

Johnston Historical Society

Historical Notes

Vol. XXVII, #2

Christopher Martin, Editor
www.JohnstonHistorical.org

August 2021

"Soldier Boy" by Steve Merolla

One of the more notable cemeteries in town is Cemetery#7, the so-called Cedar Lot, situated at the end of George Waterman Road where it meets Putnam Avenue (Route 44). This large cemetery sits atop a high hill overlooking the roadway. This was a community burial ground, as opposed to the many family cemeteries scattered throughout Johnston. It operated more akin to modern cemeteries, with purchased burial plots and many different families interred. This lot began receiving burials about the mid 1850s or so, and several of the people were workers in the local mills; in fact, some burials were people who resided in neighboring North Providence and Smithfield.

One of the most poignant gravestones in this place of repose is that of Andrew J. Collins. His stone reads that he died on July 30, 1864, and that he was killed at Atlanta, Georgia. He was a member of Company B, 15th Regiment, 3rd Battery, USA. He was a drummer boy, only 15 years of age. Mr. Rory Schuler, editor of the "Johnston Sunrise," wrote an excellent article on Cemetery #7, including a section on Andrew Collins (edition of July 16, 2021). The time period involved was during Union General William Tecumseh Sherman's offensive to capture Atlanta. Schuler wrote: "According to the US Army Center of Military History, Collins' battalion fought at Kennesaw Mountain from June 23-30... By the end of July, when Collins lost his life, Company B was preparing to fight the battle of Utoy Creek, which raged from August 4-7. His Company had been attacking Confederate railroad lines encircling Atlanta. A week later, the Union took the key southern city."

As heartbreaking as the story of Andrew Collins is, the heartbreak already suffered by his parents, Henry O. Collins and Susan S. Collins, must have been almost unbearable. Just to the side of Andrew's grave are the stones of five of his siblings: William H. Collins born c.1845 - died June 16, 1846 at 16 months; Marcella Collins born c.1846 - died September 26, 1846 at 11 days; James A. Collins born c.1847 - died June 30, 1847 at 4 months; William Collins born c.1851 - died June 2, 1851 at 3 months; Mary Ann Collins born c.1852 - died August 17, 1853 at 13 months.

These numbers and dates are an indication of the high mortality rates for children in that era. Of course, how much more of a disaster for the Collins' that their son Andrew, who unlike his siblings, nearly reached adulthood, would die as a child soldier, something that we never contemplate happening today for an

American youth. Andrew was the only one of his parent's children to even live more than a year and a half (with one possible exception).



I decided to next look into the backgrounds of his parents. Henry Olney Collins was born around the year 1823, the son of Moses Collins. His wife Susan was the daughter of Joshua James Rathbone and Sabra Champlin Rathbone of Exeter; Susan was born August 18, 1829. Susan and Henry were married June 10, 1844, by the Reverend Martin Cheney in Olneyville; she was only 15 years of age. At the time of the 1850 Federal Census,

Henry and Susan had already had to bury five children; one wonders if Susan's youth contributed to the early deaths. The couple were enumerated as living in Smithfield along with their newly born son, Andrew, who was only one month old at the time.



Unfortunate Andrew and his unfortunate siblings. *Photo by Christopher Martin.*

In the ten year span between the 1850 and 1860 Federal Census, the family situation seemed to have changed dramatically. The 1860 Census indicates that Henry and Susan were now living apart. Henry was at Coventry, living in a house with ten other people, none with the Collins surname; he is listed as a farm laborer. Susan was residing in North Providence with the Burnwood family, along with Joshua Rathbone (most likely her brother) and a Harriet Collins (more on her later). Henry and Susan were almost certainly divorced at this point or soon after, for on March 27, 1864, she married Moses Evans in Newport. The failure of the Collins' marriage could have had many sources: her very young age, the death of so many children, possible financial hardships; Henry was always a laborer, never a landowner. A check of Johnston deed records indicates he never owned property in this town. In the 1880 Federal Census, Henry is now officially listed as being divorced, again a farm laborer, and living with the Waterman family in Coventry. Henry O. Collins died in 1893 and Susan Collins Evans passed in 1899. She is buried in Gloucester Cemetery #35, also known as the Harmony Cemetery. Six of the Collins siblings are buried in Johnston, but that in no way means that they ever lived in this town. The Collins family were residing in neighboring Smithfield in 1850, at which point five of their children had died; they were not landowners who could bury family members on their own property. The solution was a community cemetery like the Cedar Lot. Smithfield is just a stone's throw away from this cemetery, and there are in fact other Smithfield residents at rest here. Of interest, the parents of Susan Collins, Joshua J. Rathbone (died 1861) and Sabra Rathbone (died 1859) are interred not much more than ten feet away from their six grandchildren.

Before the story turns back to Andrew Collins, it should be noted that it seems he had a sister who at least survived to her teen years. As previously noted, the 1860 Census lists a Harriet Collins living with Susan Collins in North Providence; she was five years of age. In the 1870 Federal Census, the former Susan Collins is now married to Moses Evans and of course took his

last name. Harriet Collins is also living in the household of her step-father and is now 15 years of age; the Evans family was living in North Providence and Moses and Harriet were working in the mills. Almost without doubt, this Harriet Collins was the last child born to Susan and Henry O. Collins before their marriage dissolved. At this time, I have not been able to follow Harriet's story any further.

Now back to the "soldier boy," Andrew Collins. As previously noted, in the 1860 Federal Census, it is now apparent that his parents are separated, however Andrew, now about 11 years of age, is not listed as living with either of his parents. The answer to this mystery is quite jarring and sad. For several years, Society member Dan Brown has held a great interest in Cemetery #7 and the story of Andrew Collins. Who wouldn't be haunted by the story of a 15 year old boy being killed in a Civil War battle. In the course of his research Dan also studied the 1860 Federal Census and discovered that at that point Andrew was living in the Providence Reform School. The reason he was there -- theft. We theorized that perhaps this situation had something to do with his enlisting at such an early age, with no parent either able or perhaps willing to prevent it from happening.

The whole story is quite sad. Andrew was placed in the Reform School at only about 10 years of age for the crime of theft. Of course it was most likely a case of petty thievery, the boy probably just trying to get through another day. Without a doubt he was a victim of a bad family situation and a public social system that was almost medieval in nature.

I did a bit more research and came up with the following: In 1850, the Providence City Council was authorized to establish a reform school by an act of the General Assembly. The school was intended for "the confinement, instruction & reformation of juvenile offenders & of young persons of idle, vile, or vicious habits." It was controlled by seven trustees, including the mayor and six others chosen by the City Council. The school was located at Tockwotten, in the area of Fox Point, it formerly being a hotel, and it housed both boys and girls. In 1880, the school was turned over to the state of Rhode Island.

A blog called the "Federal Hill Irish" also provided some important information. It stated that the average age of the residents at the Reform School was under 15 years and that the usual crimes were theft or vagrancy. In 1860 there were 174 inmates in residence. With the raging of the Civil War, fresh troops were needed to make up for the great number of casualties. The school's Warden made the decision to invite U.S. Army recruiters on the premises in order to solicit the boys to join the fight. They seem to have been somewhat successful. For example, five boys signed on with the 4th Rhode Island Infantry Regiment. A boy named Jim McGovern signed up at age 15 and made the ultimate sacrifice about three years later. Almost without doubt, these were the circumstances that led young Andrew Collins to enlist.

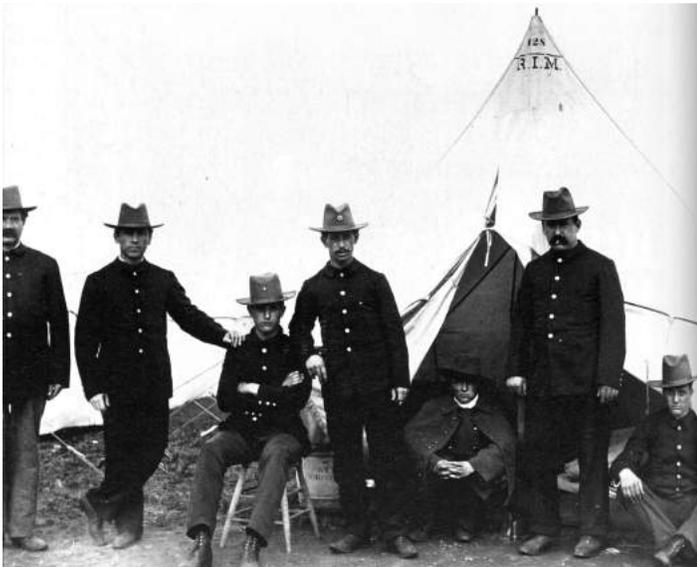
In the "U.S. Army Register of Enlistments, 1798-1914" (also provided by Dan Brown), there is a record of Andrew Collins. He enlisted at Providence on February 23, 1864. It states that he was 5 feet 4 inches tall, with blue eyes, of light complexion and with light colored hair. His unit was the 15th Infantry Regiment.

The paperwork also states that Andrew was from Smithfield and was a laborer. I find this statement to be somewhat suspicious. The recruiter is also named in the report entry, and I really feel that neither he nor any other recruiter would have wanted to admit that their new soldier-to-be was pulled out of a reform school and that he was a petty thief.

Either way, the fact of the matter was that Andrew J. Collins was killed in battle only five months after he signed his enlistment papers. He was basically an innocent victim who paid the ultimate price for the sins of others -- his family, the State of Rhode Island, the federal government, and society in general.

Johnston's Militia Units by Louis McGowan

When we were colonies of England, she naturally forbid us from forming military units with full-time soldiers. Our mother country did not want us turning any firepower we might have against her. So, although we were not able to have a regular army, we were able to form defense units made up of civilians.



Members of a Rhode Island Militia unit at Quonset Point, waiting to be deployed in the Spanish American War, circa 1898. (from *North Kingstown 1880-1930* by Tim Cranston, 2005).

In 1638, Rhode Island had its first militia unit in Portsmouth. Fearing attacks from indigenous peoples, the town's forefathers mandated that every able-bodied man report for muster. Other towns soon followed suit and, in certain ones, service became obligatory in the "Train Bands," the term used for military companies. The early units were not under any central command, however. The 1663 Royal Charter gave some limited power to the Colony to regulate militias, but rules were often not enforced. There were on-going battles between the various towns and the Colonial government about regulation of the militia units.

Fear driven by external threats such as King Philip's War and the French and Indian Wars led to the formation of more independent military organizations.

Johnston, of course, did not exist until 1759, but a Johnston Company appears in 1761, as part of the Providence County regiment. Captain William Alverson, Lieutenant Zackariah Eddy, and Ensign Samuel Henry were the first officers of the company. The unit is listed through 1776. Prior to 1800, there were two other Johnston companies of militia starting up in 1777. They were part of the State Militia. From their formation until 1799, the two units were in one or another Regiment of the Providence County Brigade. One company was formed jointly with North Providence for much of that time.

Many of our townspeople fought in the Revolution with various units of the State Militia.

Johnstonite Colonel Israel Angell commanded the 2nd Rhode Island Continental Infantry from 1777 to 1781 when there were two Rhode Island Militia Regiments. Soon after the two units were combined in January 1781, Colonel Angell retired, coming back to Johnston to live.

After the Revolution, there was great interest in the militia. Besides the regular militia regiments provided by State law, many new independent units were formed. Two independent militia units were formed in our town. One of them, the Johnston Rangers, an independent militia cavalry unit, was formed in 1791. They first appear in Smith's Civil and Military List of Rhode Island in 1792. Their first leaders were: Captain Nehemiah Hawkins, 1st Lieutenant Robert Thornton and 2nd Lieutenant John McDonald. The Rangers are listed through 1811, when they disappear from the rolls.

The Johnston Riflemen, the other independent unit, was led by Captain Emor Winsor. They received their charter in 1808 and so, in 1808 and in 1809, there were two independent militia units in town. The Riflemen, though, were not listed after 1809.

There were four brigades in the State Militia in the 1800-'15 period. Johnston had two companies, the 1st and 2nd Companies of Infantry of Johnston during this time (they are listed from 1800 to 1839). Initially, they were part of the 5th Regiment of the Providence County Brigade when there was only one Providence Brigade. The Johnston companies in 1802 became part of the Providence County 2nd Brigade.

The Johnston Company of Militia was part of the 1st Providence Regiment during this period, but its exact history is not known.

After the buildup for the War of 1812, there was a long, slow period for the militia in the state, right up to the time of the Dorr War.

In 1842, the beginning of the Dorr War period, the Johnston Guards of the 14th Regiment, an Infantry unit (one of the State's Chartered Commands), under Captain Joseph Lockwood, was chartered. The Johnston company was referred to as "The Johnston Savages" (this type of nickname was commonly used for the various State units during this period). They appear on the rolls through 1846, at which time they disbanded. An 1863 letter in our museum from the State Adjutant General's Office is addressed to Captain James L. Pettis of the Johnston Guards. It is

not known if there is a connection between the two Johnston Guard units.

Up to 1875, there were three brigades in the State Militia. In a reorganization of the militia that year, the number dropped to two, and with a second reorganization in 1879, the number of brigades lowered to one.

Our militia units were, of course, called up to active duty for the various wars in which we as a nation took part.

In April 1907, the State Militia became the Rhode Island National Guard, which is the land force militia for the state and is a component of the United States Army.

recognized in the correspondence between Washington and Greene. Retiring from the army, Jan. 1, 1781, Angell settled in Johnston, R.I., as farmer and cooper. He was a man of medium height, fair complexion, and military bearing. He was married three times: to (1) Martha Angell, his second cousin; (2) Susanne Wright, or Wight; (3) Sarah Wood. He had seventeen children and was courting a fourth lady when he died at Smithfield, R.I., in his ninety-second year.

--Transcribed by Beth Hurd from an unsourced photocopy found at the Mohr Library in Johnston.

Originally buried in Johnston's Colonel Israel Angell Burial Ground (JN043), Angell was moved at some point to North Burial Ground in Providence. -- ed.

Historical Advertising

This issue we feature a promotional matchbook from the Beef n' Bottle, 2837 Hartford Avenue. The restaurant operated from 1978 to 1985, the year the owner, Richard A. "Curly" Benoit, passed away at the young age of 47. Today there's only an overgrown lot at that address.



ANGELL, ISRAEL (Aug. 24, 1740-May 4, 1832), Revolutionary soldier, a descendant of one of the original settlers who came to Rhode Island with Roger Williams, was born in Providence, the son of Oliver and Naomi (Smith) Angell. He had a good education, and was particularly interested in scientific subjects. At the beginning of the war he was a major of Rhode Island troops and served nearly to the end. He was successively promoted; major of the 11th Continental Infantry 1776, lieutenant-colonel of the 2nd Rhode Island, Jan. 1, 1777, and shortly afterward colonel. Angell's services were at the siege of Boston, at the battles of Brandywine, Red Bank, Monmouth, and Springfield; in Valley Forge, and at various points in Rhode Island, New Jersey, and the Hudson Highlands, particularly at Peekskill and West Point. He gained distinction especially in the almost forgotten battle at Springfield, N.J., June 23, 1780, where he held an important command, by withstanding the British advance at the bridge. His value in this engagement was

Society Doings

The Executive Board continues to meet periodically to oversee day-to-day operations and re-evaluate the possibility of holding in-person general meetings again. It seemed during May and June that we were on track to safely meet in September, but then the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus became the dominant strain and infections rose sharply again -- mainly among the unvaccinated. Rather than require attendees to wear masks and attempt to socially distance themselves in our small meeting room, we've decided to err on the side of safety and continue to suspend in-person meetings for the foreseeable future.

We've had a vacant Trustee position on our Executive Board for several months now. Trustees attend Executive Board meetings and help out with various tasks as needed. Anyone with an interest in filling this position should contact a board member.

Since we shared "Seven Ways You Can Help the Johnston Historical Society" in the last newsletter and on Facebook, we've been on the receiving end of a bit of extra cash. We received \$285 from the Find on 6 and \$5.95 from Amazon Smile. A member who requested donations to JHS for her birthday sent an additional \$140 our way, and another member got us \$300 through a matching thing with the United Way. We sold a few t-shirts and books, as well. Every little bit helps!

The Johnston Sun Rise gained a new editor in May. Rory Schuler jumped in with both feet and has been writing tons of great articles about the Johnston community, including several about our Cemetery Committee and local history. Welcome, Rory! And thank you!

We'd also like to acknowledge the work of Sun Rise reporter Pete Fontaine, who has been helping spread word of our events and initiatives for the past decade or more. We appreciate that we can always count on you!

Cemetery Committee Report

by Steve Merolla

After the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Cemetery Committee really got back to work. On account of the fairly snowless late winter we were able to get back in the field by mid March. Since March 10 to the present date we have cleaned a total of twenty cemeteries: numbers 5, 7, 12, 14, 18, 21, 22, 28, 33, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 58, 59, 60, 62, 63, 66, and 93. As part of this clean-up program we participated in the state-wide Historic Cemetery Clean-Up Day, which is sponsored by the Rhode Island Cemetery Commission. The event is held every year in the Spring around the anniversary of Earth Day. Ten volunteers showed up at the Governor King Cemetery (JN021) on a wet and cold day to do their work. Around eighty bags of leaves were filled; within a day or two our Public Works Department carted them all away.

You may note that there is no mention made of repairing or re-setting gravestones in this report. Apart from Elise and Carl doing a fine job of doing an initial cleaning of cemeteries #63 and #93, the Committee has been tied up performing the routine maintenance work of mowing, weed-whacking and raking burial grounds that have already been restored. Part of the problem is that as more cemeteries are restored, it means that they now have to be fairly regularly maintained. This is a situation experienced by many other cemetery groups, and the heavy rains in July have not helped matters either. Hopefully we can get back into restoration work by at least early Fall.

Thanks again to our hard working Committee members: Elise, Marie, Carl, Doug, Steve, and George.

Just want to make note of the departure of one of our most hard working and loyal members. Shar DiMaio has moved to the suburbs of Cleveland, Ohio, to be close to her daughter and grandchildren. She was always a very cheerful and diligent member of the group. We wish her well on this new chapter in her life and bid her a fond farewell. We will miss her.

Volunteers Needed!

Retirees, Scouts, students! We always need volunteers to perform various duties to ensure the smooth operation of the society. For instance, we could use a Properties Committee to oversee the maintenance of our properties. Or volunteers to serve as docents in the Elijah Angell House during open hours. Or someone to help on meeting nights, setting up coffee, setting up the room, etc. The president would like to see many people doing small jobs.

More examples:

- 1) Help out on the cemetery committee, maintaining lots and repairing stones.
- 2) Someone familiar with excel to help keep track of membership dues.
- 3) Someone to transcribe old documents.
- 4) A "handy person" experienced in handling odd jobs and small repairs.

- 5) People willing to show the museum to visitors. Most of the exhibits are marked, so it doesn't require an in-depth knowledge of the town or its history.
- 6) Weeding our gardens.
- 7) Knowledgeable people who can help identify some of our old photographs.
- 8) Someone with design or layout experience who can help us revamp our tri-fold flyers.

Or, if you have a special talent that you think could help the JHS, let us know! Indoor tasks will be completed in small groups. Not all tasks are long-term, so you're not "on the hook" once you volunteer. We would like to establish a "who to call list" as needs arise. Interested parties should send an email to johnstonhistorical1825@gmail.com.

Our Properties

Our museum barn is open Tuesdays, 6-8pm, for those who would like to visit the museum or examine the society's collection of printed materials. 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 johnstonhistorical1825@gmail.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.

Acquisitions

Many donated objects may be seen in the "Acquisitions and Items from our Collections" photo album on our Facebook page (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
- Old photos, slides, or home movies of Johnston
- Any Johnston-related ephemera or memorabilia
- A gas-powered leaf blower
- Fire extinguishers

Upcoming Events

General meetings continue to be suspended due to the ongoing pandemic.

We're tentatively planning to hold a yard sale in October, date to be determined. If you have any gently used treasures you'd like to donate, please contact us at the email or phone number below!

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 johnstonhistorical1825@gmail.com or leave a message at (401) 231-3380.

Eight Ways You Can Help the Johnston Historical Society:

1) The Find on 6, 2953 Hartford Avenue, is now accepting consignment items on behalf of the JHS! That means you can donate some gently used white elephant items and, if they sell, JHS gets 60% of the proceeds! Each person may bring two boxes of goods at a time, Wednesday through Friday, 11am-4pm.

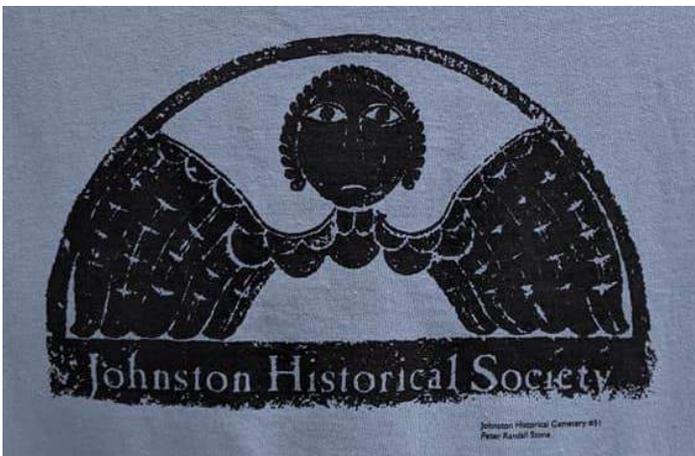
Appropriate items include antiques, collectibles, vintage clothing or handbags (in good condition), jewelry, kitchenware, furniture, etc. Nothing broken or soiled.

2) When purchasing items on Amazon, if you enter via smile.amazon.com, you can designate JHS to receive a small portion of the purchase price as a charitable donation!

3) Stop n Shop has a program where they donate \$1 from every purchase of a \$2.50 shopping bag to a local charity. The Johnston Historical Society was chosen as the charity for the month of May 2021 -- at the Greenville store! If you missed that, we're scheduled to be the beneficiaries again in October 2021 -- again at the Greenville store! So if you're *still* planning on buying a shopping bag, October is the time to do it!

4) Buy a book! We still have copies of *Images of America: Johnston I* and *I*. \$15 each, or two for \$25!

5) Buy a t-shirt! We still have new t-shirts for sale in slate blue and khaki, and we have a few left in sage green. S/M/L or XL. \$15 each. Pick one up at an upcoming general meeting, or drop us a line and we'll arrange to deliver one to you.



6) We very much appreciate everyone who has kept their membership up-to-date, despite the fact that we haven't been able to hold any in-person meetings in over a year. Please keep it up! We hope to be able to return to holding monthly meetings soon.

7) Volunteer! (See above, "Volunteers Needed").

8) And of course, we always welcome cash donations!



Find us on
Facebook



Follow us on
Instagram

As of this month our Facebook and Instagram pages have 1,292 and 252 followers, respectively! Have you 'liked' us yet? To find us type these addresses into your computer browser:

www.facebook.com/johnstonhistorical
www.instagram.com/johnstonrihistoricalsociety

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: November 15, 2021.



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Our Executive Board

President: Elise Carlson
Vice-President: Steve Merolla
Treasurer: Joe Jamroz
Recording Secretary: Carl Johnson
Corresponding Secretary: Christopher Martin
Trustees: Dan Brown, Doug Stephens, Anthony Ursillo,
and one vacant position.

Our Executive Board meets at 6:30pm 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: johnstonhistorical1825@gmail.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com/johnstonhistorical

Annual Dues

Have you paid your 2021 dues yet? Your dues help us to operate. The price of a single membership is only \$20; a family membership is only \$30. Wotta bargain! So once more, please pay your 2021 dues. Send us a check today!

Name: _____

Address: _____

Renewal Single (\$20) _____
 Family (\$30) _____

New Single (\$20) _____
 Family (\$30) _____

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
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