

Rehoboth Massachusetts



Guide to
Historic Sites

Introduction

Over a period of many years, the Rehoboth Historical Commission has endeavored to mark historic locations throughout Rehoboth with descriptive signs. A guide to the locations was first published in booklet form in 1995 under the direction of the late, still-missed, Frank DeMattos (1931-2002). Since additional signs have been erected since then, this revised edition has been prepared for 2017.

The center-page map locates all the historic sites in the booklet. Please note that many of these sites are on private property and do not trespass. All signs, and all sites except the Indian Oven, can be viewed from a public road.

Rehoboth is fortunate to have a long and interesting history. It is hoped that documenting these sites will increase public awareness and appreciation of Rehoboth's historic past.

In Memoriam, E. Otis Dyer Jr (1960-2016).

A life-long resident of Rehoboth, E. Otis Dyer Jr., was also a life-long student of Rehoboth history and wrote many articles on the subject. He was a member of the Rehoboth Historical Commission for many years, serving as its Chairman or Secretary several times, and also served on the board of the Rehoboth Antiquarian Society. Having helped write the first Guide to Historic Sites, he was working on the revision at the time of his death. He is greatly missed.

Sketches by Joseph Carpenter Jr. unless otherwise noted

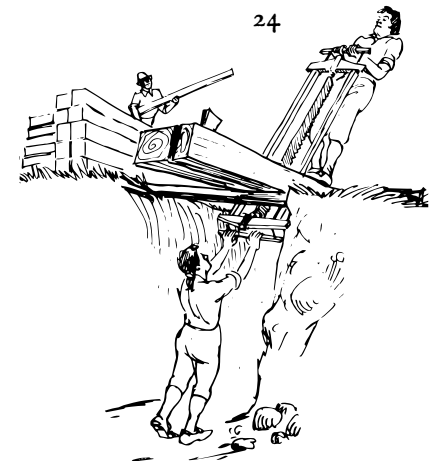
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Revised 2016

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Early Rehoboth

The map shows the town of Rehoboth at its largest. The original Rehoboth settlement was in what is now Rumford, RI. The towns of Cumberland and Pawtucket, RI, were also part of early Rehoboth. Parts of Bristol County, RI, near Swansea, were also founded by Rehoboth families. The boundaries we know today were not settled until 1861.

KEY TO MAP

— Outer boundary Rehoboth in its greatest extent.
 - - - Boundary of original Rehoboth, including Wampanoisset

////// = State line.

North Purchase. 1661 Became Attleborough, including "The Gore" inc. 1694

Attleborough Gore became Cumberland, R.I. 1747

Seekonk set off from Rehoboth, 1812.

Pawtucket set off from Seekonk, 1828.

East Providence set off from Seekonk, 1862.

1. Blackstone.

2. Roger Williams settlement in Seekonk, 1636

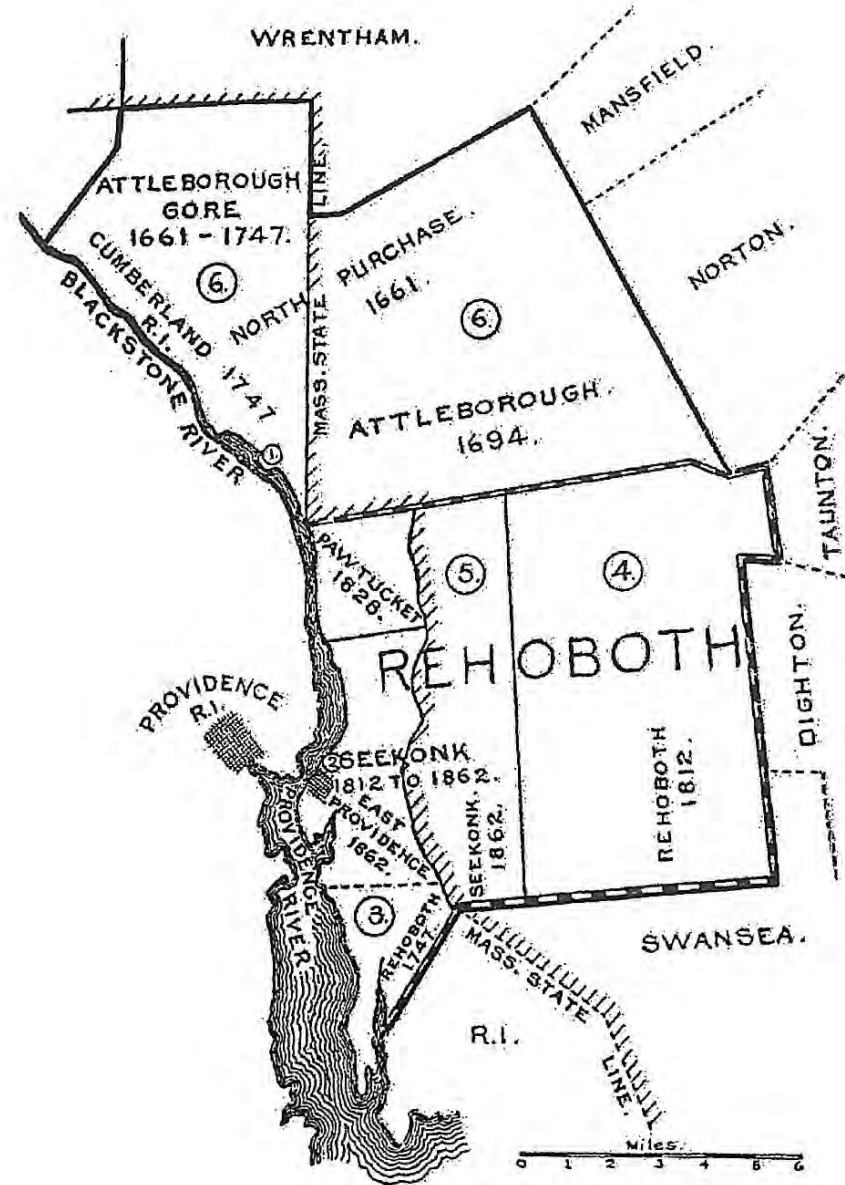
3. Wampanoisset, ward of Rehoboth till 1667, after that a part of Swansea and Barrington till 1747, when it came into Rehoboth.

4. The Rehoboth of today and since 1812.

5. Seekonk at present and since 1862.

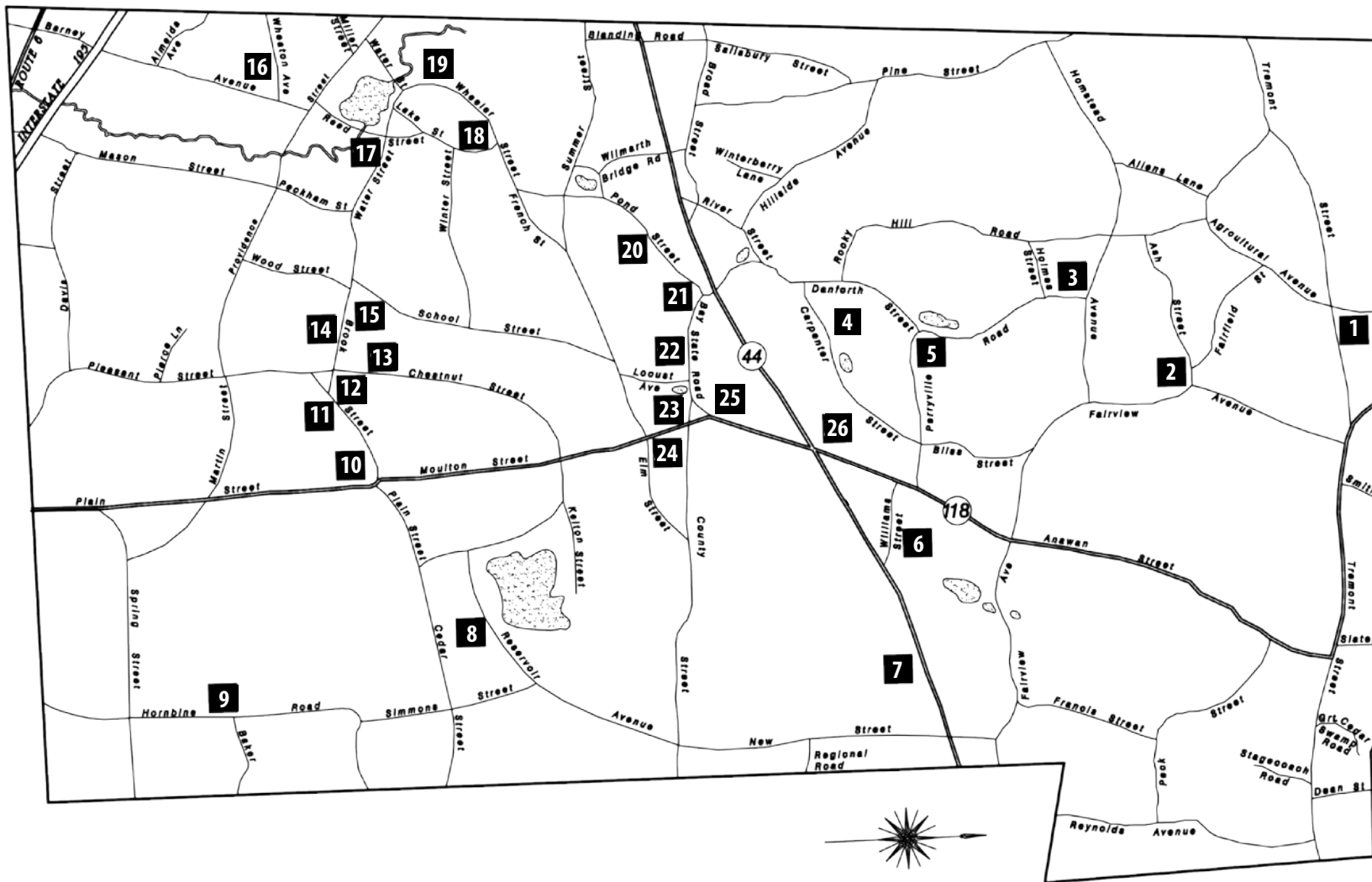
6. North Purchase, including Attleborough and "The Gore."

Note: North Attleborough was set off from Attleborough in 1887



From "Rehoboth Through the Years: A Chronological History of the Town From its Founding in 1643-1992." Rehoboth, MA, Anawan Historical Society, 1993.

Map of Historic Sites



SITE LIST

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Leonard Iron Mine | 8. Bad Luck Pond | 15. Rehoboth Town Pound | 22. Old Yellow Meeting House |
| 2. Perry Turning Mill | 9. Hornbine School | 16. Blockhouse Number | 23. Rehoboth Village and Dam |
| 3. Indian Oven | 10. Bullock Baker Sawmill | 17. Orleans Manufacturing Co. | 24. New Palmer River Iron Works |
| 4. Carpenter Street Bridge | 11. Baker Gristmill | 18. Palmer's River Meeting House | 25. Nichols Crossing |
| 5. Perryville Dam | 12. Original Oak Swamp Meeting House | 19. Paine Gristmill | 26. Anawan House |
| 6. Bliss-Carpenter Saw-Shingle Mill | 13. Horton Signal | 20. Sabin's Mill | |
| 7. Anawan Rock | 14. Liberty Tree Park | 21. Redway Plain | |

1. *Leonard Iron Mine*



LOCATION: Where Mine Brook crosses Tremont Street.

HISTORY: The Leonard family of Taunton, famous colonial iron refiners, purchased the mine property in 1696. Bog iron was dug from the swamp in the form of iron-rich gravel and was transported to the Leonard iron works in Chartley Village (west Norton) for processing into raw iron.

When the town rebuilt Tremont Street with a bridge across Mine Brook in 1720, the Leonards received extra land and the right to mine ore under the new road before its construction, as long as their operation did not damage the road or bridge.

2. *Perry Turning Mill*



LOCATION: On Ash Street about one hundred yards west of Fairfield Street.

HISTORY: In the 1700s, Ezra Perry settled in the Ash Street neighborhood and he and Aaron Cole, who lived at the corner of Homestead Avenue and Fairview Avenue, built a sawmill on the brook at Ash Street.

In the early 1800s, Perry bought out his partner, Aaron Cole. At this time, the mill produced wood bobbins for the cotton factories at Slater Mill in Pawtucket.

In 1820, a spring flood backed up water at the dam, damaging a neighbor's property upstream on Fairfield Street, and litigation resulted. Later, the Perry family abandoned the site and Ezra's descendants moved to the Perryville Dam (site # 5) to continue operations.

3. *Indian Oven*



LOCATION: About two hundred feet in from the south side of Homestead Avenue about ¼ mile west of Perryville Road. The oven is on private property.

HISTORY: The oven is a natural cylindrical hole in the southern face of a large rock out-cropping. The Jerimah Pearce family, who once owned a farm bordering this site, passed on the tradition that Indians used this natural oven to parch their corn.

4. *Carpenter Street Bridge*



LOCATION: Carpenter Street, crossing the west branch of the Palmer River.

HISTORY: A wooden bridge built about 1720 was replaced in 1873 by a stone structure that still exists today beneath the paved road, one of the last stone bridges in Rehoboth. It was repaired by the Rehoboth Historical Commission in 1981, and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. Nearby is the River Run Conservation Area operated by the Rehoboth Land Trust.

5. *Perryville Dam*



LOCATION: The dam is located at the intersection of Danforth Street and Perryville Road.

HISTORY: This site was originally known as Butterworth Falls when the area was settled in the late 1600s. John Butterworth constructed a sawmill at the north side of Danforth Street prior to 1690. Butterworth owned a large farm that included what is now the nearby Rehoboth Country Club.

The Carpenter family owned and operated this mill through the Revolutionary War and up to the mid-1800s, when it was purchased by the Perry family. That family operated a large turning mill on the south side of Danforth Street that produced tool handles as well as bobbins for the cotton manufacturing industry in the Blackstone Valley. The business lasted until the 1890s. A sawmill and gristmill operated on the site until the mid-1930s.

6. *Bliss-Carpenter Saw-Shingle Mill*

LOCATION: Williams Street at east branch of the Palmer River.

HISTORY: Jonathan Bliss moved here from south Rehoboth in 1720 and established a sawmill on the East Branch of the Palmer River and a

homestead nearby. The homestead was one of the first in the area, and Bliss called it "my farm in the woods." The mill ruins can still be seen a short distance north of here, and his house stood where the Latham house is presently situated. In the 19th century, Francis H. Carpenter converted the mill into a shingle mill, which he operated until after the Civil War. Williams Street was originally a private lane to the mill.

7. Anawan Rock



LOCATION: Winthrop Street (Route 44) about 1 1/2 miles east of Anawan Street (Route 118).

HISTORY: Captain Benjamin Church captured Chief Anawan, a Wampanoag sachem and advisor to King Philip, at Anawan Rock in August 1676. This action ended the King Philip's War in southeastern Massachusetts. Anawan and a group of followers had fled to this location at the edge of Squanakonk Swamp to hide from the English troops that were searching the woods of southeastern Massachusetts for any remaining Indian resistance.



Church and his men capturing Anawan. From "The History of Philip's War" (1827).

Church, a famous Indian fighter, received word from an Indian informant that Anawan was hiding in the north end of Squanakonk Swamp. After a difficult march to the site -- Winthrop Street did not exist at that time -- Church and his company surrounded Anawan, who surrendered without a fight. Anawan was taken to Plymouth and beheaded by authorities there despite the protest of Captain Church, who had given Anawan a promise of safe conduct at his surrender.

8. Bad Luck Pond

LOCATION: Reservoir Avenue near Gorham Street.

HISTORY: Bad Luck Pond was first dammed about 1730 by George Beverly, who established a sawmill just north of the present dam site. This name, Bad Luck, appears in the early Proprietors' Records to describe the area around present-day Reservoir and Simmons Streets, but the story behind the name has not come down to us.

In 1837-38, a larger dam was built at the present site by the owners of two cotton mills - the Village Mill and the Orleans Mill - located further down the Palmer River. Its purpose was to create a storage reservoir for which water could be let out as needed to power the mills. By 1859, maintenance had been neglected and in June, after a prolonged rainfall, the dam gave way. Bad Luck Pond lived up to its name as the flood carried away eleven bridges, a smaller dam, and a portion of the Village Mill. Repairs to the bridges cost the town \$424.36, but no lives were lost.

The present dam was built in the early 20th century by the Bristol County (R.I.) Water Authority to supply drinking water to portions of Rhode Island.



Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Beskid

9. Hornbine School



Above, Hornbine School in 1900 W. Below, children visit the school to experience what a one-room school house was like. Courtesy of Dave Downs.



LOCATION: Hornbine Road at the intersection with Baker Street.

HISTORY: The one-room Hornbine School was built in 1845-46 and offered an education through grade 9. It was enlarged in the 1920s but ceased to be used in 1937, when the number of school districts in town was reduced from fifteen to three. The building and land were auctioned off and, after serving a variety of uses, finally fell vacant. The Hornbine School Association bought and restored the school as part of Rehoboth's 325th Anniversary celebration in 1968. Because the original desks had been broken up for their metal during World War II, replacements were gathered from a variety of locales. The teacher's desk, however, is from a Rehoboth School. The Hornbine School is visited by Rehoboth's third-graders and by students from nearby towns as part of their local history education. It is also open to the public at scheduled times. The School is overseen by the Rehoboth Historical Commission.

10. Bullock Baker Sawmill

LOCATION: Plain Street where Rocky Run crosses the road a little south of Brook Street. To reach the old mill site, walk about 400 feet down the lane in front of the Greenwood Cemetery. The old mill dam can be seen on the left.

HISTORY: This mill site is closely connected with the Baker Mill (site #10) on Brook Street and with the original Oak Swamp Meeting House (site #11) at Pleasant and Chestnut Streets. The early owners had an interest in all three sites.

A sawmill was erected here about 1767 by Joseph Bullock, who lived across the street. During the latter part of the 18th century, the mill was known as the Daniel Bullock Sawmill. Samuel Baker, Jr. (1787-1872), a successful farmer who also had a genius for mechanics, later operated this mill, a second sawmill, and a gristmill. The other two mills were further down on the same stream. The Baker house still stands at 63 Brook Street near site #10. This mill was operating at least until 1850, along with a turning mill. Sometime shortly after the Civil War, the mill was abandoned by the Bakers and fell into ruins.

During the early decades of the 19th century, frequent religious revivals took place at the nearby Oak Swamp Church. During one such revival, on January 1, 1830, a hole was cut through 14 inches of ice in the mill pond and 16 people were baptized by total immersion. Amongst them was Ira S. Baker, son of Samuel. Ira said he made the decision on impulse, threw off his coat, and went into the freezing water.

Plain Street originally ran down the lane by the cemetery and crossed the Rocky Run on the dam. Present Plain Street now crosses a portion of the filled-in mill pond.

11. *Baker Gristmill*

LOCATION: Near 67 Brook Street, 1/2 mile west of Moulton Street (Route 118). The site is on private property, but a glimpse of the mill site on the east side of the driveway may be had from the road.

HISTORY: This site, like the Bullock-Baker Sawmill on Plain Street, was for many years associated with the Baker family. The original owner was Joseph Millerd or Miller, who sold it to the Hix (or Hicks) family in the 1740s. During the 18th century, Elder John Hix, pastor of the Oak Swamp Church (site # 12), owned this mill while living nearby at the gambrel house still standing at 63 Brook Street. John Hix passed the mill on to his son Jacob in 1768, and Samuel Baker, Jr. eventually purchased it from Jacob's son Daniel in 1822.

Samuel was considered to be a skillful farmer and a mechanical genius. He successfully operated this gristmill, a sawmill a little further downstream (obliterated in the 1960s), and the Bullock-Baker sawmill on Plain Street.

The gristmill operated as late as 1870, a couple of years before Samuel's death. When the mill was in operation, it reportedly had a "one bushel rock" and a "nine bushel rock." When the "nine bushel rock" was covered with water, there was enough water in the pond to grind nine bushels of corn; the "one bushel rock" indicated only enough water for one bushel.

The dam and millpond were restored about 1970.

12. *Original Oak Swamp Meeting House*

LOCATION: At the corner of Pleasant and Chestnut Streets.

HISTORY: The church was founded by the Reverend John Comer in 1732. After 1773, it was associated with Elder John Hix and his son Elder Jacob Hix or Hicks. Both Hixes lived in the little gambrel house which still stands a short distance west at 63 Brook Street near site # 10. Both

Hixes, besides being Baptist preachers, were successful farmers and gristmill operators.

Tradition has it that while the original Oak Swamp Church was being constructed at Burial Place Hill on Providence and Peckham Streets, the "Oak Swamp People" came in the night, moved the timbers away, and raised them on the new spot. In 1834 the congregation moved to a new building at the corner of the nearby Greenwood Cemetery. The old church was torn down and its timbers made into a barn.

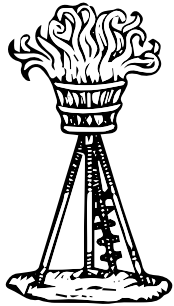
Dr. William Blanding (1773-1857) recalled that he occasionally attended the church in his youth. Writing many years later, he described the parson, John Hix, as "a pious old man ... he was unlearned and so were his flock --."



13. Horton Signal

LOCATION: Uphill from the intersection of Brook and Chestnut Streets.

HISTORY: This high hilltop was the site of a lookout and a signal beacon during the Revolutionary War. Today, the town is heavily wooded so that it is difficult to imagine the view as seen in Colonial times. At the time of the Revolution, most of the town had been cleared for farm land, and this allowed a sentinel to see Bristol, R.I., and Narragansett Bay, where the British were threatening to attack the American rebels. The next beacon site that could be seen was on Great Meadow Hill in north Rehoboth.



Most likely, wood fires were set at each site as a signal system that reached from Rhode Island northwards. The signals alerted local militia men, known as Minutemen, to British attacks. Below Horton Signal on Brook Street stood a "Liberty Tree," a great oak tree where the militia gathered in times of emergency before marching to battle.

14. Liberty Tree Park



Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Beskid

LOCATION: Brook Street, about halfway between Wood and Chestnut Streets.

HISTORY: (See also Horton Signal). During the American Revolution, local militia and Minutemen gathered here before responding to British attacks in Rhode Island. This site was forgotten until the mid-1970s when a reference to it was discovered in a deed to an adjacent property. The original Liberty Tree is long gone, but the sapling growing in its place may be a descendant. The Park is overseen by the Rehoboth Historical Commission.

15. Rehoboth Town Pound



LOCATION: Brook Street between School and Wood Streets.

HISTORY: In the mid-eighteenth century, stray livestock were kept here until retrieved by their owners. The pound was maintained by Frederick Drown for many years. The Wheeler family ran a pot ash business nearby, and the neighborhood was known as "Old Pot Ash."

16. Blockhouse Number 2

LOCATION: Barney Avenue, a short distance south of Providence Street and on the west side of the road.

HISTORY: The blockhouse, a fortified dwelling-house surrounded by a palisade, was on the rise beside Barney Avenue. It proved to be a safe haven for nearby residents when Indians attacked during King Philip's War in March 1676. All other buildings in the area were destroyed, but only one person was killed when he ventured too far from the stockade. Dr. William Blanding sketched the blockhouse as remembered it standing in the late 1700s. It was then "in a decayed state" and inhabited by a poor family.



"Old Block House as in 1782" Sketch by William Blanding

17. Orleans Manufacturing Co.

LOCATION: Reed Street, to the north of Shad Factory Pond.

HISTORY: In 1810, a group of Rehoboth citizens established the Palmer's River Manufacturing Company on the site of the old Joshua Smith grist- and sawmill. The new mill - which made cotton yarn to be hand-woven by nearby families - was one of the earliest factories in this area, predating the great Fall River mills.



Business was not very successful until, in 1826, the mill was enlarged and began manufacturing fine cotton cloth. It was renamed the Orleans Manufacturing Company because New Orleans was the source for the cotton. The mill burned in 1831 but was rebuilt the next year and produced cloth until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 cut off the supply of cotton. After the war, cotton thread and yarn were manufactured again until the mill burned down for the last time in 1884.

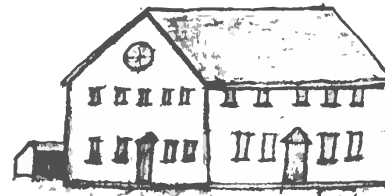
The dam was rebuilt in 1911 to supply water to Bristol County, R.I. The reservoir takes its name from the shad (a type of fish) which migrate upstream every spring.



Orleans Factory ca. 1880

18. Palmer's River Meeting House

LOCATION: Lake Street, just south of Winter Street.



"Palmer's River Meeting House as in 1793" Sketch by William Blanding

HISTORY: Early in the eighteenth century, descendants of the first settlers of Rehoboth spread out from the original center of town, now Rumford, Rhode Island, as far east as the Palmer River. In 1711, finding it difficult to attend worship at

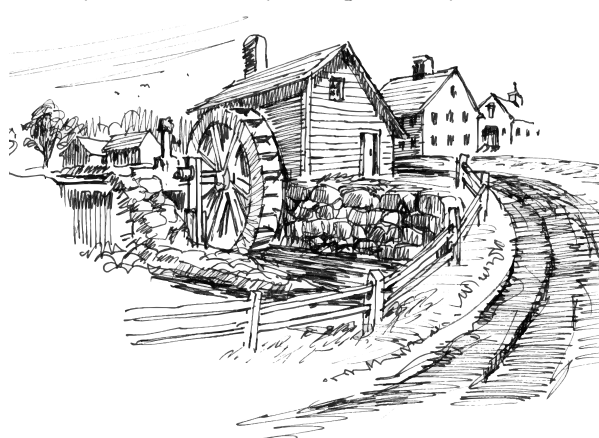
the Newman Church so far away, these "Palmer's River people" petitioned the General Court in Boston to have the town divided into two precincts. In 1717, by the consent of the Court, they began to build a meeting house in their part of town. The parent church (Newman) donated fifty pounds towards the construction.

The church was organized in 1721 and consisted of ten families with the Reverend David Turner as the pastor. On March 8, 1773, church members voted that the meeting house should be torn down and a new one (site #19) built near Redway Plain, at the present site of the Village Cemetery.

19. Paine Gristmill

LOCATION: Beside the Palmer River at Wheeler Street.

HISTORY: This gristmill, the first in present-day Rehoboth, was built circa 1662 by the Paine family and operated by them until it and all the houses in the



area were destroyed by Indians in March 1676, during King Philip's War. The mill was never rebuilt. The original building was located on the south side of Wheeler Street, and the road crossed the river on top of the dam, beside the mill-pond.

20. Sabin's Mill

LOCATION: Pond Street.

HISTORY: The Sabin family purchased this property and built an earth dam and mill here in the 1690s. The Sabins were well-established mill owners in early Rehoboth and were among the earliest settlers in this area. Nearby Sabin's Pond, also known as Devil's Pond, was named for this family.

The mill did not operate for very long, probably owing to a lack of water in the brook, which is known as "Rico's Run."

21. Redway Plain

LOCATION: Corner of Winthrop Street (Route 44) and Bay State Road

HISTORY: This field was part of the Redway Farm in Colonial times. The homestead of Captain James Redway is located across Route 44 on Danforth Street. The Captain was Commander of the Rehoboth Militia in the mid-1700s and permitted the use of Redway Plain as a militia training ground. The town's Powder House was located at the northwest corner of the Village Cemetery, near or possibly on what is now part of Pond Street. A veterans' memorial has recently been erected on part of the plain.



Reenactors Drilling on Redway Plain

22. Old Yellow Meeting House



LOCATION: Bay State Road, in the middle of the Village Cemetery.

HISTORY: In March 1773, the town voted to pull down the "old meeting house" on Lake Street (site #16). The new meeting house, with an adjoining area set off as a burial ground, was built on a site that is presently in the Rehoboth Village Cemetery. The building had no bell or steeple but served as both church and town meeting house. The right to occupy certain pews was sold at public auction. A gallery extended across the front (south) and along the two sides. The singers sat in front, and behind them, high up in either corner, were seats for the Negroes, men in one corner and women in the other. This meeting house was torn down in 1840 after the present Congregational Church was built in the village.

23. Rehoboth Village and Dam



LOCATION: The Village area is located around the intersection of Locust Avenue and Bay State Road.

HISTORY: The Bliss gristmill stood near this dam for about 180 years, starting sometime before 1690. By the time of the American Revolution, the pond and dam also served a sawmill, a fulling mill owned by Joseph Goff, a cooperage, and a blacksmith's shop. A slaughterhouse and tannery were around the corner on Locust Avenue and an iron forge (site # 21) on County Street at



Aerial View of Rehoboth Village, 1960

Route 118. In the early 1800s, Thomas Carpenter III bought the gristmill and sawmill and built a cotton mill on the north side of the street. The cotton mill and Goff's fulling mill were then sold to Nelson and Darius Goff, who manufactured cotton wadding.



Rehoboth Village ca. 1776. Illustration by Joseph Carpenter Jr.

Although most industry in the village area died out around 1880, the mill owners and their families continued to live here. Town Meetings were held in what is now the American Legion hall, and the present-day Congregational Church was built in 1838. Joseph Goff's tavern stood on the site of the present Goff Hall. The fulling and cotton mills stood across the street until 1846. Many of the houses in the village were built during these early industrial times.

In the spring of 1859, the village was severely damaged when the dam gave way at Bad Luck Pond (site #7). The cotton mill was rebuilt and remained in operation until 1884.

The Providence and Taunton Street Railway Company built a line through the village in 1901. The railway's shops, car barns, and power station were located about 500 feet north of the bridge. They were sold to a porcelain-enamel firm when the line was abandoned in the 1920s. G&W Foundry bought it after World War II and operated there until it burned in 2011.

24. *New Palmer River Iron Works*

LOCATION: Corner of County and Moulton Streets

HISTORY: The iron forge established here by 1722 was probably a refinery for the shipbuilding trade in Swansea. It was equipped with the necessary helve hammers, anvils, coal or coke crucibles, and bellows. One of the owners, Robert Carr, was a Swansea shipwright, and the other owners were blacksmiths and builders. In later years, cart wheels were made at the iron works, and numerous wheel hoops were reported found years later when the business was dismantled in 1759.



There was an earlier bridge just north-west of the corner, built in the 1720s, called the Iron Works Bridge. It was torn down in 1941 to permit the building of the present bridge. During the construction process, old timbers were found from the small dam or the sluiceway at this site. Logs notched in a similar fashion have been found at other dam sites and used in dam reconstructions elsewhere.

25. *Nichols Crossing*



LOCATION: Bay State Road a little north of the American Legion.

HISTORY: The Taunton-Providence Street Railway's trolley tracks came out of the woods here and crossed Bay State Road. The Nichols house across the street was a depot for the company.

The tracks ran on to what is now Route 44 and continued eastwards. The trolley operated from the early 1900s to the late 1920s. It was an important part of the economy of central Rehoboth, giving easy access to Taunton and Providence before the rise of the automobile.

26. *Anawan House*



LOCATION: Northwest corner of the junction of Routes 44 and 118, the present site of the Exxon Mobil gas station.

HISTORY: The Anawan House - also known as Anawan Inn and Lewis Tavern - was a tavern from the early 1800s. It also had hotel accommodations for travelers along the Taunton-Providence Turnpike, which is now Route 44. It was connected to a farm which included the northeast and southeast corners of the street junction and its stable was located about where the Dunkin Donuts complex now stands.

This building was named after Anawan Rock, a famous historic landmark which was a popular sight-seeing spot in the 19th century and which is situated a few miles to east (site #6).

During the early 20th century, the Anawan House was well known for its dance hall and tavern but eventually became run-down. In 1970, the property was sold to the Mobil Oil Corporation and the historic building was demolished to make way for the gas station.

