

# Johnston Historical Society

## Historical Notes

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Christopher Martin, Editor Louis McGowan, Assistant

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### John Viall Returns Home to Johnston

by Steve Merolla

In the last newsletter, the military exploits of John Viall were recounted. At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War in 1776, he immediately volunteered to serve in the Rhode Island militia in the campaign to besiege the British troops occupying Boston. While there, he volunteered to serve in the Continental Navy aboard the public armed brig *Washington*; the ship was soon captured and he along with other crew members were transported to England. Viall and his shipmates were subsequently impressed into the Royal Navy. When his vessel sailed to America, he took the opportunity to jump ship in New York and he returned to Rhode Island. He then volunteered to serve in the R.I. Continental Line regiment and participated in the New Jersey campaign of 1777. His unit moved north and fought in the battle of Rhode Island in August 1778; during the Continental Army's retreat, Viall was again captured by the British, while part of a rear-guard, and he had to spend a couple of months aboard a prison ship in Newport harbor before he was exchanged. He left the service at that time because of ill health, but subsequently chose to serve aboard privateers raiding British commerce. In 1780, while serving aboard the sloop *Revenge*, his ship captured a British sloop; Viall was sent aboard as prize master and sailed the vessel back to Providence.

Once again, as noted in the first article: the proper spelling of the family name is Viall, as is inscribed on John Viall's gravestone, but almost all the public documents concerning him in Johnston spell the name "Viol." When quoting documents, the name will be spelled as is, thus usually Viol.

This article deals with John Viall's life after he returned from his war service. His pension records state that he was born in Johnston on May 12, 1756. Other than that there is virtually no information to be found concerning either him or his family. In his case this is perhaps not surprising, for before the war he would have been a bit too young to have been a landowner and was not yet considered a "freeman." What is notable is that there really is no mention in the town records of his family, perhaps indicating that they were of modest means and not landowners in the town; back then land ownership meant everything and lack of it meant near anonymity. The Viall name was not at all common in Johnston, and was usually associated with the East Bay communities. How and why they ended up in Johnston is unknown.

It was only toward the end of the war that John Viall appears in the official records of the town of Johnston. The very first mention of him is rather surprising in its subject. Deed Book 2, page 655 states: *"Know all Men by these presents that I John Viol of Johnston... Mariner, Do hereby freely manumit, Set free & liberate my Negro man Servant called Bridget of the age of about 17 years from all Bondage & Slavery whatsoever from this April 23, 1781, and I request all persons whom it may concern to permit & suffer the said Bridget to go and pass anywhere after said time as a free man without molestation, he behaving orderly & without breach of Law."* How a man of such modest means,

not yet a landowner, could come to own a slave is anyone's guess. I would surmise that it had to do with his military service; perhaps while serving aboard the privateers he had acquired Bridget as a cabin boy. It is also of note that Viall is referred to as a "Mariner," or seaman.

The next notice of Viall was at a Town Council Meeting of June 1781: *"...Lt. John Viol be and is hereby appointed and directed to enlist the Town's proportion of soldiers to do duty for one month within the state..."* Soon after, at the August 28, 1781, Town Meeting, John Viall was voted a "freeman" of the town, meaning he was a full-fledged member of the community, with the right to vote.



John Viall House, 69 Morgan Avenue. Photo by Christopher Martin.

On May 9, 1782, Viall made a big move in his life, purchasing a small parcel of land on the north side of the Plainfield Turnpike from Edward Fenner for £18 silver money (J 2/142). At a Town Council Meeting a few months later, August 3, 1782, we learn why he bought the parcel: *"Resolved that John Viol have License to keep a Public Tavern in the house that he is now building, from this time until the 29th day of September next, paying the sum of 1 Shilling & 6 pence..."* (Town Council 1/154). Within the year, the house was finished, for at a Town Council Meeting of September 29, 1783, it is noted: *"Resolved that John Viol have License to keep a Public tavern in the House where he now dwells..."* (Town Council 1/178). It was not rare that citizens sold spirits to the public from within their dwellings; it was a practice that was carried on by a small percentage of the townspeople, but was not their primary source of income. However, the fact that Viall requested a license even before his house was built may indicate that he did not have a particularly strong earning potential. He was a mariner, but if he was not willing to go to sea anymore or learn another trade, his earning prospects would have been limited. Also remember that he did not own a large tract of land that would have allowed him to raise a big herd of livestock.

The house he built on its small lot was almost certainly located on the north side of Plainfield Street, somewhere between the former 1025 Club and the King estate of Neutaconkanut Park, just after the great bend in the above road. On December 17, 1783, he sold a small section of his house lot to Thomas Dyer of Cranston for £10-16s silver (J 2/153). The significance of this deed is that it is co-signed by Lydia Viall, wife of John Viall. She was the daughter of David and Mary Brown and grew up in the house that still stands today at 69 Morgan Avenue; this house is located on the north side of the forks of the road where Morgan meets School Street. It is not known for sure when they wed, but it may have been in late 1780 or early 1781 (based on the birth date of their first child). On May 2, 1794, Viall sold off another small piece of the home lot, this time to Labin Lewis, "schoolmaster," and Olney Goff; this particular lot only measured "38 feet wide on both ends and 100 feet wide on both sides" (J 2/234), and cost £6-15s. The sell-off of small portions of what was already originally described as a small lot is rather puzzling, but again may point to the chronic financial problems Viall seemed to have his entire life.



Google Map view of John Viall's Morgan Avenue House.

John and Lydia Viall had four children, and all of them would have been born in the above house: David (born December 6, 1781), Sarah (born July 22, 1788), Mary Ann (born March 29, 1791), and John Brown Viall (born July 19, 1793). John and Lydia finally did sell off the rest of the lot and the house that he had built some twenty-two years earlier. On February 1, 1804, the Vialls sold to Reuben Thornton for \$540: "A certain lot ...containing by estimation about 98 square rods [about 1,600 square feet] ...together with the Dwelling house, fruit trees, fencing, and all other buildings..." (J 2/378).

Where to now? The answer comes a few years earlier. David Brown, the father of Lydia Viall, died on December 23, 1801. His estate consisted of a fairly good size dwelling house along with about twenty-four acres of land on the north side of Morgan Avenue, and about twenty acres on the south side. There was controversy with the Will that was presented to the Probate Court by the widow, Mary Brown. The other heirs, Lydia Brown Viall, her son David, and husband John, objected and petitioned that the Will be disproved. And that is exactly what happened. At a Court of Probate held on January 12, 1802, it was in part stated: "...This Court taking into consideration the Sircumstances of the Family... with material disadvantages to the heirs & that it is also the Opinion of the Neighbors and all present that it would be much to the advantage of the persons concerned to have their request granted... it is decreed by this court that the said Paper be set aside and disproved." At a Court of Probate held a year later, on January 8, 1803, a Mr. Jeremiah Jenkins, Church Warden of St. John's Church, Providence, appealed the decision to void the Will; is it possible that the church was left part of the estate? It is notable that in addition to a "large old bible,' Brown's personal

effects also included five "Church Common Prayer Books" and six "Old Books on Divinity." However, the Court rejected his appeal and Lydia Viall was declared the only heir; she and John received all the real estate and the remaining \$515 in cash left over after expenses. I am assuming that the widow Mary Brown may have been deceased at this point, for I know of no other reason she would not have been named as one of the heirs.

Thus, John and Lydia Viall and their family now moved into the David Brown house and estate. This is proven by a mortgage deed taken out by them with James Aborn of Providence on February 27, 1806, in the amount of \$525: "One certain lot... and is the northerly part of the Homestead Lot or farm whereon the Grantors now dwell and adjoining the land where the house stands... and contains the just quantity of 16 acres..." (J 2/433). It should be noted that this mortgage deed did not include the house or all the land, just sixteen acres of the approximately twenty-four acres on the north side of Morgan Avenue. This mortgage was a harbinger of things to come and indicates some financial problems. The above mortgage was repaid on May 12, 1806, and immediately, on the same day (for \$600), the same parcel was re-mortgaged, again to James Aborn. This mortgage deed again excluded the house and its lot, but also leaves out: "...the burying ground on said tract, including 1/4 acre of land which the present graves are to be in the center..." (J 2/442). It is to be assumed that some of the Browns and Vialls were interred in this cemetery. This mortgage was discharged on September 27, 1810. The next transaction indicates how the Vialls paid off this mortgage and further points to financial woes. On September 22, 1810, they leased out their farm to neighbor Christopher Harris, for the amount of \$910, which was already paid to them. The lease was to run for a term of seven years, from April 1, 1811, to April 1, 1818: "...have leased & farm let to him the said Christopher Harris... all the homestead farm of John & Lydia... whereon the said John & Lydia Viol now live and is the same whereon the late David Brown lately lived..." (J 4/89). Unfortunately, there is no record of whether this lease ran its full course or was cut short. It would seem from this document that the Vialls had to vacate their house and homestead, and this is confirmed by a Town Council Meeting of June 24, 1811. The house in question was located at a fork in two important roads in town, the Plainfield Turnpike (part of Morgan Avenue and School Street) and the Scituate Road (the part of Morgan Avenue west of the house). The house at 69 Morgan Avenue was almost always designated as a starting or ending point for the area's highway district. For almost forty years the records indicate this house as belonging to David Brown; in 1801, the house is mentioned as belonging to John Viall, and in June of 1811, the house at the forks in the roads is occupied by Christopher Harris. This means that the Vialls had to vacate the premises, but where did they go? The answer seems to be that the family moved to North Providence. On April 29, 1811, just a couple of weeks after the lease on his house began, John Viall purchased from Oliver Williams (also of Johnston) property in that neighboring town of North Providence.

All in all, this was a very tough time for the Viall family, for not only was the family uprooted, but there was also tragedy. Their two daughters died within a week of each other, Sarah on June 8, 1811 (at age 23), and Mary Ann on June 17, 1811 (at age 20). Sarah was still basically a newlywed, having married Russell Fenner of Cranston on April 13, 1809. Their daughter Emeline B. Fenner was born on March 24, 1811, just a few months before her mother's death.

A deed transaction of March 9, 1814, is vitally important to the story of the Vialls. On that day, "Lydia Brown, late wife of John Viol," gave to her son John B. Viall "...for love & good will... one certain piece of land on the north side of the road leading from Providence to Plainfield, with the dwelling house thereon... and is all the land I own on the north side of the road except that which was mortgaged to James Aborn & excepting the burial ground; also three lots on the south side of the road..." (J 5/255). It seems that the Vialls must have at least at this point dissolved their marriage, for the deed refers to Lydia Brown, not Lydia

Viall, and also states that she was the "late wife of John Viol." This clue led to court records (ably supplied by Andrew Smith of the Judicial Records Center), and sure enough, the Vialls did in fact end their marriage. At the State Supreme Court March Term 1813, it was recorded that Lydia Viall made petition of divorce against John Viall, but the petition was not granted. She tried again at the September Term, 1813: *"Lydia Viol the wife of John Viol of Johnston, butcher, respectfully represents that about thirty years ago she intermarried with the said John under a hope of enjoying with him all the happiness arising from the marriage state - that in this respect she has been sadly disappointed - that she has faithfully & affectionately fulfilled all her engagements to the said John, and at all times sought to contribute to his wealth, his comfort & his happiness - that the chief & only reward for her attentions and sacrifices has been gross neglect and virulent abuse and a pursuit of such courses as seemed calculated with certainty to waste his estate, reduce himself & family to disgrace & ruin & make their situation comfortless and miserable - that he has neglected his wife & family, dissipated the property left her by her father, treated her with cruelty... refused to support your Petitioner & has thrown upon her the burden of supporting their family, and furthermore has been guilty of other gross misconduct & wickedness..."*

The gross misconduct referred in part to John Viall riding his horse up to Foster, R.I. on several occasions to meet up with a certain Sally Rowse. This woman, who was described as being of a "lewd" nature was living with the Herrenton family. It was testified that Viall, on at least a few occasions around July of 1812, met her at the Herrenton house, and had conversation with her. It seems that they would afterwards meet in the woods near the house, being careful not to enter at the same time, and that after about an hour, Sally would return to the house alone. One member of the Herrenton family stated that Viall claimed that he had left his wife at this point; Catherine Herrenton stated that she saw the two involved in "improper conduct" on a bed inside a bedroom of the house; furthermore, she testified that Sally admitted *"he has given her money and the reason why he gave it & for what."* I will not relate what was exactly seen in the bedroom, for it was quite scandalous.

The divorce was granted: *"...It is ordered and decreed by this Court that the Prayer of said Petitioner be granted that the bonds of matrimony subsisting between the said Lydia and her said husband be dissolved & annulled..."* Unfortunately, the date of this decree is missing, but it had to have been at least late 1813 or very early 1814. Apart from the seemingly certain case of infidelity, of equal import is the fact that John Viall either could not or would not support his family, and in fact led all into financial ruin, even putting in jeopardy the fine estate left by his father-in-law. All this makes one wonder if John Viall suffered from what we today would refer to as Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, the result of his war service; I believe it is a compelling case.

After the divorce from Lydia Brown, John Viall removed to North Providence, probably to the lot of land referred to earlier. When he was interviewed as part of his Revolutionary War pension application in April of 1818, he stated that he was a resident of North Providence. He made a declaration in 1820, that he was a resident of that same town, was 64 years old, and that he was a butcher (one of his last Johnston deeds also calls him a butcher). He further stated that his wife was 41 years of age (name not given), making her 23 years his junior, and that they had four children; Eliza (age 15), William (age 13), Anthony (age 8), and James Madison (age 6). The reading of his Will indicates that only James Madison Viall was his actual offspring. Viall does not appear in the 1820 Census, which indicates that he was living in someone else's household, but he is enumerated as head of household in the 1830 Census. In the article quoted in our previous newsletter, authors David Chacko and Alexander Kulcsar state (pg. 387) that by 1823 John Viall had become partially disabled by a stroke.

Viall drew up his Will on October 28, 1830, and it was witnessed by Barbary Anthony, George Read, and Samuel Ward King of Johnston

(who about ten years later would become Governor of Rhode Island). The Will stated that he was a resident of North Providence. Firstly, he left his daughter Mahitable Tyler Viall the lot of land he owned in the North Providence section of Olneyville. He left his wife Betsey Viall the rest of his real estate and his personal estate. After the remarriage or death of his wife, his son James Madison Viall was to receive the real estate assigned to her. In addition, he gave to daughter Mahitable \$100, and after the death or remarriage of his wife, all the household furniture. He did not forget the family from his first marriage, to Lydia Brown, but it may have been done in an insulting manner -- he left both to his eldest son John B. Viall and his grand daughter Emeline B. Fenner the amount of one dollar each. He nominated as sole executor *"my friend Samuel W. King of Johnston"*; however, King refused the assignment for some reason and William Sheldon of Providence was appointed in his stead. North Providence town records show that a Mahitable T. Viol married Albert C Allen on June 7, 1839; her gravestone indicates that she was born around 1822, and died August 27, 1869. As to the wife, her stated name was Betsey Viall; is it possible that a small error was made, and that she is the same person as the "lewd" Sally Rowse. Could "Sally" have been a nickname for "Betsey," or vice versa?

In any case, John Viall died at North Providence on December 18, 1831, at 75 years of age. Once again, with this person there is controversy and questions. Though he died in North Providence and his family lived in that town, he is buried in Johnston Historical Cemetery #21, the large Borden/King burial ground off Hartford Avenue. He has no direct family in this cemetery as far as is known, and the when, how, and why he ended up here is unknown for sure. The explanation may be that his friend and proposed executor, Governor Samuel Ward King, is also interred here, and allowed Viall to be buried in the King family cemetery for some reason. It is just another enigma surrounding this person.

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### ...of missing cemeteries by Steve Merolla

The members of the Cemetery Committee have long come to the realization that many burial grounds that once existed in the town are now long gone. Just in the above story concerning John Viall, I came across evidence of two more that are no longer in existence. When John and Lydia Viall mortgaged their farm in 1806, they excepted from the land being mortgaged *"...the burying ground on said tract, including 1/4 acre of land, which the present graves are to be in the center..."* (J 2/422). As read, this deed indicates that there were already burials here, and that the burial ground was of a decent size; the burials would have undoubtedly included Lydia's father and mother, David and Mary Brown. Neither James Arnold in the 1890s nor any other transcribers of Johnston cemeteries have ever made note of this burial ground, with one exception. On October 14, 1907, local historian Clarence I. Brown interviewed Israel K. Wilcox and his daughter. The Wilcox family had in fact purchased the Brown/Viall estate in 1833. The Wilcoxes remember a cemetery on the property, including several marked slate stones, along with many unmarked "crude" stones which they claim were those of local "colored" people and poorer residents of the district. They stated that there may in fact have been as many as thirty burials. Mr. Wilcox stated: *"There was a prospect that money in England was coming to the Vials and to prove relationship to the members of the Johnston branch, one of the would-be inheritors had the Vials reburied at some other cemetery, possibly North End...the fortune failed to materialize but the stones had been moved & of course remained in the new location..."* This is really a strange story and perhaps hard to believe. None of the Vialls that would have been buried in this cemetery are to be found in any other burial ground in the state, so if they were indeed moved, where are they? It is possible that like so many other cemeteries this one was swallowed up by development. In fact it is a rather unfortunate situation because not a lot is known about these

branches of the Brown and Viall families. We don't know the birth date of David Brown and we know neither the birth nor death dates of his wife Mary or his daughter Lydia Brown Viall. Lydia's four children would also have been buried here. If these gravestones were still in existence, they would have provided important, basic information about these people. It would perhaps prove useful for the Cemetery Committee to search the area to see if we could at least find the "crude" stones.



Google Map view of the area where John Viall's first house was located.

When trying to deduce where John Viall built his first house, I ran a deed chain from the point he bought the house lot in 1782, until the year 1880; the 1882 Hopkins map is the first that on a town-wide basis would actually show property lines of the various owners, thus one can determine exact property locations. A Pardon Davis in 1843 and 1844 purchased a part of the former Viall lot, along with much adjoining land, and this also included land on the south side of Plainfield Street (J 12/44 & 13/27). The dwelling house and main part of the twenty-six-acre Davis farm were on the south side of the road, in an area probably between the former 1025 Club auxiliary parking lot and LaFazia Auto Body (how's that for R.I. directions). The smaller lot on the north side of the road is where the Viall house would have been. On July 6, 1874, Lucy Davis and Seth Davis of Johnston and Abel and Jane Reynolds of Providence sold the former Pardon Davis farm to G. Walter Davis: "*All the real estate which Pardon Davis late of Johnston, deceased owned... on both sides of the Providence & Norwich Turnpike road... reserving the right to pass and re-pass to the burial ground...*" (J 29/126).

While there was obviously once a cemetery in that area in 1874, it is no longer there today, and was never recorded by James Arnold in the 1890s. A check of the Pocasset Cemetery records provides an answer as to what happened. As became somewhat common toward the close of the 19th century, it seems that many families began to bury their relatives in large formal cemeteries rather than in the small lots on the old farmstead. In addition, many times the bodies in the old farmstead plots were disinterred and then moved to the new family plot in the large cemetery, in this case Pocasset. Records at the cemetery state that Pardon Davis, along with John and Nathaniel Davis, were transferred from Johnston and interred in Pocasset on September 29, 1892. The person paying for the move was Lucy Davis, wife of Pardon. Pardon (1812-1863) and Lucy (1813-1901) have their names inscribed on a large granite stone, along with the names of six other family members, including sons Seth Davis (1837-1892) and G. Walter Davis (1839-1903). It is probable that the move to Pocasset and the erecting of the granite stone occurred at the time of Seth Davis' passing, for the year of his death and the removal of the three bodies from Johnston all occurred the same year, 1892.

## Johnston's Elder Abel Thornton

by Louis McGowan

Abel Thornton was born on the family farm on Hopkins Avenue on August 16, 1799. The house, labeled "Deac. Thornton Est" on the 1870 Beers map of the town, still stands along with the family cemetery out back. His father was a farmer and Abel received only the education that any child of a farming family would receive at that time. In Abel's autobiography, *The Life and Experience of Abel Thornton*, he tells us that he went to school summer and winter until he was 9 years old. After that he worked on the farm in the good weather, but went to school some every winter until his 18th year.

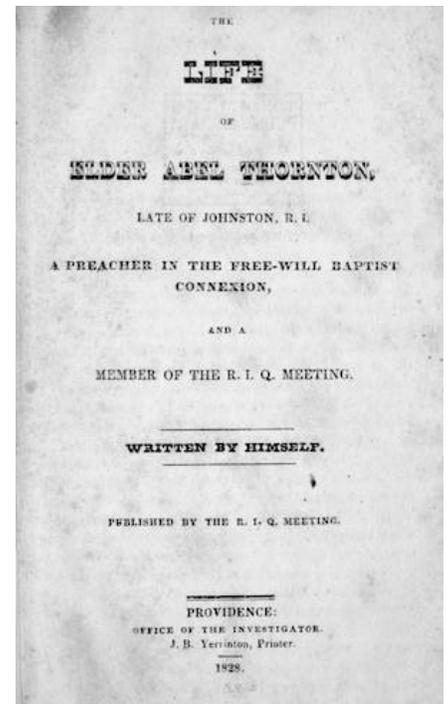
The youngest of five children, Abel writes that he had no special religious inclination in his teenage years. Rather, he wanted to be well-liked and did what any other child might do at the time. Around his 20th year, though, he started thinking about God and religion, topics that determined the rest of his short life.

He started attending Baptist meetings (i.e. services) in Johnston and neighboring towns. Even though he was not formally trained in religious matters (not unusual in those days for preachers), he appears to have had a gift for preaching. He traveled far and wide in New England and New York doing what he loved, preaching to various congregations. Sometimes, meetings were held in meeting houses and sometimes in people's houses. He details many of his appearances, including some in Johnston. On May 16, 1825, he preached at Benjamin Brown's house in Johnston. In 1826, he preached at the homes of A. Randall, Samuel Tefft and Olney Taylor.

He was affiliated with the Freewill Baptists all his life. He does mention that in April of 1820 he attended a meeting at the North Meeting House in Johnston. That would have been Samuel Winsor's Six Principle Baptist Meeting House in Belknap. Winsor was dead at that point, and the building was not used on a regular basis. Meetings were held there occasionally at least until 1825.

By 1826, though, it was apparent that the Elder Abel Thornton was seriously ill. He appears to have had Tuberculosis. He writes of his growing infirmity. On October 16, 1827, he passed away. His autobiography was published in 1828 by the Rhode Island Quarterly Meeting (Baptist).

(NOTE: the full text of this book can be found online. Most of the book is a description of his travels as a preacher, most of it outside our town.)



Cover page of *Life of Elder Abel Thornton*, from archive.org.

## In Memorium

### Mike Salvatore

Our society regrets the passing of one of our long-time members, Mike Salvatore, who died September 20, 2013. He was a frequent attendee of our monthly meetings who really seemed to enjoy the programs. Mike was a friend to many people in our group and he will be missed for his humor, friendly personality and his intelligence.

Of course, there was more to Mike than just his involvement in our group. He was a successful businessman, running a jewelry manufacturing business and a tool and findings company. He was involved in many social and community pursuits, including the Roger Williams Park Zoo, the Republican Party of Johnston, the Jewelry Institute of Rhode Island and the Narragansett Bay Commission. He was also an avid outdoorsman and an art collector.

We as a society owe a great debt of gratitude to Mike, because he helped us to raise some large sums of money, notably for the restoration of the interior of the Belknap School. I wanted to thank him publically for his efforts in this area, but he wanted to do it quietly and remain anonymous.

He was a great guy and will be missed by us, his family and his many friends.

## Society Doings

### Atkinson Family

Nancy (Atkinson) Sprague, daughter of Alan Atkinson, visited our museum on July 1, 2013. She brought us a few family papers as specified in our last newsletter. While she was here, she told me a few things about her family.

Alan Atkinson was indentured to the Joseph Benn & Son Mill in North Providence (the Greystone Mill), where he was taught to be a loom-fixer. After the mill closed in the 1930s, Alan went on to become a painter. He had no fear of heights and painted many tall structures, such as the steeple of Grace Church in Providence and the water tower at Quonset. Nancy's mother, Evaline Hollowell, was a weaver at the mill. Nancy's grandfather, William Atkinson, ran one of the departments at the mill.

Alan and his brother Fred married sisters. Fred's wife was Doris Hollowell. An additional Hollowell sister (there were five of them) is Sylvia Forrest, who wrote the book on the veterans from Graniteville.

### Florida Visitor to Belknap School

Barry Boulton, a resident of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, visited the Belknap School on July 15, 2013. His mother, Gertrude Kimball, taught at the Belknap School in the 1930s. He told me that when she got married she was asked to terminate her employment because only unmarried women could teach in town. Her pay was \$100 per month (\$900 for the year). She went on to teach in other school systems. Barry's grandfather was Hiram Kimball, Jr., who was the son of longtime police chief, Hiram Kimball, Sr. The two Hiram's were pretty much the whole town police department in the early twentieth century. Barry's uncle was Alfred Kimball, who for many years was a member of our historical society.

Mr. Boulton told me that his grandfather was the patriarch of the family, but when he died, Barry's mother took over as the matriarch of the family because she was a very strong person.

It was nice to have Mr. Boulton visit the school and see the place where his mother taught and the items that she used, such as the building keys and the original supply cabinet.

### Annual JHS Picnic

On Sunday, August 25, 2013, we held our annual picnic. It was a beautiful, sunny day, and thirty JHS members, family members and friends showed up to share some wonderful food and good company. Many thanks go out to Joe Jamroz, who helped big time in organizing and running the event, and to Elise Carlson, who picked up many of the items that we needed and also helped a lot the day of the picnic.

### Our Properties

On Sunday, November 9, 2013, society members Joe Jamroz, Anthony Ursillo, Rolf Johnson and Louis McGowan bagged almost forty bags of yard debris at our headquarters property. Shar DiMaio and Doug Stephens helped out prior to that day. A big thank you to all involved.

Through the efforts of Elise Carlson, we now have wi-fi and internet access in our museum barn. She also managed to negotiate a better price on our combined phone/internet package than we had had previously for just phone service. Thank you Elise!

The museum addition has come a long way over the past few months. Windows and doors are in, a pass-through was cut from the museum barn into the addition, and insulation and sheetrock are up. An antique door surround, salvaged by Steve Merolla a number of years ago from a circa 1795 Manton family house on Cherry Hill Road, has been installed on one wall, where it frames a shallow closet. (See "Eighteenth Century Door Surround" by Steve Merolla in our March 2009 newsletter for more info on the surround, the house, and the family.)

We'll be holding a dedication ceremony for the new space on April 26, 2014. Please see below under Upcoming Events for more information.

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 [info@johnstonhistorical.org](mailto:info@johnstonhistorical.org), or leave a message at (401) 231-3380 to set one up.

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

### Grant Activity

In the third week of November 2013, we received the exciting news that the Champlin Foundations has funded our 2013 grant request for the installation of a new boiler in the Elijah Angell House and for converting from oil to gas. This will save our society a lot of money this winter and in the future. A big thank you to the good people at the Champlin Foundations.

### Cemetery Committee Report

by Pasco Macari

The committee continued to work in cemetery #71, Sweet Yard, corner of Blueberry Lane and Pine Hill Avenue. This yard has not been vandalized, but head and foot stones have been moved to different locations within the cemetery. Using Arnold's inventory from the 1890s we were able to relocate more than a dozen head and foot stones back into their original locations. We also erected three granite head stones,

mortared one head stone, repaired one head stone, reset one head stone and a foot stone.

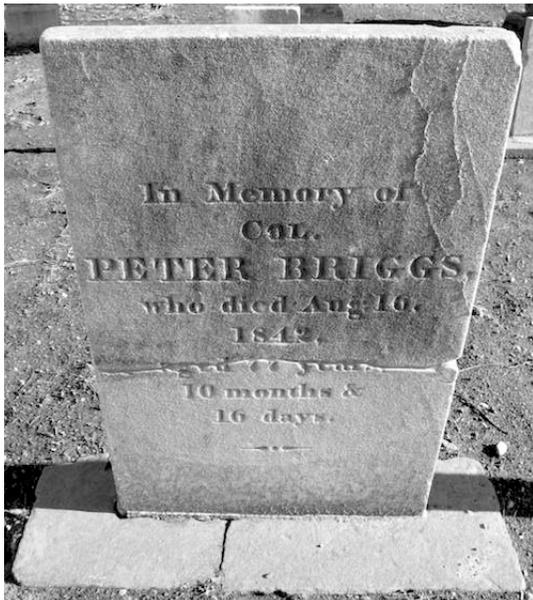
The last week of August we began work in the Smith Yard, #46, a small 25x25-foot yard located on Plainfield Pike on Joe Iannelli's property. Protected with granite posts and iron rails, there are five engraved and two rude burials. Joe has maintained the yard for many years; we appreciate his concern and dedication. We did a quick clean-up and cut the grass before repair work began. We repaired two marble head stones and reset them. We reset all five foot stones. One rude burial has a head and foot; the other is missing a foot.

Second week of September we began work in cemetery #19, Colonel Peter Briggs yard. This yard is located off Killingly Street but access is from Seville Road behind James Place. It's a small family yard about 40x30-feet with the west and south sides having a stone wall. The north and east sides have remains of granite posts and wooden rails. Today those two sides are bound by a garage and stockade fence.

Last year we were contacted by Ginger DeGregory who told us she had a connection with yard #19. She is a descendant of Colonel Peter Briggs, and plans to visit Johnston with her husband, Fred. They are residents of California. We met with Ginger and Fred and they visited the cemetery. I'm sure they were a bit disappointed in the condition of the yard, as it was so overgrown with trees and vines. I assured them the yard will be restored.

James Arnold's inventory indicates eleven burials including a large granite monument with five associated burials, three on the north side and two on the south side. This yard has been vandalized and head and foot stones thrown about -- some used as a walkway border. We found only two head stones standing but broken; no foot stones were standing.

We repaired and reset three head stones including that of Colonel Peter Briggs, and we made one cement base for the head of Henry O. Esterbrooks. All together we worked six weeks to restore this yard. Images of the restoration will be forwarded to Ginger.



Repaired stone of Colonel Peter Briggs. Photo by Christopher Martin.

Cemetery #36 is the Alverson Family yard. We began working here in late October. Located in the fenced-in property of FM Global off Downing Drive, originally Borden Avenue. This yard is protected on all sides by a stone wall and is about 70x40 feet. FM Global, on our request, cut trees and cleaned debris last year.

As in most cases we found this yard to be molested (stones moved from original locations) and vandalized. We began by comparing James Arnold's 1891 inventory with the condition in which we found the yard, which tells us we will be here for six to eight weeks. We repaired two large marble stones broken in half, and two medium marble stones broken in half. Reset three head stones, mortared one head stone.

In addition to prep work and repairs each week we continue to probe the ground for buried stones and bases. We'll also clean the yard of tree stumps and restore the stone wall boundary.

Many thanks to the recreation department grounds crew, highway department workers, Dan Mazzullo, and Arnie Vecchione, for the work they do -- grass cutting and debris pick-up.

The Cemetery Committee is Doug Stevens, Everett Cogswell, Shar DiMaio, Elise Carlson, Tim Kee, Anthony Ursillo, Bill Rotondo, Steve Merolla and Pasco Macari.

### Speakers

Author Ray Wolf returned with yet another Images of America book (he's a busy man!) at our September meeting, this time on the town of Coventry. His ability to dig up forgotten photos and lore is remarkable, and as always, the poems of his late mother added a personal touch to his presentation.

Our guest speaker for our October meeting was Deputy Secretary of State Paul Caranci. An overflow crowd turned up for his talk on John Gordon, the last person put to death by the State of Rhode Island. We all learned a lot about the role of prejudice in this obvious miscarriage of justice. We thank Mr. Caranci for his illuminating talk.

### Acquisitions

- Louis picked up a framed print of Abraham Lincoln for the Belknap School. There was one on the wall of the school when classes were held there, and now we also have one back in place.
- On August 26, 2013, James and Brenda Davey gave us an original three page history of the Belknap Chapel (1931), two copies of the pamphlet for the 1931 anniversary, and a newspaper article (1938) about the Belknap School. Mr. Davey's mother attended the school in the first decade of the twentieth century.

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!

### Wish List

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

- Display mannequins
- Any Johnston-related memorabilia

### Upcoming Events

#### December 4, 2013

General Meeting  
7pm

Christopher Martin will give a presentation on Providence: Then and Now, pairing historical images of Providence buildings and views with current ones. See how things have changed in the last 120 years, and in what ways they've stayed the same.

#### December 6, 2013

JHS Christmas Party  
6:30-8:30pm

Elijah Angell House and JHS Museum Barn will be open for a celebration of holiday cheer, and JHS members and their guests are invited for seasonal merrymaking. Please bring a desert or appetizer to share.

**January 29, 2014**

General Meeting

7p.m

Park ranger John McNiff from the Roger Williams National Memorial will tell us everything he knows about Roger Williams. Well, everything he knows that he can tell in about an hour. If he told us everything he knows, we'd be there all night.

**February 26, 2014**

General Meeting

7p.m

Our speaker will be Pat Perry from Sneak Peek Productions. She'll tell us something about eight presidential first ladies. And Bel McGowan will prepare some first ladies' dessert favorites for us to sample.

**March 26, 2014**

General Meeting

7p.m

Our speaker will be Sylvia Bartholomy of the American French Genealogical Society in Woonsocket, and the topic will be the Daughters of the King, a program sponsored by Louis XIV that brought approximately 800 young French women to New France between 1663 and 1673 in an effort to boost Canada's population.

**April 26, 2014**

Fundraiser/Dedication of Our New Meeting Room

Time TBA

Join us for the gala ribbon cutting at our new museum barn addition! We'll also have a silent auction where you can bid on items ranging from gift certificates for local goods and services to craft items to baked goods. Refreshments will be served. Proceeds benefit the Johnston Historical Society. Free admission; rain or shine. Call Anthony at (401) 764-5901, or email aursillo401@gmail.com for more information, or to donate items or gift certificates for the silent auction.

**April 30, 2014**

General Meeting

7p.m

Reinhard Wohlgeomuth of East Providence will tell us about the history and current status of Carver, Massachusetts' beloved Edaville Railroad.

**May 3, 2014**

The 5th Great Johnston Scavenger Hunt

9am-5pm

Elijah Angell House, 101 Putnam Pike. Think you know Johnston well? Test your knowledge against that of other teams and individuals in the fourth annual town-wide scavenger hunt! Teams will scour the town to locate and complete a series of tasks. At the end of the day, a point system will help determine which team reigns supreme! Prizes will be awarded and refreshments will be served. \$8 donation per team, payable on day of the event. Rain date: May 4. Call Christopher Martin at (401) 943-6961 for more information.

**May 28, 2014**

General Meeting

7p.m

Society president Louis McGowan will present on Rhode Island advertising postcards.

**June 25, 2014**

General Meeting

7pm

Speaker TBD.

**July and August 2014**

Summer hiatus -- no general meetings in these months.

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 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 9-11am the first Saturday of each month, April 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 info@johnstonhistorical.org or leave a message at (401) 231-3380.



As of this month our Facebook page has 187 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: March 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: Info@JohnstonHistorical.org  
Facebook: www.facebook.com/johnstonhistorical

**Annual Dues**

Have you paid your 2013 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 2013 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**