



A History of Avondale Farm Preserve



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The village of Avondale is within the town of Westerly and lies on the eastern shore of the Pawcatuck River, approximately four miles south of downtown Westerly and one mile north of Watch Hill. Prior to the arrival of the first Europeans in the 1600s, the land east of the Pawcatuck River as far as Weekapaug was home to indigenous peoples of the Eastern Niantic tribe, who were allied with the Narragansett tribe. Much of the present town of Westerly was deeded to the original white settlers by Niantic sachem Sosoia in 1660.

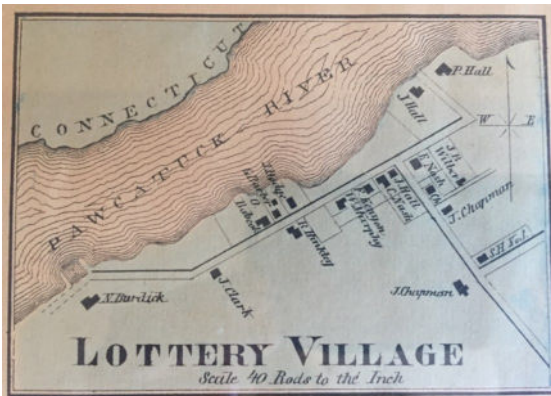
Avondale traces its history as a village back to 1750 when it became known as Lottery Village. At the time, Col. Joseph Pendleton held a large, 700-acre tract of land including present day Avondale. The land had been passed down from Pendleton's grandfather, Capt. James



Pendleton Chapman Farmhouse, circa 1855

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, a descendant, owned the land. He incurred major financial losses during a trip to the West Indies, where he lost his uninsured ship and its cargo of molasses and rum as well as his son who was captaining the voyage. Col. Pendleton 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 "Lottery Village" or "Lotteryville" was created.



Early inhabitants of Lotteryville were farmers and fisherman, but later included sailors and shipmasters. Much of the village's growth occurred during the late 1800s.

One of the original buildings remaining today is Col. Pendleton’s (circa 1740) home. It is known today as the “Pendleton – Chapman Home” since in 1812 Israel Chapman purchased the home and lot. At the time, Israel owned property from the Pawcatuck River east to Weekapaug. For 150 years, Chapman descendants farmed the property as Avondale Farm. They raised pigs, chickens and cows. Dairy farming peaked in 1942, and then fields were used for haying.

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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’s name was changed to 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 there were already enough Indian names in this part of the country, so Avondale was given the go-ahead.

As an aside, 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.

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 real estate 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. During these planning and zoning processes, three residents continually questioned the developer’s intentions and facts presented causing delays to verify such information. In 1987, the developer filed a federal lawsuit against Jane Buffum, Irene Cabot, and Hatsy Moore (as well as former Town Manager, Glenn Miller), 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. The lawsuit was rejected in 1988. Subsequently, the developer lost the property in 1995 due to foreclosure, and the whole development went up for auction.



At the auction the entire parcel was purchased for around \$1.3 million by Riad Rizk, a NY entrepreneur. Many neighbors within the Avondale village, besides Moore, Cabot and Buffum, were concerned about what might become of the defunct developer’s land which had already been paved, wired and plumbed for development. The idea of possibly



purchasing some, if not all of the lots, to protect the land started when neighbors of Avondale banded together to raise funds for a potential purchase.

It was logical to ask neighbors, people who would be directly impacted by the land being developed, and other persons who felt

invested in the area to help fund this purchase. The Avondale neighbors also realized that they would need tax advantaged status, both 501(c)(3) IRS status and Town property tax protection. Instead of starting their own non-profit company, they approached the Westerly Land Trust (WLT) whose land conservation mission seemed perfect to help with this purchase. Unfortunately, after struggling for ten years with no acquired property, the WLT Board had voted to disband and send its modest treasury to another land trust. When Cynthia Lafferty, the first WLT President, was contacted to confirm this lost prospect, it turned out that she had not yet completed the process to close out the non-profit organization. Overjoyed about the chance that the WLT would remain an organization, she agreed to wait until more work could be done regarding buying the Avondale Farm land.



Wasting no time, the NY entrepreneurs retained local real estate agents to start selling off buildable lots. The whole parcel held a price of \$1.8 million and no leeway would be given for the Avondale group to raise the needed funds. If one lot sold, the hope of saving the whole farm would be lost. Hence, the race was on to raise funds to save the land.



Setting the Pace for Conservation 5K

Sensing the urgency and risk, many people contributed to protecting the land. Neighborhood meetings were held and door to door fundraising occurred securing over 150 private donations from Avondale neighbors and other members of the community.

Chuck Royce, owner of the old Chapman cow barn and, eventual, investor in the Ocean House, contributed a private donation as well as provided a short-term bridge loan of one million dollars interest free to cover the balance. Harvey Perry of the WLT was instrumental in securing a RI DEM open space grant. In the end, it was necessary to sell a few exterior lots in order to promptly pay back the loan, but the majority of the land was protected. In October 1998, the remaining thirty lot subdivision on the remnant tract of the farm was purchased by the Westerly Land Trust for permanent preservation and public access.

The acquisition of the Avondale Farm Preserve was significant for the WLT in that it saved the it from dissolution and was the first protected property. This purchase also sparked the



Westerly Public School Field Trip

community's interest and gave viability to the WLT for preserving more lands as well as opened the door for future collaborations with Royce, including the urban initiative which has made such a positive impact on the town of Westerly.



Today, Avondale Farm Preserve is open to the public for passive recreation, agriculture and bird watching, due to its rare grassland habitat that is actively managed by WLT. The Preserve hosts annual events including the Farm Dinner and Setting the Pace for Conservation 5K Race.

The surrounding village of Avondale has changed little in the past century retaining its character as a small coastal settlement.

We invite you to explore this special place while reflecting on its past.





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