



OLDE NEWS

EAST ■ PROVIDENCE ■ HISTORICAL ■ SOCIETY
■ NEWSLETTER ■

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

The City of East Providence, as well as other cities and towns in the State of Rhode Island, is in the process of forming its Comprehensive Plan which by state mandate must be completed and final by December of 1991. The Comprehensive Planning process was mandated by the State to encourage local governments to plan for the future. It is designed to provide "blueprints" for local and state leaders to follow in their daily decision making process. It is hoped that these plans will reduce the arbitrary and often favor-ridden decision making process that has evolved in some cities and towns.

MEETING

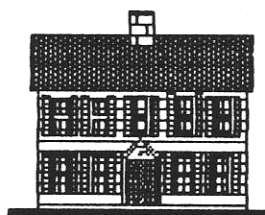


THE NEXT MEETING
OF THE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
will be held Monday,
October 28, 1991
at 7:30 pm
at Newman Congregational
Church.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER *cont.*

Last November, both by default (no one else wanted the job) and personal interest, I was given the responsibility of acting as the E.P. Historical Society Representative to the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee. During the past eight months as few as a half dozen or so of 22 different local representatives have met and wrestled with the problems and opportunities that exist in East Providence. We have analyzed with the City's Planning Department and their consultant various subjects affecting the City such as land use, zoning, housing, circulation and why the City seems more like three separate districts than one City. Other subjects included improving the image of the city and its economic base, encouraging new businesses and protecting property owners from developers whose only interest is making a "quick buck" instead of building on the historic character that exists throughout East Providence.

On October 9th the Committee

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*The
East Providence Historical Society
meets every month on the fourth
Monday except for holidays and
the months of July and August.*

*Meetings are free to all and all
are welcome.*

PRESIDENT'S LETTER *cont.*

will receive for the first time the Comprehensive Plan that is supposed to guide us into the next century. This plan is supposed to be reviewed by the public, the City Council, the State and finalized by December, a schedule which seems a bit optimistic. While we have had two sections of the report for two months we have yet to discuss them. However, we were informed last week that the representatives will have *one week* to read, synthesize and provide written responses and corrections (for the first time) to this 50 to 70 page document.

I'm lucky in that I commute to Boston by train every day and will have two hours minimum to devote to this task and maybe more after I get home at 7:00 p.m.. But what about the other volunteer representatives? What kind of review does the Planning Department want of this document by its representatives?

If it sounds like I am a bit irritated and frustrated by this process, as I am sure other representatives are, on such an important

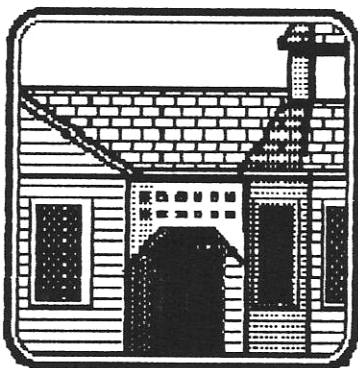
subject that will affect us all, I am, and we are. The Committee started out with enthusiasm, but it seems as with most things that go on in East Providence, enthusiasm for change runs head on into status quo and the Bureaucracy at both the local and state levels.

Jeanne Boyle, Director of the Planning Department, has been asking the state Department of Transportation for the proposed plans on the Industrial Highway along the Seekonk River so that the Committee can review it and include it in their plan. We have yet to see it and have been told that we won't. I'm tired of being patronized by the DOT and having them run over whomever they see fit and then answer to no one. I was pleased to see the officials of Jamestown *tell* the DOT and the Governor what kind of highway *they* would allow to run through their community. Maybe that's the kind of stand East Providence should take. It seems it's maybe the only way to make a bureaucracy listen.

cont. on pg. 8

UNION PRIMARY- 1933-34

John Agren has written extensively about his memories of East Providence, and has kindly sent his manuscripts to OLDE NEWS. We are continuing Mr. Agren's reminiscences of Union Primary School with the story of his experiences in the fourth grade during 1933-34. Ed.)



paper incorrectly spelled which did not escape my teacher's eagle eye.

"John," she said so all could hear, "You go out to the front of the building and look at the big sign which says 'Union Primary

School' and come back here and spell the name of your school correctly."

Grade four at Union Primary School was one of the best, one of the most important school years in the life of this writer.

My fourth grade teacher was Miss Cute, a dark haired woman with a quick smile and happy voice, one of the best teachers that I ever had on any level of education, although on several occasions my knuckles were harshly rapped by the blackboard pointer which she kept by the big door to the corridor. She embarrassed the dickens out of me on one occasion.

Whenever we wrote anything it was necessary to put our name and the name of the school at the top of the paper. One one such occasion the words "Union Primary School" appeared on my

In the back of the room I could see big Georgie Olson look up and laugh at me. He was delighted with my misfortune. "I'll take care of him after school," I said to myself. Near the front of the room a little blond haired girl looked at me as though I had to be the dumbest boy in the world; couldn't even spell the name of his school correctly! Filled with embarrassment I walked out to the front of the school, looked at the sign and made the lonely walk back to the classroom. The writer took his seat and was given a new piece of paper. The heading on the second piece of paper was completed but,

wouldn't you know, the words were misspelled again! Such humiliation! This time the loud and stern admonition was to "take a good long look at the sign on the building and don't you *dare* misspell those words ever again." Georgie Olson was in stitches in the back of the room, Elden Doe was wearing a grin as big as the American flag and the little blond-haired girl and all of her sisters were staring at me in disbelief. I knew they were thinking, "how could any boy be so dumb?" Again the embarrassment, the pain and the shame in front of the whole class! The second time I returned my spelling was correct.

My score on the arithmetic test was a 100. George could laugh at me for some of my problems, so could the little blond haired girl and Elden Doe, but when it came to arithmetic there wasn't anyone who could compete with me. It wasn't until I went on to Wilson Grammar School that a classmate could challenge me in math.

Grade four had several important events in each day. They included the recitation of the sa-

lute to the flag and singing the opening of school songs. We often sang "My Country 'tis of Thee", sometimes "The Star Spangled Banner" and sometimes it was "America the Beautiful." I have always loved to sing and this was probably my first opportunity to sing with a group of my peers. My voice was good, strong and true and I made sure everyone heard it. I didn't like to say "The Lord's Prayer" though. It was my feeling that prayer, to be meaningful, should be said in private.

The best part of fourth grade day was when the teacher read aloud to the class. This period lasted for about thirty minutes and it took place at about 2:30. Miss Cute once chose a book that I shall never forget, one which made me a lifetime reader of books. The story was "The Rover Boys in School." Dick Rover's fight with the big bully Dan Baxter was a thrilling tale of bravery, and when Richard finally put the bully on his back it was a story that had to be read over and over. The bully Baxter was discovered to have had a stone in his right hand during the



HUNT HOUSE REPORT

The boys are back to work and we're still look-

ing for more volunteers on Tuesdays and Thursday mornings from 8:00 a.m. to noon.

Our goal is to have the Front Parlor and front hall finished for the Society's "Open House and Craft Sale" in December. Charlie and Don are presently concentrating on the framework of the front door to enable the replacement of the restored fan window. Another project was just recently commenced: the reconstruction of the original cellar stairway, which Charlie and Lou have already been working on.

Lou and I finally removed much of the rubbish from the cellar and our thanks to Ken Booth of the East Providence Water Department who had it cleared from the property.

Walter Vincent

PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

Welcome to another ongoing year of preservation in East Providence. Your committee is always eager (?) to hear about possible projects and to take on new committee members. Please call Nancy Moore at 438-4299.

We trust you all saw the piece on Rumford in the Providence Journal's Saturday Real Estate section of 10/5/91 - a nice plug for the Society and the work it has done at Hunt's Mills and in the Pleasant Street area. Rumford and East Providence sounds like good place to live, doesn't it? And hopefully, with just a little more hard work, talk, and patience the whole city will also have pristine, historic Brigham Farm as OPEN SPACE to enhance the quality of life here. After a long fruitful meeting with the DEM, the Nature Conservancy, and the City, the Land Trust Board (on which Preservation Committee members sit) appears to be closing in on that goal. Hope springs eternal, where there's a will, and all that stuff: YOU JUST GOTTA BELIEVE! Watch this column for

the good news.

What's (only slightly) bigger than a breadbox and sits on the old Burlingame site? The "what" is a cape house, a compromise with the Quadra builders group. What the Society asked for: horizontal real siding, divided light windows (6 over 6), a specific pitch to the roof, windows on all four sides, fascia boards, a porch, a brick chimney. (Some of these things you may think are standard?) What we don't have yet is the detailing. But there are more houses to be built and each one will have to be applied for separately, and thus each will have to pass by this committee. As we have said before, hope springs eternal.

And finally, are you a Senior Citizen who attended first or second grade at Union Primary? If so, and if you will use the Union meal site, you may have a case of *deja vu*. The great news is that the City has decided to use the old first and second grade classrooms as the meal site and remove all partitions and extraneous portions of those rooms. The false ceiling in the

first grade room will be removed and the beautiful carved beams will be revealed once more. What that means to the Society: these rooms will be readied for restoration which when done will strengthen the case for nomination to the Historic Register. Questions for our members: was there ever a stage in the first grade room? Who remembers just when the red color was put on? What was the detailing of the back entrance before the brick addition? (Bud Plummer is making a model of old Union Primary and would like some input or pictures of the building before the addition. Please contact Bud at 438-4066.) Thanks!

Nancy Moore



FOR WHOM THE BEANS TOLL!

The Ham and Bean Supper needs volunteers. If no support is forthcoming, then there can't be any supper this year. Anyone who knows his beans can tell you it's as simple as that.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER cont.

Well folks, the same applies to local government. They'll do what they think is best, whether you agree with it or not; *unless* you tell them otherwise. This Comprehensive Plan is our chance to correct the things that bother us the most about East Providence. We have the opportunity to improve the quality of life we want in this City.

Unless:

- you *like* that house being squeezed in next to yours sideways or
- you don't *care* about access to the water or open space, or
- you *want* Taunton, Newport, Pawtucket or other Avenues to remain the strip shopping centers they are, or
- you *like* the signage ordinance that makes our City look like a cheap Las Vegas or,
- you *like* people saying, "East Providence, where is that? Oh yes, that's the first exit on the other side of Providence, by...the Washington Bridge, isn't it?"

Unless you like those images, that is exactly how this city will

remain. Unless you take an active review of this Comprehensive Plan and suggest what you want E.P. to be in the next century, then special interests will rule and nothing will change. I would also suggest that we do this correctly and not rush it to the State just because there's some deadline that needs to be adhered to or else!

The question finally is, what kind of City do you want to leave your children and grandchildren?

Scott Booth

UNION PRIMARY, '33-34 cont.

battle! Here was a story of a real hero-and of a real rat! Putnam Hall became my school, the Rover Boys my heros.

One of my obligations to the class was to walk to the Rumford Library with a note from the teacher, to pick up the books that she had ordered for reading to the class. In the performance of this duty I discovered there were more books not only on the Rover Boys but also Tom Swift and

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

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|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| October 12 | 499th Anniversary of Christopher ("Wrong Way") Columbus' landfall in the Americas. (He thought he had landed in India. What a zany!) |
| October 26 | League of Rhode Island Historical Societies "COLONIAL CAPERS AT SMITH'S CASTLE- Rhode Island's Plantation at Cocumscussoc": Tour and Lectures Smith's Castle, Wickford R I Starts at 9:00 a.m. |
| October 28 | E.P. Historical Society October meeting Newman Congregational Church, 7:15 p.m. |
| November 25 | E.P. Historical Society November meeting Newman Congregational Church, 7:15 p.m. |

Horatio Alger. There was Tom Sawyer, Black Beauty and White Fang; hundreds of stories a boy could love! There was "Boy's Life" and other magazines for boys, and "Popular Science." There were technical articles on radio, motion pictures, airplanes and race cars. It was great to learn that as a resident of Rumford and a responsible boy I could take out as many as four books at a time, so my thirst for reading was cultivated by Miss Cute and fueled by the Rumford Library.

The Rumford Library had more than good books and understanding helpful librarians; it was open several evenings in the week and local boys and girls often worked there on their "assignments." Sometimes these "assignments" were rather nebulous- no more than an excuse to get out of the house and engage in chasing one another up and down the hill in front of the library, or in holding hands on the walk home.

There was another aspect to

cont. next page

UNION PRIMARY, '33-34 cont.

my relationship with Miss Cute: she provided me with my first regular employment. The job paid ten cents a week! As the youngest of six children there was no allowance: the depression was deep and pennies were scarce. My friends and I always hustled around and earned a few pennies here and there, but ten cents per week, guaranteed, was a fantastic opportunity and I kept the job from September until June. My obligation began an hour before the start of school when I met the teacher at her front door to receive her grocery shopping list. Miss Cute had people living with her, in a house located about where the Rumford Towers now stands. The list was carried by me to a variety store

which was located on Pawtucket Avenue near the junction of Newman, Pawtucket and Ferris Avenues. Here I gave the list to the manager who then filled the order. When completed it was my duty to carry it back to Miss Cute who again met me at the front door. Often I had to carry two big bags full of groceries: milk, cereal, coffee, meat, etc. Often the weather was bad- cold, windy, snowy or rainy. This was a five day a week job and Friday was my payday. So, in the morning I walked from home to the Cute house, to the store, back to the Cute house, and then to school. At noon we walked home to dinner and then back to school. At the end of the day we walked home again, a daily total walk of perhaps four miles.

PAPER CHASE

Ned Connors, a Rumford native and currently a Brown graduate student in American Civilization, is researching the Richmond Paper Company for the Smithsonian Institute and they can use the Society's help. Richmond Paper was situated at Omega

Pond and was the first company in North America to utilize the sulphite method of pulping paper. Richmond was active from 1882 to 1887 and although commercially unsuccessful is historically very significant.

Ned can use whatever information our readers can supply about

Richmond Paper, especially information about where the company's buildings were sited. He can be reached at 246-0164, or if you're a shy person write to Ned c/o the Society at P.O. Box 4774, E. Providence, RI 02916.

MEMBERSHIP

Now that the weather has cooled off after a hot sticky summer, some of us are ready and raring to go, so let's get our friends and neighbors involved in the East Providence Historical Society and build up our membership.

For those who need reminding, I have one more request for dues before enclosing the dreaded "pink slip" in with your November newsletter.

If your check or cash reaches me by the time this month's newsletter goes out, I will see to it that your "91-92" membership card will be

DON'T SUFFER THE TERRIBLE
EMBARASSMENT
& HEARTBREAK OF THE
DREADED PINK SLIP IN
NOVEMBER'S OLDE NEWS!

PAY YOUR DUES NOW!

If your Dues are
overdue, send them in today!
And remember, they're
pro-rated if you joined in
1990!

NAME (S) _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____

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

enclosed.

We have had only seven new memberships since March, so let's find those people who are interested in the Historical Society.

Madeline Vincent



A Note from the Hunt House Elves: We are working at the Hunt House Wednesdays from 10 a.m. til 1 p.m. Come in and give us help or advice; the coffee & tea pot is always on.

Most of the chairpersons are ready to accept your help. Come to October's meeting or call Gladys Panzarella, 434-5116 if you want to set up on the Saturday, Nov. 30 or on the big day of the Open House, Dec. 1. What are you making, baking or cooking? We are getting a hand-made basket, and a baby quilt for the raffle, but a third or fourth prize would be nice. We could also use paper goods, napkins, soup bowls, coffee cups and plastic tableware. Get your creative juices flowing. Can't you just smell the food and Christmas greens now?

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