

# Johnston Historical Society

## Historical Notes

Vol. XIII, #3

Christopher Martin and Louis McGowan, Co-Editors

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[www.JohnstonHistorical.org](http://www.JohnstonHistorical.org)

### Walking the Providence and Springfield

by Louis McGowan

In the July 2007 issue of our newsletter, I wrote an historical account of the Providence and Springfield Railroad. In the past few days, I had the pleasure of walking some of the roadbed of that line. The Northwest Bike Path, recently completed in part, now follows the path of the old Providence and Springfield. One can access the path in Johnston at Greenville Avenue where it meets the Woonasquatucket River. There are a few parking spaces set aside for bike path users on the south side of Greenville Avenue.

On a Sunday morning in October, about 10am, I set out by myself for a little exercise on the bike path, using the section that runs south off Greenville Avenue. It was a warm, sunny day, and the leaves were swirling around on the newly laid asphalt. I set a pretty good pace, to the accompaniment of some birds that seemed to be singing happily.

It was very pleasant walking alongside the river. The trees formed a backdrop beyond the water, with their leaves just starting to change to their fall colors. It was hard to believe that I was just a few yards from all the hustle and bustle of the built-up neighborhoods surrounding the walkway.



Before it was redeveloped into a golf course, Button Hole was Dyerville State Park, an abandoned and neglected area which had been used as a landfill and illegal tire dump. This picture was taken after the land was cleaned up, but prior to redevelopment. Photo from [www.woonasquatucket.org](http://www.woonasquatucket.org).

Soon I came upon the Button Hole Golf Course, named it is said, for a long-forgotten factory which once operated in the

area. It is a very pretty little course, and a lot of youngsters get their first taste of golf here. There were a few people enjoying themselves (well, they seemed to be, anyhow -- golf can be pretty frustrating!) on the course, and very quickly, I was back to nature.

Soon, though, Route 6 came into view, and the path veered east following the highway. For the last part of my walk, I saw a lot of Route 6 and a number of mass housing units. The scenery was not as nice as the first section of the trail, but it was still fun walking and seeing things from a whole different perspective. Soon I was crossing under the Glenbridge Avenue Bridge. After crossing the bridge hundreds of times by automobile, I got to see it from below for the first time. I looked for trolls, but none were to be found. They probably don't like all the modern buildup. Not too far ahead, I turned around and headed back to Greenville Avenue, after having walking through parts of Johnston and Providence. I met only one man walking the path and another man in a golf cart. I got some good exercise, saw some nice natural scenes, and felt good that the bike path has come into being.

On the following Tuesday morning about 7am, I returned to the bike path and took the north leg this time. It also was a very pleasant walk, although not as scenic as the southern leg. The path terminates a few hundred yards north and leaves you on back streets, east of Greenville Avenue. I walked for a few blocks in the neighborhood before returning to the bike path.

Again, it was fun to see things differently than we do as we drive by in our cars. It felt to me more like the exploring that I did when I was a child, walking through woods and fields in the Thornton area. Most of my two walks this week covered territory that is in Johnston. I hope that the rest of the bike path following the old Providence and Springfield route, running south and north off Putnam Pike in Graniteville, will soon become a reality.

So, the old Providence and Springfield Railroad still lives on, its route still stretching across the western border of our town. And if you walk the bike path and you listen real closely, you can still hear the whistle of the locomotives as they pull their load across the landscape. Well, I guess that is being a little silly, but it is still nice to think back to those days and pretend that we can hear the steam whistle blowing as the train thunders down the track headed for Graniteville.

## Love Those Thornton Nicknames!

Text by Louis "Stretch" McGowan

List by Tom "Ticky" Hartshorn

One of our members, Tom "Ticky" Hartshorn, compiled the following list of people, mostly in our town, and their nicknames. I say mostly, because some of the people named here might have come from the Cranston side of Thornton. Thornton, as most of you know, is half in Johnston and half in Cranston. People that lived in the village did not usually make any big deal about which town they lived in -- they lived in "Thornton." Tom's list is made up of Thornton people. That is because, in Tom's own words: "I was born, bred, and lived all my life in Thornton." Tom also thinks that the nicknames helped to make Thornton "a proud and wonderful area."

When I was growing up in the 1950s in Thornton (my family moved here in 1954), I was always amazed by all the nicknames that the males of the village carried. If you did not have one, it seemed like you were not in with the in-crowd. When I started playing baseball in the 1950s, I played for Tommy "Pooker" Cappelli. Tommy was a great guy, and my teammates all loved to play for him. Each year, Tommy would give all of the new kids a nickname. I do not know why he did it. He just did. Sometimes your nickname was based on nothing other than a similarity between your name and some other figure out in the larger world. Tommy called me "Geishy Lou" because there was a nag running at a local horse track with that name. Thankfully, that name did not stick. Other times, nicknames came from something you did. I played first base and was called "Stretch" by some people. That was because I got to be pretty good stretching for throws from the other infielders that were not exactly on the mark. Sometimes, nicknames were given in childhood and stuck with you for your whole life. My uncle John as a child was called "Snook." I think he was named for the comic strip character, Baby Snookums. My uncle never escaped that nickname. My children did not know that he had a real first name. He was always "Uncle Snook."

I do not know why Johnston males all seemed to have nicknames. Maybe, it is an ethnic thing, maybe it is a Rhode Island thing, or maybe it was just a sign of the times. Whatever the reason, they are a lot of fun and are something that these people were and are proud of.

Here is the list:

"Jug-head" Allen	"Ikey" Iafrate
"Cowboy" Ardente	"Gulliver" Iannotti
"Greek" Aurrechia	"Jazzy" Judge
"Razor" Aurrechia	"Obey Dyer" Kenyon
"Prince" Beaudry	"Fonz" LaFazia
"Bunky" Caddick	"Shorty" Lanni
"Pecky" Caniero	"Sweet" Lanni
"Ace" Cappelli	"Stubby" Leonard
"Mini Guch" Cappelli	"Banjo" Macari
"Mormy" Cappelli	"Seaweed" Macari
"Omego" Cappelli	"Hank" McDermott
"Goosey" Caparrelli	"Peanut" McDermott
"Shaker" Cerra	"Custy" Merolla
"Baldy" Colletti	"Zeke" Merolla

"Gunga Din" Constable	"Bobo" Nardillo
"Peachy" Conti	"Jakey" Osborn
"Jockey" D'Ambra	"Lala" Pezza
"Kelley" Delfino	"Quakey" Pezza
"Gully" Delmazzio	"Blair" Ray/Rega
"Shorty" DiRaimo	"Bozo" Riccardi
"Chicky" Dove	"Barney" Ricci
"Fly" Dove	"Chang" Ricci
"Ducky" Dwyer	"Count" Ricci
"Scotty" Fairley	"Shorty" Ricci
"Buffy" Ferri	"Jake" Riccitelli
"Butch" Ferri	"Two-Ton" Riccitelli
"House" Ferri	"Monio" Rossi
"Pip" Ferri	"Mooney" Sacciao (?)
"Skippy" Ferri	"China" Salzillo
"Chuck" Fleury	"Hank" Shepard
"Moe" Geary	"Rastise" Stable
"Teddy" Geary	"Stiff" Tartaglia
"Scotty" Hackett	"Chicken" Vanner
"Tick" Hartshorn, Sr., and Jr.	"John Doe" Ventetuolo
"Pepe" Hodges	"Squeaky" Weeks

And here are a few additions from my own memories:

Anthony "Can-opener" Cinami  
Anthony "Handsome" Ferri  
"Flip" Flanagan  
Americo "Mutt" Martinelli  
"Sonny" Pezza  
Anthony "Moo Moo" Rossi  
Carl "Nation" Simone  
Mel "Butch" Steppo  
"Peppy (Pepe)" Vanner  
"Sweetheart" Vitullo

Please contact us if you would like to tell us of any other nicknames that you know of for the Thornton area or if you have nicknames for people in other villages in town.

## A Visit to Neutaconkanut Hill

by Christopher Martin

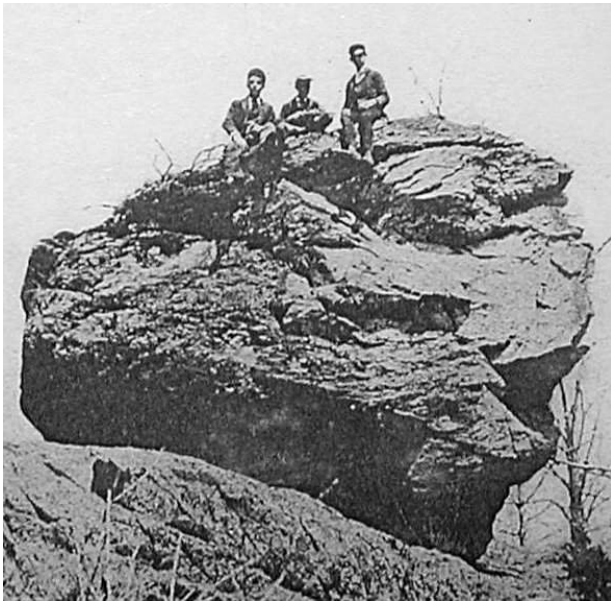
On the morning of October 27, a damp Saturday, Louis McGowan, Joe Jamroz, and I responded to an open invitation from the Neutaconkanut Hill Association for a guided walk on the hill. The Association has been working for the past several years to make the area public-friendly again, picking up trash, cutting brush, hauling out abandoned cars, and clearing or restoring walking paths, including some built by the WPA back in the 1930s.

We were greeted by association president Elli Panichas, and Mike Lusi, a landscape architect, and Robert Fitzpatrick, a Providence police officer, were our guides on the walk. They took us all around the eighty-eight acre park (which is owned by the City of Providence), pointing out improvements, filling us in on history, and answering questions.

Did you know there was once a small ski slope on the hill? Or that much of the property was originally part of an estate

belonging to a branch of the King family? Or that there were once manicured public gardens there? Some of you may remember attending concerts or seeing outdoor movies in the park. For many, the top of the hill was the place to take a date, enjoy the view of Providence, and steam up the car windows.

We already knew that a once well-known landmark, a huge glacial boulder, was dynamited in the 1950s because people feared it might roll down the hill. Mike Lusi was able to show us where it once stood, on a ledge overlooking the 1025 Club. All that remains is a pile of blasted stone.



The boulder that once graced Neutaconkanut Hill. Photo from *The Influence of Physical Features Upon the History of Rhode Island* by David W. Hoyt, 1910.

The Neutaconkanut Hill Association was formed in the 1970s to fight condo developments that threatened to encroach on the hill. In recent years the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council and Citywide Green have become actively involved the revitalization of the park, and much of the recent cleanup of the hill was accomplished with the help of students from Providence College, Roger Williams University, and the MET school.

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### Society Doings

#### Speakers

Our September meeting got the season off with a bang with a very interesting and detailed talk on the exploits of Rhode Island's 7th Regiment in the Civil War, given by Robert Grandchamp. Robert's enthusiasm for the subject and amazing recall of persons, dates, and events had us all enthralled.

In October Dan Brown tested our collective well of presidential knowledge with a slide show accompanied by presidential trivia. Turns out our well of knowledge was fairly shallow.

#### PawSox Game

In the spirit of summer and the quest to be outdoors, a group of society members attended a Pawtucket Red Sox baseball game

on August 18th. In the car on the way over we discussed the origins and ingredients of dynamite sandwiches and their place in Rhode Island cuisine. At the game were Rolf, Louis, Christopher, Mike, Liz, and Joe. The weather was perfect, the crowd was enthusiastic, and the junk food was as good as we all remembered it. The Sox won the game in fine fashion, scoring the deciding runs in the later innings.

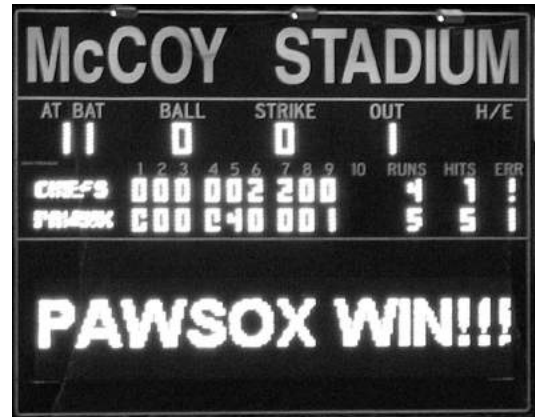


Photo by Christopher Martin

#### Halloween Party

On October 27, 2007, about twenty-five historical society members and friends attended a Halloween Party at the home of Paul and Nancy Nadeau. Nancy had the house wonderfully decorated, and scary music played throughout the evening. A number of us dressed in costume, as did our gracious hosts. There was plenty of good food and fun to be had. An especially enjoyable part of the evening was spent listening to members tell the group about their experiences with ghosts. A big thank you goes out to Paul and Nancy for hosting the event, to Bel Peters and her committee for organizing things, and to the committee and the guests for preparing the food.

Photos of the event, as well as many past events, can be viewed online at [picasaweb.google.com/johnstonhistorical](http://picasaweb.google.com/johnstonhistorical). This link can also be accessed from the bottom of the Events page on the society's website, [www.johnstonhistorical.org](http://www.johnstonhistorical.org).

#### Photo Montage

Louis has put together digital copies of fifty historic photographs from our Arcadia books which will be given to the Johnston Senior Center. They will use them to create a montage that will be displayed in the center's south entrance. The display is sure to stimulate the nostalgia glands of all long-time Johnston residents who see it.

#### Our Properties

Louis sent out bid requests for the plumbing and heating work and interior restoration of Belnap School to three contractors. Now we wait and see what kinds of estimates we get.

Regarding our much-delayed attempt to sell the Brown Avenue property, Louis has been in touch with a lawyer and the Department of Environmental Management, and has been told that a check has been cut. We're just waiting for the okay from

November 17th was another of our twice-annual yard cleanup days. Louis, his daughter, Jennifer, and her mother, Judy, Kit

Rhodes, and Phil Lemoi gave the society's headquarters property a quick going-over, and did a good job of it, too.

As of January 2008, the Johnston Historical Society will be ostensibly responsible for the war memorial located two doors down from our headquarters on Putman Pike. Up till now the Graniteville War Memorial Association was responsible for the memorial, but the organization will soon be disbanded, and members felt the JHS would be a good steward going forward. While the memorial will be in our name, the town will be responsible for maintaining the property. the title company.

Our museum and Elijah Angell House continue to be open by appointment, and we always welcome visits by interested individuals or groups. Just shoot us an email at [info@johnstonhistorical.org](mailto:info@johnstonhistorical.org), or leave a message at (401) 231-3380 to set one up.

Our museum space is also available (on a limited basis) for meetings of small groups of adults at a reasonable price. If you know of a local group or organization that is looking for a meeting space, and might be interested in using our museum, please have them contact us.

#### Grant Activity

- In early October we received a \$500 mini-grant from the Harvard Pilgrim Foundation. The money will go toward the purchase of a digital projector which we'll use to give presentations at our headquarters, the senior center, area schools, etc. Our thanks go out to Christopher Martin for applying for this grant, and to the Harvard Pilgrim Foundation for their generosity.
- We've applied for a \$2,500 grant from the Narragansett Bay Commission that will go toward the restoration of Belknap School.

#### Acquisitions

- A Graceland Holstein pint milk bottle, purchased by Louis McGowan.
- A cast-iron Victor Stove Company parlor stove, purchased by the Society from the Mabel Sprague estate auction on August 25, 2007.
- A copy of *From Paris to Providence, 1915-1947*, a history of the Tirocchi dressmakers shop, donated by Michael and Liz Burch.
- A siren from a Central Falls fire truck, donated by Joe Jamroz.
- An early twentieth-century coat rack from Central School, Warwick, donated by Thomas E. Greene.
- A Town of Johnston policeman's uniform and badge that once belonged to Lloyd Winsor, donated by Mike Salvatore.
- An 1866 attendance book, donated by Chris and Elaine Pereira.
- A cloth tax accessor's notice from 1928, donated by Elaine Pereira.
- A 1950 photo of Thornton Hose Company No. 1 on a picnic, including the names and nicknames of everyone pictured, donated by Tom Hartshorn.

- Two bibles and some photos from the George Lofgrin family, donated via Bob Jackson.
- Herb Newman brought in six photographs having to do with fire fighting in Johnston. They were passed to him by Betty Kaye.
- Louis purchased from eBay a day book in which a man named Bennet recorded his day-to-day employment history. Louis believes this book was part of the Sprague auction.

Our sincere thanks to all who have donated items for our collections. Keep it coming!

#### Cemeteries

Historical Cemetery #29 has been reclaimed from encroaching nature thanks to the efforts of local Eagle Scout candidate Raymond Lovell of Providence Troop 53. Lovell spent much of the summer, with the help of his troop and family, clearing brush and poison ivy from the lot, located at the corner of Scituate and old Pocasset Avenues. In the process he uncovered several stones belonging to the Fenner family, at least one of which dates back to 1836. Lovell also obtained donations of landscaping material from Central Nurseries and a granite bench from Hartford Paving. The lot looks great and stands as a fine example of civic responsibility.

It's never too late to adopt one of Johnston's one-hundred or so historical cemeteries. All you need to do is pick up trash, weed whack grass and undergrowth, and cut and clear brush at least once a year. Not only will you be helping to make your town more attractive, you'll also be helping to preserve our heritage. If you are interested, or know of someone who might be, please contact us at (401) 231-3380 or [info@johnstonhistorical.org](mailto:info@johnstonhistorical.org).

#### Upcoming Events

Unless otherwise noted, all events take place at the Johnston Historical Society Museum Barn, 101 Putnam Pike, Johnston, and are free and open to the public.

#### December 5, 2007

General Meeting

7pm

Fred Mikkelson will read excerpts from some family letters of interest: his grandmother's account of an earthquake in Japan in the 1920s, and a second cousin's account of his experiences as a prisoner of war in the Philippines at the beginning of World War II. (Please note that this meeting takes place a week later than usual, because of Thanksgiving).

#### December 9, 2007

Christmas Open House

2pm-6pm

Elijah Angell House, 101 Putnam Pike. Come in from the cold, traveler, and join the Johnston Historical Society for candlelight, yuletide music, and refreshments in their restored 1824 farmhouse. The adjacent Johnston History Museum, housed in a replica post-and-beam barn, will also be open. Free.

**January 30, February 27, and March 26, 2008**

General Meetings

7pm

Check the Events page of [www.johnstonhistorical.org](http://www.johnstonhistorical.org) for the latest information on speakers for these meetings.

**Spring 2008**

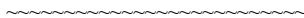
Silent Auction

Time TBA

Johnston Senior Center, 1385 Hartford Avenue, Johnston.  
Please join us for our first fundraiser for Johnston's 250th Anniversary celebration in 2009. If you have something you'd like to donate to the auction -- a product, service, or really cool object -- please contact Louis (286-3012) or Dan (742-0685). More details to follow.

**Johnston's 250th Birthday**

The latest news on our efforts to commemorate the setting off of Johnston from Providence in 1759 is that representatives from the Johnston School Department have been brought into the loop, and are working on ways in which the town's students can participate in the celebrations.



**What the Heck is That?**

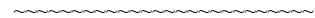
A different look at some Johnston Landmarks  
by Christopher Martin

Following are some close-ups of places or objects located in the Town of Johnston. Can you identify what or where they are? (Answers will appear in the next issue).



Answers to last month's poser:

- 1) Crypt door, Historical Cemetery #7, George Waterman Road.
- 2) The folk-art star which hangs to the right of the front door of Antioch Chapel, Plainfield Pike.
- 3) Front door handle, Clemence-Irons House, George Waterman Road.



**Contribute To Our Newsletter!**

We are always looking for articles for our newsletter. Naturally, we would like pieces that have to do with the town's history, but if you have an interest that ties in with history somehow, why not share it with us? Maybe you collect old snuffboxes or old railroad material. Maybe you have done some of your family history that others might be interested in. Maybe you would like to talk about the old days in Johnston. Wouldn't it be fun to share your knowledge! You do not have to be a great writer to put together an article. None of us are great literary figures. If you need help though, one of us would be glad to assist you.

We think that it will make for a much better newsletter if others contribute pieces that they have written. Remember, your reminiscences about the old days in Johnston will become valuable pieces of our town's history. But if you do not get them down on paper, they will be lost forever. We should make sure that future generations know what went on in times past.

**Next newsletter deadline: February 27, 2008.**

**Our Executive Board**

President: Louis McGowan  
Vice-President: Dan Brown  
Treasurer: Virginia Brunelle  
Recording Secretary: Evelyn Beaumier  
Corresponding Secretary: Christopher Martin  
Trustee: John Barratini  
Trustee: Gregory Burr  
Trustee: Rolf Johnson  
Trustee: Bel Peters

Our Executive Board meets at 7pm in the Museum building, 101 Putnam Pike, on the second to the last Wednesday of each month, September through June (except December). All are welcome to attend.

General Meetings are held at 7pm the last Wednesday of each month, September through June (no December meeting. We hold our Holiday Party that month). The meetings are held in the Museum Building.

Our phone number is: (401) 231-3380  
Our website address is: [www.JohnstonHistorical.org](http://www.JohnstonHistorical.org)  
Our email address is: [Info@JohnstonHistorical.org](mailto:Info@JohnstonHistorical.org)

**Annual Dues**

Have you paid your 2007 dues yet? It is that time again. Your dues help us to operate. The price of a single membership is only \$15; a family membership is only \$20. Wotta bargain! So once more, please pay your 2007 dues. Send us a check today!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Renewal    Single (\$15) \_\_\_\_\_  
                  Family (\$20) \_\_\_\_\_

New            Single (\$15) \_\_\_\_\_  
                  Family (\$20) \_\_\_\_\_

Don't forget -- your donations to the Johnston Historical Society can be deducted from your taxes. We are registered with the Federal Government as a non-profit organization.

**JOHNSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
101 PUTNAM PIKE  
JOHNSTON, RHODE ISLAND 02919**