

For those who want a bit of background on the Railway Depot - the following articles were published in the Point Association's publication - *The Green Light*.

Peter Martin

History of the OCNRR Depot Print

Article

Esther Fisher Benson

April 1991

A Small House Moves

The Island Cemetery owned a parcel of land on Warner Street, running on the west side from Callender to the lot owned by the **Cottrell family**. Here was stored all the gear needed to carry on the work of the cemetery; shovels, roller, pry-bars and a hand-pulled cart used by old Jim Moriarity, who dug raves and set stones. At the northeasterly end of his property stood the Cottrell House, in all probability 18th-century, with a gambrel-roof and a large chimney. Three generations in all had carried on the monument business. Early in our century the Cottrells had built a charming little house for their office. It encroached somewhat on the cemetery's property.

In 1915 or thereabouts, at a board meeting, the Island Cemetery Company voted to build a modern substantial stable. They now owned a horse and wagon, and needed more storage. This stable of red brick with limestone corners, still stands, quite handsome. The Cottrells were asked to move the little house, so it would be on the property line. This they did still having room for a fine display of granites and marbles.

Much later, in the 1970's, the Cottrell family sold their land to **Douglas O'Neil** of the D and D Fence Company. Although realizing the attractiveness of the little house, he did not want it sitting there in the midst of his working property. He was ready to tear it down. At this moment **Christie Smith** of the Robert Potter League) came into the picture. One look at that little house told her that it must not be torn down. At once she wrote a check to Doug O'Neil, then said to her husband, **Ed Smith**, and his partner, **Tom Benson**, "I've just bought a house. Where will we put it?"

At that time, Tom was part owner of 18 Elm Street (now the bicycle shop) which had some land in the back. A foundation was put in, and then the exciting process of moving the little house began. Ed and Tom had worried about the cost of moving, with all the electrical wires to come down, but the electric company was sympathetic and sent a tall man to stand on the top of the little house. He and Tom Benson, also tall, raised the wires on tall sticks, allowing the house to move easily underneath. It went west on Warner, south on Thames, took a right turn onto Bridge, then across the tracks, coming to rest behind 18 Elm Street. Such a move was great fun to watch, and everyone enjoyed it.

For a little while, the house just sat there. **Gary Martin** polished its silver and brass pieces for a bit. Then **Larry Allen** bought it. But that is another chapter, because an awful lot happened next, and you will hear about it all in the next issue of *The Green Light*. Esther Fisher Benson

Esther Fisher Benson

July 1991

A Small House Moves Again

(A continuation of the article begun in the April 1991 issues of The Green Light).

Some of you may remember the long struggle the City of Newport went through when redevelopment became a reality, not a dream. Of course we wanted this drastic change which would revitalize our city, but each one of us had our own priorities, according to where we lived. The position of the traffic-bearing road from the new bridge through, and then out of the city, presented many serious problems. The Point with its many homes, was particularly vulnerable, as the new road would have to cut right through, taking many houses. It was suggested at one time that the railroad tracks be taken up, in this way providing all of the necessary space for America's Cup Avenue. However, many people felt that the tracks should stay. The railroad might well be needed at a later date to haul material to the Naval Base, or possibly a renewal of the rail traffic in the future which, once lost, could not be regained.

From this concern an association of railroad buffs was organized, called '**The National Railroad Foundation and Museum**'.

The purpose was to preserve the line and keep it open, and to enable young children to know their heritage. Two pieces of rolling stock were acquired by the Foundation, and short trips were run up and down Aquidneck Island. Neither platform or station existed, the passengers stepping right down on the heavy grass by the old Mc Kenzie and Williams feed and grain store.

The Foundation had many members from all over the country including **Allen Freed** of Washington, D.C.; **Richard Long**, Newport architect; **Pat Kirby**, former mayor of Newport; **Don Elbert**, who became executive director; **Bob Morris**; **Don O'Hanley**, historian; and especially, **Colonel William F. Long**, chairman, also of inestimable value were the volunteers who staffed the project. Many of these were Navy personnel who enjoyed working the trains and maintaining the stock in their spare time. The Navy gave additional support by allowing the train to park overnight on a piece of track that went onto their land.

Colonel Long, as he drove through the Point, had caught sight of a small building behind 18 Elm Street. He thought it was a line shack once used by the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad. Upon inquiry he found that it was owned by **Larry Allen**. Colonel Long acquired the shack and moved it one and a half blocks to the south, setting it on a concrete base. In the meantime, tourist trips and charters started under the historic name of '**The Old Colony and Newport Railway.**'

It was very evident that the station house would need much repairing. Richard Long, member of the board and highly skilled architect and preservationist, offered to take charge of the restoration. Rogers High School provided the labor from its vocational classes, and the work was well done. Richard Long designed the cupola as well as greatly improving the interior and laying out the platform with a shed roof. By 1982 all was complete. In spite of the fact that so much of the work was donated, the Foundation was responsible for a large financial outlay.

In 1983, the station was named for Senator Pell, who has done so much to promote railroads and the wise use of public transportation in the nation. Later on, when the Gateway project needed the land where the station was located, the station and platform were moved to the present site. Including the railroad in the project was important for transportation and legal reasons, since the land has a federal easement for railroad operations.

In 1989, the Foundation leased the station to the Newport Clipper Dinner Train which also operates on the track used by the Old Colony and Newport Railway for tourist and educational rides. So the history of this small building is now complete, and we urge you to take a trip on the railway and support the Foundation in their good work which is part of the rich heritage of the Point.

Esther Fisher Benson

These articles were written by Esther Fisher Benson. They were printed in the Newport Point Associations publication, The Green Light in April and July of 1991. Mrs. Benson died in 1999. Her son Tom died 'too early' in 1987.

Copies of these publications, and all other issues of 'The Green Light' are on file at the Newport Historical Association. In this presentation, the bold faced format has been added for clarity.