

Johnston Historical Society

Historical Notes

Volume VII #3 Louis McGowan, President & Editor
Pat Macari, Vice-President

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SOCIETY DOINGS

We had two very enjoyable fundraisers at our headquarters this winter, a breakfast and a corned beef dinner. The breakfast, held on Feb. 16, netted us \$40 and the dinner, held on March 15, netted us \$90. Thanks to: Warren & Ellen Lanpher for donating a ham for the breakfast; Dan & Nancy Brown for donating the eggs for the breakfast and vegetables for the dinner; Mike, Ellen, Nancy, Shelly, Louis, & Everett who donated their labor for both affairs; Cathy Carroll for all her help with both functions; Erin Carroll and Stacy Peters for their great waitressing; all who supported the events; and, especially, Bel Peters who did the cooking and organizing for both meals.

On March 9th John Sterling, who is coordinating a state-wide inventory of cemeteries, accompanied our cemetery committee on one of its Sunday morning get-togethers. We inventoried the Thornton Cemetery and the Atwood Cemetery, both on Morgan Avenue. John generously donated his time and shared his knowledge with us.

On March 23rd Pat, Everett, Mike, Louis, and Steve made a trip to the Snake Den Quarry. It was a thrill for all of us to see the remains of this once-thriving operation, which provided rock for Providence streets and for the Congregational Church on Benefit Street. We saw many signs of the old workings including: rotting timbers, with pulleys and cables still attached, from the tripods which were used in some aspect of the operation; many pieces of cut stone, showing the pin marks where the pieces were split; and the towering rock face where layers of rock were cut away. The quarry was probably used over the course of 100 years, possibly from the early 19th to the early 20th century.

We had four excellent speakers for our first four meetings of this year. Phil DeMaria, of R.I. Battery B, spoke at our January meeting about the Gettysburg Cannon, which resides at the State House. We had a large group on hand and no one was disappointed. Phil was very good. At our February

meeting Tom Greene, North Providence Town Historian, treated us to a wonderful slide show on the early history of his town's school system. It was very professional, yet very entertaining. Walter Nebiker, former planner for the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, had big footsteps to fill but did so quite nicely. His slide-talk at our March meeting was a look back on his many years in historic preservation, featuring many of his slides of sites in north-western Rhode Island. George Kelley was guest speaker at our April meeting. His topic was antique advertising tins. He has been collecting them for many years, and he entertained us with stories about the tins and their makers.

All four talks were great! We are very fortunate to have such high-caliber speakers come to our society.

Louis McGowan presented a slide-talk at the April meeting of the Plainfield Young Adults Club held at the Broadway Baptist Church. His talk dealt with amusement parks in R.I. It was a lot of fun because most people there remember the parks so well.

Things are going well with the book. Our deadline is June 30 with a publication date during December, 1997. Louis McGowan, Dan Brown, Steve Merolla, and Pat Macari have been working hard on accumulating photos and selecting which ones are going in the book. Next we will be working on captions and chapter introductions. Remember that a photo book on Johnston will make a great gift for those relatives or friends who have everything.

Our Town-wide cemetery, held on April 26, 1997, was a great success. Vin LaFazia, Director of Parks & Recreation, organized the event with help from our cemetery committee. About 20 cemeteries were cleaned, including some real trouble-spots. Cemetery #24 on Scituate Rd., the Alverson cemetery on Morgan Ave., and Cemetery #1 on Hopkins Ave. were ones that were in very rough shape and were cleaned to bare ground. The huge Cemetery #7 on George Waterman Rd. was about 90% cleared, a real accomplishment! Thanks to Society members Steve, Dan, Pat, Mike, Louis, Everett, and Rolf for all their hard work that day.

ANNUAL CEMETERY CLEAN-UP

By Steve Merolla

On Saturday, April 26, 1997, the Town of Johnston, in association with the Johnston Historical Society, conducted its second Annual Cemetery

Clean-Up Day. For the second year in a row, we enjoyed fine weather, and the whole day was a great success. It is really heartwarming to see the interest of all the groups and individuals involved in the clean-up. While most of the people involved in the effort were Johnston residents, there was one group that brought a national and international flavor to the day. This group was comprised of recruiters and recruits from the United States Army who did a great job clearing the much-neglected Alverson Cemetery on the old Crandall farm off Morgan Avenue. Some of the recruiters were paratroopers from the Army's elite 82nd. Airborne Division, another a member of the 101st. Air Assault Division. They came from hometowns in South Carolina, Virginia, Massachusetts, and Puerto Rico. Their recruits were an even more far-flung group and included a young man from India and a young lady from Guatamala. Though their own hometowns were so far away, they showed a real interest and enthusiasm in cleaning out this Johnston cemetery. For example, they wanted to know if any descendants of those buried in the cemetery still lived in the area, and they were quite eager to re-erect a large fallen gravestone. In fact, I think they would have wanted to re-set all the toppled grave stones if they had had the time. They and all the other groups and individuals did an outstanding job all over the town.

This brings me to a copy of an old newspaper clipping Louis McGowan passed along to me some time ago. It is dated November 27, 1898 and concerns the Job Smith Homestead, which was located in the Manton area of town. Part of the article mentions an old cemetery in the general vicinity. "Near the house, perhaps three or four hundred yadrds to the south, is the remnant of a very ancient burial ground... Like so many old family burial grounds in Rhode Island this one receives no care; no one ever gives it a moment's attention... Today the little burial ground is a sorry spectacle, so reduced and poverty stricken has it become. Weeds grow all around in abundance - decay has set in... In every town in the State there are similar abodes of the dead. Some day it is possible efforts may be made to rescue them from complete oblivion, if for no other reason that of preserving historical landmarks ought to suffice."

One hundred years later, 1997, people are doing something. There is sometimes the perception that things were better in days gone by, but the people who cleaned our cemeteries these past two years have shown that our generation can stand tall. We have carried out a community service that was only hoped for 100 years ago. As far as I know, no other town or group in the State is presently involved in a similar program. The people involved in the cemetery clean-up sholuld feel quite proud of themselves for their efforts and accomplishments. They have honored themselves as well as the people buried in the cemeteries they cleaned.

(continued on back page)

NOTE: The cemetery mentioned in the story was ancient and held many very old stones of importance. It is no longer in existence.

HAVE YOU SENT IN YOUR 1997 DUES YET? IF NOT, PLEASE DO SO!

Our society needs your help. We are hoping for big things to come.

If you have not attended any meetings of the Society, why not attend one in the near future. We meet the last Wednesday of every month, except for July and August

**JOHNSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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