



OLDE NEWS

EAST ■ PROVIDENCE ■ HISTORICAL ■ SOCIETY
■ NEWSLETTER ■

AXE ME NO QUESTIONS

A report from the
Lizzie Borden Conference



Lizzie Borden took an axe... or did she? If she didn't then who did? If she did, how did she get away with it? And why, after one hundred years, does this infamous crime still provoke an un-

MEETING



THE NEXT MEETING
OF THE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
will be held
September 28, 1992
from 7:15 pm
at Newman Congregational
Church.

LIZZIE BORDEN cont.

relenting curiosity as to what the heck really happened that morning of Aug. 4, 1892. The Fall River house where Lizzie Borden's father and stepmother were murdered still stands, as do questions concerning many aspects of the tragic affair. Questions that were examined, discussed, and debated during the intensive "A CONFERENCE ON THE LIZZIE BORDEN CASE", held Aug. 3, 4, and 5 at the Bristol Community College in Fall River.

Roughly 500 people attended the conference. Among them was Riverside resident Millie Smith. Like everyone there Millie has a great interest in the case. Unlike most there, however, Millie can claim an indirect connection to the actual event. Millie was raised in an apartment above a Fall River bakery. The bakery was owned by Millie's grandfather. The bakery was located on Borden Street, around the corner from the Borden family. It was where the family bought their



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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.*

LIZZIE BORDEN cont.

bread. The bread was also discussed in passing in testimony during Lizzie Borden's trial.

The conference did not solve the mystery. It actually raised more questions as it seemed everyone had their own theory. Was the evil deed done by Lizzie, the maid, an illegitimate half brother, or someone not even suspected. If Lizzie did it, was it for greed, an epileptic fit, or revenge for incest ? All these theories were discussed. Not only is this case a mind boggling whodunnit, it is a "looking glass" into the past. Studying the Borden case is a history lesson on life in Fall River and America in the 1890's.

The only hard facts that came out of the conference were those that concerned the people who attended. Whether they were local or not, (some people had come from as far as New York, Texas, California, England, and even Australia), there was a feeling of unity among the crowd, a unity in working together for a

common goal. And although the mystery may never be solved the teamwork will continue. Just ask Millie Smith, who days after the conference had ended, was on the phone to new friends and fellow Lizzie sleuths she had met at the conference. The reason? A television news program was featuring the Lizzie Borden case, and there might be some new information...pass the word!

P.S. If any Olde News readers have, or know someone who has a story, account, or memory concerning Lizzie Borden please get in touch with the folks at Olde News. If the E.P.H.S. could break the Borden case we could then try to solve the Bermuda Triangle or the Pawtucket Water Mystery.

written and illustrated by
Michael Charves

MUSEUM COMMITTEE

Many thanks to the following for their generosity in donating their research and memorabilia during the last month:

Edward Adams-research on the history of Riverside.

Lewis and Sophie Allen-a mulberry Staffordshire plate which belonged to Allin Hunt's daughter.

Bruce Britton-his 1940's EP track suit and a Victorian silk dress

H. Austin Butterworth- several pieces of ironware made by his grandfather, Joseph Butterworth who was a blacksmith on East Providence at the corner of Pawt. Ave. and Taunton Ave. at the turn of the century. Included was a beautiful set of fire dogs which are now in the Hunt Parlor fireplace. Austin also donated four RUMFORD shipping boxes and Rumford powder cans and a Rumford cookie cutter. We also received a "FALLOUT SHEL-

TER" sign from the Masonic Temple, Taunton Ave.

Frances Doherty-a Victorian evening purse that belonged to her mother.

Charles and Frances Gross-research Charlie did on the George F. Wilson genealogy. George of Rumford Co. fame had a grandson Ellery who married John Hunt Jr.'s great great granddaughter, Fannie Hunt. Charlie also sent us copies of the birth and marriage records from the Hunt Family bible.

Howard and Louise Mersereau- a velvet sewing case and a volume-"The History of Rhode Island"which featured a few businesses in East Prov.

Parsons Richmond-several deeds to and a picture of his family homestead in Vue de L'Eau on Pawtucket Ave. known locally as the Pearce House.

Rising Sun Masonic Lodge-thirteen folding chairs once owned by the Rumford Chemical

Works and used upstairs over the old Rumford store on Greenwood Ave. Each has the letters "RCW" burned into it.

Helen Smith-two pictures of her in 1926 as Little Miss Rumford Baking Powder.

Virginia Sollitto-a picture of Wallie Jamison's first EP Championship team

Nancy Stevens- a 1992 CRIMSON yearbook.

Louise Yeager-a Rumford cookbook.

It is inspiring that so many are saving precious pieces of East Providence history. By reading this list perhaps you have a better idea of the many different things that contribute to the piecing together of local history.

AN ANNIVERSARY DID YOU KNOW THAT:

Chimney Corners in Riverside got it's name from the chimney of Capt. Willett's house which had burned and only the chimney

remained standing? The original Willett House stood where the Willett Arms Apartment building now stands, on Willett Ave. of course. Supposedly some of the old bricks are included in the two brick posts built at the entrance to Circuit Drive. Capt. Willett married the daughter of John Brown, the original purchaser in 1645 of the area known as Wamanoisett, (now Riverside).

And did you know that Riverside was "a ward of Rehoboth until 1667, when it became a ward of Swansea?" In 1747 it

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A DAY AT THE RACES

Memories of Narragansett Race Track

by John Agrin

When Narragansett Race Track opened for business in 1934 it added a lot of rail traffic through Rumford. There had been regular passenger and freight traffic between Providence, Attleboro and Boston but now thousands of race track fans were to be moved from Boston and Providence to the track. Spur track was laid on

the Northeast side of the grandstand to accomodate the trains from the north. When the passengers got off the train they dolars into one of the turnstiles for admission to the track. Rail passengers from the

south (Providence) were discharged on the east side of the track and they dropped their coins into the turnstiles and took a special fenced-in walk to the grandstand or to the clubhouse.



In addition to the passenger trains there were many freight trains; these brought in horses, hay, feed and thousands of other items for use at the track. This was big business, on a Saturday afternoon thirty or forty thousand people might be at the track. A million dollar a day handle was not unusual; this at a time when

the minium two dollar bet , was a sizable investment for the man who might be working (if he was lucky) for twenty or thirty dollars a week.

Inside the track there were many bookies. They

could be found in the restaurants, barber shops, parking lots, etc. With them you could bet as little as ten cents. Bookies were illegal, but they did a flourishing business. Many of them had huge rolls

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was again part of Rehoboth. In 1812 it was a part of Seekonk. In 1862 Riverside became part of East Providence. "Between 1875 to the early 1900's Riverside became known as the best summer resort in all of new England".

Information from article entitled "Riverside" and donated by Eddie Adams.

Edna Anness

A DAY AT THE RACES cont.

of big bills stuffed into each of their pockets.

The illegal "ten cent" bookies kept their records of who bet what amount on the sides of their programs or on slips of paper kept in their numerous pockets. Some wore big hats and kept their records in the hat band or inside of the hat. Bookies often had runners so that big bets could be "laid off" at legitimate betting spots inside the grandstand. Sometimes there were "big" bookies who took the "lay off" from the smaller bookies. These men could be identified by their huge black automobiles, big black cigars and tough demeanor. The

little bookie had to avoid a "big hit", one which could put him out of business.

There were many bookies outside the track, leaning on the fences in the parking lot or grandstand. Admission to the track was a dollar, the minimum bet was two dollars, the racing program was twenty five cents so a bettor could eliminate all these charges by using a bookie. After the race was over a runner inside the track ran to look at the toteboard to get the official pay off. Radios, of course, were also utilized for this purpose and many people had field glasses to see the portion of the race that was not obstructed.

Bookies could not lose, provided they didn't succumb to the temptation to bet. They only paid off on the even odds, keeping the change. They never paid off on a horse that won at over twenty to one odds. There were so many bookies that the police seldom put a real crimp in their number and many looked the other way when it came to the bookie operations in and around the racetrack.

A DAY AT THE RACES cont.

The race track area and its feeding line, the railroad, were often the site of one of our adventures. Perhaps it was crawling under, or over, the chain link fence for a walk through the stable area. Here the beautiful thoroughbreds were warmed up for a race or they were cooled down after a race. Sometimes they were exercised for future races. The area had the pleasant odor of newly mown hay or of the warm manure which was stacked in steaming piles at the end of a row of stables. Here we could see the horses up close and stake a childhood claim-"that one is mine". Sometimes we got to see "our" horse in a real race, and we might even bet 10 cents at the bookie on "my" horse. If the horse won we might have a two dollar pay off, a virtual fortune. More likely it was forty cents, a respectable sum, enough for a pleasant evening at the movies complete with a candy bar and a milkshake. Usually the bet was lost.

In the middle of the stable area was a restaurant which we some-

times entered. Here you would see the characters who frequented this part of the track. This was a different crowd of people from those you might see in the grandstand or the clubhouse. It was a very seedy group of men, those who took care of the horses (the grooms) and the exercise boys or the jockeys who were no bigger than we were. The restaurant was noisy and full of smoke. There were many beer bottles on the tables and a generous layer of sawdust on the floor. A man could buy a substantial dinner of beans and frankforts for 30 cents. Here you would often see drunkards and serious fights. It was not my kind of place but, being curious, I went in on a few occasions - on a dare or in the company of my older brother. Brother Edgar was lucky, in 1934 he was hired to pick the stones out of the race track oval, he earned over 10 dollars a week for this backbreaking work. If we bought anything in the restaurant it was a bottle of coke and we never stayed for long, it was too

dangerous.

On a Saturday afternoon the race track crowd made a terrific noise as the horses raced down the homestretch. Thirty or forty thousand people were yelling at the top of their lungs, they were waving programs or newspapers and making every kind of noise or gesture which they thought would help their horse become the winner. When the horses passed your location on the homestretch you could see the jockeys beating on their mounts, exhorting their horse to extend himself to the limit for the foolish thousands who had wagered their hard earned money on the hope of a big payoff. It was a sad crowd, whether you were in the stable or in the grandstand area. Sometimes someone "made a killing" but you knew the money would not last for long. The race track was exciting for many reasons, perhaps mostly because it permitted me to study different people and their behavior.

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NEW NEWS

Best wishes for a speedy recovery to Earl Berwick. Earl, a founding member of the East Providence Historical Society, is a valued volunteer on the Hunt House restoration team. His hard work and enthusiasm is greatly appreciated by all.

A warm greeting and best wishes on their new adventure to the O'Hare family. John, Ellen, Jack, and Andy have established a East Providence Historical Society outpost in the wilds of Corning, New York. Best of luck and don't forget to visit.

Historical outrage should be felt by all preservation minded people at the plans of Johnson and Wales University. It seems that they would like to knock down a number of Weybosset Street Buildings, all over a hundred years old, so as to build a new school library. We would ask why they can't use the Outlet building site which they recently purchased instead. Even

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SUMMER EVENTS

The plantings at the Hunt House took place through the efforts of several people. It began with a donation of perennials from the Rumford Junior Women's Club. Virginia Berwick and Lura Sellew planted the carnations and Canterbury Bells along with some Virginia Bluebells and Brown eyed Susans from Lura's yard. Virginia and Lura decided that the city should be involved, so Virginia called the Parks Department (because she is awake early enough in the morning to catch them!) to see if they could provide us with any flowers. They answered that they had some geraniums and that they would deliver them. They did!

Virginia, her daughter, Janice Lakey who was visiting, and Lura planted forty-eight geraniums up both sides of the walk to the front door of the Hunt House. They were in place to make a pretty display on the day we had the yard sale.

We thank the Rumford Junior Women and the City for their

donations.

On September 13, Health Havens Nursing Center, on Wampanoag Trail is celebrating it's 30th anniversary. We have been asked to participate in two ways. The first way is to run a food booth. It will be provided by Health Havens and the proceeds will go to the East Providence Historical Society (a fund raiser). When you are called to donate, please be as generous as you were for the yard sale. That response was great! We will also need at least two people to run the booth.

The second way we have been asked to participate is to narrate historic tours on a sight seeing bus provided by Health Havens. The affair will last from twelve noon to four P.M. and it would be nice to run at least three tours in that time concentrating on Kent Heights, Willet Ave., the Carousel and Little Neck Cemetery. We will need tour guides for those trips. A script will be provided. Volunteers may call Lura at 434-8961 or Virginia at 434-0998 by

Sept. 7th.

This is a great opportunity to advertise what we are all about. A display of pictures of the work being done at Hunt House can be put up and applications for membership could be available at the food booth. If you have a period costume and wish to wear it, that will add to the fun.

Lura Sellow

GOODBYE

To paraphrase one of my favorite U.S. presidents : "Well, you won't have Danger Editor to kick around any more." Our more alert readers will already have noted that the new OLDE NEWS editor has taken over the controls of the Historical Society's Official Computer and is now basking in the afterglow of having completed his first newsletter.

Let me just state for the record that these young whippersnappers who think they know it all will rue the day, mark my words, blah, blah etc. etc. (You know the rest, you've heard it all before.) But I digress. Since this will be

my last communication to the Society as Editor of OLDE NEWS, I want to thank everyone in the Society for their support, both material and moral. Working for an appreciative readership is a great ego booster, especially late at night when sitting blearily in front of a softly glowing computer screen. (Just kidding, Mike, ha,ha.) A special thanks must go to the committee chairs whose monthly reports are the life blood of the newsletter. (Sometimes getting those monthly reports was like *drawing blood*.)

I hope that the Society will give Mike the same kind of backup and ego massage you gave me, because the newsletter is important to our organization, both as a bringer of tidings, and as our voice to the outside world. A vital newsletter is a reflection of a strong Historical Society.

And you haven't heard the last of Danger Editor; you may see very soon the return of **Danger Ex-Editor!** Watch for him in your local newsletter.

YR. OB'D. EDITOR

NEW NEWS cont.

though this battle is taking place on the other side of the river, all Rhode Islanders should be concerned when a huge chunk of the capital city historical landscape is about to be trashed. Let us hope these beautiful buildings, which have been criminally neglected for so long, can be saved and restored to their former glory. The last thing the city and this state needs is one more pile of rubble or another vacant lot. If any

E.P.H.S members have contacts at Johnson and Wales, or Providence City Hall please make your feelings known. Remember, the capital city and its history belongs to all Rhode Islanders.

Committee Chairs: The deadline for the September issue of OLDE NEWS is the weekend of Sept. 4th. Copy may be dropped off with the former editor.

Michael Charves

OLDE NEWS

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