GROTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY Newsletter

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Summer 2011

Wm. Warburton alias "Bristol Bill"

Newspaper clipping from Caledonian of August 22, 1873 **Courtesy of Eric McGuire**

MEETING SCHEDULE

10 AM the second Tuesday of May through October at the Peter Paul House 1203 Scott Highway Groton, VT 05046

2011 OFFICERS

Richard Brooks President Vice President Deane Page Secretary Josephine French Joan Haskell Treasurer

APPOINTED STAFF

Web Site Editor **Donald Smith** Newsletter Editor J. Willard Benzie

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Bristol Bill and His Exploits.

Mr. Richardson in one of his letters home, thus refers to a matter which caused great excitement in this county at the time:

The only great excitement I ever heard of in Groton was the magnificent counterfeit money scheme that was organized for this location in 1848. It was the biggest thing of the sort I ever heard of-would have been worthy of a much larger place-Washington for instance. For some good reasons, I cannot relate the minute details of the affair, but it will do in the rough.

"Bristol Bill" was one of the most notorious burglars that England ever produced, and he came over to curse America. - Christian Meadows was a most ingenious banknote engraver, in the employ of the American Banknote Engraving Co., of Boston. Ephraim Low was a Groton merchant, none too honest. Low had somewhere fallen in with Bristol Bill, and Meadows was induced to leave his employers after first stealing some thirty or forty genuine bank note dies, which he was successful in getting away with. these dies were the genuine engraving of the principal features of a large share of the banknote circulation of the country. Bank bills made from them would be in a mechanical sense, strictly gen-

uine, except as to the usual autographsignatures of the bank officers. In the possession of dishonest men they were the most dangerous agents imaginable to the financial condition of the country. Public safety in money matters, and the reputation of the engraving company, as well, demanded the apprehension of the theif and the recovery of the stolen dies. Energetic steps were at once taken to that effect. The police authorities of the entire country were notified, large rewards offered, and sharp scented detectives had their sharp eyes and sharp wits constantly at work. To write up the history of the affair in detail—the search of years, the arrest, the denouement, and the trial would require the space of a large volume. Bristol Bill and Meadows were hunted down. They were found with their several accomplices in and near this village in the winter of 1849-50, the dies recovered, likewise a heavy transfer press used by engravers to imprint the engraving on the round dies upon plates of soft stuff from which the bank notes are printed, also a bank note printing press, together with plates ready for the press; likewise a large account of burglars tools of every de-That these counterfeiters scription. might issue money with genuine signa-tures as well as mechanically genuine printing, they had secured from the bank at Danville a package of one thousand dollars in one dollar bills. By

a process known to these experts in villainy the denominational engraving to be removed by chemical process, and higher denominational value printed in instead; transforming the genuine one dollar note into a ten, a fifty, hundred, or any other figure that suited. Upon the market, and scarcely in the hands of the signers of these bills, could the fraud be detected. The paper, the printing, the signatures would be genuine; the one dollar bill mentioned had never been in circulation-hence no difference in printing could be detected .- But just in the nick of time, before any bill had been raised or any printing done, the parties were all rested and imprisoned. Two accomplices, then residents of this place, but whose names I have omitted, turned state's evidence—the whole affair from beginning to end was brought to lighthow the game had been worked up, how the dies had been shipped to Low's store in axe boxes, how the transfer and printing paraphernalia had been smuggled into town by various ways, how the new building opposite to Low's store, with a deep sub-cellar and under ground culvert to the cellar of Low's store had been nearly completed for a counterfeiting den; how one party and another had been roped in for various reasons—and the whole matter of former suspicions fully explained. Bill and Meadows went to the penitentiary for long terms; Low died in Danville just before trial; one of the state witnesses is dead; the other is still living. was an incident in the annals of crime that will never be forgotten in Grotonone that is rarely ever mentioned with out a soudder of thrilling interest.

The Mr. Richardson referred to in the article is believed to be Mr. David Nelson Richardson (1832-1898) who lived in Davenport, IA where he was the owner and editor of the Davenport Daily Democrat; Regent of Iowa St. University; and advisor of President Grover Cleveland. In 1895 he purchased the hill north of Groton village, named it Mt. Medad (for Medad Welch a former owner) and built the first summer home in Groton. He married Janette Darling, daughter of John and Janette (Brock) Darling, in 1858 and they had 4 children, two girls and two boys.

Eric McGuire lives in CA and visited Groton a few years back looking for information about his ancestors. Harold Puffer took him to several cemeteries where he found some of his ancestors tombstones. Eric sent this article to GHS with the following note: "I happened upon an interesting article - actually a series of articles - that included two of my ancestral uncles, Ephraim Low and Peter Paul. You may know about this little piece of "dirt" that apparently really rocked sleepy Groton back in 1849-1850. It involves the case of Bristol Bill and his counterfeit money operation. Apparently Ephraim Low died [26 Mar 1850] (see tombstone picture - in Groton Town Cemetery) prior to going to trial, and Peter Paul was acquitted, but it is pretty sensational stuff for Groton. I found a later (1857) article that notes a number of counterfeit bills and coins were found associated with Ephraim Low's old store."

Another article from the May 27, 1903 Caledonian Record

quotes from one of Horace W. Bailey's rare and valuable pamphlets: "Life and Exploits of Bristol Bill the notorious burglar being compiled from his own confessions and the records of crime in England and America. Willis Little & Co., Publishers, No. 19 State Street, Boston. Entered according to the Act of Congress 1850."



(photo of Ephraim Low's Tombstone in the Groton cemetery by Eric McGuire)

WORLD WAR II STORIES – PART VII

Conclusion of the rescue after a German Sub sunk his ship By Captain Dwight A. Smith (1888 – 1962)

(continued from last newsletter)

All the harsh thoughts and words of the night before were forgotten as cigarettes were passed out by the Motor Torpedo Boat's crew. As soon as everyone was safe on board the young "Skipper" came to his cabin to ask me what he should do with the boat, and I'm afraid I didn't express much concern about its disposal, this being due to such a feeling of relief that my responsibility was at an end as far as the personal safety of the survivors was concerned. I told him that I didn't give a damn what he did with it, which apparently was correctly interpreted as he saluted, went on deck, got his craft underway, and towed the poor old boat into the harbor, where she still is for all I know.

LIST OF SURVIVORS IN NUMBER FOUR LIFEBOAT 1. D. A. Smith, Captain 19. J. Span, Messman 2. H. R. Brown, 2nd Officer 20. J. Kearney, " 3. H. R. Carter, 3rd Officer 21. D. J. Portley, Oiler 4. H. R. Bower, Jr. 3rd Officer 22. H. Mole, Fireman 5. H. L. Tasker, Purser 23. P. J. Thornton, Fireman 6. I. Suchocki, Radio Operator 24. Mrs. Eliz. Fowler, Passenger 7. H. A. Anderson, 3rd Asst. Engr. 25. Mr. Paul Kirtch, 8. R. A. McQueen, 3rd Asst. Engr. 26. Master Paul Kirtch 9. C. J. Velez, A. B. Seaman 27.Mr.O.H.Bush 10. M. Mareno, 28. Mr. W. Sirolla 11. L. Canera. 29. Mr. Browning 12. C. Lindell 30. Mr. Stokking G. Torres, Ord. Seaman 31. Father M. J. Bane 14. S. Jones, Chief Steward 32. C. E. Stevenson, U. S. Navy 15. T. Santos, Utility 33. J. R. Redwine, 16. J. Vincent, Ch. Cook 34. K. Sharp, Jr. 17. O. Day, 2nd Cook 35. Seytz, 18. A. Hirschkoff, Messman

About 8 AM we were alongside the mole of the Custom's shed where were assembled what seemed to be the larger part of the city's population, or at least the official part. As I stepped onto the quay the Harbor Master, Commander Wynne introduced himself and his companion, a Captain Jones, both of whom desired to assist me in walking into the shed where I was to be questioned on the torpedoing in the customary routine manner.

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As up to this particular moment I had only used my legs in scrambling onto the deck of the rescue craft, going but a few steps down to the Skipper's quarters, and then again stepping off the deck to the quay, I thought that feeling so fit in all other parts of my body I was normal in my legs. In that I was wrong, and it required but a few steps to convince me that at least for the first few yard some slight help would be advisable. Ten days and nights of remaining mostly in a sitting position, with no room in which to stretch one's legs, much less exercise them, had left their mark, and I found that it took a day or two of practice before I could really say that my walk was in any way normal. I had lost all semblance of calves, and my thighs were as flat as boards, and were still far from being in their old shape at the time I reached home six weeks later.

Assembled under the Customs shed were Naval, Military, and Police representatives, young ladies of the St. Johns Ambulance Brigade, stretcher bearers, (not needed), and a large number of citizens both white and colored who were of sufficient importance to be allowed inside of the gates. As soon as I was inside a young lady in uniform stepped up and presented me with the most luscious mug of soup I ever tasted anywhere in the world, and after the first mouthful I thought what a wonderful thing it would have been if the cook who made it had been in the boat, along with the utensils and ingredients, and fed us that instead of concrete biscuits, pemmican (Ugh) and malted milk tablets. After I had answered a few of the Commander's preliminary questions I was driven to the Central Police Station, where the rest of the boat's company were taking baths and receiving a supply of clean clothes, and was taken by a Police Captain to his private living quarters. There I was loaned his safety razor, supplied with towels, soap, etc., and turned loose in the shower bath. By the time I had completed shaving and bathing clean clothes had been brought for me, and did I look cute when I was all dressed up in them, they consisting of white short socks, khaki shorts without belt, and a blue chambray shirt.

After dressing (?) I went into the living room where awaiting me were the American Consul, Commander Wynne, Mr. Niblock, the agent, and my host, the Captain. First I sat down in luxury in a real comfortable chair with a cushion seat (no hard, wet slats), then had a famous Barbados rum punch and a cigarette, after which I was called upon by the Consul and the Commander to answer untold questions, all of which were read from official forms, and the answers written down.

By the time this session was over the rest of the survivors were in readiness to be taken to the store of a local merchant, who was only too pleased to open up on a Sunday morning, where they were given credit to purchase up to \$15.00, guaranteed by me through the agent. Nearly all made the same sort of purchases, toilet articles, socks, shirts, pajamas, and other minor items just sufficient to carry them over until Tuesday, when they would be able to do proper shopping with a cash allowance of \$150.00 each. Ordinarily these purchases would have commenced on Monday morning, but that particular Monday happened to be one of those days so dear to the British heart, a Bank Holiday, which day everywhere under the flag is really and truly a Holiday, one on which nothing opens up.

As soon as the shopping was well underway I went with Mr. Niblock to his

office, Robert Thom & Co., where I sent off three lengthy cablegrams, one to the American West African Line, one to the U. S. Navy, Washington, and the other to Admiralty, London. All these were worded alike, giving all particulars of the torpedoing of the "West Kebar", and listing all survivors. This was followed by a private message worded as follows: "Mrs. Dwight Smith, c/o P. A. Smith, Groton, Vermont, USA. Arrived safely. Feeling fine. Love. Dwight Smith". Signing ones full name no doubt sounds very formal, but wartime restrictions call for it. This message was filed about 10:30 AM November 8, 1942, and to date of writing (May 25, 1944) this has not arrived at its destination.

As soon as possible after reaching New York I made inquiries of Naval Intelligence, 90 Church Street, to discover why such a message was held up by Naval Censor. I received the bright answer, and satisfying (?) information that the message was held up in order not to aid the enemy. I thought that a most asinine reason, and said so in a forcible manner, feeling justified in saying anything I liked, having only that forenoon been told by a brother Shipmaster, who was in West Africa at the time I came to grief, that all my friends up and down the length of the Coast had heard all the details, including ship's name and my name, over English radio broadcasts from Berlin and Rome. I told my pal in Intelligence of this, and asked him if he did not think the information contained in my "Sans Origins" cablegram would have altered submarine warfare in the Atlantic. For some reason he had no ready answer to that and I left him after telling what my opinions of their actions were in regard do their ideas of how to build up morale of the folks at home.

During our stay in Barbados many of the survivors received mail from home telling of their letters arriving in good time, and although four weeks passed before I had my first letter I thought all that time that my cablegram and letters had been received. I have never yet found the reason for holding up my letters (three) while those written by others were unmolested.

From the Agent's office we (Mr. Niblock and I) went to the Niblock home, a typical Barbadian dwelling in a setting of flowers and fine tall Royal palms, where I met Mrs. Niblock and one son, Ian, just under age to go into service. An older son was a flyer in the R. A. F. and expected home most any day to recover from wounds suffered over Germany. Mrs. Niblock prepared a most marvelous breakfast (breakfast hour in Barbados is 11 AM) for me, ham and eggs, toast, marmalade, guava jelly, real home made butter, and excellent coffee. This last in spite of the fact the Niblocks were very British. Perhaps the nearness of the island to coffee producing countries accounted for the un-British brew. While I was enjoying my first real meal in ten days Ian went back downtown to purchase a belt of some sort, as I was finding it difficult to keep my shorts anywhere near the proper position.

After breakfast my host drove me to the beach hotel where the officers and crew were to be housed, as I wished to see how things were going with them. I found their housing arrangements quite alright, especially so considering that it was Sunday, and that our addition brought the number of torpedo survivors up to a total of 130. This number coupled with the usual winter vacationers from nearby islands and as far away as British Guiana and Canada filled to overflowing

Groton Photos



Morrison Hall



Groton Depot of Montpelier & Wells River Railroad. Photo by Captain Dwight Smith in 1919



Groton Manufacturing Co. by the Powder Spring Road Bridge Photo by Captain Dwight Smith in 1919



Feed Store and Dam west of Manufacturing Co.. Photo by Captain Dwight Smith in 1919

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every kind of hotel accommodations to be found in Bridgetown. The officers and three passengers were in one part of the single storied building, and the crew members in another, with separate feeding and bathing facilities. Mrs. Fowler had been taken away to live in the home of a local lady, Father Bain went to some mission where he was still living some time after I managed to get away from the island, and one passenger (Stokking) who was a Pan Am employee was flown out on the second day after landing.

I looked up Velez and handed over to him the ten dollars promised for sighting anything leading to our rescue. I found later that he followed the ancient custom of the sailor in from the sea and speedily blew the money on his shipmates at the hotel bar, which was OK with me, because the offer was made with no strings attached.

About 3 PM I arrived at the hotel where a room had been secured by Mr. Niblock from the proprietor that morning, as soon as I had made it plain that I wouldn't live along with my crew, but must be accommodated separately. Arrangements had been made that when I arrived I would give orders regarding being disturbed, and the staffs were to obey them to the letter. The point being that if I felt like sleeping for a week, more or less, that I could do so free from all callers, and no one need think that I was ill, or dead, because of no signs of life

THE END **Postscript**

written by the Captain's son, Dwight A. Smith Jr. and his wife Gee.

This is the end of the 1944 narrative, although it seems to stop rather abruptly. It was at this point that Dad reached the bottom of the last page of the notebook. Perhaps there was more, written in another place?

It is now March, 1988, and we continue with additional facts, notes, and postscripts gleaned from various sources.

As I recall, and from notes in other sources, Chief Officer E. F. Raymond and several other persons were in Lifeboat No. 2. It was reported that they doused their lights and rowed off under cover of darkness soon after the first torpedoing. This boat apparently safely reached land somewhere in the Caribbean. Mother, in Brooklyn, wrote to Dad in Bridgetown on December 2, 1942. A portion reads, "Mr. Raymond and his companions picked out a better spot for they got home the Monday before Thanksgiving. He knew nothing of you until his arrival here."

The survivors aboard the life raft, the one that became separated from the No. 4 lifeboat, were picked up by a Spanish tanker. I quote from a newspaper clipping: "SPANISH SHIP SAVES 8 VICTIMS OF TORPEDOING" "Funchal, Madeira, Dec. 4 (U. P.)" "A Spanish tanker landed eight survivors here today from the American steamer West Kebar, which was torpedoed off the Azores. The ship's crew numbered 39, but the fate of the others, including the

captain, was not known." As I recall, these eight were interned by Spanish authorities for the duration of the war.

Of the names mentioned in Dad's narrative, the following persons were aboard the "West Kebar", but not aboard Lifeboat No. 4: Chief Officer E. F. Raymond; Chief Engineer W. Pope; 1st Ass't. Engineer John Corey; 2nd Ass't. Engineer C. Larson; and a Missionary passenger with the last name Meyers.

I recall reports of a "small loss of life" from the incident, and it may be that some of the engineers were lost when the torpedo struck in the vicinity of the engine room, as Dad reports that the engines immediately stopped and all the lights went out.

Mrs. Elizabeth Fowler, the wife of an English Doctor doing missionary work in West Africa, wrote a book on the sinking and subsequent lifeboat cruise, entitled "Standing Room Only." The book was published by Dodd, Mead & Company, 1944. She describes Dad, on page 104, as follows: "He sat high in the stern, his blanket draped across one shoulder, a knotted handkerchief dipping over his brow, with the classic dignity of a Roman senator. He was a noble, a heroic figure, as he sat there presiding over us. He might have been immortalized in bronze, so deeply had the sun burned him. 'The Mighty Mite', his men called him."

Mrs. Fowler later relates a conversation with Dad aboard the motor boat that picked them up outside of Bridgetown harbor in Barbados. "How about your watches, Captain?" He had two watches of which he was inordinately proud and fond. Before he had wrapped them away in oilskin at our last port he had shown them to me, one a very old and beautiful half-hunter, its gold case mellowed with age like copper; the other a masterpiece of Swiss craftsmanship with an exquisite chime. He chuckled and patted his breast pocket. "Hermetically sealed. My guess is they've weathered it, too." He had packed them in oilskin, and then they were wrapped in rubber and cemented.

We talked of our rations. I smiled when he said, "But those damned raisins. How I hated 'em. Fished every one out before I could eat that pemmican."

Mother's family scrapbook contains items concerning the lifeboat saga that were printed in the following publications:

Yachting Magazine, March, 1943. An article by passenger Oakley H. Bush entitled "Torpedoed: Ten Days in a crowded Life Boat in the Atlantic."

Seapower Magazine, February 1943. An article by passenger Elizabeth Fowler entitled "Thirty Four Men and Me".

Atlantic Monthly, date unknown. An article by passenger Elizabeth Fowler entitled "Thirty Four Men and I".

Various newspaper clippings, most without name or date of publication, including:

Interview with survivor Elizabeth Fowler. (Passenger)

Interview with survivor Albert S. C. Hirschkoff (Messman). In the article Hirschkoff is quoted as saying, "Our skipper, Capt. Dwight A. Smith, is the best navigator I ever saw. We sailed for ten days, during several of which we battled rain and squalls, but we hit the exact spot on the West Indies, over 400 miles from

(Continued from page 11) World War II Stories

where our ship had been sunk, that the skipper had headed for."

Interview with survivor Rev. Martin J. Bane (Passenger). This one published in "The Catholic News", March 20, 1943. Father Bane was quoted as saying, "I was delighted to learn also that only a few of our passengers and crew were lost when the ship went down. The others on rafts and in lifeboats were picked up eventually".

Interview with Capt. Dwight A. Smith, published in "Dixie, Time-Picayune States Roto Magazine", New Orleans, December 28, 1952. The article, in part, reads as follows: "Every detail of this last voyage is in longhand in my notebook. This helped me get the 230-hour nightmare out of my mind, and records it for my children and grandchildren. I didn't do it so they would think I was a hero. For what happened to me has happened to many captains on many ships in every recent war."

Although not specifically mentioned in Dad's narrative, several other survivors mentioned sighting sharks in the vicinity of the lifeboat, as well as porpoises and other fish.

Dad's travels, after arrival on Barbados: on December 15, after 38 days in Bridgetown, Barbados, he flew to Port-of-Spain, Trinidad on British West Indies Airlines. He stayed at Queen's Park Hotel. Departed Port-of Spain on a Pan American Airways flight at 6:10 AM on December 20th, arriving at Miami 7:00 PM that evening. He departed Miami at 9:30 PM on an Eastern Airlines flight, arriving at LaGuardia Field, New York, 7:10 AM December 21, 1942.

Mother and Dad had difficulties communicating with each other. Mother moved from Groton, VT to an apartment at 33 Garden Place in Brooklyn on November 8th, which ironically is the same day that Dad landed in Bridgetown. Dad's cable to Mother on November 8th was never received. In a cablegram sent to Groton on November 28th Dad says, "Still here feeling fine no answer my letter twelfth. Cable your present address. Love". On the same date Mother sent a cable to Dad in Barbados, "Anxious contact me 33 Garden Place Brooklyn. Love"

Mother phoned in a cable message to Dad on November 30th. I'm not sure of the contents, but Mother received a message back from Western Union reading, "Held by censor. If addressee in American Armed Forces please let us have the following information, Serial Number, APO Number, Cable Address and Routing Word of Addressee."

On November 31st Mother received a cable from Dad, "Delayed here due lack transportation. Will advise you later. Love".

Dad next received, on December 1st, a cable from Mother reading: "Received cable via Vermont. Great relief. No letters. Write. Better still come. Love."

On December 2nd Mother wrote a letter to Dad. Parts read: "Evidently your letter to me was held up or lost and I have surely been through Hell until I got your first cable this week. All that I ask is to know that you are feeling fine..... Your father and Phoebe are fine. The strain on them, too, has been terrific but everything has been set right now I will soon forget all the mental torture of the past weeks."

Cable from Dad received in Brooklyn on December 11th: "Letter received.

Have written three. Prospects very good leaving shortly. Love."

And on December 16th Mother received the following cable: "Leaving today. Hope to see you by Christmas. Love."

On a visit to Barbados several years ago, Bee and Bob Wehmeyer (the Captain's daughter and her husband) contacted the Harbormaster's Office in Bridgetown and found the following information on file:

S.S. West Kebar. 5,620 tons.

Sunk 11 minutes after midnight, 29 October, 1942.

14 degrees 57 minutes North

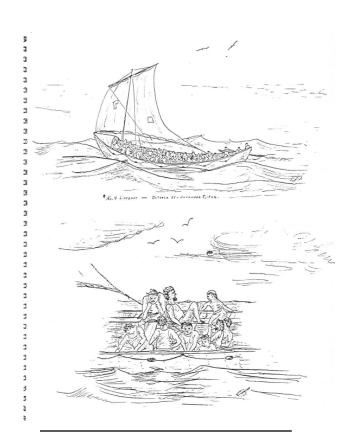
53 degrees 37 minutes West NE of Barbados

Struck by DC type U-129, Lt. Cmdr. Hans Witt.

Struck 22 ships from 10/6/42 to 5/5/43.

Was bombed in French port Lorraine, July 1944.

Sketches from Captain Smith's notebook of lifeboat #4 and the life raft.



GROTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Visit GHS Web page at <u>Historical Society</u> on http://www.grotonvt.com/

Lifetime Membership dues are \$100 Annual dues are \$10 for individuals and \$15 for families

Lifetime members (both sin	_		
Individuals	igics &	51	
paid 2011+	35	31	
paid 2010	15		
paid 2009*	1		
Families		15	
paid 2011+	10		
paid 2010	3		
paid 2009*	2		
+ eight members have also paid ahead for 2012			

* 2011 will end the Grace period for members who last paid dues for the year 2009. If dues are not paid by the end of this year their membership will lapse. (twelve members have elected to receive their newsletter by e-mail saving printing and mailing costs.)

Annual dues are payable each calendar year. The last year your dues were paid is shown on your mailing label. Please let GHS know if there is an error. Those receiving their newsletter by e-mail will be notified when they are in their grace period. If you want to receive your newsletter by e-mail please send request to jwbenzie@mchsi.com

Mr. Glover's Groton describes the "Bristol Bill" story briefly on pages 233—234. McLean (McLane) Marshall, a tavern keeper, Ephraim Low, a storekeeper, and Peter Paul all of Groton, turned states evidence and were acquitted. Others involved besides Bristol Bill and Christian Meadows were Meadow's wife, Bill's companion, Margaret O'Connor, a cabaret singer, and George (English Jim) Green. At the

trial on June 12, 1850 in Danville the witnesses in addition to those turning states evidence were Col. Jacob Kent of Newbury and Robert Darling, who made the arrest; Alden Heath, stage driver, Daniel Coffrin, a local officer; Oscar C. Hale, cashier of Newbury Bank; Jonathan Peck, a blacksmith; Marvin Whitcher, a carpenter; and Horace Pierce, keeper of the Coossuck House at Wells River. At the sentencing on June 21st Bristol Bill stabbed the prosecuting attorney, Bliss N. Davis, in the back of the neck with a case knife. Mr. Davis recovered and the next day Bristol Bill was taken to Windsor prison to serve a ten year sentence.

Eric McGuire also sent a picture of Peter Paul's tombstone that is in the Groton cemetery (see below). Perhaps the Groton Historical Society should expand the work Jim Dresser started when he listed the burials in each of the Groton cemeteries and posted them on the GHS website. Digital photos of each tombstone could be added with a biographical sketch of those buried there. It might also be possible to post them on <u>findagrave.com</u> where they would be more readily available to people searching for them.



Photo of Peter Paul's tombstone in Groton cemetery by Eric McGuire

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