

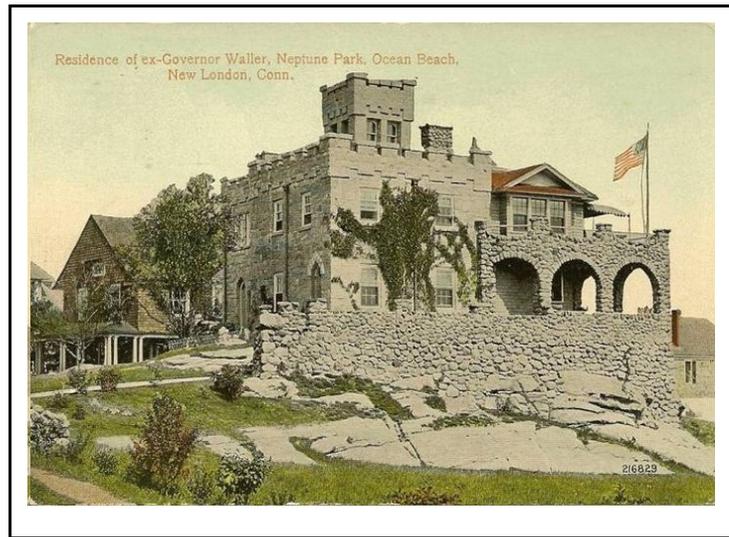
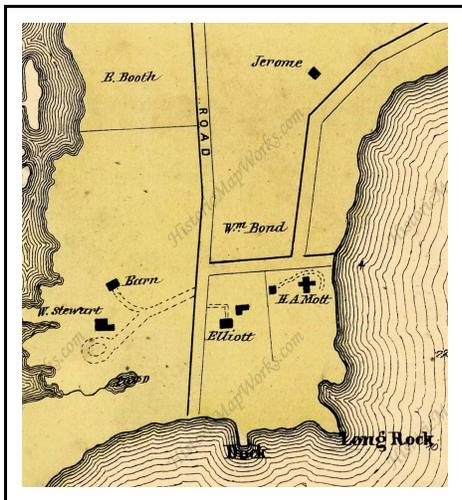
The Castle, Neptune Park

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The history of Neptune Park's Castle involves a rags-to-riches story of an Irish orphan who became governor, a famous eye doctor accused of being a quack, and an unconventional circle of writers and feminists, all of whom found respite by the sea in New London.

Starting in 1892, both Ocean Beach and Neptune Park were developed by the Post Hill Improvement Company from land formerly owned by Augustus Brandegee and C.A. Williams, among others, with water and sewers completed by 1906. Former Governor Thomas Waller, the future owner of the property that came to be known at the Castle, was instrumental in leading the company. He was called "the Father of Ocean Beach."¹

There were only a few homes in the vicinity before the development of Ocean Beach, but two properties, each with several buildings, were owned by New Yorkers, the Motts and the Elliots, as shown on an 1868 map of New London. Meanwhile, about a mile away, there was a sizeable colony of summer people building places along the Thames River and as far as the Lighthouse, in what was known as the Pequot Colony.



The story of Neptune Park and the Castle begins with the Doctors Elliott, father and son, long forgotten today. When the son, Dr. Samuel R. Elliott (1835-1909), died of pneumonia at his home in Staten Island, N.Y., on October 26, 1909, he was famous among other well-known stand-outs of the Civil War generation. A native New Yorker, he was the son of a renown eye doctor and civil rights activist, Brig. Gen. Samuel Mackenzie Elliott (1811-1875), a friend to Abolitionists, social reformers, and literati. Samuel Mackenzie Elliott was the builder of a stone house that today is known as the Castle. It was built about

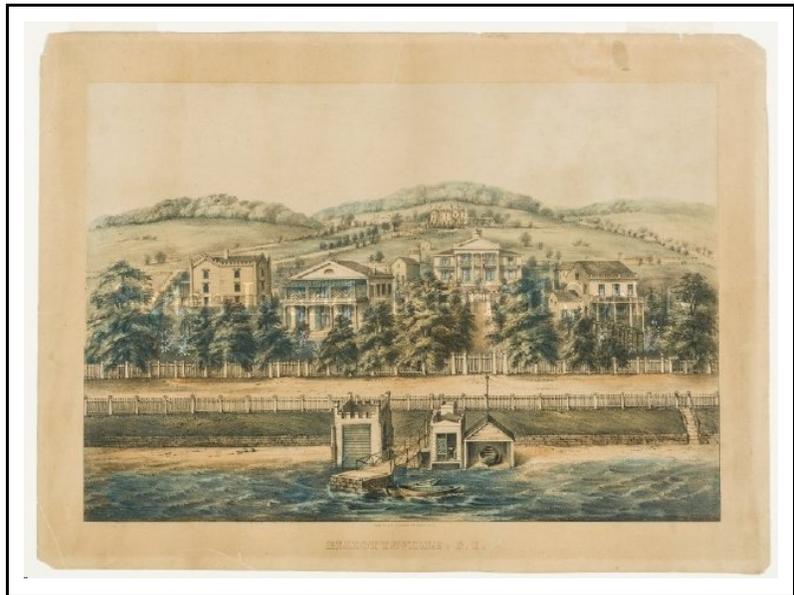
¹ The Hartford Courant, 24 July 1921.

1857 when the property included ten acres, including much of what is Ocean Beach park today.

Dr. Elliott-the-younger, like his father, befriended leading writers and social activists of his day, and he was himself a writer and amateur musician. Like his father, he was a great advocate of physical exercise. He was educated at Columbia University, Heidelberg, and Paris, and graduated from the New York Medical College in 1856, at age 21.²

The younger Dr. Elliott started medical practice in New York with his father, Dr. Samuel Mackenzie Elliott, who called himself an “oculist” rather than a physician. The senior Dr. Elliott was a Scotsman who could be counted on to “impart the element of the picturesque to common affairs,” according to his obituary in the New York Tribune (7 May 1875). In other words, he was eccentric.

Dr. Elliott was accused by some American physicians of being a quack. His background was unusual, his methods revolutionary, and his personality unconventional. To establish his reputation in America, he was aided by Dr. Valentine Mott (1785-1865), America’s premier surgeon at the time. The elder Elliott was encouraged by Dr. Mott to enroll in the New York medical college to demonstrate the depth of his knowledge. He passed all the exams, much to Dr. Mott’s satisfaction, notwithstanding continuing controversy about Elliott’s “character.” Mott’s son, Henry A. Mott, is listed in New London City Directory in 1865



Grimes Hill, Staten Island, NY.

² See, New York Sun, 1 Dec. 1909. The list of famous people who were friends with S.R. Elliott is astounding – including Garibaldi and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Besides being a child poet and musician, he was an accomplished broadswordman who wrote for the Atlantic Monthly and Harper’s Weekly. He performed numerous heroic feats during the Civil War. See, *History & Legend of Howard Avenue and the Serpentine Road, Grymes Hill, Staten Island* by Charles G. Hine (1914).

as a merchant, N.Y. and resident of what is now Mott Avenue, New London.³ Henry A. Mott's son of the same name (1852-1896) was a nationally known professor of chemistry who lived on Staten Island. Perhaps it was the Mott family that attracted the Elliotts, father and son, to New London, or vice versa.

At an unknown date, Samuel Mackenzie Elliott married the somewhat older Letitia (Irvine) Elliott (1802/05-1884), described as a "blue-eyed Irish girl."⁴ Dr. And Mrs. Elliott settled on Staten Island in 1839 in what was, in their honor, named Elliottville (today, Livingston). Dr Elliott also had an office in Manhattan.⁵

The senior Dr. Elliott was born in Inverness, Scotland, on April 9, 1811, and was trained as a doctor at the Royal College of Surgeons, Glasgow. His father was a British army officer, and it is probable that he knew his future wife when his family was posted to Northern Ireland, but this is speculative. He also studied in London, both medicine, diseases of the eye, and astronomy. At age 22 in 1833, he emigrated to the U.S. and swiftly became a highly successful eye doctor. He attracted many famous people to his home on Staten Island so that they could undergo his revolutionary treatments and sometimes surgery.

The senior Elliott was also a real estate developer on Staten Island. One of the homes he built today bears the address of 69 Delafield Place, Livingston, across the street from Walker Park. This National Register gothic-style cottage was made of locally quarried stone, 23-inches thick, built about 1840.⁶

³ For example, see, Albany Evening Journal, Feb. 6, 1852. Dr. Valentine Mott's son, Henry A. Mott (1852-1896) is listed in NL City Directory in 1865 as a merchant, N.Y. and resident of what is now Mott Avenue. He was the author of *Was Man Created?* There appear to have been family connections to New London through Henry A. Mott's grandmother, Jane Way Mott (1761-1834). Did Mott bring Elliott to New London? Undated notes in vertical files, New London Landmarks: Dr Mott & the Wetmore family of NY, houses moved and remodeled, now part of Hobart estate on Ocean Avenue. Mott interests sold for nearly \$70,000. Bryon F. Hobart listed in 1915 city directory at 1110 Ocean Avenue, with adjoining property on 967 Pequot housing 11 servants. Bryon Frankli Hobart, b. abt 1847-1923, San Diego, m. Emma Longwell. He was a NY banker.

⁴ See, *History & Legend*. In 1880, Letitia Elliot, age 77, was living with her daughter Catharine, 35, and Catherine's husband, William H. White, a retired merchant in West New Brighton (former Elliotville on Staten Island). Catharine's children: David S., 10, and Latetie, 7. There are two servants. Letitia Elliott died in 1881 and is buried in Silver Mt. Cemetery, Staten Island.

⁵ "Oculist" is an old-fashioned term for ophthalmologist or optometrist.

⁶ Boston Medical & Surgical Journal, Vol. 161, Issue 2. In 1836, the respected eye surgeon Samuel MacKenzie Elliott bought much of the land along today's Richmond Terrace and Bard Avenue. For the next 50 years, the area bore the name of Elliottville. In 1886, when the North Shore Railroad bought the mansion of resident Anson Livingston and opened a station nearby, the growing neighborhood became known as Livingston. From the 1880s until World War I, the neighborhood of Livingston was known for its elegance. Bard Avenue was called the "Fifth Avenue of the Island," and attracted the well heeled, according to NYC parks department website for Walker

Elliottville attracted a circle of literary types, some of whom bought or rented homes from Dr. Elliott. Among his patients were John J. Audubon, James Russell Lowell, Francis Parkman, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Jacob Aster, Lydia Maria Child, Charles Dana Horace Greely, and General Winfield Scott. Another of his patients was the wife of Robert Gould Shaw, who would command the 54th Massachusetts Infantry of African Americans in the Civil War.⁷

Elliott, Sr. developed at least 22 homes on Staten Island, all of his own design. It is said that he lived in each of his houses before selling them, in order to correct any imperfections. This was perhaps a necessity as it is said that his “love of the beautiful so far obscured the practical side that he sometimes overlooked such trifles as stairs in his buildings....”⁸ He continued his interest in astronomy and built an observatory at one of his homes on Serpentine Road (now Howard Avenue) on Grymes Hill.⁹ He was an avid abolitionist and a friend and supporter of those who held common cause.

Dr. Elliott enlisted in the Civil War but suffered a spinal injury early in the conflict. Finding himself unable to return to active duty, he founded the 79th N.Y. Highlanders, appointing his daughter, Elizabeth, as the enrolling officer. His sons, all three educated to be physicians, joined the brigade. At the end of the war, he received a commission as brigadier general. He died April 29, 1875 and is buried on Staten Island.¹⁰

The younger Samuel Elliott enlisted in the Civil War in 1864 and was commissioned as an assistant surgeon in Co. S., NY 5th heavy artillery regiment. He was promoted to full surgeon in January 1865 and mustered out in July at Harper’s Ferry, W.V. For several years after the war, he contributed war stories to various magazines. He was mentally and physically strong and performed many heroic feats during the war.

Park. For print: <http://stateniland.pastperfectonline.com/webobject/8D9AD246-37A4-4CE5-9FB5-351628076251>

⁷ See, <https://sites.google.com/a/nyp1.org/staten-island-papers/famous-islanders>. Robert Gould Shaw’s sister, Josephine, married Charles Lowell, brother of James Russell Lowell.

⁸ See, *History & Legend*, pp 32.

⁹ http://www.silive.com/homegarden/index.ssf/2012/06/scandal_maxim_gorky_and_a_hous.html.
<http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/archives/pdfs/Howard%20ave.pdf>.

¹⁰ See information by Patricia M. Salmon, http://blog.silive.com/memories_column/2015/06/dr_samuel_elliott_prominent_island_oculist_and_architect.html S.M. Elliott and wife are buried at Silver Mount, Brighton Heights, Staten Island. Also see *AIA Guide to New York City*, White, Willensky, & Leadon (2010). His portrait is available through Ancestry.Com, an oil in the possession of a direct descendant, attributed to Audubon.

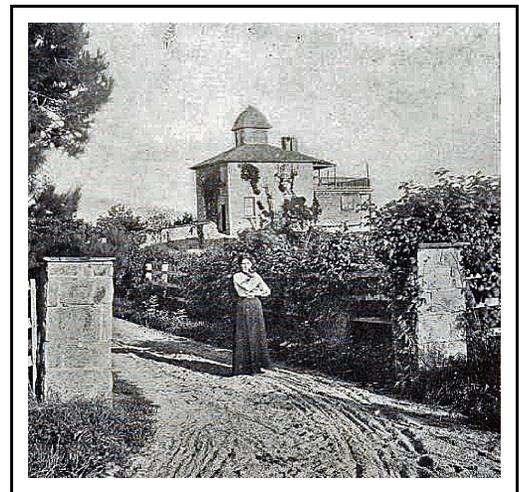
The 1850 census gives a snapshot of the Elliott family living on Staten Island.¹¹ In addition to Samuel, 44, “occulist” from Scotland, and Letitia, 48, wife, from Ireland, there were five children: Samuel R., 14; Alvin [Alban], 12; William, 10; Elizabeth, 10, (twins); and Catharine. Also living with the family is Thomas Nolton, a carpenter, and Letitia Dinsmore, 18, from Ireland. Letitia was a cousin and would become the wife of Samuel R. Elliott, Jr.¹²

The 1860 census shows the family in New London, with Samuel M[ackenzie] Elliot, 50, having real estate worth \$200,000 and personal property, \$50,000. Present are Samuel R., 24, physician; Alvin [Alban], 23; William, 21; Elizabeth, 20; Kitty [Catharine], 18; Ann, 28. There are also three servants. The 1865 city directory lists Dr. Samuel Elliott’s home “near LightHouse.” In 1870, the property was mortgaged to Thomas Hobron, who had owned the property before the Elliots.¹³

The family was not found in the 1870 or 1880 census records, and 1890 records are lost. However, the 1900 census gives another snapshot. The younger Dr. Samuel R. Elliott, now aged 44, a widower, is head of the family, living in New London “off Ocean Avenue,” with his sister Elizabeth, 50, and friends Mary S. Thompson, 38, a teacher of elocution; Edith Thomas, 35, poet; Agnes Slade, 30, musician; and niece, Ellen F. Arthur, a student.

Old Paths & Legends of the New England Border, published in 1907, shows a photo of the Elliots’ place, said to have been “built on the rock where the British landed,” in their attack on New London in 1781. The writer reflects that Dr. Elliott’s house had long been a rendezvous for men of letters, but no mention is made of women of letters. Interestingly, the photo shows not a castle (there are no battlements) but rather a slightly pitched roof with what might have been (probably was) an observatory.

Dr. Samuel Elliott shows up in Staten Island and New London directories, with a home off of



Old Paths & Legends of the New England Border, (1907). 'The summer home of Dr Samuel R. Elliott built on the rock where the British landed.'

¹¹ They are living in Castleton, Richmond County, N.Y. Castletown was the former town encompassing Elliottville. Settled in the late 17th century, the original manor house of Governor Thomas Dongan burned in 1878. The town was dissolved in 1898.

¹² Why Samuel Mackenzie Elliott is listed with middle initial “L” is unknown, probably an error. When did Samuel R. marry Letitia Dinsmore? When did she pass away?

¹³ Thomas Henry Hobron (1822-1892) settled in Hawaii where he developed shipping and railroad lines. His father, also Thomas, died in 1869. This was a family that would have known the Wallers of New London.

Ocean Avenue below Neptune from 1904 through 1909, when he passed away.

When Samuel R. Elliott died in 1909, he specified in his will that his sister Elizabeth would serve as executrix. He also provided for his sister Catharine. To his friend, Edith M. Thomas, he left his home on Staten Island, and to Mary S. Thompson, he left his property in New London.¹⁴ Not to omit Agnes Slade, Samuel leaves her his gold watch, explaining that it is his assumption that Mary Thompson will “assist and befriend” her. He explains that he had decided to leave his property to the women not only for “love and affection” but also because they had spent so much of their own money over the years in maintaining his houses.

Edith Matilda Thomas (1854-1925), poet, was born in Ohio and attended Oberlin College. In 1887 she moved to New York and worked at Harpers. Between 1890 and 1909 she had 300 of her poems published. Her *Selected Poems* were published in 1926. At the time that Dr. Elliott knew her, she was considered one of America’s foremost poets. It seems impossible that Thomas was not acquainted with a younger poet who lived in New London, Anna Hempstead Branch (1875-1937).

Mary S. Thompson was in the first graduating class in oratory from Boston University and became a student of the Del Sarte schools. She taught in Boson, New York, and elsewhere. With Genevieve Stebbins she developed a system of vocal gymnastics and became well-known. Werner’s Magazine in 1894 described her as a woman of “unusual intellectual virility.”

In 1910, Elizabeth Elliott, age 70, can be found living in her own house on Staten Island (Radisson Terrace), living with Mary S. Thompson, 50, music teacher, and Agnes Slade, 40. The ladies may also be found living in New London in the 1910 census: Agnes L. Slade, 45, “companion,” and Mary S. Thompson, 54, living on Elliott Avenue with Elize Franz, servant. By 1930, Agnes Slade was living at her own house on Delafield Place (likely the former Elliott house) on Staten Island, along with Berthe Franz, “visiting nurse.” Elizabeth Elliott disappears from the record after 1910.

Waller’s Castle

By 1911 the Elliott property was in the hands of ex-Governor Thomas McDonald Waller (1839-1924). One report claimed that Waller had paid \$35,000 for the Elliott property, “a tract of sand dunes and swamp,” and that another \$15,000 would be needed to reclaim and develop it. The property had been acquired a year earlier by the Post Hill Company. Plans for the subdivision were drawn up by Daboll & Crandall, creating Mott Court, prior to being absorbed into Neptune Park. Thanks to numerous postcards, we know that the Elliotts’ stone house was transformed into Waller’s Castle -- the

¹⁴ Will probated 23 Nov. 1909, Richmond, NY, vol. 12-13, 1908-1910. Ancestry.com

Elliotts all but forgotten except in the name of the street.

It was Thomas Waller who had the battlements constructed atop the stone part of the Elliotts' old stone house, and it was Waller who made or remade various additions and modifications to the woodframe section of the structure.¹⁵

Thomas Waller (MA, Yale Hon 1883), Waller & Waller, attorneys, New London; Secretary of State of Connecticut, 1870; Mayor of New London, 1873-79, 33rd Governor of CT, 1883-85; consul-general to London 1885-89; a founder of the Mariners Savings Bank, etc. was the adopted son of Robert K Waller of New London. He was the husband of Charlotte (Bishop) Waller (1839-1910), who was the daughter of Cynthia (Davidson) and Charles Bishop, of New London's great building construction family.¹⁶ Waller's rise is a quintessentially American rags-to-riches story: An orphaned Irish immigrant (his father's name was Thomas Armstrong), living on the streets of New York hawking newspapers, signs on as a cabin boy on a clipper ship in the 1849 rush to California, finds himself in New London, where he is adopted by the wealthy Robert K. Waller (1806-1875), who educates him and brings him up in the family. He becomes a state governor and all-around leader of his community.¹⁷ Sounds like an implausible plot in an old movie.

Waller was admitted to the bar in 1861, just as the Civil War began. He enlisted in the Second Connecticut Volunteers in April, but due to an eye disease, he was discharged two months later. With his successful legal practice, he also served as Secretary of the State of Connecticut and then as New London's mayor (1873-79). He was elected Governor of Connecticut, 1883-85. He was appointed consul-general to Great Britain and lived in London 1885-89. In the 1890s, Waller opened law offices on Wall Street in New York (Waller, Cook & Wagner), as well as running his New London office. His wife Charlotte died in 1910.¹⁸

Waller overhauled his stone acquisition in Neptune Park in 1913, according to

¹⁵ New London Landmarks, vertical files.

¹⁶ Charles Bishop (1813-1898) was one of the Bishop brothers, prolific New London contractors. Charles was a house carpenter and then a manufacturer of sash trim, according to census records. Among his projects were tenements and cottages at Eastern Point. Might he or own of his brothers have been involved with the building of the Elliotts' stone house? The oldest brother, John Bishop (1811-1892), was particularly known for building in stone, including the lighthouse at Stonington Point (1842).

¹⁷

<https://books.google.com/books?id=r9k-AAAAYAAJ&pg=PA343&lpg=PA343&dq=New+London,+CT+%22Robert+K.+Waller%22&source=bl&ots=MEGaqF87g&sig=W782ZcDnBH8RpVcDhXiqvPBRyxQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwimrqWqgZ7VAhUCOSYKHcj-C6oQ6AEIQTAH#v=onepage&q=New%20London%2C%20CT%20%22Robert%20K.%20Waller%22&f=false>

¹⁸ https://www.cga.ct.gov/hco/speakers/bios/TM_Waller_older.pdf

newspaper reports. By that time many of the surrounding lots had been sold and cottages built by people from New London, Norwich, Hartford, and beyond, but mainly Norwich. By 1920, Waller had leased the Castle to Mr and Mrs Henry James Cooper, who apparently lived there with the ex-Governor as a boarder. The Coopers purchased the property in _____

Waller's city house was at the corner of Channing and Vauxhall in the Post Hill district, and this was where he lived from the 1880s to 1912, having purchased property in Neptune Park from the Post Hill Improvement Company in 1911. Besides the Castle, he also had a cottage at 9 Mott Court built in 1912, just below the Castle, and a cottage built at Ocean Beach by carpenter/builder William L. Roe, no doubt with the idea of renting or selling at a profit. Roe built something like 120 cottages at Ocean Beach.¹⁹

Waller is listed in city directories as living on Elliott Avenue from 1913 to 1923.²⁰ In the 1920 Census, Thomas M. Waller, 82, is listed as a "boarder" on Elliott Avenue, living with Harry J. Cooper, electrical engineer, his wife Helen C. and a 17-year old "granddaughter," Blanch R. Jennison. The former governor passed away on 24 January 1924 at his home in New London.

When Thomas Waller enlisted in the Civil War, he had to resign almost immediately due to eye disease. Might his eyes, which made him unfit for duty, have brought him into the orbit of the Elliots? A better understanding of the relationship among the Elliots, the Motts, the Bishops, and Governor Waller might unravel the story still further.

¹⁹ Picturesque NL, p. 89, 128. And New London by Laurence & Catherine Keating (2015).

²⁰ Waller's house at the corner of Channing and Vauxhill Street in the Post Hill District is his address in city directories from the early 1880s through 1912. He lived on Granite Street from 1865 through the 1870s.