



OLDE NEWS

EAST • PROVIDENCE • HISTORICAL • SOCIETY
• NEWSLETTER •

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

I'm thrilled to report that the Historical Society has begun the year with renewed enthusiasm and a fresh sense of commitment. The Committees are all busily planning and /or carrying out their various projects, as you will read in this issue. The Preservation Committee has an important pilot project to cut its teeth on, the Safety and Security Committee is implementing measures to protect Hunt House from vandals and the Ways and Means Committee is looking for ways to increase the treasury. As for grant writing - well, although we don't have a Grant Writing Committee yet, but we do have

members of the Rumford Junior Women's Club sending out letters to various foundations to receive grant guidelines and applications.

Even the Board has been busy planning an event. We've been looking for ways to help integrate our many new members into the Society. The Pot Luck Supper (see page two) grew out of this idea. We'd like as many members as possible to attend. It will not only be an opportunity to see our old friends but also an opportunity to make new friends who share our interest in East Providence history. I hope I'll see you there!

Claudette Field

JANUARY MEETING

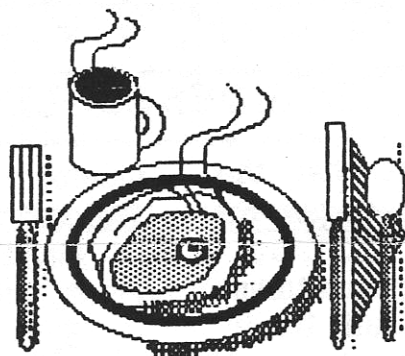
Don't forget that the January 23, 1989 meeting will start the New Year off with a difference, with a Pot Luck Supper for our members at **Newman Congregational Church** (*not* the Grange). The dinner will start at the regular time (6:30 pm) and be followed by a short business meeting. Members who are bringing a hot dish should arrive around 6:00. Volunteers will be needed to clean up afterwards.

After the business meeting, a "mystery penny social" will be held. Each participating member should bring a wrapped item

(or two or three!) to the meeting. Then we will take chances on these mysterious packages by purchasing tickets and placing them in cups placed by the items. (Just like the normal penny social.) The object of bringing *wrapped items* is to make the members guess what might be lurking under the wrappings. This is a good time to unload unwanted Christmas presents and household bric-a-brac etc. The items needn't be wrapped like fancy gifts. You may wrap them in newspaper,

hide them in sealed brown paper bags — anything to stump the group. A ticket will be drawn for each item and hopefully some members will unveil mystery winnings which will amuse the rest of us. See how creative you can get in trying to fool us. So have fun!

Ticket prices will be nominal. This is meant as an ice-breaker not a fund raiser. It should be a night to enjoy and to get acquainted before we plunge into the work to be done in the months ahead. A volunteer will be calling



you this week to remind you about the meeting.

This month Handicap Transportation Service will provide rides to the meeting for members of the Historical Society. We know that we have members who no longer drive at night. If you would like to join us but can no longer get to the meetings on your own, please call Claudette Field at 431-0257 or Florence Adams at 437-1530 and reserve a ride on the mini-bus.

WAYS AND MEANS

Despite a slow start: the Ways and Means Committee has been trying to come up with a few fund raising events for 1989.

Thanks to the members who answered our request for some assistance on ideas we have a lot of suggested projects.

The committee is getting together on the 15th of January and hopefully will be able to announce our plans at the general meeting on January 23rd.

Let's get back to work and make 1989 a healthy and prosperous year for the E.P.H.S.

Madeline and Walter Vincent



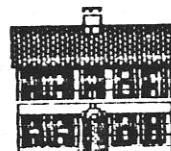
TREASURER'S REPORT as of Jan 10, 1989.

General Fund	753.78
Savings	7,545.59
C.D.	2711.30
Credit Union	25.57
Total	11,036.24

OLDE NEWS would also like to thank Apprentice Angel Florence Adams, who bravely volunteered to oversee the printing, folding, stamping, mailing and whatever else is needed to make it all happen.



HUNT HOUSE UPDATE



THE SECURITIES COMMISSION, Part II

Ray Anderson Mike Charves and Bob Soderlund, our Security Committee, have been busy investigating ways to make the Hunt House more secure. This has become more important in the light of the attempted break-in on Halloween Eve and subsequent vandalism of all of the buildings in the Hunt's Mills complex. All three buildings have suffered from broken windows, and the Pump House is now almost totally boarded up. The small building which was used as a meter repair shop has several windows broken, as has the Hunt House. This vandalism is particularly distressing in light of the fact that it has only happened recently, and seems to be escalating in frequency.

Bob and Ray have contacted several security firms and have presented alternatives to the

Board and to the Society. The primary areas of interest were methods of securing the ground floor and basement window against further intrusions and upgrading the present security system (which has proven its efficacy several times as Ray can attest.)

The Board, at the Jan. 9 meeting, authorized Ray to install mesh screens on the most vulnerable windows as a temporary measure. They will also secure the non-locking sashes.

All of the experts agree that the deterrent that will work best in such an isolated area is to have someone on the premises. The Water Department has unofficially expressed an interest in moving back into the Pump House as one means of keeping the area secure, and the idea of a live-in caretaker of some kind has also been mentioned. Both of these options would require con-

HUNT HOUSE, CONT.

siderable study before any real action could be taken on them. Both buildings in question would need substantial renovations to render them fit for occupancy.

A NEW LEASE ON LIFE

On December 14, Claudette Field and Fales Peirce met with City Manager James Beeley to discuss renegotiating the terms of the lease the Society has on the Hunt House. They explained to Mr. Beeley that it would be difficult for the Society to obtain any grant money for extensive rehabilitation projects unless the Society could demonstrate that it would have control over the property for a longer period of time. Mr. Beeley was apparently impressed with these arguments for he drafted a letter to the City Council recommending that the lease be renewed for twenty years. It's not the ninety-nine years we hoped for but...

Ray Anderson & George Field

DECEMBER MEETING

The meeting opened with the Secretary's report followed by a report from Claudette Field and Fales Peirce about their negotiations with City Manager James Beeley about the terms and length of the lease for Hunt House. The result of the meeting was Mr. Beeley's recommendation to the City Council that the lease be extended to a term of twenty years. He also endorsed the Society's suggestions that the brick ell should be removed and the chimney should be repaired. (see also **Hunt House Update**, this issue.)

Our Treasure reported total assets of \$10,849.57.

A pep talk delivered by our President indicated that the newsletter can not be a one or two man job; it takes cooperation. She called for help to coordinate the people who have already volunteered their services.

Nancy Moore, Chair of the Preservation Committee, has been trying to set up guidelines with the City Planning Board and the R.I. Preservation Commission.

MEETING, CTD.

There have been good press releases in the *E.P. Post* thanks to Florence Adams.

Ray Anderson reported for the Safety and Security Committee, saying that the police respond very well to the alarm at Hunt House. However, there is no way to detect problems before the house is entered. (see **Hunt House Update.**)

A vote was taken to O.K. a request by the Grange to raise the price of the dinners to \$4.50 per person.

Lura Sellow

UNPLEASANT DEVELOPMENT?

A new development has been proposed on Pleasant St. diagonally across from Hunts Mills. The developer plans to put apartments in the two old farm and carriage houses on the site. Five new buildings containing five apartments each are also planned behind these existing houses. This requires the re-zoning of an area which is part of the Rumford Historic District. Any alteration to this area should be given careful scrutiny by East Providence residents.

DECEMBER SPEAKER

I visited Blithewold and sat on the floor of the dining room under the pear tree that supported the world's greatest partridge and listened to the music of Haydn and Vivaldi played on mandolin and guitar. The two musicians sat in front of a blazing fire that illuminated the face of the Victorian hostess, an appropriately dressed, graciously poised mannequin, seated at the head of the table in serene contrast to the contemporary holiday visitors gathered around her.

Blithewold. Old English for "happy wood". This past December Willard Scott, of NBC's *Today Show*; called it "one of the most beautiful homes in America." The *New York Times* carried the Christmas at Blithewold's visiting schedule and *Colonial Homes Magazine* featured a color spread of the mansion in a recent issue.

At the Historical Society's December meeting, guest speaker Mark Zelonis, Director of Blithewold Gardens and Arboretum and Executive Director of Heritage Trust of R.I., showed slides of the Christmas exhibit that had a meager beginning nine years ago but has blossomed into a nationally recognized attraction. The 45 room, 33 acre estate with a modest endowment was left to the Heritage

Trust in 1976 by Marjorie Lyon, daughter of the original builder Augustus Van Wickle, the 1876 Brown graduate, for whom Van Wickle Gates is named.

The landscape is essentially as it was in 1895 before a fire destroyed the first Blithewold. The current mansion was built in 1897 by Van Wickle's widow. Plants from many parts of the world have been added over the years including bamboo, thousands of daffodils on display each spring, an 83 foot redwood thought to be the largest east of the Rockies, and 13 more redwood descendents. Currently there are 6 full time staff, 18 part timers and 80 to 100 volunteers who maintain Blithewold and help raise money by memberships, plant sales, outdoor concerts, a gift shop, and the biggest event of the year, the Christmas display.

Mr. Zelonis said that the Heritage Trust of RI manages five other properties besides Blithewold: the Jeremiah Dexter House and the Henry Lippitt House, both in Providence, 500 acres of open space on Prudence Island, a plot of land near the Lookout Tower in No. Kingston. But the of greatest importance to East Providence is the Philip Walker House, on the corner of Massasoit Avenue and No. Broadway.

The Philip Walker House, built in 1679 could be the oldest house in Rhode Island according to Mr. Zelonis. A house in South County may be ap-

proximately four years older, but its age has not been documented. The Walker House was left to the Trust in 1986 by Mrs. Faith Potter, who "had no strong wishes one way or the other for the ultimate destiny of the house," Mr. Zelonis said, except that it be maintained and used in an appropriate manner.

Mrs. Potter, the former Faith Shedd, married her cousin Christopher Dexter Potter, when both were well along in years. They were both extraordinarily interested in the family history and began amassing the family papers and materials in the "Museum Room." There are drawers and boxes full of goodies, including rocks, sea shells and arrowheads, which will take years of sorting. Mr. Zelonis showed slides of the interior.

Since the end of November, an associate of Heritage Trust has been living in the house. A feasibility study being conducted by Clifford "Jack" Renshaw, who has provided restoration recommendations to the Society regarding the Hunt House. The study will attempt to determine the best use for this 309 year old treasure with "paper thin stairways and listing floors." Suggestions from the community — and especially the East Providence Historical Society — will also be considered.

Florence Adams

THE OFFICIAL OLDE NEWS CALENDAR

	SUN	MON	TUES	WEDS	THURS	FRI	SAT
JANUARY	1 happy '89	2	3	4	5	6	7
	8	9	10 board meeting	11	12	13	14
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	22	23 meeting & supper	24	25	26	27	28
	29	30	31	1	2 board meeting	3	4
FEBRUARY	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	12	13	14 ♥	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
	26	27 meeting & supper	28				

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 East Providence Historical Society
 30 Gurney Street
 East Providence, RI 02914

