

Johnston Historical Society

Historical Notes

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**William Alverson House,
Circa 1755**
by Steve Merolla

Taking a ride down Morgan Avenue, one comes across a fair amount of historic houses along the way. One of these stands at 167 Morgan Avenue. This 2 1/2 story gambrel roofed structure does not at first jump out at you, for it is painted dark brown and is surrounded by tall, mature trees. This fine house is located just east of the intersection of Downing Drive (formerly Borden Avenue) and Morgan Avenue.



William Alverson House, 167 Morgan Avenue. Photo by Christopher Martin.

The story of the land on which the house is located can be traced back to the late seventeenth century, when in 1680, Deacon William Parks of Roxbury, Massachusetts, sold to John Thornton 300 acres of land (Providences Deeds 1/40). This huge parcel of land had as its southern boundary much of present-day Morgan Avenue, which for about 200 years was known as the Scituate Road. On April 22, 1686, John Thornton gave to his son, John Thornton Jr., about sixty acres out of this estate, taken from the eastern end of it (P 8/245). John Thornton Jr. made more land purchases, increasing the size of his farm. When he died in 1716, he thus left in total about eighty-five acres of land, to be divided between his two sons, Josiah and John 3rd. On April 4, 1716, the brothers made equal partition of the parcel, dividing it into northern and southern halves (P 2/497). The deed in fact states that part of the southern boundary was "a highway," meaning Morgan Avenue. Josiah Thornton received the southern part. Unfortunately, it seems that he was dead by April 16, 1726, for on that day a Letter of Administration was granted to his widow, Amy Thornton (Providence Town Council Book 1/14). His son, Josiah Jr., was the only heir and thus came into possession of his father's estate. As a point of interest, the road known today as Downing Drive (Borden Avenue) was laid out at the Town Council Meeting of December 22, 1735 (P T.C. 1/ 102): "...then ranging Southwest until it comes to the line that Raingeth between the land of Mary Garnett and the land of Josiah Thornton, deceased, and then South until it comes to the highway that leadeth from Scituate to

Providence Towne." In fact, Downing Drive became the western boundary and Morgan Avenue (Scituate Road) the southern boundary of Josiah Thornton's land.

Many years later, Josiah and his wife Martha decided to sell off a very small parcel of their farm. On April 5, 1755, the Thorntons sold to William Alverson Jr. for £400: "...one certain lot or parcel of land containing 2 acres & 20 poles... and is part of the Homestead Farm of Josiah Thornton & lieth adjoining the Highway that leadeth up to the new Bridge over Pochasset river, & a little east from the Brook out of said Farm..." (P 14/55). The highway mentioned that leads to Pocasset River is of course Morgan Avenue, and the dwelling at 167 Morgan Avenue does in fact lie a little eastward of a small brook that now crosses under Morgan Avenue. There is no mention in the deed of a house being on the property, and of course this would be so because Josiah Thornton retained his own house, selling Alverson an empty lot. When Josiah Thornton mortgaged his property in 1767, the mortgage deed mentions his house and the fact that the southern boundary included the land of William Alverson and the "old highway."

It is more than likely that William Alverson soon began building his house on the empty lot, especially as his first-born child came along about a month after purchase of the land. Considering that the land purchase was made in April of 1755, and that there were still seven months left in the year, it is probably safe to assume that the house was considerably finished by the end of the year. As such, the build date can be safely assumed to be presented as 1755, with the builder being William Alverson.

There is no known birth date for William Alverson. He was married to Lydia Harris (date of marriage unknown), the daughter of Thomas and Abigail (Smith) Harris. Lydia's family owned much land on the western side of Downing Drive, consisting of much of the land owned today by FM Global, and formerly, Crandall's Dairy. Perhaps this is what brought William to the area. On August 26, 1755, William was voted a Freeman of the Town of Providence, meaning that he now met the property holding requirements to meet that standard. This makes sense, in that William had purchased the above related land just the previous May.

Prior to the land purchase of 1755 along Morgan Avenue, there are recordings of deeds for a William Alverson in the years 1738 and 1746; however it cannot be known for sure if these were for the William Alverson of Morgan Avenue or his father, also named William. In two of these deeds, William is described as being a "weaver." In the inventory of William's estate after his death, there was a listing for £96 worth of "new cloth," which may indicate that William Jr. was in fact a "weaver." Perhaps this explains why Alverson was able to manage on such a small parcel of land; he may have been primarily a tradesman and artisan rather than a farmer. After the purchase of the house lot in 1755, William only made one other land purchase. On June 14, 1756, he purchased a little over 6 1/2 acres of land from Jabez Westcott, this parcel being a tall rectangle of land located on the northeast side of

Morgan Avenue, at the great bend in the road, at the intersection with Monson Avenue (P 14/244).

At the first Town Meeting held in the newly formed Town of Johnston, on April 18, 1759, William Alverson and William Harris were appointed to value estates for qualification to Freeman. In addition, Alverson was also selected to be Town Constable. In the Civil and Military List for the years 1761 and 1762, he is referred to as a captain. William and Lydia Alverson had five children: Caleb (b. 5/26/1755; d. 4/30/1824), John (b. 4/17/1757; d. 6/1/1856), Catherine (b. 10/1/1761; d. 12/9/1842), William (b. ? ; d. c.1794), Joseph (b. ? ; d. 7/14/1820). Very little is known about the personal life of William, though it is notable that at the formation of the town his fellow citizens held him in high enough regard to install him in two offices.

William may have contracted some sort of illness, for on May 3, 1767, he drew up his Will. In it, his wife Lydia was to have one cow and all the household goods she brought to the marriage, as well as *"full and free use of my house & Lands so long as she shall remain my widow."* Caleb, John, and Catherine were also provided for, but for the purposes of this story we are most interested in the provisions for sons William and Joseph: *"I give unto my two sons William Alverson and Joseph Alverson equally between them my house and about 2 acres of land where I now dwell..."* (J Probates 1/45). On May 27, 1767, William Alverson died, less than a month after signing his Will. Judging by terms of the Will, it is probable that William and Joseph were still minors when their father died, and that William felt that they would be spending many years in the house anyway with their mother.

Lydia never remarried and presumably lived in the house with her sons. During the 1780s, the two brothers carried out a series of land transactions, along with their other brothers Caleb and John, and neighbor William B. King. Some of the land involved was an area that adjoined to their father's original estate, one purchase coming on April 16, 1783, when thirty acres of the former Josiah Thornton estate was purchased from Edward Fenner (J 2/147). On November 5, 1788, King and the other two Alverson brothers sold to William and Joseph a little over five acres of the above land *"not as joint tenants... but as tenants in common"* (J 3/61). On September 10, 1788, William and Joseph together purchased a very small lot of land from Andrew Harris, said land bounding with their other property (J 3/61).

William Alverson Jr.'s date of birth is unknown; his wife was named Elizabeth (b. c.1765; d. 2/20/1842). He was voted a Freeman on August 28, 1781. They had only one child, Abigail (b. c. 1789; d. 4/22/1820), who later married Asahel Fenner (son of Pardon and Huldah). Joseph was likely the youngest of the Alverson siblings. There is no known birth date for him either, but it is recorded that he was voted a Freeman on August 30, 1785. He and his wife Catherine Lathem (daughter of William Lathem) had two children, Sarah and Joseph. As specified in their father's Will, William and Joseph were to share ownership of their father's house. Judging by the fact that the two families were not large, it is quite probable, and later deeds indicate, that the two families did live together in the house. Though Joseph on his own later purchased many parcels of land (some of it on the Johnston/Providence line in Olneyville), deeds and probate records indicate that 167 Morgan Avenue remained his homestead.

William Alverson Jr. died around 1794, leaving wife Elizabeth and daughter Abigail. Within about ten years after William's death, December 26, 1804, his widow quit-claimed to brother-in-law Joseph: *"...all my right of Dower of thirds in and unto the real estate of my former husband William Alverson, deceased..."* (J 3/464). On the same day, *"...Abigail Fenner... who when single was Abigail Alverson and Daughter & sole Heir of William Alverson, deceased, have by contract and bargain sold unto the said Joseph Alverson all the real estate which did belong to William at the time of his decease & is now the property of*

Abigail..." (J 3/461). Thus, by the close of 1804, Joseph Alverson had full ownership of 167 Morgan Avenue.

Joseph Alverson himself died on July 14, 1820, leaving widow Catherine and children Sarah and Joseph; it is also possible that his mother was part of the household, for she was still alive at this time (she died 6/28/1823). At a Court of Probate held on April 2, 1821, administrators set off; *"...to Catherine Alverson... also one acre & 78 square rods of land with the Dwelling house and shop..."* (J Probate 6/25). An auction of parts of the estate to satisfy debts was held on June 25, 1821, and Catherine Alverson herself was the highest bidder: *"...to two lots of land... with the buildings and improvements thereon... part of the Real Estate which was set off & assigned to Catherine Alverson, widow of said Joseph... one of which lots being part of the homestead place of the said Joseph Alverson at the time of his death & contains 1 3/4 acres & 12 rods of land..."* (J 6/114).

Five separate deeds indicate that Catherine and her children had moved to Warwick by 1826. She ended ownership of the subject house by the Alverson family on October 8, 1828, when she sold to James F. Simmons: *"A certain house and lot... about two acres... and is a part of the Homestead estate which belonged to my late husband Joseph Alverson, deceased... and is all the real estate that I own in Johnston..."* (J 7/432). Exactly a year later, on October 8, 1829, Simmons sold the house and nearly two acres to Rufus Thornton (J 8/59).

The subject house went through a succession of owners through the years: Fenner Potter (J 12/204), Charles Knight (J 13/49), George W. Davis (J 22/335), George Brown (J 57/155), Patrick C. Walsh (J New 16/183), Craig family (J New 18/523), Waterman family (J New 24/224). Of particular note is the purchase of the house and property by Abraham L. and Susan E. Smith on May 20, 1921 (J New 32/305). The Smith family came to own the property for fifty years, until 1971. Abraham Smith ran Smith's Ford Farm from the premises and a great picture of the east part of the house and a multitude of junk Ford cars can be seen in "Images of America: Johnston", volume II., page 20. Burton and Marilyn Salk purchased the property in 1972 (J New 121/919). Records at Town Hall indicate that much restoration of the house took place in 1973. Finally, the Salks sold the house and 2.8 acres of land to Kenneth and Anna Giansanti on March 13, 1974 (J New 128/1177). The Giansanti family have owned the house for the past forty years and have done an excellent job maintaining the historical integrity of this fine house. In addition, their landscaping of the grounds has added to the attractiveness of the property.



Smith Ford Farm, 1924. Photo courtesy of Bob Whitaker.

The Alverson Cemetery by Steve Merolla

The Alverson Cemetery (Johnston Historical Cemetery #36) is located in open country owned by FM Global, about 150 yards in from a fence line mid-way along Downing Drive. As alluded to in the story of the William Alverson house, this land was once part of a large 300-acre estate owned by John Thornton in the late seventeenth century. On

March 7, 1692, John Thornton gave to his son Thomas his dwelling house, along with about seventy acres of land (P 2/153). Thomas died March 27, 1712. In his Will he left to son Thomas Jnr. all the land he owned on the east side of the Pocasset River. In subsequent years, Thomas added more acreage to the farm. On January 29, 1732, Thomas sold the greater part of his property, about sixty-nine acres, to Captain Thomas Harris (P 9/205). This Captain Harris was one of the leading men of the Colony; his homestead lay along present-day Hartford Avenue. The Captain died in 1742. In his Will, he left the land he had purchased from the Thorntons to his son Thomas Jnr.: "...all that tract of land and farm whereon he (Thomas Jnr.) now dwells... that which I purchased of Thomas Thornton..."



Members of the Cemetery committee resetting stones in the Alverson family lot around October 2013. Photo by Steve Merolla.

Thomas Harris Jnr. and his wife Abigail had four children. Their only son, Joseph, died in 1770, leaving daughters Lydia, Phebe, and Abigail as the heirs. Lydia Harris married William Alverson, the date of the marriage unknown, but probably occurring in the early 1750s. William purchased a small two acre lot of land from Josiah Thornton in 1755 (P 15/55), and probably finished building his house there by the end of the year. This same house stands today at 167 Morgan Avenue, just around the corner from what was his in-laws' property. When William died in 1767, he left his wife Lydia and five children: Caleb, John, Catherine, William and Joseph. Lydia's father Thomas Harris died December 4, 1782. His estate, now grown to about ninety acres, was to be divided between his three daughters. Abigail (married John Holden) quit-claimed her interest in the farm to her two other sisters, Lydia Alverson and Phebe Smith (married Edward Smith). Phebe received the northern forty-five acres, which is bounded on the north roughly with Central Avenue and on the east with Downing Drive. Lydia Alverson received the southern forty-five acres, and this is where Cemetery #36 is located.

Lydia died on June 28, 1823. She, of course, was heir to the above-described forty-five acres, which now descended to her children. On November 23, 1823, her heirs signed the following document: "...We the undersigned heirs to our deceased friend & Parent Lydia Alverson after due consideration we unitedly agree that there shall be a reserve in the division or sale in the land that Lydia died in full possession, of 6 rods of ground for a burying place where it is now for any one that inclines to be buried there of her descendants." (J 6/202). The wording of the above document indicates that there were already burials on this particular plot of land, as shown by the words "burying place where it is now." The document states that the cemetery was six rods, which probably meant square rods, putting the boundaries at about ninety-six square feet; this cemetery is larger than that, and in fact it was enlarged at a later point. In a way, it makes sense that a burial ground for the family would be established here instead of the much smaller two acre parcel where the Alverson house stood. It would have been much easier to find the proper place for the cemetery in the forty-five acre plot, and of course it would

have taken up proportionately a much smaller footprint. In addition, the two areas were literally right around the corner from each other anyway.

At a Court of Probate held on April 2, 1825, Lydia Alverson's estate was divided up between her heirs. The issue of the cemetery was again addressed: "...We have located a lot of land within the Right No. 5 for a Family Burying Ground... to be used and to remain unto the heirs & Descendants of the Deceased to inter their dead with full Privilege however dispersed they may be, to inter the same for that purpose..." (J 6/376).

There is very little doubt that William and Lydia Alverson were buried in this cemetery. Unfortunately, neither one of them is interred under a marked stone, which in Lydia's case is a bit surprising. Absolute proof that this cemetery was being used by the family before the official probate document of 1825 establishing it, comes in the form of the gravestone of Lydia Alverson 3rd, granddaughter of Lydia. She died September 12, 1824, her stone being the earliest marked gravestone in the cemetery. For families without a lot of resources it was not uncommon for them not to pay for marked gravestones, even into the nineteenth century. Looking over probate and land records, it becomes clear that some of the earlier branches of the Alverson family were not awash with money, and thus did not erect marked gravestones early on, opting for the so-called "crude" stones evident in this and many other burial grounds in town. In a future installment, a closer look at the burial practices of the family will be addressed.

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### Charles Fletcher, a Giant of the Textile Industry

by Louis McGowan

Charles Fletcher, a giant in the U.S. textile field, may not have been Johnston-born and bred, and he never even lived in town, but he was arguably one of the most important people in our town's history.

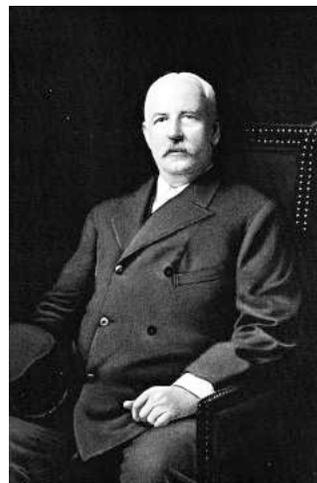


Photo of Charles Fletcher from *Representative Men and Old Families of Rhode Island*, published by J.H. Beers and Co., 1908.

Mr. Fletcher was born in Thornton, England, near Bradford in Yorkshire on November 20, 1840. He learned the textile business in the mills of Bradford. After emigrating to America, he spent one year working at the Pacific Mill in Lawrence, Mass., and later worked very successfully for nine years as a supervisor at the Valley Worsted Mills on Valley Street in Providence. In 1875, Fletcher decided to go out on his own and leased the Rising Sun Paper Mill, also on Valley Street. He was soon supervising operation of his mill, doing the books and selling the product of his mill. When requested by his old employers, he additionally took on the supervision of the work at the Valley Worsted Mills.

He soon became well-known for the quality of the worsted goods that he produced, and became so successful, that he embarked on a large expansion program. In 1878, he purchased in total 213,000 square feet of land on Valley Street with a frontage of 852 feet. On this property between 1878 and 1890, he built six large mill buildings, as well as numerous smaller ones. In 1883, this complex became the Providence Worsted Mill Co. As president and principal owner of this company, he soon became the largest consumer of wool in the United States. Fletcher went on to open other mills in Massachusetts and New York, he owned the Narragansett Hotel in Providence, and he was one of the prime

movers in initiating the cable railway over the city's East Side. He also was a key figure in organizing and running the American Woolen Co., a huge textile trust, which remained in existence until Textron purchased it in the 1950s.

In 1883, Charles began work on the Johnston connection to his textile empire. In that year he purchased the Providence Thread Co. on Mill Street in Thornton (Lower Simonsville at that time). He changed the name of the company to the Thornton Worsted Mills, naming it after his birthplace. His son, Joseph E. Fletcher, was made superintendent.

During the period of our town's greatest growth and helping to usher in that growth, Fletcher built three of the largest textile mills in our town's history, the British Hosiery Mill (1884), the Pocasset Worsted Mill (1898) and the Victoria Mill (1898). Fletcher leased the hosiery mill to Robert W. Cooper before finally selling it to him. Both the Pocasset Mill and the Victoria Mill were kept in the family -- Fletcher ran the former and his son-in-law, Harry Hartley, ran the latter.

Immediately after the British Hosiery Mill opened its doors at the beginning of 1885, the village's name was changed to Thornton, in honor of Fletcher. The influx of a totally English workforce to man the hosiery mill brought profound change to the little village of Thornton. Soon, cricket was being played in the village, English choral and literary groups were in place and a brass band lent its sounds to the culture of the inhabitants. A new Congregational Church was added just across the border in Cranston, and numerous stores were erected along Plainfield Street and some of the side streets.

These mills provided thousands of jobs. Many of these openings were filled by new people moving into town. They needed housing and dozens of new duplexes were built for the workers' use by the Fletcher mills and by the British Hosiery Mill. New people in the village meant more accompanying services were needed. Dozens of new stores and a post office were added in the built-up section of Thornton, as well as new churches, including St. Bridget's and St. Rocco's, both Catholic, and Holy Nativity Episcopal Church. Fire services came to the village. In 1898, after the Johnston section of Olneyville was annexed to Providence, the town hall and police department were moved from Olneyville to Thornton.



*This 1903 view from a state report shows worker housing on Maple Avenue near the Pocasset Worsted mill. Fletcher built twenty-seven duplex houses on Pocasset and Maple Avenue in 1897-'98, and added fourteen more on Walnut Street. The mill provided basic services and charged a nominal rent. The houses were sold in 1928.*

Eventually, the textile industry went into decline, and the three textile companies in our town that Fletcher was involved with all ceased production by the 1930s. The mills sold off their housing and other companies took over the mills. As time went on, many of the old stores closed, and new businesses took over. But, even today, much of Thornton still looks the same as it did one hundred years ago. Fletcher's

mills, though, changed our town forever. Thornton truly became the business and residential center of Johnston. We could argue that things have changed in the last thirty or forty years (with the Town Hall area becoming the new center of town), and I guess that would be true. Fletcher was still probably the key figure in bringing Johnston into the modern age, though. He was really a giant of a man.

Bibliography: (1) History of Providence County; Richard Bayles; 1891.

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## Society Doings

### Annual Christmas Party

On December 6, 2013, we held our annual Christmas party at our Graniteville property. The Elijah Angell House was open and beautifully decorated, and the barn was set up with two tables full of delicious food donated by our members. About thirty-five members and family attended, and a good time was had by all. Our thanks go out to all who worked hard in making the evening a grand success.

### Our Properties

#### Museum Addition Update

As of the end of March 2014, we are excited to report that our museum addition is almost complete. The project was funded thanks to a generous grant from the Champlin Foundations. Other than the electrical work and the installation of the furnace and foundation, all work on the project was performed by our wonderful friend and carpenter, Warren Lanpher. Warren's body of work over the years is, of course, very impressive, and we have been very lucky that we made his acquaintance many years ago. Our addition is 22' by 24' and will be used as our permanent meeting place as well as an integral part of our Johnston History Museum. We already have two important historical artifacts in the room. One is our penny-farthing bicycle that is mounted atop the large beam that bisects the room. It looks wonderful. The other piece is the restored c.1810 door surround from the Daniel Manton (later George White) House on Cherry Hill Road. The doorway is about ten feet high and has beautiful decorative touches around the triangular pediment, including dentil work, ribbed pilasters and hand-carved flowers with leaves on the capitals above the pilasters. Warren did a masterful job of repairing some damage to the surround and incorporating the doorway into the addition.

Two of our members must be thanked, though, for enabling us to secure the doorway. The first person is John Barratini who alerted Steve Merolla to the fact that the homeowner had taken the doorway off the house. Steve immediately moved into action, contacted the relevant party and purchased the artifact. Countless hours were then spent by Steve hand-stripping the surround over the course of the last four or five years. It was a true labor of love for him. This past fall, Steve donated the surround to the Johnston Historical Society, and now the surround, which is the only one of its type in the town, stands proudly in our new museum addition. It is an appropriate centerpiece for this wonderful room.

For January's general meeting, we used our new room for the first time. Things went very well. We have two new display cabinets (we have added four new cabinets overall to the museum) in the room and will soon display on the walls enlarged photo reproductions of our various villages. Warren built a new display wall (two-sided) in the middle of the original portion of the barn. The back side will be part of our veterans' display, and we are planning a timeline of town history for the front side. We have been moving around the old display cabinets and redoing displays.

Still to come is a ramp on the back of the addition, which will provide access for the handicapped. The front door of the barn has been changed

(the old one was warped, letting in cold air and setting off the alarm system) and Warren will build new stairs on the front which will make it easier for our members and guests to enter the building.

#### *Atwood Family Clock Restored*

On March 21, 2014, Edmund W. Cornwell, JHS member and clock-restorer extraordinaire, delivered to us a beautiful mantel clock that he has painstakingly restored over the last few months. The clock once resided in the Abraham C. Atwood House on Atwood Avenue and was last owned by Mabel Atwood Sprague who passed away a few years ago. The clock, which had seen better days, was given to us by the family. When Ed saw the clock, he asked if we would like to have it restored, and I [Louis McGowan] said, "Of course!" The thing that makes the clock really exciting for me is that on the front of the clock case is a reverse painted image on glass of the old Morgan Mills, created by a relative of Mabel, her father's brother, William Waldo Atwood. To think that we could have this clock looking like it did in its heyday was a wonderful thought. Ed really delivered on his promise to have the clock look almost like new.

The timepiece is an ogee shelf clock, made between 1871 and 1885 by the William L. Gilbert Clock Company of Winsted, Connecticut. It is weight-driven and has a painted metal dial. Ed brought the clock back to working condition, which includes chiming at every hour.

A huge thank you goes out to Ed for his wonderful work.

#### *Heating System Converted In Angell House*

In February, the ancient oil furnace in the Elijah Angell House was replaced with a new gas-fired furnace. Having a new heating system fired by gas should save us much in energy costs. Thanks to the Champlin Foundations for funding this project.

We have also had to make some repairs to the heating system in the barn and have added a humidifier to the new addition.

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.

#### **Cemetery Committee Report**

by Pasco Macari

As recorded in the November 2013 newsletter, the committee has continued to work in cemetery #36, the Alverson yard.

First week of December we reset five footstones and reset in base the headstone of Calista A. King. This headstone is a replacement for her original slate headstone, which was also found in the yard. We have seen this situation many times in other cemeteries. The family decides to upgrade their ancestors' slate stones with a modern marble headstone.

Many times the headstones sink into the ground as the casket decays. In the case of large marble stones the only way to pull them up is with the tri-pod. Granite stones sink in the same way, but are much harder to correct. Such was the case with the following three stones: Marcy Potter,

Emeline Potter, and Lydia A. Potter are large marble with marble bases. The second week of December we were able to pull these large headstones out, fill in the holes, and position them as they were originally.

The last week of December we reset the headstone of Welcome Alverson (using the tri-pod) on its base with mortar. Also, using the same process, we reset the headstones of Marcella P. Pink and William A. Potter onto their bases with mortar. The last stone we worked on was that of Elizabeth Alverson, resetting her partial head and foot into the ground.

As always, many thanks to the dedicated cemetery committee, giving up Sunday mornings working in extreme heat, and frigid weather.

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

#### **Speakers**

At our November meeting (held the first week of December), Christopher Martin entertained us with a well-researched slide presentation on views of Providence, then and now. There was a lot of audience participation, and everyone attending seemed to enjoy themselves very much.

In January we held our first meeting in our new addition. Roger Williams National Memorial Park Ranger John McNiff came back to see us and thrilled thirty-six members and guests with a rousing talk about Roger Williams. He is a wonderful speaker and has obviously done a lot of research on Roger and Rhode Island in general.

For our February meeting we invited historical interpreter Pat Perry back to present the first part of her program on American First Ladies. As always, Pat did a great job of entertaining and educating us about a number of the first ladies and the roles they played in their husband's administrations. Pat is very knowledgeable and a wonderful speaker and performer. About forty-five members and guests attended the meeting. To top off the evening, we had desserts (favorites of different presidents) hand-made by Bel McGowan, Evelyn Beaumier, Alice Lombardi, Elise Carlson, and Ida Silva.

Louis McGowan stepped in at the last minute to replace a speaker who couldn't make it to our March 26th meeting. He gave a fascinating slide presentation on advertising postcards.

#### **Acquisitions**

- Two items purchased on eBay by Louis McGowan: (1) 1873 program for a grand ball at Irons Hall, Olneyville Square (in Johnston at that time); (2) A real photo postcard of Thomas Ferrazzeno in his World War I army uniform. He lived at 92 Greenville Avenue in Manton.
- A 1923 broadside detailing info about a town financial meeting to be held at the Pocasset Social Club on Plainfield Street in Thornton. (donated by Mayor Joseph Polisena).
- During December, Bel McGowan donated three items for use in our house museum, the Elijah Angell House: a wooden darning egg; a candle wick scissors; and a wooden-sided and metal mesh sieve.
- On February 4, 2014, the Sutcliffe family turned over to us a number of exciting pieces detailing various aspects of George Sutcliffe's life. Included were: his WWII wool-lined leather boots; his flight glasses; a detailed flying manual for the P-47; his grammar school, high school and college diplomas; various WWII papers about his military service; P-47 reunion memorabilia; various hand-held flying direction devices; two Graniteville School yearbooks and a Bryant College yearbook; a story about one of George's dogfights written by one of the enlisted men in his unit;

and two copies of "Hot Shots," a WWII newsletter that presented information about Graniteville servicemen.

- On February 23, 2014, Louis picked up a small batch of St. Rocco's Church Bulletins from the 1940s, some dealing with WWII soldiers and others dealing with the proposed church, construction of which would begin in 1950. The items were purchased on eBay. A booklet about a minstrel show at Ferri's Casino to benefit the church was included in the lot.
- On February 28, 2014, Peter Dupont, step-son of Arnold Waterman, came in to our museum with a number of items from the Waterman Farm which was situated at the corner of Green Hill Road and Plainfield Pike. The donation included: an 1830s washstand with three bowls, a number of hand saws, a scythe, a steelyard (aka as a stilyard, it is a simple metal balance, whose design goes back to ancient Greece or China) and a metal, long-handled skimmer.
- In March 2014, Louis McGowan donated a large springware (mid-nineteenth century) sugar bowl.
- In March 2014, George Daigneault donated two Johnston Tax Books (1894 and 1900).

JHS member Michael Smith kindly donated a workhorse snow-blower to our group, out of which we are sure we will get many years of use. Our thanks go out to him.

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

#### **Historical Teasers&#8212;Do You Know Your Town's History?**

(For a number of years we included "Historical Teasers," questions about our town's history, in our newsletter. The answers were given in the following issue. We have decided to try them again on a trial basis to see if there is enough interest to keep publishing them. Let us know!)

- 1) How many present and former Johnston town library buildings are still standing?
- 2) In previous issues we told of four Johnston churches that were destroyed in the twentieth century (Chapel of the Good Shepard on Brown Avenue; the Hughesdale Chapel; St. Peter's on Killingly Street, and the original Antioch Chapel). What was a fifth church that was destroyed in the twentieth century?
- 3) "American Pickers," the popular TV program on the History Channel, visited an old Johnston farm a few years ago. What was the location of the farm that they visited and was shown on their program?

#### **Upcoming Events**

##### **March 26, 2014**

General Meeting

7pm

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

##### **April 19, 2014**

Tag Sale

8am-3pm

Belknap School, 509 Greenville Avenue.

##### **April 26, 2014**

Fundraiser/Dedication of Our New Meeting Room

1-4pm

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. The Rhode Island Philharmonic Jazz quartet will supply tunes, Edible Arrangements will hand out tasty treats, and Rolf Johnson will give a wheelwright demonstration. Proceeds benefit the Johnston Historical Society. Free admission; rain or shine. Call Anthony at (401) 764-5901, or email [aurillo401@gmail.com](mailto:aurillo401@gmail.com) for more information, or to donate items or gift certificates for the silent auction.

##### **April 30, 2014**

General Meeting

7pm

Reinhard Wohlgenuth 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

7pm

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.

##### **June 25, 2014**

General Meeting

7pm

Restoration carpenter Warren Lanpher will give a slide presentation on one of his recent restoration jobs in Gloucester, Massachusetts, and he'll also talk about the construction of our museum addition.

##### **July and August 2014**

Summer hiatus -- no general meetings in these months.

##### **Some Upcoming Sunday**

A special Sunday talk by Pat Perry from Sneak Peek Productions, on an as-yet to be chosen topic. This presentation will be a fundraiser for JHS. Stay tuned for details.

##### **September 24, 2014**

General Meeting

7pm

Judge Frank Williams on Lincoln?

##### **October 29, 2014**

General Meeting

7pm

Member Beth Hurd will give a slide presentation and talk about cemetery iconography.

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

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

Do you have a suggestion for a future speaker? Or do you yourself have a topic you'd like to present at one of our meetings? Please drop us a line at [info@johnstonhistorical.org](mailto:info@johnstonhistorical.org) or leave a message at (401) 231-3380.



As of this month our Facebook page has 212 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: July 15, 2014.**

### Photo Gallery: Our New Museum Barn Addition

*Photos by Christopher Martin*



Addition exterior.



Edmund W. Cornwell and Louis McGowan with restored Gilbert clock.



Door surround and penny farthing.



Door surround.



Penny farthing bicycle.



Gilbert clock.

**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 2014 dues yet? Your dues help us to operate. The price of a single membership is only \$15; a family membership is only \$20. Wotta bargain! So once more, please pay your 2014 dues. Send us a check today!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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