

# THE CTHULHU PRAYER SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

## Recent Meetings of The Providence H.P. Lovecraft Friends' Group: A Wrap-Up

NOVEMBER 5, 2001 — Once again, writers, artists, composers and others who are fans of the writing and mythos of H.P. Lovecraft, America's greatest horror writer, gathered at the Union Station Brewery in downtown Providence for the sixth Cthulhu Prayer Brunch. The managers of this micro brewery, famed for its excellent cuisine, waived the usual restrictions on chainsaws, unusual attire, and pets so that all could be comfortably seated at our outdoor tables.

Activities for the survivors of brunch included a trip to Brett Rutherford's apartment on Hope Street for gingerbread, tea and an audition of horror-related classical music. Music for the occasion was selected by Brett Rutherford and Allison Rich.

Documentary film-maker Hal Hamilton updated us on the progress of his planned biographical film about Lovecraft. Finally, we walked over to Ives Street to visit the Peaceable Kingdom gallery and shop for an inspection of Gothic, Haitian and "Day of the Dead" arts and crafts.

The fourth Cthulhu Prayer meeting in July was held in Fall River, Massachusetts, hosted by Egyptologist, Latinist and classicist extraordinaire Dr. Jake Rabinowitz. More than 15 persons attended the festivities, which included a guided tour of the Andrew Borden house, where Lizzie Borden may or may not have killed her father and stepmother.

Other highlights included a fine Portuguese lunch, a visit to the vaults beneath a local cathedral to see the relics of St. Concorde (who appears to be the martyr saint of babysitters, or of supersonic flight), a walk through the winding hills of Fall River where our odd attire attracted genuflections and stares, and, finally, espresso, tea and pastries. At Dr. Jake's apartment, housed in a converted nunnery, we listened to the Mad Scene from Jack Beeson's Lizzie Borden opera, and to another song performed by Cyril Richard whose refrain was "You can't chop up your father in Massachusetts." Attendees were

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"Chepachet is a veritable bucolic poem – a study in ancient New-England village atmosphere, with its deep, grass-bordered gorge, its venerable bridge, and its picturesque, centuried houses,"

—H. P. Lovecraft to Frank Belknap Long in September, 1923, on his way to Pascoag.



Main Street looking south from Chepachet Bridge

In November of that same year, Lovecraft returned to the bucolic village with his friend C.M. Eddy in search of the Dark Swamp, where "It" lived. Although he did not find the dark swamp or "It," HPL and C.M. Eddy had an enjoyable day. Today, November 11, 2001, we create the combined parts of Lovecraft's voyages in September and November of 1923 to the village of Chepachet. Join us as we retrace the Old Gent's steps...

## The 1923 Quest for The Dark Swamp, Revisited: By Car and Foot in Chepachet & Glocester

By Allison Rich

"It was a quest of the grotesque and terrible – a search for Dark Swamp, in Northwestern Rhode-Island, of which Eddy had heard sinister whispers among the rusticks. They whisper that it is very remote and very strange, and that no one has ever been completely thro' it because of the treacherous and unfathomable potholes, and the antient trees whose thick boles grow so closely together that passage is difficult and darkness omnipresent even at noon, and *other* things, of which bobcats – whose half-human howls and heard in the night by peasants near the edge – are the very least. It is a very peculiar place, and no house was ever built within two miles of it. The rural swains refer to it with much evasiveness, and not one of them can be induc'd to guide a traveler through it; altho' a few intrepid hunters and wood-cutters have plied their vocations on its fringes. It lyes in a natural bowl surrounded by low ranges of beautiful hills; far from any frequented road, and known to scarce a dozen persons outside the immediate country. Even in Chepachet, the nearest vilage, there are but two men who ever heard of it. Eddy discover'd its rumour at the Chepachet Post Office one bleak autumn evening when huntsmen gather'd about the fire and told tales and exprest wonder why all the squirrels and rabbits had left the hills and





The first trolley car arrived in Chepachet in 1914. The building decorated in bunting and flags is the Masonic Hall.

fled across the plain into Connecticut. One very antient man with a flintlock said that IT had moved in Dark Swamp, and had cran'd ITS neck out of the abysmal pothole beneath which IT has ITS immemorial lair. And he said his grandfather had told him in 1849, when he was a very little boy, that IT had been there when the first settlers cam; and that the Indians believed that IT had always been there. The antient man with the flintlock was the only one present who had ever heard of Dark Swamp."

—Letter to Frank Belknap Long, November 8, 1923

"So on that Sunday my son and I took the stage for Chepachet, and in due time alighted before the Tavern," writes Lovecraft. **(We are now at The Stagecoach Inn, once Sprague's Tavern, built 1799.)** "In the tap-room they had never heard of Dark Swamp, but the landlord told us to ask the Town Clerk, two houses down the road beyond the White Church **(Chepachet Union Church)**, who knows everything in the parish." **(I am not quite sure who the Town Clerk was in 1923)** "He told us, that the Dark Swamp had a very queer reputation, and that men had gone in who never came out; but confest he knew little of it, and had never been near it. At his suggestion we went across the road to the cottage of a very intelligent yeoman nam'd Sprague, whom he reported to have guided a party of gentlemen from Brown University thro' parts of the swamp in a quest of botanick specimens, some twelve years gone."



Old Town Clerk's Office, at the corner of Douglas Hook & Main Street.

**At this point we are at a location that is most likely where the modern State Police Barracks are.**

**H.P.L. continues:**

"Sprague dwells in a trim colonial with pleasing doorway and good interior mantels and paneling; and tho' it turned out that 'twas not he who guided the gentlemen, he prov'd uncommon genial and drew us a map by which we might reach the house of Fred Barnes, who did guide them. After a long walk over the same highroad travers'd by Mortonius [**James F. Morton and H.P.L. set out on the September journey to**

**climb Durfee Hill but finding it too late, they decided to go to Pascoag instead.]** and me, we came to Goodman Barnes' place; and found him after waiting all of thirty-five minutes in his squalid kitchen. When he did arrive, he had not much to say; but told us to find 'Squire James Reynolds, who dwells at the fork of the back road beyond the great reservoir, **(i.e. Bowdish Reservoir)** south of the turnpike.

**Lovecraft and Eddy walked a good ways up Putnam Pike, but the Prayer Society will make use of modern transportation and drive. We will first stop across the way from Sprague Hill, which is half paved and very rough dirt-road even still, and look at the house which still stands there. Then we will proceed to the intersection of 44W and 94S, at the shores of Bowdish Reservoir.**

"Again in motion, we stopt not till we came to Cody's Tavern, built in 1683, and still affording best entertainment for man and beast. Tho' Eddy much feared that the coach-passengers wou'd engross all the landlord's attention, in preference to mere foot travellers, we were receiv'd with proper civility and given excellent food ... The tavern lyes on the main Putnam Pike; but shortly after quitting it and passing the reservoir we turn'd south into the backwoods, coming in proper season to Squire Reynolds' estate. He told us, that we had better take the right fork of the road, over the hills to Ernest Law's farm; declaring that Mr. Law owns Dark Swamp, and that it was his son who had cut wood at the edge of it."

**Though a 17<sup>th</sup> century tavern does not stand now on Putnam Pike, there is Cady's Tavern, what I believe to be very near the site of what must have been Cody's Tavern. It is possible that Lovecraft did mistake the name. Cady's today is a biker hangout, located across the road from a state campground.**

**Driving down Rte 94 (named after Mr. Reynolds) is a wonderful experience. Here lies the route to Foster, Rhode Island, far more rural even than Gloucester. At night there are no streetlights and one can almost sense the devil in the woods if**



Old Captain Inman shop where Lovecraft and Eddy met with Goodman Barnes before finding Squire Reynolds' estate.

## EVENTS

### WEDNESDAY NOV 7th OPEN POETRY READING "It's Still Halloween"

6:30 pm, Rochambeau Library,  
708 Hope Street, Providence.

### SUNDAY NOV 11th CTHULHU PRAYER BRUNCH

11:30 am, Union Station Brewery.  
Recreating HPL's "Dark Swamp"  
search in Chepachet, Foster, Gloucester  
with Allison Rich.

### SUNDAY DEC 16th CTHULHU PRAYER BRUNCH

11:30 am, Union Station Brewery.  
Followed by Anti-Christmas at  
Rutherford's place, including decking  
of the tree with bats, rats & witches.

### Dec 31st — JAN 1 POETS' NEW YEARS EVE

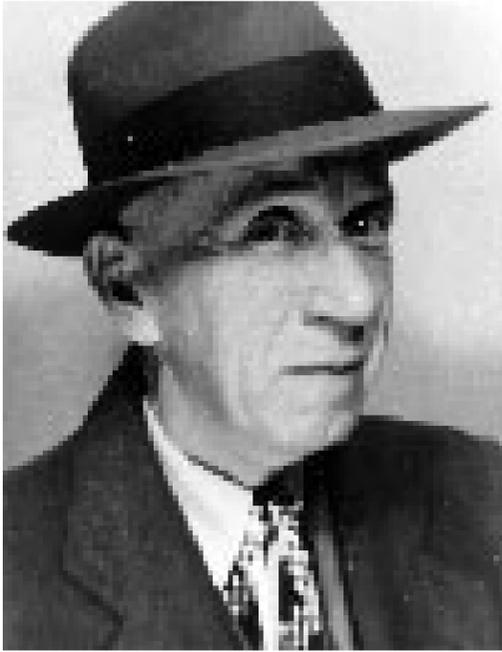
Second annual Poet's Press Gothic  
New Years' dinner & fireside New  
Years' in historic Bristol, RI. Indian  
dinner in Warren, B&B in Bristol in  
historic house with fireplace, deca-  
dent New Years' breakfast. By reser-  
vation only, attendance limited.

### one lets the experience of driving down rural roads wash over.

"Following the Squire's directions, we ascended a narrow rutted road betwixt picturesque woods and stone walls; coming at last to a crest that stood mysteriously limned against the fire and gold of a late afternoon sky. Another moment and we had spied the stretch beyond it: to the right the antient farmhouse of Mr. Law, and to the left the most gorgeous and spectacular agrestic panorama that either of us had been beheld or indeed conceiv'd to exist."

**We will drive down Route 94S just a ways until you see a sign for Willy Road. We will take a right. Willy Road is a dirt road, not too rough and certainly passage by non 4-wheel drive vehicles. Dark Swamp borders Willy Road although we cannot get to it. Victory Sportman's Club is in front and it is private property. We will however drive to the end of the road, a cul de sac, drink in the atmosphere, and try to imagine its proximity.**

I tried all kinds of ways to get closer to the Dark Swamp, including a beautiful three-mile hike in further down Route 94S but could get no closer on the trail. Then again, Lovecraft and Eddy were not able to get to the site either, so our recre-



The sinister visage of C.M. Eddy and the gaunt presence of H.P. Lovecraft might have alarmed Gloucester locals as they scoured the countryside in search of the Dark Swamp

**ation is more than accurate. We can only imagine what he saw when he waxed lyrical about the bucolic scene:**

"Were this Prodigious prospect anywhere within the easie reach and knowledge of the town, 'twould be flockt with and noisy revelers on every Sunday and bank-holiday; but obscurity hath effected that unusually'd preservation which is impotent to achieve, this region being far from any great road, and north of a district very flat and notable for its want of pleasing scenes. I doubt that ten men in Providence are sensible it is on the globe. Here, surely, is the inmost spirit of antient New-England; that vivid woos of Mother Earth which our forefathers, and the Indian savages before them, knew and understood so well. We found Mr. Law ... [who] ... informed us, that Dark Swamp lyes in the distant bowl betwixt two of the hills we saw; and that 'tis two miles from his house to the nearest part of it, by a winding road and a cart-path. He said, the peasants have a little exaggerated its fearful singularities, tho' it is yet a very odd place, and ill to visit at night."

**You will see where Dark Swamp is still listed on the Gloucester Map, and though it does seem to be unreachable, it is represented, and we are most likely seeing what Lovecraft and Eddy saw about 70 years ago, as this area is still somewhat wild. Lovecraft and Eddy covered seventeen miles that day and walked back to Chepachet "under the onyx and powder'd gold of a rural night sky" where they must have eaten and perhaps taken the trolley back. We do not know. The letter ends here. But, in true fashion, he not only waxes lyrical about his surroundings but also waxes poetic in this verse written at the top of the hill:**

Far as the Eye can see, behold outspread  
The serried Hills that own  
no Traveler's Tread;  
Dome behind Dome, and on each  
flaming Side  
The hanging Forests in their virgin Pride.  
Here dips a Vale, and here  
a Mead extends,  
Whilst tho' the piny Strath  
a Brooklet bends:  
Yon farther Slopes to violet Aether fade,  
And sunset Splendour gilds  
the nearer Glade:  
Rude Walls of Stone in pleasing  
Zig-zag run  
Where well-plac'd Trees salute  
the parting Sun;  
Vext with the Arts that puny Men  
proclaim,  
Nature speaks once, and puts them  
all the shame!

**Here our recreation ends. We will now proceed back to Route 44W and onto to**



The Old Gent's shade says, "If you find the Dark Swamp this afternoon, give IT my regards."

**Connecticut where will have a nice meal and something hot. Follow Route 44W past the Connecticut border until you come to the intersection of 44W and 21. Take the left fork, which is 21S. We will come to a stop sign, which is the intersection of 21 and 12. A bit further down the road, you will see *The Golden Greek* on the left hand side. It is now time for soup.....**

**After our meal, we will proceed back to Chepachet. Follow Route 44E into Rhode Island and we will drive up Durfee Hill Road, near where we stopped across from Sprague Hill. We will take the right and drive up Durfee Hill Road, and climb it as Lovecraft and Morton were not able.**

**There is a beautiful little historic graveyard, no. 13, in fact, and a beautiful farmhouse at the crest of the hill with some more family plots. Follow Chestnut Hill Road down the hill, which borders Keach Pond at the base. Chestnut Hill Road comes back out to Route 44 in front of Acote's Hill and the cemetery.**

**Take a left back 44W and turn right down Oil Mill Lane (across from Christy's liquors) and back to Allison's where we will again park.**

**We may, if we wish, pay a visit to the old stone gristmill, the old post office, and Brown and Hopkins, now all antiques stores, before repairing back inside to have dessert and mulled cider. We can share music and poems, and discuss the origin of the Learned Elephant/Mr. Po-**

## RECENT CTHULHU MEETINGS WRAP-UP SINCE JULY — continued

also introduced to the Victorian parlor game of "furtling."

We also had a reading of Stephen Ronan's fine poem about Lizzie Borden, based on childhood memories of living in the Lizzie-haunted town.

In August, an impromptu fifth Cthulhu meeting was called, and we were joined by several escapees from the Necronomicon convention. The day ended with a visit to Lovecraft's grave, where the usual ceremonial poems were read.

The Cthulhu Prayer Brunches are intended to be both social and intellectual, bringing together fellow creative artists and Lovecraft fans of all ages.

Most brunches are followed by field trips to Lovecraftian sites, film viewing, poetry/fiction readings or discussions. Artists engaged in Lovecraft-related work are encouraged to bring their work to show and share.

Artists and writers may also submit work excerpts, poems, graphics files, shameless promotions of their work, and personal ads for trans-dimensional relationships.



**tato Head sculpture in front of the library.**

**Thank you for joining me on this little journey. Chepachet and Gloucester have been my home for two years to the month and it is the place I have felt most at home so far in my life. I am pleased that I could recreate this journey for the Cthulhu Prayer Society. I hope that you enjoyed it.**

The pictures in this newsletter have been taken from two sources:

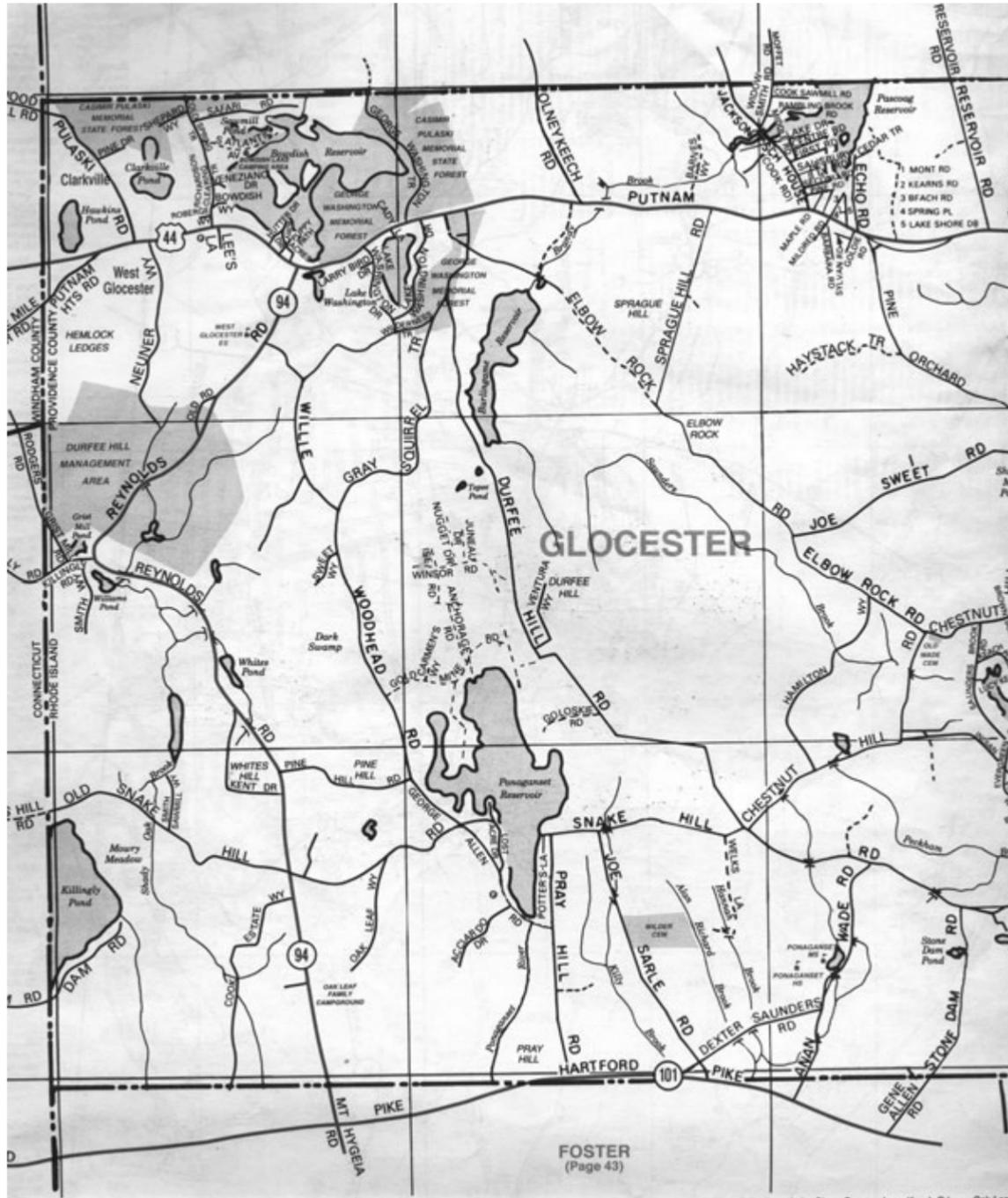
*Gloucester: The Way Up Country: A History, Guide and Directory*, compiled by the Heritage Division, Gloucester Bicentennial Commission, 1976. Gloucester, R.I.: [s.n.], 1976. A great book, now out of print.

*Gloucester, Rhode Island. (Images of America series). Edna Whitaker Kent. Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 1998. Edna Kent is currently the Town Historian and lives on Rte 44 in Chepachet Village in the HUGE house two doors down from the State Police Barracks behind the fence. The house is huge ... even the barn is huge. I have never met her.*

I am indebted to Phyllis, and Astrid and Albert, my neighbors and lifetime Gloucester residents, for their insight in deciphering the places in the 1923 letters.



Friends of Lovecraft in a monumental tableau at the Union Station Brewery: Jash Wood, Pierre Ford, Carl Johnson and Riva Leviten.



Present-day map of Rhode Island clearly shows The Dark Swamp, but no roads lead into it.