

Johnston Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

Vol. I #3 March 1985

Shirley Beaune, president

Louis H. McGowan, editor



GEN. ZENAS R. BLISS, (1835-1900)

During the Civil War, Zenas Randall Bliss, one of Johnston's native sons, earned the Congressional Medal of Honor, our nation's highest honor, for bravery on the battlefield. Zenas R. was born in the Simmonsville section of Johnston on April 17, 1835, the son of Zenas Bliss and Phoebe Waterman Randall Bliss. His father, a textile print works operator in Hughesdale, provided his son with proper schooling and had enough influence to procure an appointment to the military academy at West Point, from which Zenas R. graduated in 1854. He subsequently spent many years in the army, both before and after the Civil War, on the frontier in Texas. His Congressional Medal was won during the first battle of Fredericksburg, December 1862. "...to encourage his regiment, which had never before been in action, and which had been ordered to lie down to protect itself from the enemy's fire, (Bliss) arose to his feet..." and led a charge against the Confederate lines. Bliss eventually served 47 years in the Army and rose to the rank of Major General.

Zenas Work Bliss, the General's son, was also born in Johnston, becoming prominent in the state himself. He was elected to one term as Lieutenant-Governor of Rhode Island and was instrumental in organizing the state Department of Taxation.



QUIZ

Questions of the Month:

- 1) Only one Johnston resident has ever been elected to the Governorship of Rhode Island. Name him.
- 2) Hipses Rock is an important Johnston landmark. For what reason is it important and where is it located?
- 3) Oresto DiSaia, a noted Rhode Island architect, designed two significant buildings in Johnston. What are they?



Historical teasers: Answers to last month's questions

- 1) As far as is known there are four of Johnston's 19th century schools still standing. One was the District 11 school and has been converted to a house at #1443 Plainfield St. in Thornton. The old District 3 school house is in Simmonsville in back of the house at the corner of Simmonsville Ave. and Randall St. The District 13 school is on Central Ave. in Hughesdale and is presently used as a day care center. The fourth school is the District 8 school, located in Belknap, and is presently used as an American Legion Post. The Antioch school, also converted to a private home, dates from the early 20th century when it was built to replace the earlier school that was lost to fire. It is located on Plainfield Pike in the western part of town.
- 2) Route 44 was called the Powdermill Turnpike. It was named for the gunpowder mill that was built during the Revolutionary War period near the bridge where the Woonasquatucket River crosses the highway.
- 3) The western part of Olneyville and the Silver Lake area was annexed to Providence from Johnston in 1898. The referendum was approved by Johnston voters.

Johnston Historical Society Officers
for 1984-1985

President: Shirley Beaune
First Vice Pres.: John Nanni
Second Vice Pres.: Joseph Paquette
Treasurer: Norma Todd
Recording Secretary: Eileen Perriello
Corresponding Secretary: Rita Saccoccio
Past President: Gilda Perrotta

EDITORIAL POLICY

This publication is to provide: 1) timely information to the members of the Johnston Historical Society, while 2) fostering the study of local history by sharing data and reasonably researched articles about the town's heritage. Six issues will be published per year. Back issues are 75¢ per copy. The editor eagerly solicits manuscripts and notes of any length and grammatical quality (generally not to exceed 2000 words). Topics can range from history and preservation of old houses (general or specific buildings) through biographical sketches and genealogy of local families, to Johnston events, geography, archaeology, industries, clubs and organizations, to folklore and crafts of past decades. Documents and diaries of historical significance would be considered for reprinting.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING...

At our January meeting Walter Nebiker of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission shared with us some of his insights concerning historic preservation in Rhode Island. Twenty plus members enjoyed Mr. Nebiker's narrated slide presentation. The society thanks Walter for his entertaining and informative remarks and observations.

On Feb. 9, 1985 nine members of the Johnston Historical Society traveled to the Greystone Mill for a tour of the Worcester Textile Company. Marcus Thompson, purchasing agent for the plant, graciously conducted the tour for us, pointing out various aspects of the business. Worcester Textile employs 900 people in producing finished cloth from the scoured and combed wool that is shipped to them. We were able to see many of the machines operating and all of us were glad to have had the chance to see what has become a rarity in New England- an operating textile mill.

We would like to thank Mrs. Ellen Hall, Editor of The Observer, for her fine article entitled, "Johnston Loses a Landmark", which appeared in the February 7th issue of the paper. It is important that word circulates about our historic structures, even if it is after the fact as in this case. The article concerned the demolition of the Leroy A. White barn, just off Greenville Avenue and Cherry Hill Road. The only possible error noted was that Town land records show no Murphy in the deed chain for this property. The records show that the farm was purchased in 1884 by Mr. White's father, Leroy A. White, Sr., from the estate of Jonathan S. Killey, a prominent local resident.

We regret the loss of the White barn and only hope that the owners of the remaining house have plans to preserve that fine old building, which appears to date to at least 1850. It is an excellent example of a simple, but substantial farm house and is an important part of our inventory of significant buildings in town.

Welcome to our new members;

Evelyn DiCenso
Virginia H. Stevens
Thomas DiPetrillo (Family member)
John Cain (Family member)
Dorothy Sadowski

A word of thanks to the Noto & Sons Builders and Wreckers for donating various farm implements to our society. These implements were recovered from the Leroy A. White barn before it was torn down on January 31st.

This will be the last newsletter that will be sent out to members who are not current on their dues. If you wish to remain a member send your \$5 check to the society post box number.

BURIED TREASURE IN YOUR OWN BACK YARD

by Audrey and Tom Monahan

The very thought of going through someone's garbage is not very appetizing, and would hardly be perceived as a scholarly endeavor. Yet, that is exactly what archaeologists have been doing for years in their efforts to better understand our past.

Think about it: if you were to rummage through your neighbor's rubbish, you could learn much about their way of life. "Oh, an empty natural cereal box; they must be health-food types. And here's one with lots of beer cans; they must have had a big party last night."

Viewing people's trash in this manner provides a composite of their lifestyle. To the archaeologist, it's a window backward, sometimes 50, 100, 200 years.

If you own an old house or even just the site where a house stood, the grounds are likely to be filled with clues as to the history of that building and its occupants. What class of people lived here? Were they wealthy, or led a meager existence? What was their ethnic heritage? What items were available to them,-- imported goods or only locally-made products? How early did they live here? What were their personal tastes and interests? These answers and more can often be found not far beneath the surface of your lawn or under the car port.

One key trick that will make the amateur archaeologist's life a whole lot easier is to find the family dump. Most every house had one. Remember, they did not have Friday morning trash pickup. They actually did not have much to throw away. The "disposable society" that we take for granted today is a very recent phenomenon. Back in great-grandpa's day there were no food packages, no throw-away bottles. In fact, the only things they did toss out were items broken beyond repair or terribly out-dated,--completely useless things. But even these discarded materials often never made it to the dump. Useless wooden pieces were burned in the fireplace. Pewter, silver and other metals were saved to be melted down and refashioned. What you are most likely to find in a family dump are broken bits and pieces of glassware, ceramics, ironware, and maybe some leather items like old shoes or belts (if they haven't already rotted away). Certain datable items like clay tobacco pipes, nails, and stylish ceramics provide

the greatest enlightenment, but you will need to consult reference books or talk to experts to draw definite conclusions about their likely age and origin.

Find the dump and your project is half completed. And finding the dump is not as difficult as you might think. It is often right outside a window or door, especially on the "back side" of the house and near the kitchen. Sometimes the dump was behind the old out-house (which was downhill and away from the well). Other times it was located just off a path, but generally not far from the house. A little spade work here and there throughout the yard should help locate this "informational gold mine". An unexplained rise of ground is often a tell-tale sign. Once you've found the probable site, the process is easy. Dig and scrape an inch or two of dirt off of your site, which in the beginning should be kept to a couple of square feet. Using garden tools and your hands, carefully sift through layer after layer. If you are really serious about the chronology of the findings, keep a record of what you dig up in each level or strata. Obviously, the "junk" you find deepest is usually from the earliest period of time.

Your discoveries could become quite exciting. To turn up a broken shard of a clay pipe or a redware pottery chip might be cause for celebrating, but keep in mind that these pieces are still junk to the collector of antiques or anyone else. The value is in what can be told about those who lived here decades and centuries ago. Studying dumps is most useful in providing insights into the daily life of earlier generations, into "social history" of other eras. This knowledge is of great worth to those of us who find in the past the cultural foundations for the present.

It's important to note that just reading this article will not make you a pro. Useful reading for those who would like to know more about archaeology is A Guide to Artifacts of Colonial America by Ivor Noel-Hume (NY: Alfred Knopf, 1970).

Tom and Audrey Monahan are currently restoring their 18th century home, the Dean Kimball House on Hopkins Avenue. They have dug up a number of family dumps around former homes. Hope to hear more from them in the future.



Title of microfilm reel: Original Johnston-Graniteville Baptist Church Records to Sept. 1908

Title page of manuscript: Church Records of the Free Will Baptist Church in Graniteville or "Johnston" // Jan. 21, 1877

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Johnston Church Reco(rds) MISSING EDGE OF PAGE

The General of Six principle Baptist Church of Christ in Johnston was constituted under the Pastoral care of Elder Samuel Winsor June 20th, 1771.--

June 21st 1759 Samuel Winsor son of the late Elder Samuel Winsor Deceased Was Ordained an Elder in the Baptist Church of Christ in Providence. And Edward Tha _____ Cornelius Easten, John Dyer, Deacon _____ said church. By the hands of Elders Job Mason, Russel Mason, and Nathaniel Cook A true copy from Book of Record of the Baptist Church in Providence.

The Church then enjoyed peace and _____ for a number of years. When Differences arose from some members holding to the sentiment that the laying on of hand au(ght) not to be considered a Barr to Communion. But we think this principle of Christ's (etcetera?) should be observed. And for this reason we withdraw Our Communion from them, this twentyeth Day of June 1771. Our Names are as follows.

Samuel Winsor Elder died
Nedadiah Angell died
John King died
Jonathan King died
Job Olney died
Stephan Whipple recommended
Arther Fenner jr died
Jonathan Jenks died
Anne King died
Abigail Dyer died
Sarah Waterman died
Zeviah Burlingham died
Hannah Sprague died

TRANSCRIPTION

Six-Principle mss. page 3

Kathena Turpen died
Betiah Whipple died
Frelove Jinkes died
John Dexter died
Phela Dexter died
Marey Burlinlane died
James Olney died
Hannah Olney died
Debra Olney died
Hopstill Brown died
Penelopa Daget died
Sarah Willmoth died
Elisabeth Eddy died
William Carpenter died
Anne Carpenter died
Precillia Collins died
Marey Potter Widow died
Demiras Luns died
Hannah Sprague died
Marey Potter died
Nahanel Waterman died
Bethiah Randall died
Marey Demmons died
Marey Brown died
John Dyer
Gorge Brown died
Marey Olney died Dec. 10, 1764
John Brown died Dec. 10, 1764
Amey Nickles died April 4, 1765
Emor Olney died Oct. 16, 1765
William Dyer died June 27, 1772
Sarah Westcot died June 27, 1772
Isabella Sprague died July 9, 1772
William Mathewson died Aug. 22, 1773
John Randol died Sep 3, 1775
Marey Barton died Oct 1, 1775
Marey Thornton letter Oct. 29, 1775
Daniel Sprague died
William Burdon Baptised Nov 2, 1777
Huldy Burdon Baptised Aug. 23, 1778
John Sheffield Baptised Sept. 4, 1780

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Elizabeth Remington died
Freelove Dyer died
Mercy Dyer died
Barbery Sprague died
Hope Sprague died
Susanna Warner died
Huldah Randall died
Desire Olney died
Rhoda Williams died
Roba Dyer died
Jeremiah Sheldon died
John Dyer Deacon died
Mercy Waterman died
Sarah Warner died
Martha Randall died
Jemima Potter died
Lois Briggs died
Lydia Smith died
Obadiah Hinghambottom dismis by letter
Dorcas Hinghambottom dismis by letter
Rhoda Burlingham strayed
Christian Sheldon died
Martha Thornton died
Amey Fenner died
Reba Fenner died
Elisabeth Borden died
Mercy Williams died
Anne Collwell died
Prudence Carpenter died
Christian Fenner died
Sarah Car died //NEW HAND//
Joseth Randal died
____pha Randal died
Clarah Warner died
Marey Burlinghame died
Calpha Whipple leter
Mary Winsor died
Marey Potter died
Elizabeth Potter died
Anne Waterman died

TRANSCRIPTION

Six-principle mss. page 4

Oliver Burdon Baptised May 7, 1780
Marey Fisk Baptised May 1780
Henry Randol Baptised May 21, 1780
Charles Olney Baptised May 21, 1780
Naomia Mason Baptised June 24 (or 14?) 1780
Deliverance Hawkins Baptised May 24, 1780
James Conves Baptised July 2, 1780
Samuel Dyer Baptised 1780
Amey Angell Baptised July 11, 1780
Pelege Peck Baptised July 18, 1780
Abygill Sheldin Baptised July 18, 1780
Marey Mackentash Baptised July 21, 1780
Henry Beandel (or Randel?) Baptised July 2, 1780
Hope Seser Baptised July 2, 1780
Ruben Knight Baptised Dec. 22 1780
Rachel Knight Baptised Dec. 22 1780
Eliha Briggs Baptised Dec. 22, 1780
Samuel Dyer Baptised Dec. 22, 1780
Barrilley Knight Baptised July 9, 1780
Nicholes Williams Baptised July 9, 1780
Rachel Gaham Baptised July 9, 1780
Assa King Baptised July 16, 1780
Alce Waterman Baptised July 16, 1780
James Shelden Baptised July 23, 1780
Stephen Dyer Baptised July 23, 1780
John Anthony Baptised July 23, 1780
Jon Bates Baptised July 23, 1780
Sareh Dyer Baptised July 23, 1780
Frances Williams Baptised July 23, 1780
Elmer Knight Baptised July 23, 1780
Marey Barton Baptised August 16, 1780
James Dyer Baptised August 16, 1780
John Randol Baptised August 20, 1780
Joseph Benet Baptised August 20, 1780
John Edwardes Baptised Oct. 8, 1780
Lyde Carpenter Baptised Oct. 8, 1780
Rachel Sheldon Baptised Oct. 8, 1780
Marey Hickers Baptised Oct. 15, 1780
Kaharina Waterman Oct. 22, 1780
Anthony Poter Oct. 29, 1780
Nasport Weeks Oct. 29, 1780

CEMETERY CLEAN-UP

There is a crying need to clean and maintain Johnston's graveyards. Pat Macari, Lou McGowan, and Bob Burford are planning a clean-up project this spring. We are looking for volunteers and contacts with other local organizations interested in helping. There will be a planning meeting April 1st, 8:00 pm, at the Farnum/Angell House, 101 Putnam Pike (Rt.44). Call Pat Macari (949-2822).

INVITATIONAL TOUR AND DINNER

On Saturday, the 13th of April the Johnston Historical Society will be visiting the Smith-Appleby House for a tour and dinner. The Smithfield Historical Society will be our hosts. The \$5 tickets cover the 3:00 p.m. tour and the 5:00 p.m. chicken pot pie dinner at this, their restored headquarters. Tickets will be limited to members of our society until our March 25th meeting when non-members can then purchase any remaining tickets. Seating is limited to 24 places. Call Louis McGowan at 272-9431, evenings to reserve a ticket. Reservations not paid for at our March meeting will be forfeited.

SAMPSON ALMY'S POND The picturesque pond on the grounds of the Allendale Insurance Company used to be a favorite ice skating spot for past generations of Johnston skaters. Some people knew the pond as "Sunset Amy's" (possibly because nearby Central Avenue is something of an extension of Sunset Avenue, Providence). Others called it "Sanson Amey pond" or some variation thereof. The town map of 1948 shows "Sampson-and-Almy's", which is closer to truth. Actually, the pond gets its name from a local textile factory operator of the early 19th century, a Mr. Sampson Almy, whose mill was just down the Pocasset River at the Morgan Mill site.

Regardless of its name, this pond served decades of ice skaters, young and old. Many a rough-and-tumble hockey game was played. (Any kid fortunate enough to own shin pads was immediate candidate for team captain.) More leisurely skaters could always find a piece of ice, though.

Anyone out there have photos or stories to tell of skating at Sampson Almy's? Anyone else skate at Charlie Stone's pond, on the old Fenner property just south of Plainfield Pike?

MAGAZINES AT THE LIBRARY

Among 100 magazines subscriptions being received, the Mohr Memorial Library has several possibly of interest to Society members:

American Heritage (since 1955)
Antiques (1940-1980, & new subscription)
Antique Trader (new subscription)
Country Journal (since 1982)
Mother Earth News (current 5 years)
Natural History (current 5 years)
Smithsonian (current 5 years)
Yankee (current 2 years)

JENNEY GAS Anyone having information about ownership or photographs of the Jenney gas station which existed at 105 Greenville Ave. for several decades, please contact:

Keith A. Sculle
Historic Sites Div./Nat'l Register
Illinois Dept. of Conservation
Lincoln Tower Plaza
524 South 2nd Street
Springfield, Illinois 62701

The family of Henry Carson may have run this service station in 1941. Is it now Shaw's Garage?



JOHNSTON'S WWI STREET NAMES

In the southeastern part of town, near Killingly Street, six streets cluster together whose names suggest World War I: Marne, Argonne, Flanders, Ostend, Antwerp, and Pershing.

In July 1918, 270,000 American soldiers were in an Allied army that beat the Germans along the French river MARNE. Later that year, a million Americans fought through the area of France called the ARGONNE in the last offensive of the war. FLANDERS is another area of France and Belgium, and OSTEND and ANTWERP are Belgian seaports; American "doughboys" were there. And General John J. ("Blackjack") PERSHING was the commander of our army, the American Expeditionary Force or A.E.F.

Johnston men served in the trenches "over there" in the Great War. But few stories have been preserved about how it really was. Does anyone have any memories, letters, or bits of information to share about the Johnston boys in the A.E.F., and how are WWI streets came to be named?

JOHNSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 7155
Johnston, Rhode Island 02919

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- MARCH 25 (Monday) Johnston Historical Society GENERAL MEETING with speaker (tba)
Farnum House, 7:30 p.m.
- APRIL 1 (Monday) CEMETERY CLEAN-UP Planning Meeting, Farnum House, 8:00 p.m.
- APRIL 13 (Saturday) TOUR & DINNER at the Smith-Appleby House, Smithfield.
- APRIL 22 (Monday) Johnston Historical Society GENERAL MEETING, Farnum House, 7:30 p.m.
- MAY 4 (Saturday) FLEA MARKET, Farnum House grounds, to benefit the Johnston Historical
Society, 10: a.m. to 5: p.m. Rain date: May 5th. Dealer space
\$10 per. Address: 101 Putnam Pike (Rt.44), next door to the
Graniteville Fire Station. Call Gilda Perrotta, 231-8565.
- JUNE 1 & 2 (Saturday/
Sunday) Johnston HERITAGE FESTIVAL, Johnston Memorial Park

