



50 EAST PROVIDENCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1966-2016

November/December 2017

Volume XXX No. 3

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

November

Monday, November 27
7:00 pm
Members' Meeting -
Public invited

The Hunts of Hunt's
Mills Send a Son to
War - 1861-1864
Part 3

Riverside Library
475 Bullockspoint Ave,
Riverside, RI

December

Sunday, December 10
1:00 - 3:30 pm
Hunt House Museum
open
1:00 - 3:00 pm
Hayrides at Hunt's



CONTACT US AT:

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

President's Letter

By Nancy More

As we continue to celebrate the Hunt family, and specifically, Peter Hunt's Civil War service, we come ever closer to the threads that tie generations together. It has been so gratifying to have the descendants want to be a part of this special view of our local history at Hunt's Mills. The family was gone from the Mills by 1867, although not from RI, and the Hunts by other names have remained prominent in their own localities. Our great thanks go to all of them for their support for this project. And it has been a true boon to have Philip DiMaria surface at the very last minute for these three fall public programs. Phil showed up at Weaver in his Civil War uniform and charmed us all. He graciously filled in for our great friend Dave Norton in October, and will handle the last talk by himself. (Please see Nov 27 blurb on the next page) I hope you can make it to Riverside Library to meet him.

Per usual, we are combining the Nov/Dec issues of the Gazette: **there will be no other issue until March.** Please note all the dates - no reminders coming! And please note that the hayrides will operate only until 3:00pm when those stately animals need to leave for another venue. So plan to come early and be on the wagon by 2:45pm.

We are closing in on the end of our 50th year celebration. Our great thanks go to all of you who have joined to support the EPHS: to those of you who are pillars of the group, to those of you who help out whenever you can, to those of you who send us financial support and good wishes from far away, to those City workers in all departments who willingly help with matters that concern Hunt's Mills and preservation in general, to our partners at Hunt's (the Master Gardener group, the 10 Mile group and the Conservation Commission), to those Blackstone Valley Corridor people, Bank of America volunteers, all the people who spread the word through our press releases, our speakers, activity leaders, and connections at venues all over the City. EPHS continues to widen its message with every new member. We hope that includes you!

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

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Nancy Moore *Programs*
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General Meeting

Monday, November 27 @ 7:00pm

Riverside Library

Bullocks Point Ave., East Providence 02915

“The Hunts of Hunt’s Mills Send a Son to War - 1861-1864”

Part 3

Lt. Peter Hunt volunteered for the RI Light Artillery in August 1861, and was assigned to Battery C. As the war progressed, batteries were reformed as need be, and eventually he found himself with Battery A. In 1986, Battery B of the 1st RILA was reactivated and its members now act as custodians of RI's rich Civil War history. If you have been with us for the first two parts of this trilogy, you know how engaging and effective a speaker Captain Philip DiMaria of Battery B is. Phil will be the primary presenter for this last evening, concentrating on the Battle of Gettysburg (July 1-3, 1863) and the role of the RILA

in that battle. And if you have been wondering about the gun at the RI State House? We'll get the lowdown on its travels, all the way from RI to Gettysburg, PA and back again, twice.



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

Current Museum Exhibit: "All Quiet on the Rappahannock Tonight: the Civil War service of Lt. Peter Hunt"

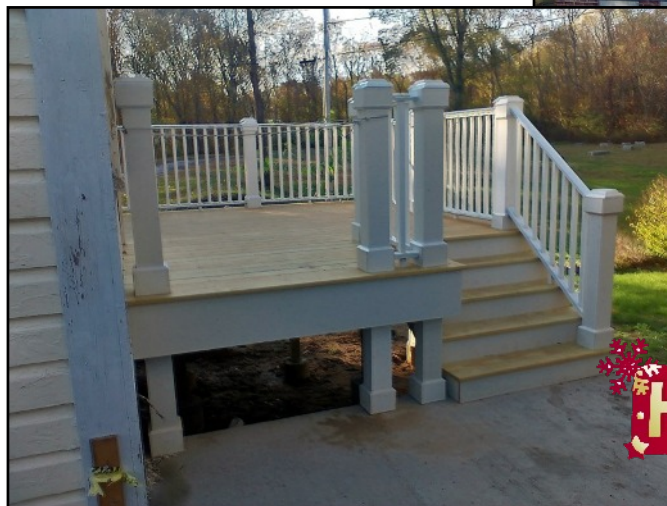
These two open houses are the last time the personal Civil War possessions of Lt. Peter Hunt of the Hunt family of Hunt's Mills will be on view to the public: his battle sword made in Providence, his Bible and stamp/money holder, pieces of his battle uniform and original letters written by him and his family. The descendants of his brothers, Daniel and Horatio, have been very generous with their family pieces, and portraits of these brothers would have hung in the Hunt House at that time. Also on display are the family china and quilts made before the Civil War. If you have been attending our Civil War presentations, this is the best way to make those talks come to life. Come and have a "Sunday visit" in the Hunt parlor and steep yourself in the family history.

Ed Center Update

We had 8 people come to share in the scraping/cleaning on Saturday the 22nd. That included 2 high-school fellows doing community service - thank you all! And our good friend Dean Martineau will have his crew finish up that work this November so the new storm windows can go on. We have good friends indeed at the EPHS!

Most noticeable exterior changes to the building are the two new stairways and doors. The preferred way to make the education center handicapped accessible was to add a chair lift to the back deck, rather than a long ramp. While the stairs have been installed, the lift will be added later.

Photos provided by Brian Turgeon



**2nd Sunday
Fall Open Houses**

Nov. 12, Dec. 10

The John Hunt House
1:00pm - 3:30pm

"Hikes at Hunt's"

1:30pm at the Gazebo -
November and December

"Hayrides at Hunt's"

1:00pm - 3:00pm

December only

Co-sponsored by the

family of Councilman

Britto : cookies and hot

chocolate

- family

activities

- music



HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

An Old World Christmas

By Reinhard Wohlgemuth

When I first immigrated to this country I had a lot to learn about Christmas. Everything that I had grown up with and learned about Santa was suddenly wrong and I was re-educated, watching Rudolph and other Christmas specials with my children on television. In the end, some of my customs were incorporated and embraced by my family in our Christmas celebration today. Others had to fall by the wayside.

So what did I do when I was a little lad in the early 1950s back in Germany? Well, it would start with my father making an advent wreath for the 1st Sunday of Advent. It was held by 4 ribbons attached to a star on a homemade stand. Every Advent Sunday we would light the appropriate candle(s) while we had our coffee and cake in the afternoon. I kept that custom going after we moved into our own home.

For the first year, I had to make my own stand and even create candle holders with a pin to stick into the wreath. The design changed over the years and today we are using a commercial metal wreath. The live pine wreath was abandoned the year we had a cat that decided that his favorite place to curl up was inside the wreath on the dining room table.

On December 5th I would polish my shoes and put them on the window sill in the evening. During the night, St. Nicholas would come to check up if I had been a good boy. If the shoes were clean, I would find a small toy or candy in them when I woke up on the 6th, St. Nicholas' Day. This is another custom that survived until today. The kids are out of the house but we still get them something little for St. Nicholas' Day. And no, they don't have to bring their polished shoes to our house the night before.

Finally, Christmas Eve would come and my father would bring in the fresh Christmas tree. After that the living room door would be locked while he decorated it. He clipped on the candles, hung the glass balls, added some chocolate ornaments, and painstakingly distributed the strands of lead tinsel, one at a time. The decorated tree would be part of the surprise for the whole family. I used to get the biggest kick out of snagging a few strands of tinsel and laying them across the tracks of my electric trainset. Crank up the power and presto: beautiful fireworks!

Although I am dragging my feet every year, I have never been able to stall setting up the tree until Christmas Eve! My family always wanted to follow the American custom of having the tree on display well before Christmas. And after many years of the mess with pine needles, we did switch to an artificial tree a few years ago.



In the afternoon at 4:00pm you would find my whole family at church and then we headed home for supper. The traditional meal for us was hot Wieners and Glühwein (glow wine); not necessarily a German tradition just something my family did. It was simple and we never had Wieners the rest of the year. For the Glühwein, my mother heated some red wine with sugar and cloves. And finally, the big moment had arrived – my father went into the living room to light the candles on the tree. When everything was ready my brother and I were finally allowed in the room. It was a beautiful scene that made my young heart pound: the tree with the tinsel reflecting the flickering candle flames, more candles on the table, pine branches with tinsel stuck behind some of the pictures on the

wall, my 'sweet plate' with homemade cookies, marzipan, nuts and the annual orange, and some wrapped presents. But we were not yet allowed to tear into the presents. There was more waiting involved. To remember the true meaning of Christmas, my father would read us the story of Jesus' birth from the Bible (although we had just heard it in church), say a prayer with us and we would sing a few Christmas hymns. Then everybody hugged and kissed, wished each other a merry Christmas and then opened presents.



The photo shows a special Christmas when I was 4 years old: Santa actually came to our house to deliver presents. Normally the presents were just piled on the table, sometimes covered with a sheet. This year my father asked one of his railroad colleagues to dress up that evening and you can see it was a poor post-war Santa. Anybody with army experience will recognize the coat as a piece of a pup

tent. The beard was nothing but a piece of cotton batting. The presents were in his slightly used potato sack. I had been taught a little Christmas poem and had to recite it for him before he opened his sack to give me my presents. At that age I was convinced that he was real, despite his no-frills suit. And since the German Santa does not fly through the air but walks out of the dark forest on Christmas Eve, there was nothing suspicious about him coming up the stairs.

Notice also the live candles on the tree. If you think that was dangerous, think again. The highpoint of the evening was when every family member took several sparklers, lit them and hung them on the tree! Then we all stepped back and admired our sparkling tree. It wasn't dangerous at all as long you kept one eye on the rug and immediately stepped on the stray sparks that made it to the floor and into the rug. Needless to say, live candles and sparklers on the tree are not included in our Christmas customs today.

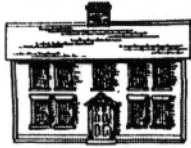
After the celebration, the candles would be extinguished and relit the next day when we usually had relatives for dinner. By the end of the meal they would burn out and my father would replace them with fresh ones. Sometimes we had company on the second Christmas day (yes, we have two days to celebrate

Christmas in Germany) and the candles would be lit again and they would finally get used up on New Year's Eve. New Year's Day was the beginning of the end for the tree, when the family event of un-decorating took place. We would gather around the table and roll dice. Whoever rolled a six was allowed to pick a chocolate ornament off the tree. This continued until no sweet ornaments remained and was a custom we kept while our children were little.

At the end, my father carefully removed each thread of tinsel, wrapped the glass balls in paper and packed everything away for the next year.



Seeing the 'real' Santa was serious business for everybody involved. No ho ho ho here.



John Hunt House

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

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Bank of America Volunteer Day

We had two projects on the boards for B/A this fall and both got done in short order and with great fun! Keith Gonsalves had unearthed what he thought might be some of the foundation supports for the old Hunt's Mills dance hall and he was right! The group of 7 volunteers dug and scraped and uncovered 3 supports which will be flagged and included in the historical narrative of the site. And Jeff Faria and Nancy Moore worked with that group to establish the "Rumford Garden" in the stone circle in front of the Pump House. Stones were moved from the back of Hunt House and yards of compost/loam was wheeled to the site from the composting area.



We hope to welcome B/A back in the spring to do some planting! The plan is to have red white and black flowering plants! Wish us luck. What a wonderful relationship!