

EAST • PROVIDENCE • HISTORICAL • SOCIETY



G A Z E T T E

John Hunt House

Vol. IX No. 14

RIGHT ON.

April 1998

EAST • PROVIDENCE • HISTORICAL • SOCIETY

Evening of
Alhambra

*Ballroom
Memories*

*Dance to the music of the thirties, forties & fifties
with the seventeen piece*

Strictly Sentimental Swing Band

*Playing the arrangements of Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, Duke Ellington and all Your Favorites
in the magnificent ballroom high atop*

*Post 10 American Legion
870 Willet Avenue, Riverside*

Monday April 27, 7:30 p.m.

Donation, \$5.00 per person

LIMITED number of tickets available ...for reservations telephone the E.P. Historical Society at (401) 438-1750 or (401)437-1530 ..or Post 10 at (401) 433-9859

SWAY AND SWING....

THIS EVENING

MONDAY, APRIL 27, 7:30 p.m.

*"My heart gets a chill. I feel such a thrill.
My feet won't be still when they swing that
music..."*

The STRICTLY SENTIMENTAL SWING BAND of Riverside will make "hep-cats" of us all as we dance and listen to the music of the '30's and '40's. The fourth annual visit to Post 10 American Legion, Riverside, is the society's regular monthly meeting night and open to the public. But the only business to be conducted is music... by conductor, Ed Maddern, as it was heard at the Alhambra Ballroom, Crescent Park.

Special guests will be Larry and Beverly (MacLean) Procopio. Larry, former owner of the Palms Restaurant, Waterman Avenue, had a 10-piece band in the early '40's and played a gig at the Alhambra. It was for East Providence Night: an annual all-classes high school reunion. Larry's nephew, Ron Procopio, directs the East Providence Community Chorus. And...how about this?...Larry played in the band of Chet Lima, society member!

From the Attic *Edna Anness, Museum Curator*

THE REST OF THE ALHAMBRA STORY

The Alhambra building at Crescent Park flourished for sixty-seven years serving as an exhibition hall, roller skating rink, ballroom, a place to hold dances (public and private), reunions for East Providence High School, square dancing and tri-weekly bingo games. Charlie Weygand was a local celebrity whose band played regularly for thirty years at the Alhambra. Yes...his descendant is U.S. Rep. Robert Weygand. *(continued on page 3)*

**TICKETS ARE REQUIRED.
Limited Number Available.**

**Donation is \$5. Reserve by calling the
society , 438-1750 or 437-1530.**

**TICKETS WILL BE HELD AT THE
DOOR FOR PAYMENT.**

Members' home-baked cookies will be served with punch. Special thanks to Don and Annette Akers of Post 10 for their enthusiasm and continued support for this affair.

Board Briefs

May 10 to 16 is **National Preservation Week**. It's being recognized by the city with a pictorial display in city hall of historic places in East Providence.

Also...the **East Providence Historic Properties Commission** will present awards to three East Providence residents on Tuesday, May 19, 8:00 p.m., city hall council chambers.

A committee has been formed to update the society's brochure. Members are **Leslie O'Brien, David Kelleher, Doreen Bonney, Virginia Berwick, Edna Anness and Florence Adams**. We are pleased to report that it will be partially funded by the **Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor**, a historic designation which includes the John Hunt House and part of Rumford.

And speaking of the Blackstone Valley, the society's March meeting in Riverside was great and well-attended. **Kevin Klyberg**, Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor and **Bob Billington**, Blackstone Valley Tourism Council informed and entertained us. We are excited and enthused about our rightful place within the corridor. But it was **Edna Anness'** introductory remarks that were worth the "price of admission". She set the stage for the delightful exchange that followed. The refreshments were also delightful, provided by **Florence Adams, Mona Breault, and Pat Henry**.

🌸🌸🌸 GARDEN GIFT 🌸🌸🌸

A \$100 gift has been received by the society for a special planting in recognition of the **East Providence Beautification Commission, Billie Arden, President**.

A Virtual Bouquet to the Commission!



Help! Help! Help!

We could use the help of a Boy Scout Troop on a Saturday morning to help us clean some plat maps which we found in the attic of the Hunt House.

Also, does anyone in the community have a used computer or xerox machine just sitting around gathering dust? Such a donation to the museum is tax deductible.

If you can help with the above, please call the Hunt House, 438-1750, and leave us a message.

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. Annual dues are \$10, individual or \$15, family.

Please make check payable to:

East Providence Historical Society

Mail to: **Mona Breault**
34 Josephine Avenue
Rumford, RI 02916

New Renewal Amount Enclosed \$ _____

Name(s) _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____



The GAZETTE

is published monthly by the

EAST•PROVIDENCE•HISTORICAL•SOCIETY

P.O. Box 4774, East Providence, RI 02916-4774

(401) 438-1750

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Markers	Kris Rose
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Museum	Virginia Berwick
Museum Curator	Edna Anness
Newsletter	Doreen Bonney
Preservation	Les Haworth
Publicity	Florence Adams

The
GAZETTE

is printed at



1062 Willett Avenue, Riverside

The book, "*Images of America: East Providence*" can be purchased at the Hunt House. The House is open Tuesdays and Thursdays 9 to noon.

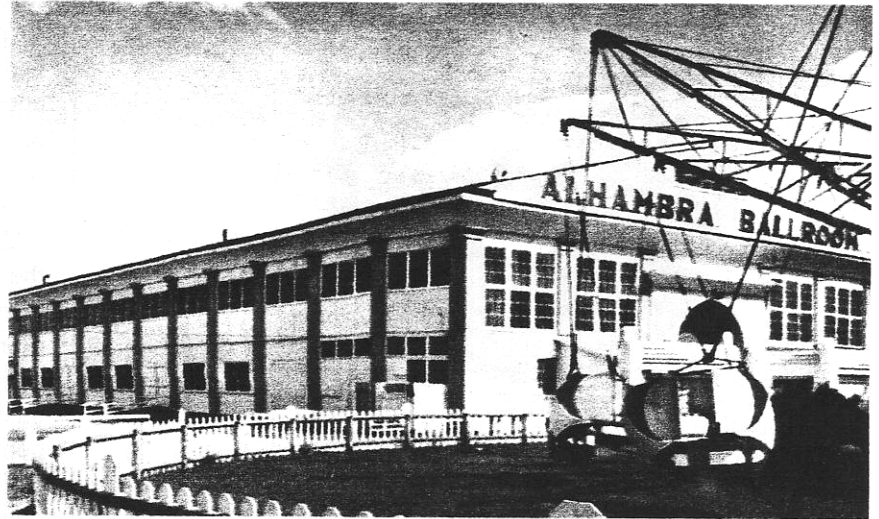
From the Attic *Edna Anness*

(continued from page 1)

Because the building was so large and open inside and because it was in a neighborhood subject to strong winds, the fire department had set up special plans to fight a fire should it ever occur at the ballroom. There was even a night watchman who checked the building several times every night.

And so it was in the early hours of September 3rd, 1969 that the watchman thought he detected a gas odor at the rear of the building, checked the interior for a similar odor, found none and returning to the rear of the building found it afire and turned in the alarm at 1:54 a.m. Every fireman in East Providence responded to fight the fire. Even with prior planning the fire was out of control quickly with a breeze blowing and all the firemen could do was put up a wall of water to protect the neighborhood from flying embers. The Town of Barrington sent firemen to Crescent Park and the City of Providence covered the fire stations around East Providence.

The grand Alhambra, where 3,500 had danced on Saturday nights and where during World War II hundreds of Newport sailors had met their brides-to-be, lay in ashes. The fire had been visible from as far away as Portsmouth and from across Narragansett Bay. The Alhambra is gone forever, but not the Big Band Sound which will be bringing back memories of those Saturday night dances on April 27th at Post 10, Riverside. See you there! Ref: *The Evening Bulletin*, Sept. 3, 1969. Vol CVII, No. 206, Page one.



The Beautiful Alhambra Ballroom at Crescent Park

(photo donated by Ed Serowik)



In September of 1969 a terrible fire completely destroyed the Alhambra.

(photo on loan from Dave Kelleher)

ACCESSIONS - GIFTS

Al Hutchinson - Photo of Vanity Fair Park.

Peter Midgely - Two glass signs from Riverside Square clock, imprinted "Riverside Businessmen's Association."

Raymond Johnson - Set of photographs and negatives chronicling the demolition of Kent Heights Water Tower and the construction of the new water tower.

Don Paulhus - new 100th Anniversary history of Wannamoisett Country Club.

John Demerchant - Two booklets: EP Town Building Laws and EP Street Directory with folding map - 1928.

Virginia Berwick - Book: "History Blooms in Rehoboth".

Leslie O'Brien - Items found in wall of her home on Fourth Street.

Dave Kelleher - Articles written by Isabel Izoo from the Post and Providence Journal

Clint Sellew - History of the Izra Ide House, two news clippings and plans for the new EP High School - 1950.

Celia Beckett - Bureau set and mementos from EP High class of 1949.

(More Accessions on Page 4)

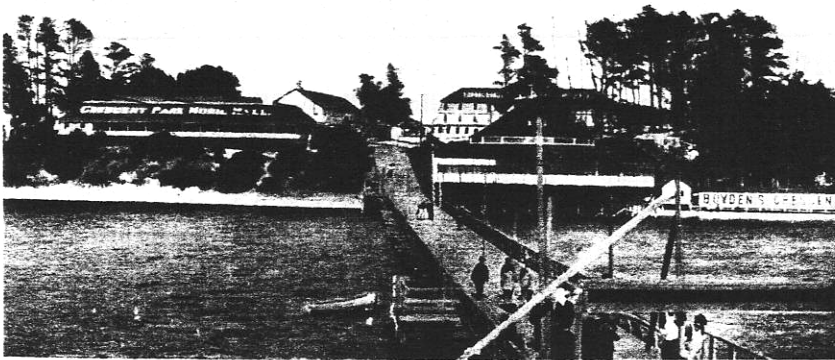


GEORGE BYRON BOYDEN

by Amelia Cabral

George Byron Boyden, the originator of Crescent park, was born in Petersburg, Virginia in 1840. He was the son of James Hervey and Elizabeth Mason Lee Boyden. After completing his education he enlisted in the United States Navy for twelve months.¹ Prior to coming to Rhode Island Boyden worked as a caterer where he had the privilege of catering to certain famous people. These experiences included preparing dinner for General Grant and General Sherman, on his march from Atlanta to the Sea, at Goldsboro at the Griswold Hotel. Boyden also served as a caterer for the Newburn, N.C. Club House under Edward McAlpine, formerly of the Astor House, New York.²

Boyden came to Providence after the Civil War and obtained the position of steward of the Squantum Club where he worked for eleven years. He then worked as a caterer for four years at the Vue de L'Eau Hotel in East Providence. While working here, John W. Davis offered him a lease to open Crescent Park. He started this resort with the famous Rhode Island clambake, bath houses, summer cottages and a hotel. He gradually added other rides and worked with the steamboat and electric car companies to provide convenient public access to the resort. He managed the resort until October 1901, when he sold it to the Hope Land Company.³



George Boyden's Crescent Park is depicted on a post card mailed in 1908.
(post card donated by Norma Allen)

In December 1901, he leased the area in the back of Squantum Club for \$30,000 and opened his second resort: Boyden Heights.⁴ This resort never became as popular as Crescent Park because Crescent Park had grown too big and Boyden had trouble acquiring adequate transportation. However, this park did last for two seasons under a great expense and eventually went bankrupt on December 3, 1902 (*Echoes of Summer...*).

His last business venture consisted of purchasing the John Baker estate on South Broadway in East Providence in January 1905. He set up a shore dinner hall here, which was also used for dancing, called Boyden's Bayview. Unfortunately this business didn't make it to the next season and many believe the strain from worrying about his financial difficulties contributed to his death. George Boyden died on May 31, 1906 of kidney trouble.⁵

¹Boyden's obituary; Rhode Island Scrapbook "Shore Resort Pioneer Dies" May 31, 1906.

²Providence Journal of Commerce. P.178. Boyden's photo.

³Boyden's obituary.

⁴*Echoes of Summer: The Lives and Times of Crescent Park*

⁵Boyden's obituary.

More ACCESSIONS - GIFTS

Hugo Esposte - Ford wrench commemorating Tasca Ford's first garage salesroom on lower Taunton Ave. in Watchemoket. Two FINAST bags from old store on Taunton Ave.

Caroline Hurdis - Invitation to Harriet Briggs' retirement party - former Weaver Library librarian.

Olive Stringfellow - People's Bank envelope and smelling salt packet from Williams' Undertaking Parlor.

George and Beverly Chalko - Two new views of the Grist Mill at Hunts Mills. We now have enough views to be able to re-construct the Mill.

Thank you so much for your generosity!

In memory of...

A donation was made to the Society's Memorial Fund in memory of society member Isabel Rich who passed away in March.

Sadly Missed... Fondly Remembered

Close-up of Historic Sites

by David Kelleher

The Philip Walker House served as the primary and final residence of one of Rhode Island's most prominent citizens.

Philip Walker came to America from England as a young man in 1643 and settled in Rehoboth, which is today known as East Providence. After his marriage in 1654, Walker built a house which was burned during the Indian War. In 1676, he constructed a new home on the old foundation, and this section is now the northern part of the Walker House.

Until his death in 1679, Philip Walker had a distinguished career as a weaver, husbandman, poet, surveyor, a constable of Rehoboth and a deacon of Newman Congregational Church. The southern section of the house was constructed around 1750. The front facade of the Walker House is five bays wide with a simple cornice and corner boards. Additional features include a central entrance and two chimneys, one from each major construction campaign.

Additions include a late 19th century ell to the north that houses a modern kitchen. The first floor consists of five rooms with a central stair entry hall.



THE PHILIP WALKER HOUSE, 1676, is located at the corner of North Broadway and Massasoit Ave., Rumford. It is the oldest house in the area.

The plan of the second floor closely mirrors the first.

Before the 1980's, the house was maintained as a private residence by Philip Walker's descendants. In 1986, Faith Shedd, a member of the 10th generation of Philip Walker's family, bequeathed the house to the Heritage Trust of R.I.

During the past several years, the Trust has undertaken many construction efforts (mainly exterior) at the Walker House and has recently started to pursue educational and programming initiatives at this historic property.

(Article first published in the East Providence Post, January, 29, 1998)

GROUNDS COMMITTEE

Ray Anderson, *Chairman*

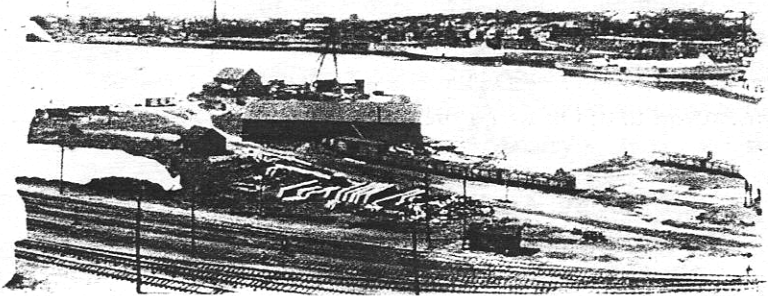
The Executive Board met with Lala Searle, landscape architect for the Hunt House grounds improvements. The Board was presented with a colored concept plan and thorough explanation. Greg Gammel, head of the city's Parks Department explained what the city can do. Generally speaking, the Parks Department will provide the labor and the historical society will purchase needed field stones and some plants.

Depending on the weather, some work could begin this summer with re-grading and seeding to take place in the fall. Minor details have to be worked out with the city. The Board directed the architect to proceed with phase three with construction drawings and specifications for historically appropriate designs for the front, sides and rear yard.

The colored concept plan as presented will be displayed at the April 27 "Ballroom Memories" night, Post 10 American Legion, Riverside.

THE LONG VIEW

SPECIAL EXHIBIT OF PANORAMIC PHOTOGRAPHS



Fragment of panoramic photo of Providence Harbor, taken in 1910...the other 4 ½ feet are in the "Long View" Exhibit.

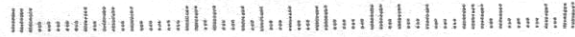
This special exhibit of *panoramic* photographs, made with special cameras that take pictures with a long aspect ratio (as much as 60 degrees) features a spectacular 8 X 59 inch photo of Providence Harbor, as well as three pictures of Watchemoket Square which were taken by **Jess Welt**. There is also a 1909 photo of Providence's Exchange Place (now Kennedy Plaza) and a panoramic picture of the 1943 East Providence High School Band...and much more! **The "Long View" is at the Hunt House, which is open Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9 to noon.**



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EAST PROVIDENCE, RI 02916

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Events Calendar

APRIL



Monday, April 27, 7:30 p.m.
Alhambra Ballroom Memories
Strictly Sentimental Swing Band
Post 10 American Legion "Ballroom"
830 Willett Ave., Riverside

Wednesday, April 29, 7:30 p.m.
Board Meeting
John Hunt House
Newsletter Deadline

MAY

OPEN TO
THE PUBLIC

Thursday, May 14, 7:00 p.m.
**East Providence Historic Properties
Commission**
1419 South Broadway
Rasmussen Homestead

Monday, May 18, 7:30 p.m.
Members Meeting
Newman Church.
Rumford