

### III. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL DEVELOPMENT

#### Settlement (1621-1746)

The geographical location of Warren has influenced its development from the beginning of colonial history. Warren lies at a strategic halfway point between modern Providence and Newport, has a deep river channel, and is easily accessible by both land and water. Here, the Wampanoag tribe had established a great camp site known as the Indian village of "Sowams." Just before the Pilgrims settled at Plymouth a great plague had reduced the Wampanoag warriors from 3,000 to a mere 300. In July, 1621 Governor Bradford of Plymouth sent Edward Winslow and Stephen Hopkins to visit the Sachem Massasoit, chief of the Wampanoags and ruler of "Pokanoket" including all the land from Plymouth west to Narragansett Bay. Massasoit sought the friendship of the English in an attempt to strengthen his position against the powerful Narragansett tribe living on the west side of Narragansett Bay.

Two years later news of the Sachem's illness and of a Dutch trading vessel stranded nearby brought Winslow and John Hampden again to Sowams. Winslow restored Massasoit's health and won the Sachem's enduring friendship for the English. By 1632, an English trading post had been established on the west bank of the Kickemuit, now part of East Warren. Today, Massasoit's spring is commemorated by a plaque at the foot of Baker Street.<sup>2</sup>

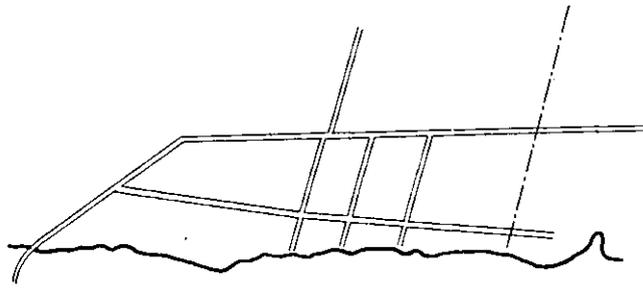
In 1653 Massasoit sold a large section of "Pokanoket" to "certain worthy gentlemen" for thirty-five pounds sterling including the "Sowams Lands" which were incorporated by the Court of Plymouth as the town of Swansea, Massachusetts in 1667 including the present towns of Warren and Barrington, Rhode Island and Somerset, Massachusetts. Exempt from the purchase were the uplands of "Mount Hope Neck" (the central part of present Warren and Bristol) that had been reserved for the Indians until they "should remove therefrom." Two years later in 1669, King Philip, Massasoit's son, sold to "Hugh Cole and others" five hundred acres in Swansea "on the west bank of Coles River." Hugh Cole was a town official, farmer, surveyor, and early land speculator. Records indicate that he and other town officials granted Dormit Smith "ten acres at Kecamuet" in 1670. Here the first houses and "ways" (roads) of present-day Warren clustered around the Cecamuet or Kecamuet River (ten spellings of this Indian place name meaning "at the great spring" are known).

After Massasoit's death in 1661, his oldest son Alexander (Wamsutta) became sachem. The death of Alexander on his way home from Plymouth about 1665, after his forcible arrest on a false rumor that he was plotting an uprising, broke the long friendship between the English and the Wampanoags. Philip (Metacomet), Alexander's younger brother and new chief, started the bloody war that ranged throughout New England until 1677. On June 20, 1675, King Philip's War broke out with the plunder of Sowams. Troops from Boston and Plymouth joined with the forces at Miles Garrison (Barneyville) and marched down Mount Hope Neck chasing Philip, who fled to Pocasset, now Tiverton. Just south of King's Rock (in present day Warren) they found newly burned homes and the "heads of eight Englishmen stuck up on poles." None of the settlers' houses survived King Philip's War.

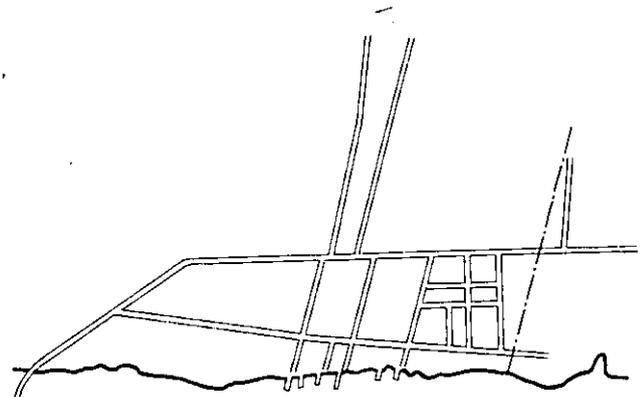
Following peace in 1677, the settlers returned to rebuild Sowams. The Sowams Purchase of 1653 was divided into farm and building lots. Development of the main part of Warren began in 1682 with the "Brooks' Pasture First Division" of lots extending from the old Bristol line (Franklin Street) north to present-day Wood and Liberty Streets. In 1725, "Brooks' Pasture Second Division" occurred dividing the north section of Warren. The old "Back Road" or "Bristol Highway," now Metacom Avenue, was the original Indian trail from Mount Hope. Market Street, marked by a grooved flat stone at King's Rock on the Warren-Swansea line, was the trail past the "National Grinding Mill" of the Wampanoags. Main Street was the trail from Poppasquash (Bristol) north to the present bridge to Barrington.

Warren became a town in 1746. After a dispute dating from 1664, Rhode Island gained Attleborough Gore, Little Compton, Tiverton, Bristol, part of Barrington, and Swansea from Massachusetts. By royal decree, "Swansea and Barrington, with a small part of Rehoboth" evolved into a new town called Warren honoring the Naval hero of Louisbourg, Sir Peter Warren (Barrington remained part of Warren until 1770). The first town meeting, a political form of organization still in existence today, was held on February 10, 1747. The first census of 1748 lists the total population of Warren at 380 with thirty Indians. By 1782 only three Indians remained.

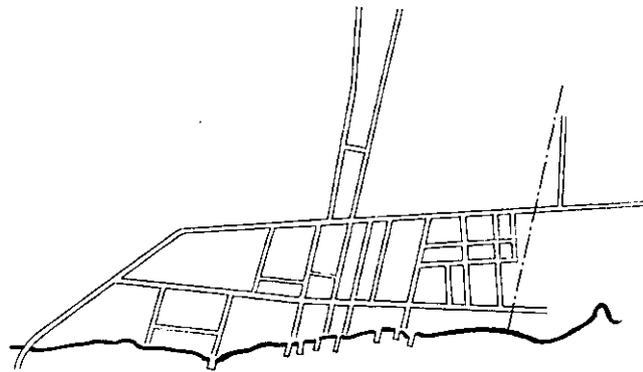
From this initial settlement period, only a handful of houses in outlying Warren have survived. Still standing on Poverty Corner Road in Northeast Warren near the Swansea line is the Benjamin Bosworth House begun in



1682-1750



1750-1790



1790-1825

1690 by John Cole, Hugh Cole's grandson. John Cole's father and uncle were captured by the Indians but returned by King Philip because of his friendship for Hugh Cole. Cole's own house stood at the head of Asylum Road near the Kickemuit River; his well is now a recognized town landmark. The Honorable Levi Haile House on the west side of Market Street south of King's Rock dates from the beginning of the eighteenth century. This central chimney farm house is distinguished by an irregular hip roof with sweeping salt-box addition. The Captain John Mason Homestead on Maple Road, Touisset Point, dates from c. 1720 and has undergone many renovations. The old Mason family cemetery on a knoll overlooking Cole's River lies just east of this house. At one time the Mason family owned all the land on the south part of Toweset Neck, another Indian place name meaning "at the cornfield."

### Colonial (1700-1776)

The development of the Town of Warren is typical of Rhode Island seaport communities. Shipwrights, carpenters, coopers, and merchants from Swansea, attracted by the deep river, settled along the old Indian trail or "Highway" to Bristol. "Ways" were then cut out from this Main Street spine to the waterfront. No formal town plan laid out around a square or "common," as was typical in Massachusetts and Connecticut towns, existed in Warren.

The original pattern of narrow streets is still clearly discernible. Miller and Church Streets were "thrown out" before 1750 as "ways" to the river, where Sylvester Child opened a shipyard before 1764. Lyndon, Manning, Broad, Wheaton, and Queen (now School Street) were laid out by Governor Lyndon, John Wheaton, and Caleb Carr between 1756-1765. Baker Street from Water Street to the river was opened about 1767. South Water Street existed as "Carr's Street" before 1760. Caleb Carr operated the Ferry to Barrington at the end of Ferry Lane, leading west from Main Street to the river. Ferry Lane was renamed King Street. After the American Revolution, however, the name was changed again to Washington Street. State Street opened in 1791, Baker Street by 1796, and Liberty Street (originally Ropewalk Street) in 1803. By 1796 the old "Shore Road" from north to south end was officially incorporated as Water Street. All these streets exist today, creating a compact waterfront district (see map Plate C).

Map Plate C: Development of Warren

The earliest house discovered in the waterfront survey area is James Maxwell's Birthplace at 54 Church Street, built in 1743 by Elder Samuel Maxwell. With its great central chimney, steep gable, handmade brick, drip moldings, and southern orientation, it is typical of a vanishing colonial architectural type. Other pre-Revolutionary houses found in Warren include gambrel-roofed cottages such as the Luther House (c. 1750) at 95 Union Street, the Sherman Cottage (c. 1760) and Hoar-Cole House (c. 1760) at 7 and 12 School Street, the Nicolas Campbell house (c. 1750) at 23 Broad Street, and the 2½ story gambrels at 592 Main Street (c. 1760, altered c. 1820) and 15 Lyndon Street known as "Governor Lyndon's Refuge" (1751).

### Revolutionary War Era (1776-1783)

By the beginning of the American Revolution, Warren was a prosperous maritime community with some agricultural development in the outlying areas. Cromwell and Caleb Child operated a shipyard at the foot of Miller Street, Jesse Baker and his four sons operated a cooperage, Caleb Carr kept a tavern in addition to operating the ferry to Barrington, and a man named Kelley ran a second ferry at the north end of Water Street. Caleb Carr and Caleb Eddy were also shipbuilders along with Samuel Miller and James Easterbrook Bowen. Warren sailors were engaged in coasting, the West India trade, the merchant service, and some whaling. Warren shipyards were noted for variety and excellence throughout the colonies.

For a community almost completely dependent upon maritime commerce, the opening of the American Revolution threatened ruin and during this period Warren suffered near-starvation and chaos. From a population of 1,005 (including slaves) in 1776, Warren was reduced to 789 inhabitants in 1778. Business was destroyed, twenty-three vessels (amounting to 1,090 tons) were lost, shipyards were empty, farms neglected, and the population destitute. Two hundred and seven "dwelling" houses and other buildings remained. The hardships endured by the inhabitants of this sturdy seaport, their participation in the defense of Rhode Island, the shipping and personal losses sustained during the disastrous British raid in May, 1778, and the later visits by the Marquis de Lafayette and General George Washington are detailed in Virginia Baker's *The History of Warren, Rhode Island, in the War of the Revolution, 1776-1783*.



Fig. 3: James Maxwell's Birthplace (1743), 59 Church Street



Fig. 4: Luther House (c. 1750), 95 Union Street



Fig. 5: James Maxwell Eddy House (c. 1780), 582 Main Street

The town's economic condition at this time is reflected in the rich architectural details found throughout the waterfront district where entrances, window trim, cornices, quoins, and interior woodwork bespeak local affluence. The quality can be attributed to the skill of native shipwrights and carpenters. Of note are the pediments found on the Charles Barton House (c. 1760) at 211 Water Street, the Davol House (c. 1751) at 41 State Street, and the elaborate twin doors of the Caleb Carr Tavern (begun before 1756 and remodeled c. 1790) at 317 Water Street with delicate Ionic capitals, fluted pilasters, semi-circular pierced fanlights, frieze, and modillions. The Georgian entrance with angel figureheads and hearts in the Ionic capitals at the Reverend Sidney Dean House, 23 Greene Street (moved from the corner of Greene and Main Street), and the delicate fanlight of the Eddy House at 582 Main Street, also date from this flourishing period.

In Warren, William Turner Miller was appointed lieutenant-colonel of the first regiment raised in Newport and Bristol Counties to prepare for war after the Battle of Lexington. The bombardment of nearby Bristol in October, 1775 startled all the Bay towns and led to the establishment of a watch house at Burr's Hill. Daniel Cole and Samuel Miller were appointed to organize the watch. A "trained band" and a company of "alarm men" had been formed the previous year. On February 5, 1776, when it was voted to make a list of all persons in town unable to equip themselves with arms, only two were lacking and the town supplied "two good firearms with bayonets and cartrich boxes." The British occupation of Newport in December, 1776, caused many of that town's inhabitants to seek refuge on the mainland, including Governor Josias Lyndon who later died in Warren during a smallpox epidemic early in 1778.<sup>3</sup>

May 25, 1778 witnessed the disastrous British raid on Warren. Five hundred British and Hessian troops commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Campbell came up the Bay under cover of darkness and landed in Bristol about a half mile south of Peck's Rocks. Colonel Campbell split his party, the larger part going through Market Street to the Kickemuit to burn seventy flat-bottomed boats built at Cromwell Child's shipyard and hidden at the Kickemuit stone bridge in preparation for an American raid against the British. The smaller party hurried to guard Kelley's Ferry and Carr's Ferry in the main part of Warren. Colonel Campbell's men then burned the Baptist Meeting House and Parsonage on the corner of Main and Miller Streets, blew up the powder magazine across the street,

burned seven houses including Caleb Child's house, looted and vandalized homes, and partially destroyed the frigate *General Stark*. The British took about sixty prisoners including Parson Thompson, Sylvester Child, Major Martindale, Edward Church, and a number of young men, who were sent aboard the notorious prison ship *Jersey*. Upon leaving Warren, the British continued south to burn Bristol until Colonel William Barton, alarmed by a messenger, raced from Providence with a troop of mounted men to overtake the British at Bristol Ferry. A Warren native and local hero, Barton had led the daring capture of British General William Prescott in Middletown on July 5, 1777.

Following the battle of Rhode Island on July 13, 1778, the Marquis de Lafayette took charge of troops on the eastern shore of the Bay. From Bristol, he removed them to Warren, joining Varnum's brigade at Windmill Hill. During the severe winter of 1778-1779, Windmill Hill was abandoned and troops were quartered in the wharf buildings and private Warren houses. The French army under Count Rochambeau arrived in July, 1780. French troops were quartered on the old Windmill Hill site in October. No longer remaining is the historic "Burr's Tavern" (c. 1680). Originally located on the southwest corner of Main and Washington Streets, General Washington was entertained here during his visit of March 13, 1781. Lost, too, is its rival, "Cole's Hotel," begun in 1762 and destroyed by fire in 1893. On the northeast corner of Main and Joyce Streets, it was patronized by Lafayette who favored Ruby Cole's "jonny-cakes." Unmarked today are the sites of the Windmill Hill Camp on the west bank of the Kickemuit, the Watch House at Burr's Hill, and General William Barton's Birthplace on the north side of Barton Avenue in Touisset.

Several wharfs which date from the Revolutionary War period can still be seen along the Warren waterfront. "Child's Wharf" is at the foot of Miller Street, "Barton's Wharf" and "Baker's Wharf" between Miller and Baker Streets, "Caleb Carr's Wharf" at the foot of Washington Street, and "Caleb Eddy's Wharf" is located just to the south of Carr's ferry landing.

### **Federal-Early Republican Era (1780-1810)**

Following the destruction incurred during the Revolution, Warren recovered rapidly and re-emerged as a prosperous maritime community. The merchant service, trade with the West Indies and Africa, freighting,



Fig. 6: Burr's Tavern (c. 1680), Main/Washington Street, demolished



Fig. 7: Cole's Hotel (1762, burned 1893), Main/Joyce Street



Fig. 8: Rudolphus B. Johnson House (c. 1790, c. 1823),  
43 Miller Street

and the coastal packet trade all flourished. Shipbuilding remained for many years the major industry of Warren; allied industries including sail-making, coopering, iron-moulding, and blacksmithing thrived along Water Street.

From 1790-1810, Warren was second only to Providence as a shipbuilding center. The most famous Warren vessel, the *General Greene*, was built in 1799 by Cromwell and Caleb Child. The *General Greene*, 650 tons with thirty-two guns, a crew of 250 men, and distinguished by a full-length figurehead of General Nathanael Greene, was burned in 1814 in Washington, D. C. to prevent British capture during the War of 1812.

One of the most successful industries was Caleb Wheaton's ropewalk. Ropewalking in the late eighteenth century in Rhode Island was an export industry. The 1810 census reported thirteen ropewalks in the state — two located in Warren. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the large Wheaton and Baker ropewalk existed the entire length of present-day Warren Avenue, beginning at Liberty Street (old Ropewalk Street) and running north to Main Street. The old building "long and low, with its window all arow like the parts of a bulk" produced "hawsers, shrouds, stays, and running rigging which was to be tested by the gales of Cape Horn and the white squalls of Mauritius." No trace today remains of this or the other ropewalk on the north side of Green Street owned in 1810 by William Barker and John Hill.

Slaving was resumed after the Revolution in spite of the 1787 act of the Rhode Island General Assembly forbidding Rhode Islanders to carry slaves into foreign ports and the 1794 action by Congress making it a federal crime to violate state laws against the slave trade and imposing strict penalties on slavers. Warren merchants, including leading citizens Ebenezer Cole, Caleb Eddy, Samuel and Sylvester Child, all owned slavers. From 1803-1807 approximately 600 slaves were carried primarily from Guinea to the Charleston market in Warren ships. By 1808 Congress had closed the slave trade.

The wealth generated by this maritime commerce is clearly manifested in several outstanding Federal-style mansions built by leading citizens and sea-captains. Of note are the pair of "wedding present" houses built by James Maxwell, who survived imprisonment on the

notorious British ship *Jersey* to become one of Warren's leading citizens, ship-owners, and merchants. Both the Rebecca Maxwell Phillips House (1803) at 24 State Street and the Eddy-Cutler House (c. 1800) at 30 State Street are hip-roof, three-story mansions with well-scaled windows, projecting porticoes, and excellent proportions. The Eddy-Cutler house is particularly noteworthy for its Palladian window, flat treatment of brick wall surfaces, and handsome monitor. In the mid-1800's the mansion passed to Captain Charles R. Cutler, a noted whaling captain, textile manufacturer, and Lieutenant Governor of Rhode Island in 1872.

A smaller Federal mansion with a beautiful door and portico is Charles Wheaton's Home (c. 1830) at 33 Liberty Street executed in wood. Cromwell Child's House (1803) at 382 Main Street is an excellent example of a two-story, hip-roof, Federal style brick town-house, now converted to commercial use with its original facade altered. The doorway of the Rudolphus B. Johnson House (c. 1790) at 43 Miller Street, which was almost certainly added later, displays an unusual wooden fan.

The Miller-Abbott House (1789, 1803) at 33 Miller Street, begun by General Nathan Miller of Revolutionary War fame, came into the possession of the noted military Abbott family in 1847. Commodore Joel Abbott was Admiral Perry's second-in-command on the historic trip to "open" Japan. His son, Charles W. Abbott, accompanied his father and later saw service in the Civil War, retiring in 1891 with the rank of Rear Admiral. Charles W. Abbott, Jr. served in the Spanish-American War in 1898 as a Lieutenant in the 12th Infantry and later was appointed Colonel of the 1st Rhode Island Volunteer Infantry. Similar to the Miller-Abbott House, with its central hall plan, gable roof, and elaborate interior woodwork, is the Bliss-Ruisden house (c. 1820) at 600-606 Main Street.<sup>4</sup>

The Masonic Temple (1798) on Baker Street served as Town Hall and home for The Warren Academy (from 1803) during this Early Republican era. Built as the second Masonic Temple in Rhode Island and still used for Masonic meetings, the structure contains beams salvaged by Sylvester Child from British frigates sunk in Newport Harbor. It is outstanding for the elaborate painted interior containing murals done by Max Muller and the excellent Federal-style detailing on the exterior. Details include corner quoins, a modified cornice from Asher Benjamin, and twin pedimented Ionic doors which repeat the cornice design. The Temple was enlarged sometime before 1887, remodeled in 1913, and today is missing its original cupola.



Fig. 9: Miller-Abbott House (1789, 1803), 33 Miller Street



Fig. 10: Bliss-Ruisden House (c. 1820), 600-606 Main Street



Fig. 11: Masonic Temple (1799), Baker Street