



## The East Providence Historical Society

# Gazette

April 2013

Volume XXV No. 5

### April

Monday, April 22  
7:00 pm  
Members' Meeting  
*Public invited*

**Once around the Bogs.  
History of Edaville**

Riverside Library  
475 Bullocks Point Ave.

### May

Sunday, May 12  
1:00 - 3:30 pm  
Hunt House Museum  
open  
Hunts Mills Road,  
Rumford

Monday, May 20  
7:00 pm  
Members' Meeting  
*Public invited*

**Old Route 6.  
Where Did the Road  
Originally Run?**

East Bay Manor  
1375 Wampanoag Trail  
East Providence

#### CONTACT US AT:

East Providence  
Historical Society  
P.O. Box 4774  
East Providence, RI  
02916-4774  
Tel. (401) 438-1750  
Email: [info@ephist.org](mailto:info@ephist.org)  
Web Site: [ephist.org](http://ephist.org)

**Dedicated to Preserving the Heritage and Enjoying the  
History of Our City**

## Notes from the President's Desk . . .

By Maggie Dooley, President

Hello Friends!

Do you find yourself at this time of year making plans for the upcoming months? Spring always inspires me to renew and revise my plans, whether it's gardening, vacation, a walk...how do I want to spend my time?

If you're reading this Gazette you most probably have an interest in history, preservation, museums, recreation, gardening, East Providence and its neighbors. So, as you prepare your Spring plans, why not make a plan to volunteer with the East Providence Historical Society?

There are so many activities for all ages...writing for the newsletter and website; landscaping the grounds; training as a docent to host tours; creating and presenting educational programs; planning fundraising and membership events; museum collections, research and processing; and building preservation...to name a few.

Like you, I have an interest in the mission of the Society. Whatever time or interest you have, please give us a call. Volunteering has been a very rewarding experience for me. And I have so many new friendships!

Of course, you could volunteer for a position as a Board member. Nancy Moore is chairing the nominating committee and we're searching for additional board members. As we work on the strategic plan, we are learning a lot about the people and history of the society which will help us answer the question, *How did we get here and where are we going?* It's an exciting and fun process and we hope you'll join us.

To RSVP with your interest as a volunteer or candidate for the Board of Directors, please contact us at [info@ephist.org](mailto:info@ephist.org) or call (401) 438-1750. We also accept suggestions!

Thank you for your interest, dedication and participation as members and volunteers. Your support is the foundation of the Society.

**The Gazette**

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East Providence  
Historical Society

P.O. Box 4774, East Providence, RI  
02916-4774  
Tel. (401) 438-1750  
Web Site: ephist.org

**OFFICERS**

- Margaret Dooley *President*
- Rose Marie Sirenski *1<sup>st</sup> Vice President*
- Deborah Ormerod *2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President*
- Cheryl Faria *Recording Secretary*
- Pat Henry *Corresponding Secretary*
- Dot Thornley *Treasurer*
- Nancy Moore *Immediate Past President*

**COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

- Bob Tewksbury *Buildings*
- Jeffrey Faria *Grounds*
- Kris Rose *Markers*
- Mona Breault *Membership*
- Virginia Berwick/Karen Panzarella *Museum*
- Deborah Ormerod *Acting Curator*
- Edna Anness *Curator Emeritus*
- Reinhard Wohlgemuth *Newsletter*
- Nancy Moore *Preservation*
- Nancy Moore *Programs*
- Nancy Moore *Publicity*
- Reinhard Wohlgemuth *Webmaster*

**May Open House  
May 12**

Once again, Hunt House will be open on Mother's Day as it proved to be a popular destination for an intergenerational outing last year. Our visitors CAN look through old year books and admire the changes on the grounds. Our master gardener volunteers will be available to answer questions and a plant will be given to every mom who attends. And maybe you'll spot that last late herring as it makes its way up the ladder.

**A Thank You for  
the Telephone  
Committee**

Pat Henry would like to thank her telephone committee. She appreciates what they do and the time they put into it.

-  Linda Agresti
-  Billie Arden
-  Genny Berwick
-  Mona Breault
-  Miriam Kenney
-  Jo Marchi

**Once around the Bogs  
Tracing the History of the Edaville Railroad with  
Postcards, Pictures and Other Ephemera**

**April Members' Meeting**

April 22 at 7:00pm

Riverside Branch Library

Refreshments will be served before the meeting.



**The East Providence  
Historical Society**

is dedicated to preserving the heritage and enjoying the history of our city.

**If you are not a member we  
invite you to join now.**

Annual dues are \$15 individual, \$25 family or business, or a Life Membership for \$150.

Please make check payable to:

**East Providence Historical Society**

and mail membership form to

**East Providence Historical Society  
P.O. Box 4774  
East Providence, RI 02916-4774**



**Membership Form**

- New
- Renewal/Change

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Street: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

\$15 Individual

\$25 Family/Business

\$150 Life

# Once around the Bogs

## Tracing the History of the Edaville Railroad

By Reinhard Wohlgemuth

Even if you have never been to Edaville yourself you probably have seen advertisements or discount coupons at a local store. Or maybe you saw the TV commercials at Christmas time for their 'Christmas Festival of Lights'. What is it that makes people return year after year to ride the train and put up with long lines at the ticket booths? What is the magic that makes children and adults run closer to the train when they hear the whistle? How has this place survived for more than 50 years with only a short interruption in the 1990's?

Well, I have to confess that I am one of these people who just can't stay away and still can't explain why I get goose bumps when I hear the steam whistle. For almost 40 years I visited every year (except while they were closed), not just once but several times each year.

It all started in 1974 when my wife Kathy suggested, "I know you like trains, we should go to see Edaville." She knew of the place but had never been there herself. So we packed up the car with a picnic lunch and went; she was pregnant with our son Erik and our daughter Inga was about two. Inga found the rocking of the train and the clickety-clack of the wheels so relaxing that she was fast asleep within 5 minutes of the trip. As for me, I was hooked and we



continued to return year after year as a family.

Over the years I became friends with many employees, rode on almost every engine, was allowed to shovel coal and spent a day helping the track crew replacing rotten ties, published a newsletter for several years and maintained a fan website for Edaville.

When Mr. Atwood opened the railroad he never envisioned that it would turn into a popular tourist attraction. He wanted to use the railroad to be a tool in his cranberry business: carry workers back and forth, haul berries at harvest time, move equipment as needed and haul sand used to maintain healthy bogs. But within a short time after the first rails were laid people started to come and beg for rides. And Mr. Atwood just loved it!

After his death Nelson Blount ran the operation and he is best known for collecting railroad and trolley equipment. Some of it ended up at Edaville, much more

at Keene, NH. From Keene he moved it to Bellows Falls, VT, where he established Steamtown. Ultimately his collection became the seed for the large museum at Strasburg, PA.

Unfortunately Mr. Blount also passed away and now George Bartholomew took over and kept the trains running. It was during his

time that I started my visits. Sadly, due to a sagging economy and other factors he ended up putting the railroad up for sale and most of the equipment was moved to Portland, ME. Several groups unsuccessfully tried their luck after that to reopen the railroad. Finally, in 1999, Edaville reopened once again under new management and has been operating ever since. Its concept has changed a little and is now advertised as 'an amusement park with a train', but wheels are still turning.

I hope this short history has piqued your interest in this New England attraction. While I won't be able to answer all your questions I guarantee you will be able to learn more at our **Members' Meeting on April 22**. Please note that we will meet at the **Riverside Branch Library at 7:00pm**. And come early to look over some of the ephemera I will have on display. Due to the closing time of the library we will also serve refreshments before the meeting.

## Memorial Fund

The Society's Memorial Fund was established in 1993, in memory of past members, for "the betterment of the Society and with no specific purpose".

The Memorial Fund is a qualified endowment administered by the Executive Committee. Members and friends wishing to contribute may make checks payable to the East Providence Historical Society and mail to:

East Providence Historical Society  
Box 4774  
East Providence, RI 02916-4774

## May Members' Meeting Old Route 6 Where Did the Road Originally Run?

Member Don Doucette has been researching Route 6 and we've been scouring the archives for information about the old course of the road. You'll be fascinated to see what he has dug up and perhaps will be able to add some memories yourself. Join us.



## A Herring of a Tale: From the Seekonk to the Turner Reservoir

By Nancy Moore

Once upon a time, in East Providence RI, there was a young man who loved to fish. When he fished for stripers and blues, he used herring for live bait, which got him thinking about those herring and their life cycle. Herring lived for five to seven years and returned to the same spawning rivers year after year. What if he put herring into the Ten Mile River? Would they return year after year? So off he set to herring runs in South County and nearby Mass. to collect herring in garbage cans, to be dumped above the Omega Dam. His theory was right. The fish spawned in Omega Pond made their way to the ocean that fall and continued to come back to the Omega Dam looking for a way to get back to their spawning habitat. Now Paul Bettencourt had a backbreaking task: scooping those fish from below the dam and carrying them up into the pond above.

But others also saw the wisdom of doing this ecologically sound work and each year since the mid 1970's, the herring have been scooped with nets during runs of amazing bounty in some years. In the later years, Save The Bay took up the task as they simultaneously began lobbying the DEM and Federal Fish and Game officials to consider a fish ladder at Omega Dam. As they began to make progress at the State/Federal level, they broadened their scope. What if all the dams from the Seekonk River to Central Pond were given ladders? That would open 340 acres of spawning habitat and support a herring population of 200,000! And perhaps the shad would return also.

Why would it be so important to reestablish a herring run on the Ten Mile River? Was the Ten Mile a spawning habitat for herring and shad historically? Well, the Ten Mile, 150 years ago, was so full of herring that farmers used the fish as fertilizer on their fields. And archeological digs at Hunts Mills falls and Turner Reservoir have established the presence of Indian summer encampments, presumably to dry fish for their

winter supplies. In the natural food chain, river herring (alewives and blueback) are at the bottom, feeding everything that is bigger than themselves. A healthy herring population would sustain a larger sport/edible fish population. This sound reasoning convinced the Fish and Game people to look very seriously at the Ten Mile and to finally make a commitment to all three ladders on the river.

Work commenced on the first ladder at the horseshoe dam at Hunts Mills in 2011 with completion in the spring of 2012, in time for the April migration. However, an unseasonably mild winter with little snow melt or storms left the ladder dry. Herring were sighted at Herring Rock but none were sighted above the dam. Work on the Turner ladder was finished in time for the 2013 migration and as this piece is being written, about 300 fish have been lifted over Omega Dam by the Ten Mile River Group led by Keith Gonsalves. These fish are the first herring able to reach the Turner Reservoir in over one and a half centuries. A group of fish counters will be trained on April 13 at the Hunts Mills ladder and the Historical Society will be open that weekend to share in this historic event. Work on the final ladder at Omega Dam will begin June 1, 2013, with 2015 as the target year for a clear, non-scooped path from the Seekonk River to the Turner Reservoir for any fish which chose to use the Ten Mile to spawn. This has been a fifty year commitment for the Bettencourt family. No wonder the State of Rhode Island has seen fit to name the Omega ladder the Paul Bettencourt Ladder.

*(Information presented at the March members meeting by HS member and Ten Mile River leader, Keith Gonsalves)*



Now this is a fish ladder! If the herring thought it was hard work getting over the dam at Hunt's Mills, wait 'til they get to the Turner Reservoir. The dam is at least twice as high as Hunt's Mills and this view from the top of the ladder is a good indication of the impressive size of the structure.

Reinhard Wohlgemuth photo

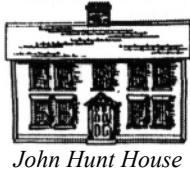
## Gardening Tips

By Jeff Faria, Master Gardener

Please come to the member meeting on Monday, April 22 at 7:00pm at the Riverside library and bring soil samples for testing. Collect a tablespoon of soil from a few different areas of a particular garden and bring them in a plastic bag. I will test the pH from up to three samples per member.

I will also have seeds for you to choose in planting vegetables or flowers for the upcoming season.

- Once you know your pH you can amend your soil by adding either lime, at a rate of approximately 50 pounds per 1000 ft<sup>2</sup> which is a 20' x 50' area, or amending the soil by adding compost or other organic matter such as coffee grounds or grass clippings incorporated into the top 6 inches of your garden bed.



East Providence Historical Society  
P.O. Box 4774  
East Providence, RI 02916

**Non-Profit Organization**  
**U.S. POSTAGE PAID**  
**Providence, RI**  
**Permit #2712**

**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

- 
- Rake away old foliage from irises and dispose of it. Eggs of the iris borer overwinter on this old foliage. Do not compost it.
  - Begin an aggressive weeding campaign now to reduce the chore later on in the season. I attack flowering weeds and dispose of them. One plant can produce thousands of viable seeds. Remember my adage: 10 minutes of weeding in April saves an hour in July!!!
  - Sow your packages of peas, lettuce, root crops and other greens now. Try planting greens in blocks rather than rows for more efficiency. I also like to plant leafy greens in amongst flowerbeds to give variety and to confuse the bad bugs!
  - Spraying dormant oil on fruit trees and evergreens now can help reduce hatching

of sucking and chewing insects if you have this problem.



- Be careful when you transplant young seedlings, whether you have started them or purchased them because strong sunny days could damage the leaves. Move them to a semi-shaded and sheltered location for a few days so that they can acclimate to outdoor conditions. Keep an eye on their need for water. Also prepare to cover them if nighttime temperatures dip below 40°.