

# Joseph Jenks Jr.

## PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF PAWTUCKET RI

Joseph Jenks, Jr. is noted as the founder of Pawtucket. He was a young ironworker, born in England, who had come to America to join his father.

Joseph Jenks, Sr. had organized and operated the first American iron works at Saugus, Massachusetts. In 1670, young Joseph left Saugus intending to settle in Warwick, Rhode Island on the "Pawtuxet" River. It is not certain just how he learned of the more powerful "Pawtucket" Falls on the Blackstone River, but with a readily available supply of timber and nearby bog iron ore, it was the ideal place to build his forge.

This area was still wilderness then. It was the northern boundary of Roger Williams' settlement of Providence, but had remained quiet woodland and fertile flood plains. On October 10, 1671, Joseph Jenks, Jr. purchased 60 acres of land on the west bank of the Blackstone River. This transaction marks the establishment of the first permanent settlement of Pawtucket.

The small Jenks settlement was burned to the ground in 1675 during the King Philip War. The Indians of the New England region had been feeling the expanding power and presence of the English colonists. Massasoit, the Wampanoag chieftain, had managed to maintain friendly relations with the colonists. He dies in 1660, and in 1662 was succeeded by his son, Metacomet, also known as King Philip. The Wampanoags nursed an increasingly hostile attitude toward the white men and in 1675, after a series of aggravations, the Indians finally attacked. Many colonial towns were either wholly or partly destroyed during the war which finally ended in August 1676, when King Philip was killed. The results of the conflict were disastrous for everyone and almost fatal for the Indians, who would never regain their strength in southeastern New England.

The Jenks forge was rebuilt when the King Philip war ended, and soon there was a small village clustered near the Pawtucket Falls. It included several stone-ended dwellings, the forge, the foundry, a gristmill, and sawmill. Despite the small size of the village, it was an important center for iron products such as farm tools and housewares that were vital to the survival of early settlers.

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## THE SAGA OF THE OLD JENKS FAMILY BURYING GROUND

Compiled by Elizabeth J. Johnson and James Lucas Wheaton IV

The Jenks Family laid their dead to rest on Broken Back Hill, in the "fields at Pawtucket" perhaps as early as the year 1717 if not before. The spot they chose for their family burying ground was in a beautiful and peaceful setting overlooking the river. It measured ten rods long (165 ft.) from north to south and ten rods wide from east to west; more than an ample amount of land to devote for this family's needs for many years to come.

Over the centuries, this hallowed area digressed from times of reverence and respect, through periods of vandalism and desecration to an age when the growth process of a city swallowed it into oblivion. By 1925 very few knew, and still fewer cared, that there ever had been a cemetery between Read Street on the north, the huge Masonic Temple on High Street and the old Capt. Ellis House at 84-86 North Main Street (formerly Mill Street and still more formerly New Street). In June of that year, while excavating for a foundation for a garage south of the old Allen House

at 10 Read Street and behind the Capt. Ellis House on North Main Street (now Roosevelt Ave.), five gravestones plus bones were unearthed, much to the astonishment of the citizenry. The first stone to be examined proved to be that of the Colonial Governor of Rhode Island from 1727 - 1732; Joseph Jenks, son of the founder of Pawtucket. The Governor's stone showed he died "ye 15th Day of June A. D. 1740, in ye 84th Year of His Age". It was one of two unearthed slabs discovered to be used to cover a well behind the old Allen House.

There were four other stones discovered that day. The oldest stone found was dated 1723 and was partially damaged. What inscription could be discerned indicated that this stone was that of the first wife of Governor Jenks; Martha (Brown) Jenks. On another stone could be made out: Lydia Jenks--Dc: Janu--Aged--. A third stone was that of "William Jenckes, Esq. Who Departed this Life July the 19th A. D. 1765; in the 63rd Year of His Age." The fourth stone was the foot stone of Governor Joseph Jenks and the final stone was unidentified. III

There is no hard evidence to say that the bodies of Joseph Jenks, the Founder, and his wife Esther (Ballard) Jenks were interred here, but this was believed to have been the case by one of the older citizens of the Village; Mr. William Phinney. In 1894, Mr. Phinney wrote an article for the PAWTUCKET GAZETTE & CHRONICLE containing his recollections from 50 to 60 years earlier concerning the Jenks Burying Ground. He was a child at that time living adjacent to it to the west. To his recollection, there were no gravestones north of Read Street, and the sixty or so dark-gray slate stones that were south of Read Street were all uniform with angels heads engraved on the faces. They lay in rows north to south and facing to the west. They were badly leaning, broken and defaced. Mr. Phinney drew a plat of the burying ground showing the surrounding buildings and the major grave locations. A fence was lying north to south through the middle of the lot. He showed the graves of the founder Joseph Jenks and his wife as being at just about the center of the lot at the point of this north south boundary fence. They both died in 1717. Their burial here was probable, but was only legend heard by Mr. Phinney as a boy. He showed the grave of Governor Joseph Jenks to the south and just east of the center line fence in line with the property of Deacon Tabor. The Tabor lot fronted on North Main Street and extended to the west to encroach on the Jenks Burial Ground. [2]

The foregoing establishes that the Jenks Burial Ground was opened c. 1717 and was in very active use until near the time of the establishment of the West Burial Ground (now Mineral Spring Cemetery) in 1774. After that, the number of burials here diminished radically. One of the final burials was that of Jonathan Jenks in 1781.

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