

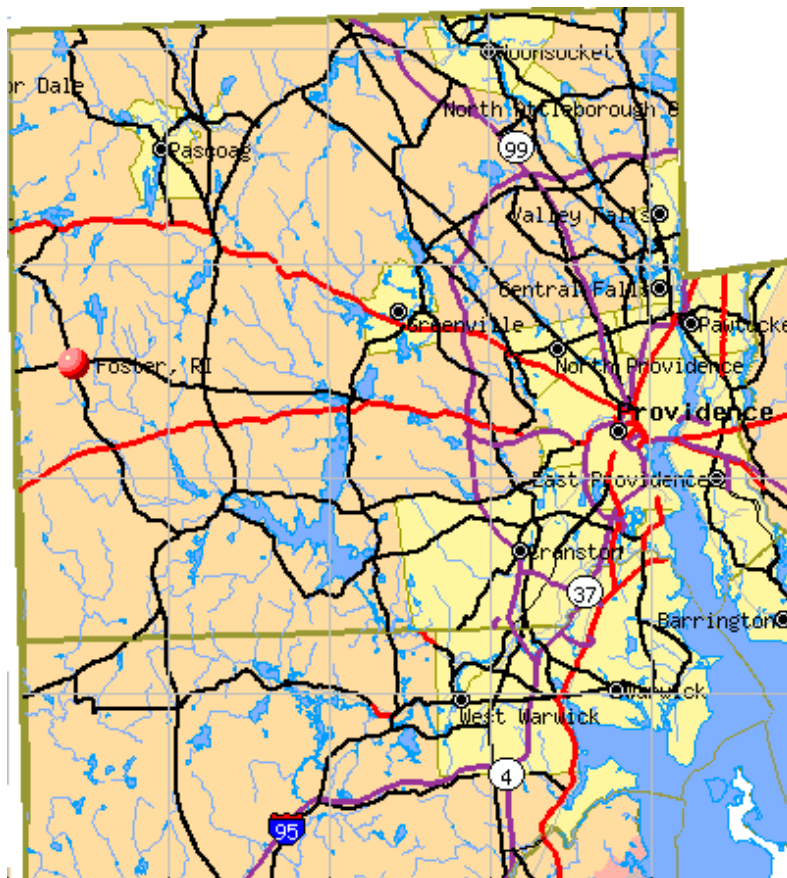
GO TO MASTER INDEX OF RHODE ISLAND PLACES

FOSTER, RHODE ISLAND



"I know histhry isn't thtrue, Hinmissy, because it ain't like what I see ivry day in Halsted Street. If any wan comes along with a histhry iv Greece or Rome that'll show me th' people fightin', gettin' dhrunk, makin' love, gettin' married, owin' th' grocery man an' bein' without hard coal, I'll believe they was a Greece or Rome, but not befur."

— Dunne, Finley Peter,
OBSERVATIONS BY MR. DOOLEY,
New York, 1902





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1662

William Vaughan, Zachariah Rhodes, and Robert Wescott purchased of the native Americans a large tract of land called West Quanaug, to the west of [Providence](#). It seems that the first settler there would be Ezekiel Hopkins — but not until the early years of the 18th Century. This purchase would account for nearly the whole southern half of the town now named [Foster](#) in honor of a distinguished resident who donated to it his library. Foster's Jerimoth Hill is the highest point in [Rhode Island](#), from which on a clear day can be glimpsed the peaks of southern New Hampshire.



The top of this rock along someone's driveway is the highest point at 812 feet above mean sea level — but you're allowed by the landowner to visit only on weekends during full daylight.



1662. Up to this time, the act requiring the conveyances in land to be made in writing was not generally observed, and regulations were made on this subject to prevent apprehended difficulties, confusion and litigation. A bridge was order by the town to be built over Moshassuck river, near the dwelling of Thomas Olney, jun. This is supposed to have been at or near what is now called Randall's bridge.



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After the restoration of the English monarchy it was of course necessary to obtain a new charter, and various expedients were resorted to in order to raise funds on which colonial agent Dr. John Clarke might subsist. A voluntary contribution of £200, to be apportioned among the towns, had been called for by the colonial legislature in 1661, but only some £40 was contributed with “allacrity and cheerfull freeness,” so two men were appointed in each town to see what “moneies” they could “rayse in the several towns,” with “old England moneye” being accounted “double the value of other pay.” For such a purpose the country payment in kind, by means of barter products, was reckoned at about half the value of actual coinage and bills of exchange, because of the cost of transporting such to England and disposing of it there, and New England’s silver coins were reckoned at about two-thirds the value of the English coinage. A tax of £288 was levied in June and was paid by a few men in each town, each of whom was to ask his own town for reimbursement.

READ EDWARD FIELD TEXT

1730



At this point, before other towns were set off, there were at least three [Baptist](#) churches within the limits of the town of [Providence, Rhode Island](#): one established in 1706 in that district which was to become the separate community of [Smithfield](#), another established in 1725 in that district which was to become the separate community of [Scituate](#), plus of course the central one in beautiful downtown Providence. In addition there were Baptist churches in Johnston, [Cranston](#), [Pawtucket](#), [Pawtuxet](#), [East Greenwich](#), and perhaps elsewhere. It was at this point, however, that Scituate became a separated town. [Foster](#) was incorporated with Scituate, forming the western section of that township, and would remain such until 1781, when it would be set off as a distinct and separate township.

1731

When the town of [Scituate](#) in [Rhode Island](#) was incorporated, its first town meeting was held at the Angell Tavern in South Scituate, with [Stephen Hopkins](#) being elected as the first moderator and Joseph Brown as the first clerk. Initially, Scituate boundaries also encompassed the land which is now [Foster](#), so it was bounded by Gloucester to the north, [Providence](#) to the east, [Warwick](#) to the south, and Connecticut to the west. During the Revolutionary War, 76 cannons would be forged at the Hope Furnace in the town.



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1781

The present town boundaries of [Scituate, Rhode Island](#) were created when a western portion of largely unsettled woodlands was subtracted in order to create the town of [Foster](#). This new entity derived its name from US Senator Theodore Foster, a resident who donated to it his library (some of his books remain, including one in which were set down the earliest factoids of the government of the town).

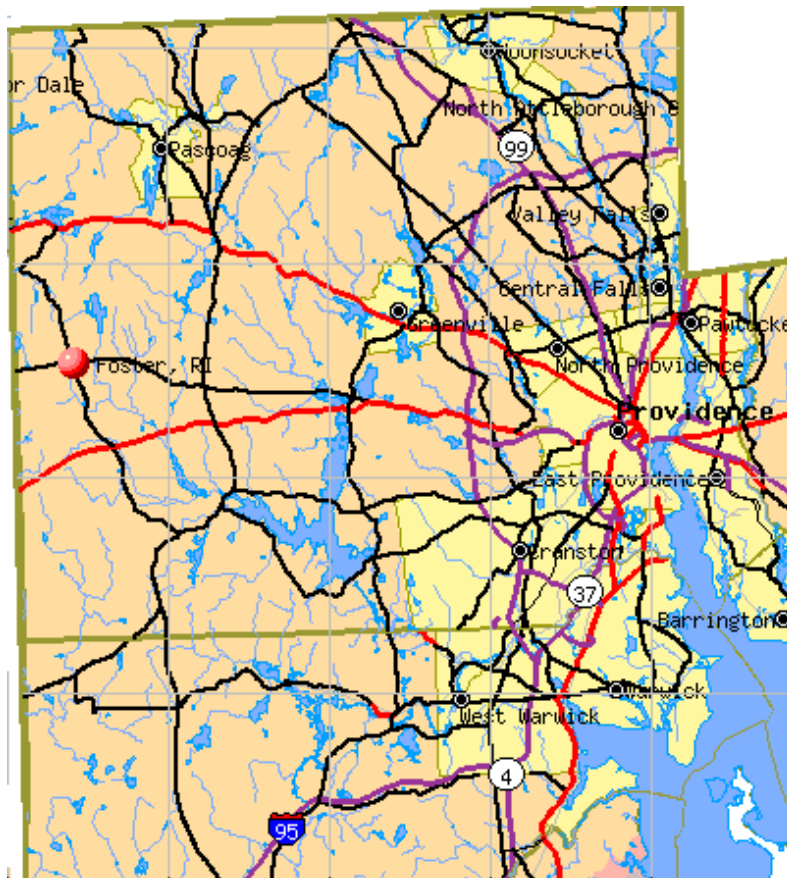


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1795

Construction in [Foster](#) of a townhouse, that has now become the oldest surviving government meetinghouse of its type in the US of A.



On a following screen appears the then-current map of [Rhode Island](#), the “Harris” map:

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

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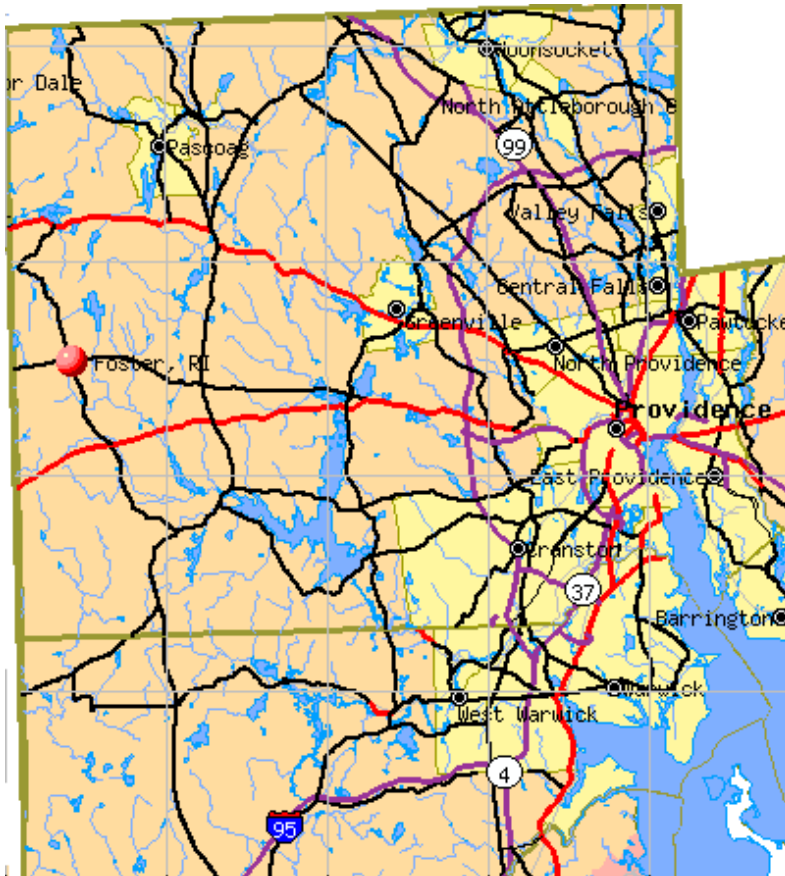


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1878

The history of [Foster](#), per HISTORY OF THE STATE OF [RHODE ISLAND](#) WITH ILLUSTRATIONS (Albert J. Wright, Printer; No. 79 Mille Street, corner of Federal, Boston; Hong, Wade & Co., Philadelphia, pages 133-135):



Foster is a considerable post township, and situated on the extreme western border of the State, some fifteen miles from the city of Providence. It is bounded on the south by Coventry; on the west by the towns of Killingly and Sterling, in Connecticut; on the north by Glocester; and on the east by Scituate. The average length of the town, from north to south, is more than eight miles, and its average breadth about six miles, comprising about fifty square miles. This town is of a granite geological character, and the greater part of it is very rugged, being hilly, rocky, and broken. The soil is of a gravelly loam, and better adapted to grazing than the production of grain. The



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land, in general, is stony and rough, and hard to cultivate. There are extensive forests in the town, particularly in its western section, which afford large supplies of timber and wood. The agricultural products consist of corn, rye, oats, hay, potatoes, butter, cheese, and some other products. The principal stream in the town is the Ponnegansett River, which has its source in a pond by the same name, situated in the town of Glocester. This stream is the principal branch of the Pawtuxet River, the latter of which enters into the Providence River, about five miles below the city of Providence. Hemlock Brook, a branch of the Ponnegansett River, rises in the interior of this township, and, after many windings, runs easterly into the border of the town of Scituate, where it united with the Ponnegansett. Moosup River, a branch of the Quinibaug, runs through the western part of the town, passing into Coventry, and from thence into Connecticut. Upon these streams are good sites for factories, mills, &c., but little use has ever been made of the water-power they furnish. In the year 1662, William Vaughan, Zachariah Rhodes, and Robert Wescott, purchased of the Indians a large tract of land called West Quanaug, bordering on Providence. This was called the 'West Quanaug purchase', and consisted of nearly the whole southern half of the town of Foster. A number of prominent individuals of Newport were afterwards associated with the original purchasers, among whom were Governor John Cranston, Caleb Car, Thomas Clark, Aaron Davis, John Jones, and Latham Clark, whose descendants, or some of them at least, are found at present as residents in the town. In 1707, this purchase was divided by lot among twenty-nine proprietors; but the first settlement was not commenced until 1717. The first settler (so says tradition) was Ezekiel Hopkins, whose descendants are even now quite numerous in the town. Foster was incorporated with Scituate in 1730, forming the western section of that township, and remained up to 1781, when it was set off as a distinct and separate township. It derived its name, Foster, from the Hon. Theodore Foster, for many years a United States senator; and for this mark of esteem upon the part of the citizens of the town, Mr. Foster presented the town with a library. Some of the books are still preserved, and especially one in which was written the early records of the town, and is now in the possession of the town clerk. As has been remarked, the town of Foster was set off from Scituate in 1781, and its first town-meeting was held, Nov. 19, 1781, at the house of Thomas Hammond. This was done by an act of the General Assembly. They organized by the choice of the following officers: John Williams, Moderator; John Wescott, Town Clerk; John Williams, chosen first Deputy, and Jonathan Hopkins, Jr., chosen second Deputy, to represent the town in the next General Assembly. They then adjourned to the 23d of November for the choice of the remainder of the town officers. They afterwards



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met, pursuant to adjournment, at the house of Mr. Hammond. Enoch Hopkins was chosen Town Sergeant; Timothy Hopkins, Christopher Colwell, William Tyler, Daniel Cole, Stephen Colgrove, and William Howard, were chosen Town Councilmen; Jonathan Hopkins, Jr., was chosen Town Treasurer; Daniel Hopkins was chosen Sealer of Weights and Measures; Enoch Hopkins, Vendue Master; Jonathan Hopkins, Jr., George Dorrance, Jr., and Abraham Walker, Assessors of Rates, and to have their accounts adjusted by the town; John Cole and Josiah Harrington, Jr., were chosen Collectors of Taxes, and to have sixpence on the pound for doing the same; John Hammond was chosen Pound-keeper; Joseph Weatherhead, Peter Cook, and Daniel Cole, Viewers of Estates; Josiah Harrington, Jr., and Levi Wade were chosen Constables; Peter Cook and Noah Miller were chosen Overseers of the Poor; Peter Cook, Joseph Davis, and John Williams were chosen a committee to audit the town treasurer's accounts. Voted, that the surveyors of highways stand as chosen before the division of the town, except Abraham Wilcox, Francis Fuller, and John Wescott, who had already been chosen. Peter Cook, James Seaman, and Noah Miller, were chosen Fence-viewers. Joseph Davis, Peter Cook, and John Cole were chosen a committee to meet a committee appointed by the General Assembly, to ascertain the proportion of taxes between the towns of Scituate and Foster, on Friday, the 27th of November, at the house of Thomas Waterman, in Coventry. Voted, that John Westcott and Jonathan Hopkins be appointed to receive, in behalf of the town, the case and books given to said town by Theodore Foster, Esq., and also to return the thanks of the town to Mr. Foster for the same.

Reuben Wescott, Luke Phillips, Eleazer Bowen, Peleg Frey, Benjamin Frey, David Hatch, and Reuben Blanchard were propounded in order to be voted freemen of said town. Voted, that this meeting be adjourned until the seventh day of December next, at the house of Thomas Hammond, and that notice be given by the clerk for making a town tax.

At a town meeting holden in the town of Foster, on the fourth day of March, 1782, it was voted, that Mr. James Seaman be, and is hereby, appointed to erect a pair of stocks and whipping-post for the use of the town.

The population of the town in 1782 was 1,763; while in 1875, according to the census of that year, it represented a population of only 1,543. In 1820, it exhibits the largest growth, its population reaching 2,900. It is a purely agricultural township, no attempts having been made to develop any of the various manufacturing industries. The whole number of acres, improved and unimproved, is 25,764, valued at \$449,690; average per acre, \$17.45. The total value of farm and forest products, in 1875, was \$145,994, giving to each inhabitant an average of \$94.62., and an average production per acre of \$5.67. Foster at one time exhibited a good deal of



enterprise and thrift, and bid fair to become quite an important commercial centre. A bank was early established in the town, and a few energetic and active citizens attempted to infuse a new life into the business interests, and thus establish a healthy growth in all of its material industries. The peculiar location, and the mistake made in dividing the towns when it was set off from Scituate, thus depriving it of a share of that town's water-privilege, and placing it under peculiar disadvantages for communication with Providence, have undoubtedly rendered any material development and individual enterprise have retarded progress.

Mount Hygeia.

The settlement of this celebrated spot was begun by two of the most learned and distinguished men in the history of the town of Foster, if not in the State. Theodore Foster and Solomon Drowne are names that are intimately connected with the history of Foster, and occupy a prominent and honorable place in the historical record of their native State. The following interesting sketch of the early life and settlement of these distinguished personages, at what is familiarly known as 'Mount Hygeia', was kindly furnished by the Hon. Amos Perry of Providence.

Among the prominent men whose names are enrolled on the records of the town, Senator Theodore Foster, after whom the town was named, and Dr. Solomon Drowne, the eminent botanist, unquestionably hold a first place. Therefore, without disparagement to other worthy residents of that rural district, we shall offer a brief paragraph, to recall the images and preserve the memory of these two men, 'par nobile fratrum', who represent types of character that well-nigh belong to the lost arts. The friendship of these men was formed and cemented in boyhood's days.

Foster came from Brookfield, Mass., while yet in his teens; graduated at Rhode Island College in 1770; and Drowne graduated three years later. The boys roomed, studied, and took their meals together, in the old Drowne mansion, on Cheapside, Providence; worshipped together in the old First Baptist Church; had each other's company in visiting favorite sylvan retreats and exploring the forests for miles around, and had longer and more intimate relations than ordinarily fall to the lot of college classmates. Writings and traditions are still preserved that give an idea of the visions and romantic schemes of these youthful students. Science, philosophy, and belles-lettres were their delight, and in order to indulge their taste for these pursuits, they agreed to withdraw, as soon as circumstances would permit, from places frequented by the multitude, and take up their abode in adjoining farms, where they could have each other's society and pass their days in rural retirement. This



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cherished plan was, however, for a long time frustrated by the force of circumstances, and seemed to be forgotten. Indeed, nearly a quarter of a century elapsed with only occasional and hurried meetings.

[Hon. Theodore] Foster, besides contracting a matrimonial alliance with a sister of the late Governor James Fenner, studied and practiced law in Providence; was town clerk twelve years; was drawn into the exciting life of a politician, and in 1790 was made a United States senator, which office he held till 1803. Drowne studied and practiced medicine; married the lady of his choice, Miss Elizabeth Russell of Boston; served as surgeon in the Revolutionary war; spent considerable time in foreign travel and study, and, like General Varnum and Admiral Whipple, acted as a pioneer in the settlement of the West.

In the summer of 1800, while Mr. Foster was still a member of the Senate, these quondam room-mates and cherished friends met in Providence. They were somewhat changed by the discipline of life, yet in heart and soul seemed to each other as in boyhood's days. Amid their hard encounters with the outward world, they had maintained their loyalty to truth and duty, and sustained their interest in the pursuits which were the delight of their youth. Shortly before this meeting, Mr. Foster, who had been bereft of the companion of his joys and sorrows, wrote Dr. Drowne several letters, in some of which he referred in touching terms to his affliction and to his future prospects. The latter, acting the part of the good physician, sought to amuse and soothe his friend, and recommended in the most felicitous terms, religion, philosophy, science, literature, and finally, a second matrimonial alliance.

In the following extract from a letter dated May 2, 1800, the doctor shows a deep appreciation of the senator's needs, and indicates in no ambiguous terms the step that should be taken: 'Who, at your time of life', says the doctor, 'could think of passing the remainder of his years without a partner of his joys and cares, when qualified so peculiarly to reciprocate domestic felicity?' The doctor then proceeds to discuss the matrimonial question, and in his remarks brings in a case where there is a great disparity of years. A week later, the doctor made the following manifest effort to divert his friend and draw him into the field of philosophy:

Dr. Drowne to Senator Foster.

'Your very agreeable letter of the 2d instant was received by me this beautiful morning, and I could not but consider it a confirmation of the congeniality of our minds; for while I lay awake last night, my imagination was roving amid the wonders of creation. Among the wild fancies in which I indulged, one was, how this wonderful structure, the terraqueous globe, would appear to a person entirely detached from it, and



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contemplating it unsupported by any visible power, wheeling majestically through the vast expanse of heaven. I was next led to admire the surprising faculties and capacities of the human mind, so fitted to embrace sublime ideas, and to range, I had almost said, beyond creation's bourne. Of what an astonishingly projecting genius is man possessed! He has not hesitated to propose cutting a world asunder and joining immense oceans together, as at Panama. Thus, if he could not create, he has dared to think of altering and improving the formation of a globe. Surely, thought I, that principle in man which can contemplate and project such mighty things must participate of immortality. But perhaps, at least, I must come to your conclusion – Guesswork, all!'

The meeting, which took place in the closing summer month of 1800, and had been anticipated with pleasure, was the occasion of a full and free expression of the sentiments and principles that were the mainspring of their lives. The pleasures of friendship seemed not only an abiding reality, but fully within their reach. In this state of mind, Mr. Foster, who had an interest in the town that had taken his name, proposed to his friend to purchase a farm, then for sale, adjoining his estate, and carry into practice certain cherished ideas of their youthful days.

The proposition came just in the nick of time. Dr. Drowne, who had had enough of the West, and was intent on enjoying again the social privileges of his youth, lent a willing ear. The farm was surveyed; its soil pronounced good; its situation elevated and eligible; its air bracing and salubrious; its sylvan scenery charming and exquisite, and its title was, of course, secured. Then forthwith began to be discussed and matured plans for the combined settlement, with model farms and gardens and the various appliances of civilization and refinement. The two founders of the settlement, or perhaps I should say, the poets, 'That with no mean fight designed to soar,' having determined the site of their future home and enterprise, sought to have it designated by some appropriate name. Dr. Drowne called it Mount Hygeia, after the Greek goddess of health, and wrote a letter to illustrate the fitness of this name, and composed some verses invoking the favor of that cherished divinity of heathen mythology. Senator Foster caught up the glowing strains of his friend, and wrote, while at his official post at the national capital, the following poem: –

'The Anticipation of Mount Hygeia, in the Town of Foster.

'Hail, Hygeia! Rhode Island's fairest seat!
Famed Fosteria's highest hill!
Where beauty, love, and friendship meet,



And Rapture's sweetest joys distill!
The noblest boast of Narragansett's groves
In great Miantonomi's day,
Where native chieftains told their softest loves,
And cheerful passed their time away!
Raptured here we see the wide-spreading plain,
Far south o'er beauteous towns extend,
To where the Atlantic joins its vast domain,
And where our views in sweet confusion blend.
Cheer'd by rich Ponaganset's pleasant stream,
We here behold the Muse's haunt;
Where Fosteria's matchless rock is seen
Sequestered far from meagre want.
Winding up towards Hygeia's healthful height,
See good Drowne's rich orchards smile, —
Drowne, well informed and wise, here finds delight
Cultivating the fertile soil.
Worthy Drowne! known on Europe's distant shore,
Where he was taught the healing art,
Is famed for greatness here, nor wishes more, —
Wish supreme of an honest heart.
Drowne and Foster, blest friendship here enjoy,
Like Castor and Pollux of old;
Their families, too, in like sweet employ,
Live in bliss of Ganymede told.
Millard, prudent and good, also dwells nigh,
To both, the agreeable friend;
His family, worth and goodness supply,
Partaking the friendship they blend.
Thus good from each is here from each acquired,
Each studies the other to bless;
Each always helping each, yet never tired,
Nor grows their stock of goodness less.'

The Millard referred to in the last stanza but one, was the father of Senator Foster's second wife. It is pleasant to observe, that these life-long friends maintained, despite the severe demands upon their time, familiarity with the ancient classics, and had at their command choice expressions from Latin, Greek, French, and English authors. The poets, regardless of nationality and tongue, they claimed as special friends, manifesting for the memory of Virgil and Horace unusual interest.

In the spring of 1802, Dr. Drowne writes Senator Foster thus: —
- 'There is a spot on my farm which, by anticipation, we call 'Virgil's Bower'. There I intend to plant the elm, and more virgiliano, wed thereto the vine. There, too, the poplar of his native land shall rear its spiry top, and the Babylonian willow wave its drooping limbs to his memory. Beneath their shade, in the company of my friend, I shall feel that enthusiasm which Virgil will inspire.'

By this letter, Mr. Foster was wrought into ecstasies of delight, and while sitting in his senatorial seat, during a session of the Senate, wrote thus: — 'Thursday, April 22, 1802. 'Dr. Solomon Drowne: My Dear Friend, — I participate in your 'anticipation' of the pleasure we are to have in 'Virgil's



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Bower', on Mount Hygeia. Oh, my friend, there is in friendship something more than a name. It is the sublime bliss of kindred spirits. It is the love of souls.' [Here follows a quotation in Greek, which literally rendered is: Two bodies, indeed, but one soul.] Always sincerely the friend of yourself and family, Theodore Foster.'

'N. B. I hope you will not let the spring pass without setting out the trees, – the elms, the poplars, and the willows, which are to witness our friendship for the memory of the Bard of Mantua. If you will attend to this business, I will procure a poem, – I have a suitable one, – to be composed and published, to record your laudable spirit in setting apart a favorite spot on Hygeia's Mount for the purpose of honoring the memory of a man who honored his country. Cujus fama est ubique. Quod scribo, scribo seriatim. A motto for your bower may be: Nomen Virgilii est hic sed Fama est ubique.'

To give an extended sketch of the Mount Hygeia settlement, with notices of its various literary, scientific, benevolent, and business enterprises, is beyond the limits of our work. On the other hand, to fail to give an outline of a movement that taxed the skill and resources of two worthy, public-spirited and eminent citizens, and was watched for years with lively interest, would incur the reproach of negligence, if not of downright injustice. Largely through the influence of Senator Foster, a turnpike was projected and built from Providence to Hartford, and the part of the road that passes through his farm was made of great width, and called the Appian Way. A circulating library and a bank were established in the town, and a plan was drawn up for an extensive seminary of learning. Indeed, many and various plans were devised for benevolence, pleasure, and profit, most of which have long since passed from the memory of men. Mr. Foster took special pleasure in displaying the stock and products of his farm, and generously exerted his influence to awaken interest in agricultural pursuits. While Dr. Drowne had no lower estimate of the dignity and importance of agricultural pursuits, his pride and delight was his garden, which, with its great variety and rare specimens of trees, plants, and flowers, and with quaint mounds and sylvan bowers, was a curiosity to strangers, and attracted for years visitors from far and near. Through his friend Virgil sang of 'Arms and the man who fled from Troy', rural delights were ever the theme of his Muse. Walking leisurely through his garden, or occupying the 'Muse's Seat', he composed many verses, of which the following may serve as a specimen; –

'When calm reclined in woodbine bower,
I spend the meditative hour,
Or careless wind these walks along,
And listen to the thrush's song;
Salubrious odors floating round,
Mingled with melody of sound,



Sweetly combined the heart to warm,
Touched by fair Nature's varied form.'

Adapting the harmonious utterances of favorite authors to his needs, he often performed his devotions without resorting to temple made with hands, as in the following slightly changed extract from Thomson: —

' — Lead on, ye Powers,
That o'er the pleasant garden scene preside,
Oh, lead us to the sweet embow'ring walks
Of mild Hygeia's favorite abode.
Not Persian Cyrus, nor Ionia's shore
E'er saw such sylvan scenes.'

Dr. Drowne took up his residence at Mount Hygeia in 1801, and Mr. Foster at the close of his senatorial career, in 1803. While Dr. Drowne was a popular and successful physician, he cared less for the practice of his profession than for scientific pursuits, especially for botany, which he taught successfully for many years in Brown University. He would have been content to pass his life in the quiet of his study and the circuit of his garden, with only an occasional ramble for the enjoyment of rural scenery. Mr. Foster was more inclined to history, statistics, and general literature, and looked for a wider field of action. He was accustomed to jot down passing occurrences and thoughts in his books and papers as he read. Thus, his old almanacs, pamphlets, and books are now treasuries of history. While Messrs. Foster and Drowne remained devoted friends to the last, the former, however, satiated with rural pleasure, and craving more social intercourse, left Mount Hygeia in 1820 for a home in Providence, where he died in 1828, leaving, as the fruit of his industry, a voluminous collection of manuscripts, supposed to be of an historic character, that remains locked up in the archives of the State Historical Society. Dr. Drowne, surrounded by affectionate and devoted members of his family, and spending some time each year in the discharge of his professional duties in Brown University, became more and more attached to country life, and thus continued his residence at Mount Hygeia until his death, in 1834; and his house and lands are still owned and occupied by his descendants, including one daughter, who remains, with the sterling virtues of her parents, to direct the affairs of the estate. With an extended sketch of the Mount Hygeia settlement and its founders, should be prepared and published a collection of the writings of these remarkable men. While the literary remains of Dr. Drowne are in the hands of worthy descendants, some of whom are eminently qualified to prepare a suitable memorial, the responsibility of prosecuting this work must rest with them.

But while the manuscripts and various documents left by Senator Foster are in the keeping of the Historical Society, with the express approbation of the State, a persistent demand for action



is both proper and becoming. If the Foster papers contain nothing of value, then let it so appear, and the public curiosity be quieted. If, on the other hand, they are of a character to shed light on the history of the State, and thus promote the public good, then let the public have the benefit of them, and render due honor to their distinguished author. This wholesale entombment, without so much as a coroner's inquest, accords not with generally received ideas of justice.

Post-offices and Villages.

Foster has four post-offices, styled, respectively, Foster Centre, North Foster, South Foster, and Moosup Valley. Its most considerable village is the Hemlock, where the Foster Centre post-office is kept. The town meetings are held there, and a store kept by G. W. Phillips; and one of the historic men of the town and State, the venerable Judge Daniel Howard, still lives, and delights to recite incidents and scenes that he witnessed more than three-quarters of a century ago.

Hopkins Mills is the second village in importance, having a saw-mill, a grist-mill, a small manufactory, and the South Foster post-office. The late Judge Hopkins resided there, and had charge, for many years, of the excellent library founded by Senator Foster.

Mount Vernon used to be a village, but now shows little more than the relics of its former self, — the sites of its bank, manufacturing establishment, doctor's office, and other agencies. The Mount Vernon post-office has taken the name of Moosup Valley, and been removed to Tylerville. The North Foster post-office is kept at a locality near Mount Hygeia settlement, formerly called Foster's office, but now designated as Cooke's. Though Foster makes a meagre show of population, wealth, and enterprise, it is well represented in these respects beyond its own limits. Many persons who first saw the light of day, and received the enforced lessons of industry and economy in that town, are now enterprising, affluent, and honored citizens of prosperous towns and municipalities in different parts of our country. Thus Foster is represented in the faculty of Brown University, in the board of trade and city council of Providence, among bank officers and leading merchants, in the State Legislature, and in the professions of law, medicine, and theology. So it appears that names that have faded in the town, or been dropped from its records, have, in many cases, acquired additional honor, due primarily to the simple fare and practical instruction received at the homes and in the schools of that town.

Churches.

The first church in the town was of the Calvinistic Baptist



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order, and was established shortly before the incorporation of the town. The meeting-house was built on an elevated acre lot, which was given for the purpose of Mr. Barnard Haile, and is now called the Meeting-house Land, near Hopkins Mills. This church was soon divided, and a Six-Principle Baptist church was formed. The next church was of the Freewill Baptist order, and it was common for preachers of various sects to hold religious services at the school-houses. There are in the town, at the present time, six churches, — two styled Christian, three Freewill Baptist, and one Union.

The honor of establishing and superintending the first Sunday school in the town, belongs to the late William Drowne, Dr. Solomon Drowne's eldest son, who, aided by his sisters, afterwards carried on for successive seasons, three Sunday schools at the same time, in different neighborhoods. Senator Foster took part in the first Sunday school, and left a record of its proceedings, including the dates of its sessions, and the number of pupils and teachers in attendance from time to time; but the almanac in which the records were made, having been removed from its place in the Historical Cabinet, cannot now be found for reference.



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1924

At its Newport Torpedo Station on what little still remained above water level of [Goat Island](#) in the harbor of [Newport, Rhode Island](#), the US Navy completed the development of a Mark 14 proximity fuse, brainchild of Ralph Waldo Christie, that would fit on the nose of a torpedo.

MARY DYER

During the 1920s the [Ku Klux Klan](#) was active in [Rhode Island](#), with one of its monster rallies being held during June of this year on the Old Home Day grounds of [Foster](#), with 8,000 in attendance and the honor of delivering the keynote address going to a white Protestant man from the South, United States Senator J.

Thomas Heflin of Alabama.



The focus of this KKK anger in the rural northwest corner of Rhode Island was largely upon the Catholic immigrants of the cities rather than upon the local black citizenry.



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1999

April 26, Monday: An article in the ProJo by staff writer Robert L. Smith:

In the 1920s, the Klan ruled the countryside. The state's Klan groups drew from the skilled labor and professional classes and Klan members controlled many towns' government and police.

Growing up in the Smithfield countryside, Dr. Daniel Russell glimpsed one of the seldom-told chapters in local history.

On summer Saturday nights, he and a friend would scramble up to the roof of the icehouse in the back yard and peer across Georgiaville Pond.

They climbed at dusk, because that's when the people in the field on the other side -the adults in ghostly white- lit the fiery cross.

"It was certainly something to see," recalls Russell, 79, a retired dentist. "We couldn't hear what they were saying, but they'd have a big meeting and then they'd burn a cross. They had on these white robes and they would parade around. We used to kind of laugh."

As the flames died, the two boys would climb down and run home, as if sensing they had witnessed something they were not meant to see. They probably need not have worried about their safety. Those hooded marchers were almost certainly neighbors.

In 1920s Rhode Island, especially in the rural towns of the Northwest, a new force captured the allegiance of townspeople. The knights of the Ku Klux Klan spread their anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant, and anti-black venom among a welcoming populace. Klan gatherings were as common as clambakes and often drew a comparable crowd.

Young Daniel Russell was on his perch frequently.

Beginning in 1925, when an estimated 2,000 people assembled for the state's first Klan wedding, the Klan Field in Georgiaville drew regular gatherings. Smaller Klan groups met in Scituate churches, Burrillville barns, and the lodges of leading fraternal societies.

Their white hoods masked bankers, merchants and even town officials.

"It's sort of like a secret that people don't talk about," says Scituate town historian Barbara Sarkesian. "All the movers and shakers in the community -the Masons and the Odd Fellows- were all members of the Klan."

In a state founded on the principle of religious tolerance, America's foremost hate group found fertile soil, the historical record indicates.



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Not all Rhode Islanders embraced the Klan. In fact, evidence suggests most rejected the secret order and expressed disgust with its ideals. But the so-called Invisible Empire was popular enough in June 1924 to draw 8,000 people to a monster rally behind Foster Town Hall.

Scituate resident Norman Smith, a retired professor of history at Rhode Island College, says such rallies must have tapped a deep well of passion.

"You can't find gatherings that size in [Foster](#) today," he says. That one could witness such a crowd in 1924 spoke to the times and to the changing demographics of the Ocean State.

Rhode Island in 1920 witnessed what historians call the second coming of the [Ku Klux Klan](#). A secret society that grew out of white Southern anger with the Civil War and its aftermath, the Klan had died out by 1870, only to be reborn at the close of World War I.

This time, recruiters roamed the North and New England states in particular, where white Protestant communities viewed with alarm the waves of arriving immigrants.

"The Klan became massively popular everywhere," reaching 5 million members in 1925, says Mark Potok, an editor for the Klanwatch program of the Southern Poverty Law Center.

"What they're trading on is not really black stuff anymore, but Catholics and Jews. It's the peak of immigration in the United States, and the Klan was desperately anti-Catholic."

In 1920, Rhode Island's black population composed less than 4 percent of the state's residents. But, in 1921, about 45 percent of the state's 600,000 people were Catholic, and Klan recruiters often found a welcome mat off village lanes.

While the Klan leadership lived in and around Providence, much of its strength flowed from the countryside.

"The rural towns were where the immigrants were not," explains Smith, who has studied the Rhode Island Klan. "There were already many immigrants in eastern Rhode Island, but in the west, you still had a large number of swamp Yankees and other groups, which is where most of [the Klan's] support came from." Rhode Island Klansmen differed from their southern brethren in several respects. The Klan was linked with Democrats in the South, but Klansmen of New England were most often associated with Republicans, the more conservative party, Smith says.

The state's Klan groups also drew largely from the business and professional classes, not the poor and uneducated. They staged gatherings flavored with familiar cultural trappings.

"Outside of New England, you didn't see many Klans celebrating at clambakes," says Smith.

But in western Rhode Island, men and women wore white sheets to oyster suppers, chowder dinners and tent meetings. By 1924, newspapers were announcing Klan meetings as they might a community picnic.



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A news brief on the front page of The Evening Bulletin of July 18, 1924, alerted Klansmen to a "union meeting" at Scituate's Advent Christian Church. Klan faithful also met at the Odd Fellows Hall in Clayville and at Eagle Schoolhouse on Gleaner Chapel Road, Sarkesian says.

More prominent were gatherings at the Grant estate in Georgiaville, where the Klan owned a farm field, in the [Smithfield](#) village of Greenville and in Foster Center.

Alabama's Sen. Thomas Heflin spoke at the Klan rally on the Old Home Day grounds in Foster on June 21, 1924, an event surpassed in size one month later.

According to the Providence Sunday Journal, more than 8,000 Klansmen and sympathizers from Providence and Kent Counties poured into the natural amphitheater behind Foster Town Hall early in the afternoon.

Car caravans arrived from Connecticut, Navy men from Newport. Local constables directed traffic.

"The exercises opened shortly after one o'clock . . . when a chowder dinner was served," the newspaper observed. Organizers staged a baseball game, running races, "contests for children." At night, a giant cross blazed while hooded Klansmen initiated 200 members in the glow of car headlights.

The Rhode Island Klan appeared to differ from other Klan dens in one other key aspect: It was not commonly associated with violence. Newspaper reports make no mention of lynchings, floggings or brandings common in other states.

Still, it dealt in terror.

Seeking to educate black children in the spirit of Booker T. Washington, the Rev. William Holland, a black minister from Virginia, in 1922 began busing black youth from Providence to North Scituate, and boarding them at a school he called The Watchman Institute.

The trade school and summer Bible camp was seared by suspicious fires twice in the '20s. The first blaze, in 1924, destroyed a boys' dormitory wing; the second, in 1926, badly damaged the girls' dormitory. Newspapers reported the Klan was suspected, but no one was ever arrested.

Elsewhere, there were occasional cross-burnings and incidents of racist leafleting.

Meanwhile, immigrants and minorities passing through western Rhode Island could hold little faith in public officials. The Klan's tentacles reached into almost every civic group and myriad public offices.

In the mid-1920s in Hopkinton, Klansmen held 11 of 22 town offices, 4 of 5 seats on the Town Council, the Rhode Island Historical Society reported in the May 1989 issue of the journal Rhode Island History.

The police chiefs in Hopkinton, Coventry and East Greenwich belonged to the Klan. So did the sheriff of Washington County,



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two state senators and the master of the state Grange. A grand cyclops, John A. Domin, lived in Smithfield. Analyzing a report from a 1928 investigation by the state House of Representatives into the Klan, historian Joseph Sullivan determined that 63 percent of the state's known Klansmen held skilled or professional jobs. He attributed this to Klan dues, \$15 a year, or about the weekly wage of a well-paid laborer. But it meant many people dealt with the Klan in the normal course of life.

The man who owned the grocery store in Daniel Russell's boyhood village belonged to the Klan. So did a neighboring farmer. Russell recalls a big white arrow painted down the center of Farnum Pike, and words directing motorists toward the Klan field off Stillwater Road.

"That's how brazen they were," he said.

The state Assembly report sprang from a scandal that helped seal the Klan's demise in Rhode Island. In March 1928, The Providence Journal disclosed that the Klan had infiltrated the state militia and controlled three of the state's historic militia brigades.

A subsequent investigation helped smoke out Klan leaders and scare off potential members, historians say.

By the close of the decade, the Klan was a shadow of the group that once drew thousands to fiery gatherings in nighttime fields. But its impact probably echoed for years, insuring that, for many, the Rhode Island countryside remained a forbidding place.

Scituate town historian Sarkesian, in 1988, interviewed Mr. Holland's granddaughter, Jacqueline Holland Coffey, who grew up at the Watchman School on a small hill on the edge of the postcard village of North Scituate.

One night in the 1930s, she told the historian, the Watchman schoolchildren looked out to see a cross burning on the lawn. North Scituate Elementary School stood just a few dozen yards away, but Jacqueline Holland Coffey was sent to elementary school in Providence.

Says Sarkesian: "The children were not allowed to go down to the village alone."

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"It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago."

- Remark by character "Garin Stevens"
in William Faulkner's INTRUDER IN THE DUST



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ARRGH AUTOMATED RESearch REPORT

GENERATION HOTLINE



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