Coventry, Rhode Island

Coventry is Rhode Island's largest town with an area of 65 square miles. Purchased from the Narragansett Indian Tribe the area is steeped in history. Coventry's most well-known citizen, General Nathanael Greene, was the youngest second-in-command to General George Washington during the Revolutionary War.

Information compiled by Norma Smith

Where We've Been

Coventry was first settled by English colonists in the early 18th century when the town was part of Warwick. By 1741 enough farmers had settled in the area, now known as Coventry, that they petitioned the General Assembly of Rhode Island to create their own town.

Among the buildings that survived from that time are the Waterman Tavern (1740s), the Nathanael Greene Homestead (1770), and the Paine Homestead (circa 1691). The oldest church, Maple Root Baptist Church, dates from the end of the 18th century.

During the American Revolutionary War, the people of Coventry were supporters of the patriot cause. Nathanael Greene, a resident of Coventry, rose through the ranks to become a leading general of the American army. By the end of the war, Greene was second in command in the US army after George Washington.

In the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution came to Coventry with the building of the first mill in Anthony. Over the next century the eastern end of town became very industrialized, with manufacturing centers being located in Anthony, Washington, Quidneck, and Harris Villages. Many of the old factories still stand in the town and the village centers (in particular, Anthony) remain mostly intact. By the end of the 19th century, almost one fourth of the population was born outside the U.S.

By comparison, the western end of the town remained very rural, with the only centers of population being located at Greene and Summit, both established as railroad stations on the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad. In the 20th century, the town went through much change. The advent of the automobile brought an end of the railroad. By the mid-20th century, industry had largely left the Town and most of the factories closed.

Since the late 20th century, the town has attracted new residents and the eastern part of the town became suburbanized. In the early 21st century, a movement in the Town has developed to limit residential development to keep the rural flavor of the western part of the town.

Early History

The Paine House Museum

The General Nathanael Greene Homestead

Photos Courtesy of Frank Grace

Historic Houses
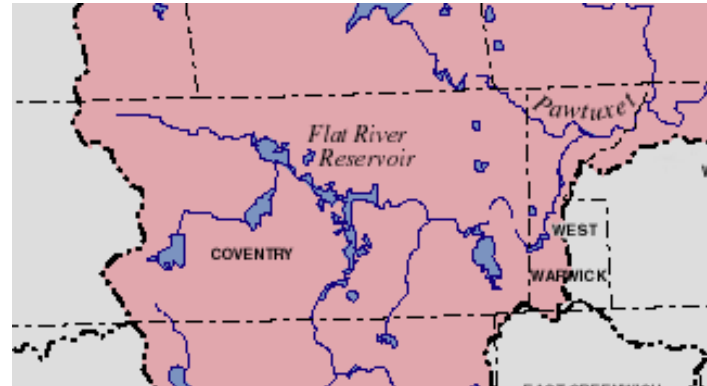

Waterman Tavern

Nicholas Farm

Isaac Bowen House

Christopher Greene House

Pawtuxet River

The area around the river was occupied by members of the Pawtuxet tribe, who were part of the larger Narragansett tribe. In the native language, the word "Pawtuxet" means "little falls."
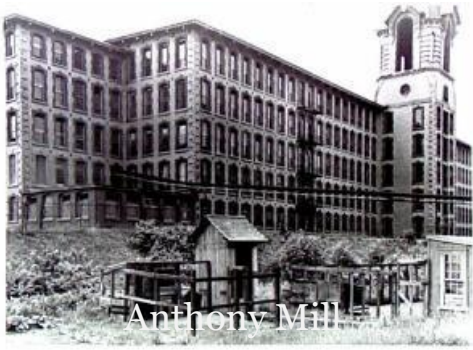
Primary transportation for the settlers in the 1600s and the energy source for the saw and gristmills.

The Pawtuxet River Valley played an important role in the early development of the textile industry in New England during the 19th century.

The north branch of the river is formed by the confluence of the Ponaganset and Moswansicut rivers in the area that is now flooded by the Scituate Reservoir, the primary drinking water supply for the city of Providence and surrounding towns.

The south of the river is formed by the confluence of the Big and Flat rivers in the area now flooded by the Flat River Reservoir in Coventry.
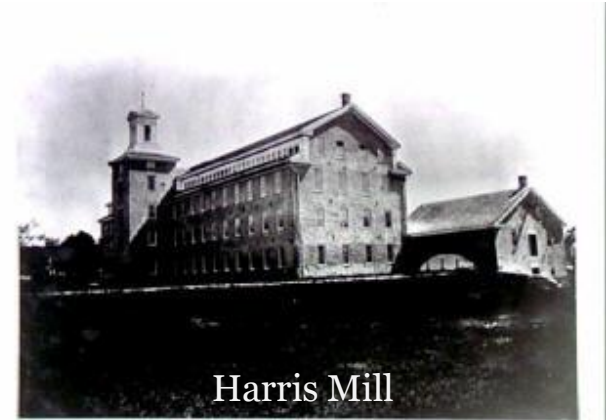
Mills and Reuse

Washington Coventry Co 1873

The Anthony Mill (1872-1874)

One of the most architecturally elaborate mills in the state of Rhode Island. Currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Anthony Mill has recently been renovated into luxury loft apartments by Brady Sullivan Properties, and was reborn as the Lofts at Anthony Mill.
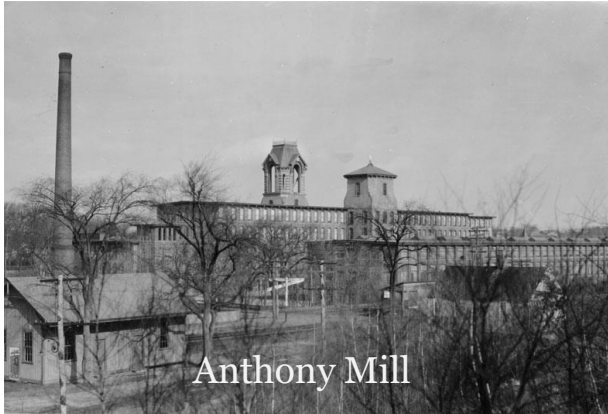

Harris Mill

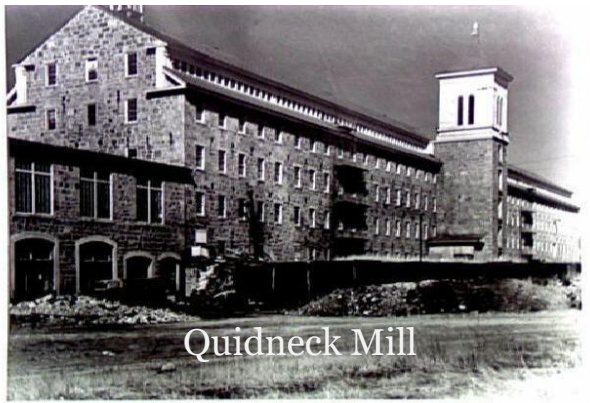Harris Governor Harris Mill

The Harris Mill

Built in 1850, the mill was the second of two textile mills developed by Elisha Harris, a former governor of Rhode Island. The Harris Mill has recently been renovated into luxury loft apartments by Brady Sullivan Properties, and was reborn as the Lofts at Harris Mill.

Anthony/Quidneck Villages

Anthony Mill

Quidneck Mill

Quidnick. Mill   1848

Anthony: Originally known as "Greeneville" and "The Quaker Village." In the eighteenth century, the Greene Family were early owners of the land and gave their name to the village where they operated a gristmill, forge, and saw mill. Anthony was established and renamed in 1805 by William and Richard Anthony who built a textile mill in the village as part of the Coventry Manufacturing Company.

Quidneck: Before the American Revolution the area where Anthony and Quidneck are today was originally named Greeneville for the Greene Family who had operated an iron forge in the mid-18th century. By 1811 the village was renamed Taftville for Stephen Taft a local cotton manufacturer. After the Sprague Family acquired the village in 1840, they changed the name to Quidneck, which is a Native American word meaning "at the end of the hill." The current Quidneck Mill Complex was constructed in 1848.
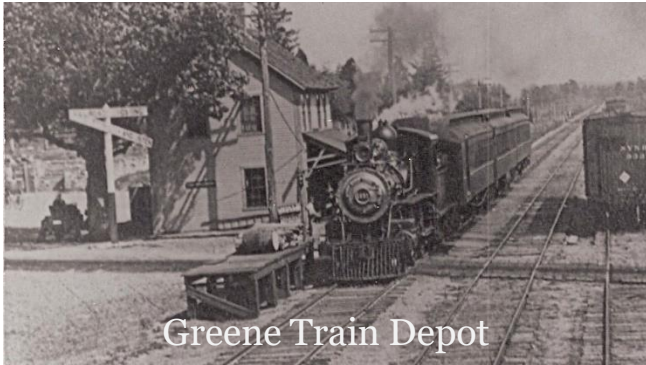
Coventry Centre/Summit

Coventry Centre Mill

Coventry Centre: The village was founded in 1809 and was originally called "Shoethread." The village was renamed Coventry Centre because it is the geographic center of the town. The area also contains Foster Ledge Quarry from which granite was transported by the Hartford Fishkill Railroad and used in various buildings across the state.
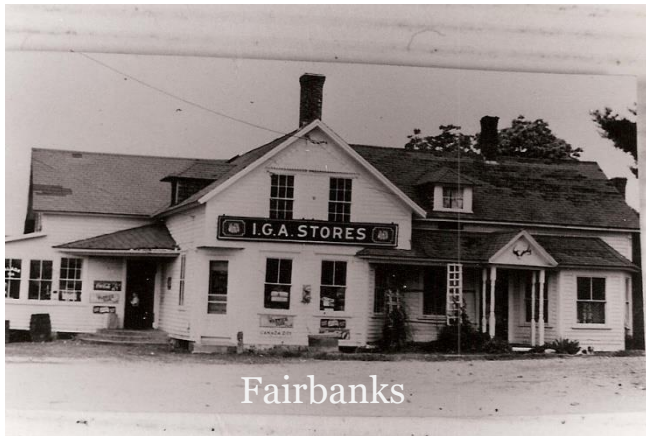

Summit Station

Summit: Summit developed as a railroad village with half-dozen white clapboard houses centered around a church, a library, and a store. The original Summit Baptist Church building was constructed in 1862.

Greene/Rice City Villages
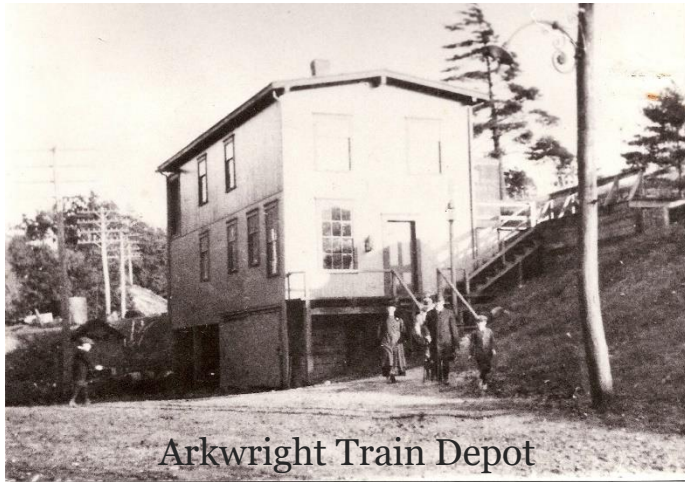

Greene Train Depot

Fairbanks

Greene: in 1854 was a swamp with a cart path going through it. The path connected Hopkins Hollow to the south and Rice City in the north. Then in the early 1850s, the railroad came to the area and the original train stop was known as "Coffin Station." In 1856 railroad officials renamed the station "Greene" after the Revolutionary War hero because of the bad associations with the name "coffin

Rice City: Rice City village is dominated by Rice Tavern (built 1804), which used to serve travelers on their way to Connecticut, as well as the Rice City Church (1846)
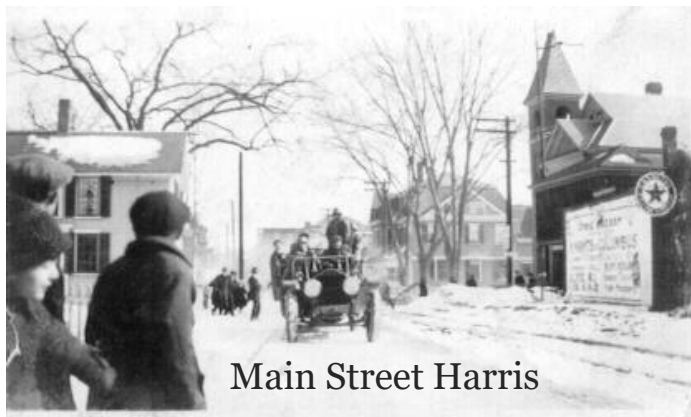
Harris/Arkwright Villages

Arkwright Train Depot

Main Street Harris

Arkwright: In the 1700s the Remington family owned a large parcel of land in the area, and the village became known as "Remington's Run.

Arkwright Manufacturing constructed its first textile mill in 1810. After a fire it was rebuilt in 1822. It is named after Richard Arkwright who trained with Samuel Slater.

Harris: The village was once part of the Burton and Potter farms. Around 1813 Caleb Atwood built a textile mill in the village, known as the Dumplin Mould, and later the building became the Lamphear Machine Shop in the 1840s. The village was named for Elisha Harris who arrived in 1822.

Washington Village

Main Street Washington

Washington: Settled in the 1670s around the time of King Philip's War. It was re-settled after the War and was named Bennett Mills after Samuel Bennett who resided at in what is now known as the Paine House which is the oldest surviving building in the village of Washington and was once a Tavern.

The village was renamed "Washington" in 1810 after the Washington Manufacturing Company. The Hartford, Providence, and Fishkill Railroad maintained a train depot and other buildings near Station Street and along the bike path.

Railroad to Greenway

The path follows the former rail corridor. For more than half its length, the path runs parallel to the Pawtuxet River. Small boat access is possible at several points with formal canoe launches. The trail also features an equestrian trail Snow required winter activities along the Greenway include; snowshoeing and cross country skiing

Greenway in Anthony

National Historic Districts

Anthony Village Historic District: the Anthony Historic District is a mill village containing about 250 acres of land and 247 properties, including a mill complex, 48 mill workers' houses, 150 other houses, 14 commercial buildings, 3 churches, 3 social/recreational buildings, 2 parks, a former school, a former library, a fire station, a former railroad right-of-way, 4 cemeteries and private burial grounds, and 1 known industrial archeological site of an early 19th century machine shop. The irregularly shaped but linear district encompasses the largest concentration of historic resources built within Anthony Village during its period of significance (ca. 1750-1938).

Carbuncle Hill Archaeological District: The Carbuncle Hill Archaeological District is considered significant because of the area's potential to increase our understanding of prehistoric lithic procurement patterns and production technology in western interior Rhode Island.

Hopkins Hollow/Roaring Brook Historic District: The Hopkins Hollow-Roaring Brook Historic District is approximately 2,000-acre rural village in Coventry, Rhode Island, near the Connecticut border. Forested, agricultural, residential and industrial properties in the district form a cultural landscape associated with the Colonial settlement and subsequent nineteenth through mid-twentieth-century development of Hopkins Hollow.

Rice City Historic District: The district includes three primary areas of activity: the village center, Rice City proper, located at the turnpike's junction with Vaughn Hollow Road; Vaughn Hollow itself, an enclave of former agricultural and milling activity, north of Rice City; and the former industrial and commercial center, Fairbank's Corner.

South Main Street Historic District: A residential district in the town of Coventry. It developed largely in the early and mid-nineteenth century and extends about one quarter mile between the South Branch of the Pawtuxet River at the north to a short distance south of Wood Street at the south. Although there were six factories operating at one time near the district, few of the South Main Street houses were occupied by millworkers, but rather by people of various occupations, a mill owner, a policeman, a carpenter, a doctor, farmers, the town clerk, and several dealers and manufacturers, including a carriage maker who had his shop on South Main Street

National Historic Register

Pawtuxet Valley Dyeing Company: Comprised of Mill, Upper Pump House, Lower Pump House, Pearce Pond Dam and Trailrace. Circa 1859-1955.

Read School: The Read School c. 1831 is a wood-frame one-room schoolhouse.

Wilson-Winslow House/Windy Parks Farm: A well preserved early nineteenth-century farm house with remarkably elegant detail and significant later additions. Built c. 1812, it combines the traditional vernacular center chimney form of the eighteenth century with Federal detail.

Arkwright Bridge: The Arkwright Bridge, with its unusually light members, is one of the finest surviving truss bridges in Rhode Island. It is the only Phoenix column bridge known to survive in the state.

Harris Mill: The complex includes ten contributing buildings that connect to form the Mill, and one contributing structure, the Headrace, all associated with the historical development of the property between 1850 and 1953.

Isaac Bowen House: Built in 1795, the Isaac Bowen House is one of the finest surviving testimonies to Rhode Island vernacular architecture of the late eighteenth century in Coventry.

Waterman Tavern: On June 10, 1781 the French expeditionary army under Comte de Rochambeau left Newport, Rhode Island, where they had been encamped for almost a year, to embark upon the campaign that won the American Revolution. The first day's march was difficult for the army. The infantry arrived in Coventry at Waterman's Tavern, about fifteen miles from Providence, at 6:30 P.M., and the tail of the artillery at 11:00 P.M. They left Coventry the following morning at four.

Moosup River Site: "The site is the earliest dated site in Rhode Island and is one of the few intact Middle Archaic [6,000-4,000 years before present] occupations known in the state."

National Historic Register

Christopher Rhodes Greene House: Built in 1883 for an owner of a textile mill, the Christopher Rhodes Greene House in Coventry, Rhode Island is an excellent example of the Queen Anne-style as interpreted by Stone & Carpenter, one of the most prominent architectural firms in Providence in the late nineteenth century.

William Waterman House/Potter-Hall-Moore House: A well-preserved example of the vernacular farm house type that appeared throughout western Rhode Island during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Interlaken Mill Bridge: The bridge was built about 1885 to connect the new dye house and bleachery of the Interlaken Company on the north side of the river with the former Arkwright Mills now demolished. The Interlaken Mill Bridge replicates the principles and appearance of the five span Aiken Street Bridge of 1883 in Lowell, Massachusetts, which is considered one of the finest late nineteenth century iron bridges in America.

Paine House: The Brayton Tavern was located on the "Eight Rod Highway", the principal thoroughfare for the agricultural trade between markets in Providence and eastern Connecticut. This tavern was thus a convenient stopping place for travelers, a center for exchanging news and information, and a place where town and personal business was transacted.

General Nathanael Greene Homestead: Home from 1774 to 1783 of Nathanael Greene, a major general of the Continental Army and, with the possible exception of Benedict Arnold, probably the greatest military genius produced by the War for Independence.

Joseph Briggs House/Coventry Town Farm: Built about 1790 and enlarged in 1851, the Coventry Town Farm is a two and one-half-story clapboard structure with a gable roof. The rear ell, built after the Town of Coventry acquired the property in 1851 to meet the needs of a municipal poor farm and asylum, the rear ell is unusual in this type of plan.

Natural Resources/Recreation

Carbuncle Pond: Carbuncle Pond is a pretty 39-acre pond completely within the Nicholas Farm Management Area. This is a site for launching boats from trailers, canoes and kayaks. Popular spot for fishing.

George B. Parker Woodland: Diverse scenery, historic landmarks, hills and valleys, easily navigable. Hiking trails, photography, birdwatching, remnants of historic farmsteads, cairns, old sawmill.

Maxwell Mays Wildlife Refuge: Diverse high quality wildlife habitat, hiking, open meadow, 11 acre Carr's Pond home to river otters.

Nicholas Farm Management Area: Woodland paths, old farm roads, through open fields, and along an abandoned railroad bed.

The Arkwright Riverwalk: A former rail bed purchased from Penn Central Railroad, by Pawtuxet River Authority. The one mile trail includes a wooden boardwalk, but is primarily surfaced with dirt and follows the north branch the Pawtuxet River.

Visit
http://coventryrecreation.com/info/default.aspx
for Recreation & Program Information

Herbert F. Paine Memorial Park: Baseball and softball fields, basketball court, tennis courts, skate park and playground.

John J. Giblin Memorial Recreation Area: Softball field, basketball, tennis and volleyball courts.

Foster Memorial Park: Baseball and softball fields, soccer fields, hiking trail, volleyball court.

Rice Field: Lighted football and baseball fields.

Central Coventry Park: tennis courts, picnic facilities, soccer and softball fields.

Briar Point Beach and Picnic Area: Swimming and picnic facilities with lifeguards on duty.

Neighborhood Playgrounds:
Harris Playground
Quidneck Playground
Town Hall

Neighborhood Playfields:
Fish Hill Ballfields
Wood Street Field
Quidneck Field

Sunrise Over Paine Field on a Hazy Summer Day

Town Hall Annex Field

Coventry Lumber Music Pavilion

Concerts, Community Events & Programs