming the obstacle of transportation led area manufacturers to be successful in the making of cotton, woolen, and worsted cloth, costume jewelry, a vast variety of machines, steel wire, firearms, steam engines, railroad cars, diners, carpets, envelopes, ladies corsets, monkey wrenches, Tupperware, and toys. In times of war, the Blackstone Valley factories converted grass-cutting scythes into cavalry sabers, cast the gigantic gear for the turret of the Civil War iron-clad Monitor, machined key parts and assembled 23,000 Gazda Oerlikon 20 millimeter anti-aircraft cannons for use on Liberty Ships, and fabricated an entire army of inflatable tanks and artillery out of rubber for the coastal fields of England to fool Hitler as to the whereabouts of the real army of the Normandy invasion.

Perhaps the Blackstone River's greatest achievement of artificial enterprise is its present transformation from the old mill stream to a scenic recreational river. The river that was at the center of an important chapter in the development of the American industrial story has undergone a miracle make-over. Once one of the true blue collar rivers of America, with plenty of "ring around the collar," the Blackstone has become reborn as a recreational corridor of bikeways, state parks, boat landings, community playgrounds, and environmental, historical, and visitor attractions. Derelict mill complexes, once only the targets of arsonists, have now become much desired condominium and apartment developments because of their water views and their proximity to linear parks and bikepaths. The naysayers who wrote off the Blackstone as the poster child of lost causes have had to eat their words. In fifteen or twenty years, they may be eating its fish again.

Remarkably, a good deal of the present day's personality of the Blackstone River is the result of the planning and labor of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, created by Congress in 1986. It built on the initiatives begun all along the river over the prior decades by individuals, groups, and local governments in twenty-four cities and towns in the two adjacent states that share the valley. The Corridor has not only undertaken comprehensive master planning exercises but it has been the initiator and manager of hundreds of federally-funded projects over the last 20 years to carry out the objectives of the community-driven goals of the master plans. The accomplishments are striking and the development is of as much interest and importance to our nation as was the Valley serving as the birth place of the American industrial revolution. The challenge and accomplishments of reversing the negative impacts of two centuries of industrial use of the river can only be appreciated by reviewing the stark contrasts between then and now. Just as the steps take to make the Blackstone America's Hardest Working River were the result of many people over great periods of time, so the cleaning of its banks, the un-ringing of its mill bells, and the curing of the pollution of its waters is an enormous undertaking requiring cooperation all along its main stem and feeder streams. The river is now beating the odds; once again, the conventional wisdom is being stood on its head. The river is on a track to being fishable and swimable by the year 2015 —a notion once thought to be unthinkable for a river once described as being a "sewer with history." ~Al Kylberg lives in an old mill house on the Blackstone Canal in Lincoln and continues his interest in local history by researching the historical origins of Rhode Island state parks, beaches and forests for RIDEM. He is currently teaching the practice of public history at Bryant University