

New Bedford Streets; A Piece of Americana: Ashley Boulevard

In this installment we will delve into the background of Ashley Boulevard, particularly because it was requested by a reader. I'd again like to re-iterate the importance of reader feedback, correction, and contributions. By all means, let us make this an open discussion to keep the "wiki" accurate. To our more informed readers, and local historians the answer is perhaps an obvious one, however to be sure I had to rule out and other "Ashleys." Let's take a detective type of ride through the process of elimination.

The earliest mention in the region of an Ashley that I could find in the historical record was that of Edward Ashley who arrived the region in approximately 1628 and started a trading post in Penobscot, Maine on the George's River, in what is now Thomaston. An interesting character, William Bradford mentions that he *"...lived among the Indians as a savage and went naked amongst them and used their manners, in which time he got their language."* However, he is ruled out because there is no mention of his ever marrying or having children and he was arrested for dealing guns and ammunition to Amerindians...not exactly the type of person to create honorifics for.

From this date onward there are a number of Ashleys mentioned mainly in Plymouth Colony (Rochester and Freetown), Boston and Maine. Most likely the ancestors of the Ashleys that we have in the region today, originated with Joseph and Elizabeth Ashley who settled in Springfield in approximately 1639. The Ashleys that spread through the region did not make it to New Bedford proper before 1790 as they do not show up on the census.

The first mention of an Ashley in New Bedford after the 1790 census is that of Joshua Bishop Ashley, son of John Sherman, born in Rochester in 1820. Joshua Ashley married a Susan Sanderson and they had many children that were born here in New Bedford. Joshua Ashley is the Ashley in the name of the firm Brownell, Ashley & Co, “...manufacturers of fine grades of carriages of all varieties, excepting coaches.” which was started in 1848. This business was located on numbers 24 to 38 Fourth Street. Here is the beginning of the Ashley family name’s journey to prominence.



Mayor Charles S. Ashley unveiling of the Whaleman Monument – 1913 (Courtesy of the NB Whaling Museum)

One of approximately nine of Joshua and Susan Ashley’s children, Charles Sumner Ashley was born in New Bedford on September 5, 1858. Here we have our “culprit.” Charles graduated from Parker School and Friends Academy. Instead of heading to college as his parents wished, Charles had business ambitions and was involved in many business ventures including Covell & Ashley on Purchase Street, dealing in produce and general goods and Ashley & Pierce Clothing & Furnishing Goods on 72-74 William Street.

Seemingly always looking for greater challenges, Charles carried his ambitions into the political arena, starting at the age of 26 in 1884 as a member of the “Common Council.” He

would serve on the New Bedford Water Board, Board of Public Works, and the School Board, and served as Alderman, which in essence was a city council position, for two years. This prepared Charles for Mayorship which he would serve as more than a whopping 25 times and for thirty-two years between 1890 and 1936. In 1903 and 1910, he received nearly 50% of the registered vote, an astounding number. In between acting as mayor, he would serve as CEO and postmaster.

Charles would eventually marry Annie Butler Luce and have four children, before passing away in 1941. He is currently interred at Rural Cemetery on Dartmouth Street. In 1898 the Charles S. Ashley Elementary school was named in his honor.

Ashley Boulevard Timeline

1880: 99 Ashley Boulevard home is built as one of the earliest modern homes.

1884: Building that houses Sowle's of Dartmouth (Florist) is built.

1898c: Pine Grove Cemetery is opened.

1900: Church that is now St Kilian's Parish is built.

1905: 102 Ashley Boulevard home with the "tower" is built.

1908: Abraham Lincoln School is built, designed by Architect Louis E. Destremps.

1909: New Bedford Independent Industrial School opens to 59 students. Now called Greater New Bedford Vocational Technical High School.

1915: Richard's Auto Sales building is erected.

1916: Calvary Assembly of God Portuguese Church is built

1918: New Bedford Independent Industrial School is renamed New Bedford Vocational School.

1930: St. Anthony's School is erected. Brooklawn Liquors building is erected.

1934: Fire Department at 131 Ashley Blvd. is built.

1935: 2nd Spanish Church of God/Greek Orthodox Church built.

1940: Star Auto Sales building is erected.

1945: Gas station is built at 116 Ashley Blvd.

1946: New Bedford Vocational School is renamed New Bedford Vocational High School.

1947: Sixth District Social Building is erected. Costa's Insurance building.

1948: Small plaza is built from 293-305 Ashley Blvd. Green Miles convenience and D&D Party Food sit here.

1952: At Lowe's Auto building is erected.

1955: Diamond Triumph Glass building is erected.

1958c: JFK Memorial Highway/Route 18 development is begun as a downtown connector.

1961: Homlyke Bakery opens.

1963: Construction begins on Route 18 in conjunction with the I-195 construction project.

1964: What is now Lincoln Laundromat at 139-143 Ashley is built.

1965: Police Department is built at 781 Ashley. Cumberland Farm's at 757 Ashley is built.

1967: Poirier Post is built.

1969: Tedeschi's/Dunkin Donuts building is erected at 453 Ashley Blvd.

1971: Acme Liquors opens. Knowlton School burns down when a student broke into the school and set it on fire.

1975c: The Cemetery Board relinquishes part of their land at Pine Grove and sells it to the Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational High School.

1977: Greater New Bedford Vocational Technical High School is built.

1974: Tiny building that houses Zar Dogs is erected.

1983: Gary's Best Hot Dogs opens.

1984: Patenaude's Aquarium is built and opens.

1998: Slade's Ferry Bank is built at 833 Ashley.

2000: Dartmouth Dental opens.

2007: After a year long operation by Southeastern Mass. Gang Task Force, N.B.P.D., FBI, and Bristol County Sheriff's Office "Operation Kingfish" nets 30 Latin King members. December snowstorm dumps 1 foot of snow.

2008: School Committee votes to close down West Side school program for troubled students. Public responds strongly. CVS is erected.

2010: Bristol County Savings Bank building is erected.

2011: The new Abraham Lincoln Elementary School is completed.

If you have any corrections, additions, advice or anecdotes to share please comment below or e-mail us at ngbarts@gmail.com.
