

XX
XXXXX
XXX
X
XXXXX
XXX
X

THE HALF MILE ISLAND

HISTORY OF THE
EAST HAVEN RIVER SIDE IN CONNECTICUT
NOW
MANSFIELD'S GROVE & SHEPHERD'S GROVE

FROM THE MIDDLE OF THE 19TH. CENTURY

For use
in-library
only

XX
XXXX

X
XXX
XXXXX

XX

REF
974.6
NIT

The following information was compiled from various sources, including talks with people who lived in the area, newspaper articles, East Haven records, and a paper furnished to me by George Uihlein, an area historian who has done quite a bit of research on the area known of as "The Half Mile Island". The paper referred to was written by Mr. Carroll Alton Means. Any errors resulting from inability to read the old papers, and from my own errors in copying and typing, bids me apologize. Basically I have gathered this History into one book primarily for my own interests and for use as the Historical Society historian of East Haven.

For those who wish to do further research into the land transactions should spend some time at the East Haven Town Hall Vault. Records back to the formation of the town are available for your perusal and may be copied mechanically for a nominal sum at the main desk.

Cliff. Nitchke

East Haven Historical Society

September, 1996

(1ST EDITION)

SECOND EDITION 1 / 19 / 1998 (Expanded)

THIRD EDITION 1 / 20 / 2001 (Expanded)

SHEPHERD'S GROVE

A study of "Half Mile Island" properties, particularly the parts now known of as "Shepherd's Grove," in East Haven, Connecticut.

Prior to 1850, "Half Mile Island (so called)," which is located at the mouth of East Haven (Also designated as Stoney and Farm)River, on its west bank was considered to be inaccessible, except by water, with no roads leading to it. A map of 1856 (by H. & C. T. Smith) shows a dead end road of John Hemingway's (On Hemingway Ave., East Haven) leading in the direction of the present Short Beach Rd, (Dyke Road), but incomplete and lacking the necessary bridge across the river to Branford side. Another road appears back of South End and present Momauguin, but there were no roads leading across Bradford Cove Creek to the island and there were no dwellings on the island.

F. W. Beer's map of 1868 (Which is inaccurate in its delineation's of this obscure section of East Haven, and most of the area as well) shows the present Short Beach Road as still dead end, with dotted lines indicating the beginnings of what is now Mansfield's Grove Road, leading towards "Half Mile island," the location of Dennis T. Mansfield's famous shore resort. Unfortunately the delineator of the map did not extend the road far enough to the south and did not indicate that the terminus was an island, surrounded by Bradford Cove Creek, (Once called Smuggler's Bay and creek). He did indicate the presence of five houses, but these were up river and adjacent to the "Gut," back of Kelsey's Island. Actually these houses were all down-river and on "Half Mile Island." The two northernmost houses, near the river, were:

1. Daniel W. Palmer, (His house being the first erected on the island.)
2. Obadiah Smith (the second house built). Obadiah's wife, Harriet, objected to

the "lonesomeness" of the location and so they removed to the Green, selling out to Daniel W. Palmer in 1865. Both of these houses, considerable altered, are still standing, the property of Mr. Carroll Alton Means and wife Sylvia Means. The other three houses were in the "Grove" and less is known of their history.

Mansfield's Grove Road was not installed on property owned by Mansfield, as his land was further east, and closer to the river, but the contractor made a mistake, due to poor location points in those days. The current owner, however did not object as he said it gave him access to his own land without cost to him. Some distance south, the road finally was on Mansfield's land (about where the "Indian" lived, (so called). This last from a talk with Don Bartlett awhile ago.

It should be noted that the Beer's map did not show a road leading to the houses owned by Palmer. This was because Palmer had his own private access road which started at a bend on the Mansfield's Grove Road, south of the property owned by Jennings, then Talmadge, then Greene, following what is now described as a "wood road" (belonging to the town) and proceeding to the very edge of the salt meadow. From this point a 33 foot right of way (purchased by Daniel W. Palmer from William Thompson in 1863) proceeded across salt meadow, over a "stone bridge". (The path is still visible and has been in use continually for about 95 years. There is a rough wooden bridge over the creek.) The right of way terminated when it reached land belonging to Horace A. Smith (now the property of Carroll and Sylvia Means,) but there is evidence of an old wood road which continued south to the dwelling house of Daniel W. Palmer (now the property of Carroll and Sylvia Means). Palmer purchased the right of way for a "private highway" to his house and this was later restricted to absolute privacy and the erection of a "Gate or bars near the Stone Bridge," if and when the road is built. (Ed note: Daniel was a recluse who had an unhappy life, having been left by the girl he was in love with, and wanted only to be left alone for the rest of his life, or so the rumors tell)

The existence of this right of way is acknowledged in several deeds (with some changes in the wording), but the private road has not yet been built by the "heirs or assigns" of Daniel W. Palmer. When Mr. Palmer died, his dwelling house and outbuildings (including boat house, smoke house, well, etc.) were located on property owned by Sarah M. Shepherd (sister of Dennis T. Mansfield, deceased.) This was with the knowledge of Palmer and the owners of the property, all of whom were on friendly terms. The executor of the Estate of Daniel W. Palmer, however,

Mansfield's Grove

In a recent article I mentioned the "Rum watery delivery system," and upon being questioned as to my source of such a questionable delivery system, I thought that first hand information should be convincing evidence of the fact of such occurrences.

Donald V. Chidsey was the historian for East Haven for many years, and like his father before him, he had a passionate interest in the lives and life styles of his ancestors. His lineage in East Haven goes back to 1681 when John Chidsey, a shoemaker and tanner settled in the house that is now the headquarters of the East Haven Historical Society, and is located on the North side of the Green. He was an inhabitant of New Haven in 1656, which makes him one of the first settlers of the Colony. His house, 133 Main Street, has been in the same family, except for a short time, since the 1681 date. For awhile, a few generations back around 1870, the house was called the Lucius Lindsey house, but Mrs. Lindsey was a daughter of a Chidsey.

This family has always been active in town affairs, and prominent in the church. Samuel seems to be a favorite first name of the men in the family, and so named was Donald's father.

Mr. Shepherd and Mr. Chidsey were good friends, and he spent quite a bit of time with him, both being avid fishermen. Mr. Chidsey became acquainted with Mr. Dennis T. Mansfield as Dennis and John Shepherd were related, as told in earlier pages, and both lived near the River for at least part of the year, in Mr. Shepherds case.

Stories of the area were passed down to Donald, which would seem to authenticate the stories that Donald wrote about, especially the following item regarding the Santa Cruz Rum tale, but first some common knowledge background as written by Donald a few years ago.

"Dennis T. Mansfield, for whom Mansfield's Grove was named, came down to the sandy point of land on the west shore of the mouth of the East Haven River, early in the 1860's. He bought it, cultivated the grove of scrub oaks there, built a house, and ultimately found New Haveners and summer pleasure seekers from all over the state crowding in upon him and demanding 'salt water eats' to such an extent that he had to establish the summer shore dinner there, and also the sheep bake, and coon roast idea, which he brought down from the 'North Haven Yankee,' a good restaurant. This was the beginning of Mansfield's Grove. From the very first the resort became a favorite resort of the state politicians,

A few of New Haven's prominent citizens, in the halcyon days of our trade with the Barbados, used to receive barrel after barrel of good Santa Cruz rum through 'the Mansfield's Grove route,' from the New Haven- & West India fleet, in a way that not a dollar of the expensive United States duty on it, was ever paid at the New Haven custom house.

When a half dozen or so casks of Santa Cruz were dropped overboard in the waters off Mansfield's Grove, from one of these crafts, late in the afternoon, there was every reason to expect that they would float into the hands of men about the Grove and would be safely delivered up here in New Haven under the cover of darkness, in a day or so."

Donald Bartlett was a friend of mine, as well as my brother, and many a pleasant afternoons were spent in story telling about the olden days. The above story was one that Don liked to retell, as well as did Donald Chidsey.

Along with the first part of the tale, in his paper, Mr. Chidsey went on to talk about Charles R. Bartlett, and again quoting, "Charles R. Bartlett, proprietor of and for many years a familiar figure at the famous Mansfield's Grove, died at his home, 234 Hemingway Avenue, East Haven. Mr. Bartlett was well known to New Haveners and many others who have enjoyed his famous resort. Born in East Haven, Mr. Bartlett got his first position with 'Den' Mansfield, former proprietor of Mansfield's Grove, and worked for him continually until the owner died. He then took care of the establishment for Mr. Mansfield's widow, Caroline Mansfield. Mr. and Mrs. Bartlett made the resort famous for its shore dinners, well known to many New Haveners

and for many others for miles around."

According to Don Bartlett, his father Charles, an East Havener, went to New York as a youth, and after drifting from one job to another, he finally settled as a kitchen worker in a restaurant. Here he perfected his natural cooking ability. At one of his trips home, he met Mr. Mansfield, and they became friends. Mr. Mansfield hired Charles Bartlett to help him operate the business, especially the hotel. His cooking ability stood him in good stead in this well liked shore resort; the rest of the Grove business fell on him after the owner became ill.

Clif. Nitchke
East Haven Historical Society

Trolleys, Momauguin and Mansfield Grove

With the closing of the resort at Lake Saltonstall, the Street Railway began to feel the pinch of reduced cash flow, and sought new ways to encourage rider ship. They extended all the lines and by 1898 they had reached Momauguin. Here they built a hotel to induce summer riders; and they ran this watering Spa themselves for a short time, going so far as to have the wife of the President of the company go to Tiffany Co. store in New York and buy all Sterling Silver table settings; this all melted in the fire of 1911

The Hotel has always had the name of the Momauguin Hotel along with the name of the current proprietor. The first was "Whites Hotel" operated by Mr. White, who at that time also ran the "Tontine Hotel" on Church Street, as well as a place in Branford. When the disastrous fire in 1911 burned him out as well as Hoyt's, "Hoyton Restaurant", he seemed to have given up and Theodore Swift took over. Mr. Swift was well known at Savin Rock for his food and beverage stand, and he also had a diner on Broadway in New Haven. An excellent restaurateur and cook, he soon attracted huge crowds, and the Yale Alumni groups overflowed the place in season. He could seat six hundred diners and serve them fine shore dinners, as well as standard cuisine.

When the tracks were laid to Mansfield Grove, the Company had to fill in the swamps and bay from First Avenue to the present creek. They used residue ashes from the old Gas Company on lower Chapel Street, and transported this ash, residue coke and clinkers in a trolley car that had a gondola type body that could be side dumped. People use to pick through this ash for burn-able coke in order to save a heating dollar. Once the creek was reached, the water could be crossed on the foot bridge, the company having purchased from Caroline Hill Mansfield the right to build a bridge across Bradford Creek; this was in 1898 and the idea was to encourage riders to go to the Hotel there, then called then the Mansfield Grove Hotel. Dennis Mansfield died in 1889 and Caroline passed away in April of 1924, at the Bartlett home, where she lived. In later years the current generation knew it as "Rocky Point Hotel, and it was run by Charles Bartlett, until death in 1919, and later by his son, who was often in trouble with his cellar bars, then prohibited by Federal Law. Of course he was no different from many others who sold illegally; even the Momauguin Hotel had a cup of "cold coffee" for the initiate.

After World War One the automobile began to reduce rider ship, and prohibition had its pressure on the traveling public, and to offset this, about 1922, the "Trolley Co. "encouraged the Bartletts to build a dance hall and went so far as to design the long span trusses. The Chief Engineer for the road was at that time a civil engineer by the name of Charles Rufus Hart. He either did the design of the trusses, or at least gave final approval. The railroads were at that time very conversant with bridges and the building trusses were nothing more than a span of space. In a previous article the name of the structural engineer was given as Mr. Harrison of East Haven, as told to me by Donald Bartlett, and there is no cause to doubt, because the basic building would be designed by a private engineer and contractor, and he would not necessarily be conversant with long span engineering, but would be at home in the column and general building design, working with the owners to give them the structure that they wanted. In the previous article the method of construction was spelled out as well as some other information, and this may be had by either stopping in or writing to the East Haven Historical Society, box 120052.

This building saw many uses, from dances to church. For a number of years, Jessie, Don's Sister held Sunday School classes as part of the East Haven Episcopal Churchs teaching plans.

On week end afternoons, one reel movies were shown, and the piano player could make the same song fit the action from love scenes to the charge of the Indian fighting cowboys.

Later the hall as used for roller skating and still later as a restaurant night club. I prefer the first use, when the great bands era just getting underway; Rudy Valley, Cab. Calloway, and I am told that later, Glenn Miller played there but I never had this great pleasure at Mansfield Grove, but only at Glen Island and New York City. Eventually this building burned and was razed; this was long after the tracks were removed from our streets, and the boys could no longer steal a ride by hanging on the back of the car, and thankfully, never caught by Dad or Mom, but catching the deuce from the motorman when he spotted the kids.

In the search for history of Mansfield's Grove, by way of post cards, I spotted a rather

1January 15th, 1998

large building in the background of a post card from 1902. Once this card was enlarged, a long low building emerged. Subsequent research by George Uihlein proved it to be the first dance hall at Mansfield's Grove. As to when it was built or what happened to it is still a mystery, but it seemed to be in the same area as the hall known as Don's.

If any of our readers should any more information or pictures, we would appreciate your input into this vexing historical quandary. Any local pictures or history would be appreciated, even your remembrances of any part of the shore line could aid future historians of our areas. These may be written or verbal, and we will let "George" type them up.

Some of the above was written for my by- monthly article that appears in the East Haven Advertiser Paper; I thought it would fit into this "Half Mile" Pamphlet.

This and the article titled "Mansfield's Grove" from Chidsey's article that appeared in the Register a few years ago, have been added to the original pamphlet that has been available in the East Haven Historical Society for a few years.

Gleanings from the East Haven Historical Library
January 1996
Clif. Nitchke

OFFICE OF THE VILLAGE HISTORIAN

VILLAGE HALL • BRONXVILLE, NEW YORK 10708

MOLLY'S BABY, SHEPHERD'S GROVE, 1920's

by

Sylvia Shepherd Means

After Mama died in 1924, Papa, Molly and I lived at the shore, Shepherd's Grove, East Haven, Connecticut, for several years.

One very cold night in December, a young man came to the door and asked if he could borrow my car. My Model A Ford (new), as he had to get the midwife in East Haven. He had moved into a small cottage just beyond our grove the day before with his wife and one year old baby. We had never seen him before.

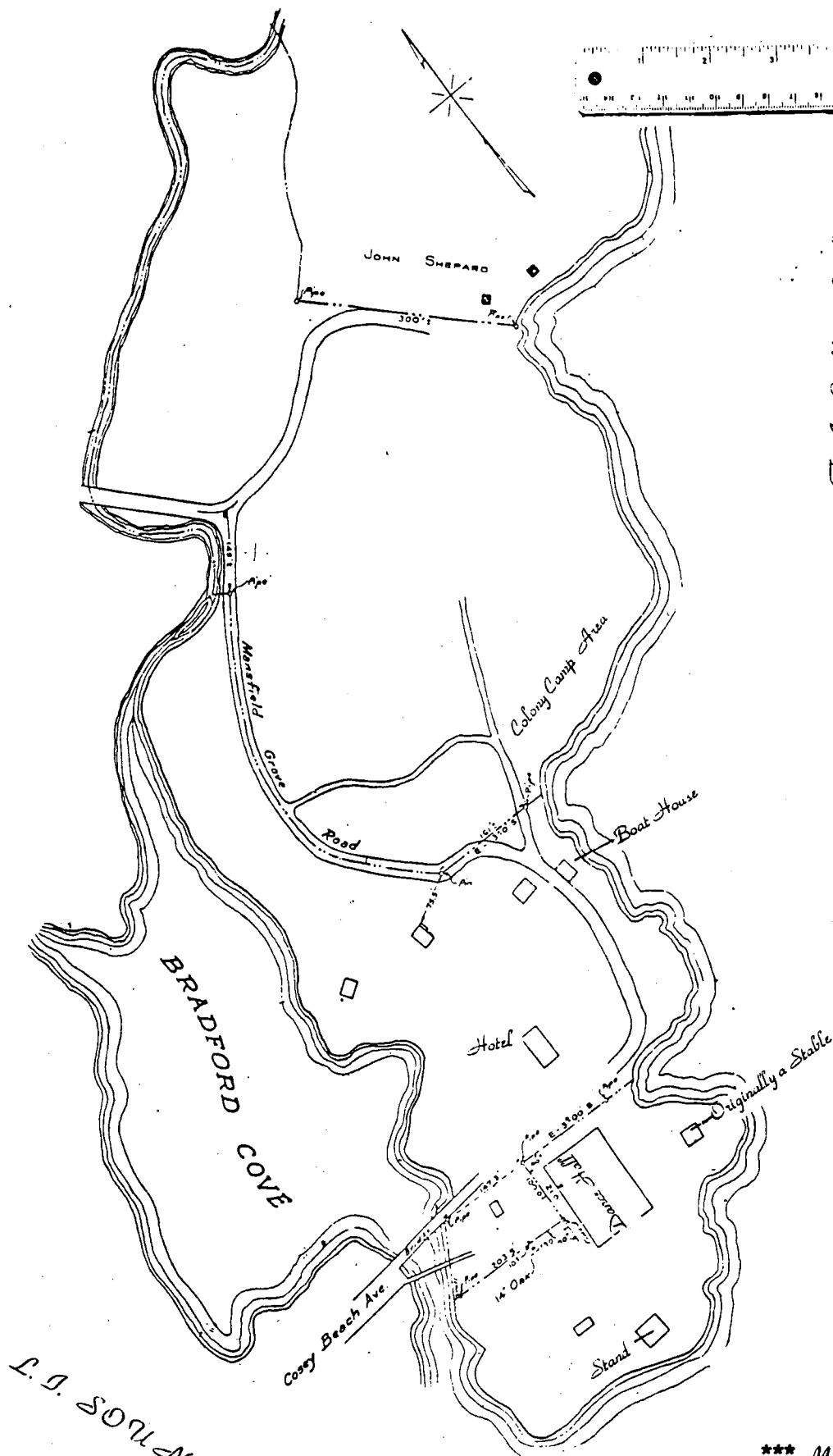
His wife was in labor. I let him take the car. Before leaving, he asked if Molly or I would stay with his wife while he was gone. Yes, of course! So Molly, and lantern and my set of various new nurse's instruments, set forth to the cottage, which was tiny and built for the summer, not winter living. Thin walls. Cold. The one year old baby was in the bed with the mother.

After a while the man returned. The midwife was away but Doctor Robert Taylor of East Haven, arrived. Just before that, the baby arrived, but Dr. Taylor took care of the cord and did all the necessary things. He charged \$20.00 and took off, also taking my instruments, which I never saw again! Molly said it was a spontaneous delivery by the baby himself.

Molly went over the next morning, got the baby, and brought him to our warm kitchen to bathe him. She did this every morning for a week and Papa helped her. He would hold the baby upside down by the legs while she wound the belly-band around him for good umbilical support.

We were the only people living at the shore. One morning, Papa's friend, Captain Chidsey, arrived on the trolley over the hill and knocked on the kitchen door. When he came in, he was surprised and amazed, and he probably wondered where I was! I was at work at Dr. Donald Porter's in New Haven.

After living in their cold quarters for a week, the young couple moved away with their two babies. They must have found a place nearer the center of East Haven, for they appeared a few years later at the shore, the father having become a rubbish collector for the town. The couple, whose name was Jennings, in the end had nine boys, all very handsome, but Molly's Richard was the best looking of all!!!



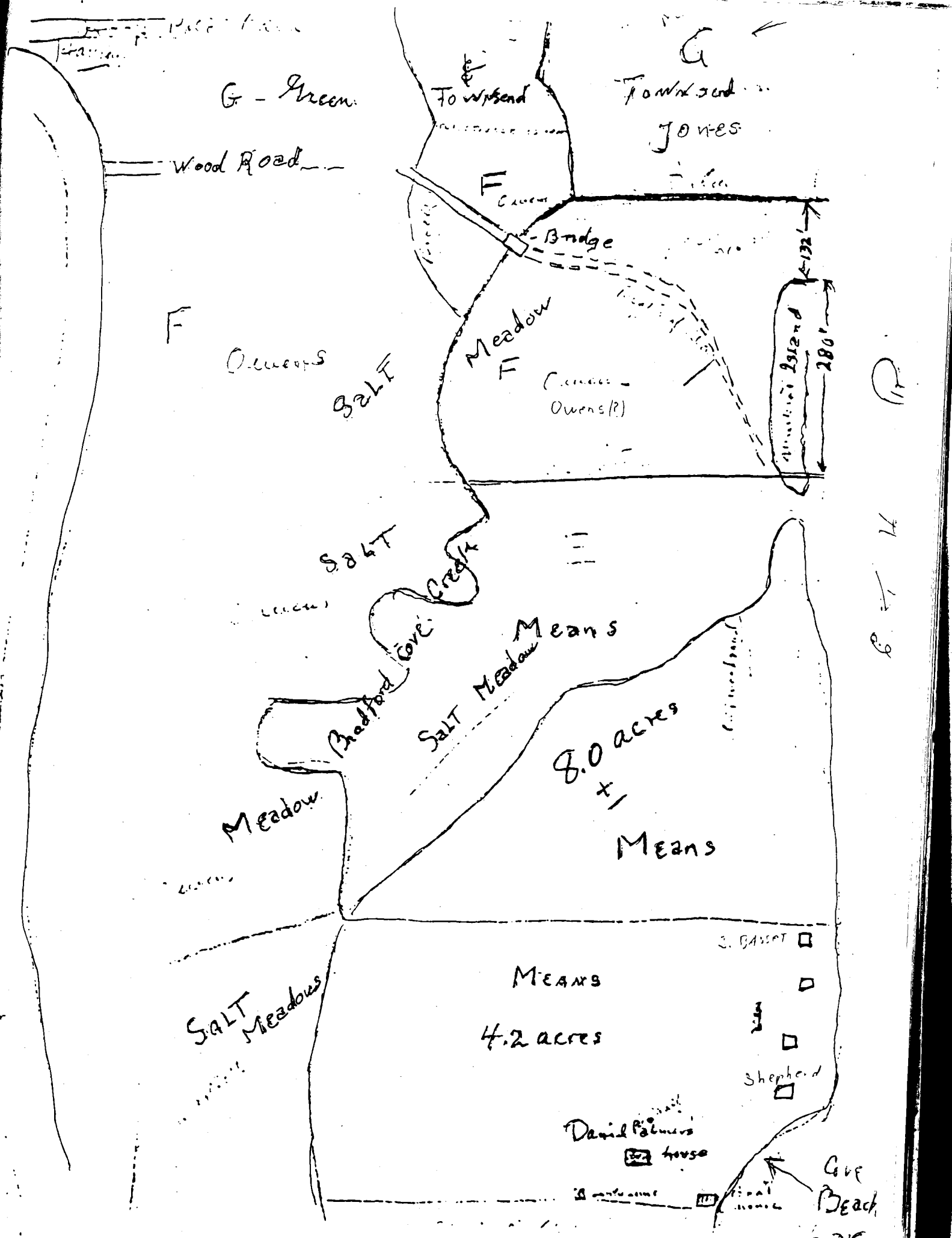
JARM RIVER
EAST HAVEN RIVER.

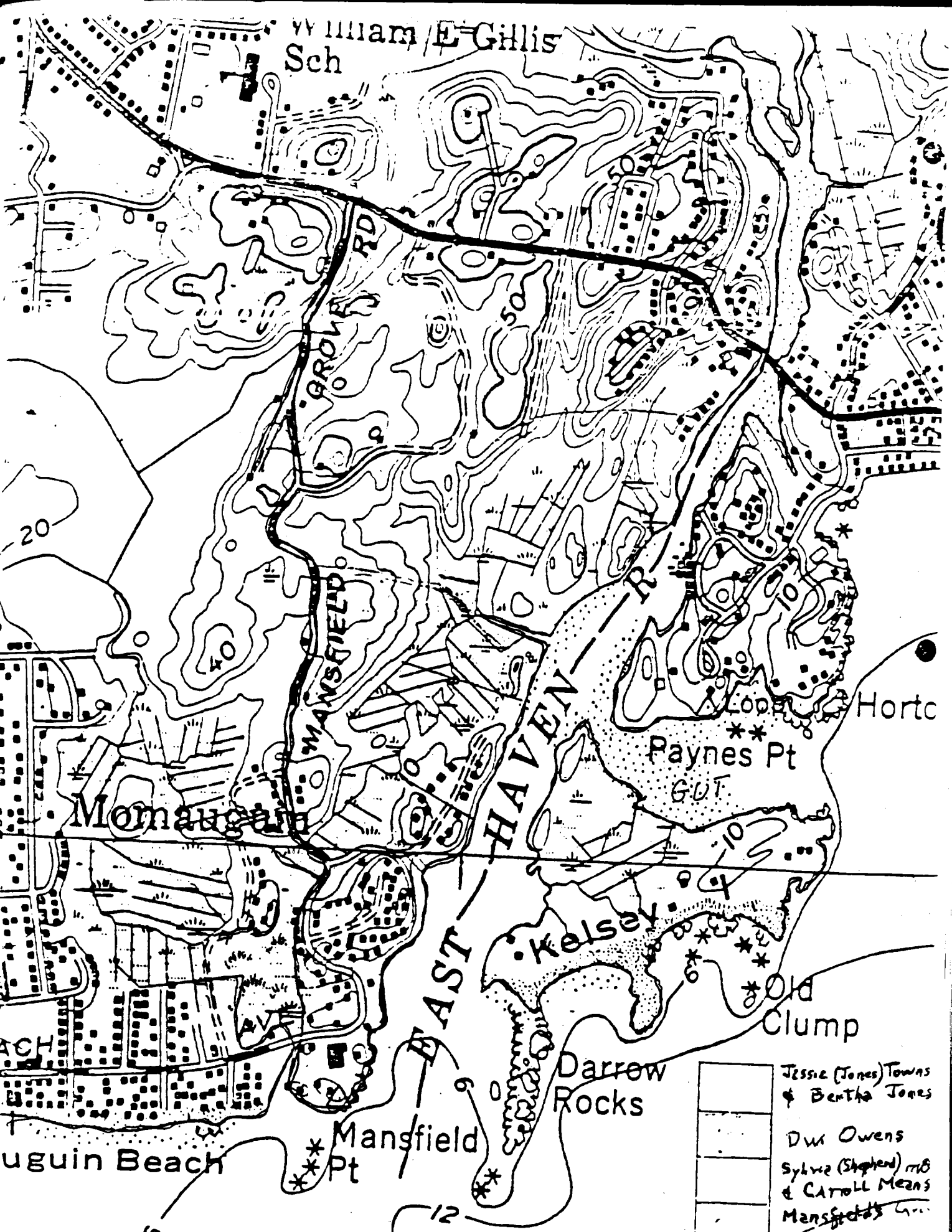
L. J. SOLUND

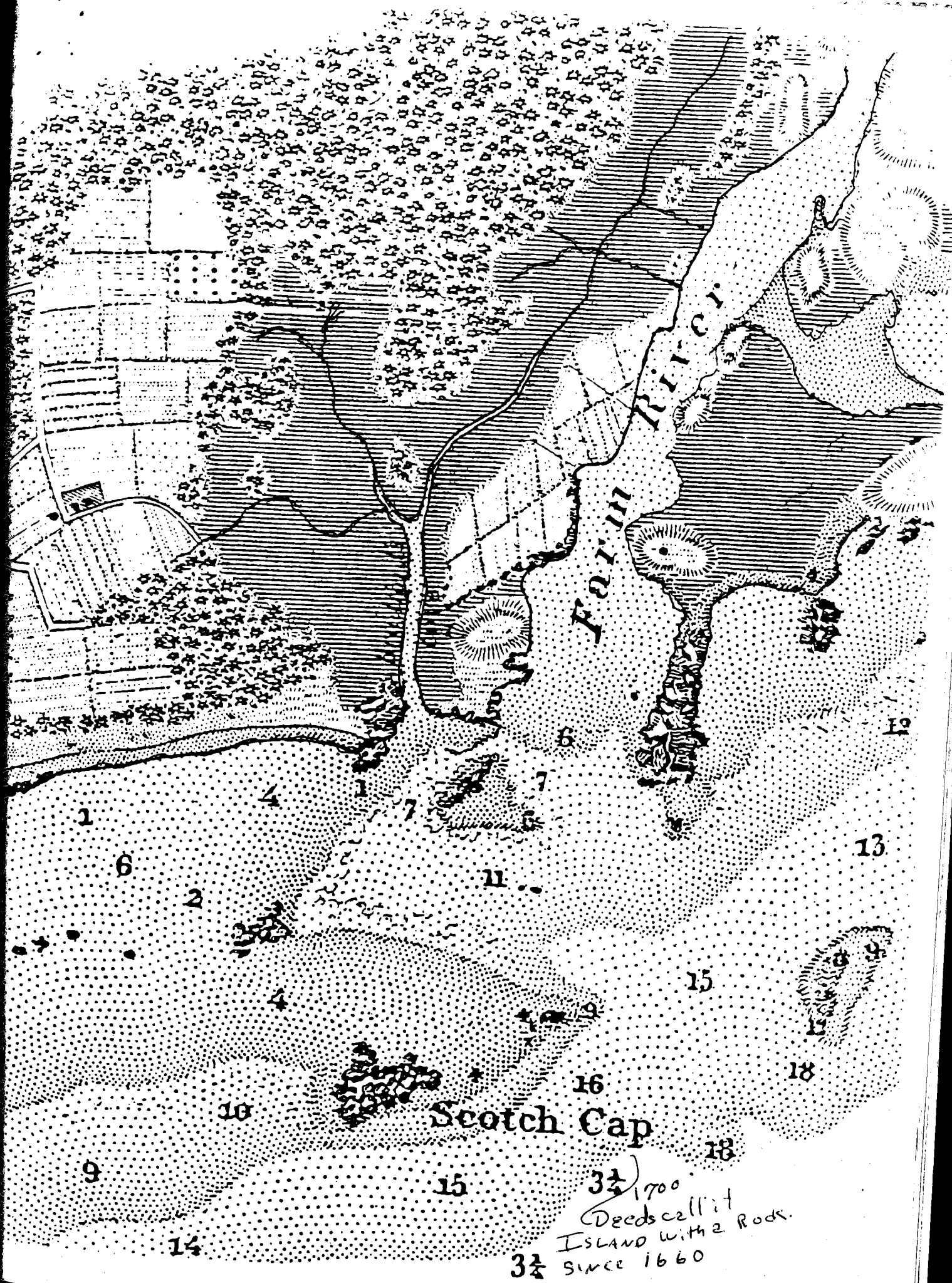
I hereby certify this map to be substantially correct
Hubert B. Burt
 CIVIL ENGINEER

*** MAP OF ***
MANSFIELD GROVE
 EAST HAVEN CONN.
 SCALE-1"=100' May 11, 1935

[ORIG. Added to - C.L.E.N.]







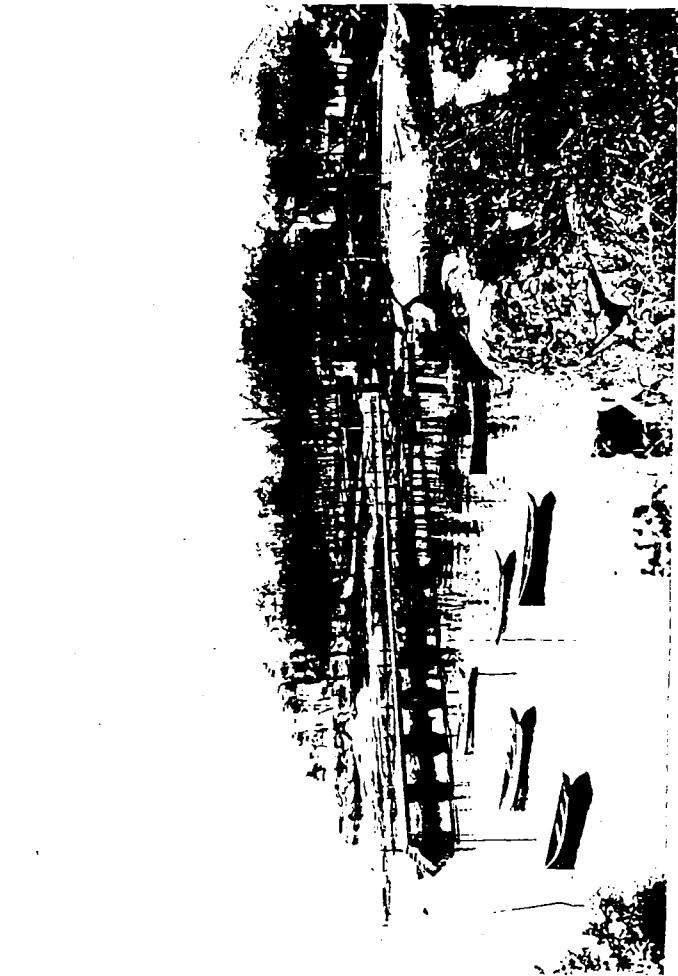
3 1/2 1700
Deeds cellit
Island with 2 Rocks.
Since 1660

01903

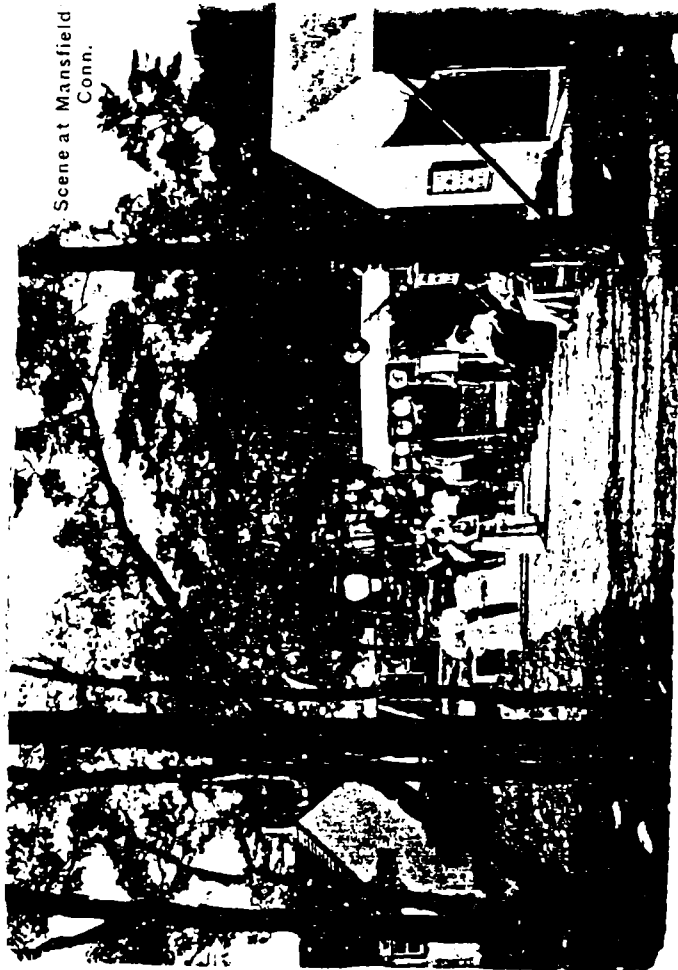


EAST HAVEN, CONN. —

View of Mansfield Grove



Scene at Mansfield
Conn.





In photo at left, John Franklin Shepherd, the patriarch of Shepherd's Grove, and his daughter, the late Mary Elizabeth Shepherd in photo taken during the 1930s. Above, Mrs. John Shepherd and four "flappers" of the 1920s, Mrs. Irving Mansfield (Grace Peck), Mrs. Carroll Means (Sylvia Shepherd), Mrs. George Eaton (Redney Peck) and Mrs. George McKlerman (Sarah Shepherd.)



This is picturesque Shepherd's Grove in East Haven which provided many pleasurable years for members of the Shepherd family for more than a century.

8/13/1978

Shepherd's Grove Revisited; '100 Years Of Good Living'

By HAROLD HORNSTEIN

Mr. and Mrs. Carroll Alton Means have been residing in the hills of Woodbridge for 35 years, but a part of them has never left the picturesque shoreline spot in East Haven known to oldtimers as Shepherd's Grove.

Located on the west bank of the Farm River, near its mouth, Shepherd's Grove was named for Mrs. Means' family. Her maiden name was Sylvia Shepherd, and her family owned the Grove for more than 100 years, starting in 1857.

"And it was 100 years of good living," says Mrs. Means.

In all those years, the place hasn't changed much. It looks like a bit of Maine. The big house the Shepherds lived in sits atop a craggy cliff about 30 feet above the estuarial waters. There's a small beach below the house and across the water is cabin-dotted Kelsey's Island.

It's a unique part of the Greater New Haven area, one that reflects many eras, life styles and personalities of the past.

For one thing, Shepherd's Grove was once the northern end of the Mansfield Grove resort, legendary site of church picnics, outings of political parties and all manner of get-togethers. Dennis Mansfield, for whom Mansfield Grove is named, was the brother of Sarah Mansfield, the grandmother of Mrs. Sylvia Shepherd Means.

Thus, her family acquired Shepherd's Grove.

Carroll Means, one of the state's leading antiquarians, has written a monograph on Shepherd's Grove. He also discusses Mansfield Grove in the short history, quoting a feature article in a 1919 edition of *The Sunday Register*. The writer of the article, known as "The Old Timer," quotes Dennis Mansfield as follows:

"Mr. Mansfield was very fond of his



place and the stories which went with it. He told me that it was, always, from the first days of the red man, a famous resort for men bent on shore dinner and shore dinner roasts, and to prove his statement, he took me out on the cliffs in the rear of the Grove where the crevices and spaces in the rocks were filled with tons of white and weatherbeaten oyster shells — shells that were left there by the Indians of long ago."

Both Shepherd's Grove, which is a 14.1 acre tract, and Mansfield Grove, are part of an area known as Half Mile Island. It is separated from the mainland by Bradford Cove on the west, setting it off from Cosey Beach and Bradford Cove Creek, which extends north, draining the salt meadows surrounding the island. At extreme high tide the salt meadows are completely hidden beneath a wide expanse of water which ebbs and flows with the tide.

As a youth, Mrs. Means' father, John Shepherd, would spend his summers at Mansfield Grove, working with his uncle, Dennis Mansfield. One evening, he strolled down to the water and saw again a young woman whom he had met earlier in the day at the hotel, where she was visiting friends. She was sitting by the shore and John Shepherd tossed pebbles over her head into the water, implicitly catching her attention.

That meeting eventually led to the marriage of John Shepherd, a Yankee

from North Haven and Margaret Roche, an Irish girl who had come from County Galway.

The couple raised four daughters and two sons. For 40 years, starting in 1887, Shepherd operated a dairy farm and sold milk on a retail basis in New Haven. He had one of the first retail milk licenses in the state. He and his daughters, Mary Elizabeth (Molly) and Sylvia took up residence year-round in Shepherd's Grove. He lived there until his death at the age of 89 in 1944.

The Meases, at their home the other day, shared their memories of life at Shepherd's Grove. On hand, too, was their daughter, Mrs. Charles C. (Mary) Huber, of Bronxville, N.Y., one of the 13 grandchildren of John and Margaret Shepherd.

"My father and Captain William Chidsey, of East Haven, would draw the captain's lobster pots in the mornings," said Mrs. Means. "The captain was in his nineties and he'd call my father, who was in his eighties, 'My boy.' They were the most beautiful rowers on the shore."

In the early days of aviation, Captain Chidsey pulled something of a surprise. As a publicity stunt, a Shell plane had landed at New Haven Airport and there was an offer to take older people up for a ride. Chidsey was chosen for a flight.

"I'll go if I can take my boy along," he told the sponsors. That would be fine. They were stunned when Chidsey arrived with his bearded 'boy' — John Shepherd at age 80.

When the Meases lived at the Grove, there were three original two-story dwellings and the barn that Shepherd converted to his home in 1922. In addition, there were about a dozen small cottages some of which the tenants owned, though they did not own the land.

On Sunday mornings, Shepherd's friends would come down from the East

14 B

Haven Green to pass the time of day with him. To the house came Chidseys, Gerishes, Thompsons, Smiths, Bishops and Atwaters. A frequent visitor was the late Leland M. Thompson, who fished with the patriarch of the Grove. A neighbor in the Grove was the late Maurice Sarasohn, the popular host at Gilbert's Restaurant at the corner of Temple and Chapel Streets. He recently died out-of-state.

Mrs. Means has a vivid recollection of the death of Leland Thompson in 1935 at age 56. "He and my father would go black fishing and one morning they got into a rowboat with an outboard motor and went to the mouth of the Farm River. My father was in the bow, Leland in the stern. Suddenly my father felt a thump. He looked around and saw that Leland had fallen

forward. My father knew nothing about the motor but he got to the back, turned the boat around and headed it toward the beach at Shepherd's Grove. My sister Mary Elizabeth called a doctor and it was found that Leland was dead."

Mary Elizabeth (Molly) Shepherd was the superintendent of the old Yale Infirmary at 276 Prospect St. She died in 1950. Mrs. Means also was in the nursing profession, having graduated from the Connecticut Training School for Nurses at the New Haven Hospital, Class of 1922. Her classmates often staged outings at Shepherd's Grove.

John Shepherd kept a ledger in which he recorded, on Sept. 21, 1938, "Gale hurricane force 88 MPH at Kopper's Coke." It was, of course, a masterpiece of

understatement. He left out all the gory details. "We lost about 150 trees and all of the original houses were damaged," said Carroll Means. "It took us about two years to cut up the trees, clean up the grounds and roadways."

Several years before he died, John Shepherd told his daughters Molly and Sylvia that he'd like to leave them the Grove as their share of his estate. When the daughters inherited the Grove, Carroll Means suggested they draw up an option to buy it from each other at a stated figure. When Molly died, Carroll Means purchased her half so that he and Sylvia Means owned it together as husband and wife.

The Meanses held the property until 1964 when it was sold to Sumner Willis, who now lives there, and Donald Lippincott, of North Haven. The two purchasers were residents of New York when they bought the Grove.

The lure of the Grove keeps the Meanses returning to it. They were there the other day for a picnic with their daughter Mary and grandchildren, Ann, 15, Betsy, 19 and John, 10. "It's still beautiful — breezy and beautiful," said Mrs. Means, wistfully. "It was kind of a pilgrimage for us today."

I visited the Grove with the Meanses, who pointed out historical features on the way. Driving down Hemingway Avenue, they took note of the oyster-white clapboard house that once was occupied by members of the Hemingway family, original settlers in the area.

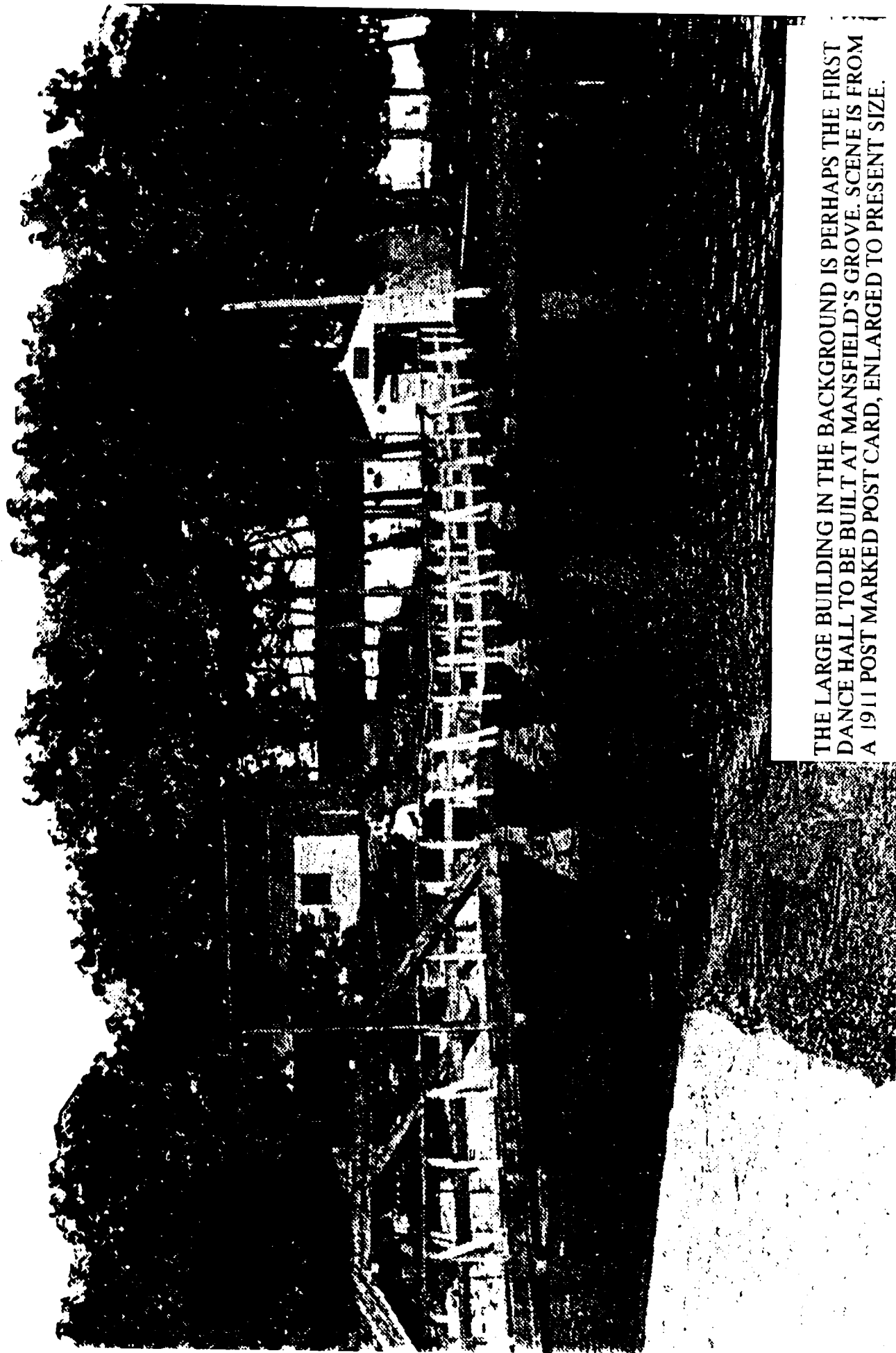
They lamented the deterioration of Mansfield Grove. There are empty spaces where once there was a hotel, a picnic area, roller skating rink, dance hall, pavilion and various residences. We turned into Cosey Beach Avenue and Mrs. Means reminisced. "There's where Swift's Hotel was. Oh, that was a bizzie. We used to come down nights and watch them dance." Trolleys would go down Cosey Beach Avenue.

Finally, we arrived at the old Shepherd homestead in the Grove. It's now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Willis, with whom we visited. We sat in the big front room, looking out at the sea, and at the little beach, empty except for a rowboat. We thought of all the times the Shepherds had gone out in such a boat and of the free, cozy feeling in the Grove.

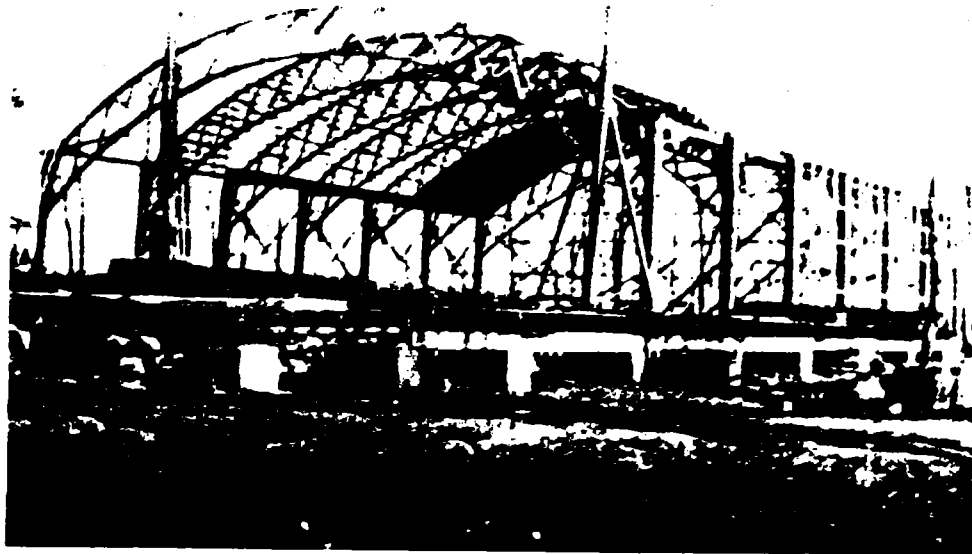
It's not a place that you leave by selling it and moving away.



John Franklyn Shepherd & Daughter
Mary Elizabeth Shepherd (1930)



THE LARGE BUILDING IN THE BACKGROUND IS PERHAPS THE FIRST DANCE HALL TO BE BUILT AT MANSFIELD'S GROVE. SCENE IS FROM A 1911 POST MARKED POST CARD, ENLARGED TO PRESENT SIZE.



FRAMING THE
DANCE HALL



The Horizon Club, an East Haven landmark for 45 years, will be razed next week, the result of a June 11 fire that gutted the main ballroom. Owner Leon Amendola, foreground, said negotiations are under way for the sale or leasing of the land.

Club To Be Torn Down

Horizon Slips Away, Memories Stay

By DEE BURGHARDT
Register Staff Reporter

EAST HAVEN — The nice thing about memories is that they always stay fresh and bright. Yesterday? It could have been last week, or was it 30 years ago?

Remember Rudy Vallee singing in that nasal voice, "Drink to all the happy hours! Drink to the careless days"? Or, "I'm just a vagabond lover"?

And the crowds loved him and Cab Calloway and Glenn Miller and the dancers stayed up half the night dancing to the magic music and their own dreams.

It was decades ago but the music and memories go together like sand and the beach. Like magic nights and starry dreams of moonlight beaming softly over the water near the Horizon Club in East Haven.

The crowds and the bands have gone now, and next week the Horizon Club itself will be gone.

The first of the week a demolition crew will begin tearing down the remains of the building where thousands of people once sang and danced. Two years ago when Guy Lombardo was there, he drew a crowd of 1,600. But 30 or 40 years ago, the big name dance bands drew crowds of 3,000 on a Sunday night. That was the heyday of a piece of property that once was called "No Man's Land" because the town fathers deemed it so worthless.

No one listened to Groves J.

Tuttle, a local attorney, and the only person who raised his voice against the sale of the beach and waterfront property. He predicted, in 1894, that some day the land would be of great value and should be held in use for the townspeople.

A. B. Clinton of North Haven and some members of his family were the first purchasers of the shorefront property, but it did not become a summer resort until between 1877-80 when a few lots were purchased and cottages erected. By 1891 there were only seven cottages at Cosey Beach.

Known as the Old Mansfield Grove Pavilion, there appeared to be legal doubt to the ownership of the property, which extended from the late George Fenton's place to Mansfield Grove. The town then had a special act passed by the legislature authorizing it to sell the land. The town immediately plotted it and sold the lots.

Prior to that, Dennis Mansfield owned it from about 1860 to 1889. Charles Barelett, who worked for Mansfield running the property as a picnic area and restaurant, became part owner after Mansfield's death. When Bartlett ran it until 1919, the Mansfield Grove House had become famous throughout the area as a restaurant. The only other restaurant equalling it was Wilcox's Pier in New Haven.

However, it was Bartlett's son, Charles, who built the first dance hall in 1923. For many

years it was "the" place to go, until it was turned into a roller skating rink during the depression years of 1936.

In 1963 Leon Amendola, a hair stylist with Charles of the Ritz, refurbished and reconstructed the building for a public restaurant, cocktail lounge and dance hall. The remodeling job cost \$100,000, the ceiling alone was \$10,000.

Then on June 12, this year, fire broke out in the rear of the huge banquet hall, causing such extensive damage it has closed the old landmark.

Commercial Wreckers of New Haven will take down the largest building of its type left standing in Connecticut.

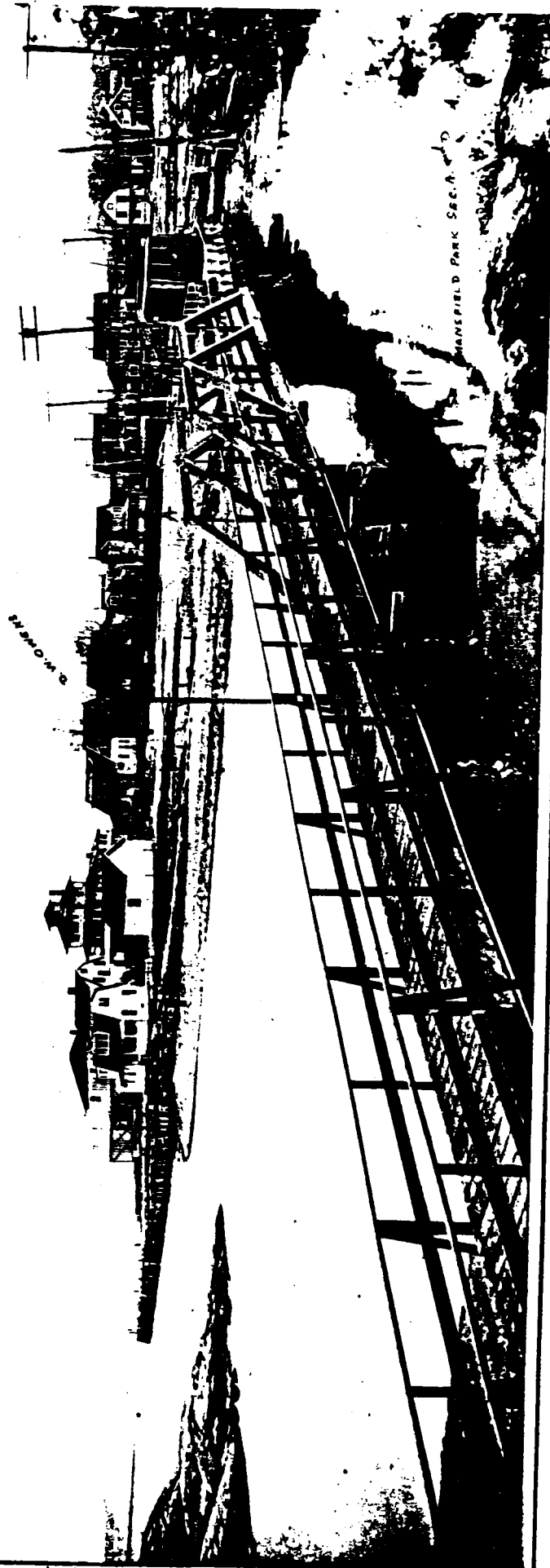
Amendola said Wednesday negotiations are currently under way with a Boston concern for the erection of a three-stage theater. A New Haven concern has also expressed interest in purchasing the land for a housing and beach complex while Guilford resident is also interested in building apartments there.

He ran his fingers over the keys of a burned grand piano. A tinkling brass sound came out. Over in another corner was a burned and scorched player piano, while on top of a heap of charred timbers lay the remains of an organ.

"I am interested in long-range programs," he said.

"I want to see something decent here. It is one of the most beautiful shore properties along the coast."

Fire:
June 12
1969



BRIDGE, DESIGNED AND BUILT BY TROLLEY COMPANY 1898
ACROSS BRADFORD CREEK TO MANSFIELD'S GROVE

BLAZE LEVELS HOTEL IN MANSFIELD GROVE

OLD Rocky Point Building Razed--Loss estimated at \$8,000-\$10,000--Fireman busy two and a half hours. (No date 1938?)

Fire of unknown origin destroyed the old Rocky Point Hotel at Mansfield Grove, East Haven Conn, late last night, causing damage unofficially estimated at between \$8,000 and \$10,000. Fireman from headquarters and the Riverside company, directed by chief Ernest Hansen were summoned at 10:49.

FRAGILE STRUCTURE

The building, 60 years old, built of pine and sheathed, with no plaster, made a perfect place for a fire. The flames swept thru the two story structure, fanned by a strong wind which both aided and hampered the fireman.

According to Chief Hansen, the fire was discovered by Charles A. Bartlett, owner of the hotel, in the South east corner of the first floor of the structure. Bartlett telephoned an alarm, and the two companies answered.

Two lines of hoses were laid, one from a hydrant 500 feet away, across the bridge, and the other from the river. Because the wind was blowing out over the water, the flames could not spread to the dancing pavilion nearby. The fireman kept the pavilion wetted down, however, just in case sparks should fly.

Fireman remained on the scene until 12:50, when the flames had died down enough to permit most of the men to go home. Chief Hansen said, however, some members of the department would remain at the scene for an hour or two to continue wetting down the embers to prevent a recurrence of the blaze.

Mr and Mrs. Ernest Dupuis, caretakers of the building, and their two year old child, were away when the fire started, it was reported, and had not returned when Chief Hansen and the men left for headquarters. It was first reported that the Dupuis family had been inside the building, but got out safely.

From a newspaper account, probably the N.H. Register date unknown

2/22/39 } E.H. FIRE RECORD
10:49 P.M }

Blaze Levels Hotel In Mansfield Grove

Old Rocky Point Building Razed—Loss Estimated at Between \$8,000 and \$10,000 — Firemen Busy Two and One-Half Hours

Fire of unknown origin destroyed the old Rocky Point Hotel at Mansfield Grove, East Haven, late last night, causing damage unofficially estimated at between \$8,000 and \$10,000. Firemen from headquarters and the Riverside company, directed by Chief Ernest Hansen, were summoned at 10:49.

Fragile Structure

The building, 60 years old, built of pine and sheathed with no plaster, made a perfect place for a fire. The flames swept through the two-story structure, fanned by a strong wind which both aided and hampered the firemen.

According to Chief Hansen, the fire was discovered by Charles A. Bartlett, owner of the hotel, in the southeast corner of the first floor of the structure. Bartlett telephoned an alarm, and the two companies answered.

Two lines of hose were laid, one from a hydrant 500 feet away, across the bridge, and the other from the river. Because wind was blowing out over the water, the flames could not spread to the dancing pavilion nearby, thus helping firemen immeasurably. The firemen kept the pavilion wetted down, however, just in case sparks should fly.

Firemen remained on the scene until 12:50, when the flames had died down enough to permit most of the men to go home. Chief Hansen said, however, some members of the department would remain at the scene for an hour or two to continue wetting down the embers to prevent a recurrence of the blaze.

Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Dupuis, caretakers of the building, and their 2-year-old child, were away when the fire started, it was reported, and had not returned when Chief Hansen and the men left for headquarters. It was first reported that the Dupuis family had been inside the building but got out safely.

1939
60
1879

2/22/39

10:49 PM

Register

Following from a letter to a possible relative, living out of state.

We have been tracing the history of the so-called Half-Mile Island, now called Mansfield's Grove and Shepherds' Grove.

I noted, in the Genealogy by Rev. Havens, that some of the Bartlett families moved to the general area in which you now live. Assuming that this is the same family, we request an information that you have that you would be willing to share with us, relative to East Haven, Conn.. Our records indicate the following

Horace Bartlett and his wife Frances Redfield, who was born in 1810, removed from Guilford to East Haven in 1852. The Beers map of 1868 shows a Bartlett homestead on what is now Grannis Street just south of its juncture of Strong Street and, in all probability, is where Horace settled.

They had a son Charles, and four other children according to the Havens' genealogy. The next Charles had three children, by Mary Ellen Butler one of whom was also named Charles, in 1866

A news paper obituary dated December 11, 1919 said the Charles of the Grove, was 54 years old, which if correct, would indicate birth in 1865. Be that as it may the time element seems correct in general for this Charles to be the man who lived in Mansfield's Grove, and eventually whose family became the owners of that site. These were Charles, Donald and daughter Jessie. Another son had died in WW1 and was named Harry R. Bartlett. Our American Legion Post is named after him.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,
Clif. Nitchke.

Answer / No Relation known