

102 Golden Street & 77 Green Street

Douglass Cooperage and Richard & Anna Douglass home, c. 1801

Downtown New London Historic District

"They were lovely and pleasant in their lives and in their death they were not divided."

[2 Samuel 1: 23] Inscription on gravestone of Richard and Anna Douglass, Cedar Grove Cemetery

Richard and Anna Douglass are remembered as founders of the New London's Methodist Church. The emerging congregation held meetings at the Douglass's home until the group built its first church on Methodist Street in 1798-1800.¹ Methodism during this period was anti-elitist, anti-slavery, and evangelical, appealing especially to African Americans, laborers, seamen, and women. It became the largest and most influential religious denomination in the U.S. during the Second Great Awakening.

About 1801, Richard Douglass (1746-1828) built a house and shop on property fronting Green Street at the corner of Golden, property that included a sizable garden. The house remains largely unchanged as a central-hall, gambrel-roofed dwelling at what is today 77 Green Street. The workshop – a cooperage – was located next door at what today is 102 Golden Street. This building has changed considerably. In his will (1825) and probate record (Ct Wills & Probate Records, Vol. 9-10, 1825-1845), Richard left his "dwelling house and land adjoining the same where I now live and reside with the shop standing on said land together with all the furniture in said house and tools and garden tools in said shop" to his widow and thereafter to his unmarried daughter, Nancy.

The son of Stephen and Patience (Atwell) Douglass (aka Douglas), Richard is often said to have answered the Lexington Alarm and served in the Revolution as an ensign and then captain in Swift's Regiment,² during which time he married a young widow, Anna (1751-1837), daughter of Samuel Champlin. (She had married Daniel Jennings in New London on 31 Jan 1773, but Jennings died soon afterwards.) Anna married Richard Douglass on 9 Nov. 1777, and their first child, Alexander, was born 3 October 1778. There would be nine more offspring, with the unmarried daughter, Nancy (1780-1861), being the second child. Nancy would outlive all but one of her siblings, all of whom left New London to settle new towns like Lima, N.Y. and Chillicothe, Ohio.

Miss Nancy Douglass continued to live at her parents' Green Street house throughout her life, according to city directories for 1855 and 1859. Her brother, Dr. Charles Douglass (1792-1851), who also remained single, shows up living with Nancy in New London, in the 1850 U.S. Census, but at other times he was in Boston and Washington, D.C. Dr. Charles was a leading activist for labor rights and in 1834 was

elected president of the New England Association of Laboring Men, despite not being a laborer himself. He helped establish the first national organization of workers – the National Trades Union (1834), and he was editor of several radical pro-labor newspapers, including the New England Artisan (1832). He was appointed Director of Public Buildings of Washington, D.C. under the Polk administration, as is mentioned in several obituaries.³

The Douglass family were early settlers of New London, and many were coopers. The art of coopering dates back centuries, requiring skill, intelligence, and strength. The tools of the trade were often handed down for generations, and this was no doubt the case with Richard Douglass. The cooperage trade was particularly important in ports like New London where containers were required for barreled pork, beef, and salt cod for export. In the colonial era, molasses shipped to New England was distilled into rum and shipped in barrels worldwide. Seaports customarily had large cooperages which held contracts from shipping agents. By the early 19th century, smaller cooperages like Richard Douglass's would have been fading fast, and none of his sons stayed in New London to follow this demanding trade.⁴

Over the decades, the Douglasses intermarried with other early New London families, including the Hempsteads. In 1665, Robert Douglass married Joshua Hempstead's aunt, Mary Hempstead, the first European child born in the town. Joshua Hempstead makes mention of numerous Douglasses in his diary, including one he recognized as a bigamist during a trip to Maryland in 1749. In the 20th century, Annabel (Lamphere) Douglass owned the Huguenot Tea Room and Book Shelf in the museum which today is known as the Nathaniel Hempsted House. Our Richard Douglass was among the fifth generation of the family in New London.

Richard Douglass, in his will, left everything to his widow, with the understanding that daughter Nancy would also be provided for so long as she continued to live with her mother. This she did. By the time of her father's demise, Nancy was about 48 years old, and she would live another 33 years. Her mother passed away in 1837, about a decade after her father, by which time the property had been "mortgaged" to Nancy's brother, Dr. Charles Douglass.⁵

In his 1825 will, Richard Douglass foresaw the possible necessity as selling the property, or part of it:

"... should my said wife be unable to support herself and Nancy in a comfortable manner and suitable for women in their situation in Life with the use of said Estate only[,] then and in that case it is further my Will and I do hereby authorize her to sell so much of said Estate either real or personal or both as together with the use of the remainder will be sufficient for the support of

herself and Nancy and for that purpose and in case of such necessity I do give and devise the said Estate both real and personal to my said wife accordingly."

The will also stipulated that following Anna's death, Nancy and her heirs were to inherit "the dwelling house and the land adjoining the same where I now live and reside with the shop standing on said land..." Thus, when in 1830 Richard's widow, at about age 80, "sold" the house but not the land on which it stands to her son, Dr. Charles Douglass, it was surely in exchange for needed resources for herself and Nancy while continuing to live in the family home.

The property was mortgaged to Charles Douglass in 1851 by his sister, Nancy, but Charles died that same year in Lima, N.Y. where his sister, Fanny Miner, and family lived. Shortly thereafter, Fanny also passed away, and thus it was that Fanny's son, Charles Douglas Miner (1816-1891), enters the property history of 77 Green Street and 102 Golden.⁶

When Nancy Douglass died at age 81 in 1861, the property was inherited in part by Daniel N. Hobron, Nancy's executor, who gradually acquired the rest of the property. Daniel N. Hobron (1826-1901) was not related to Nancy Douglass, but neither was another beneficiary. When Nancy's will was entered into the New London Probate Records in 1856, a legacy of \$500 was to go to Mrs Betsy Harris, widow of Jonathan (known at "Jot" Harris), according to R.B. Wall in "Bank Street Fifty Years Ago." Nancy further specifies that if Betsey died before her, then the legacy was to go to Betsey's son, William. There is reason to think that Nancy's friendship with this widow of many years was based on a shared religious faith. Both were long-time Methodists. Betsey Harris, according to R.B. Wall, provided a home for her nephew "Blind Billy Harris, the preacher, who lived with his aunt, Betsey Harris" on Bank Street. The final distribution is unclear, but the estate inventory is interesting because it lists the "house" on the corner of Green and Golden, valued at \$2500, and the house on Green Street, valued at \$2,000, plus \$754.83 in the Savings Bank.⁷

Daniel Hobron was the son of Russell (d. 1888) and Martha (Howard) Hobron, and he eventually inherited his father's meat market business. But in the 1850s, he was a mere "butcher" boarding on Green Street at the home of Nancy Douglass.⁸ Certainly, by the time of Nancy's will in 1856, the old cooperage had been converted to a dwelling house and was no doubt used by Nancy for rental income.

During Hobron's ownership of the property, the neighborhood changed, increasingly surrounded by rooming houses, livery stables, a commercial bakery, veterinarians, and shoemakers. It is noteworthy that the Hobron family did not live at either of the former Douglass houses. They lived and had a grocery store (D.N. Hobron & Co.) at 141 Bank Street for many years, and elsewhere before that. When Daniel

Hobron retired to live with family in Washington, D.C., he was recognized as a highly skilled embroiderer. One wonders if Daniel might have learned the art from Miss Nancy Douglass.

Why did Nancy Douglass leave part of the family property to Daniel Hobron in 1861? He was not, apparently, a Methodist. It seems likely that Nancy had some sort of private financial relationship with him. In any event, as is clear from the 1868 map of New London, Hobron continued to figure into the history of both 102 Golden and 77 Green Street, even after he had married and had a home and market on Huntington Street and later Bank Street. In 1888, Hobron sold the two Douglass buildings to William S. Chappell (1850-1931).

Tom Couser's research finds that what had been the Douglass cooperage (102 Golden), while under the ownership of Daniel Hobron, was raised up a story to create a brick ground floor, no doubt with other renovations done at the same time. The 1868 map shows the persistence of open space around and between the two buildings, space that would have accommodated a large garden, implied in the will of Richard Douglass.

The Sanborn Insurance maps are helpful, but not infallible, in tracing both the cooperage building and the Douglass house next door. The 1884 map shows the dwelling at the corner of Cross (Green's Alley) and Green Street to be a two-story dwelling house. This is no doubt a mistake because subsequent maps show a one-and-one-half story house, which it still is today.

For the next-door building (former cooperage) at the corner of Green and Golden, it is listed as a two-and-one-half story building in the 1884 insurance map, but it shows up with its new brick ground floor in the birds-eye view map of New London published in 1876. By 1891 the insurance map shows a three-story masonry addition for 102 Golden. The use of this building, shown in the 1891 insurance map, is as both a dwelling and "SAL," a saloon. This designation continues in the 1896 revision of the map where it is further specifies that the new ground floor was made of brick, while the older upper floors were wood-frame, as they still are.

Between Richard Douglass's time, when 102 Golden served as a cooperage, and the period when city directories began in 1855, it is difficult to document what the building was used for, but one likely tenant was Henry Stayner (1808-1890), furniture maker, who shows up with his workshop in the building in 1855. (He did not live in the building; his residence was at 15 Meridian Street.) Stayner likely used the shop for some time before 1855. He later had his business on Bank Street, known as Stayner & Hammond.

For a while, there was a restaurant and saloon at 102 Golden run by F.S. Johnes (aka Jones), a mulatto from Florida, and his wife Emma. Later, 102 Golden shows up in

city directories as a laundry run by Charles Lem. By 1915 it was a restaurant listed as the Lee & Lem Company restaurant, followed by the Baldwin and Swanson restaurant. The 1930 directory lists the building as H.D. Utley, printer, and also "Circulating Library." From the early 1940s to the early 1960s, it was the home of the Anchor Restaurant.

William Saltonstall Chappell (1847-1937) was the last to own both 102 Golden and 77 Green together. He was an insurance and real estate broker, and he owned a number of homes, including a beach house in Waterford and a home in Windham where his family apparently lived most of the time. The house on Green Street is where his insurance business shows up in city directories starting in 1914. The 1930 Census shows that age 82, William Chappell continued as an insurance agent on Green Street. During that time Chappell leased 102 Golden Street.

The Chappell family were highly successful lumber and coal dealers of the later 19th century, with wharves in New London, Newport, and New Haven. By the time of William Chappell's death at the height of the Great Depression, the Savings Bank of New London had entered the picture, and 102 Golden and 77 Green Street parted ways.

The early history of the intersection of Green and Golden Streets is worth remembering. Golden Street was initially opened after the Revolution and derives its name from a tavern built by Captain Nathan Douglas (1721-1786), known as the Sign of the Golden Ball, "at the head of the street," according to F.M. Caulkins' *History of New London*. Caulkins adds that the ascent to this "house of entertainment" was "abrupt and the summit called Golden Hill." Green Street was named for early printer, Timothy Green, who owned this land. The street was laid out in 1787, according to Caulkins.⁹

The narrative above starts with title information researched by Thomas Couser in 2019/2020 and by Ellen Scala in 2007. From there we looked at various primary and secondary sources, including maps, census records, city directories, newspaper accounts, local and family histories, cemetery and military service records. This is by no means exhaustive research but is meant to give an idea of the people involved in the early history of these two properties.

– Mary Beth Baker for New London Landmarks, February 2, 2020

ENDNOTES

1. I did not discover where the family lived before 1800.
2. There is confusion as to whether this war record belongs to this Richard Douglass or to a cousin of the same name. I believe the war record belongs to the cousin: Capt. Richard Douglass (1750-1816), son of Deacon William and Sarah (Denison) Douglass. He m. 1790 Abigail Starr (1750-1799) and 2) Lucy Way (d. 1858).
3. See, American Telegraph (14 Oct 1851); The Republic (15 Oct 1851), both Washington papers.

4. Alexander Douglass (1778-1857) was a whale ship captain at first, moved to Brooklyn, and died in Chicago. Richard (1785-1852) was a lawyer in Chillicothe, Ohio. Dr. Luke (1788-1820) was a doctor in Tennessee. Peter Douglass lived in Cincinnati for many years and moved to Chillicothe after going blind. Daughter Carissa (1781-1824) married Palmer Peck and lived in Bloomfield, N.Y. Another daughter, Mary, died young
<http://www.revolutionarywarjournal.com/coopers-had-the-colonists-over-a-barrel-18th-century-barrel-cask-production-in-america/>.

5. The 1830 Warranty Deed grants the house but not the property. Presumably Dr. Charles Douglass thus paid his mother for the value of the house so that she could survive comfortably. Charles took a mortgage on the property in 1851 from his sister Nancy.

6. Charles Douglas Miner's father, Jeremiah Miner, was originally from Lyme, Connecticut. The Miners settled on a farm near Lima, N.Y. (Orchard Hill Farm) in 1817, which was where Charles D. Miner was born. The town's name, pronounced "Lime-ah," was named to reflect the fact that many residents had come from Lyme, Connecticut. Charles D. Miner evidently inherited his uncle Dr Charles Douglass's interest in the New London properties.

7. Vol. 13, p. 567; 666. See, familysearch.org: R.B. Wall's "Bank Street" was found online at Ancestry.com. Methodist Church Records, 1787-1922, were also found at Ancestry.com.
<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/FMfcgxwGDDjqzsdmpLRgSjLRHwBxVLzq>

8. Daniel Hobron married Mary Isabella Pitcher (1833–1863) of Norwich on November 25, 1858, and after her death, he wed Ellen Elizabeth Saunders (1841-1889) of Waterford.

9. Timothy Green (abt. 1679- 1757) settled in New London about 1714. He was the second printer in Connecticut. He had six sons, five of whom became printers. The two that figure most prominently in Connecticut newspaper history were Timothy Green, Jr. and Samuel Green.