

Johnston Historical Society

Historical Notes

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New JHS Member from Texas Remembers Thornton

by Eunice Brooke (Allison) Herrington

Edited by Louis McGowan

Eunice Brooke (Allison) Herrington, who grew up in Thornton, has just joined our historical society. She lives and works in Texas, though, so she will not make many meetings. I have had a lot of fun e-mailing her back and forth because we lived in Thornton at the same time and are only a year apart in age. She lived with her family on Pocasset Street in the second mill house in from Plainfield Street.

We are printing sections of her e-mails about her time in Thornton. Her words will be in quotation marks.

"I was born and raised in the village of Thornton. I attended kindergarten at the Simmonsville School ca. 1949-1950 and from there went to Thornton School for grades one through nine. Johnston did not have a high school back in those days so students were held until the ninth grade and then attended the high school of choice in Providence. My parents rented the first floor of George Tomlinson's house on the corner of School and Plainfield Streets, and then we moved into my grandparents' duplex at 58-60 Pocasset Street across the street from Mongony's Garage. Ours was the house between the Merolla's and the Cappelli's. Grandma Merolla taught me how to make the best meatballs ever, and I babysat for Joe and Evelyn Cappelli's four kids, Joe, Elizabeth, Karen and Raymond. Grandma Merolla grew the most beautiful hydrangeas on her side of the chain link fence, and my grandmother had roses on her side. Keeping a well-maintained yard and growing flowers was very important on our street. Father Kelly was the priest at St. Bridget's Church. I remember going to Mario and Ann Votolato's movie theater across from St. Rocco's Church back in the days when \$0.50 bought two full-length movies, a cartoon and a newsreel. In 1961, after the death of both grandparents, we moved to Exeter and later to North Kingstown.

"My birth name was Allison; my grandparents were Herbert and Martha Brooke/Tom and Besse Garvin, and my maternal great-grandmother was a Mathewson. Somewhere in my attic are trunks with old photographs including some of Graniteville School where my uncle Herbert Brooke, my Mom's younger brother, taught English and Latin. He died in 1989.

"Do you recall the cobbler in Thornton? I think the shop was on the first floor of Mario and Ann's building on Plainfield

Street. Back in those days, one did not just go to the store and buy new shoes. Shoes were repaired, re-soled, re-heeled, polished or new laces bought. A man named Sam was the cobbler who, along with his wife, ran the shop. I remember the wonderful smell of the leather and the various polishes and crèmes in the store." [The cobbler shop was Renaldi's, and it was located in the Myrtle Hall Building, which was owned by the Votolato family -- Ed.].



St. Brigid's Catholic Church, 1231 Plainfield Street, was built in 1914 and became a parish in 1915. Photo by Christopher Martin.

"Heck, as kids, we had to be imaginative and creative. I remember spending hours playing hop-sotch, and this required only a piece of chalk and a stone. Jump rope! How low tech is that, and when we were fortunate enough to have two lengths of rope, we did double jump rope. The big deal was when someone received a plastic bag full of jacks and a small rubber ball -- an entire afternoon was spent playing 'jacks.' A rope and an old tire made a swing. Remember the 'fried doughboys' at St. Rocco's carnival and festival? What a time that was!

"I remember my grandfather, Herb Brooke, Sr., talking about the 'old days' when horse-drawn wagons would bring the cotton to the loading dock [of the Pocasset Mill]. There was also a person who worked in the mill whose job it was to clean up the horse poop from the street and mill yard. My grandfather, who supervised the shipping/receiving department, would hire Italian immigrants who came to Thornton because they had family or friends here. Back in that time, people tended to settle

among their own kind. My grandfather would hire a newly arrived Italian to work where bull-labor was all that was necessary -- loading and unloading the raw cotton or wool. Speaking English was not a requirement -- just the sweat of hard labor. As the immigrant became conversant in English, my grandfather would find out that in the old country the person may have been a carpenter, brick-layer, landscaper and through a network of Thornton people, would find a position for the person in their own trade. Exit one bricklayer, enter one new immigrant.

"My grandfather wore a shirt and tie to work every day. As a very young child, I remember sitting on his lap as he prepared the weekly pay envelopes. No one used checks in those days, and the paymaster (my grandfather) hand calculated the amount of each worker's weekly pay, recorded it in huge ledgers and then counted out the cash delivered by the mill guard. He then put the cash into small manila envelopes, wrote the name of the worker and the date on the envelope, licked and sealed it. Come payday, a Johnston police officer would escort my grandfather and his satchel full of money to the mill for disbursement to the workers.



Hipses Rock, also known as Indian Rock, was a landmark on the original 1638 Providence purchase agreement between Roger Williams and the Narragansett Indians. Photo by Christopher Martin.

"A bit of a historical note, if I may. Yorkshire, is in the north of England and is a heavily industrialized area. Back during the industrial revolution, many mills were built along the rivers and waterways... Some of the towns were: Batley, Hanging Heating, Dewsbury -- and most of the English immigrants to the Thornton mills were from this particular area: the Gearys, Brookes, Hartshorns, Harpers, Brandreths, Blamires, Holroyds, Stringfellows, etc. All were friends in the old country and many sponsored each other when they came to America. Some were even kin to each other.

"He (Percy Brooke) was married and had four children -- again from the Western Yorkshire region of England -- and was an assistant engineer in the mill... Percy sponsored my great grandmother, her three Brooke kids and her last child, Tom Peace, for entry into the United States. [*Percy Brook was one of the incorporators of the Thornton Volunteer Fire Company, when it was incorporated on August 19, 1914. He was chief of the fire company in the 1920s -- Ed.*].

"My uncle Herb Brooke (aka Pop) graduated from Rhode Island College, then known as Rhode Island College of Education. He later went on to Officers Candidate School at Notre Dame and after returning from World War II, he became a teacher at Graniteville School.

"Mrs. Blamires [*the family lived at the last house near the river on Pocasset Street in the Pocasset Mill village -- Ed.*], in my mother's age group, was born in the same town in England as my grandparents -- as were many of the English/Irish immigrants who came to work in the mills. Many of the Irish first immigrated to various towns in the Yorkshire area for jobs in the mills there before coming to America with the rest of the skilled workers.

"Rosie's Diner (on Plainfield Street): One could hardly get near the place on Friday afternoons. Fridays were fish and chip days and everyone in the village ordered from Rosie's. Rosie worked a couple of frying vats with the only relief being a couple of fans. Every Friday my mother would phone in an order for my extended family, and I would walk to Rosie's to pick up and pay for Friday dinner. To this day, I've never eaten better fish and chips than Rosie made. As I handed her the money, she would reach across the counter and pinch my cheek. How I hated getting my cheek pinched! The fish and chips were wrapped in old newspaper and packed in a paper sack -- to be eaten with malt vinegar on the fish and ketchup on the chips. Rosie also fed the wonderful men who made up the Thornton Volunteer Fire Department -- all of whom were friends and neighbors of ours. She was still in business when my family left.

"The Indian Rock: A major place to hang out and play. While the caves didn't go anywhere, it was still fun to climb in them. I had no idea of the significance of the rock until I read your article. There was also an older man who lived close by who was indigenous [*This was without a doubt one of the Onsleys, Native Americans, who lived nearby on Morgan Avenue -- Ed.*]. I remember him as being a very nice man. Near the rock was a spring -- we called it the 'piss pot.' It wasn't very large; nor was it very deep, but come winter, we'd ice skate on the frozen water -- an area maybe 100 square feet. We'd also build fires to both stay warm and to toast marshmallows. Because the water was only knee deep, it was the safest place around to skate -- the girls would have figure skates; the boys, hockey skates -- and the boys would run off the girls if a hockey game was scheduled.

"The Ghost House: My remembrance of this is based on village rumor -- true or not. Two sisters lived in the house. [*She refers to the first house in on the right as you enter Morgan Avenue from Plainfield Street -- Ed.*]. Both were prostitutes and rumor had it they hastened the death of their father because he objected to their means of making a living. They ended up inheriting the place and there were strange things that went on there after the father's demise. The running water was one; another was the house would literally shake while other places nearby did not. Back around 1955 or so, the newspaper (either the *Providence Journal* or the *Evening Bulletin* -- we had a morning and an evening paper back in those days) did a story on the house. The article must be on microfilm somewhere in a library.

"The Egg Lady: I have no idea what her name was but twice a week, she delivered eggs from her farm and once a month came by to be paid. Her husband also sold chicken manure to anyone who had a garden, especially vegetables. We grew the best

tomatoes and roses ever and it was all due to the manure from the chicken farm.

"The Pig Farmers: the original recyclers. Have you thought about how much recycling the village actually did before anyone coined the term? Like most everyone else, we had a burn barrel in the back yard for paper trash. Cans and bottles were flung over the Pocasset River to what was actually the Cranston City Dump. Garbage, however, went to the pig farmer who made periodic visits.

"The Rag Lady: Again, do not recall her name, but she came from time to time for worn-out cleaning rags -- later I found out that she used the rags to make braided rugs. Again, the recycle thing.

"Mongony's Garage: We had the cars serviced here rather than at Bud Mullins which was farther away. Mongony's had the contract to service the town police cars along with some of the State Police Cars. Mr. Holroyd, who ran the Thornton Post Office, had a son, Robert, who was nicknamed 'Shorty' because he grew to be 6'5". He became a State Trooper and was body guard to John Chafee when he was governor. Shorty was my godfather and a good friend of Uncle Herb's (Brooke). They went to the [Pocasset] Casino and were great fishing buddies. Mrs. Mongony and my grandmother were good friends. It was a treat for me to walk across the street with grandma to sit on Mrs. Mongony's front porch which was the only screened porch on the street -- a huge plus in mosquito season.

"Brigid's Church: Father Kelly was the St. Brigid's priest, and he and my grandfather got together in the evenings for a bit of brandy and a cigar. The church was built around 1915 for non-Italian mill workers -- the Italians went to St. Rocco's Church. The non-Latin part of Mass at St. Rocco's was in Italian; at St. Brigid's it was in English.

"Other Churches: I don't remember the Congregational Church [on the Cranston side of Plainfield Street, in back of what was Mainelli's Spa -- Ed.], but that would make sense. Between the English and Scots Reformation, a number of different interpretations of Protestantism took place. The "Free Church of Scotland" was fundamentally Presbyterian; however, Congregationalism was a less severe branch -- not as far into Calvin or Knox. A Congregational Church to serve the spiritual needs of some of the Scots/English/Irish makes perfect sense.

"Many of the English immigrants were Anglicans, hence the church there (Holy Nativity Church), but there were not enough of them to keep the church solvent, so it closed. Most of the congregants went to the Methodist Church in Olneyville.

"Thornton School: Mr. Rampone was the principal, Mrs. Muto the school nurse, Mr. Mendozzi my History/Civics teacher. Right next to the school was a candy store and for a nickel, one could walk out with a bag full of treats.

"Collins Drug Store: the best ever cherry Cokes and hot fudge sundaes -- two scoops of ice cream, hot chocolate sauce, whipped cream, nuts and a cherry on top. Across the street was Golini's which was more of a pharmacy.

"The Movie Theater: I wasn't allowed to go to the canteen on strict orders from my grandmother [Ed. -- *The SwingHaven Canteen which was held in Myrtle Hall*]. According to her, young ladies did not dance to the devil's music. I did get to go to the movies where \$0.50 would buy two feature-length movies, a cartoon and a news-reel with Mario and Ann policing the movie goers to make sure we all behaved. Otherwise, they would call our mothers -- a fate worse than death! Everyone in the neighborhood, it seemed, was calling someone's mother for one reason or another.

"Sledding: Pocasset Street was great for sledding during the winter. Once everyone was home from work and the cars parked, it was time to hit the hill. Some [kids] used sleds, some used trash can lids, others pieces of cardboard. What a ride down the hill it was -- except when we annoyed Mrs. Stringfellow -- a widow lady without any children who lived about half-way down the hill. When the noise became too much for her, she'd walk outside and sprinkle coal dust across the street which all but stopped our sleds mid-way down the hill. We'd then put snow from the side of the street to cover the dust. She would then get back out and throw more coal dust and the cycle went on and on. When the street lights came on, it was time for everyone to go home. Those lights were the village signal that it was time for bath and bed.

Editor: I was the Providence Journal-Bulletin paperboy for Eunice's street in the late 1950s and early 1960s. I asked her about the woman who collected stamps and had dozens of Scott Stamp Albums. I remember looking at the stamps with her. Eunice replied: "The older woman with the stamps, then, must have been my grandmother. She used to help me with my 'collection' -- but she and my grandpa were much more serious about stamps, and they had a vast collection. How excited I was when an overseas airmail letter arrived -- it was a big deal back in those days... While my grandparents may have been a bit better off than many, we were all working-class people and pinched pennies... Heck, as kids, we had to be imaginative and creative.

John Sweet House (c. 1746)

by Steve Merolla

The village of Belknap was the first town center of Johnston in the colonial period. It was centered along Greenville Avenue and the terminus of Atwood Avenue. Back in those days, Atwood Avenue as we know it today did not extend to Greenville Avenue, but Greenville Avenue was in fact one of the oldest roads in town, known then as the Killingly Road. Belknap still has many fine old houses and buildings standing today, including the house at 595 Greenville Avenue. This house has been wonderfully maintained and preserved for about the last nine years by Society members Mike and Liz Burch.

The house stands at what was the boundary between two great estates in the area. The Paine/Belknap estate totaled over 500 acres of land, extending westwards down Greenville Avenue and mostly on the north side of the road. The Manton estate was even larger. The present-day village of Manton was named

after this family, whose center of origin was the area of lower Greenville Avenue and Killingly Street. The western boundary of their holdings extended up Greenville Avenue into Belknap.



John Sweet House in 2007. Photo by Christopher Martin.

In 1723, Solomon Paine began acquiring land in Belknap from various landowners situated just west of the Manton holdings, eventually acquiring the aforementioned 500 or so acres. Paine built the house that once stood at the corner of Greenville Avenue and Pine Hill Avenue, where the first Town Meeting was held in 1759. Though Solomon Paine sold his house and farm to Godfrey Malbone of Newport on April 20, 1738, it is most likely that he continued living in the dwelling, leasing it from Malbone (Providence Deeds A 10/190). Malbone was one of the most prominent citizens of the seaport city, and it is highly unlikely that he ever lived in Johnston. In fact it was not uncommon for the wealthy to own more than one farm, leasing out the excess to a tenant. This appears to be confirmed by a deed executed about a year later, a deed that also happens to be the genesis of the story of the subject house.

On March 16, 1739, Paine purchased two small parcels of land from Edward Manton (P A 10/361), one lying on the north side of Greenville Avenue and the other on the south side of the road. The deed is interesting for a couple of reasons. It states that both tracts of land lay to the south and east of "...the now dwelling house of the said Solomon Paine...", meaning almost undoubtedly that Paine was still living in the house he had sold to Malbone a year earlier (595 Greenville Avenue is in fact just east and south of where the Paine/Belknap house once stood). The other point of interest in the deed is that it does not mention that there was a dwelling house on the property conveyed from Manton to Paine. The total amount of land conveyed was around eight acres, but the most important parcel was the smaller, two-acre and 71-pole lot located on the north side of Greenville Avenue. It was on this parcel that the subject house would eventually be built. It would be logical to assume that Solomon Paine soon began building the house on this property after he purchased the lot. However, almost exactly a year later, on March 20, 1740, he bought five acres of land from Isaac Fox. Significantly, the deed indicates that this lot did in fact already have a house on it (P A 10/424). I think it unlikely that Paine would have bought a lot in 1739, build a house on it, and just after finishing that project buy a different house. Paine most likely was still living in his former house, leasing from Malbone, until he bought the house and property

from Isaac Fox in 1740. Paine now had to find a place to live, for on November 3, 1740, Malbone sold out to Benjamin Belknap of Northlake, Connecticut (P 11/5).

In the meantime, what happened to the small parcels of land that Paine had purchased of Edward Manton? On April 10, 1746, Paine sold the two parcels to John Sweet (P 14/275). Significantly, the deed never mentions the existence of a house on either parcel, further confirming that Paine did not build a house here. The person who almost certainly built the house was John Sweet, and he probably commenced construction soon after purchase of the lot. Deed P 14/277 confirms that a house was soon built. In this deed, executed on November 13, 1751, Edward Manton sold a parcel of land to John Sweet: "...a certain tract of land... containing three acres and four poles of land... adjoining to the northwardly side of the road, called Killingly Road, and from thence a few poles east from said Sweet's house wherein he now dwells... adjoining on the Grantees land..." This parcel of land adjoined to the eastern side of the land that Sweet had purchased from Paine in 1746, and deed P 14/277 confirms that there was now a house on the "1746 parcel." Thus, the evidence indicates that John Sweet built the house at 595 Greenville Avenue sometime between 1746 and 1751. I feel that John Sweet built the house soon after purchase in 1746.

Sweet lived in the house for about eleven years. On January 12, 1757, he sold it and approximately twelve acres of land to Barzillai Fisher of Preston, Connecticut (P 15/173&174). Sweet stayed in the village, purchasing land nearby, where his family would live for many years. On September 3, 1762, Fisher sold out to Samuel Potter of Smithfield (Johnston Deeds 1/115); Potter added nine-and-a-half more acres on the north side of the road from Daniel Manton on January 11, 1765 (J 1/328). On April 16, 1767, Potter sold the house and eighteen acres of land to James Waterman (J 2/33), whose heirs subsequently sold the same to William Mathewson on April 1, 1773 (J 2/33). The deed from the Waterman heirs to Mathewson states that a Phillip Potter was living in the house at the time, another example of the practice of some families leasing out farms that they owned outside of their homesteads.

After William Mathewson purchased the house in 1773, it would end up remaining in the hands of the Mathewson family for nearly 200 years. According to family lore, William continued to live in the house even after he purchased the larger two-and-a-half story house across the street at 544 Greenville Avenue in 1793 (the well-known Mathewson farm). After his death in 1796, his Will provided for his wife and nine children to stay in the gambrel house on the north side of the road, while his son Phillip took possession of the larger house to the south. William's grandson, Paris Mathewson, united the two houses and fifty acres into one entity in the last half of the nineteenth century. The house and lot at 595 Greenville Avenue would remain in Mathewson hands for many more years afterwards, until on October 14, 1968 William H. Mathewson III finally sold the house and a small lot to Edward and Nancy Hulatt (J 113/672). The Hulatts did a very fine job preserving the house for the thirty years they owned it. On March 27, 2002, they sold the circa 1746 gambrel to Mike and Liz Burch, who are the proud owners of this fine house.

Civil Defense in Johnston

by Louis McGowan

It may be hard for us to imagine but at one time Civil Defense sirens wailed in Johnston. We know of at least two sirens that were located in town during World War II. Herbie Newman had one on his house at the top of Pine Hill Avenue. In October of 2002, he gave the siren to our museum. It still works. He told me that the Providence Civil Defense Office would ring his house and he would then give a code name. The siren would then be sounded for test purposes.

Herbie told me that Chief of Police Chet Colwell also had an air raid siren at his house during the war. He lived off Greenville Avenue. There must have been other sirens placed strategically throughout the town. The air raid siren testing stopped at the end of the war.

Blanche and Alice Atwood, Johnston Teachers

by Louis McGowan

On November 9, 1998, I visited with Mabel Atwood Sprague. She talked about various things, including the teaching careers of her two sisters, Blanche and Alice. She told me that Blanche taught four years at Graniteville School starting in 1932, one year at Calef School, and then taught at Thornton Junior High School from 1937 to 1944. Alice started teaching in Johnston in 1935 at Hughesdale School. She stayed there teaching in the third, fourth and fifth grades until the school closed in 1946. From there she went to the Williams School, where she taught until 1949. Leaving Williams School, she moved to Simmonsville, where she taught three or four years until 1953 or 1954. She then spent one year at Thornton, two years at Winsor Hills, another year at Thornton, one year at Barnes, more time at Thornton, more at Winsor Hills and then back to Barnes where she was teaching when she died in 1967. Alice taught for a total of thirty-two years, all in Johnston.

Quarrying Rock on Morgan Avenue

by Louis McGowan

In the late 1990s, I spoke with Betty and Paul Russo in the course of putting together our Images of America Book, *Johnston II*. They told me that Labra Russo, Paul's grandfather, for years blasted out rock on the west side of Atwood Avenue from Morgan Avenue down towards Thornton. He sold the rock to builders to use for house foundations. The mill house foundations at the Cranston Print Works are built from rock that he quarried. He had a work crew and thirty tip carts, each with one horse pulling them. Labra also did farming and cut and sold wood on Scituate and Simmonsville Avenues. The work was done on his own property.

The Russo farm is on the north side of Morgan Avenue on the west side of the Pocasset River.

Society Doings

Financial Report for Our November 2010 Tea

Expenses:	Food & Paper Items		-\$249
	Smith-Appleby rental		-\$100
	Total		-\$349
Income:	Ticket Sales	\$25 x 20	\$500
	Raffle	\$121	\$121
	Silent Auction	\$100	\$100
	Total		\$721
Profit:			\$372

Neutaconkanut Hill Hike

On November 20, 2010, eight members of our historical society joined Elli Panichas and Mike Lusi of the Neutaconkanut Hill Conservancy for a two hour walk on the hill. Elli and her group have done a great job bringing back many of the trails and vistas on the hill and have added many hiker-friendly features such as benches and steps. The hill, which was formerly all in Johnston and today is shared by both Providence and Johnston, was for many years a favorite recreation spot. The level area of the park has remained heavily used for sports, but the hill area was allowed to go back to nature pretty much. The conservancy group with much outside help, especially from Providence College students, has done much to make the hill area once again a wonderful place to hike and observe nature.

We commend the conservancy, under Elli's leadership, for doing a wonderful job. If you have some time and would like to visit a still wild place, why not visit Neutaconkanut Hill, one of Providence's treasures!

Holiday Open House

On Friday, December 10, 2010, we held our annual holiday open house at our properties on Putnam Pike. About forty members, guests and other visitors attended the joyous event. The house looked great thanks to decorating done by Bel McGowan and Alice Lombari. Alice was good enough to bring over a lot of decorative items from her house, which added a nice personal touch to the rooms. Bel also decorated the barn, and many of our members brought delicious desserts for us to snack on. Anthony Ricci kindly donated a couple of MP3 players for a raffle. The money raised covered most of the cost of the event.

Thanks to all who attended, helped out, and/or donated items. It was a fun time.

Our Properties

Clean-up at Elijah Angell House

On November 13, 2010, nine historical society members gathered to clean the yard at our headquarters. Dan Brown used his leaf vacuum which greatly cut down on raking. Doug Stephens, Elise and Eric Carlson, Pat Macari, Bel McGowan, Steve Merolla, Louis McGowan and Joe Jamroz all worked very hard raking and bagging more than fifty bags of leaves. It was the most thorough cleaning job here that I can remember. We finished all the grass area, raked the beds and even mowed the grass. Thanks to all!

Belknap School Placed on National Register

On January 13, 2011, Louis McGowan received an e-mail from Sarah Zurier of the Rhode Island Historical Heritage and Preservation Commission notifying us that the Belknap School has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. This indicates that the State of Rhode Island and the Federal Government recognize that the school is significant for its historic and architectural value to the town, the state and the country. Our little school is the last one-room school left in town that is still recognizable as a school. Other one-room schools exist, but all have been severely altered. The Belknap School, opened in 1893, served as the village school into the early 1940s. It then served as a community center, an American Legion Post, and was finally deeded over to us. We restored the exterior of the building thanks to a Champlin Foundations Grant and restored the interior with a State Preservation Grant. This winter we will start the ball rolling toward setting up a program whereby we will bring in town schoolchildren to learn about schooling in the old days before video games and iPods. If you are interested in getting involved with this program, please let us know.

The JHS museum barn is open on the third Sunday of every month from 2 to 4pm. The museum is also open every Monday evening from 6:30 to 8:30pm, and 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 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.

Cemetery Committee Report

by Steve Merolla

After the Thanksgiving holiday, the Cemetery Committee was able to make it into the field two more times before the winter weather set in. Our target was Cemetery #33, the Reuben Mathewson Lot, located on Simmonsville Avenue at the large bend in the road as you crest the hill coming up from Atwood Avenue.



Cemetery #33 in 2008 (left) and 2011 (right). The site has been cleared a number of times over the years, but this past winter was the first time anyone made a serious effort to restore the broken and tilted stones. *Photo by Christopher Martin.*

James Mathewson first came to the area by the early 1700s, amassing an estate of over 200 acres. He and his heirs are buried here, including his son, Reuben Mathewson, who owned a textile mill located further down Simmonsville Avenue. The

cemetery itself is shaped like a rectangle and extends back from the road about 150 feet; it is enclosed by a fine stone wall. There are eighteen marked, or inscribed stones, but these are far outnumbered by about forty more crude, unmarked fieldstone markers which occupy about two thirds of the cemetery. As for the marked stones, the Committee repaired two headstones and two foot stones. In addition, three children's stones were reset in the ground.

An interesting feature to this cemetery is that most of the marble stones are set directly into the ground, slipping through so-called "pass through" bases. A standard base for a marble stone usually consists of a block of stone with a channel or key way chiseled into it. The headstone or foot stone is then mortared into this key way, which is like a trough; the stone thus sits mortared into the solid stone base. In the "pass through" base, a slot is cut all the way through the base, almost like a rectangular donut or a collar. The headstone then passes through the slot and then into the ground. The thinking behind the usefulness of this type of base is unknown; it provided very little support for the stone itself. As a result, most of the marble stones in this cemetery had sunk more deeply into the ground than originally intended, and in most cases they also tipped at an angle. The crew thus had to spend much time and effort raising and straightening these stones.

Example of one of the unusual "pass through" bases at Cemetery #33.

Photo by Christopher Martin.



As a result of the severe winter weather this year we were only able to make the two trips to this cemetery, the last visit being December 5. We will likely make one more visit here in order to do a little more clearing of brush and small trees. If we can get a large group together, it may be possible to one day clear up to the back wall, where most of the crude markers are located. Once again, thanks to Committee members Pat Macari, Anthony Ricci, Tim Kee, Doug Stephens, Anthony Ursillo, Billy Rotondo, and Steve Merolla.

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 the Johnston Historical Society at (401) 231-3380 or info@johnstonhistorical.org, or Steve Merolla at (401) 944-3412.

Speakers

Our November speaker (the meeting was actually held on December 1, 2010) was Tom D'Agostino. He is a student of the paranormal, which is a very popular topic these days. Over

thirty people attended his presentation, which included a look at techniques for finding and contacting the spirit world and also a look at some of the more famous ghost and vampire sightings from the past around the local area.

In January 2011, for the first time in years, we cancelled a monthly meeting. A forecast of snow, on top of the snow and ice that was already on the ground, forced us to decide on safety first for our members.

At our February meeting, Dan Brown entertained our group with another of his Presidential trivia nights. The group was pretty sharp in coming up with the answers, but Dan stumped everyone with a few questions.

Acquisitions

- In November 2010 Louis McGowan purchased at an antique store: an enameled ladle for the Belknap School and a Byers Choice figure of Shang Bailey that was originally made up for and sold exclusively at Anthony Ursillo's Log Gift Shop (which was Shang Bailey's Roadhouse way back).
- In December 2010 Louis purchased five nineteenth century photographs online of Johnston residents (Wade, Walch, Harris and Fenner families). He also purchased a turn-of-the-twentieth century framed photograph of a Johnston volunteer fire company meet. It shows an ancient hand pump apparatus as well as members of the Graniteville and Manton Volunteer Fire Groups.
- In January 2011 Louis and Bel purchased a flat sad iron (used for sleeves). It is one of the heavy, non-electric types used in the nineteenth century. In February, Louis and Bel purchased another type of early iron, probably one used for pleats. Louis also bought a number of matchbook covers online.

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

Wish List

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

- A small cube refrigerator
- Display mannequins
- Any Johnston-related memorabilia

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.

March 30, 2011

General Meeting

7pm

Raymond A. Wolf, author of *Lost Villages of Scituate* and *The Scituate Reservoir* will be our speaker.

April 9, 2011

The 2nd Great Johnston Scavenger Hunt -- rescheduled from August 11:30am-5pm

Elijah Angell House, 101 Putnam Pike. Think you know Johnston well? Test your knowledge against that of other teams and individuals in the second annual town-wide scavenger hunt! Use digital cameras and cell phones to capture images of items from our extensive list of common and not-so-common objects. Prizes will be awarded and refreshments will be served. \$8 donation per team, payable on day of the event. Rain date: April 10. Call (401) 943-6961 or email cscm@toast.net for more information.

April 27, 2011

General Meeting

7pm

Glenn Laxton, co-author of *Rhode Island: A Genial History* and author of *Hidden History of Rhode Island* will be our speaker.

May 25, 2011

General Meeting

7pm

Society president Louis McGowan will give a presentation on "Treasures from our Archives." (Rescheduled from January).

June 29, 2011

General Meeting

7pm

Bill Sgambato, second-generation owner of Yacht Club Soda, will talk to us about the history of his company.

July-August 2011

Summer meeting hiatus.

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 info@johnstonhistorical.org or leave a message at (401) 231-3380.



We now have our own Facebook page! To find us type this ridiculously long address into your computer browser:

www.facebook.com/pages/Johnston-Historical-Society/118275668189114

...or, go to www.facebook.com and search on "Johnston Historical Society"

...or, go to www.johnstonhistorical.org and find the Facebook link at the bottom of the About Us page.

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: July 15, 2011.

Our Executive Board

President: Louis McGowan
Vice-President: Dan Brown
Treasurer: Joe Jamroz
Recording Secretary: Evelyn Beaumier
Corresponding Secretary: Christopher Martin
Trustee: Bel McGowan
Trustee: Rolf Johnson
Trustee: John Barattini
Trustee: Kit Rhodes

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
Our email address is: Info@JohnstonHistorical.org

Annual Dues

Have you paid your 2011 dues yet? It's 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 2010 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**