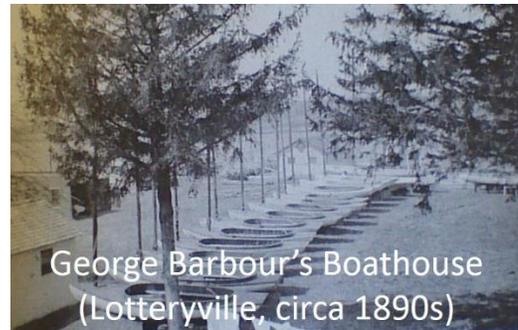


Avondale Farm Preserve: A Brief History of the Preserve and its Surroundings

The village of Avondale is part of the town of Westerly and lies on the eastern shore of the Pawcatuck River, approximately four miles south of downtown Westerly and two miles north of Watch Hill. Prior to the arrival of the first Europeans to the area in the 1600s, the area of land east of the Pawcatuck River as far as Weekapaug was at one time home to the Eastern Niantic Indian tribe, who were allied with the Narragansett Indian Tribe to their east. Much of the present day town of Westerly was deeded to the original white settlers by the Indian sachem Sosoa in the year 1660.

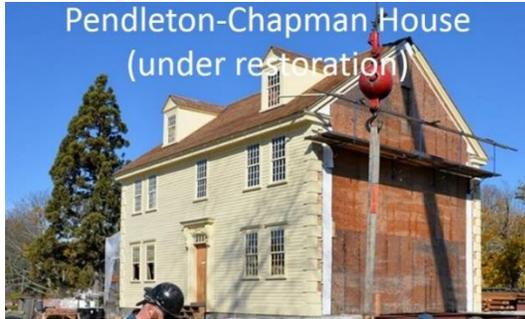
Avondale traces its history as a village to Lottery Village in 1750. Col. Joseph Pendleton held a large tract of land of about 700 acres including present day Avondale. The land had been passed down from Pendleton's grandfather, Capt. James Pendleton, who settled Westerly in 1669. In 1699, the Pendletons reportedly operated a tavern on the first floor of a building and a brothel on the second. In August 1749, Col. Joseph Pendleton incurred major financial losses from a trip to the West Indies, where he lost his uninsured ship and its cargo of molasses and rum. Col. Pendleton then successfully petitioned the Assembly of the Colony of Rhode Island to divide his land into 124 quarter-acre house lots to be sold by lottery, with the proceeds used to settle his debts. The grant was given February 27, 1750, and thus started "Lottery Village" or "Lotteryville".



Early inhabitants were farmers and fisherman, but later included sailors and shipmasters. Much of the village's growth occurred during the late 1800s. In 1847, the first church in the village was built at a cost of \$1,200. The building burned in 1852, but was replaced the next year with a structure still standing and known as "Avondale Chapel". In 1867, a road from Lotteryville to Watch Hill was opened.

In 1893, the village was renamed Avondale after a US Post Office was established there and complaints arose over the "lottery" label. Postal officials in Washington decreed that "Lotteryville" smacked of gambling and requested the good people of the village to come up with another name if they wanted a post office. Three names were proposed: Ninigret, Mastuxet, and Avondale. Two of the names had Indian origins, and the post officials responded that we already had enough Indian names in this part of the country, so Avondale was given the go-ahead.

Avondale Farm saw unusual action in 1969 when a plane carrying three passengers from Pennsylvania to Massachusetts was diverted to Westerly Airport in heavy fog. Unable to find the airport, the pilot forced his plane down in the field at Avondale Farm.



Several original buildings remain today, including the Avondale Chapel and Col. Pendleton's circa 1740 home known today as the "Pendleton – Chapman Home". Israel Chapman purchased the home and lot in 1812 and at the time owned property from the Pawcatuck River east to Weekapaug. For 150 years, Chapman's family farmed the property as Avondale Farm, including pigs, more than 25,000 chickens, dairy

farming peaking in 1942, and later haying.

In 1984, when there were no more farmers left in the Chapman family and the farmhouse and grounds were getting difficult to maintain, the Chapmans sold 71 acres, including the Chapman Farm, to a New York development firm. The developer originally planned for 108 condominiums. The land was zoned for one-half acre lots, and the developer requested to change zoning to "planned development units", which would allow as many condos as the developer pleased. After that request was rejected by the Westerly Town Council in 1986, the developer changed to plans for 43 single-home lots. In 1987, the developer filed a federal lawsuit against Jane Buffum, Irene Cabot, former Town Manager Glenn Miller, and Town Councilor Hatsy Kniffin, alleging these residents violated his civil rights by attempting to scuttle the project. These individuals were instrumental in campaigning against the development of the land, and making the current Avondale Farm Preserve possible. The lawsuit was rejected in 1988. The developer lost the property in 1995 due to foreclosure, and the development went up for auction.

In October 1998, with the help of many donations from residents and some state open space funding, the remaining thirty lot subdivision on the remnant tract of the farm was purchased by the Westerly Land Trust ("WLT") for permanent preservation and public access. The WLT received grants to purchase and restore property for the benefit of wildlife. Volunteer labor and money were used for that purpose. Additional work may be needed for future protection.

The acquisition of the Avondale Farm Preserve was significant in that it saved the WLT from dissolution, was the first acquired WLT property, and sparked interest in the WLT developing additional preservation initiatives. The Avondale Farm Preserve is used for passive recreation today, and hosts annual events including the Farm-to-Table Dinner and Setting the Pace for Conservation 5K Run. The surrounding village of Avondale has changed little in the past century and retains its character as a small coastal settlement.

Written by Jeff Walker, May 2015



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