

# Do-It-Yourself Walking Tour

by Doris Sherrow, July, 2000

**The new road went through the smaller parcel** of the Wangunk reservation, which was used for ceremonial functions, the residential area being on the larger parcel near Penny Corner Road. Toward the west end near the river was the Hot House--the sweat lodge. There had been burials in that area, as well.

Shipbuilding began here in the 1750s under the direction of George Lewis, and continued under his sons until Sylvester Gildersleeve bought the shipyard lot in 1828. Gildersleeve also set up several other businesses on the street, including a carriage factory, a mattress shop, and an ice house.

Here is a list of the properties as you will encounter them walking from Main Street toward the river:

**644 & 646 Main** -- Samuel Buckingham's & Gildersleeve Stores, both general stores built in the 1850s. An earlier wooden store building occupied the site of 646, and a house was built in the 1740s on the site of 644. From 1872 to 1952 the Gildersleeve Post Office occupied part of the Gildersleeve Store.

**3 Indian Hill** -- the Job Bates house, a single-story colonial, built about 1747. Bates was a squatter on the Wangunk reservation, coming here from Wareham, Massachusetts. In a 1760 petition to the General Assembly to buy the reservation from the Wangunk, he wrote "through mistake, I have set my house on the same..."

**5 Indian Hill** -- the David Bates house, a two-story colonial built in 1779 for Job's oldest son. It was raised about 1850 to accommodate the barroom of the Union Hotel in the basement. This tavern continued more or less uninterrupted until shut down by Prohibition in 1920. A bottling plant stood on the hill west of this house in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

**Left, opposite 5** -- Airex Rubber Products Corporation. This was a 3-story tobacco warehouse until 1943, when James Hetrick bought it, took off the top two stories, and began using it for the war effort, creating rubber parts for aircraft.

**Left, opposite 15** -- the former FCV Tool & Engineering, now part of Airex.

**15 Indian Hill** -- the John Button house, a two-story colonial, built 1796. Button worked in the nearby shipyards, and, with Sylvester Gildersleeve's father, was nearly drowned on the river in 1801. (see *Carved in Stone*, April, 2000).

**21 Indian Hill** -- the "Swede Tenement," built in 1871 by Sylvester Gildersleeve to accommodate the Swedish immigrants he employed in his shipyard and factories.

**Right, opposite 32** -- the Lewis Shipyard, 1750-1828, then Gildersleeve Shipyard, 1828 to 1932, and since 1945, Petzold's Marina. George Lewis built boats here in the 1750s, followed by his grandson Abel, who sold the lot to Sylvester Gildersleeve in 1828. Gildersleeve also built a large ice house on the hill overlooking the boat yard for the storage of ice chopped from the river to be shipped to New York hotels. The Gildersleeve yard closed in 1932 and remained closed until it was bought by William Petzold in 1945.

**32 Indian Hill** -- the Elijah Shepard house, built in 1799. Shepard also worked in the shipyard, alternating between here and Middle Haddam. In the late 1800s, Gildersleeve used this house as an office for his saw mill.

**36 Indian Hill** -- Theodore F. Lewis's tailor shop, built 1851. Lewis was descended from the Lewis family who had operated the shipyard, though he chose tailoring over shipbuilding.

**40 Indian Hill** -- the Theodore F. Lewis house, built 1846.

**42 Indian Hill** -- the John Lewis house, built 1889. Lewis found so many Indian bones while attempting to dig a cellar that he decided he didn't need a cellar!

**41 Indian Hill** -- this house has the corner posts of a late 1700s or early 1800s building. There were two old houses in the area which disappeared, one to the west of #15 built about 1807 by Samuel Bartlet, and another, west of that, built in 1771 by James Witon. Perhaps this house is one of those two, moved to this location.

**46 Indian Hill** -- the Abiel Cheney Jr. house, built 1796.

Formerly on the right opposite 46 -- the Deacon David Sage house, built about 1770 on land

bought from the Wangunk. About 1975, the house was taken down. It was later reassembled in Story City, Iowa. Not long after, developers tried to create a 58-unit condominium complex on this side of the road, wrapping around the Greek Revival-style house at #57, but the land was eventually sold for single family houses, numbers 43, 49, 51, 55, 59, 63, and 67.

**52 Indian Hill** -- the William Dixon house, a Greek Revival style house built 1849. Dixon was a master carpenter at the shipyards.

**57 Indian Hill** -- the Richard Concklin house, Greek Revival style, built in 1849. Concklin was David Sage's great grandson.

**58 Indian Hill** -- the Philip Gildersleeve house, a two-story colonial built in 1787, 11 years after Gildersleeve and his family had escaped the British attack on Long Island. Gildersleeve was a master carpenter and architect. Sylvester Gildersleeve was born in this house in 1795.

**64 Indian Hill** -- the John Pelton Jr. house, a two-story colonial built in 1796. However, at the time it was built, it was a single-story gambrel-roofed house like #76.

**Right, formerly opposite Taylor Drive** -- the Henry Concklin house, a Greek Revival house similar to #57, built by Richard's brother Henry around 1850, and torn down in anticipation of the condominium complex in 1980.

**70 Indian Hill** -- the Sarah (Norcott) Lincoln house, Victorian domestic style built in 1870. Sarah was the daughter of Elijah Norcott who bought #64 in 1833.

**Right opposite 70 & 74** -- open field; the Hot House lot probably lay along the riverbank here, or possibly to the east under the hill; shipbuilding probably took place here as well--notice the built-up spot which could have supported a dock.

**76 Indian Hill** -- Thomas Stevenson, 1766. Stevenson had a wharf on the river. This house was later the home of the William Norcott who ran the ferry here in the early 1800s.

Beyond the barrier -- the Wangunk reservation land stopped about where the barrier is. On the site of the **Firemen's Picnic Grounds**, George Ranney built a house in 1720. It burned in 1910. During the early 20th century, a rowdy dance hall occupied this site. In the 1950s, plans arose to create a fish cannery here, and alarmed Indian Hill and Main Street residents took up a collection and bought it for the firemen to establish the Fireman's Picnic Grounds.