

Johnston Historical Society

Historical Notes

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Care of the Poor in Eighteenth Century Johnston

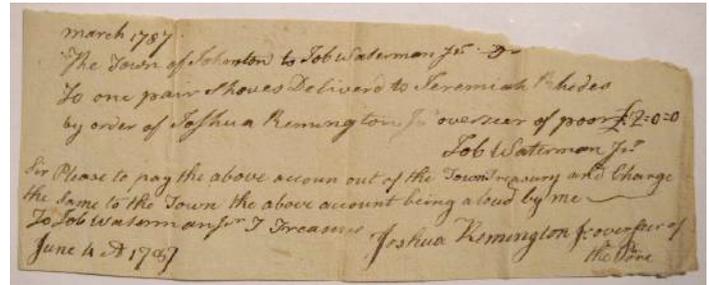
by Steve Merolla

We may think that the social safety net, the care of the less fortunate in society, is a product of the twentieth century -- but this is not so. Almost from the founding of the colony of Rhode Island the care of the poor and indigent was a matter of public policy. As early as 1650, Roger Williams himself petitioned the Providence Town Council for the relief of an elderly, infirm resident. From this point on similar petitions were made to the Providence authorities for like situations. What was the story in our own town, which was founded in March of 1759?

The newly formed Town of Johnston, as previously its parent Providence, provided for the maintenance of those citizens unable to care for themselves. These could include the poor, the elderly and those incapacitated either physically or mentally. In addition, it also happened that the children of poorer families were apprenticed out to those households who had the means to take them in. In all these cases the Overseers of the Poor made the arrangements. At the very first meeting of the freemen of the town of Johnston, Benjamin Belknap, Charles Waterman, and Samuel Smith were chosen as Overseers of the Poor. In addition, the newly minted Overseers were instructed to divide the poor with the town of Providence as part of their first tasks in office; settling of accounts with Providence over their work house was an issue at the January 23, 1771, Town Meeting, possibly indicating an ongoing dispute with the mother town. An example of the authority of the Overseers is taken from the Town Meeting of December 15, 1788: *"Resolved that the Overseers of the Poor have full Power to draw orders upon the town treasury for the support of the Poor of this Town and that they purchase a suitable Book for the recording of their doings in said Office..."*

While both Town Council and Town Meetings dealt with these cases, it appears the monthly Council meetings were the primary venue for these matters. The first official note in the Town Council records in these situations came in 1760, the first full year after the town was incorporated. Typically, certain citizens volunteered to take on the care of a disadvantaged fellow townsman. In turn, the town would compensate the caretaker a set amount of money per week to take that person on. The caretaker was then paid according to how many weeks of maintenance was provided. In most cases, the term of service was less than a year. The names of the same unfortunate people show up month after month in the town records, but there is no indication of under what conditions these people were kept. It is an open question as to whether they were treated as family,

servants, or forced labor; of course, this would depend on the attitude of the host family.



This document, purchased recently by Louis McGowan for the Society, provides an example of how the Town would help the poor in the late 1700s. It reads: "March 1787. The Town of Johnston to Job Waterman Jr -- To one pair Shoues Delivered to Jeremiah Rhodes by order of Joshua Remington Jr overseer of poor £2-0-0. Job Waterman Jr. Sir please to pay the above account out of the Town Treasury and Charge the Same to the Town the above account being aloud by me -- To Job Waterman Jr T Treasurer [signed] Joshua Remington Jr overseer of the poor."

At the Johnston Town Council of November 1760, Daniel Eddy, one of the Overseers, stated that Thomas Thornton "...came to him & said he was poor & had not the wherewithal to support himself & was very alone & wanted relief..." His plea was accepted. In 1761, Richard Fenner presented a bill to the town for "keeping" Thomas Thornton for fourteen weeks and two days at £8 per week for a total of £111-16-0. Later that same year, Col. Jabez Bowen was paid £60-10-0 for *"doctoring Thomas Thornton, now deceased."* More bills came due and were presented to the Council regarding the care of Mr. Thornton in 1762. Daniel Eddy and Henry Strievens were both compensated for his care. In addition, William Warner charged the town £23-10-0 for moving him from the Providence work house to Henry Strievens'. Finally, William Henry billed the town £32-15-0 for a coffin and funeral services. It could happen that the same person was "farmed out" to several different households during the course of the year. In some cases a family member was paid by the town to care for their own. Mary Tracy was paid £366-1-6 for *"keeping her helpless child,"* Lucy, from February 26, 1759, to December 25, 1761. In fact, for many years members of the Tracy family were paid to care for the unfortunate Lucy Tracy. This indicates rather forward thinking by the community, that the town would assist a family in the care of a disabled child. In some cases children were paid by the town to care for an elderly parent, but there were also instances where the town demanded that children help support parents. At a Town Meeting of June 1, 1772: *"It is voted & resolved that the present Overseers of the Poor prefer a petition to the next General Assembly... To oblige*

the several children of Richard & Patience Thornton his wife (who are supported & maintained by this town) to contribute to the support & maintenance of the said Richard & Patience...”

The Town Council and Meeting records continually refer to poor boys and girls being apprenticed out, and sometimes to households from out of town. Surprisingly, in many cases these apprenticed children were under 10 years of age; for example, a three year old in 1787 by the name of John Potter was apprenticed out by his mother Sarah to Christopher Potter of Scituate (probably a relative) until age 21. The following example from 1788 is also typical: “*Josiah Thornton, a poor boy aged 13 years last October 22... bound an apprentice to Richard Knight of Scituate until 21 years, to learn the art & trade of making Liner wheels... to be taught to read, write & cypher & to keep a book of Accounts... to be given at release two new suits of Broad Cloth clothes & other clothing to make said two suits complete, exclusive of Common apparel...*” In 1782, a poor girl named Hannah Tripp was apprenticed to Caleb Alverson until age 18; in his household she was to “*...learn to read, write, & cypher, and the act of Knitting, Sewing & Common House work...*” As can be imagined, these arrangements did not always work out, and the apprentice was shunted off to a different household, as in this case from 1789: “*Whereas the Town Council of September 29, 1786, bound out Polly Mathewson to Philip & Lucretia Stratton of Providence and the Strattons desirous of discharging her, the said Polly is to be bound out to Lydia Alverson, widow, for the term of 7 years, 11 months, & 12 days... she is to learn to read & write... & if Lydia should die, Polly shall serve the remaining time with Mrs. Catherine Manton.*” Just as today we hear the sad stories of foster children shunted from one home to another, I suspect the case back in the eighteenth century was similar. Boys were usually apprenticed out until age 21, and girls until age 18. These children were found in this position usually because their families were very poor or because of the death of the breadwinner of the household. For example, in 1781, it was represented to the Council that “*...the family of Henry Strievens is now in a suffering condition - therefore it is resolved that the Children of the said Henry be immediately bound out...*” Bounding out or apprenticing children certainly saved money for the town, for the master supported the child in return for the youngster’s service. The masters were usually directed by the Overseers to teach their charges to “*Read, Write, & Cypher,*” sometimes stated until the Rule of Three, as well as (for the boys) learn a trade. Generally, at discharge the apprentices were given a couple of sets of new clothes in addition to their daily wearing apparel.

There was a group of free blacks residing in town, and their poor relations seem to have been treated in much the same way as poor whites. For example, in 1777, a certain Malakiah Tanner, “*...negro boy aged 8 years old October last be bound out as an apprentice to Abraham Belknap Esq. until age 21... is to learn him to read, write & cypher... and discharge him with two suits of clothes, one new...*” Similarly, in a Council meeting of 1778: “*Barshaba, a negro girl aged 5 years to be bound out as apprentice to Joseph Borden Jnr. Esq. until age 18... learn her to read... dismiss her with a new Gown and Bonnet exclusive of Common apparel...*”

If the town fathers felt that a whole family was in need or in danger of falling into bad times, it would intervene. Such a case occurred in 1770: “*Several Freemen of the town represent that Henry Strievens having but a small estate and a large family of children and through or by his misconduct he is likely to spend what estate he now has -- it is judged that Henry Strievens is likely to bring himself & his family to want and misery and thereby render he and they chargeable to said town. It is hereby voted that Joseph Waterman Esq. and John Beverly are to be directed to be Guardians of Henry and empowered to take over his personal estate.*” Unfortunately as it turned out, 11 years later, in 1781, the remaining children in his household had to be bound out to other families. The town also took care of African-Americans in this regard. At a 1785 Town Council: “*Levi Ceasor, a black man for want of Discretion in managing his Estate and likely to bring his family to misery & chargeable, he is appointed a Guardian, William Waterman...*” This interference in the personal life of a family would not be tolerated by modern sensibilities, but much of it came down to money. The town was concerned that if a household was poorly managed, its members might eventually become chargeable to the town, that the town would have to support them.

As noted, supporting the poor of the town could be an expensive proposition, thus it became imperative to avoid supporting those who were not legal residents. Thus, the records are replete with orders to remove people from the town who were not residing in Johnston legally. A hearing was usually held where it was ascertained where the person in question was legally resident, and if that said person was a resident of another town he or she was then removed to that town; in some cases the person was sent out of state. For example, at several Town Council meetings held in the year 1793, at least ten people were removed out of town, five of them to Massachusetts. In turn, the town would sometimes go to court to prevent another town from having an indigent person removed to Johnston. For example, at a Town Meeting of January 29, 1787, it was stated that Josiah Harris and family were removed to Johnston from Dudley, Massachusetts per court order of December 2, 1786, because they were destitute and unable to ably support themselves. In turn, Johnston empowered its representatives to travel to the Court of Common Pleas for the County of Worcester to appeal that decision. In extreme cases in which an expelled person kept on returning, there was the threat of arrest and whipping. In one instance, an Abigail Kimball was removed to Gloucester by order dated December 12, 1789. It seems that she returned, thus the Council ordered her fined, but in default of payment she be “*publicly whipped on your naked back 5 Stripes and depart town within 12 hours*”; in addition, ministers within the town were cautioned against marrying her and town resident Rhodes Strievens. Orders for fines and whippings were very rare, being employed only when a removed person dared return to the town.

In addition to volunteers taking the poor into their households, the town, rather than taking that step would often attempt to directly support them with food and other goods and services. For example, at the Town Meeting of June 2, 1788, while it is noted that several of the poor of the town were bound out to certain households, there were also approvals to pay directly for the support of the poor. At this session the Overseers of the Poor ordered that money be paid from the town coffers to supply

goods such as meat, sheep, cloth and other “sundries” to particular citizens in want. In one case the town paid for the materials that were used to repair the house of a certain Mary Tabor. The Town Meeting records also indicate that articles of clothing were also supplied to some of the needy. It can be assumed that the people who received direct aid in this way were physically and mentally capable to care for themselves with this help. Those sent to live with other households were probably either too old, frail, intemperate, ill or too young to live on their own.

A watershed moment occurred at the Town Meeting of October 8, 1791, at which it was decided to treat the matter of the poor and indigent in a new way: “*Resolved that all the Poor, which is now supported by the Town, be sold at Public Vendue, at the Adjournment of this Meeting, for the Term of Six months, except for those that the Overseers hath agreed to support for a year.*” Basically, this was an auctioning off of the poor. At the Town Meeting of October 22, 1791 there was a notice: “*Public Sale -- Jabez Westcott, one of the Poor of the Town is Struck off to Josiah King at 4 Shillings per week from this time until April Town Meeting next.*” Thus, the person who bid for the lowest compensation from the town gained custody of the unfortunate indigent in return for money from the town and the labor provided by the poor resident. This new system almost certainly was bad news for the auctioned person; in return for bidding low on cash support from the town, the winning bidder would almost certainly try to get as much labor out of the indigent as possible - - this almost seems to border on slave labor. However, the apprenticing of young people fortunately does not seem to have been included in this new procedure. The new system of public sale of the poor was not unique to Johnston, as it seems to have become commonplace throughout the state by the early nineteenth century. Detailed study of public sale or vendue is beyond the scope of this piece, but it seems to have remained the norm for treatment of the poor until the mid-nineteenth century, with the introduction of the alms house or poor farm, a topic for another time.

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**Graniteville’s Junior Crew**  
by George Caldwell

Around September 1943, the Graniteville Volunteer Fire Department, also known as Johnston Hose 2, was having a problem. Most of the active fire fighters were in the armed forces, and those who were not were working long hours in the defense industries. The result was that during the day there was nobody to answer fire alarms. The only active fire fighter who was available was my father Bill Caldwell, who was the janitor at Graniteville School.

To alleviate that situation, Chief Harry Nelson decided to recruit some of the older and bigger boys then in the ninth grade at the school, and THE JUNIOR CREW was created. There were six 14-year-old ninth graders recruited: George Caldwell, Albert Darby, Everett Naylor, Jimmy Fooks, Frankie Smith, and Alfred Rotondo. If a fire alarm was sounded while we were in school, we were allowed to leave school (in an orderly manner -- ha ha!) and report to the fire station, then located at the top of Cottage

Street. There we would meet my father, who was the Captain of the fire crew and the only man available during the day who could drive the fire trucks. Then off we would go, siren blaring, bell ringing, and us hanging on the rear of the fire truck, to douse the fire in whatever was burning. Some may think that this was kind of risky for a bunch of 14 year olds, but we never thought about that, and we enjoyed every minute of it. After all, we were bullet-proof.

Our training was conducted during the evenings by Chief Nelson, my father and some of the other firemen. I must say we were well-trained and did not make many mistakes when we were in action. We all did as we were told and tried not to be a problem, because none of us wanted to be dismissed from the Junior Crew.

While on the Junior Crew, we fought two major fires at the Greystone Mill and two old ice house fires, one at Sebilles Pond on Route 44 in Smithfield and one on George Waterman Road. There were also house fires, forest fires, brush fires, car fires and some I cannot remember. Whenever the fire alarm would sound, day or night, we responded and if enough of the regular firemen responded, we were left at the station. Fortunately, none of us were ever injured while in action.

We also helped to keep the station clean and orderly, helped to keep the equipment in good order, and when there was a social function at the station, we did all we could to assist. In retrospect, I feel that the experiences we had matured us a bit quicker than would normally be the case.



Johnston's first ambulance, bought by the Graniteville volunteers in 1947, was a converted hearse. Pictured are, from left to right, Ken Aust, Harry Nelson, Eddie Simpson, unknown, Herbie Falls, and unknown. Before the station was remodeled as shown, the fire trucks entered it on the side of the building on the lower floor, and the first floor was used for things such as the Graniteville Follies. Photo courtesy of Vinnie Crosby.

After World War II ended and all the veterans came home, we still were kept on as junior members. When we reached 18 years of age, we all joined the fire company as regular members. We represented Johnston Hose Two at firemen’s field days, and we were one of the best teams in the area. My specialty was the Water Battle, where four men with a large hose would face another four men about fifty feet away and try to knock them over. By then I was about six feet tall and weighed 240 pounds, so I was a good anchor for our team.

There were a few close calls. One day while fighting a brush fire, Jimmy Fooks’ tie got burned off at the knot, and he did not notice it until one of the guys told him. One day, while riding on

the back of the truck, I started to lose my grip on the bar and almost fell off. Another day we were fighting a forest fire and noticed that it suddenly got a lot hotter. We looked up and saw that the trees above us were burning -- we got the heck out of there fast.

It was not easy work. Try to control a large hose under ninety to 100 pounds of pressure. Or go into a forest fire with a metal can holding five gallons of water and a hand pump strapped to your back. At night, when we went into a burning area, everything is on fire and you can see what you are doing. When the fire is out, though, everything is pitch black, and you are somewhat disoriented. Sometimes we had to go into a smoke-filled structure to see if anyone was in there. We did not have air-packs or any other sophisticated equipment, but we did what had to be done.

There was one tragic event that caused us a lot of pain. It happened in May of 1946, on the Saturday before Palm Sunday. Jimmy Fooks and Ken Rowley, a later addition to the Junior Crew, were drowned while sailing on Slacks Pond in Greenville. The fire department was called out on Sunday morning to search for them. I, at age 17, was in the boat that found them. This tragic event has forever remained in the memories of the Junior Crew.



### **“Old Home Week” In Manton**

On July 30, 1986, I spoke with Smokey Ullucci about his home village of Manton. Most of what he told me has been recorded in other articles in past years, but I recently found this information that has not been published yet (LHM).

Smokey told me that the old fire barn in Manton was torn down in the early 1930s. After that the fire station put on a carnival at the fairgrounds in back of the Sunoco station on Greenville Avenue. The carnival was held in the early summer and lasted for a week. It was called the Old Home Week (similar carnivals were held in many towns around Rhode Island) and they lasted up until World War II. Each night of the carnival, they held a dance along with a dance contest. Usually, three winners were selected each night, and they all got together on Saturday night when one overall winner was picked.



### **Society Doings**

#### **Annual Picnic**

On Sunday, September 14, we held our annual picnic on the museum grounds. It was a great time with lots of good food and pleasant company. Thanks to all who contributed to the event by donating food or their time in setting up and in clean-up. Forty-five members, family and guests attended.

#### **Wine-Tasting at Verde Vineyards**

On Sunday, September 28, thirty-five JHS members and friends attended a wine-tasting and JHS fundraiser at Johnston's only vineyard, which is run by Jim Verde. On the following Sunday, another seventeen people attended our second fundraiser. The

vineyard is beautifully situated on a sixty-five acre plot off Hopkins Avenue in north-western Johnston. Jim presented a very interesting talk on wine-growing in general and his vineyard in particular. After the talk and tasting of his delicious wines, we were treated to some cheese, crackers, and veggies, all nicely prepared and presented by Bel McGowan. Thanks to all who attended. If you could not attend, but would like some great wine prepared right in little old Johnston, just look up the Verde Vineyards on-line and take a visit out there. Thanks go to Anthony Ursillo for arranging this fundraiser for us.

#### **Giant JHS Yardsale**

On Saturday, October 11, we held a large yard sale at Anthony Ursillo's building (the former Log Gift Shoppe) on Hartford Avenue. It was a rainy day, but everything was inside and dry, and plenty of customers stopped by. We cleared \$700 that day and another \$125 on Sunday. It was a great weekend. Thanks go out to Dan Brown who set up the yard sale and hauled a lot of goods to Anthony's store; to Anthony Ursillo who graciously let us use his building and spent many hours working the sale; and to Tim Kee, Shar DiMaio, Louis McGowan, Joe Jamroz and Elise Carlson who worked the sale, doing whatever was needed. Thanks to the following who donated items: Christopher Martin and Kim Calcagno (who brought over truckloads of goods), Robbins Funeral Home, Dan Brown, Fred Mikkelsen, Michael Smith, Evelyn Beaumier, Doug and Linda Stephens, and Phil and Lori Lemoi. Apologies to anyone who contributed that I forgot to include.

#### **Cemetery Committee Helps Pocasset Cemetery**

On Saturday, October 25, 2014, our historical society cemetery committee spent the morning helping out Pocasset Cemetery which has had recent problems with vandalism. Around two dozen headstones had been overturned at the property in the preceding weeks. Pat Macari, Steve Merolla, Everett Cogswell, Anthony Ursillo, Tim Kee, and Louis McGowan uprighted about ten stones. Society member George Daigneault, who is also a valuable volunteer on a regular basis at the cemetery, was part of another crew working on stones that day.

#### **Upcoming Visit to Clouds Hill**

Members of our society plan to visit the Clouds Hill Victorian Museum, 4157 Post Road, Warwick, on Sunday, December 7, 2014. We will be seeing their exhibit entitled “Step into the Holidays,” which is open from 1 to 4pm. If you would like to carpool, we will meet at the museum barn at 12:30pm. Please call the museum at 231-3380 and let us know by Saturday afternoon (the 6th), if you need a ride from the barn to Clouds Hill.

Adult admission is \$12, Seniors \$10, Family of 4 \$25, and College Students \$8. The building is handicap accessible to the first floor and a video of the second floor is available for anyone not able to climb the stairs.

This late 1800s house has been passed down to four generations of women of Slater family descent. Learn more at [www.cloudshill.org](http://www.cloudshill.org).

## Our Properties

### *Yard*

On October 30, 2014, we raked up fifty-five bags of leaves at our headquarters property. Rolf Johnson, Elise Carlson, Shar DiMaio, Anthony Ursillo, Doug Stephens, Louis McGowan, and Joe Jamroz spent the late afternoon sprucing up our property. A big thanks goes out to these people.

### *Museum*

We have added two more framed photo enlargements of town villages to a wall of our museum ell. The new photos are of Olneyville and Pocasset. We would like to thank Anthony Ursillo and Tim Kee for doing all the legwork in acquiring the ten views that we have on the walls.

More photos and artifacts have been added to the two tall cabinets in the ell. Each shelf has items from a different village in town.

In September, we purchased a long, low display cabinet from the now departed Apple Valley Hobby Shop. We have placed in it a display on town politics. We have also set up a cabinet with a display on the Webb/Wilder family and are developing one on the Atwood/Sprague family homestead.

Our museum barn is open Monday nights (except holidays), 6:30-8:30pm; and on the third Saturday of each month, 9-11am, for those who would like to visit the museum or examine the society's collection of printed materials. Also, the Belknap School, corner of Atwood and Greenville Avenues, is open 2-4pm the first Saturday of each month, April to October. Both the museum and Elijah Angell House continue to be open by appointment -- we always welcome visits by interested individuals or groups. Just shoot us an email at [history@jhs.necoxmail.com](mailto:history@jhs.necoxmail.com), or leave a message at (401) 231-3380 to set one up.

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

### **Grant Activity**

In August we received a \$750 grant from Verizon. Thank you to Anthony Ricci for securing this grant through his employer.

In September we received a \$500 grant from the Harvard Pilgrim Foundation. The funds are earmarked for archival materials to help preserve our collections. Thank you to Christopher Martin for securing this grant through his employer, Harvard Pilgrim Health Care.

In the third week of November we received the exciting news that the Champlin Foundations has funded our 2014 grant request for improvements to the exterior of the Elijah Angell House. The money will allow us to have new clapboards installed on the east side of the house, and to have the entire house professionally painted.

## Cemetery Committee Report

by Pasco Macari

Working the yards in the heat of summer can be very exhausting. Occasionally we get lucky, the yard is deep in the woods. Shade trees blocking the burning sun from burning us and zapping motivation from the job at hand. Such was the case at the Benoni Mathewson yard. A beautiful setting on a knoll overlooking Almy Pond.

### *Number 34, Benoni Mathewson yard:*

Located on Central avenue on land owned by F.M. Global Insurance Company. This cemetery has six marked burials and three rude stone markers. Protected with granite posts and iron rails, this 30x30 foot yard has not been vandalized. Two marble head stones and foot stones in very good condition were re-set. We epoxied one small marble head stone that had been broken in half, and epoxied the head onto its granite base. Mortared three marble head stones into brown stone bases. One, that of Henry H. Mathewson, needed to be moved about a foot due to a large tree encroaching on it. Five foot stones found, two in very good condition, three broken and repaired. As expected this yard was totally overgrown, but we cleared it almost completely the first visit. We had help this visit and follow up visits for repair from Colby Forten, a student at Bishop Hendricken. Note: Steve and Doug worked on this yard a couple of times during the week, saving time on Sunday mornings.



The markers of Benoni Mathewson and his wife, Sarah, stand upright once again. *Photo by Steve Merolla.*

### *Number 35, Dr. Harding Harris yard:*

This yard is located about 100 yards off Atwood Avenue, behind the new fire station, opposite Scituate Avenue. The committee just visited the yard in the '90s, before the new station was built. It was totally vandalized and encroached upon. Piles of dirt, gravel, and stones were pushed into the yard, knocking over most all of the granite posts. This probably occurred in the '50s or '60s. Broken asphalt all around -- once a parking lot for the famous B&B Lounge. After a long day cleaning, we saw the grave stones misplaced and broken. We did find a slate in its correct position along with two foot stones and two marble head stones broken off at grade level. Inventory by James Arnold at the turn of the twentieth century tells us there were twenty-one burials.

Research by Steve determined twelve burials were moved to Pocasset Cemetery. We found six. We repaired three with pins and epoxy. Three markers could not be found, including Dr. Harding Harris. Steve, Doug, Tim, and Anthony on a follow-up visit put the finishing touches on stone alignment and re-setting. Note: We did not clear this yard completely due to the large piles of dirt and stones. We will go back at a future date to find the three missing markers.

#### *Number 27, Remington yard:*

Located on Earl Drive off Central Avenue, west of Atwood Avenue, about one-half mile. East side unprotected. We cleared this yard in two visits having to cut a lot of brier and undergrowth. We found one slate head and foot vandalized. The marbles and other slates damaged by natural causes. Also, there is a large amount of rude stone burials, close to two dozen. Note: It is very difficult to correctly determine the amount of rude burials in most yards. Four marbles, one in very good condition, one broken in half, and two broken in three pieces. We drilled, pinned, and epoxied the three broken head stones. Five pass-through bases, two in very good condition and three broken and repaired. One brown stone base in very good condition. There are three slate markers, one slate head and foot in very good condition, one slate with pass-through base, with damage at top of head and a very small piece of his foot remaining. We epoxied one slate head, foot in very good condition. We need one more follow up visit to finish this yard.

In late October a small group of committee members worked in the Pocasset Cemetery, resetting large granite head stones toppled by vandals.

Numbers 76 and 77, Smith yards. This double yard is located off Greenville Avenue, north of the power lines, about 200 yards west. I will describe the condition in the next newsletter as we are still clearing them.

Thanks go out to Dan Mazzulla and his grounds crew for grass cutting at several of our cemeteries. The Cemetery Committee is: Doug Stevens, Tim Kee, Anthony Ursillo, Ed Cornwell, Elise Carlson, Shar DeMaio, Everett Cogswell, Steve Merolla, and Pasco Macari. We welcome new member Marie Thierfelder.

#### **Speakers**

Our September 2014 speaker was former Rhode Island Supreme Court Chief Justice Frank Williams who entertained over forty of us with tales of Abraham Lincoln and events of the Civil War period. Williams, of course, is a renowned scholar of Lincoln and American history of that period.

Our October speaker was Beth Hurd, who presented to us a great slide show on genealogical tips that we can gather from gravestones. Her last few slides were a nice tribute to our cemetery committee.

#### **Acquisitions**

- In July, Beth Hurd gave us a large folder of newspaper clippings and programs for recent town events.
- In July, Rolf Johnson donated an old-fashioned Christmas tree and ornaments.

- In July, Louis McGowan picked up on eBay an eighteenth century document about upkeep of the poor in town (see article, page1).
- In August, Dan Brown donated and installed Mylar plastic in the transom window over the door in our new ell. It will prevent shortwave UV light from damaging our artifacts.
- In August, Elise Carlson donated a new flatbed scanner to our group.
- In August, Christopher Martin and Kim Calcagno donated three metal folding chairs.
- In September, Dan and Nancy Brown donated a number of Graniteville School items, including some class photos and yearbooks.
- In September, Barbra Votolato McGuirl donated some Thornton photos and Johnston newspaper articles.
- In October, Kim Beaudoin let us look in the family barn on Morgan Avenue, which they are cleaning out, and take whatever we wanted. We acquired some kitchen items, Wilder and Webb family photos and genealogical material, some old chests and various other artifacts. Thanks to Anthony Ricci for the tip which led us to Kim.
- In November, Ed Brown donated a wooden artist's easel which we will use for displays in the museum.

Many donated 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 -- Do You Know Your Town's History?**

*Answers to last issue's teasers:*

1) Thornton is the village that is named after a hamlet in Yorkshire, England. Formerly called Lower Simmonsville, in 1885 it was renamed in honor of Charles Fletcher who had just built the British Hosiery Mill on Mill Street, which would be run by Robert W. Cooper.

2) The grange building was located in the little village of Antioch on Plainfield Pike in the western part of town.

3) The famous writer who once corrected the papers of Johnston students was, of course, H.P. Lovecraft. It is documented that he made a few trips to Johnston in the old days. He tells of a trip to Thornton with his aunt, going by the Simmons Mansion and walking on to Hughesdale, where the aunt was a substitute math teacher in the early 1920s.

*New Historical Teaser Questions:*

1) There was a devastating flood in Simmonsville in 1840, which washed away houses and killed eighteen people. Another flood took place after this, washing away three dams and industrial buildings at three sites. When and where did this flood happen?

2) You might have expected Johnston's first post office to have opened in one of the bigger villages, but actually it opened in a small village. Which one was it?

3) Rail service first came to Johnston in 1871. What was the name of the railroad that provided that service?

### Upcoming Events

#### December 3, 2014

General Meeting

7pm

Our speaker will be retired Revolutionary War re-enactor Colonel Walter Otto Thierfelder. He'll speak on the mission of the Military Chartered Command and what it is like to be a part of a re-enactment group portraying the living history of the American Revolutionary War.

#### December 5, 2014

JHS Christmas Party

6-8:30pm

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 dessert or appetizer to share.

#### January 28, 2015

General Meeting

7pm

Our speaker will be Fred Mikkelsen, who will speak on his days as Conimicut Lighthouse keeper.

#### February 25, 2015

General Meeting

7pm

Author Dr. Edward A. Iannuccilli, M.D. will be our speaker, giving a talk entitled "Good Times and Sunday Dinner," in which he'll tell the story of immigration to this country, featuring anecdotes from his own family and stories in his books. Dr. Iannuccilli is the author of *Growing up Italian*, *Grandfather's Fig Tree and Other Stories* and *What Ever Happened to Sunday Dinner and Other Stories*.

#### March 25, 2015

General Meeting

7pm

Speaker TBA.

#### April 29, 2015

General Meeting

7pm

Our speaker will be former CCRI professor and Graniteville resident Ralph Scorpio, who will talk about the Vietnam War and its aftermath.

#### May 27, 2015

General Meeting

7pm

Our speaker will be Jim Ignasher, Vice President of the Historical Society of Smithfield, who will tell lost tales of Rhode Island and New England. Mr. Ignasher is the author of *Forgotten Tales of Rhode Island*, *Remembering Smithfield: Sketches of Apple Valley*, and *Rhode Island Disasters: Tales of Tragedy by Air, Sea and Rail*.

#### June 24, 2015

General Meeting

7pm

Speaker TBA.

#### July and August 2015

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 Fridays, 2-5pm, for those who would like to visit the museum or examine the society's collection of printed materials. Just in case, call ahead to confirm we're here. Also, the Belknap School, corner of Atwood and Greenville Avenues, is open 9-11am the first Saturday of each month, May to October.

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



As of this month our Facebook page has 329 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, 2015.**

**Our Executive Board**

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

Our Executive Board meets at 7pm in the Museum building, 101 Putnam Pike, on the second to the last Wednesday of each month, September through June (except December). All are welcome to attend.

General Meetings are held at 7pm the last Wednesday of each month, September through June (no December meeting. We hold our Holiday Party that month). The meetings are held in the Museum Barn.

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

**Annual Dues**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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