New Bedford Streets; A Piece of Americana: William Street

A neglected piece of nostalgia and Americana is the origin of street names. We give directions, our home address, or mention events that happened on particular streets with no afterthought. However, many street names have deep history and/or interesting stories behind them. How did they come about? Are they randomly assigned names? What exactly is a "Coggeshall"? Purchase Street is called so because that's where people bought merchandise, right? William Street is named after some famous historical personage named William or is it a last name? Union Street? Is it named after an actual Workers Union or did it come about because of the Civil War?

Each week I hope to shine some light on the origins and history of street names. Some will be dull, others exciting, but all will be a light hearted journey through the history of the region. If you read these installments, learn a bit about local history and historical figures and maybe walk down these streets with a slightly different outlook, our mission will have been accomplished. Many of the streets are named after families that are still extant in the area, and hopefully you come away with a greater appreciation for the last names of friends or even your own family.

Since the history of the area is so vast, I would encourage our readers to share any tidbits of information they may have, even if only anecdotal. Let's discover and explore together. We could build a local resource that contributes to the community.

William Street

This week we'll take a journey down William street. Our

inaugural street turned out to be an incredibly daunting task. Most street names that are named after a person borrow the surname. In this case, a person's first name was used. There is an obvious difficulty associated with researching a street named after a person's first name.

The history of William street goes back before the history of New Bedford as a city or even a town. It also begins, as is often the case with the origins of New Bedford with the Russell, Kempton and Allen families. We'll get to them in a moment. Let's set up our series.



1602-Gosnold at Smoking Rocks

New Bedford's Earliest European Arrival

The first instance of a European setting foot on soil that would eventually be called New Bedford, was an Englishman named Bartholemew Gosnold in May of 1602. Gosnold is known for giving Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard their names. Cape Cod for its abundance of the fish, and Martha's Vineyard named after his beloved daughter. The spot where Gosnold first landed in the local area is what is called Round Hill in Dartmouth. Eventually he made it to that harbor where New Bedford is today, before heading back to England in June of 1602. However, he had paved the way for the many Europeans to follow that came to the region.

In the early 1600s waves of Pilgrims and Puritans began to arrive and settle in the region. By 1628 John Endecott settled at Salem and began the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In 1630 John

Winthrop brought over 900 people to settle the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and by 1640 more than 20,000 colonists came to New England. Settlers headed into the interior of the continent, and made their way to area that would be New Bedford.

Dartmouth Township; First Families

On March 7th, 1652, the region called by the local Wampanoag tribe "Acushnea, Ponagansett, and Coaksett" was sold to elders of what was called Plymouth Colony. Familiar names like William Bradford, Captain Myles Standish, Thomas Southworth, John Winslow, John Cooke, crop up as part of this group. Wampanoag sachem Massasoit and Wamsutta sold this land to the elders for *"thirty yards of cloth, eight moose skins, fifteen axes, fifteen hoes, fifteen pairs of shoes, one iron pot, and ten shillings' worth of assorted goods."* The land was dubbed Dartmouth and comprised of what would eventually become Westport, Fairhaven, Acushnet, and New Bedford. Settlers arrived in droves and the area of Dartmouth would be incorporated in 1664. Families like the Russells, Kemptons, Hathaway, Howlands, Aldens, and others would begin to make their presence known.

Between 1700-1750 the Russells, Kemptons, and Allens, who owned large parcels of land and cattle would start many businesses and begin to develop the area of Bedford Village. The first areas settled and developed were on the western side of the Acushnet river within what is now downtown, and particularly along what is now called County Street. Joseph Russell gave New Bedford its name after the Duke of Bedford-a relative that was involved in Whaling. As there was already (and still is) a Bedford,

Circa 1870-Looking down William Street from Purchase Street

Massachusetts the town was dubbed New Bedford.

The first mention of William Street that I could find went back to 1714 with a description of how the Kempton family and the Russell family would have their estates and properties deeded and bounded. A boundary line that was between Elm and William street split the Kemptons to the North and the Russells to the south. Joseph Russell was born in 1719 and lived at the head of William Street. So by the early 18th century the street has been named already. So which Williams were known in the almost hundred year span from Gosnold to 1714?

William Allen and William Allen

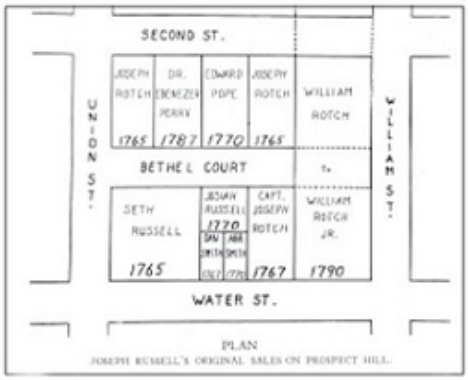
The earliest mention of a William related to the area was the name William Allen, son of George and Katherine. He was born in England in 1629 and departed Weymouth, England with his brother Matthew in 1635. While William Allen himself was not historically associated with Old Dartmouth, his brother Matthew was. It is unlikely, but possible that he named William street after his brother.

There was yet another William Allen, son of Joseph Allen and Sarah Holloway. Joseph Allen was one of the first proprietors of Dartmouth, owning a 1/34th share of the Township. His son William was born in Dartmouth on August, 10 1673.

William Bradford is a famous historical figure with ties to the Dartmouth Township that is familiar to most. He is one of the aforementioned early Dartmouth Proprietors that purchased land in the region in 1652. He is also one of the original Pilgrims that arrived on the Mayflower. His arrival as one of the first Pilgrims, stature, and participation in developing the region make him a good candidate for the naming of William Street.

The next mention of a well-known William is that of King William and King William’s War, which lasted from 1688–1697.

King William’s War was the North American theater of the Nine Years War, which was a war between New England and New France, and included the American Indians. We have to recall that at this time in America’s History many settlers were newly arrived from England and still had close ties and loyalty to their sovereign. To name a street, especially one of the original streets would not be that uncommon.



Joseph Russell’s Sales
on Prospect Hill

By around the middle of the eighteenth century much of the lands in New Bedford were in the possession of the Russells, to the South, and the Kemptons to the North. We know the boundaries because of confirmatory deeds dated May 25, 1714, that state that the Russells were bounded by a line near Clarke’s Cove on the south, and Kempton by a line near Smith Street; the dividing line was between William and Elm Streets. So there is no doubt by this time that William Street has had its name. The Russells’ land possession included William Street, and there was indeed a William Russell.

The final important William related to the area, is another William Russell. This Russell is responsible for the name of both Bedford and New Bedford and is simply the best candidate for the dubbing of William Street: William Russell, 1st Duke of Bedford. Our Joseph Russell who is responsible for suggesting the name [New] Bedford for the city, suggested the name as a tribute to his own family that had status in England. William Russell, 1st Duke of Bedford was born in 1613

and served as a politician for the majority of his life until his death in 1700 and purportedly had interests in Whaling.

So which “William” is our culprit and responsible for the name William Street? Which is your candidate? Do you have further information that could shine light on the origin? Please e-mail us at nbgarts@gmail.com or comment on this page.

William Street Timeline

1714-Kempton and Allen families have their lands officially deeded and bounded. Boundary is set between Elm and William Streets.

1719-Joseph Russell is born and lives at the head of William Street.

1765-Salisbury, England born and Nantucket whaling merchant, Joseph Rotch buys 10 acres of “New Bedford” land from Joseph Russell III and builds his first home on the west side of Water street just south of William.

1792-1795 William Street is expanded/lengthened.

1792-The first Congregational meetinghouse in New Bedford is built at William and Purchase Streets.

1828-Social Library is located at the Lyceum on 67 William Street.

1829-First Baptist Church is built at 149 William Street

1833-Perry Russell’s prussian-blue works on the corner of William and Sixth street caught fire and burned down. Sixth Street extended from Elm to Middle street.

1834-1836-U.S. Customs House is built on the corner of William and Second streets.

1837-Liberty Hall utilizes the old meeting house of the Unitarian Society at the corner of Purchase and William Street.

1838-City Hall is built where the Free Public Library stands today.

1851-The Congregational and Unitarian Church on the corner of Purchase and William Streets begins to use its bell to warn

runaway slaves that U.S. Marshals were coming.
1853-New Bedford Institute for Savings building is erected at the corner of Second and William streets by Russell Warren. Building is currently the New Bedford Whaling National Historic Park.
1863-The corner of William Street and Acushnet Avenue is used to recruit volunteers for the 54th Regiment, which is the first African-American Regiment commissioned in the North.
1877-Citizen's National Bank is built at 41 William Street. Subsequently becomes the New Bedford Acushnet Cooperative Bank, Haskell's Bar, the Pequod Lounge, before finally becoming Freestone's Grill.
1889-The YMCA relocates to 147 William Street.
1893-Liberty Hall is demolished and replaced with the Merchants National Bank.
1897-Lupo's Restaurant is built on the corner of Acushnet Avenue and William Street.
1906-A fire at the City Hall seated on William Street destroys the building. To continue functioning, City Hall moves across the street to the Free Public Library where it still sits today.
1909-New Bedford High School is built on County Street at the end of William Street.
1910-Former City Hall is finally renovated and opens as the Free Public Library.
1947-Carter's Clothign and Footwear opens its doors at 55 William Street.
1955-Post Office on Acushnet Avenue and William Street is demolished.
1962-The one ton sea god statue is erected in Tonnessen Park on William Street. It is donated by Ana Hyatt Huntington to serve as a memorial to Whalemen and Fishermen lost at sea.
1971-The New Bedford Institute for Savings Bank at the corner of Second and William streets becomes the Old Third District Courthouse.
1996-The National Historic Park moves into the Old Third District Courthouse on Second and William streets.

2004-Mount Vernon Group razes the Lupo’s Restaurant building site.

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