

John Hunt House

# OLD NEWS

## EAST•PROVIDENCE•HISTORICAL•SOCIETY•NEWSLETTER

VOL. VI NO. 7

FEBRUARY 1994

### LIBRARY MEMORIES ROUNDTABLE

Once upon a time the Watchemoket Free Library Association.....

....To Be Continued on Monday, February 28 at 7:30 p.m.

**EAST PROVIDENCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING**

at

**WEAVER LIBRARY**

**Featuring Library Stars of Yesterday and Today !**

**Caroline Bowen Hurdis and Valerie Toner**

Another of our popular "Memories Roundtable" series.....a freestyle discussion of an East Providence memory that may have been a major influence in our lives and a very important part of our past which has affected our present and future.

With the help of **Caroline Hurdis** and **Valerie Toner** we will share memories of the libraries, and learn how the present East Providence Public Library System came to become the marvelous and useful institution that it is today.

Society Member, **Caroline Bowen Hurdis**, started working part time at the *Watchemoket Free Library* while she was in high school in 1926. She assisted librarian, **Harriet Briggs**, who was the daughter of the first librarian. The library was located adjacent to the Town Hall in the building that later housed the Police Department.

In 1938, Caroline was appointed Assistant Librarian, and the library moved to the Weaver House. Construction had begun on the new Weaver Library.

Harriet Briggs retired in 1951 (after 63 years of service!) and Caroline was appointed Head Librarian, a post that she kept until she retired in 1956. EVERYBODY remembers our librarian, **Caroline Bowen!**

**Valerie Toner** is the adult services librarian of the East Providence Public Library System.

She is well known to ALL the library fans in our City because she oversees adult services for our three library branches, Fuller, Riverside and Rumford, and arranges all the adult programs at Weaver, the main library.

Valerie has done extensive research on the history of the Riverside Library, which is the reason she was invited to participate in this program. She accepted our invitation with enthusiasm because she is still very much interested in library history.....and looks forward to meeting folks who REMEMBER the original Riverside Library !

**Riverside Libraryites.....Be There !**

# President's Letter

Nancy Moore

Perhaps someone who has attended more potluck suppers than yours truly can recall a more tasty array of dishes than at our January 24th meeting? You all outdid yourselves with variety, presentation and deliciousness. On a cold and dreary January night, a supper with friends certainly boosts the spirit. It was great to see old friends and former members join us again.... WELCOME BACK! As usual this year, we had to add more seating for an overflow crowd. Thanks to the Board members for setting up and organizing such a pleasant event.

The Society has received an invitation from the Chamber of Commerce to make a short presentation to the Blackstone Valley National Corridor Commission on February 17 at the Community Center. The Commission has been set up by the National Park Service and the U.S. Department of the Interior, and already is active in East Providence with the Runnins River Project. As the letter from the Chamber states, "...the interests of the Commission are in city-wide cultural amenities. To this end, the work of the East Providence Historical Society is an outstanding example of what can be accomplished by citizen activists." (You may not consider yourself an 'activist', but I take this to mean people who get things done!) You may be sure that the Society will make a strong, colorful, impressive presentation on February 17.

I hope to see all of you at the Library Memories Roundtable on February 28 at Weaver. **And dont forget to reserve your tickets for the Pasta Supper on March 12 at Newman Church.**



Potluckers Examining the Tasty Array

## OLDE NEWS

is published monthly by  
The East Providence Historical Society  
Editor.....George Adams

EAST PROVIDENCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P.O. Box 4774  
East Providence, RI 02916  
(401) 438-1750

### OFFICERS

|                         |                     |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| President               | Nancy Moore         |
| 1st Vice President      | Kristine Rose       |
| 2nd Vice President      | Edna Anness         |
| Recording Secretary     | Don Brothers        |
| Corresponding Secretary | Lura Sellew         |
| Treasurer               | Rose Marie Sirenski |

### COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

|                  |                  |
|------------------|------------------|
| Building/Grounds | Walter Vincent   |
| Markers          | Kristine Rose    |
| Membership       | Madeline Vincent |
| Museum           | Virginia Berwick |
| Newsletter       | George Adams     |
| Publicity        | Florence Adams   |

### COMING EVENTS

#### FEBRUARY

Wednesday, February 9  
Board Meeting, 7:30 p.m. Hunt House

Monday, February 28  
Members Meeting 7:30 p.m.  
Weaver Library  
"Library Memories Roundtable"

#### MARCH

Wednesday, March 9  
Board Meeting, 7:30 p.m. Hunt House

Saturday, March 12  
Pasta Supper 6:00 p.m.  
Newman Congregational Church

Monday, March 28  
Members Meeting 7:30 p.m.  
Newman Congregational Church  
"The Rumford Baking Powder Process"  
Prof. Paul Jones

OLDE NEWS

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**PRONTO PRINT**

1062 Willett Ave., East Providence

## MUSEUM REPORT

*Virginia Berwick*  
Museum Chairman

The plans for the **Rumford Project** are shaping up very nicely. Museum Curator, **Edna Anness** and I delivered the completion papers to the R.I. Committee for the Humanities and we expect to receive the grant proceeds very soon. The funds are to support the "140 Years of Baking Powder" programs and exhibits.

We have been accessioning some of the many gifts that we received in January. There are still quite a few to do.

If anyone has any artifacts, relating to East Providence history, that might be loaned to the Society we would like to hear from you.

Please telephone **Virginia Berwick** at: 434-0998 or **Edna Anness** at: 434-3347.

## MUSEUM GIFTS

January

- Dorothy Midgely** - Rumford Co. invoices.
- Sidney Paine** - History of Stephen Paine's mill at Hunt's Mills site.
- Caroline Hurdis** - 1918 and 1929 CRIMSON yearbooks, history of the Weaver Library.
- Edna Anness** - Ad for Looff Carousel, Labor Day c.1910.
- Anna Frances Apap** - Copy of 1955 TOWNIE newspaper.
- Lillian Crumby** - 2 Viall milk bottles, 2 cream scoops, Viall advertising pencil.
- Clint Sellew** - Coat check tag from Hunt's Mills Dance Hall.
- Doris Miner** - 7 calenders, 1959, observing 105th anniversary of Rumford Co.
- Millie Legg** - Her brother's US Navy artifacts, dogtags, picture; 1938 and 1954 Hurricane books; 1943 copy of "News from the Old Home Town", service Bible, recording made by E.P. Community Chorus.
- Carolyn Donahue** - Programs from high school events 1977-79, Central yearbooks '75 and '76, band letter and glass from class of '77.
- Les Haworth** - His father's Wannamoisett caddy pin.
- Barbara Erickson** - 100th Anniversary of 2nd Baptist Church - 1960.

## SLIDE-LECTURE PROGRAMS

The Society's slide-lecture programs, prepared and presented by Museum Curator, **Edna Anness** are scheduled for :

- February 2, Rumford Grange: "How to Care for Antique Textiles"
- February 22, Riverside Congregational Church: "History of East Providence"
- March 1, Second Baptist Church: "Historic Buildings and Homes of East Providence"

For information on the slide-lecture programs, call the Hunt House at 438-1750 and leave a message or call **Edna Anness** at home: 434-3347.

## EAST PROVIDENCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY MARKER PROGRAM

Your home may be eligible for a MARKER



Any building in the City of East Providence which contributes to the historical development or architectural character of the City is eligible to be considered for a historical marker

Send the coupon below to:

The Marker Program  
East Providence Historical Society  
P.O. Box 4774  
East Providence, RI 02916-4774

I am interested in receiving information about the  
East Providence Marker Program

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The  
EAST PROVIDENCE PUBLIC LIBRARY  
Presents:

The  
**CIVIL WAR**  
A Second Look

Participants will view portions of the Ken Burns PBS Civil War series and discuss the series with **Dr. J. Stanley Lemons**, History Professor at RIC. Participants will also read and discuss fiction titles set in Civil War America with American Literature Professor **Sam Coate** from Wheaton College.

The program will be held at Weaver Library, Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m. from February 9 through April 13.

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| February 9  | Video I, 1861-The Cause  |
| February 16 | Book Discussion: <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i><br>By H.B. Stowe                                 |
| February 23 | Video II & III, 1862-A Very Bloody Affair<br>1862-Forever Free                             |
| March 2     | Book Discussion: <i>The Red Badge of Courage</i> By Stephen Crane                          |
| March 9     | Videos IV & V, 1863-Simply Murder<br>1864-Universe of Battle                               |
| March 16    | Book Discussion: <i>Absalom, Absalom</i><br>By W. Faulkner                                 |
| March 23    | Videos VI & VII, 1864 The Valley of the<br>Shadow of Death<br>1864 Most Hallowed<br>Ground |
| March 30    | Book Discussion: <i>Beloved</i><br>By Toni Morrison  |
| April 6     | Videos VIII & IX, 1865-War is Hell<br>The Better Angles of Our Nature                      |
| April 13    | Book Discussion: <i>Civil Wars</i><br>By Rosellen Brown                                    |

**Registration is Required.**

Please call  
**Valerie Toner**  
Adult Services Librarian  
**434-2453**

**THE RUMFORD STORY**  
**The Lay of the Land**

*Edna Anness*

At our Rumford Memories Roundtable in September several of the members wanted to know if the lot on which their house stood ever belonged to the Rumford Company. This prompted some research by this curator.

The *Atlas of Surveys: Providence County, R.I.* provides a map of the area as of 1895, and lists land owned by the Rumford Company and by George Wilson, a founder.

A new version of the map, showing the property boundaries, is being prepared and will be printed in the March newsletter.

When George Wilson bought all his land from the homesteads of what had been Old Rehoboth Village, he envisioned not only building a chemical plant, but also a self-sufficient mill village around the plant. By 1872, 325 acres had been bought for farming and another 175 acres for pasture. When work eased off at the mill the employees were kept busy farming, managing the cattle, processing the meat at the company slaughterhouse and operating a dairy. In 1872 Rumford predicted that 25,000 pounds of pork and 18,000 pounds of beef would be handled by the slaughterhouse and sold in the company store. The plant was placed in the center of the Ring of the Green and a dock area on the banks of the Seekonk River and Omega Pond was set aside and known as "Riverside". In 1873 Rumford bought the Hunts Mills area, which included the Hunt House and the Lemuel Brown House.

By 1880, Rumford had platted a mill village bounded by Newman Avenue, Ferris Avenue, Wildwood Avenue and the Ten Mile River. It acquired the name "Swede Village", because so many Swedes settled there! The houses of Central Village, north of Newman Avenue beside the Ten Mile River were bought for housing. Only the High House remains standing along with one house which was moved to Redland Avenue. Six mill houses were built for twelve families. This became known as "Corky Hill", because the Irish workers lived there! » 5

» **The Lay of the Land, cont'd**

All the area starting at the Greenwood Avenue railroad bridge and bounded by the railroad tracks to Pawtucket Avenue and along the road north to Roger Williams Avenue to Bourne Avenue and Elm Street was company farmland. This also included both sides of Wilson Avenue from Elm Street to Roger Williams Avenue. A few privately owned lots were interspersed throughout. This land was not platted until after 1900, and north of Greenwood Avenue until 1928.. It is said that land was sold when the plant ran low on money. Rumford also owned land in what became Phillipsdale and on both sides of Newport Avenue to Slater Park. The Company would not sell five lots on the north side of Ellis Street or on Chaffee Street, Don Avenue or Catlin Avenue because they maintained a safety zone around the plant. Rumford did not own the land where Mayfair Drive is because it was a private farmlot owned by the Cunningham family.

The Rumford Company was generous to religious groups and donated the land on which St. Margaret's Church, the Rumford Evangelical Covenant Church and the lot on which the Newman parsonage stood. The Wannamoisett Country Club was George Wilson's farm. Most of the Agawam Hunt Club was bought from farmowners on Greenwood Avenue, including the Bisops, Hortons and Arnolds. Horsford Avenue, Wilson Avenue and Catlin Avenue were named for Rumford Co. men. Catlin was a chemist.

# PASTA SUPPER

**SATURDAY, MARCH 12**

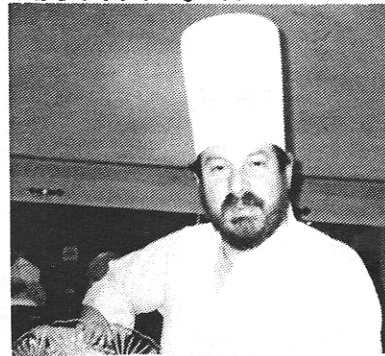
**6:00 p.m.**

**Newman Congregational Church**

*Pasta, Meatballs, Salad, Dessert*

**Directed By:**

**Maestro Dan Moore**



**CHEF MOORE**

**Donation: \$6.00 adult, \$3.00 child**

**call Kris Rose at 434-5881 for tickets**

**also available at door and at February meeting**

**The EAST PROVIDENCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**is dedicated to preserving the heritage and enjoying the history of our city**

**if you are not a member, we invite you to join now. Dues from January to June are \$5.00, individual or \$7.50, family.**

**Please make your check payable to East Providence Historical Society, and mail with coupon below to:**

**Madeline Vincent, membership  
45 Priscilla Avenue  
Rumford, RI 02916**

**EAST PROVIDENCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**NAME (s)**

**STREET**

**CITY**

**STATE**

**ZIP**

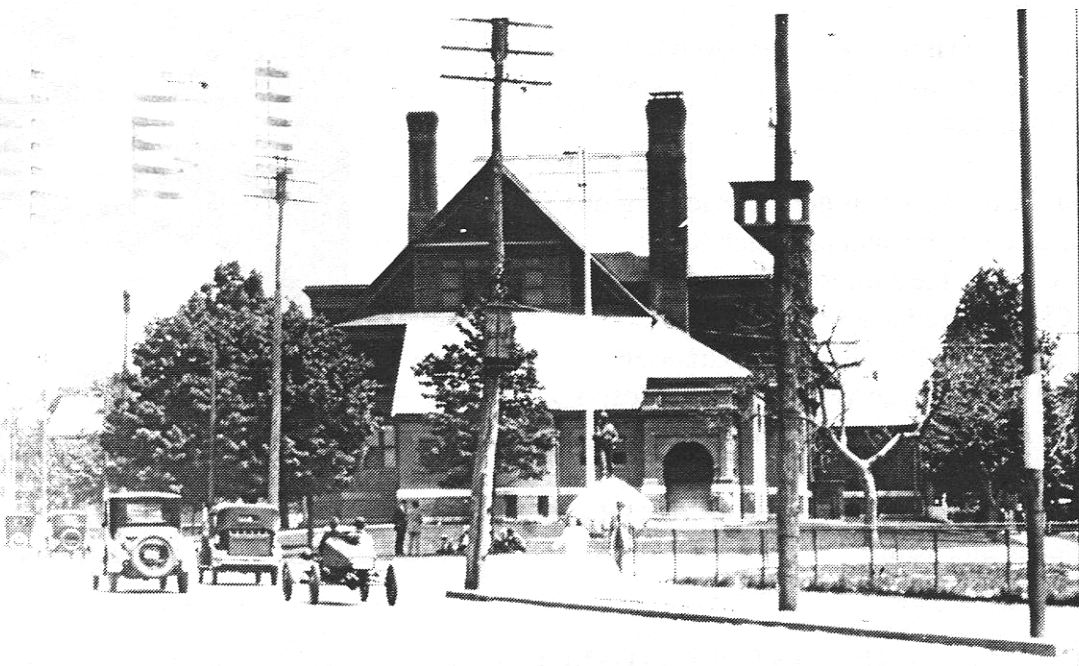
**TELEPHONE**

**Amount Encosed \$**

**@ 5.00 individual 7.50 family**



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 East Providence, RI 02916



# East Providence Town Hall - 1928

Municipal Offices, Fire and Police Departments  
 and in an adjacent building...the Watchemoket Library

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