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Corliss Landing

The Corliss Landing project was developed in the 1970s by Rob Freeman. At that time, Freeman was the director of the Providence Foundation with a background in real estate and urban planning. Freeman saw potential in the real estate in the Old Harbor district of Providence located on South Water Street across from the hurricane barrier. What became the Corliss Landing complex had been the site of various industrial enterprises beginning with the Corliss Steam Engine Factory in the 1880s. The factory space was later occupied by the New England Butt Company, which was bought out in 1955 by the Wanskuck Company.

Freeman had a vision that would transform the historic and industrial space into twelve retail shops at street level and condominiums on the upper level. The mayor at the time, Vincent (“Buddy”) Ciani, and the Providence Preservation Society supported Freeman’s plan for renewal.

Initially banks bought the condominiums for tax credits that were used to further develop the project. Later, ownership shifted from the bank investors to individual, private owners. The only business in Corliss Landing that I was able to locate is the Bert Gallery at 540 South Water Street. The Bert Gallery was founded in 1985 by Hugo Bert and Catherine Little Bert but has only operated in the Corliss Landing space since 1992. The business is now owned solely by Catherine Little Bert.

The Providence Preservation Society contains documents regarding the properties from 142-334 South Water Street. However, the Corliss Landing complex and prior industrial owners are not included in their records.

Sources:

- Fox Point Oral History Project – Interview with Cathy Bert
- RIHS – Wanskuck Company Records Manuscript
- Providence Preservation Society – Mary A. Gowdey Library Online

Some additional information concerning the South Water Street area but not directly linked to the Corliss Landing real estate:

In 1992 Old Harbor Plan was drawn up to align a new road south of hurricane barrier in an effort to relieve traffic buildup related to the highway. The plan would build a bridge near the hurricane barricade to partially relocate I-195 in an effort to relieve traffic congestion. The project was approved in 1996 and scheduled for completion in 2007. Rob Freeman worked with the team investigating the highway relocation.

Source:

- Leazes, Frances J. The Renaissance City. Northeastern. 2004.