Swansea Women in History

Cheryl Bogle, President
Swansea Historical Society

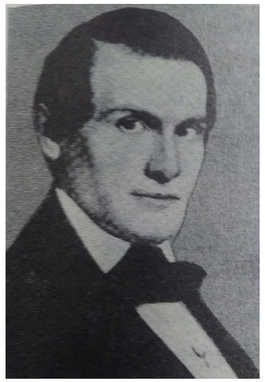
Julia Ann Briggs Chace Birch Stevens

We begin with Julia Ann Briggs Chase Birch Stevens. Julia was the starting point for what we have in Swansea Village in regards to our historical buildings and the Stevens home.



Julia Ann Briggs Chace Birch Stevens
Timeline

- 1827 - Julia was born on April 13th to Royal Chase and Patience Luther Chase on Elm Street in Swansea.
- 1853 - Julia met her first husband, James Birch, through her half-brother Otis Kelton. James and his best friend, Frank S. Stevens, worked for Otis as stable boys in Providence.


James Birch

- 1854 - Julia and James marry. Julia was 27 and James was 26.
- 1855 - Their first child, Frances Birch, was born, but died 7 days later.
- 1856 - Their son, Frank Shaw Birch, was born. Frank died in 1896 at the age of 39. He was known to have gambling and alcohol problems.

Julia Ann Briggs Chace Birch Stevens Timeline

- 1856 - The Birch Mansion was built. Its original address was 160 Elm Street, now known as the Stevens Mansion at 24 Main Street.



Julia Ann Briggs Chace Birch Stevens Timeline

- 1857 - James Birch and Frank Stevens start San Antonio-San Diego Mail-Line, the first transcontinental mail route in the US.



Julia Ann Briggs Chace Birch Stevens Timeline

- 1857 - September 12th, James Birch lost his life in the fatal crash of the steamship Central America.



- 1858 - Frank Stevens and Julia Birch got married and Frank moved to Swansea.
- 1859 - Julia gave birth to their first child, Lucinda Stevens, who died 13 days later. Julia and Frank did not have any other children.

Julia Ann Briggs Chace Birch Stevens Timeline

- 1871 - February 18th , Julia passed away at the age of 44.
- 1872 - Frank Shaw Birch, son of Julia and James, was adopted by Frank Stevens
- 1873 - Frank Stevens married Elizabeth Richmond Case



Julia Ann Briggs Chace Birch Stevens

Some examples of Stevens' Silver, also known as Birch's Silver.





Elizabeth Richmond Case Stevens

Elizabeth Richmond Case Stevens was born April 22, 1849 to Joseph Case and Eliza S. Gray Case. Her siblings were Mary Case (1846-1935) and William B. Case (1847-1854), who died at the age of 7.



Elizabeth Richmond Case Stevens

Elizabeth was 24 years old when she married Frank Shaw Stevens in 1873. It was two years after the death of Frank's first wife, Julia Chase Birch Stevens, who passed away at the age of 44.

Frank had returned to Swansea in 1858 with then wife Julia Chase Birch Stevens, whom he married a few months prior. In 1859, she gave birth to Lucinda Stevens who died soon after birth.



Elizabeth Richmond Case Stevens



After selling the profitable stage lines, Frank invested in the burgeoning textile mill business in Fall River and was a partner in the firm of Paris and Allen wholesale liquor dealers of New York. 26 years after becoming a Massachusetts resident, he was elected to the Massachusetts state senate.
During the 1850's and until his death, Frank Stevens was the largest landowner and wealthiest man in Swansea.



Elizabeth Richmond Case Stevens

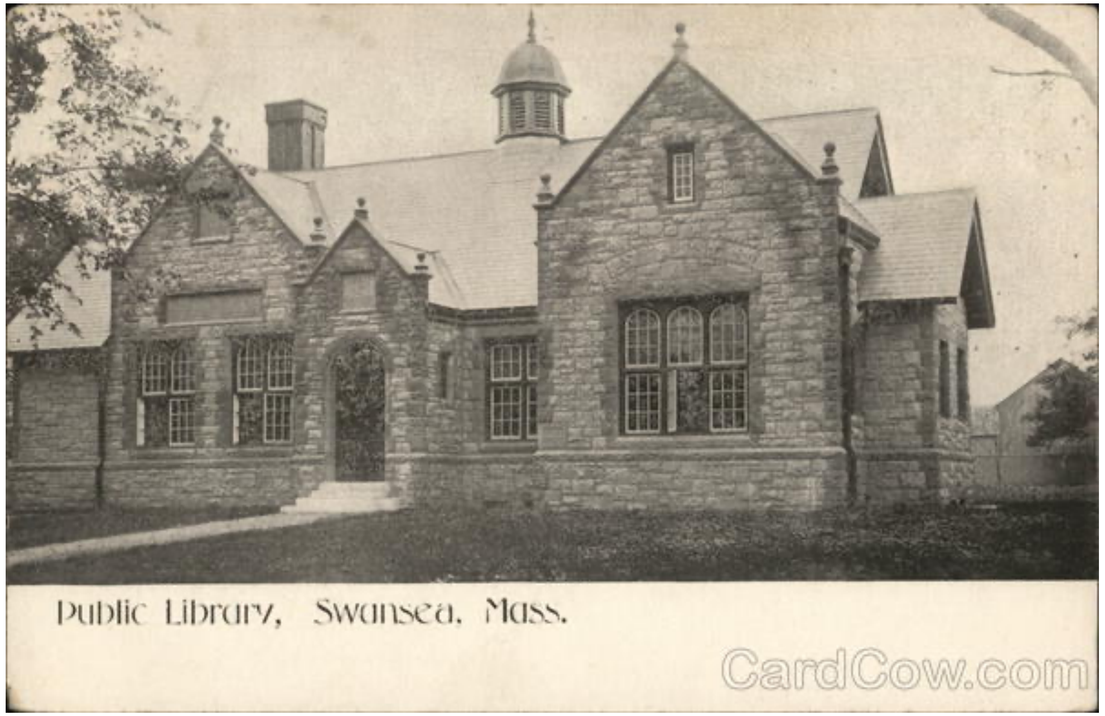
Frank provided funds to build the Town Hall of Swansea in 1888, which opened in 1890. It is still in use today.





Elizabeth Richmond Case Stevens

Frank Stevens put funds for the new library in his will. Elizabeth made sure that the Frank Stevens Public Library (now Swansea Free Public Library) was built. It opened in 1900.





Elizabeth Richmond Case Stevens

Also included in the will was money for the Frank S. Stevens School, which opened in 1908. Today, it is the Swansea School Administration Building.





Elizabeth Richmond Case Stevens

Frank also paid for the new high school, Joseph Case High School, named after his father-in-law. This included a large donation to the Swansea School system. Today, it is Joseph Case Junior High School.





Elizabeth Richmond Case Stevens

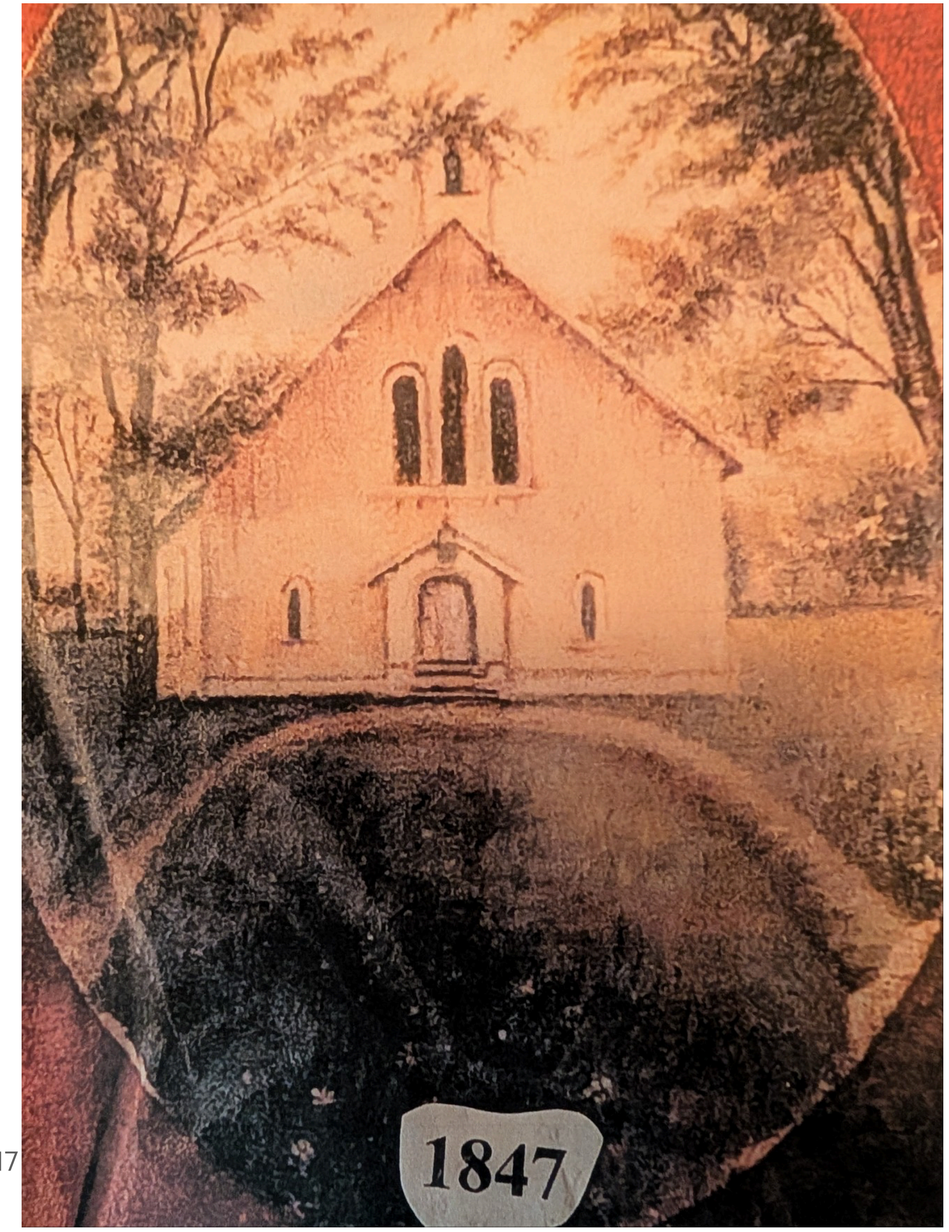
Frank Stevens also willed funds to replace the original Christ Church, which was consecrated on December 2, 1847.





Elizabeth Richmond Case Stevens

Painting of the
original Christ Church
in 1847.



Elizabeth Richmond Case Stevens

The new Christ Church was completed in 1900.



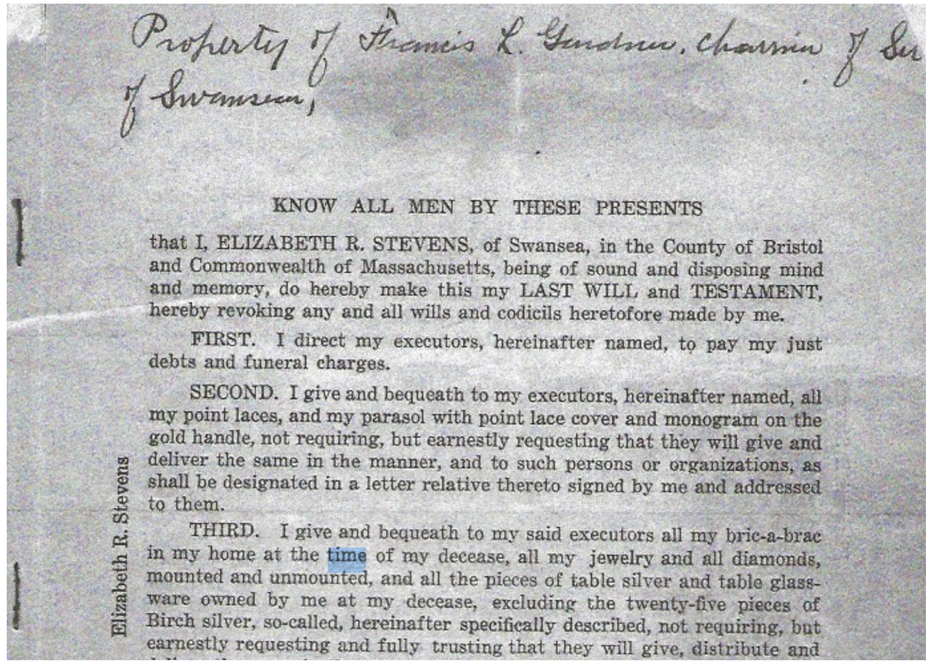


Elizabeth Richmond Case Stevens

In memory of her husband, Frank, the will of Elizabeth Stevens provided for the construction of a home for boys on the site of her estate in Swansea Village. Chartered in 1937, the home first opened in 1939 as the Frank S. Stevens Home for Boys, beginning a long tradition of service to boys whose needs had gone unmet by traditional and familial structures.







Property of Francis L. Gardner, Chairman of Selectmen of Swansea,

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS

that I, ELIZABETH R. STEVENS, of Swansea, in the County of Bristol and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, being of sound and disposing mind and memory, do hereby make this my LAST WILL and TESTAMENT, hereby revoking any and all wills and codicils heretofore made by me.

FIRST. I direct my executors, hereinafter named, to pay my just debts and funeral charges.

SECOND. I give and bequeath to my executors, hereinafter named, all my point laces, and my parasol with point lace cover and monogram on the gold handle, not requiring, but earnestly requesting that they will give and deliver the same in the manner, and to such persons or organizations, as shall be designated in a letter relative thereto signed by me and addressed to them.

THIRD. I give and bequeath to my said executors all my bric-a-brac in my home at the time of my decease, all my jewelry and all diamonds, mounted and unmounted, and all the pieces of table silver and table glassware owned by me at my decease, excluding the twenty-five pieces of Birch silver, so-called, hereinafter specifically described, not requiring, but earnestly requesting and fully trusting that they will give, distribute and

Elizabeth R. Stevens

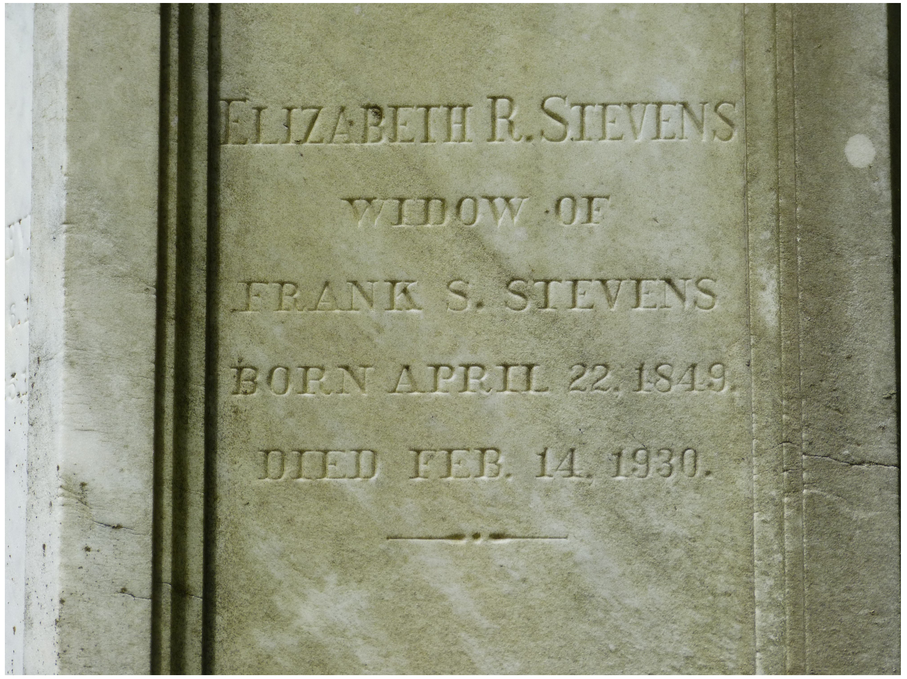
Elizabeth Richmond Case Stevens

Originally considered an orphanage, the home transitioned to a program providing services to a growing population of boys who found it difficult to adjust to life in the community or public school setting. Frank Shaw was an adolescent orphan when he was adopted by Chauncey and Lucinda Stevens. That is one reason why Frank gave so much to the community.



Elizabeth Richmond Case Stevens

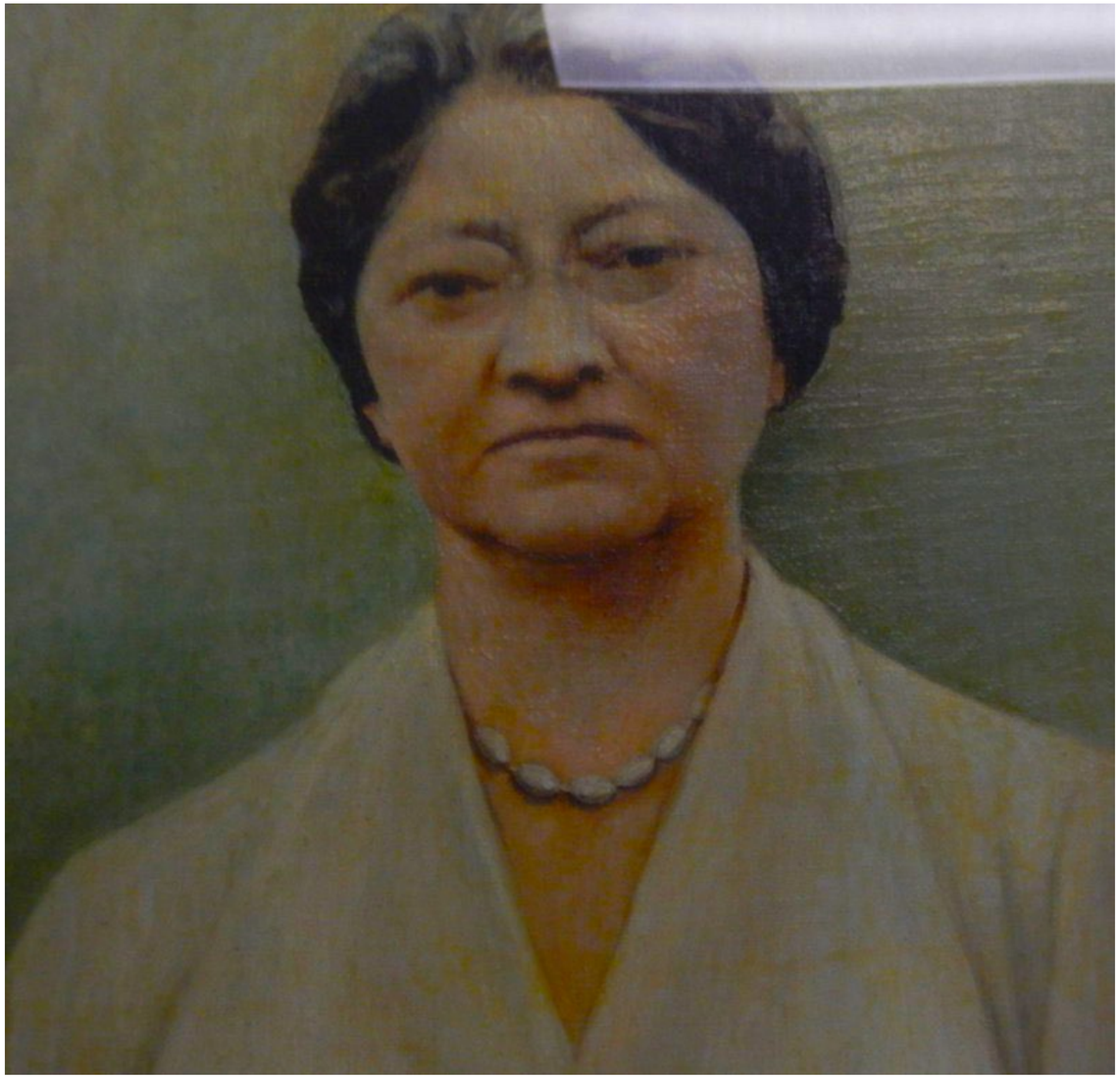
Elizabeth passed away on February 14, 1930. She is buried in the Christ Church Cemetery in Swansea.





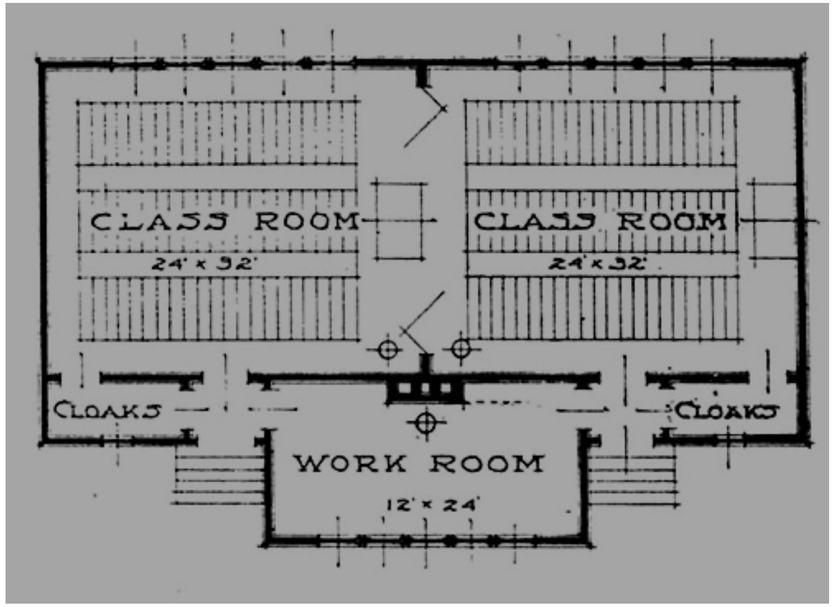
Elizabeth Stevens Brown

Elizabeth Stevens Brown was born December 17th, 1879 at the home of the Stevens family. Her father, Henry C. Brown, was a freeman who came to Swansea after the Civil War. Mr. Brown worked for the Frank S. Stevens family as a Coachman. Her mother was Florence Graves Brown. Elizabeth was named after Mrs. Stevens.



Elizabeth Stevens Brown

With help from Mrs. Stevens, Elizabeth came to be the first black educator in the Swansea school system. In 1901, at the age of 22, she started teaching in The Two Room School House, once located at the now Frank S. Stevens School site. In 1908, the two room schoolhouse was replaced by the Frank S. Stevens School. In 1932, at the age of 53, she became principal and held this position until her death on February 12th, 1941 at the age of 62. In 1956, the Town of Swansea named their newly built elementary school the Elizabeth Stevens Brown School in her honor. Elizabeth Stevens Brown dedicated her life to the education of Swansea youths.

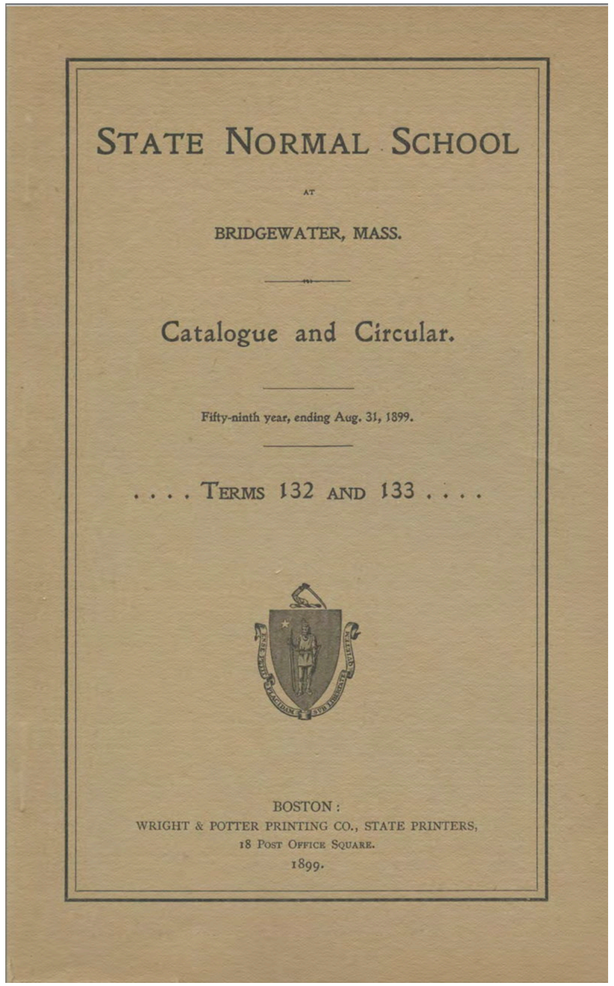




Elizabeth Stevens Brown

She attended the Bridgewater State Normal School (now Bridgewater State University) and graduated in 1898.

"In all phases of her life she respected the dignity and worth of the individual. In working with her pupils she sought to develop each person to the greatest use of their particular capabilities." - from the April 23rd, 1961 dedication of the Elizabeth Stevens Brown portrait.



STATE NORMAL SCHOOL

AT

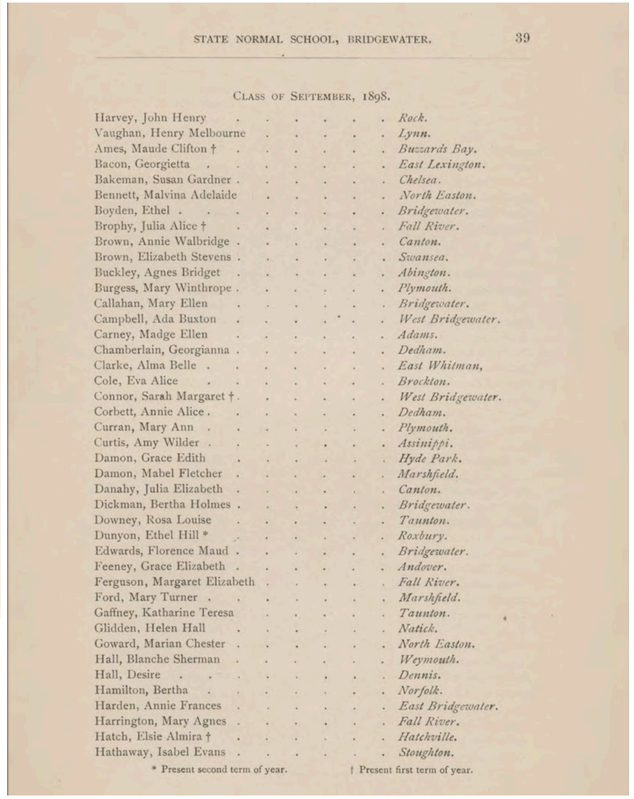
BRIDGEWATER, MASS.

Catalogue and Circular.

Fifty-ninth year, ending Aug. 31, 1899.

. . . . TERMS 132 AND 133 . . . .

BOSTON:
WRIGHT & POTTER PRINTING CO., STATE PRINTERS,
18 POST OFFICE SQUARE.
1899.



STATE NORMAL SCHOOL, BRIDGEWATER. 39

CLASS OF SEPTEMBER, 1898.

Harvey, John Henry	*Rock.*
Vaughan, Henry Melbourne	*Lynn.*
Ames, Maude Clifton †	*Buzzards Bay.*
Bacon, Georgietta	*East Lexington.*
Bakeman, Susan Gardner	*Chelsea.*
Bennett, Malvina Adelaide	*North Easton.*
Boyden, Ethel	*Bridgewater.*
Brophy, Julia Alice †	*Fall River.*
Brown, Annie Walbridge	*Canton.*
Brown, Elizabeth Stevens	*Swansea.*
Buckley, Agnes Bridget	*Abington.*
Burgess, Mary Winthrope	*Plymouth.*
Callahan, Mary Ellen	*Bridgewater.*
Campbell, Ada Buxton	*West Bridgewater.*
Carney, Madge Ellen	*Adams.*
Chamberlain, Georgianna	*Dedham.*
Clarke, Alma Belle	*East Whitman.*
Cole, Eva Alice	*Brockton.*
Connor, Sarah Margaret †	*West Bridgewater.*
Corbett, Annie Alice	*Dedham.*
Curran, Mary Ann	*Plymouth.*
Curtis, Amy Wilder	*Assinippi.*
Damon, Grace Edith	*Hyde Park.*
Damon, Mabel Fletcher	*Marshfield.*
Danahy, Julia Elizabeth	*Canton.*
Dickman, Bertha Holmes	*Bridgewater.*
Downey, Rosa Louise	*Taunton.*
Dunyon, Ethel Hill *	*Roxbury.*
Edwards, Florence Maud	*Bridgewater.*
Feeney, Grace Elizabeth	*Andover.*
Ferguson, Margaret Elizabeth	*Fall River.*
Ford, Mary Turner	*Marshfield.*
Gaffney, Katharine Teresa	*Taunton.*
Glidden, Helen Hall	*Natick.*
Goward, Marian Chester	*North Easton.*
Hall, Blanche Sherman	*Weymouth.*
Hall, Desire	*Dennis.*
Hamilton, Bertha	*Norfolk.*
Harden, Annie Frances	*East Bridgewater.*
Harrington, Mary Agnes	*Fall River.*
Hatch, Elsie Almira †	*Hatchville.*
Hathaway, Isabel Evans	*Stoughton.*

* Present second term of year. † Present first term of year.

Elizabeth Stevens Brown

Miss Brown kept this quote on every blackboard in the school:

"Whatever you are, be noble;
Whatever you do, do well;
Whenever you speak, speak kindly;
Bring joy wherever you dwell."

Elizabeth Stevens Brown

According to the 1940 census, Elizabeth lived on Main Street in Swansea with her sister, Agnes. Neither ever married.

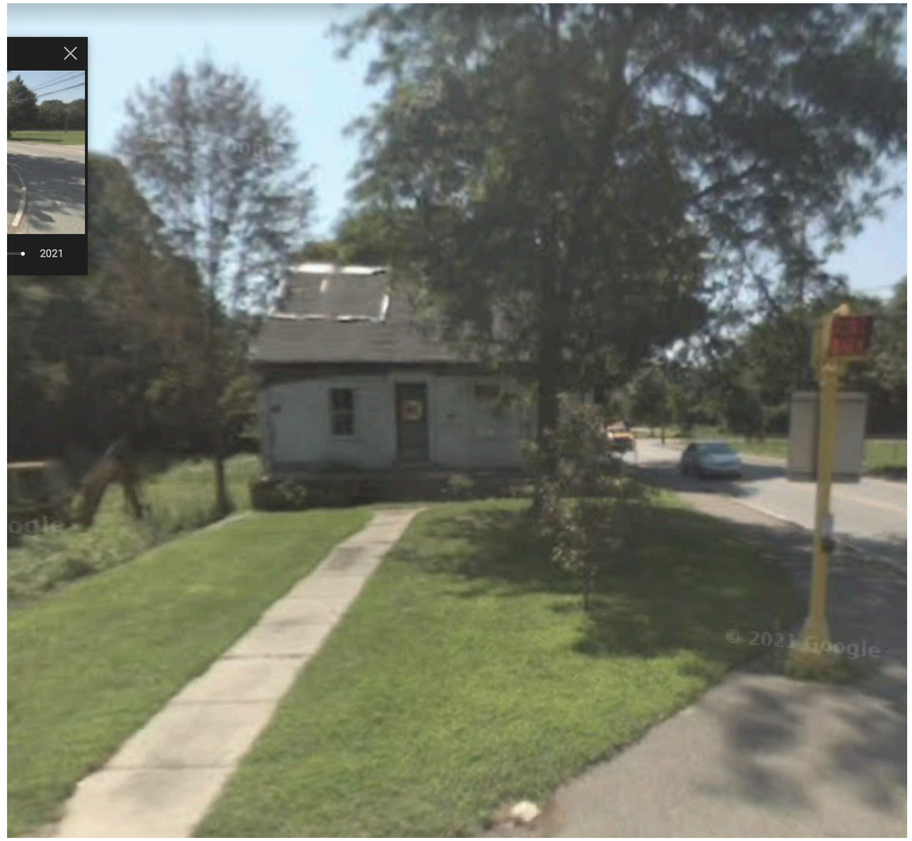
Elizabeth died on February 12th, 1941 and is buried in the Mount Hope Cemetery in Swansea.



Elizabeth Stevens Brown

The former Elizabeth Brown House





Jane Dane
AKA
First Woman to be Thrown Out of Swansea - 1749

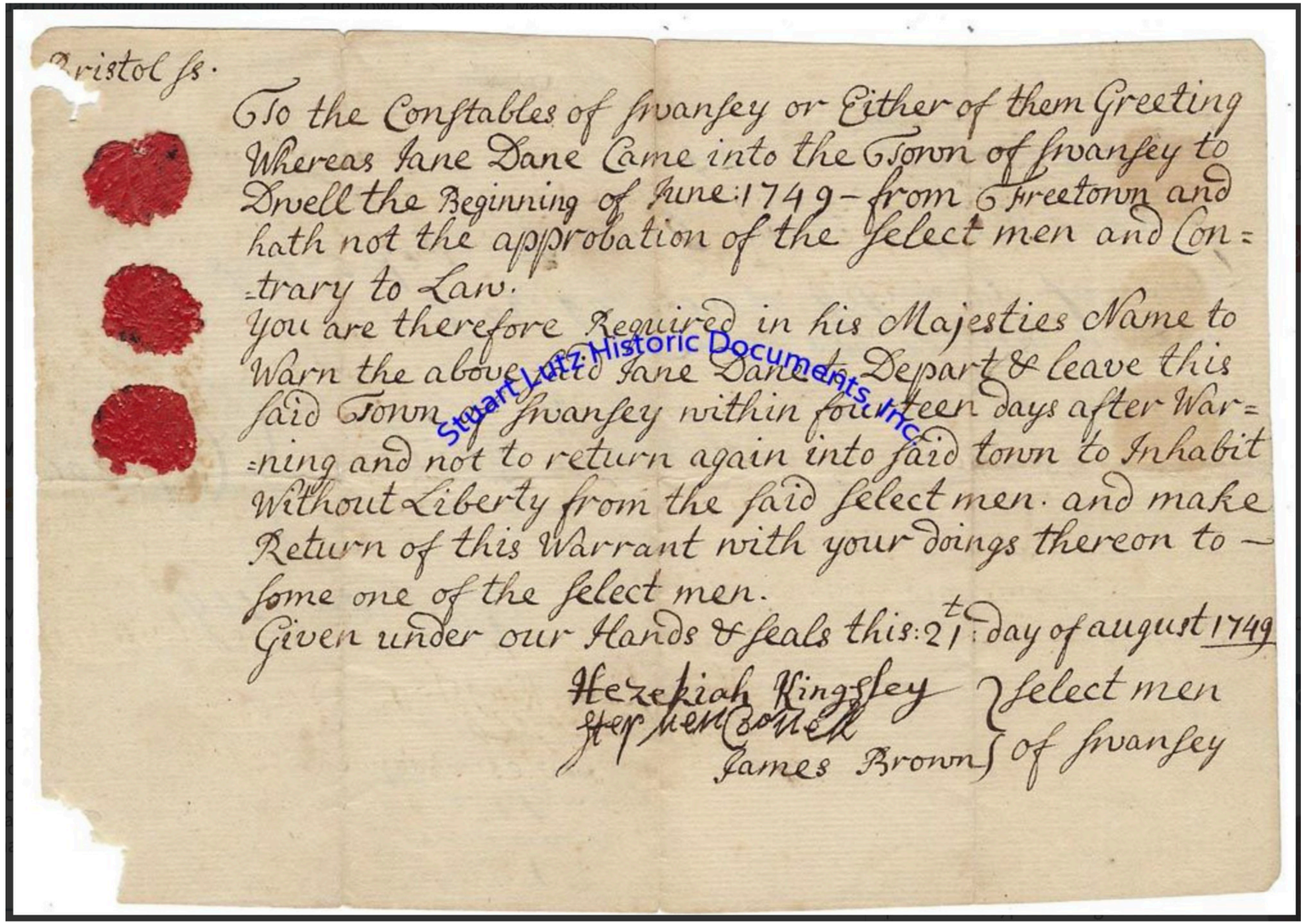
Jane Dane she was considered to be a trollop. Women were not allowed to live in the town of Swansea unless they were married. Land and buildings could only be owned and occupied by men. When the husband passed, women had to approach the Selectmen and ask to remain in their home and on their land without the security of their husband or father. The widow had to prove that she could maintain the property, take care of her children and pay the taxes. Jane could not meet these standards.

Jane Dane
AKA
First Woman to be Thrown Out of Swansea - 1749

"Whereas Jane Dane came into the town of Swansey to Dwell the beginning of June 1749 – from Freetown and hath not the approbation of the Select men and Contrary to Law.
You are therefore required in His Majesties Name to Warn the above said Jane Dane to Depart & leave this said Town of Swansey within fourteen days after Warning, and not to return again into said town to Inhabit without Liberty from the said Selectmen and make Return of this Warrant with your doings thereon to some one of the Selectmen.
Given under our Hands & seals this 21st day of August 1749"

Jane Dane

The document was signed by “Hezekiah Kingsley,” “Stephen Cornell” and “James Brown” as selectmen of Swansey.


Bristol ss.

To the Constables of Swanzey or Either of them Greeting
Whereas Jane Dane Came into the Town of Swanzey to
Dwell the Beginning of June: 1749 – from Freetown and
hath not the approbation of the Select men and Con=
=trary to Law.
You are therefore Required in his Majesties Name to
Warn the above said Jane Dane to Depart & leave this
said Town of Swanzey within fourteen days after War=
=ning and not to return again into said town to Inhabit
Without Liberty from the said Select men. and make
Return of this Warrant with your doings thereon to —
some one of the Select men.
Given under our Hands & Seals this: 21st day of august 1749

Hezekiah Kingsley
Stephen Cornell
James Brown
} Select men of Swanzey

Stuart Lutz: Historic Documents, Inc.

Mary Elizabeth Nottingham

Mary Elizabeth Nottingham was the daughter of Stanley E. and Anna B. (Johnson) Nottingham and the younger sister of Ellen Nottingham. She was born April 10th, 1901.

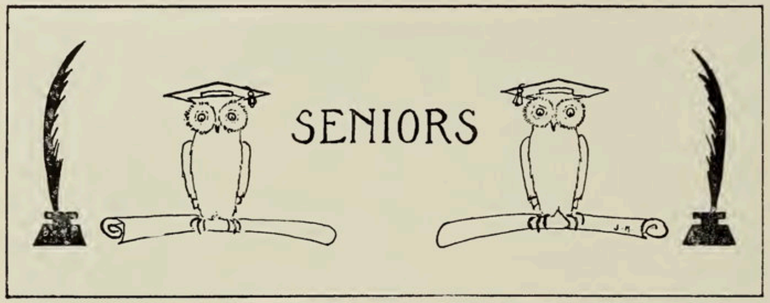
She was one of the first Black educators in the area.

Mary Elizabeth Nottingham

She attended the Bridgewater State Normal School (now Bridgewater State University) and graduated in 1920.



Mary Elizabeth Nottingham



Helen Higgins—President.
Florence Stewart—Vice-President.
Esther Sampson—Secretary.
Catherine Crowell—Treasurer.
Mary Nottingham—Historian.

Department, who have aided us so materially in the organization of our material.

And lastly, our sincere gratitude, to any and all who have contributed either directly or indirectly to the success of this book.

This year the Board decided to offer ten dollars in gold for prizes, in order to give an added incentive to contributors. The first prize, a five dollar gold piece, was won by Elizabeth Sumner '20, the winning story being entitled "Bobbie Wins Out." Mary Nottingham '20 won the second prize, a two and a half dollar gold piece, with her Class History, written in verse. "The Ballad of the Pin," a poem by Ruth Sladen '21, won the third prize, a two and a half dollar gold piece. Our congratulations to the winners!

We trust that, in future years, when looking over these pages, you may derive pleasure, enjoyment, happiness, and a keen realization of the fact that some of your most profitable years were spent at Bridgewater Normal School.

THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF.

Normal Offering Board.

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Mary Elizabeth Nottingham

Senior Class 1920:



Yearbook Notation:

MARY ELIZABETH NOTTINGHAM ("Mary Not"), Swansea, Mass. Y. P. U.; Cercle Francais; Normal Offering Board; Class Historian; Publicity Committee.

"She's as jolly a girl as you could meet,
And as for cleverness—she can't be beat."

Mary Elizabeth Nottingham

Class History.

Prize Poem.

In the fall of nineteen-eighteen,
In September, nineteen-eighteen
Came a new class to Bridgewater,
Full of life and joy of living,
Full of fun and smiles and laughter,
Ready to prepare for teaching.

Dark behind them rose the gymnasium,
Rose the ivy-walled gymnasium,
Where there passed some awful moments,
Full of fear and far from happy.

Came then to us all the Seniors,
Told us tales of work before us,
Tales that were made up to scare us.
But we did not heed their warnings,
Steadily refused to listen,
Went our way as best we saw it,
Made our mark as willing Juniors.

Oh, the long and weary lessons,
Oh, the hard and tiresome lessons,
New they were and far from easy,
But we studied them and learned them.
Reading, history and psychology,
Drawing, chemistry, and biology,
Learned we names of beasts and fishes,
Learned we names of rocks and tissues,
'Till our brains were set a'whirling.

But we had our pleasures also,
Had our socials and our dances,
Where we learned to know each other,
Learned to play and laugh together.
Thus we spent our year as Juniors,
Happy, noisy, laughing Juniors.

In the fall of nineteen-nineteen,
Came we back then to Bridgewater,
Came no longer as when Juniors,
Came as real and earnest Seniors.
Some of us began our training,
Straightway we began our training,
And indeed, we felt like teachers.
Others of us took our studies,
Went to work again with new zeal.

But the greatest of our efforts,
Dreaded most of all the efforts,
Lay before us—known as "Model."
Entered we into those portals,
With great fear and trepidation;
Found we did not lose our voices,
That our teachers were not ogres,
Letrned to like to teach the children.
But we heaved a sigh of gladness
When our six weeks there were over;
Of our marks we'll make no mention.

After that, our lessons claimed us,
Yes indeed, our lessons claimed us,
History of education,
Lit., and gym., and picture study,
Geography and how to teach it.

Just a word about our playtime,
About our gay and happy playtime,
Social parties, and big sleigh rides,
Teas and spreads and such-like gay times.

Promenade in the gymnasium,
Big event of all the season,
Lovely gowns, a really man-dance.
Prettier than all former parties.

Soon will come our graduation,
Long awaited graduation,
Time of joy and time of sorrow,
Time of smiles and time of sadness,
When we needs must leave our classmates,
Friends through all our work and play-time;
When our thoughts turn to our teaching,
To the task that lies before us,
To the years that lie before us;
When we'll need all the good counsel,
Need the many words of wisdom,
That have come to us at Normal.
But the class of nineteen-twenty
Will not shirk what seems their duty,
Will do credit to their teachers,
Credit to their Alma Mater.

—MARY E. NOTTINGHAM.

Mary Elizabeth Nottingham

According to the 1940 census, Mary Nottingham lived in her family-owned house at 160 Elm Street with her parents and her sister, Ellen. Mary never married.

The house is now owned by the Stevens treatment program.



Mary Elizabeth Nottingham

Mary Elizabeth Nottingham passed away on March 22th, 1988 and is buried in the Mount Hope Cemetery in Swansea.









Mary Elizabeth Nottingham

Mary Nottingham

10 April 1901
22 March 1988

In this day and age of mobility, Mary was an exception. Mary was born and lived until her death in the same house on the corner of Elm and Main Street in "The Village," as this part of Swansea is known.

Mary's father Stanley worked for the Stevens family. Before coming to Swansea, Mr. and Mrs. Nottingham lived in Virginia.

Following Mary's father's death, the Stevens family wanted Mary, her sister Ellen, and their mother to continue living in the house which was built in 1794 and is located on the Stevens property.

Neither of the girls married. Ellen worked for an attorney in Fall River and Mary taught school in Fall River for forty years plus.

What then set apart this family? It was that their lives started and ended with the Church as the central point in their lives. Christ's church and the Christian life was the single most important facet to Mary.

An early childhood disability helped forge Mary's character. A character made up of strength, of determination, of sensitivity, of independence, reaching and doing for others. Mary became her own person; she loved her independence, yet never forgot people who helped her as a child. Often Mary would speak of her close and loving friendship with Mrs. Helen Pierce who was her childhood chum, and how Helen used to wheel Mary around in a carriage when she was in a full body cast.

Mary loved life and people which stemmed from a deep commitment to Christ. Mary was not provincial, rather she was cosmopolitan.

For example, Mary retired early from teaching because as she said, "I wanted to see life before I had to see it from a wheelchair." It was after retirement that Mary traveled to Europe several times, Puerto Rico, Bermuda, Florida, Hawaii and Canada, to say nothing of spending the summers for years at Tanglewood in the Berkshires. There were the many trips to New York City and Boston to attend the symphony, theater and movies. And especially to attend Red Sox baseball games at Fenway Park. She also loved basketball, and on T.V. watched golf and quiz programs.

Mary loved traveling; putting more than 30,000 a year on her cars, finally selling her last one when she was 82 years old. Mary shared her car with others - driving to various events, always concerned that everyone had a ride. Yet life never became too busy to interfere with her church and her commitments to St. Anne's Guild and the Altar Guild. Mary's life was altar centered. For years she could be seen at both morning services. Only the past few years did she confine herself to the early service, regardless of the weather. Whatever Mary committed herself to she gave 100% of herself.

Years after retiring from

(continued on back page)

Mary...

teaching, former students of hers would come up and remember her. They spoke of her quality and what she had taught them. I was privileged to witness this encounter time and time again, be it in the mall, Friendly's, Howard Johnson's, Dunkin Donuts or Almac's. People remembered Mary.

She loved young people and was keenly interested in their education as well as their growing lives. Where she could lovingly reach out and assist them she did, and they in turn loved her. My own son Tim always called her "my Aunt Mary." And Mary would say "my Timothy."

Another of Mary's gifts was to share her material blessings with others. She loved beauty and wanted the same for others. This is why she was so excited to be able to give to her church two stained glass windows, one being the Resurrection Window. Here was one of her trademarks, for no credits were inscribed in the glass - simply "To the glory of God and in Thanksgiving." The secret here is that in life Mary never rejected anyone regardless of what may have befallen them.

Mary's wish was to remain at home. To help her fulfill this desire, the people from the Church, the people of the Stevens Children's Home, and the community came forward and established times when someone could return the love Mary had given by coming in to care for her.

The Lord gave us Mary and now Our Lord has Mary. In His loving arms may she rest in His peace.

Rob Roy Mason

Violet F. Dennis

Violet was a renowned cookie maker in Swansea. She was also known as Aunt Polly, Aunt Violet and Aunt Vi, and was born on August 8, 1908 and passed away on October 12, 1983. According to the 1920 census, she lived on Fall River Avenue, in Swansea, with her parents Caleb and Mary Bliss and siblings Mildred and Frederick.



Violet F. Dennis

She later married Leroy A. Dennis and lived at 472 Milford Road



Violet F. Dennis

She is buried in the Mount Hope Cemetery in Swansea.



Violet F. Dennis

Her famous cookie recipe:

Aunt Polly's Press Sugar Cookies

One cup shortening
One cup sugar
Two eggs
Four tablespoons of milk
Two teaspoons of vanilla
Three cups flour
One teaspoon of baking powder
One teaspoon of baking soda
1/2 teaspoon of salt

Mix in order given.

Bake in a moderate (325 degree) oven for five to eight minutes.

Violet F. Dennis

Spectator article from December 26, 1974:



AUNTY POLLY - AUNT VIOLET—Mrs. Leroy Dennis of 472 Milford Road, Swansea, displays some of her over four hundred cookie cutters. (Davies photo)

Renowned cookie maker resides in Swansea

If you go a-carolling on Milford Road in Swansea, be sure to stop, as the young people from the White Church did last Sunday, to sing for Swansea's Cookie Lady, Mrs. Leroy Dennis on Milford Road.

Mrs. Dennis, Swansea's famous cookie lady, has a collection of over 420 cookie cutters, and at last count, several cookie presses as well as the talent for making delicious cookies.

Her television appearances began in 1953, on Betty Adams' "Sugar and Spice" program. That memorable time included her children in what was for them a terrific experience. The Range Rider and Dick West were in the studio and appeared, with Harold, Ruth and Mary, on the program, too.

Perhaps you have heard her, as "Aunt Vi" on WALE's cooking program in the month of May. Or, perhaps you know her as sister to Margaret Medeiros, Swansea's Flower Lady, the Farmer's Wife, Amibal's wife on Maple Street. Maybe you are already among the lucky ones who have been calling her "Aunt Polly" or "Aunt Vi" for many years.

Or perhaps you were in Mrs. Phillips' cooking class at the high school a few years ago and met Aunt Polly demonstrating cookie making.

Have you seen her collection? In the sunny kitchen, there are drawers full of choice cutters, for every occasion, all holidays, any activities. Most of the characters from children's storybooks wait in the drawer for Aunt Polly to take them out, to make them real, until a hungry child eats their heads off.

CUTTERS

And it all started when the children were little and preferred cookies to cake. Then she kept four jars full; peanut butter cookies were the favorite then.

Today, Mrs. Dennis is making the same kinds of cookies for her children's children, Harold's Jay, Laurie and Wendie in Palmer, Mary's John and Peter in Fall River and Ruthie's Mathew and Jennifer, here in Swansea.

Some of her cutters are family heirlooms. These, made of tin with the handle and design soddered on, include 100-year old cutters from her family, the Bliss family, of fern, leaf and a six-sided star shapes. She has one old cutter that turns over to be a donut cutter. She has a really old bluebird and a bunny. There are, to go with these, an old set of measuring spoons that tells in the bowl, thirty drops in a half teaspoon. She has saved a Rumford measuring cup and one of the Rumford biscuit cutters.

Two unique cutters are circles of shapes on a turning wheel; Aunt Polly calls these the lazy lady's cutters. One just rolls them down the strip of cookie dough and, presto, many fancy shapes are ready for the spatula.

Some of her cutters are the heavy plastic of thirty years ago, when her children were small. Some of her cutters are more modern. This year she has added a gingerbread lady to her ginerbread men-of-all-sizes. She has, at least, 143 Christmas shapes, trees, bells, holly, snowpeople, toys, Santas, stockings, teddy bears, stars of all sizes and different points.

She told The Spectator that in her 1887 cooking book, there are only two kinds of cookies, sugar and molasses. She has tried their recipes and finds them hard, but tasty, compared to today's recipes.

One favorite of all time rule is:

Aunt Polly's Press Sugar Cookies:

One cup shortening, one cup sugar, two eggs, four tablespoons of milk, two teaspoons of vanilla, three cups flour, one teaspoon of baking powder, one teaspoon of baking soda, 1/2 teaspoon of salt. Mix in order given. Bake in a moderate (325 degree) oven for five to eight minutes.

Among the cutters, she has the Mirro press, bought for her by her husband quite some time ago; its threads are worn out now. She has two new ones and a cookie gun. She also has several springle rollers. All of which she treasures, along with a special cutter for making an oblong molasses cookie. This is a Spam can, cut in half sideways, and is the right size for a molasses cookie frosted with pink peppermint icing.

She uses buttons and many other things to make impressions on cookie dough, like butter cookie dough, that does not rise. She has lifted cookie making to a fine art and a pure enjoyment. It is one of her greatest pleasures to take a sunny cold morning for the making of cookie dough, rolling and cutting and baking, in her fine long kitchen atop the knoll looking down over Swansea towards Tiverton—on a clear day.

Ruth Manchester Doodson

Ruth Doodson was born Ruth Manchester on August 1, 1913, at her grandparents' home at 924 Gardners Neck Road here in Swansea. The Archibald Manchester House is now the Swan Brook Assisted Living facility.



Ruth Manchester Doodson

Ruth was the Daughter of Louis and Lois Archibald Manchester. Her lineage can be traced back to the Mayflower - John Alden and Priscilla Mullins Alden.



Ruth Manchester Doodson

Ruth lived a very active and fulfilling life. She was part of the first graduating class from the new Joseph Case High School in 1930.



Ruth Manchester Doodson

She attended Sargent College at Boston University, graduating in 1934.



Ruth Manchester Doodson

Career and Service:

- Recreation Leadership: She served as the activities director for the YWCA in Williamsburg, PA, and later in Cambridge, MA, before returning to Swansea.

- War Effort: During World War II, she volunteered for the Red Cross Motor Corps, driving patients to medical appointments and hospitals.

- Town Impact: Recognized as Swansea's first recreation director, and President of the Swansea Historical Society 1984-1986. Also held positions of Secretary and Treasurer over the years. She was extremely active in the Society.

Ruth Manchester Doodson

She was bestowed the honor of the Boston Post Cane as Swansea's oldest citizen in July of 2013 at the age of 100. She is the only woman in the town of Swansea ever to receive the honor.



Ruth Manchester Doodson

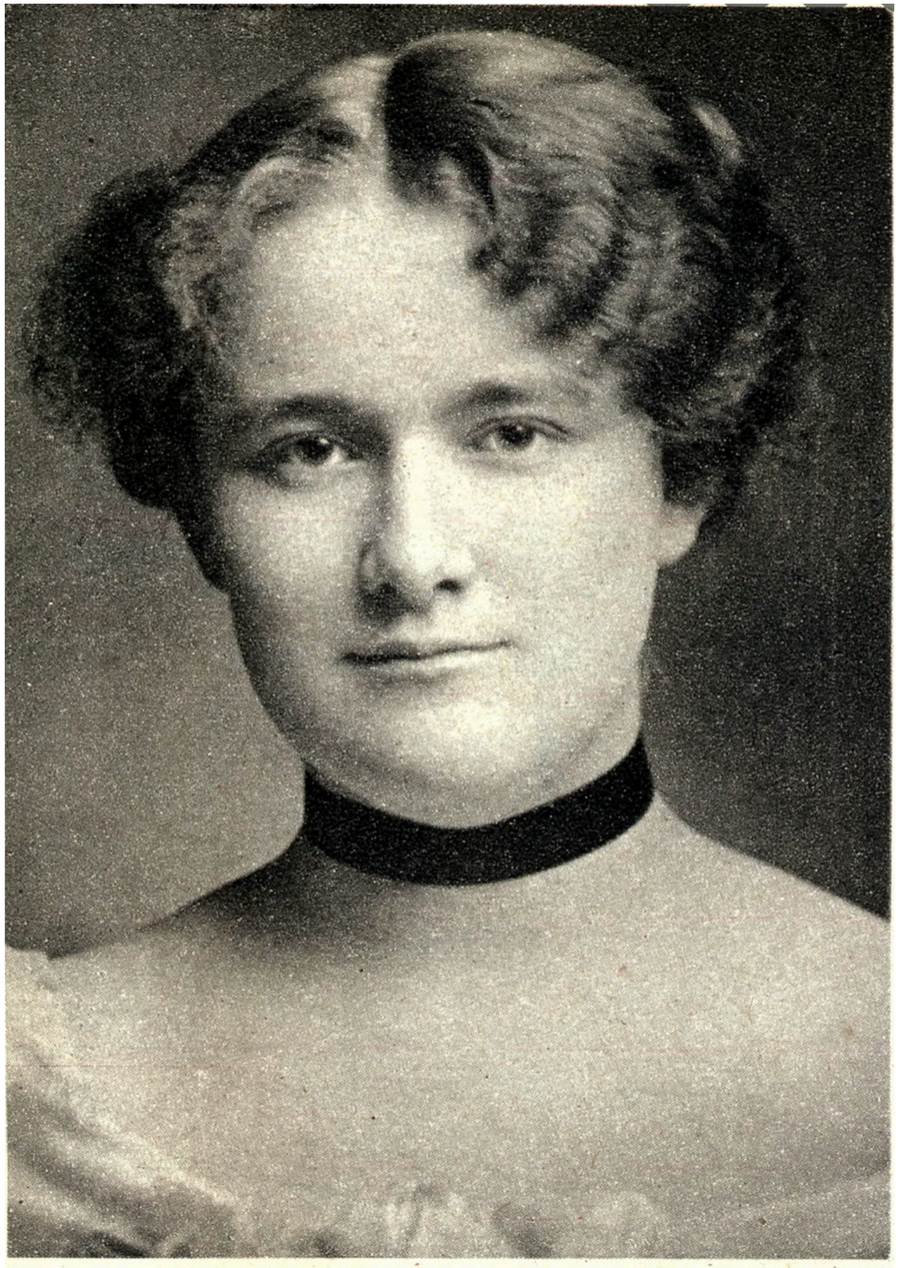
She is remembered by many for her daily swims and her wonderful sense of humor.

Ruth passed away on January 9, 2015 at the age of 101.



Flora E. Dutton

Miss Dutton was born in Vermont on April 27th, 1887.



Flora E. Dutton

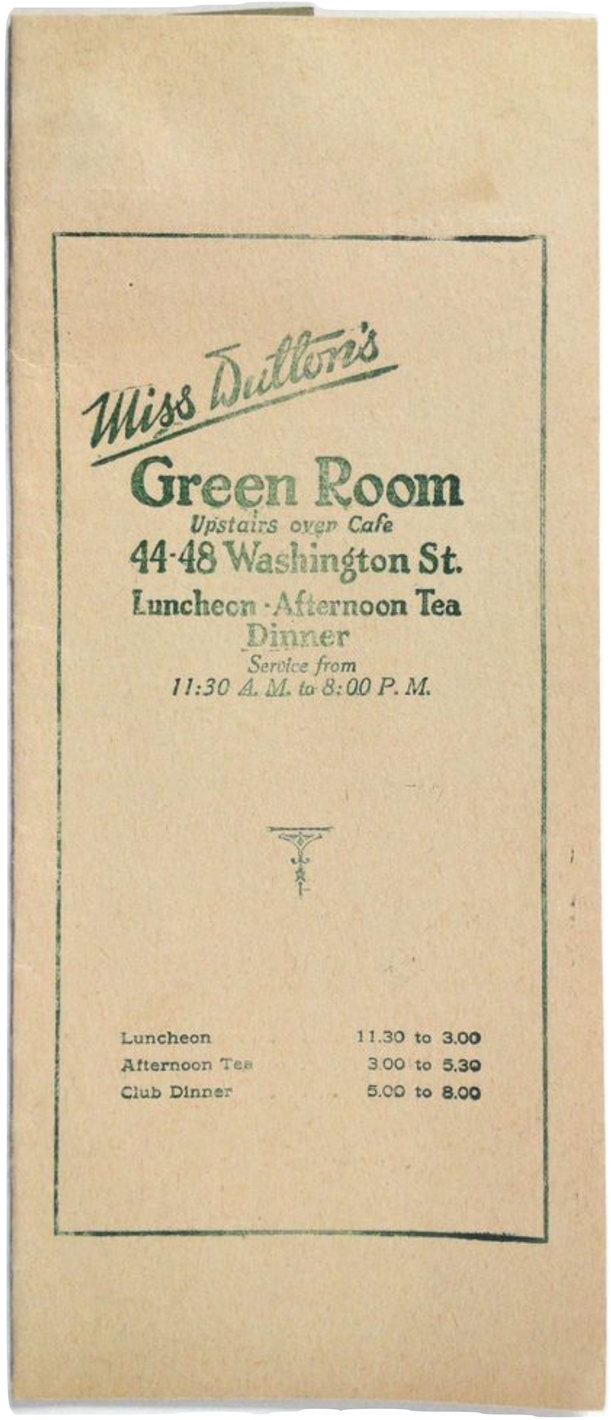
In the late 1920s, Flora E. Dutton had built a small restaurant empire in Providence.



Flora E. Dutton

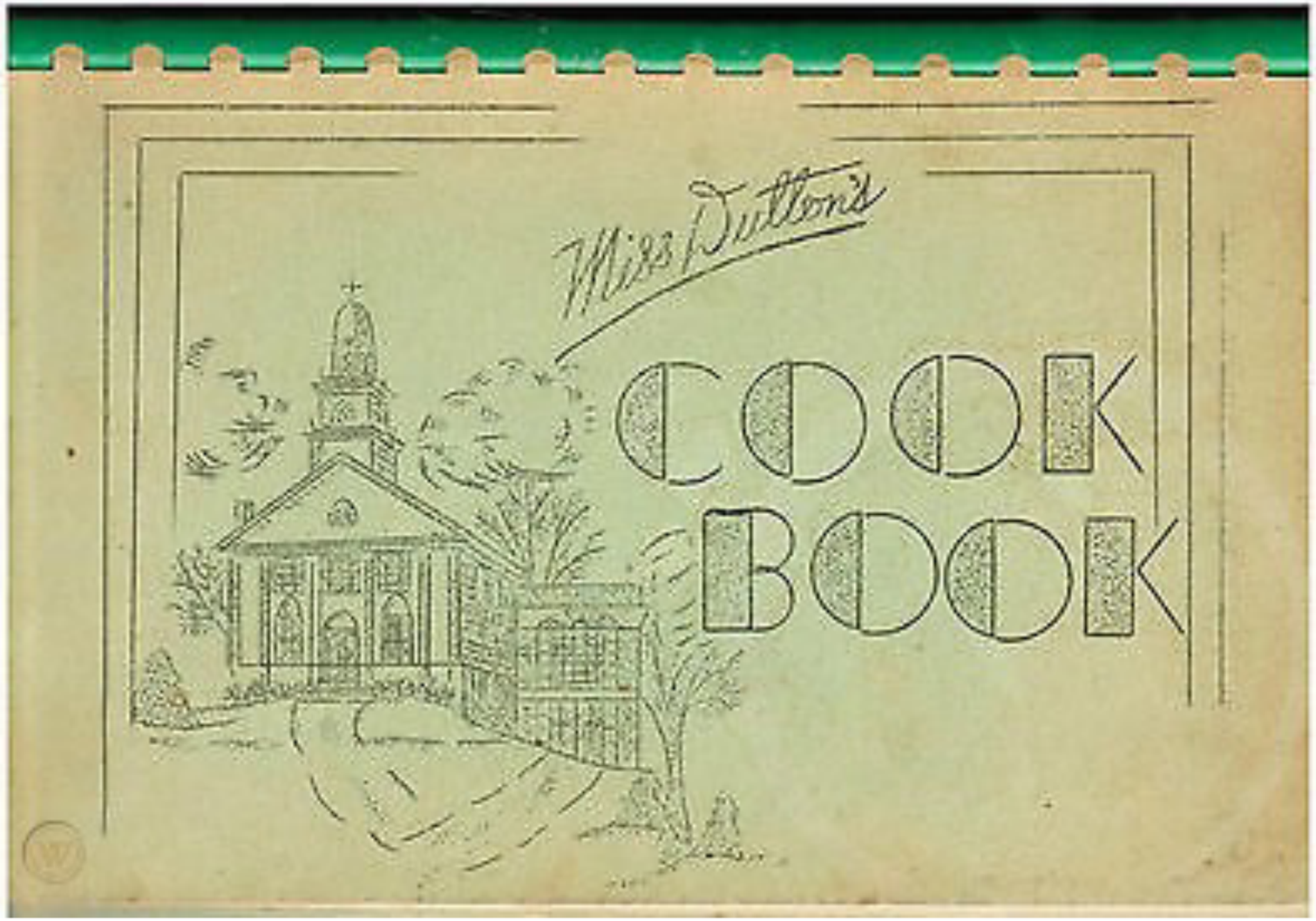
She was best known for Miss Dutton's Green Room, a local landmark at 44 Washington St.

Her farm in Swansea supplied fresh vegetables.



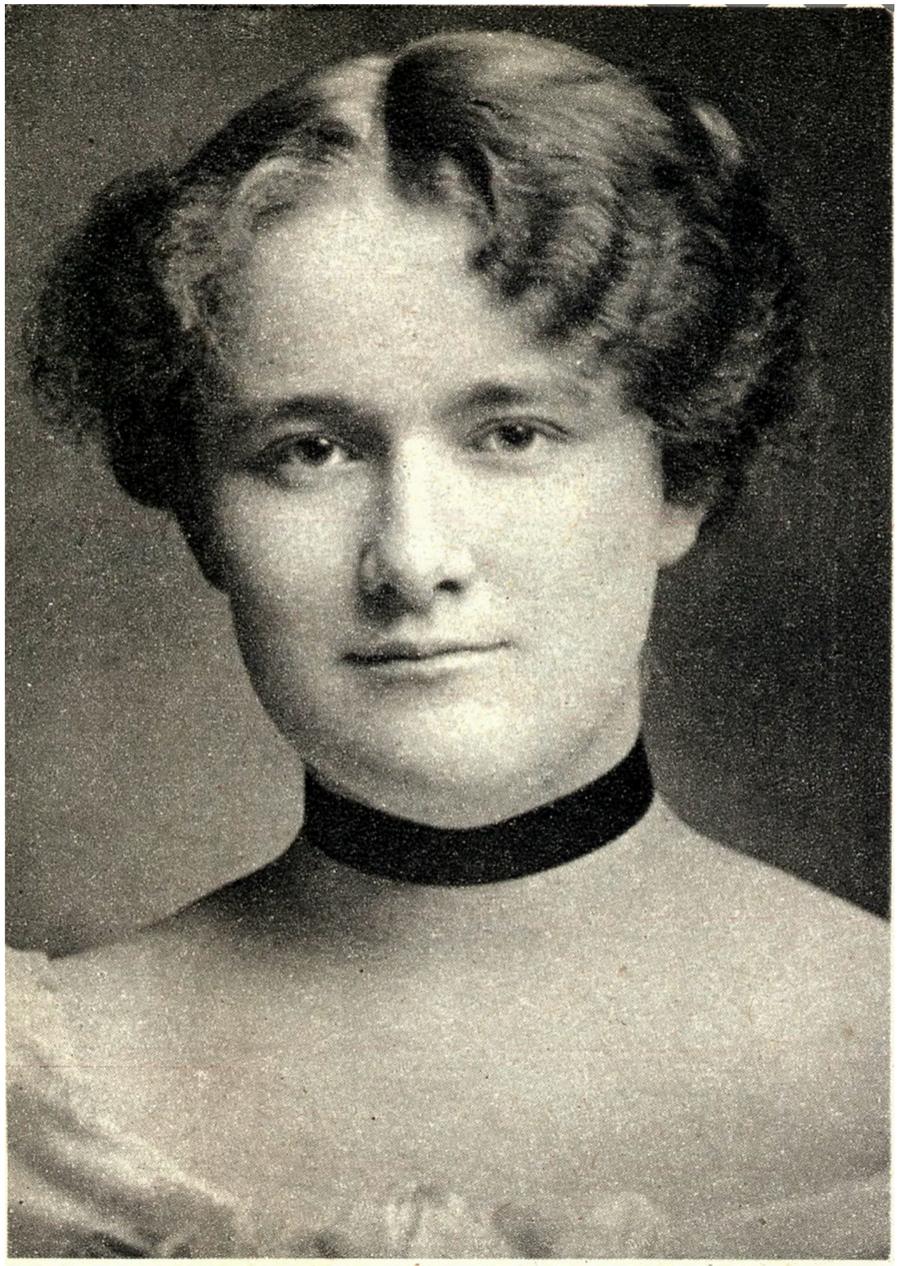
Flora E. Dutton

In 1937, Flora published a cookbook which captured the ten signature dishes of her popular Washington Street cafe.



Flora E. Dutton

The Simmons College graduate retired in 1956 and passed away in August of 1984 at the age of 97.



Katherine "Kay" Eddy

Katherine L. King was born at home in Warren, RI, in 1919.

She was a dispatcher for the Swansea Fire Department and the wife of Deputy Chief Russell Eddy.

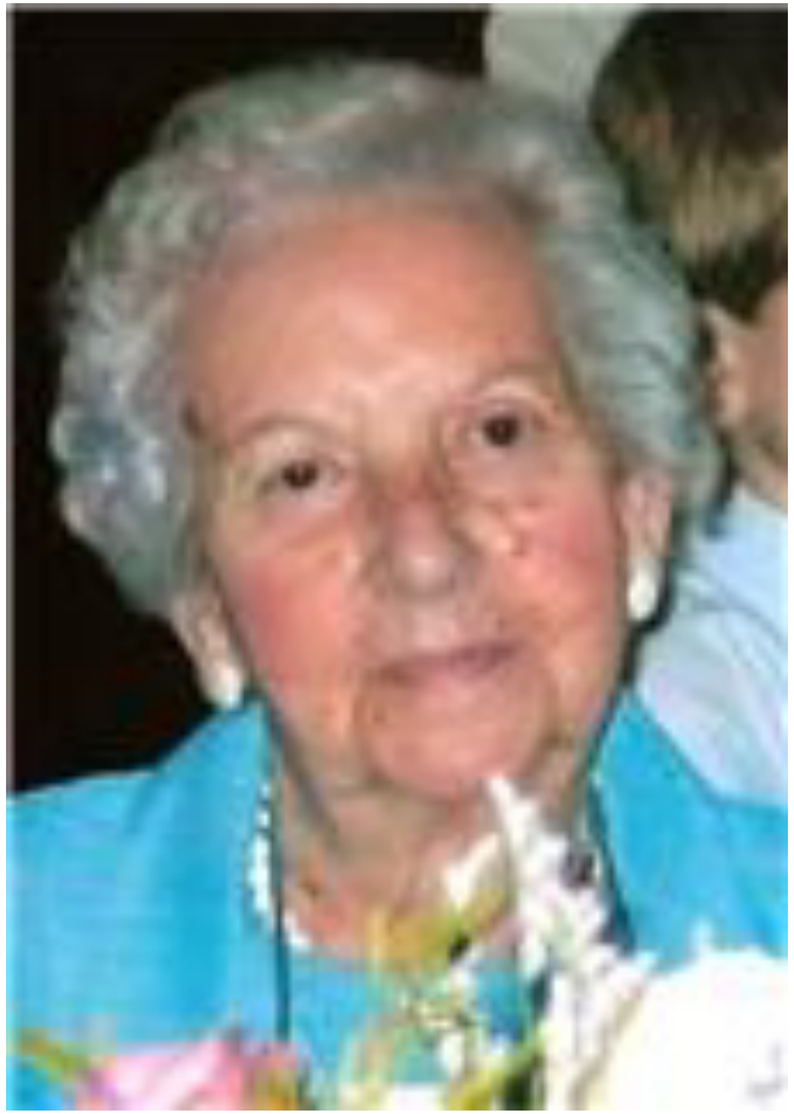
On June 26, 1951, Kay Eddy officially became the "voice of K-C-B, 6-1-5”.

She retired in 1987 after working as a dispatcher for thirty-nine years.



Katherine "Kay" Eddy

Dear to her heart was the spirit of volunteerism. It permeated her everyday life and thrives today in the hearts and minds of the Swansea Fire Dept, volunteers and staff, just as it has for the past one hundred years.



Katherine "Kay" Eddy

Kay passed away on September 24, 2010.

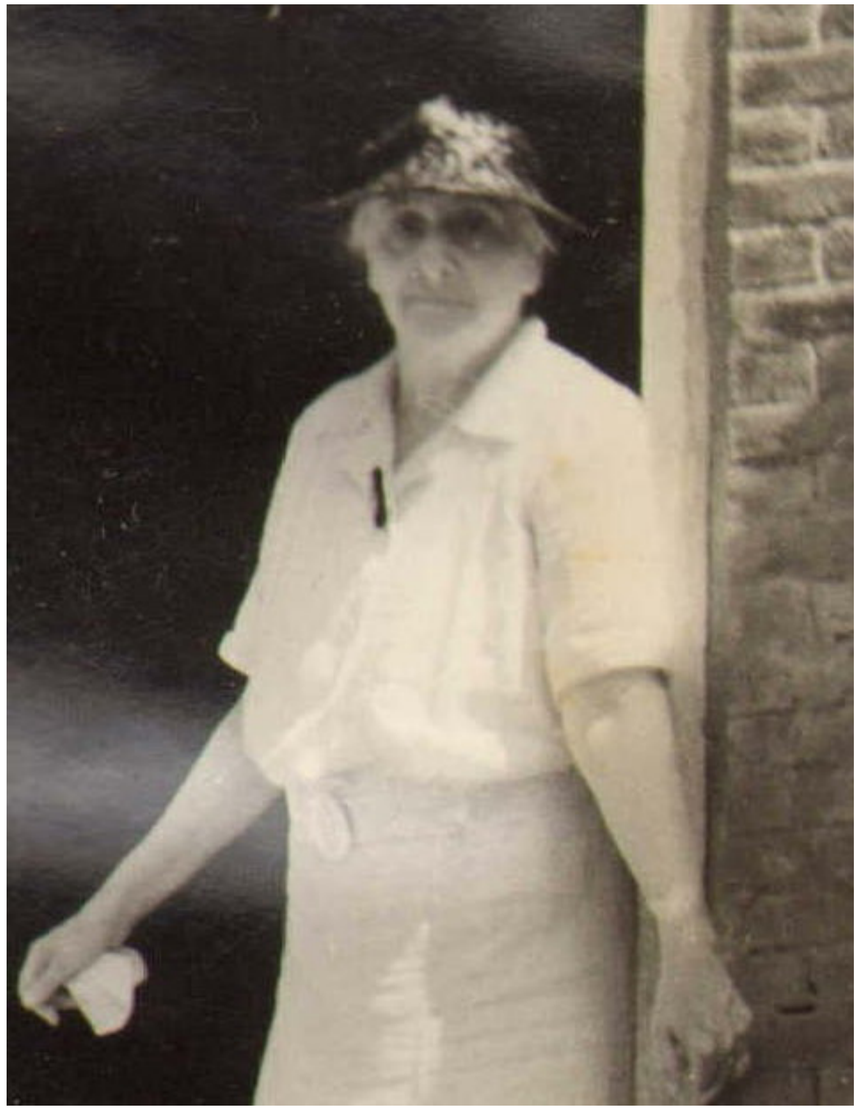
She is buried in the Mount Hope Cemetery in Swansea.



Grace Hartley Howe

She was born on November 9, 1874, in Fall River, Massachusetts, the daughter of James Wardle Hartley and Mary Jane Borden.

Her father, Dr. James Hartley, died in 1897 and left her $30,000 plus income from his properties.



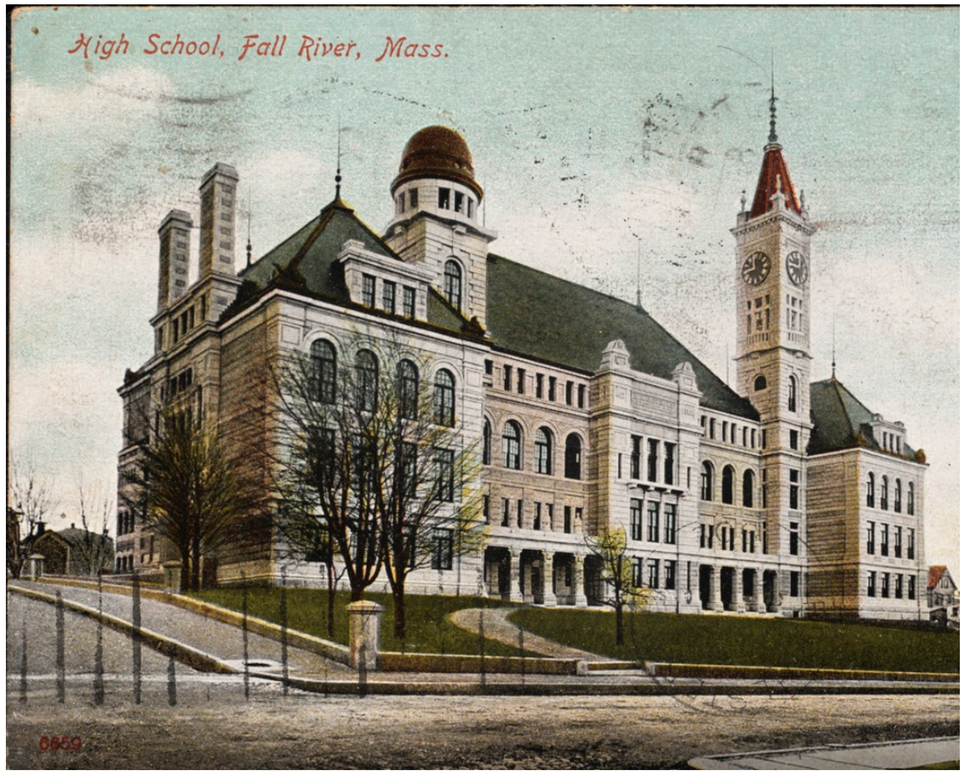
Grace Hartley Howe

Grace was a cousin of the infamous Lizzie Borden, and Lizzie Borden's will left money to Grace as a second cousin. Their grandfathers — Cook Borden and Abraham Borden — were brothers.



Grace Hartley Howe

Grace was a 1893 graduate of Fall River High School and a 1897 graduate of Vassar College.





Grace Hartley Howe

Grace married Colonel Louis McHenry Howe, private secretary and friend to President Franklin Roosevelt.





Grace Hartley Howe

Following her husband's death, Grace was appointed as the Postmistress of Fall River by President Roosevelt. She held the position for 15 years until her death in 1955. She was 77 years old.



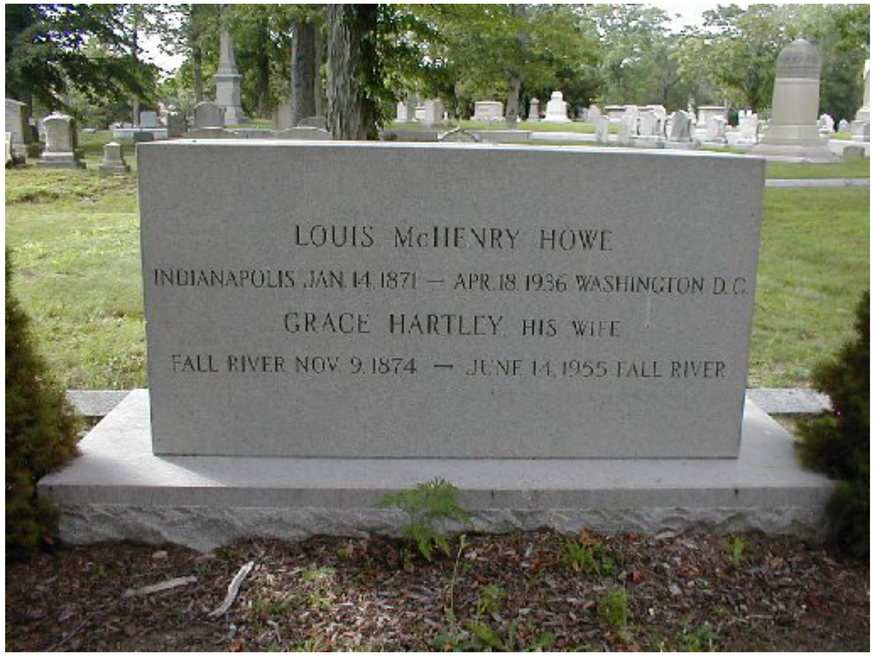
Grace Hartley Howe

In 1937, Maude Parlin, a friend of Grace's, asked her to join the team to save the Luther Store. Grace Hartley Howe arranged for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to move the Luther Store back 30 feet. This halted the demolition of the Luther Store and the Luther 4 corners became safer for cars to pass.



Grace Hartley Howe

She was responsible for the restoration and preservation of many historical homes and buildings in the Fall River Area.





Grace passed away on June 14, 1955 and is buried in Oak Grove Cemetery in Fall River, MA.

Elizabeth Tilly Howland

Elizabeth Tilly came over on the Mayflower. She later married John Howland and together they had 10 children: Desire, John, Hope, Elizabeth, Lydia, Hannah, Joseph, Jabez, Ruth, and Isaac. After her husband died, she and her daughter, Lydia, took up residence in Swansea and were the first legal female residents of the town.



Elizabeth Tilly Howland

Lydia married Captain John Brown. Together they purchased land on Pearse Road and built what is now referred to as the Captain John Brown House. Elizabeth passed away in Swansea in 1687 and is buried in the Ancient Little Neck Cemetery in East Providence, RI.







Helen R. Davis Pierce

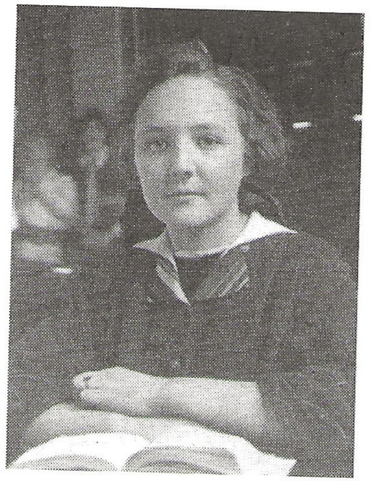
Helen Davis Pierce was born in 1901 and lived her entire life in Swansea. She was a Swansea Town Historian and a genealogist and was known to possess a photographic memory. Helen helped gather the historical information needed for many projects.



Helen Pierce, 1947

Helen R. Davis Pierce

The majority of the information that the Swansea Historical Society has on historical homes, buildings and in the family files in the societies archives were obtained from Helen Pierce. Though Helen was not officially a member of the Swansea Historical Society or the Swansea Cultural Assets Commission (now known as the Swansea Historical Commission), she worked closely with the members of both organizations.



Helen Pierce at B.M.C. Durfee High School



Helen Pierce , high school yearbook photo

Helen R. Davis Pierce

Helen passed away in 2006 at the age of 105 and is buried in the Christ Church Cemetery in Swansea, MA.



Helen Pierce



Marian Reilly

Marian Reilly founded the Swansea Historical Society on January 23, 1941. In 1965, she established the Swansea Cultural Assets Commission, also known as the Swansea Historical Commission.



Marian Reilly

Marian Reilly, along with Maude Parlin and Grace Hartley Howe, saved and preserved the Luther Store Museum. The venture started in 1937 with the moving of the Luther Store by the WPA, saving it from demolition by the Town of Swansea.



Marian Reilly

In 1941, the Swansea Historical Society was established with the primary purpose to purchase the Luther Store from the Town of Swansea. In 1952, and after an eleven-year court battle over language in the deed, the deed was transferred over the The Swansea Historical Society.



Marian Reilly

Marian Reilly passed away in 1978 and is buried at the Luther Riley Cemetery in Swansea



Swansea Selectmen

Daphne Baker Sears

- 1st woman selectman for the Town of Swansea
- She also served as Town Treasurer from 1950 until her death
- She was born April 30th, 1912 and passed away November 2, 1981
- She is buried in the Mount Hope Cemetery in Swansea

Mary Kappes

- Selectman for the Town of Swansea from 1988 to 1991

Kathleen L. A. Cardenas

- Selectman for the Town of Swansea from 1996 to 1999
- She was born January 18th, 1954 and passed away November 27, 2020

Swansea Selectmen

Gail T. Carey

- Selectman for the Town of Swansea from 2000 to 2003
- She currently resides in Swansea and is an election worker for the town

Alana Solitro

- Elected in April, 2026, to her first term

THE END