



OLDE NEWS

EAST • PROVIDENCE • HISTORICAL • SOCIETY
• NEWSLETTER •

NOTES AND COMMENTS

THE VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDE

Some of you may have noticed an article on the editorial page of the Sunday Journal a couple of weeks ago by David Brussat concerning his trip up the Seekonk River from the Fox Point Hurricane Barrier to the falls at Pawtucket. Your editor made a similar trip earlier this summer, but the geography seems to have been altered considerably between then and Mr. Brussat's recent voyage. I refer to his constant references to the east side of the Seekonk as the "Seekonk side" of the river. Some examples: "...once beyond the rusty barges and idle tugboats on

MEETING



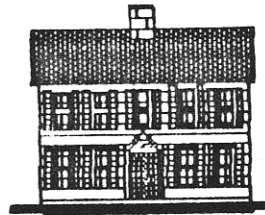
THE NEXT MEETING
OF THE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
will be held September 24,
1991
from 7:15 pm
at Newman Congregational
Church.

NOTES & COMMENT cont.

the Providence embankment and the oil tanks on the *Seekonk* side..." or "Neither Providence nor *Seekonk* is especially evident from sea level." or "Only a few manmade structures, including some...smoke stacks on the *Seekonk* side..." (italics mine)

This is perhaps a shock to Mr. Brussat, but the reason that *Seekonk* wasn't evident on his journey was that *Seekonk* is at least a mile inland! Those oil tanks and smoke stacks? They were in East Providence, as indeed is much of the east bank of the *Seekonk* River.

The basic point Mr. Brussat makes (besides his lamentable ignorance about the geography of the region his newspaper covers) is that the river is a greatly under-appreciated resource, a view this writer agrees with completely. If Mr. Brussat should try a land cruise down the regrettably incomplete section of the East Bay Bicycle Path from the Veteran's Parkway to Riverside, I think he would be as impressed as I was with the beauty of the area.



OLDE NEWS

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Editor George Field, IV

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One side effect of the mason's visits to Hunt House this past month was the unearthing of a trove of objects sealed up in the basement ovens: bottles, cans and etc. which have rested there since the ovens were bricked off and offer a strange kalidescope of household items ranging from an (empty) bottle of rye whiskey (for medicinal purposes only, subject to severe legal penalties if used otherwise), to ketchup and bug spray (free mouth sprayer included).

.....
 ERATTA: I inadvertently left Bridget Anness off the list of Museum docents printed last month. My most abject apologies.

Echna

NOTES & COMMENT cont.

He may be even more impressed when he realizes that the entire length of this shoreline is in East Providence. That's the city on the east bank of the Seekonk River, Mr. Brussat. You really shouldn't miss it.

HISTORIC HERMITS

At last it can be told. For the first time on these pages we are going to reveal Helen Smith's recipe for hermits! Yes, that's right, the ones that disappear off the plate so fast they leave skid marks. The ones that have prompted fisticuffs in the parking lot over who took the last one. The hermits that have prompted those who suffer from an irrational fear of raisins to declare, "Hey these are pretty good! I *loved* those sweet little black wrinkled things! What were they again?"

Follow this recipe and get ready for a party in your mouth.

3/4 c. shortening	3/4 tsp. ginger
1 c. sugar	3/4 tsp. cloves
1 egg	1/2 c. raisins
1/4 c. molasses	1/2 c. walnuts,
2 tsp. baking soda	coarsely broken

2 1/4 c. flour 1 tsp. cinnamon

Cream together the shortening, sugar, egg and molasses in mixer. Sift together dry ingredients and stir into the first mixture. Add raisins and walnuts.

cont. next page

IMPORTANT DATES

from August 22

Weaver Library, East Providence, RI.
Exhibit: "ENCOUNTER IN NORUMBEGA:
The Hidden Story of New England Maps"

September 22

Coventry Historical Society,
Coventry RI. Bus Tour: "BRAKE FOR HIS-
TORY" A tour of Coventry historic sites, in-
cluding tours of the Nathanael Greene Home-
stead, the Paine House and the Read School-
house. Tours at 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Call
828-6521 or 397-5750 for tickets (\$5.00) or
information.

September 23

E. P. Historical Society September
meeting Newman Congregational Church,
7:15 pm

NOTES & COMMENT cont.

GRAVE MATTERS

Use an ungreased cookie sheet. Cut dough into 3 balls. Roll each out like a sausage the length of the pan, leaving room for expansion between them. Press down a bit, but not too flat. Brush the tops with beaten egg.

Bake at 350 degrees for *15 minutes*, no more! They will be slightly chewy. Cut into large bars. Share nicely and no fighting.

Your ob'd. editor has received a copy of a letter sent to Board Member Nancy Stevens in her capacity as Chair of the Historic District Zoning Commission from W. Fred Oakley. Mr. Oakley, as faithful attendees of the monthly Society meetings will remember, is President of The Association for Gravestone Studies and delivered a fascinating slide lecture about local gravestones. The Association for Gravestone Studies

held a conference in Bristol this past summer and visited the Newman Church Cemetery. To quote Mr. Oakley: "The cemetery is a gem! ...our expert in Narragansett Bay carvers was able to point out the work of nearly every major carver. The yard was nicely mowed and the time we spent there was both valuable and enjoyable."

Mr. Oakley also goes on to urge the Commission to recognize the value of this cemetery as a valuable artistic and historic resource, and also recommends that some of the stones are in a deteriorating condition and need cleaning and mending to preserve them and extend their life.

WOODSMAN, SPARE THAT PLANK!

One of the unfortunate effects

of Hurricane Bob's visit to East Providence was the uprooting of a substantial oak tree on the Hunts Mills property. While the demise of this fine specimen is regrettable, your obd. editor, an inveterate "wood butcher," can't look at it without having visions of hundreds of oak planks dance in his head. I would urge the city to consider turning this misfortune to its advantage and

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investigate the economics of harvesting this tree for timber, rather than chopping it up into small pieces for transportation to a land fill. If they do make the decision to harvest the tree, I'm *sure* that the Historical Society would be in line for a donation of some historically correct, locally grown lumber.

HUNT HOUSE UPDATE

NOT-SO-FREE MASONS

Recently, two restoration masons inspected the Hunt House chimney and discovered that our masonry/chimney problems are more extensive than previously thought. They found such severe spalling in the basement masonry that parts of brick walls have been reduced to clay dust and that the settling near the corner of the chimney appears to have worsened since Hurricane Bob's recent visit. Based on their preliminary estimates, the Building Committee has submitted a grant request to the Champlin foundation for further funds to repair the chimney and ultimately restore all of the fire places to working order.

During one of the visits, the beehive oven in the cellar was opened up, and a fine collection of bottles, cans, etc. which were sealed up when the oven had been bricked over was discovered. The Society's collection of artifacts has been enhanced as a result. (See the Museum Commit-



tee report for more details.)

HEATING UP

THE CONTROVERSY

In the interests of further fanning the debate over just how old the Hunt House really is, the following information is submitted. It was gleaned from the September/October, 1990 issue of *Historic Preservation*, the magazine of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Our text is taken from a column called "Clio's Table" written by Patrick Dunne and Charles L. Mackie and dealing with the preparation of bread in America.

In the earlier part of the eighteenth century, the bake oven was constructed at the back of the large kitchen fireplace opening. For some reason, perhaps merely convenience, the kitchen fireplace was significantly altered around 1750. The new fireplaces were smaller and the bake oven was moved to the side of the hearth, so that the wooden-or later iron-door opened directly into the room. The inside of the

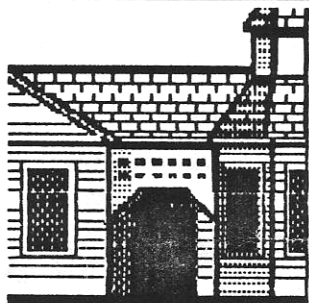
chamber continued to be constructed in a dome shape that allowed the heat to rotate evenly and rapidly.

In light of the fact that both bake ovens in the chimney stack are built in a style that became

common after the mid-eighteenth century and since the entire fabric of the house is built around the chimney, the above passage would seem to indicate a construction date after 1750.

G. Field

UNION PRIMARY SCHOOL, 1931-1932



John Agren has written extensively about his memories of East Providence, and has kindly sent his manuscripts to OLDE NEWS. We are delighted to print Mr. Agren's reminiscences of Union Primary School as a sort of companion piece to our recent articles on Miss Pagny's School i. We should note here that all contributions to OLDE NEWS are welcome. Ed.)

In 1931 I was enrolled in the first grade of Union Primary School. This old wooden building has seen may Rumford residents pass through its doors. All of my aunts and uncles and my mother attended Union Primary. In the more recent past it was closed for a few years as a "fire trap" - the aftermath of a disastrous parochial school fire in Illinois. Its future now appears dim as each succeeding school superintendent is convinced its conversion to a parking lot would serve the

city better than as an old piece of Americana. It is still capable (in terms of its physical structure) of producing a prized product. It is still in very good repair and used daily as a school. The architecture blends in well with the residential area around it.

My first grade teacher was Miss Carpenter and there isn't anything that I can remember about her except her automobile. This was a 1929 Ford two door sedan with the roof canvas run-

UNION SCHOOL (cont.)

ning down the back to the belt line below the rear window. The colors were a dark green bottom and light green top with a straw stripe at the belt line. The fenders were black and the wheels were green. (*Sounds nice! ed.*)

I remember little about our classes except that we were in the process of learning to read. There was a story of "See Spot Run" or something like that. This must be one of the popular old readers that one hears about now in terms of contempt. We must also have started to learn to write, but I don't remember that. I do recall the names of most of my classmates from Redland and Barney Streets in the north and Greenwood Avenue and Coombs Street in the south. We all walked to school, perhaps a half mile or a mile each way. Sometimes we stayed at school for lunch, this was a real treat for those of us who normally went home for

dinner. We could only bring our lunch when the weather was really bad.

My walking companion often was Georgie Olson. He lived on Redland Avenue so we sometimes got together with Norm Fiske on Pavilion or Bob McBride on the end of Redland for the final push past Charlie Lundstrom's store (now a Dairy Mart) and up Pawtucket Avenue to the school. Frequently the steeple bell was ringing, indicating we would be late, before we got in sight of the school. Sometimes we took a "shortcut" through the woods via Pleasant Street. In those days there were no houses between Newman Avenue. I was encouraged to take the Pavilion to Pawtucket Avenue route with George and Norman as opposed to Redland Avenue with Georgie and Bobbie. When Bob, George and I were together we were bound to get in trouble; it was a bad combination! Bobbie and George were frequently into

some mischief and anyone with them was sure to be implicated. School was a good experience for me ninety-nine percent of the time; there were no big problems at Union Primary School.

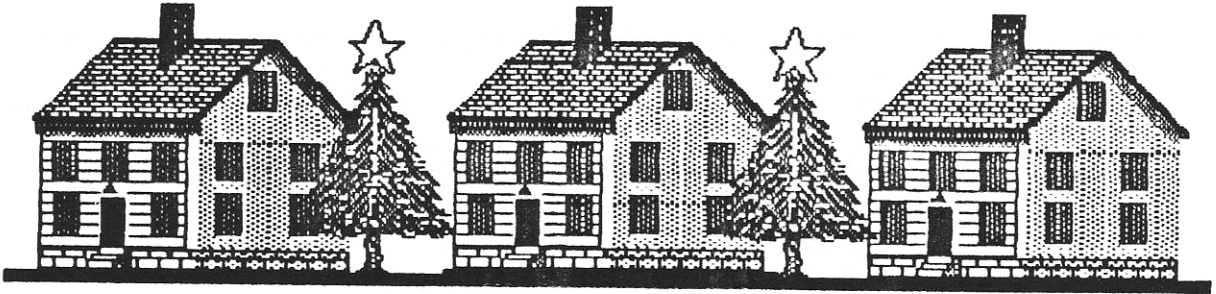
My second grade teacher was a Mrs. Bentley. While most teachers were a Miss, this was a Mrs. so there was something different about her from the start. There were other differences, she looked more like my mother than a teacher, she was heavy and very stern. Teachers were supposed to be young and pretty. She had a beautiful new car, this was a black, two door Pontiac. (I have always been enamored of automobiles). But grade two doesn't ring a bell. Throughout most of my school work I was a good student, really interested in learning. I am sure the second grade was no exception.

Mrs. Bentley was, in addition to being the second grade teacher, a leader of some kind in the Grange. One one occasion the

family went somewhere- perhaps to a Grange supper, and there was "my" Mrs. Bentley with a huge green banner over her shoulder, under the arm and around her waist. It was fitted with gold and silver badges, pins and important looking items of great beauty. It was very impressive. When she was introduced she had a fancy name, not "Mrs. Bentley, second grade teacher at Union Primary School" but "Mrs. Bentley, Past Grand Master and Grange Leader Omnipotent" or something. This was a woman to whom all present paid obeisance! It was very impressive. However, on Monday morning she was just a strict teacher with a nice automobile.

John Aggen

Did we forget to mention that dues are always gratefully accepted? And that members who joined last year get their dues prorated for this year? Consider it said.



THEY'RE BACK!

Yes, those rollicking, fun-loving elves are back to work at the Hunt House, every Wednesday from 10am to 1pm.

They're making a list and checking it twice, making sure that the E.P. Historical Society's Christmas Boutique will be crammed to the rafters with Christmas crafts and goodies. They'd love to see you there too!

Plan to stay awhile. Bring a bag lunch; drinks will be provided.

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