



## The East Providence Historical Society

# Gazette

April 2019

Volume XXXI No. 5

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

### March

Monday, March 25  
6:30 pm Site Visit  
7:00 pm Presentation  
Public Meeting

#### Herrings' Plight

Education Center at  
Hunt's Mills  
68 Hunt's Mills Road  
Rumford, 02916

### April

Sunday, April 14  
1:00 - 3:30 pm  
Hunt House open

Monday, April 22  
7:00 pm Site Visit  
Public Meeting

#### Freemasons Hall Tours

The Freemasons Hall  
222 Taunton Avenue,  
East Providence, 02914

### May

Sunday, May 12  
1:00 - 3:30 pm  
Hunt House open

#### CONTACT US AT:

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

## President's Letter

By Nancy Moore, Co-President

Hello Everyone:

We held our first Open House of the spring despite the snow - Ernie went out on the trail with a hiker. It was a great chance to look at the basement and 1<sup>st</sup> floor critically and tweak some things. By the time this arrives in your mail, the last push to get the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor in order will have taken place and the building will be ready for the conference on April 6<sup>th</sup>. The hours of work and the willingness of volunteers to show at a moment's notice has been unbelievable. We'll thank them all in this space next Gazette.

We thank Daniel Harrington for his permission to publish a piece he wrote for the Providence Journal a while back. Daniel grew up in EP and his historical perspective is always welcome. We hope you enjoy the amazing facts he has uncovered in this piece about Vanity Fair. (We thought it was timely with the Preservation Conference looming.)

And today I had my first trip to Home Depot, not inside, but along the back perimeter. I was stunned to see Great Blues in nearly all the nests and some of the nests holding both parents. This was about 4:30 pm on March 14<sup>th</sup>. So if the Great Blue Heron is back can the Blue Herring be far behind? As always, check for the fish flag at Hunt's.

## April 2019 Conference Update

The RI Preservation Conference is now 2 weeks away! If you missed the online registration date (March 22) you can still be a "walk-in" on Sat. April 6<sup>th</sup>. You will experience a look at East Providence through the vehicle of sports and recreation, not one's usual take on preservation. But it seems that EP, with all its open land and easy accessibility by land and sea, was a mecca for all kinds of activity. We had a race track, an airport and flight school, an indoor tennis court (1914), 4 amusement parks, 3 full golf courses and several smaller ones, Pierce Field, a baseball team and the usual roller rink and skating ponds, beaches and boating. Add to that the amazing history line descending from the first community in the area (Rehoboth 1643, now the Rumford area) and EP has much to share with the 500 people who will come to visit for the Day on April 6<sup>th</sup>. For the complete schedule, please go to [preservationconferenceri.com](http://preservationconferenceri.com)



**The Gazette**  
Is published by the  
East Providence  
Historical Society

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**Thank You to Our Open House Sponsors!!**



**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

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**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



# OLD FASHIONED FAMILY FUN DAY

## SUNDAY, MAY 12

### 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Sunday, May 12  
11am - 4pm



65 Hunts Mill Road  
East Providence, RI

East Providence Historical Society presents:

## Old Fashioned Family Fun Day

Join us for a day of vintage games, food, history, and fun!

11:30am - Education Center Dedication  
12pm - The Great Rumford Bake Off begins  
1:30pm - Walking Tour of Historic Grounds  
Tours of the Hunt House, food, and games available all day  
Register for the Bake Off at [rumfordbakeoff.com](http://rumfordbakeoff.com)

### 11:30 AT THE EDUCATION CENTER

You are cordially invited to attend the Dedication of the new Education Center during the Old Fashioned Family Fun Day on Sunday, May 12 at 11:30. There will be a ribbon cutting, a brief speaking program and tours of the Education Center.

# The Great RUMFORD BAKE OFF

### 12 NOON UNDER THE BIG TENT

Join us for The Great Rumford Bake Off which celebrates the 160<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Rumford Baking Powder beginning at noon during the Old-Fashioned Family Fun Day! Baking enthusiasts are welcome to enter a beloved recipe. Learn more at [www.rumfordbakeoff.com](http://www.rumfordbakeoff.com)

# America's original Magic Kingdom

by Daniel F. Harrington

The buildings were engulfed in flames. A young woman, high upon a ledge, cried out for help. Finally, the firefighters arrived. They hastily spread a net as the blaze moved to consume her. The damsel then leapt through the smoke and landed safely in the net! Two thousand onlookers burst into cheers.

Meanwhile, across the way, a room full of glass structures housed a dozen premature babies. Nurses tended to their every need.

The babes would soon get used to the shrieks that surrounded them, non-stop, day and night. You see, just outside their habitat, boats full of human beings fell from the sky and landed in a man-made lagoon surrounded by 100,000 electric lights.

It was opening day, May 25, 1907, at America's original Magic Kingdom. All over New England, people dreamed of coming to the magnificent new amusement park called Vanity Fair in Riverside, Rhode Island.



Reinhard Wohlgenuth collection

Proposed layout of Vanity Fair. Some attractions never materialized, the rest were less ornate.

Located on 40 acres of what is now the Silver Spring Golf Course, America's first theme park designed from scratch attracted 40,000 visitors on its first day- yet closed forever just five years later.

Billed as "the park triumphant," it didn't disappoint.

The fire rescue reenactment was a "masterpiece of realism." Dubbed "Fighting the Flames," it included a cast of 200 and a

life-size town square designed to burn. Acrobatic actors ascended and descended ladders to rescue their many victims, including children. (Think Cirque du Soleil.)

The falling boat ride was called "Shooting the Chutes," and its impressive edifice served as the park's centerpiece. All around it attractions abounded: An open air circus featuring Adgie the Lion Tamer, a Wild West show, a Rocky Mountain roller-coaster and a ride simulating an earthquake. A grand ballroom hosted the finest musical acts and guests dined at the exquisite College Inn.



Reinhard Wohlgenuth collection

Vanity Fair's main entrance on Pawtucket Ave.

Notice that many postcards give the location as Providence rather than Riverside or East Providence

That summer, aviation pioneer A. Roy Knabenshue flew his airship "Imperial"



Reinhard Wohlgenuth collection

The Infant Incubators were located in a separate building as part of the South Walk.

from Vanity Fair to the State House and back, dazzling hundreds of thousands of Rhode islanders.

But Vanity was doomed from the start. Three months after opening, the stock market crashed in the Great Panic of 1907, sealing the fate of the upscale park that dared charge a 10-cent admission fee. Standard Oil purchased the bankrupt property in 1915 and Vanity was forgotten.

But not before Joshua Daigneault changed the world.

Born in Providence in July 1907, Joshua was appallingly small at birth, weighing just one pound. Newspapers noted the hand of the world's smallest human being "could slide through his mother's wedding ring."

Shocked to see the baby breathing, an intrepid doctor named Crocker immediately summoned the Providence police to speed Joshua - in an open air motorcar- to the peculiar "Infant Incubators" exhibit at Vanity Fair. There, they hoped, the "tiny mite" might survive.

"Infant Incubators" was the brainchild of Dr. Martin Couney, a German-Jewish immigrant who specialized in caring for premature infants but couldn't secure funding for his endeavors from traditional hospitals. So he turned to the amusement industry, establishing functioning neonatal facilities in select parks like Vanity Fair. (Which means, of course, thousands of Rhode Islanders can credibly claim a grandparent who began life as a circus exhibit!)

At first Joshua rallied, moving from a diet of diluted brandy to mother's milk and nearly doubling his weight. The press cheered his progress, but after a few weeks, Joshua succumbed to the impossible odds.

Still, he captured the imagination of the world.

A British newspaper lovingly compared "Poor Little Joshua" to the biblical Joshua who made the sun stand still. Today, "Providence Joshua" is still worth a pause of reflection. More than 1,000 premature babies per year are cared for at Providence's exemplary Women and Infants Hospital. Each one owes a tip of his or her tiny cap to the pioneering boy who, long ago, perished at an enchanting place called Vanity Fair.

Learn more about the golden age of Ocean State amusement parks at "Midway Memories," hosted by the Rhode Island Historical Society, on May 10. ([www.springforwardthinkback.com](http://www.springforwardthinkback.com))

-Daniel F. Harrington ([danielharrington@yahoo.com](mailto:danielharrington@yahoo.com)), a monthly contributor, is president of Chartwell Wealth Management, in Rumford.



Reinhard Wohlgenuth collection

"Shooting the Chutes", the park's centerpiece. Visible on the left is the "College Inn" and the "Grand Ballroom" on the right.

# In Memory Of

## V. Ruth Pierce



*Sadly missed...fondly remembered*

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

April 14

May 12

Mothers Day

Old Fashioned Family Fun Day

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

1:00 pm - 3:30 pm

### "Hikes at Hunt's"

With Ernie Germani

1:30 pm at the Gazebo  
March - December

## April Public Meeting

### The Freemasons Hall

222 Taunton Avenue, East Providence 02914

Monday April 22 @ 7:00 pm

We have a treat in store for us this month: the stately Freemasons Hall which dominates the Taunton Avenue business district (especially as one drives west on Taunton) will be open to our group as a special presentation to wrap up April and the Preservation Conference in EP. Richard Lynch and his fellow Masons will give tours of the building and reprise the talk given at the Conference. This is your chance to see the amazing "sky ceiling" and the beautiful artistry in the main hall. Our great thanks to the Masons for being such welcoming hosts for the Conference!

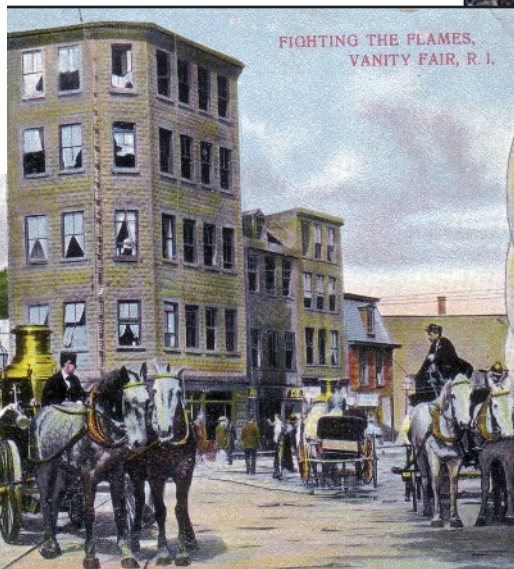


## Some More Scenes from Vanity Fair

Postcards of the famous "Fighting the Flames" area.

This was a mockup of a city block complete with the Vanity Fair fire department. Inside the tall building gas jets were strategically placed to safely create the illusion of flames leaping out of some windows.

Postcard views  
Reinhard Wohlgenuth collection



## The Historian's Circle

Thank you to those who have donated to our Annual Fund. With your Historian's Circle gift, you are helping to make a profound difference in the achievement of the Society's annual, strategic vision and endowment goals.

### Hunt's Mills Park: \$500+

- Nancy Allen
- Cheryl and Jeff Faria
- Nancy and Dan Moore
- Nancy Stevens
- Dotty Thornley

### Crescent Park: \$250-\$499

### Vanity Fair Park: \$100-\$249

- Ann Linde
- 10 mile River
- Gail Ransom
- Cindy Sloan

### Boyden Heights Park: \$50-\$99

- Pamela and Paul Gaudet
- Miriam Kenney
- Jena and Mike McNulty
- Ed Serowick
- Tom Warzeka

### Friends - \$1-\$49

- Karen and Mike Antonowicz
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- Hillary Fournier
- Dave Kelleher
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- Carol Lavin
- Loretta Monahan
- Deb Ormerod
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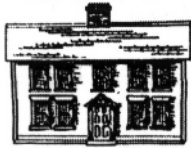
Thank You!!!

## Gardening Tips

By Jeff Faria, Master Gardener

- Gardening season is upon us! Start seeds indoors for tomatoes, eggplant and peppers. Peppers germinate best at 80°, so place in a warm location.
- Directly sow peas, lettuce, leafy greens and broccoli as soon as the soil is thawed and workable.
- Save space by planting wide rows of about 16".
- I will have seeds for free on Monday, March 25 at the member meeting in the education center.
- Most pruning and moving of shrubs and small trees is best done before they leaf out.
- You can re-plant Easter lilies in your garden after the flowers fade. Leave the greens to nourish the bulb. Be sure to mark the location because they naturally will emerge later than Easter, the following year.
- Apply Bt. as soon as Eastern tent caterpillars are spotted on fruit trees. It is a soil bacteria and considered by many to be organic.
- Dormant oil is effective at smothering eggs on trees. Apply before new growth begins.
- Thin seedlings with scissors by cutting them off at ground level.
- Rake out your lawn thoroughly and reseed bare spots. Keep them moist until the seeds sprout.





John Hunt House

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

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**Preservation, Recreation and Sport**  
THE 34<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL RHODE ISLAND STATEWIDE HISTORIC PRESERVATION CONFERENCE

Saturday, April 6, 2019 ❖ East Providence

**Registration is open!**  
[preservationconferenceri.com](http://preservationconferenceri.com)

**Register online for your pick of tours and sessions.**

- **Keynote Speaker Brent Leggs** Director of the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund at the National Trust for Historic Preservation
- **12 tours** by boat, bus, bicycle, and foot in historic East Providence
- **12 workshops** on historic sports, amusements, civil rights, roadside and dockside architecture, playful programming, and more
- Countless opportunities to network and socialize

**Don't delay! Online registration closes March 22.**

Questions? Call 401-222-2078 or email [ripresconf@gmail.com](mailto:ripresconf@gmail.com)

Find us: [facebook.com/rihphc](https://www.facebook.com/rihphc)

COVER: CRESCENT PARK CAROUSEL 2018 (CITY OF EAST PROVIDENCE), CRESCENT PARK PIER CA. 1909 (EAST PROVIDENCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY), INDOOR TENNIS COURT CA. 1927  
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**Preservation, Recreation and Sport**  
THE 34<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL RHODE ISLAND STATEWIDE HISTORIC PRESERVATION CONFERENCE

Saturday, April 6, 2019 ❖ East Providence