



Newport
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Steam Fire Engine Company No. 1 Fire Station 25 Mill Street



Image of the Steam Fire Engine Company No. 1 Station on Mill Street. The person in the far left of the photograph has been identified as Mr. Frederick Almy Gifford. Circa 1900. 2007.2. *Collection of the Newport Historical Society.*

Research Report produced for: Robert Weintraub

By NHS staff

Date: 30 November 2022

Research Request: Property report for 25 Mill Street

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Sources Consulted:

1777 *A plan of the town of Newport in Rhode Island* by Charles Blaskowitz. Engraved and published by William Faden, London, 1777. Newport Historical Society

1850 *Map of the City of Newport*, Matthew Dripps & B. I. Tilley. Copy, Newport Historical Society

1876 *Newport City Atlas*, Newport Historical Society

1883 *Newport City Atlas*, Newport Historical Society

1893 *Newport City Atlas*, Newport Historical Society

1907 *Newport City Atlas*, Newport Historical Society

1921 *Newport City Atlas*, Newport Historical Society

Cities in the Wilderness: The First Century of Urban Life in America 1625-1742, Carl Bridenbaugh (NY, Ronald Press Co: 1938)

City Documents: Fire Department Annual Reports to the Mayor, 1886, 1914, 1915, Newport Historical Society

Historic Building Data Rhode Island Survey, 1970 & 1989, Newport Historical Society

Newport City Directories, Newport Historical Society

Newport Historical Society Photo Collection

Newport Historical Society Research Files

Tax & Land Evidence Records (LE), Newport City Hall

Research Summary:

25 Mill Street (Plat 24, Lot 230) is located in the Historic Hill District of Newport, Rhode Island. The building was constructed in 1885-1886 to house Newport's Steam Fire Engine Company No. 1.

Newport was founded in 1639 by religious dissidents who fled the Massachusetts Bay Colony to create a society where religion did not define government. Newport's first settlers agreed to support religious tolerance, or what they called "liberty of conscience". Newport's active seaport and promise of religious freedom drew a diverse population to the colonial city. By the mid-18th century, there were at least 10 different faiths coexisting with each other in Newport, and the port had become one of the five most prosperous in the colonies. During this period, the town experienced a building boom that included hundreds of houses and many internationally important landmarks that survive today. This prosperity was in large part due to Newport's diverse community, but also due to its strong participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Mill Street, originally called Carr's Lane, is one of Newport's earlier streets. It was named after Rhode Island Governor Caleb Carr (d. 1695), whose house stood west of present-day Trinity Church's Honyman Hall. The street ran down to Carr's wharf, where Carr operated a ferry service started in 1675.¹ By 1777, the lower half of Carr's Lane, west of Spring Street, had become Mill Street, and the upper part, east of Spring Street, was called Banister's Lane.

The first known owner of the lot at-large was the Townsend family.² By 1876, the Townsends had divided the lot and William C. Townsend had a dwelling house on site at present-day 25 Mill Street. By 1883 the house had transferred to Charles Bateman, local Newport carpenter, who then sold the property in 1884 to the City of Newport. The City then removed the dwelling house to make way for the construction of a building to house Newport's newly created Steam Fire Engine Company No. 1. The brick building appears to have been constructed to replace a wooden building that housed an existing steam engine company known as Torrent No. 1 Engine Co., located across Mill Street just to the northeast. After the construction of the building for Steam Fire Engine Company No. 1, Torrent No. 1 does not show up in records. It is probable that, rather than disband entirely, Torrent No. 1 became Steam Fire Engine Co. No 1.

Torrent No. 1 was among one of Newport's oldest firefighting companies. The town of Newport experienced its first large scale fire in 1730 when a cooper's shop on Malbone's Wharf went up in flames and the fire quickly spread to neighboring structures. Shortly after, the town purchased its first fire engine, but by 1736 Godfrey Malbone decided Newport needed a newer model and presented the town with an engine known as 'Torrent No. 1' (*Cities in the Wilderness*, p. 370).

¹ A ferry service operated here, most recently as the Jamestown Ferry, until 1969 when the Newport Bridge was completed.

² Thomas and William C. Townsend, father and son, were proprietors of the Townsend Coffee House at the United States Hotel on Thames Street. William served in the Civil War, City Council and RI General Assembly and lived at the corner of Kay & Brinley.

In 1886, when the fire station at 25 Mill Street was constructed, the Newport Fire Department consisted of four steamer companies – Nos. 1, 2, 5, and 7; Hook & Ladder Company No. 1; and three hose companies – Nos. 4, 6, and 8. The new building for Steam Engine Company No. 1 included a driveway and a hot water system (*City Documents: Annual Reports to the Mayor, 1886*).

The building was used as a fire station until 1915 when it was sold by the City of Newport to Jeremiah Sullivan for private use. Steam Engine Co. No. 1 appears to have been disbanded that same year. The Annual Report of the Fire Department in 1914 lists five steam fire engine companies, and references ownership of 19 horses. The 1915 report makes no mention of the steam companies, only to say that steamers 5 & 6 would be held in reserve. The 1915 report also notes that all the department's horses had been sold (*City Documents: Fire Department Annual Reports to the Mayor, 1914, 1915, Newport Historical Society*). One can speculate that changes in technology eliminated the need for horse-drawn steam engine fire pumpers and therefore the steam engine companies of the fire department.

Subsequent owners and information can be found in the Property Details Section.

Property Details:

- 1850** The lot at-large is owned by the Townsend family, and the site of present-day 25 Mill Street appears to be vacant (1850 *City of Newport Map*).
- 1876** The Townsend lot has been subdivided. A dwelling house on it, owned by Wm. C. Townsend, is on site at present-day 25 Mill Street. Torrent No. 1 Engine Co. is located across the street (1876 *Newport City Atlas*).
- 1883** The lot for present-day 25 Mill Street has a dwelling house on it, owned by Charles Bateman. The size of the lot has increased. The address for the property is listed as 27 Mill Street (street numbers have changed over time). Torrent No. 1 Engine Co. is located across the street (1883 *Newport City Atlas*).
- 1884** Charles Bateman sells his property at 25 Mill Street to the City of Newport, 18 September 1884 (LE 55:23).
- 1886** Steam Fire Engine Company No. 1. is located in a new brick building at 27 Mill Street (now 25). Torrent No. 1 is no longer referenced.
- 1893** Fire Station No. 1 is shown at 27 Mill Street (present-day 25 Mill Street). The building for Torrent No. 1 Engine Co. (32 Mill Street) has been let go by the city and is under the ownership of Geo. Nason.
- 1907** The former building for Torrent No. 1 has been replaced. Steam Fire Engine No. 1 still operates from the station at 25 Mill Street (1907 *Newport City Atlas*).
- 1915** 25 Mill Street is sold by the City of Newport to Jeremiah Sullivan on 18 October 1915 (LE 101:65). Sullivan was a prominent city politician, city council member, bank officer, and land speculator.

- 1939** Jeremiah K. Sullivan dies, and the property transfers to Gertrude S. O'Connell, heir at law, 9 March 1939 (Tax Card).
- 1943** The property is deeded to Thomas M. Curry, 1 November 1943 (LE 154:8).
- 1967** Thomas M. Curry died, and the property is transferred by will to wife Marguerite Frances Curry, 17 April 1967 (Tax Card).
- 1968** The property is deeded to R.M. Richards, Inc. 25 October 1968 (LE 224:412).
- 1970** The property is deeded to Ted Materna Associates, Inc., 19 October 1970 (LE 230:496).
- 1979** The property is deeded to John and Ann Sherman; James Hyman and Arthur Murphy; John D. Sherman, 3 January 1979 (LE 288:250-253).
- 1983** The property is deeded to John Sherman and Jane Olson, 29 February 1983 (LE 311:856).
- 1987** The property is deeded to John Sherman; Steven McInnes, agent; Lucia Lawrence, 7 October 1987 (LE 402:95-99).
- 1990** The property is deeded to John Jed Pearsall, 20 September 1990 (LE 481:282).
- 2013** The property transfers to 25 Mill Street, LLC 23 April 2013 (LE 2348:149).
- 2022** 25 Mill Street, LLC sells the property to Robert Weintraub, 14 January 2022 (LE 3062:307)

IMPROVEMENTS AND EXPENDITURES.

The usual supplies have been purchased and various improvements made for the use of the Fire Department during the year. Rubber coats have been furnished each company. Also fuel, oil, cleaning material and sundry repairs.

Steamer No. 1 has been furnished new wheels, and steamer and hose carriage painted and varnished.

The new Station on Mill street has been fitted up and is now occupied by the steamer company, the apparatus having been transferred from the old Station which was out of repair. A driveway has been provided in front of the building, and a system of hot water heating has been placed with boiler in the cellar.

The engine room at Station No. 2 has been kalsomined and wood work refinished with hard oil finish. A boiler house has been added and a steam boiler placed with pipes and connections for steam heating.

Curtains have been furnished for Station No. 4, also new fastenings for front doors.

Station No. 5 has been provided with a water-closet, the engine room cleaned, and ceiling and sash painted.

Reference to the Steamer Company No. 1's new building on Mill Street (*City Documents: Fire Department Annual Reports to the Mayor, 1886, Newport Historical Society*).

FIRE DEPARTMENT.

Headquarters, Hook and Ladder Building, Long wharf.

BOARD OF FIREWARDS.

Chairman, Henry H. Tilley, *Chief Engineer*; Secretary, Joseph G. Stevens.

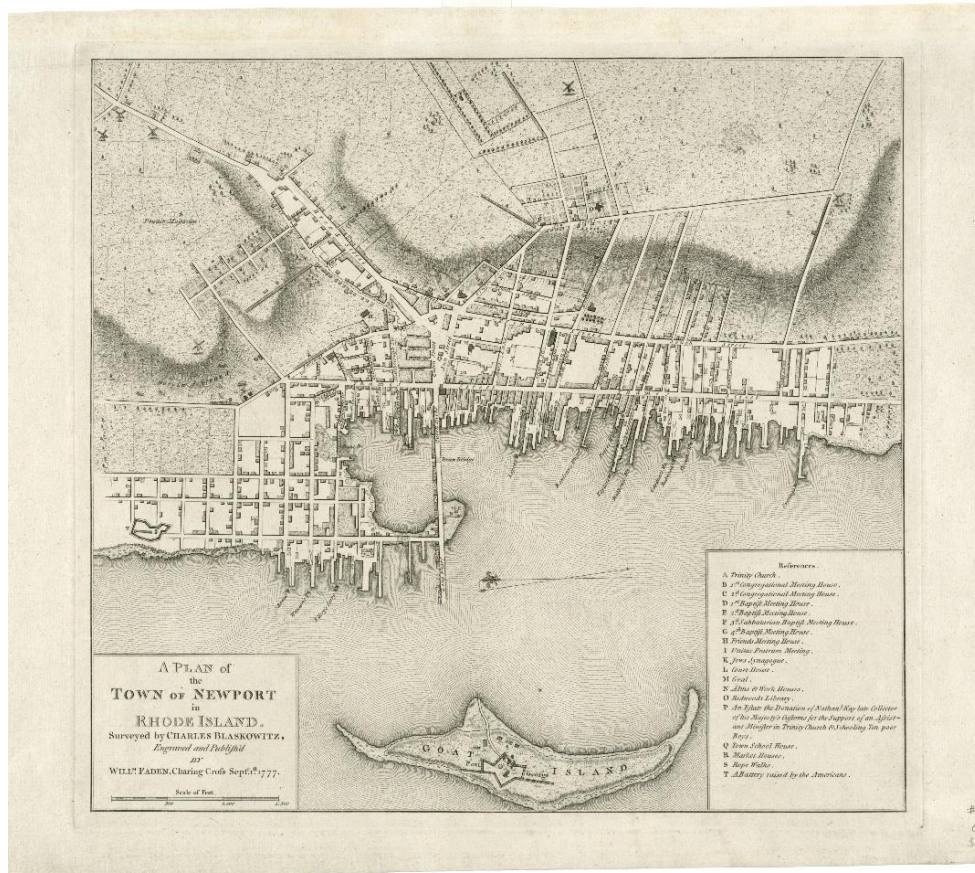
Chief Engineer—Henry H. Tilley, headquarters, Long wharf; *First Assistant*, J. G. Stevens; *Second Assistant*, John E. Lake; *Third Assistant*, George A. Brown; *Fourth Assistant*, Andrew J. Kirwin.

STEAM FIRE AND HAND ENGINE COMPANIES.

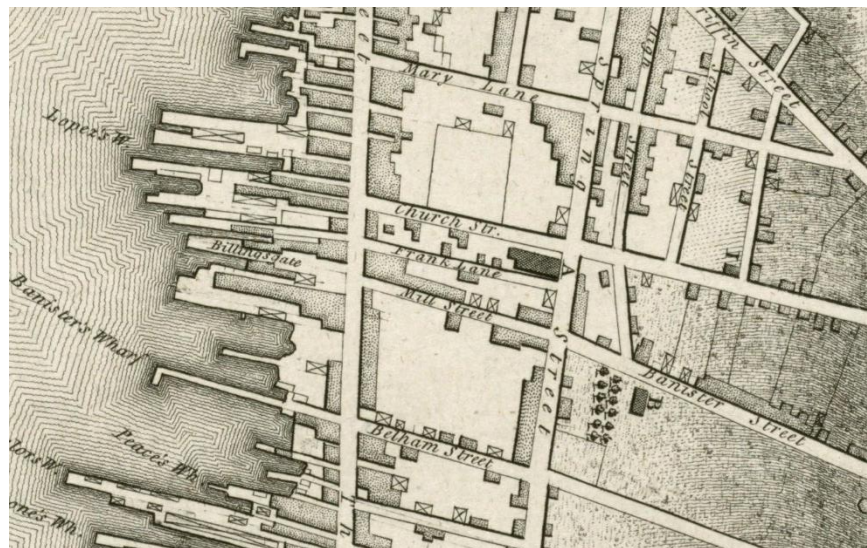
STEAM FIRE ENGINE COMPANY No. 1.—Foreman, George Martin; Assistant, Thomas S. Bowler; Engineman, Peleg D. White; Assistant, George A. Tilley.

STEAM FIRE ENGINE COMPANY No. 2.—Foreman, Benjamin S. Peabody; Assistant, Seth B. Hammett; Engineman, D. J. Moriarty; Assistant, Robert M. Pike.

Listing for Steam Fire Engine Company No. 1 (1887 *Newport City Directory*, Newport Historical Society).

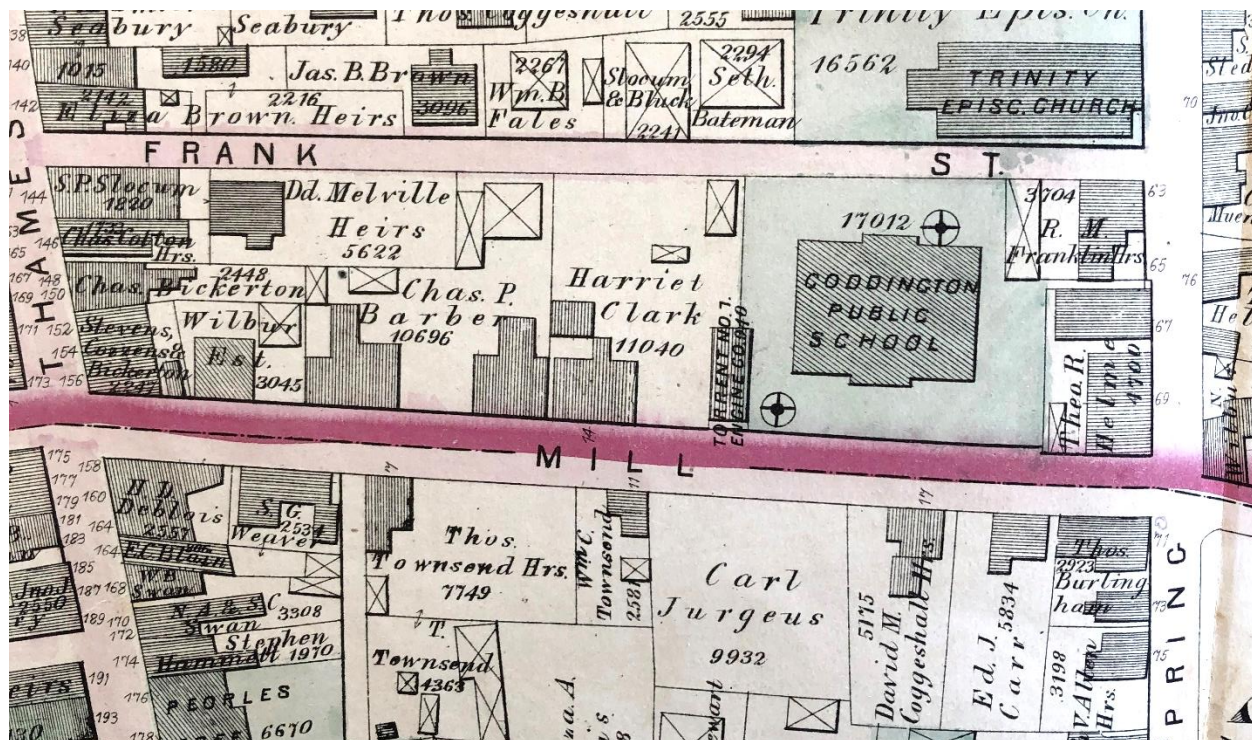


A plan of the town of Newport in Rhode Island by Charles Blaskowitz. Engraved and published by William Faden, London, 1777. Detail enlarged below, showing Mill Street.

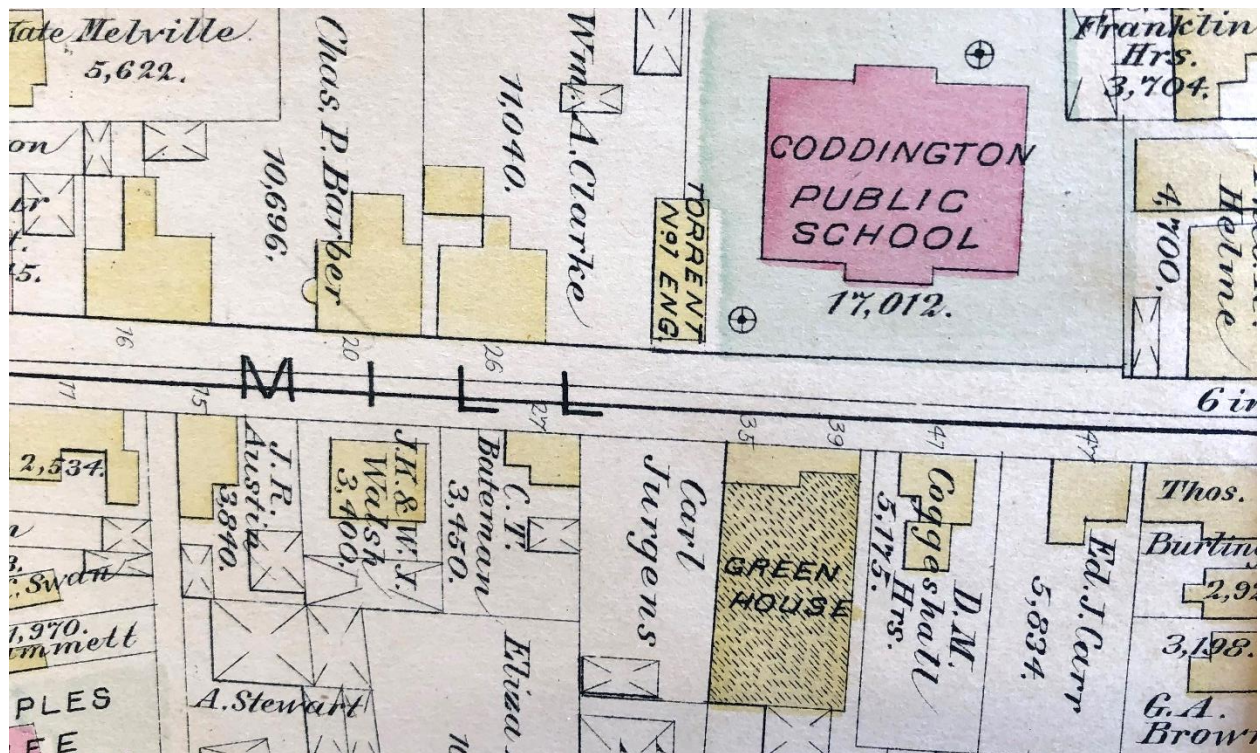




Detail from the 1850 *Map of the City of Newport* showing 25 Mill Street as an empty lot (just below the “L” in “Mill” on the map). Matthew Dripps & B. I. Tilley. Copy, Newport Historical Society.



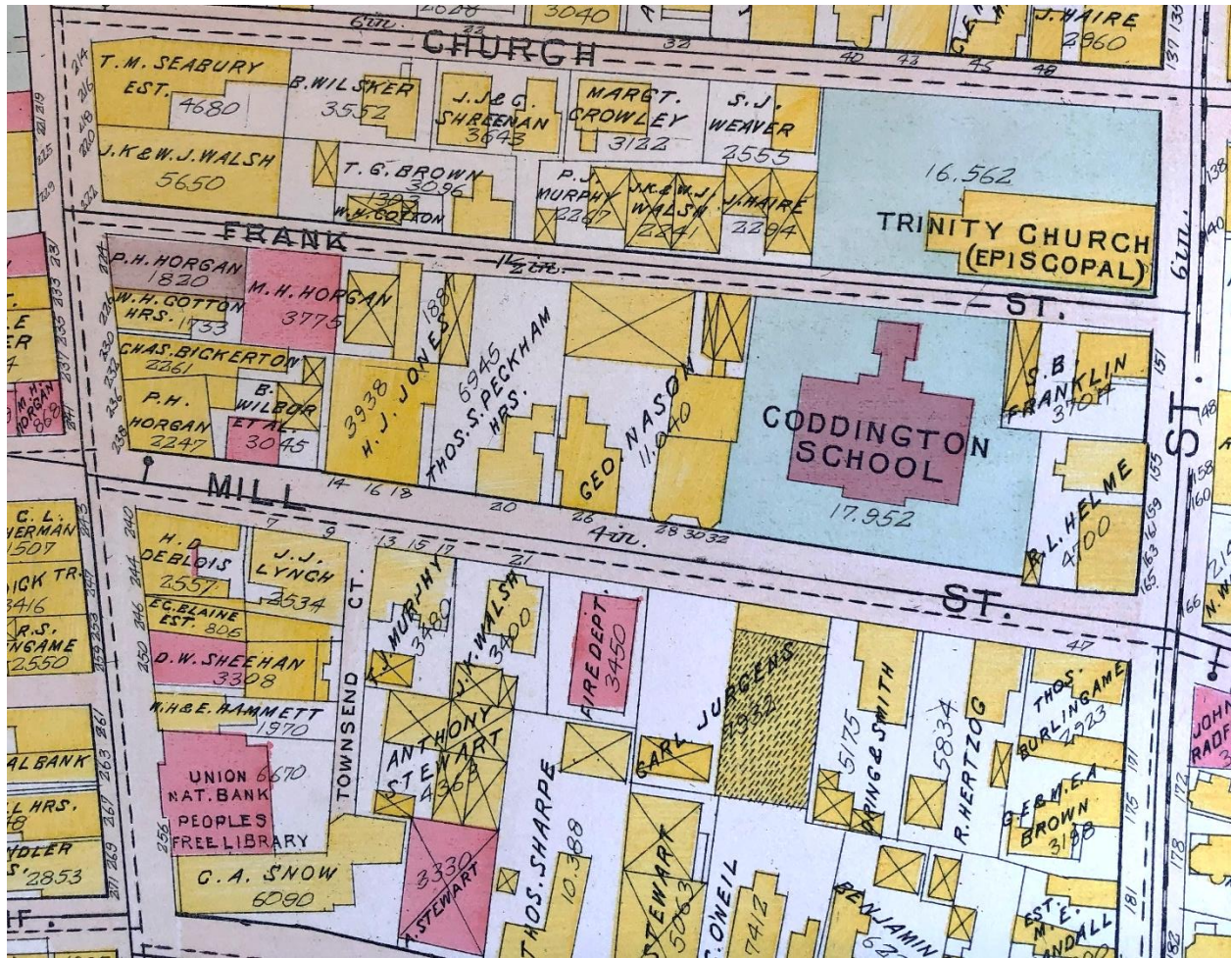
Detail from the 1876 *Newport City Atlas*. Please note that street numbers have changed over time; on this map no. 11 is present-day 25 Mill Street. A dwelling house owned by Wm C. Townsend is on site. Torrent No. 1 Engine Co. is located opposite to the northeast.



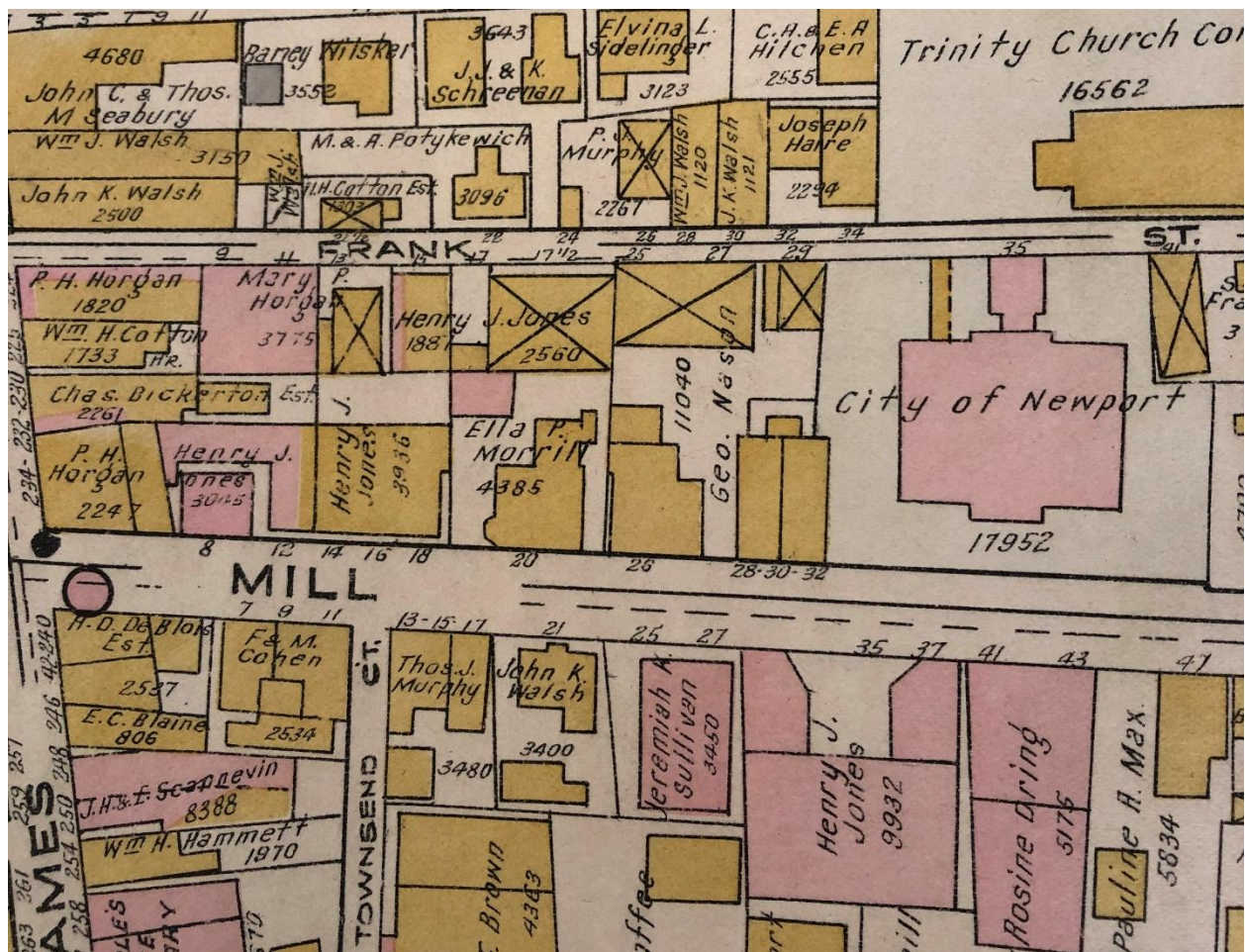
Detail from the 1883 *Newport City Atlas*. A dwelling house, owned by Charles Bateman, is on the lot at present-day 25 Mill Street. Torrent No. 1 Engine is located opposite to the northeast.



Detail from the 1893 Newport City Atlas. The Bateman house has been removed and new Fire Station No. 1 is shown at 27 Mill Street (present-day 25 Mill Street). The building for Torrent No. 1 Engine Co. (32 Mill Street) has been let go by the city and is under the ownership of Geo. Nason.



Detail from the 1907 Newport City Atlas. Fire Station No. 1 is shown at s5 Mill Street. The Torrent Engine Co. 1 building is gone and has been replaced with a larger structure.



Detail from the 1921 Newport City Atlas. Fire Station No. 1 has been let go of by the city and is owned by Jeremiah K. Sullivan, 25 & 27 Mill Street.



The persons pictured in this 19th century tintype are likely the members of Torrent Engine No. 1. This fire station predated the one at 25 Mill Street and was located across the street to the east. Circa 1870. P10142, Collection of the *Newport Historical Society*.



Members of Steam Fire Engine Company No. 1 lined up on Mill Street. The structure in the background on the right is likely the building that housed the company before they moved into the new building in 1886 on the opposite side of Mill Street (not pictured). Circa 1880. P10140, Collection of the *Newport Historical Society*.



Image of the Steam Fire Engine Company No. 1 Station on Mill Street. Circa 1890. P10141, *Collection of the Newport Historical Society*.



Image of the Steam Fire Engine Company No. 1 Station on Mill Street. The person in the far left of the photograph has been identified as Mr. Frederick Almy Gifford. Circa 1900. 2007.2, *Collection of the Newport Historical Society*.

The 1900 *Newport City Directory* lists Fredrick A. Gifford as the foreman of Steam Fire Engine Company No. 1. His residence is listed at 21 Mt. Vernon, and his occupation was carpenter.



Image of the Steam Fire Engine Company No. 1 Station on Mill Street. Circa 1915. P10139, 'Newport Daily News negatives collection'. *Collection of the Newport Historical Society.*

Note the presence of the tower; the 1970 Historic Building Data Rhode Island Survey of the property records the absence of the tower. It has since been restored.

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REPORT OF FIRE DEPARTMENT

ROSTER FIRE DEPARTMENT, 1914 **Headquarters, West Marlborough Street**

Chief Engineer
Assistant Engineer
Assistant Engineer
Assistant Engineer
Secretary

ANDREW J. KIRWIN
JOSEPH S. LAWTON
MICHAEL P. MURPHY
MICAH W. WETHERELL
HENRY H. TILLEY

5 Goodwin Street
79 Third Street
42 Dixon Street
8 Bath Road
5 Dartmouth Street

COMBINATION COMPANY NO. 1 **Station, West Marlborough Street**

Name	Position	Badge	Occupation	Residence
Thomas W. Wood	Foreman	9	Permanent at Station	40 Charles Street
John Malloy	Hoseman	153	Permanent at Station	At Station
William H. Graffam	Hoseman	154	Permanent at Station	7 La Salle Street
George H. Freeborne	Hoseman	155	Permanent at Station	31 Bridge Street
Charles S. Freeborne	Driver	169	Permanent at Station	14 Calvert Street
Frank H. Whitman	Driver Days Off	173	Permanent at Station	29 Newport Avenue

STEAMER COMPANY NO. 1 **Station, Mill Street**

Name	Position	Badge	Occupation	Residence
William P. Dawley	Foreman	at call 1	Mason	5 Summer Street
George H. Kirby	Assistant Foreman	at call 14	Merchant	9 Pine Street
101 George Martin	Hoseman	at call 26	Painter	38 Rhode Island Avenue
102 Henry L. Martland	Hoseman	at call 27	Painter	53 John Street

103 Perry B. Dawley	Hoseman	at call 28	Carpenter	18 Levin Street
104 Alexander B. Carr	Hoseman	at call 29	Driver	150 Spring Street
105 John Henry Brown	Hoseman	at call 30	Tinsmith	31 Thames Street
106 Nathan B. Brayton	Hoseman	at call 31	Book-keeper	12 Gardiner Street
107 George S. Flagg	Hoseman	at call 32	Merchant	21 Division Street
108 John C. Matley	Hoseman	at call 33	Gardener	20 Levin Street
109 William Nelson	Hoseman	at call 34	Gardener	25 Gidley Street
110 Duncan McLean	Hoseman	at call 35	Carpenter	16 Cranston Avenue
Joseph Brown	Engineman	at call 84	Machinist	15 Warner Street
Thomas J. Murphy	Fireman	at call 96	Plumber	15 Mill Street
Edward J. Shea	Driver	157	Permanent at Station	41 Mill Street
William J. Shepley	Driver Days Off	170	Permanent at Station	26 Golden Hill Street
Robert Welch	Driver Days Off	75	Permanent at Station	2 West Howard Street
Frederick P. Lee	Sub-Hoseman	at call 176	Undertaker	66 Church Street
Andrew J. Kirwin, Jr.	Sub-Hoseman	at call 177	Mason	5 Goodwin Street

REPORT OF FIRE DE

Last listing of Steam Fire Engine Company No. 1, Mill Street Station (*City Documents: Fire Department Annual Reports to the Mayor, 1914, Newport Historical Society*).