



# 50 EAST PROVIDENCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

September 2016

Volume XXIX No. 1

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

— September —

Sunday, September 24  
11:00am - 4:00pm

Smithsonian National  
“Free Museum” Day  
Hunt House Museum open

Tuesday, Sept. 27  
6:30pm

Members’ Meeting -  
*Public invited*

History of Textiles  
in Rhode Island

Weaver Memorial  
Library  
41 Grove Avenue,  
East Providence, RI

— October —

Saturday, October 1  
11:00am - 3:30pm

Watchemoket Square  
Day

Sunday, October 9  
1:00pm - 3:30pm  
Hunt House Museum  
open

#### CONTACT US AT:

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Historical Society  
P.O. Box 4774  
East Providence, RI  
02916-4774  
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Web Site: ephist.org

## President’s Letter

By Nancy More

Hello everyone.

This becomes a lengthy letter when we don’t print during the summer, but we surely want to tell you about all the exciting news of the summer. First of all, we have had a change in our Board: Stephanie Poole, our young vivacious preservation expert, has moved to NH where her husband has a new job. With Steph’s fine qualifications, she will soon find a new job herself and we wish her the very best and thank her greatly for her work with EPHS.

During the summer, Jeff Faria ably filled in for Steph but his primary position is with the Master Gardener Program. We are very happy to say that Nancy Allen, a recent member and Chair of the Education Committee, has agreed to take on the secretary’s position also. Nancy hails from Seekonk but that is a plus in our preservation opinion.

We all sported the new 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary T’s at “Arts at Hunt’s” and the Annual Meeting the next evening. Our great thanks go to new member Leslie Tente and Curator Deb Omerod for spearheading the design and printing. Perhaps you’ve already noted the new heading for the Gazette for this 50<sup>th</sup> year? The 1st Annual “Arts at Hunt’s” was a fabulous success for the EPHS. We were busy all day long, speaking with so many people from all over the state who were very impressed by the beauty, accessibility and historical significance of the site. The artisans produced high quality work and seemed to like the site as well. We look forward to the 2<sup>nd</sup> “Arts at Hunt’s”. Our tremendous thanks to all the volunteers who manned the house, gardens and gift gazebo.

We generally have quiet summer Open Houses but the Pro Jo did a special article on the quilt exhibit in its “What to do this weekend” spot for July and we had another banner day with turn out above the numbers of “Arts” and “Ring of the Green” Sundays. Our docent staff

Continued on page 3

**The Gazette**

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East Providence  
Historical Society

P.O. Box 4774, East Providence, RI  
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Web Site: ephist.org

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**Notice Regarding  
July Dues Payments**

All dues are payable in the month of July. They can be paid at the annual picnic in June, OR can be mailed in to the post office address found on page 2 of the GAZETTE. You can also download a membership application to print and mail from our website: <http://ephist.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/membership.pdf> This reminder will save us considerable postage, and we will be able to spend more money on programs for you!

Thank you all for your continued support. We hope to see you this fall at the Hunt House for our open houses, the second Sunday of each month. If you have any questions about dues, please contact me at (401)434-9462.

Miriam Kenney  
Membership Chair



It is our pleasure to welcome the following new members:

- George & Jill Bowen
- Eugene & Mary Carpenter
- Jane Dennison
- Dwayne & Judith Hall
- Paula Keavy & Richard Brown
- Becky Rego & Jack McAlice
- Candace Seel
- David Valerio

We also have several new Lifetime members:

- Nancy J. Allen
- Nancy McBride
- Michael & Norma Reynolds
- Dorothy J. Thornley

Welcome to the new members and thank you for your continuing support to the Lifetime members.

**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

**President’s Letter – continued from page 1**

was pressed to the limit but they did a tremendous job of keeping everyone informed and glad that they had come to Hunt’s Mills. The addition of Ernie Germani’s group for Hikes at Hunt’s has also proved very popular and is an excellent extension of our focus. And if you haven’t checked the Pump House windows yet, take a look at the displays which tell the history of that amazing building and the birds which frequent the river. Our great thanks to Keith Gonsalves and Becky Ellis for relieving our crew of the many questions about the Pump House. It’s a great idea!

Perhaps the most exciting news of August was that our own Dave Kelleher has won the Antoinette F. Downing Award for volunteerism in preservation, RI’s highest award of this kind. He had been nominated by the EPHS, Friends of Pomham Rock Lighthouse, Save the Bay and the EP Historic District Commission for his ongoing efforts on behalf of our City and his tours of the lighthouses in Narragansett Bay. Dave has been a force for preservation since he joined the effort to save Union Primary back in the 90’s. He has served as program chairman and president of our group, the Friends, and chair of the Historic Properties Commission (now the HDC). We are so proud of David’s achievement! He will be presented his award by Preserve RI at the Rhody Awards at Rosecliff in Newport on Sunday Oct. 16<sup>th</sup>.

In ongoing projects, the Ed Center (old Manager’s cottage) is close to obtaining a permit for work to begin and we have been asked by the Champlin Foundation to flesh out our request with project bids, always a good sign. The 6<sup>th</sup> Watchemoket Square Day happens on Saturday Oct 1<sup>st</sup> (see article) and the Volunteer Fire Dept. display is already up at City Hall, thanks to Joe Donato, department historian. This display moves to WSD and then to our three Fall Open Houses, with the addition of tours of the Training Grounds and antique fire trucks. And in another plus for EP, the Looff carousel was featured in the Pro Jo’s special section of major historical sites in RI. A wonderful beginning for our 50<sup>th</sup>, don’t you think?



**Members Meeting**  
**Tuesday, September 27**

Weaver Library -41 Grove Avenue  
 East Providence 02914

Public Invited

Refreshments/viewing at 6:30pm  
 Program at 7:00pm

The quilt exhibit at Hunt House will travel to the Champlin Room for this meeting - one last look before these special quilts get carefully stored away. In celebration of the fine work still being done by women (and men) in our community, Linda Welker and Margaret Ordonez, editors of and contributors to the book “Down by the Old Mill Stream,” will present the history of textiles in RI and its significant contribution to the industry in the US. The Piecemaker Quilt Group based at the Newman Church will be honored for their contributions to the EPHS quilt exhibit. Please feel free to bring a family quilt to share.

**Please note the change from our usual Monday slot.**

**In Memory Of**  
**Joan Hanlon**



*Sadly missed...fondly remembered*

## Moments in Time

By Andy Valerio

### The Ragman (Part I)

In the late spring of 1949, I got home from work at the usual time and went into the house, said “Hi” to my mother to let her know that I was home. She responded, “I had a visitor today.” She said the Ragman stopped when she was outside cleaning the yard. “He asked about you kids and how you were doing. I told him that you quit school at 16 and now had a full time job in Providence. We talked a little and just before he left he said, ‘I liked your family and you had good kids.’ ” That was the extent of the conversation with my mother and I went off to do whatever and would be back at 6:00 for supper. Sometime later that day I thought about my mother’s conversation with the ragman.

In the late spring of 1938, I was 5½ years old and playing with some neighborhood kids in the street when a horse pulling a wagon came down the street. When any traffic came down the street, we kids got out of the street and up on the sidewalk until the traffic went by and we did the same for the horse and wagon. I noticed the driver of the wagon looked like an older man, with a soft hat pulled down to his ears and a scruff of mostly gray hair down over his collar. He would cup his hand and put it next to his ear and yell, “Rags.” He didn’t seem to come every week. After a few times of seeing this Ragman with the horse and wagon, someone in the group got the idea of hitching a ride on the wagon. We would let him go by and then run behind the wagon, grab the tailgate and lift our feet off the street and get a ride. I guess he knew what we were doing



because he would turn around and yell, “Get off there!” And then he would snap his horse whip and try to hit our fingers. We would let go - end of the ride. Within a few weeks, he stopped coming down our street. I thought maybe he went by a different street so as not to put up with us kids trying to hitch a ride on his wagon.

Within a short time, another Ragman came by. He was younger in appearance and drove a truck. His truck looked like a station wagon but there were no windows around the sides and back and he could put his bags of rags through the sides or over the tailgate without climbing in the truck. There were no seats. Also, the roof over the truck body was higher. His truck was similar to the fish peddlers’ trucks which stopped in our neighborhood. In their truck body, there were boxes with lids on them. When the fish peddler lifted the lid, we could see different kinds of fish lying on ice.

After seeing this Ragman for a few times, one day he stopped and one of the neighborhood women came out to him with a half full pillow case of clothes. He took the bag and hung it on a weight scale. He said something to her and she nodded. He put the pillow case into his truck. He then put his hand in his pocket and handed the woman some coins. She went home and he got into his truck and drove away.

Sometime later, I thought about what went on between the Ragman and the lady. I remembered how she gave him a pillow case with some clothes and he gave her some money. I thought, "If I had some rags and gave them to him, I could have some money." The big problem was, where would I get some rags? I'm sure it took a few days of thinking but I came up with the solution of where to find some rags. That was at the dump. It seemed to me as a kid, that whenever there was a deep hole on the ground, people took stuff they didn't want any more and they threw it in the hole, thence the dump. In the field off Mercer Street and Lyons Avenue, there was such a hole. It was only a few blocks away from where I lived on Juniper Street. Today that dump site has been filled in and there are several ball fields there. I had heard grownups talk about a stone crusher and a gravel and dirt pit on that site. Once the site was no longer useful, the hole in the ground became a dump. One could say it was a poor boy Home Depot. The best part was it didn't cost any money. The only problem was that to get what you wanted; you might have to dig through a lot of debris. But, I reasoned, if I found some rags, I could make some money.

I don't remember the first time I sold rags, but I know I did because as soon as I got the money, I went to JJ Oliver's store (no longer there) which was on the corner of Juniper Street in front of the apartment I lived in. I headed right for his penny candy counter. Most of the candy was wrapped in paper and was 2 or 3 pieces for a penny. I needed a bag for all my candy. I would go behind the store to check out my good fortune. If some of the group was around, I would share my good fortune.

After a time of selling my rags to the Ragman, I became aware that he always weighed the bag of rags and I reasoned that if the bag was heavier, I would get more money. What could I do to make my bag heavier? I thought to put a rock, mixed up with the rags, in the bag. That worked once. The next time he came, after weighing my bag, he said, "I'll give you back your bag." He emptied the bag onto the ground and out rolled my rock. He looked at me and said, "Next time you pick up rags with dirt on them, give them a good shake to make sure there are no rocks mixed in with the clothes." I was caught but he didn't scold me. The bag of rags I had sold him the week before had a rock in the bag and he must have found it so after that he would empty my

bag to make sure I hadn't put anything bogus in the bag. I couldn't use that rock idea anymore.

Within a short time, I came up with the idea to wet the rags so they would weigh more. I wet the rags for the next time he came. He weighed the bag and looked a little puzzled and then felt the bag, emptied it and touched the rags. "These rags are wet. I can't take these. Put them in the sun to dry and I'll take them next time I come." Well I didn't earn any money that week and that was a punishment to me. I didn't outsmart the Ragman. I felt a little remorseful and decided that from now on I would not try the cheat the Ragman again.



*The story of Andy's experiences and business with the ragman will continue in the October Gazette. Don't miss it!*



# Quilt Show

**Saturday, October 29, 2016**

**10:00 am to 3:00 pm**

*Sponsored by  
The Piecemakers Quilt Group*

Held at  
Newman Congregational Church  
Memorial Hall  
100 Newman Ave., Rumford, RI 02916

(at the corner of Newman Ave. Rt 152 & Pawtucket Ave. Rt 114)

*Quilt Display by members,  
Featured Quilters: Nancy Poor & Eileen Lovett with  
quilts & quilted items for sale,  
Challenge Project "Animals Out of Their Element",  
Vendors, Quilter's Boutique, Bargain Table,  
Quilter's Café,  
and more...*

*See our Autumn Churn Dash Raffle Quilt!*  
Raffle tickets available at the show.  
Drawing will be held on Sat., December 3th  
at the Newman Church Bazaar.

Public Invited  
Admission: \$5.00 per person  
Tel: 401-434-4742

## Smithsonian National "Free Museum" Day

Saturday, September 24  
11:00am - 4:00pm

### *"Keep Me Warm One Night"* *An Exhibit of Antique Quilts*

This is the last on-site showing of this quilt exhibit showcasing an array of antique quilts from as early as 1845. Most of these local quilts are finished but several are quilt "tops" which allow one to see the intricate piecework. The Blackstone Valley quilt and the Crescent Park quilt have drawn many visitors already. The WCTU quilt (1888-1938) has been a wonderful new addition and a new yo-yo quilt acquisition will be on display. The Rumford Baking Powder Room and Hunt Family artifacts are also on display. 45 acres of grounds to hike.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Fall Open Houses

Oct. 9, Nov. 13, Dec. 11  
1:00 - 3:30pm

The John Hunt House  
65 Hunt's Mills Road, Rumford 02916

### Early Days in the EP Volunteer/ Paid Fire Dept

When Joe Donato, fire department historian, contacted us about collaborating on an exhibit, he had no idea how timely his suggestion would be. Over the spring we talked about the possibilities and eventually it was settled that WSD - Oct 1<sup>st</sup>- would be the opening event for an exhibit of the EP Volunteer Fire Dept - 1880s to 1930. The first WSD display has gone into the City Hall case and Joe came up with some truly important pieces. Look for the display at WSD in the Cafe at Tockwotton and at our Fall 2<sup>nd</sup> Sundays. Weather permitting, Jim Viara's fire trucks will be with us and the 10 Mile Group will be on hand to talk about the history of the old Fire Dept Training Grounds behind Hunt House.



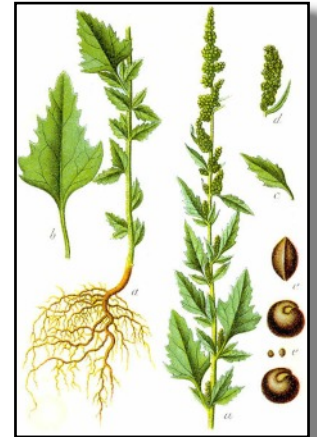
Hose Carriage of Volunteer Fire Dept., East Providence, RI

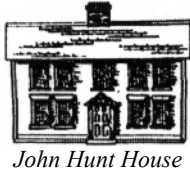
## Plant of the Month By Jeff Faria, master gardener

### Lambs Quarter

#### *Chenopodium album*

It is actually the plant of the season in my opinion! And, it is a weed that grows right under your feet. It is called Lambs Quarter, also known as pigweed, fat hen, or goosefoot (after the shape of its leaves). Lambs Quarter can be eaten raw in salads as well as steamed, sautéed, or added to soups. Leaves can be dried or blanched and frozen for year round nutrition. Just add them to almost any dish, smoothie or tea! It is a great source of the amino acids which our bodies do not produce and 1 cup of raw Lambs Quarter contains 73% of daily vitamin A and 96% of daily vitamin C recommendations. It is also loaded with iron and B vitamins. The leaves can be salty as they absorb nutrients from the soil and the flavor varies with growth stages but it is always edible. Check out lambs quarter on-line at Mother Earth News for recipes and more information.





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East Providence, RI 02916

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## Watchemoket Square Day

Saturday, October 1  
11:00am -4:00pm

Check your local paper/ WSD facebook site/ [ephist.org](http://ephist.org) for details

It seems incredible that the EPHS is about to participate in the 6<sup>th</sup> annual WSD! This year, the EP Chamber of Commerce is sponsoring the event with the WSD steering committee working alongside the Chamber. The EP Fire Department and the Friends of Pomham Rocks Lighthouse join us for an all-day exhibit at the Tockwotton cafe. Weather permitting, antique fire trucks will be on hand. Mini-presentations will be out on Bold Pt. and inside at the Tockwotton theater. Walking tours begin at St. Mary's Church and proceed down Warren Avenue to the old bridge abutment with stops at Industrial Nat'l Bank and Jacques Tavern. **NO BOAT TOURS THIS YEAR.**

Family fun, music, visits with K-Rob, antique cars, and food will be showcased at venues from St Mary's down to the waterfront. Shuttles available. Come celebrate the old Square!

