

# Portland's Historic Site Markers

by Bill & Chris Sullivan, April 2001

**Traveling around town** you have probably noticed some brownstone markers with bronze plaques. Have you ever stopped to read one? Or wondered where they came from?

In the early 1970s, the approaching national bicentennial encouraged the formation of the **Portland Historical Society**. Society members also formed an historic sites committee, with the intention of marking several of the most important historic sites in Portland. Members of the committee working on this project were **Chairman Phyllis Greene, Pat Aresco, Jim and Mary Gildersleeve, Roger Hinze, Clifford Kelsey, Harold Krieger, Robert McDougall, and William Sullivan.**

The brownstone markers were erected in 1979 by the Society with Community Development funds. The condensed histories on three of the six markers are shown below along with their locations.

Mountain laurels frame this marker located on the southeast corner of the intersection of William and High Streets:

## "Site of the First Meeting House"

"After 9 years of planning, settlers built their first meeting house in 1720 on this approximate site. It served as church and seat of local government. The structure (40' x 26") originally served 29 members under Rev. Daniel Newell, who was succeeded by Rev. Moses Bartlett, the town's first physician. A second meeting house was needed by 1746 and was built on the north side of Bartlett Street and east of Prospect Street."

Below the modern bridge that makes it so easy to cross the river, and almost hidden to the right of the building at 5 Lower Main Street, can be found the sign below:"

## "First Ferry Landing" 1726-1896

"South of this point was the approximate landing site of the ferry serving Portland and Middletown. In 1726 Izrahial Wetmore was given a franchise for ten years. Toll charges were 6 pence for a man, horse and load, and 3 pence for a man and horse. Later maintained by the Colchester-Chatham Turnpike and the Middletown Ferry Company.

"The Middletown-Portland Bridge bought the franchise in 1896. Other ferries ran from Gildersleeve to Cromwell."

There is a marker on Indian Hill Avenue, to the left of Petzold's driveway. Arrangements have been made to have the plaque reset in the stone, which was knocked over by a car last year. Boats are still the focus at this bend in the river:

## "Ship Yards and Indian Grounds"

"In the 18th and 19th centuries shipping and shipbuilding were important industries in this community. Several yards operated near this site.

"The largest and last to survive was the Gildersleeve Yard, which built 358 ships of various classes from 1821 to 1932. Prior to 1672, this area, known as Indian Hill, was inhabited by Wangunk Indians, a tribe of the Algonquins. Their relics and burial sites have been found along this road.."