

# Johnston Historical Society

## Historical Notes

Vol. XX, #2

Christopher Martin, Editor Louis McGowan, Assistant

July 2014

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

### Johnston Education After the Demise of the District System

by Louis McGowan

*This is the second part of an article that looks at education in our town. The first part of the article (see November 2010 issue of "J.H.S. Historical Notes") dealt with schooling in the early years of the town and with education under the district system which lasted until 1895. In this second part we will look at education in town from then until about 1956.*

*Much of the factual information in this article is taken from "A History of the Growth and Development of Public Education in the Town of Johnston, Rhode Island," Santo Albert La Fazia's Master Thesis from Rhode Island College of Education, June 1956. His work was largely based on the various published Johnston School Committee and Superintendent Reports.*

The district school system started out with much promise in Johnston when it was established in 1828. By 1895, though, it was clear that the system was no longer working well for all students in the town. Students lucky enough to live in districts with large populations usually received a better education because the district had more money to spend on schooling. Additionally, with all the school trustees in the town (each district had their own trustees), there was a real problem with authority. Questions constantly arose, like who should be hiring and firing teachers, who should be setting up the curriculum, who should be choosing books, etc.



The Thornton Grammar School at 4 School Street. The size of the 1890 building reflects the expanding village population. Before that time, one- or two-room schools took care of the village needs. A 1919 fire burned the school to the ground. In 1920 the present brick school was completed. *Postcard courtesy of Louis McGowan.*

### Move to Town System

After a town-wide referendum was authorized by the R.I. Supreme Court in 1895, a vote to abolish the district system was taken. The issue

was approved, and Johnston moved to the town system of education in that same year. A school committee was formed on June 20, 1895, and it was given the sole power to administer the schools. The committee soon elected the Reverend Frederick B. Cole as superintendent of schools. An appraisal of the schools in the old districts was made by January 16, 1896. There were seventeen schools in the fifteen school districts, and they ranged in value from \$328 for the Winsor District School to \$37,912 for the Concord Street School in the Annex area. Many repairs were needed in the schools, but funds were limited. A new room was added at the Thornton School, and one room was enlarged at the Manton School. Both of these schools were experiencing overcrowding because of the large influx of students from families that had moved into their neighborhoods for work in the nearby textile mills.

Most of the other schools also had problems. Things like fence repair, upgrading of heating systems, roof leaks, painting and so on all needed to be dealt with. The district system had failed to keep up with business as far as maintenance was concerned. Right away the school committee made recommendations for a budget increase for the following year. In 1896, the first year under the new system, there were 1,783 pupils attending town public schools. \$34,363.61 was set aside for school use. The school committee decided that necessary repairs to the schools would total about \$4,000. They asked for this extra amount and received it. Before the year was over, though, they had spent \$5,000 with some repairs still undone. On top of this, there were 288 new pupils in the town compared to 1895. New teachers were added at the following schools: Brown Avenue, Graniteville, Hughesdale, and Simmonsville. In addition to hiring more teachers, it was seen that the teachers needed to be properly trained. So, in order to improve things in this area, a training school was established at the Concord Street School in the Annex section.

Additionally, in 1896, a course in physical training was added to the curriculum. The school committee decided that a healthy body was also important for the town's youths.

A significant person was hired to fill the superintendent's position for the 1896-'97 school year. That person was Sarah Dyer Barnes, who had much experience in school affairs, including teaching in our school system. Although hired only as a part time administrator, she did such a good job that she was hired full time the next year at a salary of \$1,800. She had become the first full time superintendent in Johnston. In her first year in charge, there were across-the-board improvements made in the curriculum as well as the introduction of two new courses, physical training and nature study.

In the outlying sections of the town, many of the teachers were conducting ungraded schools. Superintendent Barnes instructed those teachers to conduct their schools as nearly as possible like the graded schools. In general, discipline in the schools improved and the school work improved. Ms. Barnes took on the task of setting up a uniform course of study for the entire town. It is said that this was accomplished quite efficiently. Now all students in the town could be assured that they

were getting the same education as everyone else. Results from tests given to students graduating from the town grammar schools backed this up. All students were now learning what they needed to get into high school.

The school system continued to grow. Whereas in 1896 there were 1,783 pupils, in 1897 there were 2,186 pupils taught by fifty-nine teachers, spread out across eighteen schools.

### Problems for New System

In looking through the yearly school reports from that period, it can be seen that three major problems confronted the administrators of the day. They were: 1) to raise the physical standards of the existing school buildings and provide more classroom space; 2) to provide more uniform instruction for all the schools, and 3) to train good teachers and to retain them. The first problem was dealt with nicely, with repairs having been made to all the schools and provisions made for building of new schools in Olneyville and Manton. The second problem was taken care of by providing a uniform course of instruction for the entire town. The third problem was partially addressed by the setting up of two rooms at the Concord Street School (in the Annex area) for the purpose of training new teachers. The problem of retention of teachers could not really be addressed because in 1898 the populous Olneyville area was annexed to Providence.

### Evening School

In 1874, it is first recorded that there were evening schools in Johnston. They opened in four sections in town, but in general were poorly attended. For the next few years, only Merino kept its evening school running. In 1890, the school committee decided to open evening schools in Olneyville, Thornton, and Merino because many town residents expressed the desire to attend evening school. Again though, attendance was at first low compared to registration. The town continued the three evening schools, with ever increasing attendance, until the annexation in 1898. After that, only the Thornton evening school continued to run. In 1909, it shut down, and after making arrangements with Providence, town children wishing to attend evening school could enroll there. The town paid the tuition for these pupils.

### Need of a High School

In the twentieth century, for those students wishing to attend high school after graduating from grammar school in town, they were forced to go to high school in one of the surrounding cities or towns, namely Providence, North Providence, or Cranston. Our town had to pay their tuition and supply their transportation. Increased costs for educating our students through high school led to a drive to build a high school in Johnston. This eventually took place and the new Junior/Senior High School opened in 1960.

There was an earlier high school, though, in town. In 1885, the first Johnston High School was established in rented rooms in the Odd Fellow's Block on Plainfield Street in the Olneyville section of town. About twenty-five students attended classes in that first year. Attendance increased yearly at the high school, and in 1889 Superintendent William E. Wilson asked the town for its own high school building. An appropriation of \$20,000 was approved in 1890, and a committee was appointed to build a new schoolhouse. Building soon commenced and the new brick building on Killingly Street opened in November 1891. The school was very well run and its graduates were able to get into the best New England colleges without examination.

### Annexation Brings Changes

Everything changed, though, in 1898 when the Olneyville section of Johnston was annexed to Providence. Johnston lost its high school and five other schools. Because of the big drop in population due to the annexation, residents felt that they could no longer maintain a high school. It is estimated that the town lost almost sixty percent of its population to Providence. The years from 1898 until 1915 were mostly

taken up with reorganization and adjustment, with not a lot of progress made. Talks of building a new high school were revived in later years, but nothing happened until the middle 1950s when townspeople realized that it no longer made sense to pay the tuition for over 400 students to surrounding communities. As was stated earlier, a new high school was approved, planned and built in the late 1950s.

The people of town knew that we needed a strong school system, and despite the changes brought about by annexation, they got right to work to strengthen the system. In 1899, money was appropriated for new buildings at Manton and Simmonsville and for an addition in Thornton. These projects were completed in 1900. Growth in the Manton section brought about overcrowding in the Manton School, and the Lincoln School on Greenville Avenue was added in 1912. Thornton also faced overcrowding and a new addition to its school opened in 1916.



This circa 1912 photograph shows students of the Lincoln School, located on Greenville Avenue just west of where George Waterman Avenue begins. The building is now gone. *Photo courtesy of Herb Newman.*

### School Fires Plague System

Between 1916 and 1919, three Johnston schools burned to the ground. On January 19, 1916, the four-room Simmonsville School was destroyed by fire. A new building was occupied in May of that year.

On May 15, 1917, the Antioch School on Plainfield Pike in western Johnston burned. The school committee proposed sending the neighborhood children to Thornton, but their parents wanted a new school, and one was built on the old site, opening in May, 1920.

The biggest fire of the three occurred on January 13, 1919, when the school at Thornton burned to the ground. It had been the best equipped and largest building in the town. Pupils were temporarily housed in one room of the Cranston's school in Thornton and at the Pocasset Social Club. Before the end of 1920, a new ten-room brick building was completed on the site of the old one at a cost of \$66,000. Gifts of \$500 each were secured from the Pocasset Mills, the Victoria Mills, and from Mr. Charles Fletcher. This money was used to furnish the new school. This 1920 building stands today and is still the elementary school for the area.

### New School Buildings Needed

With the onset of the 1920s, the town school system was facing a bit of a crisis. Fire insurance did not cover completely the cost of the three new buildings, and the town's population was still growing. From 1898 to 1920, the numbers of students in town had increased from 798 to 1,404. The fires and World War I had stopped any growth in the available classroom space, however. The years 1920 to 1931, though, saw the largest building program since the dividing of the town. At a financial town meeting in 1922, taxpayers voted for a \$50,000 school bond to erect new school buildings. The new four-room George C. Calef School was completed in 1923 as was the two-room Franklin

School. The Calef School was named after George Clinton Calef, a long-time trustee and active member of the school committee. In 1924, the Brown Avenue School was up and running. Also in 1924, two of the old district schools were abandoned and sold. The two were the Reservoir Avenue and Winsor Schools. The children from these two schools were bused to the Brown Avenue and Bell Schools.

Throughout the 1920s, the town continued to build schools and add to others, but it still had trouble keeping up with the increases in the school population. Six-room additions were added to both the Thornton and Calef schools around 1926. Thornton now had sixteen rooms and Calef ten rooms. Another old district school closed at this time, the Bell School.

The facilities at Pocasset and Graniteville were looked at next. In 1928, a four-room brick school was completed at Pocasset. It was named for Alfred A. Williams, a long-time trustee of the area. Graniteville received a new brick, eight-classroom school in 1932 to replace the old district school in that village.

### **Curriculum**

Most children graduating from town grammar schools attended high schools in Providence. To best prepare the town students for study in high school, the town school committee in 1912 adopted the Providence Course of Study in its essentials for use in the Johnston schools. To standardize the work in all the town schools, quarterly examinations were given for all students from the fourth to the eighth grades.

About 1923, a special room was opened in Thornton school for children who were unable to keep up with the regular grade work. It was known as the "opportunity class" and consisted of activities that it was felt would better prepare these students for life. Calef added one of these classes the following year.

### **Partial Return of Secondary Education**

In 1928, for the first time since the annexation, Johnston's students could spend the first year of high school in the town instead of traveling to a neighboring community. In that year, junior high schools were established at the Thornton School and at the George C. Calef School.

By 1930, the school system had grown to include thirteen school buildings housing fifty-three classrooms and employing fifty-five teachers. All this was accomplished despite the fact that of all the towns in the state Johnston had the lowest taxable valuation behind every student.

### **Growth of the Educational Program, 1932 to 1945**

During the depression years, there was little money available for sustaining physical growth of the system, so the focus of attention in this period was on improvement of the course of study. (The only school built between 1932 and 1950 was the Brown Avenue School, which opened in 1942). In 1938, a new reading system was put into effect in the first grade and in each succeeding year in the following grade. In the same year, a driving safety course was instituted at Thornton Junior High, and the following year the course was added at Graniteville Junior High and at Calef Junior High. After a 1940 standardized test showed Johnston's students slightly below the national norm, the system felt that a Course of Study was needed as well as a standardization of text books. These recommendations were soon accomplished. When the tests were given again in 1941, some improvement had been achieved.

Hot school lunches were instituted at Calef and Thornton Junior High Schools in 1940. Graniteville added the program in 1944, the Manton School in 1948, and the Lincoln School in 1950. When the Winsor Hill and the Barnes School were opened in 1953 and '54, respectively, they both included cafeterias.

During World War II, most male teachers were drafted, so female teachers were hired to replace them. There were still shortages, though, because of the high salaries that industry was paying. This caused many teachers to leave the profession, and the school committee decided to hire married teachers to fill the vacancies.

Precautions were taken for the war years such as: delineating safe places for students to hide in case of attack (as determined by construction experts), and training of all teaches in first aid.

A special needs classroom was started in 1943 at Calef Junior High School. In that same year a new position was created, the Supervisor of Elementary Education. That person assisted in the supervision of instruction and acted as a coordinator for all the elementary grades.

By 1945, the entire town was on the annual promotion basis, a change from the previous system when some schools were promoting on a semiannual basis. Also during the late war years, work was made to correct the discrepancies between the salaries of the elementary school teachers and the junior high teachers. Another step forward was the creation of a central book store and supply room at the Manton School. This helped to insure that all students had the proper textbooks and supplies.

The Manton School is shown in the early twentieth century on Greenville Avenue, just west of Killingly Street. Its large size shows how much the village had grown. In the 1970s the building housed the town school administration offices. It was demolished after that.



### **The Postwar Years**

In the postwar period, the educational system continued to modernize. The Department of Visual Education was organized and the Assistant Superintendent of Schools position was created in 1946. During the 1946-'47 school year, remedial classes were organized. Students with more severe problems were sent to Providence.

In 1948 the testing program for all students was completed. This testing was felt to help teachers find out where students most needed help, after which the course of study could be adapted to better the educational program.

The Johnston Town Council, at a meeting on October 11, 1950, authorized the President of the Town Council to name a committee of seven taxpayers to make a study of problems which had, and would, arise from increased attendance in the schools. Additions or new schools might be needed. The committee met, studied available information, and visited schools. Their recommendations to the council were: 1) Buy the Colwell property and build a school on it; 2) Purchase the Jacques

property, adjacent to Memorial Park, and build a 1,000 student junior high school on it. Construction should allow addition of a senior high in the future; 3) build a small addition to the Lincoln School; and 4) they also recommended that a bond issue be floated to cover the cost, which would also cover a sum for repairs.

The recommendations were presented at a special financial town meeting on March 30, 1951. \$440,000 was approved at that meeting, not enough to cover all that the committee recommended. What was approved was: the buying of land for the junior-senior high school and the new Franklin School; the replacement of the Franklin School; purchasing land and constructing a new Lincoln School to replace the old one; and money to renovate older schools. The new schools would be located in the Manton and Winsor Hills sections of the town. The money for the erection of the junior high school was not approved at this meeting.

The Winsor Hill School, which replaced the old Franklin School, was opened in May, 1953. The Sarah Dyer Barnes School, which replaced the old Lincoln School, opened in January 1954.

Because of the increased enrollment in the years following World War II, the building committee became active once again and made recommendations to the town budget committee at a financial town meeting in 1956. The most important recommendation was, of course, the construction of a junior-senior high school. Building a combined junior-senior high school was now seen as a better plan because of the increased cost of sending students to high schools in other towns (North Providence had already stopped admitting Johnston students). Land for the proposed Johnston Junior-Senior High School was purchased and the Federal Government gave the town \$10,000 to draw up plans for the new building.

This is pretty much the end of our story for now. As we know, the Junior-Senior High School finally was built and later, a new Johnston Senior High School was erected across the road. Two of our junior high schools no longer are used for general classroom use, the Calef School and the Graniteville School. Both are still standing. The Alfred A. Williams School was sold off a number of years ago (still standing near the intersection of Hartford and Atwood Avenues), and the Manton School on Greenville Ave., which had been used for administrative purposes at the end of its life, was demolished.

~~~~~

### **Growing Up in the Thornton Section of Johnston**

by Evelyn Beaumier

*(The events recounted here would have taken place in the late 1920s and the 1930s)*

I lived on John Street in Frog City until I was ten years old. There was a brook that ran down Pleasant Street, John Street, and Joy Street. It then ran in back of the Priscilla Mill [the British Hosiery Mill on Mill Street], where it connected with the Pocasset River. There were two women in the neighborhood that did their weekly laundry in the brook, Mrs. Rinaldi from John Street and Mrs. Fuoco from Joy Street. They each had a rather long, but not too rough, rock that they used as a wash board. They would bring their clothes to the brook in baskets, which they balanced on their heads. They would wash the clothes with yellow soap, rinse them and then carry the wet clothes back to their houses on their heads to hang on their clothes lines. Their children always looked clean, so I guess it worked.

Mike Palumbo ran a market on Joy Street. He would slaughter calves and pigs and maybe other animals that I don't remember. Whenever we would hear the loud squeal, we would know that it was a pig being killed, and we'd all go running to see the slaughter (blood-thirsty kids!).

There was a homeless man in Thornton (the only one that we ever knew). We knew him by his nickname Fuzza. He lived on a ledge in the huge pipe that ran under Atwood Avenue carrying the Pocasset River. I never knew his background, but I did know that many people in Thornton gave him food and clothes. His real name was John Slack, and he is buried in Pocasset Cemetery.



Evelyn (Stone) Beaumier and her sister Muriel at their home on John Street around Christmas Day 1930. *Photo courtesy of Evelyn Beaumier.*

Another man ran an odds and ends shoe store on Plainfield Street across from Mill Street. His name was Charlie DeLillis, a kindly man whose nickname was Shemella Sham (whatever that means). No two of his shoes were alike, but he sold them for \$1 a pair. I remember mostly the women would buy just slippers from him.

In 1933, we moved to Victoria Mount (across from the Victoria Mill) into a duplex mill house owned by the Carroll family. Victoria mill closed in 1931. The mill burned coal and the partially burnt coal called coke was thrown in the area across the street from our house. We kids, each with a pail, would go there and pick through the coke getting the best pieces for our mothers to burn in our kitchen stoves.

I was friendly with some of the kids from Pocasset village and every spring I would join them to be in the Minstrel for the benefit of St. Brigid's Church. Herman Fleury trained us, and we had fun singing many Irish songs in the chorus. The women from the church made us crepe paper costumes. It was a fun time, well-attended and a good fund raiser for the church. I attended Thornton School, and those of us who lived close enough went home for lunch. We had an hour for lunch and our cue to being late for afternoon class was when we heard the Pocasset Mill whistle blow at 12:55 for their workers to go back to work. We then knew that we had only five minutes to get back to school. The day before the dirigible Hindenburg burnt in Lakehurst, New Jersey, it flew over our area. Our principal Vincent Rampone called a fire drill so that we would all be outside to see it fly over us.

I spent lots of time on my grandfather Stone's farm on Plainfield Pike in Cranston (now Stony Acres). I roamed the woods with my cousins, brought the cows in from the pasture at milking time, then back to the pasture after milking, making sure the rails were up on the gate so that the cows would not get out. The extended family gatherings at the farm were memorable. We skated there in winter and went sledding on the hills. I enjoyed all of my growing up years.

**In Memorium**

**Mike Carroll Passes**

On May 15, 2014, an old friend of ours passed away. We are sad to report that Mike Carroll died that day. Our thoughts are with his wife Kathy, their daughter Erin, and his brothers Dan, Steve, Joe, and Alfred and their families.

When we re-formed our group in 1995, Mike was elected to an officer position when we held our first election. We had met him during an Open House that we put together in October of 1995. In November of that year we formed our Cemetery Committee, and Mike was an important part of that group. We all banded together working hard to take care of the town's historic cemeteries. Mike was enthusiastic and funny, and we all enjoyed his company. When he was able to, he was very willing to help our group function in any way that he could. I remember Mike and Kathy helping us make hundreds of sandwiches for teas that we ran during that period.

Music was a big part of Mike's life, and he graciously shared that love with us. At many picnics and Christmas parties, he sang and played his guitar at society functions with his friend Tom D'Agostino. His music brought joy to our members at these get-togethers. He enthralled us with his tales of the time in his youth when he hit the road with his guitar, writing, singing, and playing all around New York City and even on a boat traveling down the Mississippi River. He once sat at a bar in New York next to Bob Dylan. He had other hobbies that he pursued too, including reading and postcard collecting. About a year and a half ago I saw him at a big post card show. He loved to try to find Rhode Island or Halloween cards that he liked. He also had a strong interest in noted Rhode Island author H.P. Lovecraft, and he wrote an article about him for our newsletter.

My wife and I visited Aidan's Pub in Bristol last night to listen to the Celtic music. My thoughts went back to the time that a number of us from the historical society visited that pub to have dinner together. We had a wonderful time. I remember that Mike ordered the Irish Mixed Grille, which included items like blood pudding. He wasn't sure about that dish but he ate it nonetheless.

We did not see Mike much in recent years. I regret that that was the case. Showing the kind and caring person that he was, I know that he spent a lot of time taking care of his parents, who were both wonderful people. No matter whether he was with our group or not during that time, we will always remember him and miss him. His light has been extinguished, and the world is a little darker for me now that he is gone.

-- Louis McGowan

**Father of Doug Stephens Passes**

Our condolences go out to Doug and Linda Stephens. Doug's father recently passed away.

**Johnston's Polish Community**

In the era spanning the 1920s and 1930s, there was a small Polish community in the Homestead Gardens neighborhood of Johnston, which radiated out from around where Killingly Street meets Greenville Avenue. Polish families lived on at least eighteen different streets in the general area. A quick look at the 1930 Federal Census shows about

forty-three Polish families with seventy-five residents that were born in Poland, and about 115 (mostly children) that were born in this country of Polish parents.

Sharon Osazajca, who grew up in the neighborhood and whose family has lived in the area since around 1910, visited our museum on May 12, 2014, to research her father and his family. She was able to look at records of her relatives in our copies of the Manton School Attendance Books from the late nineteen-teens and early 1920s. She told me that Polish picnics were held in the empty field beside her family property at 52 (later re-numbered 61) Jackson Avenue. She thinks that they were organized by the Polish American Club on Chaffee Street in Olneyville.

~~~~~  
**Original Congregations of Graniteville Church and Belknap Chapel Cease to Meet**

The original congregation of the Graniteville Baptist Church is no longer meeting. The group was formed in the 1840s, and the church building dates to 1859. The church was originally part of the Six Principle Baptist denomination, but it changed its affiliation a number of times over the years. Membership had fallen off in recent years, and the group decided that it could no longer maintain itself as a viable congregation. A new church group is now renting the property.

The original congregation of the Belknap Chapel, run throughout its existence by the Johnston Industrial Society, has also ceased to meet. It is almost definite that the building will no longer function as a church. The pews have been donated to the Antioch Chapel on Plainfield Street in our town. As noted elsewhere in this newsletter, the pulpit was donated to our group.

We are sad to hear about the end of both of these long-standing congregations. Both of these groups had dwindled to such a small size that they could no longer afford to maintain their buildings.

~~~~~  
**Society Doings**

**JHS Yard Sale**

On Saturday, October 19, 2014, we held a yard sale for the benefit of our society. Dan Brown headed up the event, which turned out to be very successful. Dan rounded up an awful lot of items for us to sell, picked up most of them and transported them to the Belknap School for the sale that day. A lot of people contributed items that day, and we thank all of them.

We have some items left over, and we will have another sale this fall. Thanks to Dan, Louis, Joe, Elise and her son Eric, and Shar for working the yard sale.

**Dedication/Fundraiser**

On Saturday, April 26, 2014, we held a dedication ceremony for our new addition as well as a fundraiser for our organization. It was a grand day! At least 125 people attended and at times it was wall to wall people. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves. There was a lot of friendly conversation, and a good number of people enjoyed the exhibits in the barn and went on tours of the house.

The dedication was short and sweet with President Louis McGowan cutting the ribbon to the room after giving thanks to the Champlin Foundations for making the funding available to build our addition. He also thanked Steve Merolla for the donation of the 1790 door surround which is the focal point of our new ell. Thanks then went to our executive board for all the work that they put in to the effort for the fundraiser.



Louis prepares to cut the ribbon as event attendees look on. *Photo by Beth Hurd.*

Our group, of course, owes a big debt of gratitude to our co-hosts for the fundraiser, Anthony Ursillo and Timothy Kee. They put in a lot of hours in order to make this day the great success that it was. The silent auction that they organized went over very well. Their contacts really came through with generous donations before the event and on the day of the event.

Thanks also go out to other members of our team, starting with Jim and Alice Lombardi for taking care of the donation table. They are real pros when it comes to handling the money. Thanks go to Bel McGowan and her sister Ida Silva for handling the food and preparing many of the items. Everything was delicious. Thanks to Joe Jamroz for all the running around that he does. Thanks to Dan Brown for all his help in getting the exhibit displays in order and to Elise Carlson for all the things that she does. Doug and Linda Stephens, Rolf Johnson, Beth Hurd, Christopher Martin, Ed Cornwell, and Fred Mikkelsen are also to be thanked for their contributions.

Lastly, we would like to thank all the individuals and businesses that generously gave money, gift certificates, auction items and food for the event. An awful lot of people pitched in to make this a great event!

## **Our Properties**

### ***Yard Clean-Up***

We had a good yard clean-up at the museum on the week of April 12th. Tim, Anthony, Shar, Elise, Joe, Phil, Bel and Louis all worked on the yard. Thanks to all who showed up.

### ***Museum Addition Update***

Work by Warren Lanpher on our museum addition is complete. During the second week of May, he finished up the handicapped access ramp leading to the new rear entrance. He did a great job with it.

During the last part of March and the month of April, we have been working on a revamp of our exhibits. In the addition we have put in place three display cabinets, one with an exhibit on the textile industry in Johnston, and two other displays on the villages of the town. We have also displayed on the back wall eight enlarged photos of our main villages. We are very happy with them. We are trying to keep the room simple and tasteful.

We have redone much of the display area in the old part of the museum. We now have re-worked displays on: veterans, the textile industry, and the fire and police departments. We have also created new displays on:

town politics, religion, old documents, education, transportation, and places to eat. Not all displays are complete -- some are still in the works. Louis, Dan, and Elise have been working in this area.

Thanks also to Tim Kee and Anthony Ursillo for suggesting and then facilitating the purchase of our eight photo enlargements. They are printed on canvas stretched onto wood frames and look wonderful!



Our new handicapped access ramp. *Photo by Christopher Martin.*

Our museum barn is open Monday nights (except holidays), 6:30-8:30pm; and on the third Saturday of each month, 9-11am, for those who would like to visit the museum or examine the society's collection of printed materials. Also, the Belknap School, corner of Atwood and Greenville Avenues, is open 2-4pm the first Saturday of each month, April to October. Both the museum and Elijah Angell House continue to be open by appointment -- we always welcome visits by interested individuals or groups. Just shoot us an email at [history@jhs.necoxmail.com](mailto:history@jhs.necoxmail.com), 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**

We have submitted a request to the Champlin Foundations for a grant to cover the cost of painting the Elijah Angell House, which has not been painted professionally since 2000. We have painted a couple of sides ourselves as a stopgap measure, but it needs professional care.

## **Cemetery Committee Report**

by Pasco Macari

Due to the harsh winter of 2013-2014 we lost almost three months of cemetery work. We were finally able to get out in the field in late March.

### ***Number 36, Alverson Yard on the FM global property:***

We returned to this yard after the long winter to continue our restoration only to find it needed clearing again. Note: John Alverson's grave is marked with rude stones. Using James Arnold's inventory we were able to locate his grave, but there is a slight twist to his marker. In the 1920s the military placed a standardized granite marker honoring his military

service. We determined it was placed wrong, so we moved it and placed it behind his rude headstone.

We placed Lydia Alverson's repaired slate headstone to the right of her brother Captain Thomas Alverson. Her foot stone was not found.

Mrs. Phebe Alverson -- her original slate headstone, medium in size and broken at top, had been replaced with a marble stone. We repaired her headstone as best we could. Marble foot stone not found -- we used her slate headstone for her foot marker.

Calista A. King -- just as I stated with Mrs. Phebe Alverson, replacement stone had the same issue as with Calista. We placed her marble headstone into the brownstone base and used her slate headstone for her foot marker.

We also repositioned and corrected the location of two foot stones and one headstone. Number 36 has been restored as best as possible.

*Number 66: Colonel John Waterman Yard located off Plainfield Pike:*  
This yard was totally overgrown when we returned to continue our restoration. We cleared and cut the yard on this visit. The next few visits we were able to:

- repair and reset three foot stones
- repair and reset two headstones including Colonel John Waterman and Sarah Waterman

The large slate headstone of John Waterman was broken below grade and almost completely covered by a tree. We dug out the bottom and epoxied the pieces together. Later, we reset it back into its correct location. I transported the head and footstones of Sarah Waterman, (repaired by Steve in his workshop) and we reset them. We completed the restoration of number 66 although we could not find the head and footstone of Betsy Gorton.

*Number 18, Manton Yard:*

We cleared and cut grass and then began to work on the stones. As I stated in the earlier article, this yard was vandalized severely. Many stones were broken and smashed. We moved all the pieces of marble and slate that we could not match off to the side of the yard. We could not spend any more time trying to piece them together -- but we will at a future date. The head and footstones we were able to piece together have been placed in the correct locations. There were two rude markers with dates, one 1813, the other 1819. We set them into stone dust and took liberties as to where they were originally located. This yard is far from being completed.

*Number 62, Sheldon-Waterman Yard:*

This yard is located down a steep embankment on the Home Depot property, which is owned by the Carpiionato Corporation. The Carpiionato company has been very accommodating with our requests. The company replaced all the iron pipes around the granite pillars, and cut all the large trees last year. Also, they hired a landscaping company to periodically clean the yard. Many thanks to the Carpiionato Corporation.

There are two cemeteries here, although only one assigned number. One is protected with granite pillars and iron rails, the other is a rude stone burial ground. We have not inventoried the rude stone burial ground as yet. After a short cleanup period, we began to do what we love -- repairing stones.

We made two cement bases to replace one broken and one missing one. Drilled two large marble headstones and epoxied the broken sections. Epoxied one footstone (although a small piece is missing), and reset three marble headstones and one footstone.

Throughout the past few months, we cleared, raked, and cut the following yards: Numbers 29, 87, 45, 72, 19, 41, 71, 59, and 60. In addition to the yards I mentioned in this report, we had additional help in a few of the yards by Julie Penta and her son Luca and Colby Fortin. Committee thanks these three helpers.

A thank you goes out to Dan Missoula, Parks and Recreation director, and his hard-working groundskeepers. Without their commitment in cutting many of our cemeteries, the committee could not move forward.

The cemetery committee is: Shar DeMaio, Elise Carlson, Doug Stevens, Everett Cogswell, Tim Kee, Anthony Ursillo, Ed Cornwell, Bill Rotondo, Steve Merolla and Pasco Macari.

The committee is losing a longtime member. Bill Rotondo graduated from Bryant College in May and accepted a job offer out-of-state. He will be leaving in August for the Phoenix, Arizona, area. We wish him the very best of luck.

**Speakers**

Our April speaker was Reinhard Wohlgenuth, who presented us with a historical look at the Edaville Railroad. His show was very interesting and brought back a lot of memories for most of us who used to travel to South Carver to see the two-foot trains run around the pond, especially at Christmas time.



Some of the Edaville Railroad memorabilia shared by Mr. Wohlgenuth. *Photo by Christopher Martin.*

Our May speakers were Norm Deragon and Sylvia Bartholomy of the American French Genealogical Society who gave a fascinating talk on the King's Daughters, a 700-plus group of women who came to Quebec from France between 1663 and 1673 and helped to populate the sparsely settled colony.

For our June meeting, we started out with a hot dog roast, which twenty-five of our members attended. We had a rousing good time. After the roast, Warren Lanpher presented a slide show about a restoration project that he performed on a mid-seventeenth century house in Gloucester, MA. He also showed us views of our museum addition. Both projects were masterfully crafted by Warren, and his Gloucester restoration will be covered in an upcoming issue of "Early American Life," a national magazine.

**Acquisitions**

- On March 24, 2014, Beth Hurd gave to the society: a bag full of new T-shirts (all relating to Johnston); a Johnston grammar school project book about solutions to pollution ("Nurtle's Home"); and a folder of materials relating to the first four generations of the Thomas Clemence family (Thomas was the pioneer of his family in Rhode Island).
- In March, Elise Carlson donated a box of frames to be used in our museum.

- In April, Rolf Johnson donated three frames and two items for our house museum: a carved needle egg and a wooden sock toe darning.
- In May, George Daigneault donated an 1870 Beers' Atlas plate of the Annex/Silver Lake area of Johnston (later Providence).
- In May, Louis McGowan purchased two small luster ware pitchers for the house museum.
- In May, Rolf Johnson donated a 1960s dynamite storage box.
- In May, Pat Macari donated a curio cabinet which is now housing a display in our museum.
- In July, we purchased a display cabinet from Apple Valley Hobby Shop.

Many of these objects may be seen in the Acquisitions photo album on our Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/johnstonhistorical](http://www.facebook.com/johnstonhistorical)). As always, our sincere thanks to all who have donated items for our collections. Keep it coming!

### Belknap Church Donation to JHS

On May 29, 2014, Carol Morin of the Johnston Industrial Society (the group that runs the Belknap Church) gave us a number of items from the church that closed its doors earlier this month. The main item is the pulpit. Oral tradition tells us that it was made by a member of the group from an old meal box (presumably a box used to feed animals). It is a finely crafted piece, and we are glad to receive this wonderful artifact from the church. We think that it goes back to the very early days of the church.



*Photos by Christopher Martin.*

We also received the following items: six ceiling lamp fixtures that date to the early twentieth century; two collection plates; communion wine glasses with the tray and cover; a bible with a list of departed members; and a lighted crucifix given in memory of Marietta Mosley, one of the founders of the church.

We thank Carol and the rest of her group for their generosity.

### Sutcliffe Family Donates Curio Cabinet

Thanks go out to the Sutcliffe family for donating a beautiful curio cabinet to our group. The cabinet will house all the wonderful pieces that the family has given to us that belonged to George Sutcliffe, a World War II fighter pilot. Stop by soon and see the new display.

### Wish List

Following are a number of items we could make good use of:

- Display mannequins
- Any Johnston-related memorabilia

### Historical Teasers -- Do You Know Your Town's History?

*Answers to last issue's teasers:*

1) There are three present and former Johnston Library Buildings that are still standing. The oldest is the 1891 building that is extant and located in Olneyville Square. It was a town library until the 1898 annexation. Its top two floors have been removed. The other two buildings are, of course, the former Marian J. Mohr Memorial Library on Atwood Avenue and the present Johnston Library (also named the Marian J. Mohr Library) at 1 Memorial Avenue.

2) The fifth Johnston church that was destroyed in the twentieth century is the Manton Baptist Church, that was dedicated in 1889 on lower Greenville Avenue.

3) The American Pickers TV reality show visited and televised the former Benjamin Pirce Farm at 150 Simonsville Avenue. For many years the Ruotolo family has owned the farm.

*New Historical Teaser Questions:*

1) Which Johnston village is named after a small village in Yorkshire, England? Why is that so?

2) There was once a Grange chapter in Johnston. The group folded in town in the mid-twentieth century, but the building itself lasted until the 1980s. Where was it?

3) In the early 1920s, the aunt of a famous horror story writer taught math at the Hughesdale School. The aunt brought home papers for the nephew to correct. Who was this famous writer who actually corrected papers for Johnston students?

### Upcoming Events

#### July and August 2014

Summer hiatus -- no general meetings in these months.

#### September 14, 2014

JHS Picnic  
4-7pm

Johnston Historical Society members and their families and friends are invited to partake of pic-a-nic goodies. JHS will supply hamburgers, hot dogs, buns, and soda. Anything else is pot luck, so please bring a dish to share. Plus, there'll be badminton, horseshoes, sitting around chatting, maybe even a raffle.

#### September 24, 2014

General Meeting  
7pm

Our speaker will be former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Rhode Island Frank J. Williams. Williams is an expert on the Civil War and the life of Abraham Lincoln.

#### September 28, 2014

Wine Tasting Event  
3:45pm

Shang Bailey Roadhouse, 2737 Hartford Avenue (we'll meet here and carpool to the vineyard). Jim Verde will give a talk on the history of Verde Vineyards, how wine is made, and how to taste wine, and he'll give a tour of the vineyard right here in Johnston. \$20 per person; 21+ only; limited to a total of twenty-five guests. Please book early by calling Anthony Ursillo and Timothy Kee at (401) 764-5901 or e-mailing [aursillo401@gmail.com](mailto:aursillo401@gmail.com) to reserve your spot. At this time we are half full!!!

Verde Vineyards ([verdevineyardsri.com](http://verdevineyardsri.com)) is a farmer-winery established under the Rhode Island Agricultural Act of 2008. The purpose of the act

was to promote new forms of agriculture in Rhode Island. Verde Vineyards opened to the public in June 2012.

The ninety-minute tour will consist of three parts: Grape growing and vineyard maintenance; the process of winemaking; and tips for wine tasting. The tour includes the tasting of three wines currently for sale at the vineyard: two dry reds and one white.

Verde Vineyards ("Green" in Italian) is green in another important aspect: All of the energy -- electricity, hot water, heating and cooling is produced on-site resulting in a carbon-free footprint. The tour covers this aspect of the vineyard and all questions are welcomed at any time during the tour. Bottles of wine will be available for sale that day for those who are interested in purchasing. The tour will also include cheese and crackers and grapes provided by the JHS.

**October 11, 2014**

Tag Sale  
9am-12pm  
Shang Bailey Roadhouse, 2737 Hartford Avenue. Come by and buy stuff. Better yet, donate some gently used stuff that we can sell. Proceeds from the sale will benefit the Johnston Historical Society.

**October 29, 2014**

General Meeting  
7p.m  
Member Beth Hurd will give a slide presentation and talk about cemetery iconography.

**December 3, 2014**

General Meeting  
7p.m  
Speaker TBA.

**January 28, 2015**

General Meeting  
7p.m  
Our speaker will be Fred Mikkelsen, who will speak on his days as Conimicut Lighthouse keeper.

**Other Non-JHS-Sponsored Events of Interest:**

**September 22, 2014**

Shang Bailey's Own Story: Sailor-Soldier-Circus Man-Saloon Keeper, Changed from Sin to Righteousness  
Johnston  
6:30pm  
Marian J. Mohr Memorial Library, 1 Memorial Avenue. Anthony Ursillo, owner of the historic Shang Bailey Roadhouse in Johnston will host a presentation on Shang Bailey's autobiography, which will also include Shang's involvement in the Civil War, 1860-1865. The presentation will include a slide show/powerpoint presentation by

Timothy Kee. Free. (401) 231-4980; info@mohrlibrary.org; www.mohrlibrary.org.

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.

**Note:** Our museum barn is open Monday nights (except holidays), 6:30-8:30pm; and Fridays, 2-5pm, for those who would like to visit the museum or examine the society's collection of printed materials. Just in case, call ahead to confirm we're here. Also, the Belknap School, corner of Atwood and Greenville Avenues, is open 9-11am the first Saturday of each month, May to October.

Do you have a suggestion for a future speaker? Or do you yourself have a topic you'd like to present at one of our meetings? Please drop us a line at history@jhs.necoxmail.com or leave a message at (401) 231-3380.



As of this month our Facebook page has 270 followers! Have you 'liked' us yet? To find us type this address into your computer browser:

[www.facebook.com/johnstonhistorical](http://www.facebook.com/johnstonhistorical)

**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: November 15, 2014.**

**Our Executive Board**

President: Louis McGowan  
Vice-President: Dan Brown  
Treasurer: Joe Jamroz  
Recording Secretary: Elise Carlson  
Corresponding Secretary: Christopher Martin  
Trustees: Belmira McGowan, Rolf Johnson, Doug Stephens and Anthony Ursillo.

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 Barn.

Phone: (401) 231-3380  
Website: www.JohnstonHistorical.org  
Email: History@JHS.necoxmail.com  
Facebook: www.facebook.com/johnstonhistorical

**Annual Dues**

Have you paid your 2014 dues yet? 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 2014 dues. Send us a check today!

**Note:** Dues will be going up to \$20 single, \$30 family as of January 1, 2015!

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**