



# OLDE NEWS

EAST ■ PROVIDENCE ■ HISTORICAL ■ SOCIETY  
■ NEWSLETTER ■

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

It's been a month of wonderful milestones for the Historical Society. First, we were officially notified that we were indeed chosen by the RI Historical Preservation Commission to be the recipients of a \$44,400 grant, then we signed our long-awaited twenty-five year lease with the City of East Providence on November 5th.

If that wasn't enough excitement for just one month, today we received a letter from the Champlin Foundations announcing that we will be receiving a check for \$25,850 in mid-December. The money will pay for a completely new heating and air-conditioning system for the

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## MEETING



THE NEXT MEETING  
OF THE  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

will be held

**November 26, 1990**

from 7:15 pm

at Newman Congregational  
Church.

at 7:30PM

**Anita Flax, Esq.**

will speak on

Rhode Island, the Reluctant Signer  
U.S. Constitution & Bill of Rights

John Hunt House.

Imagine— heat for our meetings, and heat to keep our stalwart volunteers from freezing. And air-conditioning too!

It's very exciting.

Air-conditioning would be a luxury if we planned to keep the Hunt House as our private clubhouse, but it's absolutely essential for a museum.

Heat, light, and moisture will eventually damage all antiques, but are especially damaging to old paper.

While Edna has very professionally dealt with the light problem by using proper museum storage techniques, there wasn't much she could do about the heat or all the excess moisture in the house. Soon those elements will also be controlled and we will truly be on our way to creating a museum of East Providence history.

GET WELL WISHES TO:

BARBARA BRAINERD

ELEANOR LAMON

BUD PLUMMER, &

JANE THOMPSON

WHO ALL WERE RECENTLY  
HOSPITALIZED .



## OLDE NEWS

published monthly by

The East Providence Historical Society  
Editor George Field, IV

EAST PROVIDENCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P.O. Box 4774  
East Providence, Rhode Island 02916  
438-1750

### OFFICERS

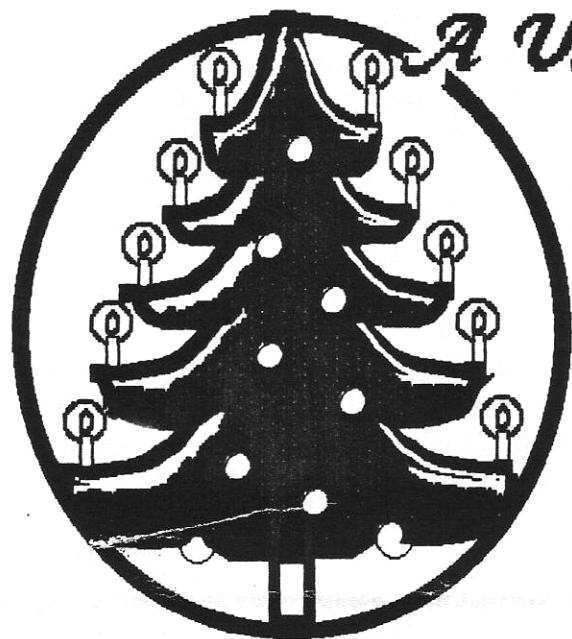
President	Claudette Field
First Vice-President	Scott Booth
Second Vice-President	Ginny Berwick
Secretary	Rose Marie Sirenski
Corresponding Secretary	Lura Sellow
Treasurer	Martha Rivas
Board Members-at-Large	Billie Arden Ellen O'Hare Nancy Stevens

### SPECIAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Building	C. Field
Hunt House Restoration	Walter Vincent, Earl Berwick

### STANDING COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Artifacts	Edna Anness
Grant Writing	Jewel Drickamer
Membership	Madeline Vincent
Newsletter	George Field, IV
Mailing subcommittee	F. Adams
Preservation	Nancy Moore
Publicity	Florence Adams



## *A Victorian Christmas at Hunt House*

### *Open House and Sale*

*Sunday, December 2, 1990.*

*from 10AM to 5 PM*

*See the Hunt House  
decorated as it might have  
been back when Christmas  
as we know it began*

*Plus Crafts, Baked Goods, Jams  
and Jellies, Attic Treasures,  
Colonial Cafe and Exhibits*

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### MUSEUM COMMITTEE

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The Christmas Open House will be held this year on December 2nd. The Hunt House was continuously occupied from c.1750 to c.1930 so this year we will furnish and decorate a room in the Victorian (middle nineteenth century) style. There will also be two displays in the second floor Museum Workroom which is being spiffed up and outfitted with wall display panels and our two display cases. One display will feature the restoration of the

Hunt House and the second will feature old recreation areas in East Providence. We would appreciate the loan of any souvenirs from Crescent Park, Boyden Heights, Vanity Fair and/or Hunts Mills. They will be well cared for during the display period. Call Edna Anness at 434-3347 and she will be glad to pick them up. Anyone with a brass ring?

The following gifts were accepted into the collection: Memo-

cont. on pg. 4

**MUSEUM** (cont.)

abilia from Virginia Berwick, a bureau set and picture frames from Mary Flores, a presentation teapot from Dr. and Mrs. Frederic Ripley, a poster from Gloria Knott, an antique map from Marjorie Chase, a lantern and meat press from Hope Ring, a bed wrench from Edna Anness and scrap-books, plaques, etc. from the GFWC Rumford Junior Women's Club.

In addition to the Open House on December 2nd, the Hunt House will be open to the public every Sunday afternoon in December from 1 to 4 p.m.

*Edna Anness*

Join the Historical Society today! Send this coupon (with money) to

E.P.H.S.

P.O.Box 4774

East Providence, RI

02916

NAME (S) \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

Single (\$10)  Family (\$15)

**PRESERVATION  
COMMITTEE**

In the preservation news this month is a new item, that of the re-zoning of the property at 410 North Broadway (the Haig property) from R-4 to C-2. This property is directly across North Broadway from the Philip Walker House which is undergoing extensive restoration. The 1966 Master Plan, in a genuine stroke of genius, created a residential corner there to protect the Walker House and to reduce commercial strip development.

To negate that zoning in the face of such a great commitment to restoration by the RI Heritage Foundation seems very unwise! Subsequent attempts to re-zone the property to C-2 have likewise been turned down. This month another attempt will be made to formally zone that parcel C-2. (The property now has a special variance for office use.) This committee has presented a letter of opposition to the Planning Board and the City Council based on the premise that the property now presents the best of both worlds: an historic building and site which has lent itself

well to expansion and present day use.

*Nancy Moore*

**As we go to press:** The Planning Board voted at its November meeting to defer any decision on the Haig property rezoning request until all the interested parties (Mr. Haig, his attorney Mr. Sleprow and the E.P. Historical Society) can arrive at a mutually satisfactory conclusion to this issue. Mr. Haig claimed at the hearing that he wants the zoning change only to make it easier to obtain future financing and to clarify his insurance status and that he plans no changes to the property in terms of expansion. The E.P. Planning Department recommended against granting the zoning change.

## WHAT'S DUE

We know that there's a lot of confusion about dues. Some people don't even know when they were due let alone whether they've paid.

So let's try to clarify the situation once and for all.

**Everyone's dues are due each year at the annual meeting.** This year a by-laws

change moved the annual meeting to June. Therefore from now on dues are due in **June!**

(If you joined the Society in the spring of 1990 you still owe dues but they are prorated i.e. if you joined in April and you have a single membership you only owe us \$2.50 for the 1990-91 membership year!)

If you are still terribly confused please call our Membership Chair, Madeline Vincent (434-0481).

Some people feel a membership is like a subscription; they wait for a bill to remind them of their dues. But billing would cost us about \$100. in postage, money better spent on the Hunt House.

Next month there will be a notice in your newsletter if you haven't paid. . . so please call Madeline or use the form below and send your dues in today. You (yes *FOU*) are *very* important to us, we need every one of you!

NAME (S) \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

Single (\$10)  Family (\$15)



## HUNT HOUSE UPDATE



### **INCREDIBLE, BUT TRUE!**

Yes, it's finally happened! The lease to the Hunt House has been signed, sealed, and delivered, and the E.P. Historical Society is now the proud possessor of a twenty-five year lease. The agreement is subject to reviews by the City every five years on the progress we have made on our master plan, which was submitted as part of the lease. It was a long, difficult struggle, but finally a lease was arrived at that everyone feels comfortable with.

### **PROGRESS**

Painting has begun in the keeping room: the trim, wainscoting and corner posts will be a prussian blue, close to the original color, and the walls will be white.

The restored wall in the parlor is almost complete, including the reconstructed door casings. It looks, as though it has always been there. Even better, it gives us another room to restore!

### **MORE GAS**

Two things worth noting: (1) Annoying to us as it may be, the city has done nothing illegal or improper in connecting the Caleb Williams house to our gas line, and would be within their rights to connect the pump house to this line as well. (2) Despite what we see as a generally non-helpful attitude of the city towards the Society's efforts at the Hunt House, some in the city administration *have* been most supportive of the Society and its goals. (And it *is* gratifying to know that OLDE NEWS is read so assiduously down at City Hall! Keep those cards and letters coming!)

### **BONUS POINTS**

The grant for the new heating system will produce an exciting added bonus. The new system will clear the way for the removal of the old boiler and the subsequent future restoration of the summer kitchen in the basement of the Hunt House.



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## THE PETER HUNT LETTERS

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The East Providence Historical Society is fortunate to have in its possession a rich and remarkable collection of documents: the Peter Hunt letters. Peter tells a gripping story in the course of these two hundred odd letters to his mother and brothers back in Providence, that of a young Rhode Islander who fought in an artillery regiment with the Army of the Potomac from the start of the Civil War until his death in 1864.

Peter grew in that time from an enthusiastic young recruit of 18 to a war-weary veteran of 21 who had participated in some of the major battles of the war, including Gaine's Mill, Antietam, Second Manassas, and Gettysburg: names familiar to anyone who watched the recent PBS series "*The Civil War*". In late May of 1864, just days before he and his regiment were to be sent home, Peter was wounded at the Battle of Spotsylvania. His right foot and part of the leg were amputated, and he died two weeks later, just after his Rhode Island comrades had left for home.

The letters offer a vivid pic-

ture of a soldier's life in the Union Army, from the boredom (and mud) of camp life to the high drama (and more mud) of the battlefield. There's a brief spell during the winter of 1863-64 when Peter spends time socializing in Washington (and falls in love with a girl he identifies only as his "peach"). There's a longing for home and its comforts: the letters give a sense of what mid-19<sup>th</sup> century family life was all about. And there are surprising little vignettes- like the description of a peaceful exchange of newspapers with rebel troops (accomplished by a Union soldier swimming the river between the two armies, papers tucked into his cap); and the capture of Robert E. Lee's son, a captain, who had rigged land mines around Manassas, VA. He was forced by his Union captors to dismantle them under penalty of death.

The battlefield scenes are especially moving. Peter was a sensitive reporter who knew how to write a narrative. This one is from the Peninsular Cam-

cont. on pg. 8

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**HUNT LETTERS** (cont.)

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paign, McClellan's 1862 march toward Richmond:

About the battle of Hanover I saw the whole of it and went over all the ground next day. Such scenes I never expected to see. The secesh (*Peter's shorthand for secessionists: i.e. the Confederates!*) laid all night just where they fell. They were in all sorts of positions, some sitting up, some just getting up, some on their knees etc....The dead lay motionless, as thousands of Union soldiers walked around them and viewed the kind of men they were fighting with. ...I noticed one young man about 17 years. He fell between two trees with his head upon a stump. He looked just as natural as life. His eyes were open, his lips closed, his legs straight and his hands placed over his fatally wounded breast. ...He was placed in a deep hole with 24 more and covered up with nothing to mark the spot. Blood lay in the road in puddles, where the skirmishers fell and laid till their life's blood ebbed away in the din of battle. Horses lay dead as if in agony. (June 6, 1862)

Based on my initial research, it's apparently quite rare for such a large and complete collection of letters to come through the years

intact (most published collections of Civil War letters, except for those of famous generals like Grant and Lee, are a pastiche by a variety of writers). So besides shedding light on day-to-day life in the Union Army, the Peter Hunt letters tell an individualistic human story and paint a vivid portrait of a young man under extraordinary conditions. In a way, Peter was writing his autobiography as he penned his letters home, bearing witness to his life and his experience.

I have just sent off a proposal and a selection of 20 letters to W.W. Norton Co. in New York. Let's hope that Norton wants the book! I will keep you posted through the newsletter as to how we're proceeding.

(My thanks to Rose Marie Sirenski who kindly xeroxed the typescript of the letters for me.)

*Jacqueline Damian*

(A copy of the typescript of the Peter Hunt letters is available on a first come first serve basis from the collection at the Hunt House)

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## CHRISTMAS GIVING

Last year the Museum Committee decorated the first restored room at the Hunt House with authentic 1780's furnishings for a Colonial Christmas. This year the theme is a **Victorian Christmas at Hunt House**.

However, that's not all that will be going on at our Christmas Open House on December 2nd..

The Museum Committee will have another exhibit upstairs (described elsewhere in this newsletter); and the newly expanded Ways and Means Committee is organizing a craft sale. Some especially nice craft items have already been donated by our members.

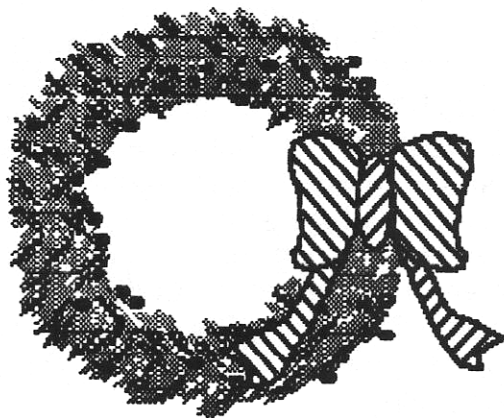
The sale will include a charming miniature executive desk and chair by Len Erickson (who made the exquisite model of Wachuset Square which is at City Hall), a country shelf with heart motif, some lovely needlework, and quilted items in addition to

the other crafts we have amassed.

We need the cooperation of each and every one of you to make this event a success. If you don't have time to take an active part in Historical Society affairs, this is a fund-raiser which you can painlessly support.

While we're looking for the usual Christmas sale donations such as crafts, baked goods, jams and jellies, we also need small attic treasures. (This is *not* a yard sale — no appliances please!) However dishes, platters, glassware, flatware, jewelry, knickknacks, baskets, pottery, picture frames, and other small decorative objects would be welcome.

Please search your cupboards and become part of our effort to



raise money for the restoration.

Donated items may be brought to the November 26 meeting or to the next Ways and Means Committee meeting (November 27, 6-8PM) at the Hunt House or they may be dropped off during Tuesday and Thursday morning work hours at the house or on set-up day December 1 from noon to 5PM.

For the bakers in the audience a Colonial Cafe is planned to encourage people to go upstairs to see the museum exhibit. Food items needed for the cafe include homemade breads, rolls and Christmas cookies. These items and other baked goods donations may be dropped off before 10AM on the

morning of the sale.

If you have *any* questions, the following people are in charge of (and would welcome donations in!) these specific areas:

**Attic treasures** — Patricia Chalmers (431-1959)

**Baked Goods** — Hope Ring (438-5031)

**Colonial Cafe** — Claudette Field (431-0257)

**Crafts** — Madeline Vincent (434-0481)

**Jams and jellies etc.** — Anna Del Pozzo (438-3108)

**Plants and greens** — Walter Vincent (434-0481)

Most of these volunteers may be reached during the day. All ask that you not call after 9PM, please.

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## 1791 U.S. BILL OF RIGHTS 1991

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In honor of the upcoming 200th anniversary of the United States Bill of Rights, our speaker this month will be Anita Flax, a Providence attorney who holds a degree in American Civilization from Brown. She will speak about "Rhode Island, the Reluctant Signer".

As guest speaker at the meeting of the League of RI Historical Societies last month, Ms. Flax enlightened the gathering about the reluctance of the representatives of "Rogue's Island" (as the state was known to its neighbors) to sign the Constitution and their view of the Bill of Rights.

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# I M P O R T A N T D A T E S

- Monday, Nov. 26 **E.P. Historical Society:** Rotary Club Tour of Hunt House,  
Nov. Meeting at Newman Church, 7:15 pm
- Saturday, Dec. 1 **E.P. Historical Society:** Set-up Day for Open House
- Sunday, Dec. 2 **E.P. Historical Society:** "A Victorian Christmas at Hunt House" Open House and Christmas Sale
- Week of Dec. 2 **E.P. High School History Class** tour of Hunt House
- Sunday, Dec. 9 **E.P. Historical Society:** Hunt House Open, 1-4 p.m.
- Sunday, Dec. 16 **Rumford Junior Women's Club:** "Holiday Houses" Tour 6:30 to 9:30PM
- Sunday, Dec. 16 **E.P. Historical Society:** Hunt House Open, 1-4 p.m.
- Sunday, Dec. 23 **E.P. Historical Society:** Hunt House Open, 1-4 p.m.
- Sunday, Dec. 30 **E.P. Historical Society:** Hunt House Open, 1-4 p.m.

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Workdays at the Hunt House are Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Ann Reynolds has been helping Walter this month at the Hunt House, if you would like to prepare the house for our visitors call Walter at 434-0481. He could sure use some cleaning help before the 26th! Holiday Houses tickets can be reserved at our meeting

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# Artisan Studios

## 431-2055

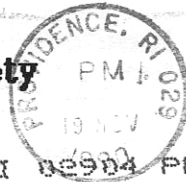
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P.O. Box 4774  
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