



HOMESTEADS

Of Old Black Rock

*—Indicates "Standing in 1930" (even though moved or remodeled).

Names of successive owners are in boldface.

Boldface dates are of (approximate) erection of houses.

Numbers refer to Map of "The Black Rock of William Wheeler."

P Indicates photograph; **S**, sketch. (See Index.)

- 1—**Thomas Wheeler** the pioneer, built the first **1649**
house¹, described in the Journal, and probably **S**
occupied also by his son John who died in 1669.
- 2—**Jonathan Wheeler, Sr.** (1680-1772) lived first near **1700**
the "old lot" near the wharves, but later built a
homestead on the road to Grovers Hill,—a
house, later occupied by his son, **Jonathan, Jr.**
In 1813 it was transferred from **Ephraim Knap**
to **Roswell Wells**², who lived there many years.
- 3a—**John Wheeler** (1664-1754) lived on the site of the **1700**
present public playground at Brewster and Ells-
worth Streets. In 1745 he deeded "the home-
stead where I now dwell" to his son, **Obediah**
(1716-1753), whose sons, Josiah, Abraham, and
Ezra, were living there in 1779. Ezra, after his
brothers settled in Redding, remained in the
house until 1788 when he removed to Weston

¹ The turpentine factory, which was built two centuries later and burned on the site, left a tall chimney as a curious monument which rose, strangely enough, from the exact situation of the pioneer home. Until blown down a few years ago, this chimney served local fishers and oystermen as a landmark for sighting the position of fishing-grounds and oysterbeds.

² He was known as "Quinkopagus Wells." The tale is told that one night the neighbor's boys tied up his pumphandle and then, knocking violently at his door, called "Oh Quinkopagus! Come quick! Your best cow has gone dry!"

and the property was purchased by Captain **Caleb Brewster**, whose family retained it for two generations.

- *3b—**John Wheeler** (1664-1754) also built for his oldest son, **John Wheeler** (1694-1725), a house which passing, after his death, to his daughter **Abigail** and from her to her uncle, **Thomas Hill**, in 1745, finally in 1749/50 became the property of Captain **Ichabod Wheeler** who two years later married **Deborah Burr** (daughter of Col. **John Burr** who lived on the **Stratfield Road**). In this house were born their three children, **Mary** (future wife of **Ebenezer Squire**), **William**, and **John**. After building houses for his two sons, Captain **Ichabod**, retaining a life lease, deeded his home in 1799 to his granddaughter, **Debby Squire** "for care and services in my home since 1793." 1720
S

After his death and her marriage to **Barnabas Bartram** (who died of yellow fever in the West Indies during a voyage), the house belonged successively to Captain **David Keeler**, **Herman Ruggles**, **Uriah Bulkley**, **Seth Perry**, and was finally deeded in 1827 to **Alanson Allen** from **Compo**, who lived there for the greater part of the century during which he served the community as shoemaker and postmaster.

The house has undergone many changes, but the interior retains some of the original paneling and wrought-iron,—and the old fireplaces where young **William Wheeler** sat, watching the logs burn and listening to family traditions and neighborhood gossip, later to be retold in his **Journal**.

- 4—**John Wheeler, 2d** (1729-1819), posthumous brother of the **John** for whom Captain **Ichabod's** house was built, lived only a short time in **Black Rock** before moving to **Greenfield** (he later lived 1750

in Stratfield). In 1757 he deeded "the homestead where I now live" and eighteen acres with his dwellinghouse to his cousins, **Abel** and **Jonathan Wheeler**. Later, **Abel Wheeler** bought Jonathan's share, and the house became the first pre-Revolutionary tavern in Black Rock of which evidence lingers.

The property included the west side of Grovers Avenue, south from Brewster Street, and was later the **Bradley Perry** and **Seth Perry** homesites.

- *5—**Nehemiah Burr** (1734-1814), about the time of his marriage to Sarah Osborn, built a house at the bend of the old road to Grovers Hill—now the corner of Balmforth Street. Here "on the produce of an acre of land he brought up a large family." One of his daughters, Sarah, married Captain Thomas Bartram. His son, **Noah Burr**, died in 1859, and the property was purchased by Captain Benjamin Penfield for his son, **William Henry Penfield**, whose wife lived there while he saw active service during the Civil War. After the war the house was sold by Captain Penfield, and after several transfers, it was bought during the nineties by **George F. Gilman** and converted into a studio. Subsequent owners, **H. H. Sprague** and **K. W. McNeil**, have made many alterations, and the original outline has been completely modernized. 1762
- 6—Captain **John Squire**, son of Samuel Squire of Fairfield, bought in 1764 "land near the Black Rock by the Sea Shore"—at the end of the old pasture road, overlooking "Money Beach." Here he built a house to which he brought his third wife, Lydea Jarvis (widow of Isaac Jarvis of Norwalk) and her two sons, Noah and Isaac,—the same Isaac Jarvis who was to com- 1764
S

mand the fort in 1779 and direct the cannonade that saved Black Rock.

A wharf at "Money Beach" was owned by Captain Squire. The house is described³ in the probate records of 1805, when the widow **Lydea** and **James Squire** were given shares of the house, while the heirs of John Squire, Jr., inherited the land east of the homestead with the old wharf. The Squire land and many acres of other holdings on Grovers Hill were acquired early in the century by Captain **Daniel Wilson**, who in 1837 deeded to **William A. Jennings** "land at Black Rock, being the place formerly known as Captain Jack Squire's homestead on Grovers Hill." The house occupied by Captain Jennings later became part of the George Hotel property.

- 7—Captain **Joseph Silliman** (1732-1788) built on Grovers Avenue a home for his bride, **Christiania Hubbell** (always called "Christian" in the records). He died in 1788 and his only son, Captain **Nathaniel Silliman**, was murdered in Spain in 1795. **Chloe Silliman**, the younger widow, remarried, but **Christiania Silliman** remained in the house until she died in 1805. The house (which was burned about 1900) was a quaint little home with a sloping roof across which sprawled a trumpet vine, accenting with bright flowers the silver-gray weathered shingles. Lilacs clustered at the door. The next owner, **John Maltbie**, whose wife was Abel Wheeler's granddaughter, Rachel Mason, lived only a few years after his marriage. He was first keeper of the Black Rock Light, established in 1808. He died the following year, and

1766

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³ "The widow to have the northerly front room, bedroom, & milkroom adjoining westerly; the chamber over front room, with the privilege of the kitchen to do great work, such as washing, baking, etc., also the privilege of passing & repassing in the usual way to said chamber and to the well...."

his widow married again and moved to New York. Subsequent owners were Captain **Walter Thorp**, Captain **Charles Penfield**, and **H. W. Fancher**, whose family appear in the photograph, taken during their residence there.⁴

- 8—Captain Thomas Holberton bought one of four 1767
lots laid out in Black Rock by David Wheeler, 3d, along a proposed road from Grovers Avenue to the harbor. During the next quarter century, Captain Holberton's property here and elsewhere in Black Rock became involved in so many transfers, mortgages, and releases (doubtless in proportion to the success or failure of his many shipping ventures) that the ownership of certain lots is not always definite. It appears, however, that in 1793, "the dwellinghouse where Thomas Holberton now lives," previously quit-claimed by the captain to Robert Wilson, was sold to **Samuel Sherwood**, during whose tenancy of four years occurred the inoculation for smallpox, mentioned in the Journal. In 1796 the new owner moved to Ridgefield, deeding the house to Captain **Thomas Bartram**, who also purchased the three adjacent lots, secured a release of the road from the town, and in 1800 (presumably when his own house was completed) transferred the entire property to his brother, Captain **Job Bartram**, who had recently married Captain Holberton's daughter, Ruth. In 1817 Captain Job was drowned off the harbor, but his family retained the homestead for many years. It was torn down to make way for the house built on the property about 1865 by Dr.

⁴The photograph shows members of the Fancher family on the front porch. The lone sitter on the side porch was a neighbor who happened to be making a call when the photographer arrived. Left in the house to her own devices, she included herself in the picture, much to the amazement of the family when the finished photograph was delivered.

Calvin E. Hull, which is now occupied by Col. and Mrs. **S. W. Roessler** (1930).

*9—Captain **Gershom Sturges** built, about 1803, the house now standing at the corner of Grovers Avenue and Beacon Street, later purchased and remodeled by Captain **Benjamin Penfield** whose descendants live there now (1930). 1803
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10—The property on which the homestead was built has an earlier history, being the site of a house built in 1768 by **Thomas Beebe** on a lot purchased from David Wheeler, 3d. This house was transferred in 1770 to **George Morehouse**, in 1773 to **Ebenezer Burr**, in 1780 to **Isaac Jarvis**, in 1784 to **John Squire, Jr.**, in 1789 to **David Squire**, who moved with his family to Stamford, N. Y., and in 1794 to Captain **Barlow Sturges**, who sold the lot to his brother Gershom, and moved the house down the road to the lot above the Middle Wharf—which was managed by the three Sturges brothers. 1768
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Early in the new century, **David Penfield** came to Black Rock from Fairfield, bought the house in 1803, and subsequently the wharf-shares from Barlow, Benjamin and Gershom Sturges. After the death of David Penfield in 1845, the house was occupied by his son, Captain **Ephraim Lewis Penfield**, and the succeeding generation (several of whom appear in the photograph, taken about 1867). The house was destroyed by fire about 1870.

11—**Wolcott Chauncy** (1732-1805) built, presumably about the time when the Middle Wharf was completed, a tiny house which stood on the present site of the Norden Club. In 1795 the owners of the wharf leased to him “during the pleasure of us the proprietors,” a “gore of land” next his garden. After his death, Mrs. Chauncy 1769

made her home with her son, Commodore Chauncy, at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and the Chauncy property was long used by David Penfield for his woodshed.

- 12—Captain **Walter Thorp** (1770-1837) bought from 1810
Abel Wheeler's granddaughters, Rachel (Mason) Maltbie Eden and Sally Mason, part of the Wheeler "Middle Lot" (through which Seaview Terrace now runs), and also the salt meadow (east of Seabright Avenue). The house which Captain Thorp built was after his death purchased from his other heirs by Henry J. and Priscilla (Thorp) Beers, sold by them to **Lothrop Beers**, who in 1847 sold to **John Plumb**. Two years later the new owner bought on upper Ellsworth Street, and the property was deeded to Captain **Daniel Wilson**, who in 1853 sold it to Captain **William B. Howes** of Sag Harbor, L. I. Captain Howes had commanded whaling vessels, but, yielding to the persuasion of his wife, left the sea and established a coal business at the wharf built on the salt meadow lot in front of his home. His family later moved to Bridgeport, and the house burned.
- *13—**Uriah Bulkley** built next the lower shipyard upon 1807
a lot purchased from Nathan Wheeler in 1807, P
the house which, subsequently enlarged, became the home of Captain **William Hanford Nichols** and of his children and grandchildren.
The lot was later added to the Bartram holdings, and the house was moved on a barge across the harbor to the location where it now stands on Grovers Avenue and Old Battery Road, the residence (1930) of Mrs. **Mary B. Henshaw**.
- 14—**Hezekiah Osborn** (1772-1846) early in the nine- 1807
teenth century came from Mill Plain and had a waterlot surveyed to him "on a wharf lot

belonging to John Wheeler" where he erected a home from which vantage point he managed a store and wharf until his removal to New York State in 1834. He was a brother-in-law of Bradley and Seth Perry, having married Nancy, daughter of Peter Perry of Mill Plain.

- *15—**John Wheeler** (1765-1846), brother of William, and younger son of Captain Ichabod, received from his father in 1790 the lot on which his father and he had built during the preceding year a house overlooking the harbor. In 1803 **Terence Riley** bought from John Wheeler the house, with a wharf and store, but during the next two years, after purchasing another wharf, business difficulties overtook the new proprietor, and after Riley's sudden death in New York in 1805, the house property was immediately attached by **Nicholas Fish** of New York, one of the creditors, who sold it to **William Hoyt**. **Rufus Hoyt** became owner in 1808. From the Hoyt family the property passed through several owners to Captain **Thomas Bartram** who in 1829 deeded it to his son, Captain **Joseph Bartram**, and for more than a century the house has been occupied by his family. 1789
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- *16—Captain **James Wilson** in 1767 purchased land from Ezra and Ichabod Wheeler and built the house now standing at 166 Brewster Street. His administrator, Robert Wilson, sold the property in 1775 to Captain **Ebenezer Bartram** who during the Revolution served actively in the defense of the Connecticut shore. After his death, his son, **Ebenezer Bartram**, remained in the home until 1818 when upon his removal to Westmoreland, N. Y., the house was sold to **William Hoyt** and **Sullivan Moulton** (of Greenwich). Captain **Daniel Wilson** later purchased 1767
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the house⁵ which remained in his family until after the death of his daughter, **Catherine (Wilson) Morrison**, early in the twentieth century.

- 17—For topographical position of 17, the reader is referred to 3a. (The earlier houses are chronologically numbered.)
- 18—**William Wheeler** wrote his Journal in a house, since burned, built for him in 1790 by his father, just east of the old home of Captain Ichabod Ellsworth Street, laid out in 1802, cut through William Wheeler's house lot and that of his eastward neighbor, Caleb Brewster. After 1845 upon William Wheeler's death the house passed out of the family, the surviving heir, **William Wheeler, Jr.**, having built his own home, which stands at the foot of Hackley Street above the Cove. 1790 S
- *19—From his father, **Ebenezer Knap**, Captain **Wilson Knap** received as a gift in 1813, the homestead at 482 Brewster Street, built probably about 1800 or earlier. Captain Knap's heirs sold the property in 1830 to **Lewis Burr** (1806-1881), in whose family it remained for seventy-five years. 1800
- *20—Captain **Thomas Bartram** (1771-1838), whose name figures prominently in many land transactions in Black Rock, bought from Joseph Squire in 1801 the land on which he erected his home and to which he added acre after acre by purchase from his neighbors. The home remains in his family (the longest consecutive tenure recorded in Black Rock) having passed to his second son, Captain **Thomas Burr Bartram** (1803-1886) and his family. 1801 P
- *21—**Seth Perry**, son of Peter Perry of Mill Plain, ship- 1812

⁵ When the porch was rebuilt, the original delicate little pillars of the old homestead were used by an appreciative builder, John Fancher, for his own house (on Seabright Avenue).

owner and merchant of the early nineteenth century, built a large home on the corner of Grovers Avenue and Brewster Street. The spacious hall held two sets of lancers and while the property remained in the family, the younger generations of Black Rock families romped through the house as guests of the Perry children and grandchildren. About five years ago the house burned, and the site has since been subdivided into many houselots. P

Later Dwellings

During the nineteenth century many changes came to Black Rock as new roads were laid out and new householders attracted to the village.

Next to the Perry homestead, on the site of Abel Wheeler's tavern, Captain **Nathan Holdredge** lived in a house, later the first Black Rock summer home of **George F. Gilman**, founder of the A. & P. grocery chain. The house was destroyed by fire November 7, 1894, and Mr. Gilman built a larger house (later the Manor Club) and developed the property between his new home and the site of the old as an attractive estate, with winding drives, offices, rose-gardens, and well-designed stables and carriage houses, many of which have (since his death and the subdivision of the estate) been remodeled. Another pretentious estate was "Mapleside," the home of **James Couch**, at the corner of Ellsworth Street and Fairfield Avenue,—the present site of the Burroughs Home. "Mapleside" is shown on an 1867 map as including many acres with "Vine Yard, Dove House, Grape House, Corn House, Ice House, and Dairy," as well as the "Residence" (later moved across, and now standing on, north Ellsworth Street). Other Couch holdings included property across the Avenue, extending to the



1812—The Perry homestead (21)
(Photographed 1870)

cove, and the corner at Brewster Street (now the Black Rock Apartments, and earlier the Washburn home).

Ellsworth (originally known as Church) Street was laid out in 1802, cutting through the Wheeler, Bartram, and Brewster properties. William Wheeler sold many lots during the next half-century. Among the new owners were: Captain **Charles Allen**, Captain **John Pierson Brittin**, **Verdine Ellsworth** (whose house is now the Congregational parsonage), **George Austin Gould**, **Morris Gould**, **Elias Hendrick**, Captain **William Hall**⁶, **Isaac Jones** (present home of **Joseph Smith**), **David Lockwood**, **Curtis Raymond**, **Sturges Seeley**, **Cyrus Spencer**, **Wyllis Wakeman**, **Eliphalet Walker**.

Captain **Thomas Ransom** built on the main street in 1839, and about this time "the Lane" (now Calderwood Street) was laid out to the new Carriage Shop (now remodeled in flats) which stood at the end. The upper floor of this shop was the first home of the Select School, later housed in its own building⁷ on the lane nearer Brewster Street.

Neighbors of Captain Ransom who lived between Grovers Avenue and the wharves before, or shortly after, the Civil War, were **William Bouton** (whose house became the property of **John Ogden**, and then, in 1853, of **Aaron Smith**), **William Callon**, **James Carr**, **Cornelius Clark**, **L. Duryea**, **Isaac M. Ely**, **Monson Gray**, **Ezra Godfrey**, **Thomas Halstead**, **W. Hibbard**, **William Mather**, **George Palmer**, **George Peck**, **William Peet**, **David Prindle**, **John Y. Provost**, **Edward T. Rew**, **George Shelton**, **Aaron Sherwood**, **David Smith**, **George Solly**, and **Andrew Turney**.

The houses of this period are chiefly of the same type, square-built, homelike, and distinguished by a quaint little fan-window at each end of the attic.

⁶ The Hall house was subsequently occupied by the *Ruthven* family, later recalled to England by the succession of the head of the house to the peerage.

⁷ The Select School building was subsequently moved to Grovers Hill, where, after long ownership by the Murray family, it was remodeled and became the residence of Mrs. Archibald McNeil, Sr.

John Clarkson, Sr., an Englishman, built about 1864 at the corner of Fairfield Avenue and Gilman Street. This house is still occupied by his family.

Residents along the "Stage Road" and creek road during the early nineteenth century included **Asa Beardslee**, **Thaddeus Burr** (1767-1858), **Elhanan Fyler**, **William Hurlburt**, **Agur Judson**, **Samuel Kellogg**, **Levi Lyon**, **Jonathan Mallery**, **Samuel Read**, **Silas Runnels**, **William Sherwood**, **Zechariah Sherwood**, **Samuel Squire, Jr.**, **Samuel Staples**, **David Trubee**, **Chauncy Wheeler** (whose home on upper Ellsworth Street was later occupied by his son **Simeon Wheeler**), **Samuel Wilson**, and **Joseph Wyman**.

The houses mentioned in the foregoing paragraphs are those within a short distance from the old center of Black Rock village,—the wharves. Between the lines of the Wheeler Journal the reader catches glimpses of many other homesteads, some on the Fairfield road,—others north on the way to Stratfield and Holland Hill.

The Wheeler family kept closely in touch with their kin, the family of the pioneering Col. John Burr, in their several homes along the roads to Stratfield and Pequannock or Newfield.

The houses on Holland Heights included those of Captain **John Knap**, **Silas Hawley** (later owned by **Amos Burr**), and the **French** and **Silliman** properties.

The home of General **Silliman**, to which the British were guided in 1779 on their raiding party, and where the general and his son were captured, was sold to Nathan Hayes after the Revolution and early in the next century was purchased by **James Penfield, Jr.**, whose widow, and son, **Lewis Penfield**, lived there for many years.

Grovers Hill, now so beautifully developed, was settled long after houses were built nearer the wharves. For a century and a half cattle grazed on the hill-slope, and crops were harvested by owners who lived a mile or two away. After the building of the new road (Balmforth Street) and the bridge across the creek in

1765, there were a few changes of ownership in which the Wheeler, Squire, Silliman, and Penfield families figure as principals. Early in the nineteenth century two new names appear as extensive purchasers,—that of **Joshua L. Green**, who bought the Penfield Mills⁸ on Ash Creek from the Davis brothers in 1801,—and of Captain **Daniel Wilson**, who sold most of his hill property within a few years.⁹

During this time the old forts were forgotten. The Revolutionary battery stood on land, long since fretted away, at the base of the hill, not on higher ground, as has frequently been misstated.¹⁰

Fort Union, the embankment of the War of 1812, stood farther up the slope. (The site was later occupied by the Thorne tennis courts.)

The sandy point, now the properties of **Robert Hincks** and **Archibald McNeil, Jr.**, was anciently known as “Money Beach” because of the legend that pirates had once buried treasure there, although the pirate gold has remained undiscovered, even by the active spades of all the children who played in the sand when the old Bridgeport Yacht Club stood on the beach.

The sketch of Grovers Hill in 1870 was taken from an old photograph and shows the cultivation of the hill as pasturage, with but few trees. At that time, from Balmforth Street to the Point were only three houses, those of **William A. Jennings**, of **Wakeman Wilson** (much remodeled, but still standing—part of the Watson property), and of **Jeremiah Jennings**,—now, rebuilt, the home of **Mrs. J. A. Ten Eyck**.

⁸ The mills were later taken over and managed by *Daniel Golden* of Glen Cove, L. I., who built the old house still standing across the creek, west of the hill which was the site of the original Penfield house on Paul's Neck.

⁹ Captain Daniel Wilson was a representative “realtor” of his day—buying and selling properties, lending on mortgage, and improving lots for sale as residences. A student of old land records will recognize such individuals as they appear in each generation to carry on business now handled by banks and other institutions.

¹⁰ The old “fort well,” mentioned in many old records, was piped through when the seawall was built and served boatmen for many years until recently the city rebuilt the wall and the original spring became polluted.

After the Civil War, many New York families came by train, packet, or their own carriages, to spend the summer along the Connecticut shore, and although at first they boarded simply with the village families, eventually they instituted the "summer home" and "summer hotel" which begin to figure in the literature of the late Victorians.

About 1880 **George A. Wells** built the George Hotel and bought extensively on the hill where he erected summer cottages, and along the beach, where he built the "Shore House" (present home of the Black Rock Yacht Club). The land west of the hotel was sold by Mr. Wells to visitors appreciative of the view across the Sound, and three residences became lovely landmarks,—the homes of General **T. L. Watson**, of **Jonathan Thorne**, and of **Thomas W. Pearsall**, who in 1893 built at the tip of the Point the picturesque little log chapel, St. Mary's-by-the-Sea, recently secularized and removed, in the plans for the boulevard and city park.

During the last few years the development of Grovers Hill has recalled many of the old names and traditions. New roads have been opened,—Sailor's Lane, Old Battery Road, Anchorage Road, and many new houses have changed the pastoral landscape from the Grovers Hill known to William Wheeler.