



# 50 EAST PROVIDENCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1966-2016

March 2017

Volume XXIX No. 4

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

— March —

**Monday, March 27**  
Members' Meeting  
*Public invited*  
6:00pm Pot Luck  
7:00pm Program  
**Rosanne Sherry:**  
**Birds of the Blackstone**

Newman Church Hall  
100 Newman Ave.  
Rumford, RI 02916

— April —

**Sunday, April 9**  
1:00pm - 3:30pm  
Hunt House Museum  
open  
1:30pm at the Gazebo  
"Hikes at Hunt's"

**Monday, April 24**  
7:00pm  
**Atwater/Donnelly Duo**

Weaver Library  
41 Grove Ave.  
East Providence, RI

CONTACT US AT:

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## President's Letter

By Nancy More

The Historical Society welcomes the public back to Hunt's Mills this spring with a new exhibit and a ramped up Master Gardener program. These offerings, in addition to the very popular "Hikes at Hunt's," the herring run and the mini-exhibit at the Training Grounds expand the focus at Hunt's and help get out the word about the natural wonders in this special place. Our great thanks to the Conservation Commission and the 10 Mile River Watershed Council for continuing to support and compliment our efforts at Hunt's Mills.

We welcome a new contributor, Leo Caisse, to our Gazette this month. Leo is a new member and also a new member of the EP Historic District Commission, representing the center of the City. He is an avid researcher and is now working on an article about the Rifle Range, located in the area at the end of Redland Avenue in Rumford. Leo would appreciate any input from the public! And I'm sure he would like to hear from you about "What Cheer Airport" also. Stretching things a bit, we decided to run his airport piece in conjunction with the Rosanne Sherry bird talk on March 27<sup>th</sup> deciding that "wings" could be the operative word for both.

The Board has had some discussion about the exact boundaries of the Blackstone Valley Heritage Corridor (BVHC)/National Park as it pertains to East Providence specifically. The area of EP north of the 10 Mile River/Omega Pond is definitely in the Corridor, with a sliver of coastline from Omega Pond south to 195 also included. Within the Corridor there are 6 sites which will be given National Park status - none of them are or ever will be in EP! However, since we are within the Corridor which is overseen by the Park Service, there are benefits which accrue to our area. One is that expert volunteers like Rosanne Sherry, our March presenter, and Park Ranger Kevin Klyberg (May) are available to us. So we have planned 3 programs to help us all explore this amazing resource. The April program at Weaver is just plain family fun - Atwater and Donnelly making their special kind of Blackstone Valley music.

**The Gazette**

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East Providence  
Historical Society

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Nancy Allen *Recording Secretary*  
Pat Henry *Corresponding Secretary*  
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Deborah Ormerod *Curator*  
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Reinhard Wohlgemuth *Newsletter*  
Nancy Moore *Preservation*  
Nancy Moore *Programs*  
Nancy Moore *Publicity*  
Becky Ellis *Website Manager*

**2nd Sunday Spring Open Houses**

March 12, April 9, May 14  
1:00 - 3:30pm  
The John Hunt House

**Hikes: Meet Ernie Germani of the EP Conservation Com. at the gazebo @1:30**

**Exhibit: Hunt's Mills: A 100 Year Retrospective Through the Lens of a Camera**

From 1895 - 1925, Hunt's Mills was the most famous area in the Rumford section of East Prov. mainly because of the amusement park built by the Rumford Baking Powder Company for its employees but also because of the natural beauty of the site with the falls, rapids, and the Ten Mile River which encloses the property. It was said to be the most painted and photographed site in the entire area in the early 1900s and some of those professional photographs/

postcards are in the Hunt House collection. This spring the museum highlights those photos/postcards and features them along side the work of five local amateur photographers who capture Hunt's wildlife and beauty today.



**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

## Members Meeting

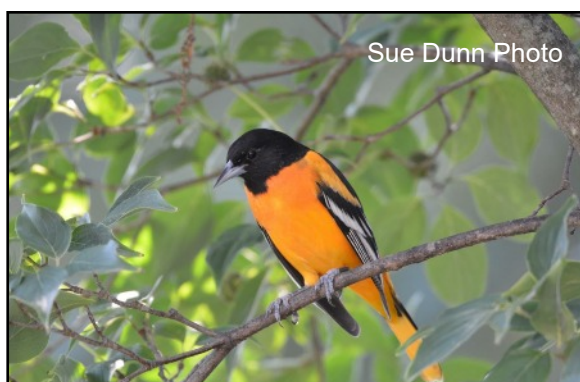
Monday, March 27

Newman Church Hall, 100 Newman Ave - Rumford 02916

### Birds of the Blackstone

By Rosanne Sherry

Traditionally our return from the winter hiatus always opens with a shared meal, and anyone who wishes to share with us is welcome, member or not. This year 3 groups are sponsoring the evening: EPHS, EP Conservation Commission and the 10 Mile Watershed Alliance. We convene to eat at 6:00pm and dessert (provided by EPHS) will be at 6:45pm for anyone coming to the general meeting and program beginning at 7:00pm. So please feel free to dine with us: bring your favorite salad or main dish! It's a great way to meet the groups!



Male Baltimore Oriole, a common sight along the Ten Mile river.

As was mentioned in the President's letter, one of the benefits for being in the BVHC is access to speakers who are top drawer volunteers, passionate about Corridor history, flora and fauna, and the little known aspects of this resource. Rosanne Sherry is well known to the Master Gardener

group at the John Hunt House as she was coordinator of the URI MG Cooperative Extension Program from its inception. The Hunt's Mills MG site was one of her babies and Cheryl and Jeff Faria know her well. Over 3 decades, she worked in garden centers, wrote for newspapers/magazines and appeared on radio/TV as a horticultural educator. In addition to her renown as a horticulturalist, Rosanne (now retired) is into her second career as a birder, leading walks through the Corridor in search of feathered friends. She is a long time member of Audubon and a founding member of the Oceanstate Bird Club. In just her second year as a volunteer with the National Park Service, she has been featured in the Volunteer Spotlight (BVHC newsletter) and was awarded a certificate for Outstanding Interpretive Program for 2016. Whether on the trail or in the classroom, she loves helping others appreciate the natural world in their own backyard. The Farias tell us that Rosanne approaches all her work with great humor. Be prepared to laugh!

## Hikes at Hunt's

During Open House Sunday make a Sunday afternoon of it with a walk through Hunt's Mills, with or without a guided tour, and a look through the exhibits, both inside and out. The 10 Mile River Watershed Alliance will be on hand to give tours of the old Fire Department Training Grounds behind Hunt House (and take on volunteers for the April fish count) and Ernie Germani of the Conservation Commission will lead "Hikes at Hunt's", his famous walking tours.

New for this year **beginning in April**: "Walks and Talks" with Master Gardeners at 2:30pm.

### Coming April 24 Atwater/Donnelly Duo

A musical look at the times celebrated by the Corridor. This event is co-sponsored with the Weaver Library.



**Atwater-Donnelly**  
Traditional American Folk Music & Dance  
20 Campbell Street • Warren, RI 02885 • (401) 392-1909  
www.atwater-donnelly.com

# What Cheer Airport

By Leo Caisse



Snow Was No Deterrent To Aviation Enthusiasts At What Cheer Airport.

East Providence Plain, toward the old Nyman Manufacturing building on Ferris Avenue and the Seekonk line.

What Cheer Airways was established as a Class A airfield and many pilots considered it to be the best natural airfield in RI. In August 1928, the US Army Air Corps flew onto the field with their biggest operational three ton bomber. Before the end of the year, a flying school with fifty students began to operate there. In the fall of 1928, What Cheer held its first air show or carnival, as it was called in those days.

Not so long ago, you could drive to Newport Avenue and charter a plane, learn to fly, go on a sight-seeing flight or watch an air show at What Cheer Airport. The unlikely founder and first president of What Cheer was Nicholas Bertozzi, a Pawtucket ice cream maker. He founded What Cheer Airways in June 1928 and it lasted until its sale in 1934 to Walter O'Hara who replaced it with the Narragansett Race Track. During its six year span, it burst on the scene with so much enthusiasm and potential it's truly a shame to contemplate what might have been.

The six plane hangars, offices, and restaurant were located on Manton Street which was in the area of the now defunct Building 19 structure off Newport Avenue, making its mailing address Pawtucket. But all of the airfield extended down Newport Avenue, along the

Governor Norman Case attended the air carnival which was comparable to our present day Quonset Air Show. An estimated 50,000 people turned out to see the three day event which included forty different aircraft, stunt flying, sightseeing flights, and military demonstrations - all without accident, no mean feat in those pioneer days of aviation. It was just the year before the Lindbergh solo flight to Paris so public interest was tremendous. Imagine the traffic jams on Newport Avenue!

Aviation out of What Cheer was unfortunately marred by at least two accidents during its short history. In 1929, three men chartered a plane and pilot for a sightseeing trip. They took off successfully but shortly after, the engine conked out and they crashed at Cole's Farm on Brown Street in Seekonk. All perished. In another incident in 1931, the airport's chief mechanic was struck and killed by a plane propeller.



By February 1929, enthusiasm for commercial aviation had arrived in earnest.

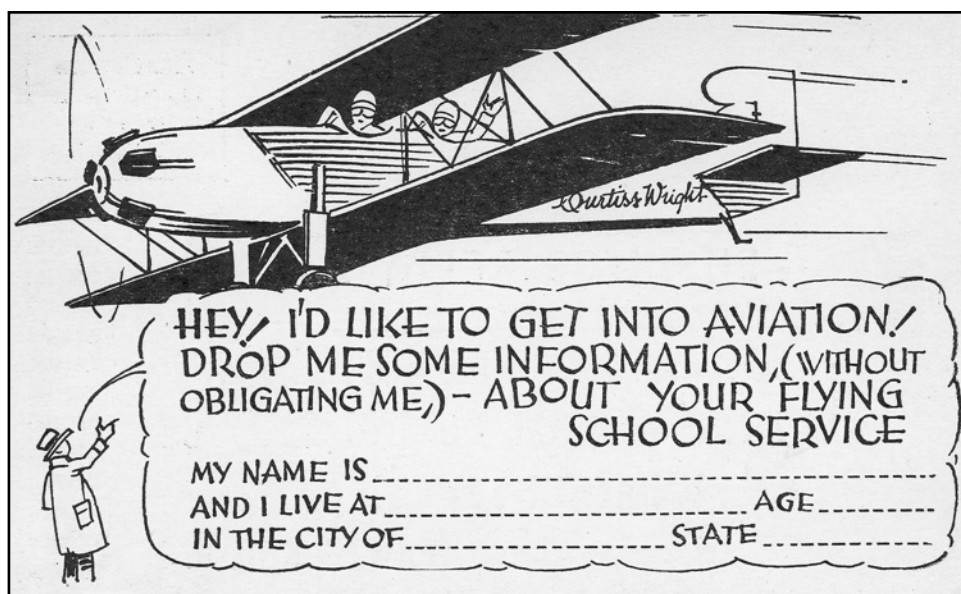
Nicholas Bertozzi (right), head of What Cheer Airways, Inc., Manton avenue, greets Edward Berns (centre), who has been engaged by the corporation to fly here. Berns has a record of 3000 hours in the air without an accident. Man on extreme left is Patrick McBride, chief mechanic at the new Pawtucket airport.

A \$300,000 legislative bill was introduced in the General assembly to build our first State airport. There were high hopes that What Cheer would be selected as that location, but other politicians were lobbying for another location at Gaspee Point. In What Cheer's favor, the Army had approved and was using What Cheer for their Texas Tri-motor Ford airplane in 1929 and the first cross country flight in a Fairchild Cabin monoplane took off from What Cheer that same year. What Cheer Airways was actively operating as was the Southern NE Air Service, offering flights anywhere along with running flight schools. In April 1929, a link with nationwide Curtis Flying Services, headquartered in New York, was established.



William Messerschmidt, owner and operator of Bavarian Aircrafts (yes, that Messerschmidt who would go on to build and supply warplanes for the Third Reich) announced that he was contracting with local businesses to build his planes in the area and would be using What Cheer Airport. The future was beginning to look bright indeed. But alas, that future came to a screeching halt when the State Airport Commission selected Hills Grove/Gaspee Point as the location for the first State airport. As soon as the State started building, Curtis Aviation severed their relationship with What Cheer, literally overnight. Use of What Cheer began to dwindle and Bertozzi finally sold the grounds to O'Hara who immediately built the Narragansett Race Track. The rest, as they say, is history. Oh, but what could have been and was, for a short while.

In closing, I would just like to add that I was lucky enough to meet an eyewitness to some of the events at the What Cheer Airport. As fate would have it, I met an elderly lady and struck up a conversation with her after learning her name. Politely, I asked her age. Obliging, she told me she's coming up on her hundredth year. Intrigued, I asked if she always lived in East Providence and she said she has been here since she was a child. Spurred on with this information, I asked her if she remembered an airport on Newport Avenue to which she replied, "Oh yes, I went to air shows there, tremendous traffic jams on Newport Avenue." She went on to say she and her sisters would save up their money and go to the airport and hire a pilot and plane for a



Advertising postcard for the CURTISS-WRIGHT FLYING SERVICE located at What Cheer airport. This was a pre-addressed postage-paid card.

Continued on page 6

## What Cheer Airport

Continued from page 5

sightseeing flight for two dollars. She said she did it many times. I asked if she remembered what kind of plane it was but she didn't, just describing it as one of those planes with two wings, a bi-winged plane, where she sat in the front cockpit and the pilot in the rear and she wore a leather helmet and goggles.

Josephine Pimentel seems to have such fond memories of her adventures there and I'm so glad I asked.



By the way, Josephine turned 100 last week. Still sharp as a tack, lives by herself and is an avid card player.

*Unless marked otherwise all photos for this article are used with permission from the Pawtucket History Research Center at the Pawtucket Public Library.*

## Public Utilities Commission Hearings

For 15 years, citizens in Providence and East Providence have been watching carefully, and protesting when appropriate, the retention of the overhead power lines/towers which run from India Point to Bold Point, eventually connecting to the Phillipsdale trunk line on the EP waterfront. \$17,000,000 was appropriated for burial of those lines by National Grid but the project has faltered at every turn. On Feb. 6<sup>th</sup>, National Grid informed the PUC that it would in fact be abandoning those towers. However, the new route for those wires to connect with the Phillipsdale trunk line has yet to be determined. Two possible scenarios were presented: a cable attached to the Washington Bridge on its south side or a crossing in the air just north of the bridge. The PUC has declared a 120 day moratorium while it researches these new options. The HS greets the news that the towers will be taken down eventually with great satisfaction. We have invested much energy in Watchemoket Square Day and there will certainly be an immense improvement in the sight lines at Bold Point.



Current Museum Exhibit:

# Hunt's Mills - a Photography Retrospective 1905 - 2016



Postcard view of the midway and Loof carousel.



Ernest Germani Photo



Becky Ellis Photo

In the early 1900's, Hunt's Mills was a mecca for artists and photographers of all kinds. We know this from our extensive postcard collection of the area and professional photographs from which the post cards were made. Hunt's Mills Amusement Park was the "place to be seen" on the weekends with its midway, acclaimed orchestra and Looff carousel. Lately, there have been photographers working there again and a group of artists meets in the gazebo from time to time. The Arts at Hunt's festival last

summer featured several works with Hunt's as the subject. Five local amateur photographers have submitted their works for this exhibit and you will note that some of the photos feature the birdlife which has flocked to the river for the April herring run. Our thanks and appreciation for their work go to these new eyes at Hunt's: Wayne Barnes, Becky Ellis, Ernest Germani, Keith Gonsalves and Dwayne Hall.



Becky Ellis Photo



We welcome our newest members:

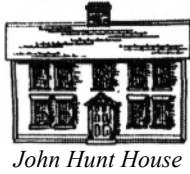
- Joe Crowshaw
- Dominic Leonardo
- Anne & Mike Teipel

## In Memory Of

**Sophie Frederick  
Albert Lee**



*Sadly missed...fondly  
remembered*



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

*John Hunt House*


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## Gardening Tips

By Jeff Faria, Master Gardener

- Assess your gardens while they are barren from winter's sleep. Think of what you enjoyed last season and what you might like to change this coming season.
  - Plan to begin weeding as soon as they begin to grow. Pull weeds before they set seeds. One hour of weeding now will save a day of weeding this summer!
  - Now is a good time pruning most fruit trees and berries. Start by assessing damaged and overlapping branches or canes. Remove the oldest or non-productive. Pruning blueberries yearly will avoid biennial production.
- 
- It is best to have your garden and lawn soils tested for proper pH. Generally applying 50 pounds of lime or wood ash per 1000 square feet will maintain a good balance.
  - By late March, it is a good time to direct sow peas, spinach, beets and carrots into your garden. Start tomato and pepper seeds indoors at the end of the month. Use sterilized soil to help prevent damping off disease.