



OLDE NEWS

EAST ■ PROVIDENCE ■ HISTORICAL ■ SOCIETY
■ NEWSLETTER ■

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

The Cliches of the Month for January are: "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away" or for those of you with a more secular bent: "Easy come, easy go" Either will do.

Last October we were notified that the Hunt House was one of the sixty-five projects chosen by the RI Historical Preservation Commission to receive a grant for \$44,000. The money was part of the three million dollar Preservation Bond Issue passed by voters in November, 1989.

This month we learned of a major problem with the legisla-
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MEETING



THE NEXT MEETING
OF THE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
will be held January 28, 1991
from 7:15 pm
at Newman Congregational
Church.

Guest Speaker will be
Mark Zelonis
of the

Heritage Trust of Rhode Island
see inside for details

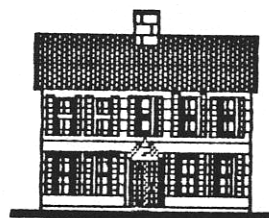
PRESIDENT'S LETTER

(cont.)

tion which created the bond issue. There is an error in the technical language of the bill specifying how the bonds are to be sold. The legislation should have called on the State to sell general obligation bonds but instead it directed the Rhode Island Historic Preservation Commission to sell revenue bonds, which they are not empowered to do. The State's bond counsel, Tillinghast, Collins and Graham, originally advised that an amendment to the legislation would suffice. However, their latest opinion states that the bill needs so many amendments that the bond issue must go back to the voters.

It is providential that the counsel has found this lovely loophole for the State, saving the administration from borrowing another three million in a time of budgetary constraints. However, it is not so wonderful for the grant recipients. It also effectively dis-

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The East Providence Historical Society
Editor George Field, IV

EAST PROVIDENCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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MUSEUM COMMITTEE

It is that time of year to assess where the Museum stands at the end of our second full year of operation. At the start of 1990 we had recorded 59 groups of 251 artifacts which had been accumulated over 23 years including some gifts at the end of the year. This year alone we received 48 individual or collective donations to bring the total of artifacts in the collection to 462. Every item has been recorded in a file tracing system so that it can be located by donor, the geographical section of the city it represents, and by its personal, business, school, or political community connection.

A gift of \$500 received in February for the purchase of conservation materials has been spent and a report is being prepared for the anonymous donor. We now own 300 acid free storage envelopes, 29 acid free storage boxes of assorted sizes, rolls of mylar and acid free tissue and double sided tape to encapsulate maps and large posters, shades to darken our windows, safety locks for the storage closets and a hand vac for cleaning. This fund also covered panels on which to safely

mount our displays. Everything is now safely stored. We never could have accomplished this without the generosity and awareness of our benefactor. The display room has been painted and set up as a mini-museum. The generosity of our Christmas Tree Santas provided us with supplies for the new office, museum and bathroom.

It is a requirement that the Museum be open at least 120 hours annually to qualify for some grants. We were open either for casual browsing during restoration or for tours and open houses for 410 hours, far exceeding that minimum. In the last year 568 visitors have signed our Guest Book and we know that again as many passed through without taking the time to leave their names. Contacts have been made with East Providence schools and three elementary classes have toured the house and I have visited a high school History class with a slide presentation on East Providence history. More such visits are planned.

The Oral History Project continues. We now have a small book

THE CHRISTMAS CAPER a Danger Editor True Adventure

It was Christmas Day and most of the world was settling down to roast turkey, chestnut dressing and fruitcake. But here I was outside the Hunt House, fumbling with two identical keys. One of them would let me inside, one of them would jiggle the door just enough to set off the alarm. While everyone else was snuggled around the Christmas tree, drinking hot toddys and singing carols, I was out here in the real world, that gritty place that never shuts down. It's my world now; I'm the Danger Editor.

I slipped the key in the lock, and gave it a turn. Nothing; I was a dead man. I opened the door with the other key, cursing the rocket scientist who had put two keys with the identical shape on the same key ring: my girl Friday would hear about this. She would, that is, if there was anything left of me once the cops came and had their way with me. I raced to the control panel, trying to punch in the code number and shut off the alarm system before all hell broke loose. Too late.

The siren went off, like the whole Russian submarine fleet

signaling for a dive. Deafened, I finished keying in the number, and the howling stopped. It had only been on for a second, maybe no one noticed. Sure. And maybe I'd meet the Easter Bunny upstairs and he'd give me a jelly bean.

I was upstairs when I saw the local constabulary pull up. I thought about hiding, but there was no place to run, no place to hide. I shrugged my shoulders under my trench coat. Might as well go and face the music.

I opened the door. "What seems to be the problem officer?" I started to ask, but stopped. The uniform facing me was not some grouchy guy with a paunch, mad because he was pulled away from his desk. This was a woman cop, and not a bad looking one at that. I slicked my hair back, and leaned up against the door frame, trying to look casual. "Hi," I said, setting my voice in the low rich tone that women find irresistible, if a bit hard to hear. "How may I help you, officer?"

She gave me a cool stare. "The alarm went off here. You know anything about that?"

"I might. I'm the guy who set it off. It was an accident, what can I say? But..." I paused for dramatic effect, "if it brought *you* here, perhaps it was fate that set off that alarm."

It was hard to read her expression behind those mirrored glasses. "Yeah, right," she said. "Do you have any identification you could show me?"

"I certainly do." I dug into my wallet, hoping she wouldn't see the bulge of my Walther PPK in my coat pocket. I showed her my Danger Editor I.D. Card, with the official gold seal embossed on the front.

"What the hell is this?" she asked, holding it up with two fingers as though it were a dead rodent. "And what is a 'Danger Editor'?"

"That's my secret identity; I don't like to let my real name be known."

"Well, how'd you like to make it known down at the station while we run a print check on you with the FBI? And maybe you could show us some real identification while we're waiting."

I didn't have to try to read her eyes any more. Somehow the old Danger Editor charm was failing

me. I sighed. "Well, then, how about a valid driver's license?" I asked, producing that as well.

She took it, and smirked at the picture that made me look like an escapee from the Home for the Criminally Deranged. "That's a good likeness they got of you," she observed as she handed it back to me. "You must really be who you say you are. Nobody would use *that* picture unless they had to."

She wished me a Merry Christmas, radioed back to the station that she had single-handedly subdued a dangerous intruder and drove off.

As I was locking up and leaving, another car drove up, and the

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Join the Historical
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HUNT HOUSE UPDATE

BAD NEWS, GOOD NEWS

This month's bad news is that due to a little "oopsy" in the wording of the historic preservation bond issue, our \$44,000 grant (and indeed everyone else's grant) from the RI Historical Preservation Commission is gone, perhaps forever. (See the President's Letter for all of the gory details.) If the preservation bond issue will have to be put to the voters again as Mr. Sandersen of the RIHPC suggests, it is quite likely that the electorate will vote it down this time around. What better way to tighten belts than by cutting back spending on luxuries like restoring dilapidated old buildings?

The good news is that we still have the money from the Champlin grant which should be sufficient to do the essential work the Hunt House needs: the structural repairs and installation of the heating system. The state money was primarily earmarked for things such as paint, exterior restoration and new windows. While these are important items that must be attended to, they



will do little good if the building is an unheated shell that is falling down.

The State had all manner of strings attached to its largesse: the City would have to grant the State an

historic easement to the property, and the Society would be under a constant obligation to prove that the restoration was being performed to the State's satisfaction. All of these complications are now put on hold. In a world that is already too complicated, perhaps we can draw a smidgen of relief from the fact that, for the Society at least, some complications are now put on hold.

LIFE GOES ON

On a more encouraging note: work is continuing on the downstairs restoration. The modern floors have been torn up, old floors have been revealed, ceilings are being scraped, and Earl Berwick has done a masterful job in recreating the chair rail for the new wall. The best part is that all of this reconstruction is still being done with "everyday things found around the house". The

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TRIP TO BLITHEWOLD

Our post-Christmas trip to Blithewold in Bristol was sparsely attended (not surprising considering the icky weather and the busy time of the year it took place) and those of you who didn't come, and/or who have never been to Blithewold missed out on a very pleasurable junket.

Blithewold is one of my personal favorite places in Rhode Island, situated in Bristol, one of my favorite towns in Rhode Island. While not an especially old home (the current structure was built in 1905 to replace an earlier shingle style house that burned in the late 1890's), it has a feeling of continuity about it no doubt due to the fact that it remained in the hands of the original family until it was left to the Rhode Island Heritage Trust, the same organization which is restoring the Philip Walker House.

Blithewold always has a special exhibit for Christmas, and this year's theme was "A Child's Christmas". It featured children's toys and games from the incredible wealth of artifacts that are part of Blithewold. (The family apparently never threw anything

out, ever.) Star of the exhibit was the eighteen foot high Christmas tree, festooned with the proverbial "thousand points of light" set up in the spacious entry hall.

The dining room had a crackling fire and was set up for an afternoon tea party, complete with a separate table for the children *and* a special table for their dolls. The living room had another Christmas tree whose base was littered with the sort of presents that would have delighted any child from the turn of the century. The electric train running under the tree was an especially nice touch.

One of the upstairs rooms was decorated as a playroom with antique toys and games that children could actually touch and play with.

All of the main rooms of Blithewold are arranged to provide spectacular views of the Bay across a smooth lawn. Regrettably, the day we were there was so foggy that at times it was impossible to even see to the end of the lawn, let alone across the bay.

The gardens of Blithewold are

MUSEUM COMMITTEE (cont.)

and E.P. Post reference collection and docents to guide visitors. We have set up three displays: the old E.P. recreation areas, the Hunt House restoration, and the Victorian Christmas Room. The only goal set last January and not achieved was the construction of storage shelves. When the heating and cooling system is finished, we will know how much space we will have for new shelving.

It has been a great year. We have all the members of the Society to thank for everyone contributes to the success of the Museum either by joining the Society, volunteering hours on the Museum Committee, working in the collection, giving tours, donating artifacts to the collection, coming to the Museum to show interest in what is being done, contributing suggestions, ideas or even old sheets- everything is a help. The Museum belongs to the entire East Providence community, Keep up the support and join us.

And thanks,

from *Edna Anness*

They're both too modest to talk about it, but the entertainment industry is still buzzing about Walter and Edna's star turn on the Channel 6 6:00 news on Wednesday, Jan 9, when they treated area television viewers to a tour of the Hunt House in all its glory (and since they also showed the basement as well, all its squalor). Offers from Hollywood are expected at any minute, and my advice to them both is: "Hold out for a percentage of the gross."

-Ed.

DANGER EDITOR (cont.)

First Vice-President of the Historical Society got out. "I got a call there was a break-in," he said. "I should have known it would only be *you*"

"Well aren't you the clever one," I retorted.

"I don't want you to feel bad about making me come all the way out here on Christmas Day, just as my daughter was opening up her presents. I don't want you to give that a moment's thought." The 1st veep seemed a bit peeved. No sense of humor.

"Okay, I won't," I said. "And don't you feel that you have to give me a ride home, even though it's Christmas and cold out, and I just suffered through a brutal third degree from the police."

"Don't worry, I won't," he said as he drove off. It was a cold walk home, but that's normal...when you're the Danger Editor.

BLITHEWOLD *(cont.)*

worth a special visit in the summer. One of the the most notable things about them are the great numbers of specimen trees, including the tallest redwood east of the Rockies.

Blithewold is not as imposing as the "cottages" at Newport, yet in its modest scale it provides us with a much clearer picture of what life must have been like for an affluent American family celebrating Christmas at the turn of the century.

HUNT HOUSE *(cont.)*

new chair rail pieces are made from scraps of hardwood that Earl and Walter discovered right in the Hunt House. We are talking authenticity here!

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

(cont.)

enfranchises the voters who approved the original bond issue by a large majority.

The economic climate has changed so drastically since the bond issue was approved. It is doubtful that Rhode Island voters would be as generous with the revised referendum which in any event would not occur until 1992.

Frankly, it will be a miracle if the Historical Society or any of the other sixty-four grantees ever see any of this grant money. It's a good thing for us that we are rather conservative: we didn't count our chickens before they hatched!

Claudette Field

JANUARY'S SPEAKER

Mark Zelonis, Executive Director of the Heritage Trust of Rhode Island will be the guest speaker at the E.P. Historical Society's January meeting. Mr. Zelonis will give a talk illustrated with slides about the HTRI's recent restoration of the Phillip Walker House.

IMPORTANT DATES

- Tuesday, Jan. 1 **New Years Day - 1991** Bank Holiday
declared for most RI Credit Unions
- Monday, Jan. 28 **E.P. Historical Society:** January Meeting,
7:15PM at Newman Congregational Church
- Thursday, Feb. 14 *St. Valentine's Day*
- Monday, Feb. 25 **E.P. Historical Society:** February Meeting
& Pot Luck Dinner 6:30 pm. at Newman Church
Details to be announced at January meeting
- Saturday, Mar. 23 **E.P. Historical Society:** Spring Pasta Supper

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