

# Buildings Change, Memories Remain

*Written by Rene A. Landry in 1981*

I was just beginning to feel the comfort of my California home after spending the previous two months in Europe. The feeling of discomfort from jet lag was leaving my body, and I felt I should begin the small projects I had planned to undertake now that I was retired. But, a telephone call from Warren informed me of an illness in the family. I felt the need to return.

It was nearing the end of November when I arrived in New England where I had not lived for 40 years. I was hoping to catch a glimpse of the changing of the colors of the fall season. I found that I had



*Rene A. Landry  
in the 1990s*



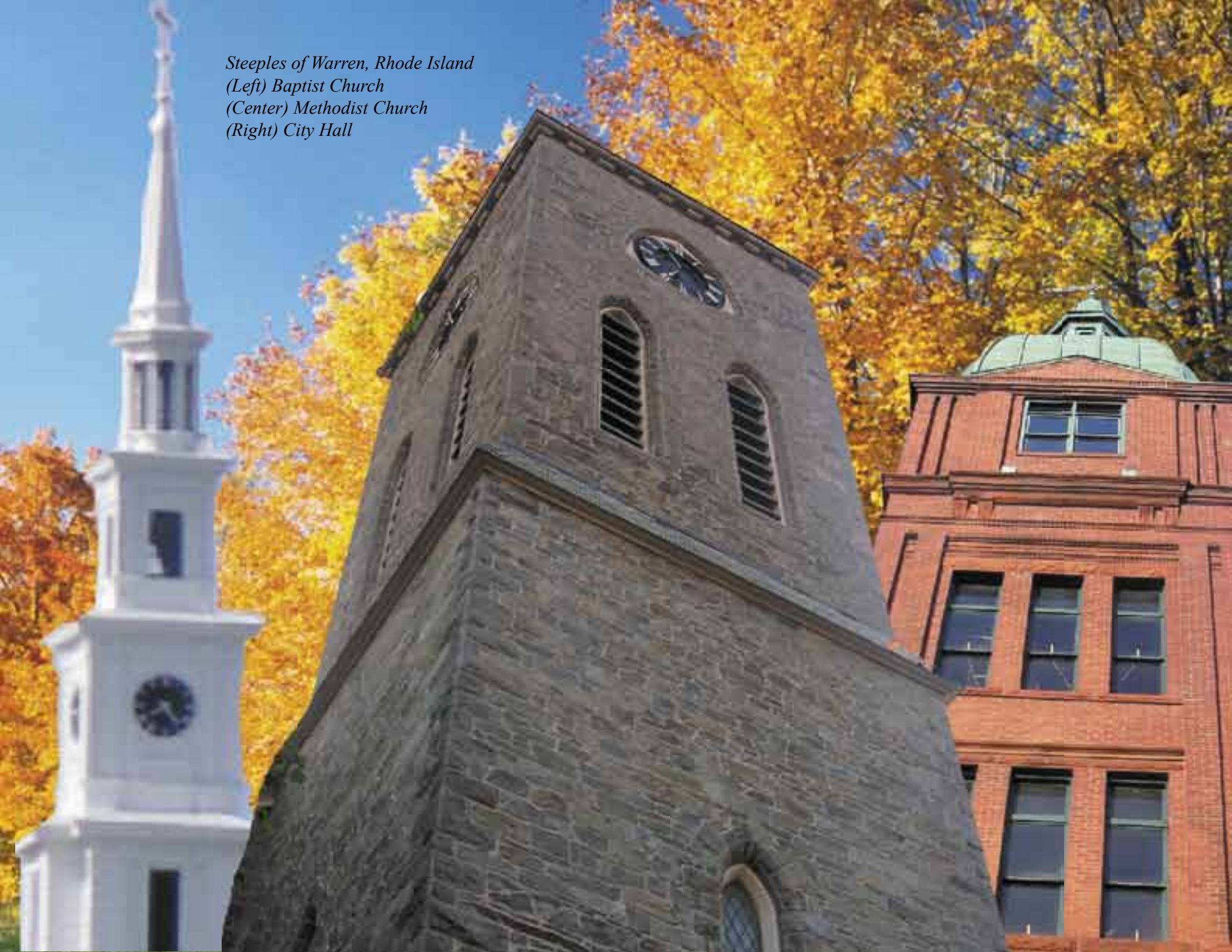
*Warren*

missed it by a week or two.

Winter was just beginning. The trees would soon see frozen rain and blowing snow on their branches for some time before the coming spring. My short visit took me here in the middle of a season change. I would not be here long enough to see the winter snow.

Driving “home” to Warren (I should not say “home” anymore because I was only 19 when I left to go into the Navy, and I never returned there to live), I was amazed by all the road changes along the way, but I found myself more entranced by

*Steeples of Warren, Rhode Island  
(Left) Baptist Church  
(Center) Methodist Church  
(Right) City Hall*



all the still familiar scenes. Traveling toward Warren, my eyes strained to see more and my head turned from side to side as I tried to capture the memories of the past.



As I approached the Barrington Bridge, my eyes looked out over the river towards Warren. In the distance I could clearly see the towers of the old Baptist Church and the Town Hall on Main Street. What had always appeared many miles in my youth was really only a short distance. When one is

young and walking, time must add distance to the miles.



*(Left) Photos Rene Landry taken in the 1930s. (Above) Rene Landry at the back stairs of the Landry house in 1947. The background photo was taken in 2006.*

The bridge brought back memories of the hurricane of 1938. I can still remember seeing large fishing boats and expensive yachts grounded by the water's edge being taken to higher ground.

Crossing the town line, I was in Warren on Main Street. The town was smaller than I



had remembered it. With the car barely moving, I was looking for Brown Street. I was anxiously waiting to see if the last house on the street was still there. I was born in that house.

I recall playing at the old

abandoned power house and looking across the railroad tracks towards my family's first home in Warren. Soon after I was born, my father, Luc Landry, bought a house close to the center of town at 19 Barney Street.



*(Above) Rene Landry in the back yard around 1938  
(Left) The Landry Family homestead in 2006*

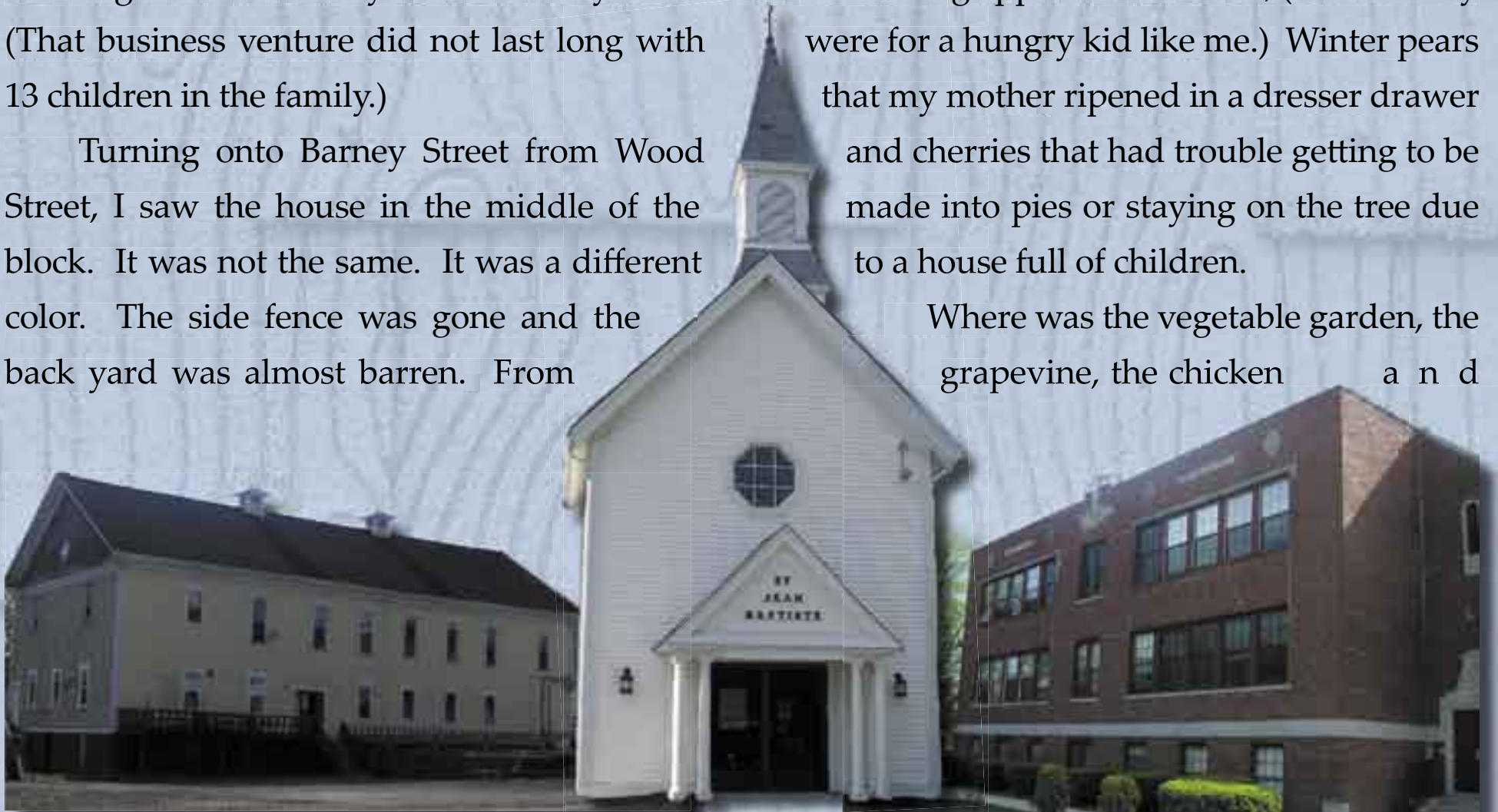
Main Street seemed to have gotten narrower over the years. I felt I could have almost touched St. Jean's Church as I drove by. On the next corner past the church was the building that housed my father's candy store. (That business venture did not last long with 13 children in the family.)

Turning onto Barney Street from Wood Street, I saw the house in the middle of the block. It was not the same. It was a different color. The side fence was gone and the back yard was almost barren. From

the street I could see all the way to the railroad tracks.

As I grew up here, I saw many changes in the back yard. There was an orchard with the best tasting apples in the world, (At least they were for a hungry kid like me.) Winter pears that my mother ripened in a dresser drawer and cherries that had trouble getting to be made into pies or staying on the tree due to a house full of children.

Where was the vegetable garden, the grapevine, the chicken and



*(Left) The Circle Jacquie Club (Center) The side entrance of St. Jean's Catholic Church (Right) Once St. Jean's School, it now used for senior housing.*

pigeon coops and even my own clubhouse where I had raised rabbits? They were all gone! The only structure I saw was a detached garage in the back yard.

The house itself, more than 100 years old, an historical building with more than 20 rooms, still remains in the family and continues to function as a home to the Landrys. The room I remember most is what we called “the big room.” It has two large bay windows that filled the room with sunlight. The room is smaller now, due to remodeling.



*The Landry Family in the 1930s (Top row left to right) Yvonne, Joe, Addie, Lucy, Gertrude, Antoinette, Alice, Maurice (Center) Luc holding Florence, Elmire (Bottom) Frankie, Donat, Rene and Irene.*

Upon entering the house, I found that the only room still unchanged was the kitchen. Walking through the door from the back porch was like stepping into the past. I could visualize

my mother standing by the old wood-burning stove. The kitchen sink and the cabinets remained the same. Even the crucifix that I remembered as a child still hung over the door. I felt strange stepping into a room I had not seen in many years.

The rest of the house was changed inside and out. It was now made up of four apartments.

The school, St. Jean Baptist, was almost



across the street, that is, if I jumped over Mr. Johnson's fence as I had done more than 100 times in the eight years I attended there. The school was a big part



*(Top) Elmire and Luc Landry with Willie and Addie Dallaire (Center) and Maurice Landry in the 1930s. (This photo was recovered from old 60-year old negatives in an envelop discovered in Alice Tupaj's attic at 19 Barney Street in 2006.)*

of my life in Warren.

The Lyric Theater took up the other



part. The film brought all my fantasies to life. I was Tarzan when I made my first



*(Top left) Elmire Landry with Kathy Dutra in the kitchen in the 1950s. (Center) Luc Landry relaxing at home in the 1940s. (Bottom left) Luc and Elmire Landry on the sofa at home in the 1940s. (Bottom right) Elmire Landry at her work table in the 1930s. (Background pattern) This is the pattern of the shingles of the Landry Family home.*

## Outside

tree house in the pine tree in my yard, Robin Hood when I challenged the kid across



the street with my wooden saber and Daniel Boone when I was blazing a trail in the wooden area at Devil's Rock behind Benson's Farm. I was even



*(Top right) The Landry Family Homestead during a snow storm in the 1990s. (Top left) The side yard in 2006. (Center) View of the back of the house after a snowstorm (Bottom left) The back-yard swing in 2006. (Bottom right) Garage in 2006*



Huckleberry Finn when my best friend and I made a raft that took us across the river to One Tree Island.

The Lyric Theater was my doorway to adventure and excitement, but it also brought me fear. I will never forget when I was "Frankenstein" at the late



afternoon showing. When the movie ended it was dark outside. I remember following the moviegoers to Market Street because I did not want to walk alone. When I reached the top of Barney Street, I could have won an Olympic medal for the 100-yard dash. I ran as fast as I could, never once looking back.

The hedges in front of the house looked taller—anything could have been hiding there. Even the structure above the well on the side of the house seemed scary. The back yard was in total darkness, the blackest I had ever

seen it. I ran up the back porch, shaking, hoping that the door was not locked. It was not. With my heart pounding a mile a minute, I ran inside giving my mother a scare as I threw myself in

the nearest chair to catch my breath.

After a week-long stay in Warren, my visit was quickly coming to an end. I knew that I would be returning to California soon. I did not have the time to look over all of Warren, but I did take a walk “around the block” I felt a little



*The Landry and Hamel children standing in front of the Landry Family home in the 1930s. (Top row from left to right) Donat Landry, Rene Landry, Irene Landry, and Rita Vallieres. (Bottom row) Raymond Hamel, Leo Hamel, and Florence Landry. The background photo was taken in 2006.*

saddened.

Places and things I remembered from my

childhood memories were all gone. I walked along Wood Street and found that the big chestnut trees were gone. I went to the corner of Wood and Main Streets to see Mr. Messier's spa, but it no longer existed. Here were memories of my teens when we used to hang around the corner and whistle at the girls passing by. Inside we listened to the juke box playing music from the big band era, and drank a coffee cabinet, the most popular drink in town.



*The Landry children (Alice and Maurice Jr. Landry) sitting on the well in the side yard in the 1940s. Yvonne Hamel is in the background. The background photo was taken in 2006.*

I looked across the street to see if Mr. Proulx's grocery store was still there. It

wasn't.

The Garceau's drugstore was gone, and so was the IGA on the other side of Wood Street. St. Jean Baptist School and the adjoining convent on

Main Street were boarded up and abandoned. Also gone were the Lyric Theater, Mr. Jamiel's clothing store, Phillip's Hardware, and the French Club at the Scenic Hall.

I was planning on leaving Warren the following day. I wondered where

Warren was going. I will come back again to see.