

# Gazette

## Riverside 2000: What Will Be New?

Members Meeting, November 22, 1999 7:30 p.m.

Riverside Congregational Church

Bullocks Point and Oak Avenues, Riverside

There are three exciting projects that are now in the planning stage for Riverside in the year 2000. All three will be discussed at the November 22nd members meeting.

Mayor Joseph Larisa will discuss the plans for the present Crescent Beach area and the new acquisition of land from Kelly and Picerne Realtors.

Thomas West, Riverside Business Owners Association, will discuss plans for the revitalization of Riverside Square including information about the state grant.

Noa Teplow, owner of Noa's Art, will discuss plans for a mural of historic sites to be painted under the Bullocks Point Avenue overpass on the East Bay Bike Path.

Dave Kelleher, member and Chairman of the East Providence Historic Properties Study Commission, will make a slide presentation of the areas under discussion.

The meeting will be held at the Riverside Congregational Church, Bullocks Point and Oak Avenues, starting at 7:30. **The public is invited.** Refreshments and a business meeting will follow.



## FIRE!

East Providence Firefighters at the Liberty Furniture Store fire in 1965.

- photo courtesy of Norm Gladding

## From the Attic

by Edna Anness, Museum Curator

### FIRES THAT CHANGED OUR CITY'S LANDSCAPE

This is not meant to be just a litany of fires that occurred over a one hundred year period, but rather the noting of fires that people today either remember or have been told of as being truly disastrous. Some took lives, some changed the scenery and some wiped out landmarks which in some cases ruined businesses.

Almost everyone has seen the postcard of the business district of Riverside in flames and wonder if it is for real. It did occur on July 3, 1904 and it is doubtful anyone is alive who remembers it. During the rest of that decade **Vanity Fair** which had opened in 1907 and regularly (continued on page 3)

## Board Briefs

We had a great turn out for the October 25th members meeting at the **Carpenter Museum**, Rehoboth. **Frank DeMattos**, curator, offered a wealth of information as he took us on tour through the three level museum. It is a must see. Thanks to **Edith Thornton, Olga Rohland** and **Kris Rose** for the goodies they provided.

We welcome **Sophie Fredrick** as a new "telephonie". A busy lady who has added another 'will do' to her volunteer work load.

*By the way, I hope you all noticed our new sign post at Pleasant Street put up by **Les Haworth**.  
Thanks, Les!*

### **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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The  
**GAZETTE**  
is printed at



3 Crescent View Avenue, Riverside

*Riverside Business District Fire  
July 3, 1904*

## **Grounds Committee**

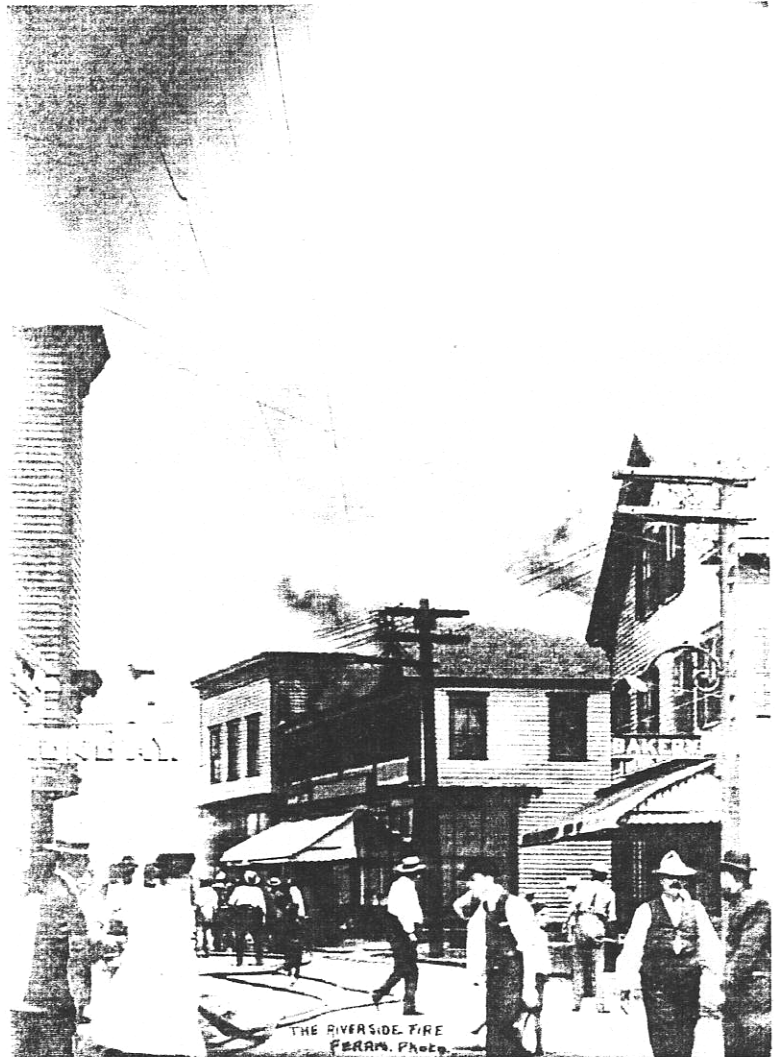
*by Ray Anderson, Chairman*

Thanks to the effort of the East Providence Parks Department, the Cottage/Rock Garden has been built. Complete with a tiered path and three-foot stone wall, it exceeds my expectations. The City also paid for substantial materials. A big **Thank You** goes to **Greg Gammel and his staff in the Parks Department**.

As perennials need two to three years to develop, we will eventually have attractive surroundings for the Hunt House.

Stop by and see what has been done so far. I'm sure you will like it.

Also, a **Special Thanks** to those who's donations to the Cottage/Rock Garden Memorial Fund made the perennials purchased possible.



*- photo donated by Harold Flint*

**From the Attic** by *Edna Anness* (cont'd from pg.1)

burned a building every day as a side show with actors taking the part of firemen, really did burn in 1912. That fire marked the end of the amusement park as it was already having financial problems. Vanity Fair was located where the Silver Spring Golf Club is today on Pawtucket Avenue.

During the 1920s there were four fires of note. In March, 1920, the **tower of the old Town Hall** on Taunton Avenue fell burning onto the sleeping quarters of the firemen quartered in the ell of the Town hall. The fire had started in a broom closet from embers collected while beating down a brush fire on Burgess Avenue that day, and the flames swept straight up to the Tower. No one was injured and the building got a new lower tower.

On August 27, 1921 **United Railway Signal Co.** blew up in Watchemoket near the waterfront and people do remember the windows in their houses breaking from the impact.

In 1925, the **Dance Hall** in the **Hunt's Mills Recreation Park** behind our John Hunt House burned. Burning shingles flew over the Rumford neighborhood causing a fright that night. This fire marked the end of Hunt's Mills as an amusement park. It was bought three years later by the Town of East Providence and the buildings were torn down. Only the manager's office remains beside the Hunt House.

On March 12, 1929 the second **Haven Methodist Church** on Taunton Avenue burned. The building was demolished and a newer, present day church remains in its place. One other fire of great note during this decade occurred when the **large barn on the Kent Farm** on the Wampanoag Trail burned. **Hope Ivers** noted in telling the story that the fire was so hot, apples on the trees surrounding the barn were roasted.

The 1930s were relatively quiet. There were two fires worth noting in 1938. **Bowen's barn** on Burnside Avenue, which had been an ice house around 1900, went up in flames as well as the **barn on Socony Vacuum property**, which for a time threatened the oil tanks near it. Thanks to our excellent firefighters a disaster was averted.

Early in the 1940s, December 20, 1943 to be exact, a second fire of major impact burned down **four houses and a store in Riverside**. Many remember to this day when the great old **Victorian building belonging to St. Mary's Bay View** burned in February, 1947. It was the Fire Chief **Kenneth Baker's** first day in his new job. The wind off the Bay certainly hampered efforts to control it and the building was lost forever.

**BUT** - the worst fire since the century began occurred on January 15, 1947 when **Bird & Son** in Phillipsdale burned and the first fireman in this century lost his life. He was on a ladder fighting the fire when it collapsed, throwing him

into a vat of exploding hot tar. His fellow firemen had to be restrained from jumping in to save him. His name was **Joe Hanfield**. His loss was a major blow to the town.

The 1950s were similarly tragic. On July 10, 1957 the second **St. Brendan's Church** caught fire and we lost another firefighter. **Lt. Robert McPherson** went into the basement to see if anyone was down there and in the smoke lost his direction and couldn't get out. A double tragedy - the church was lost and a valiant firefighter.

Three major landmarks were lost forever in the 1960s, never to be replaced. In 1967 the famous old **Clyde Mill** burned in Phillipsdale. It had been an ammunition factory during the American Revolution and World War I. The building had been converted into apartments and a man died in this fire in his apartment.

On July 3, 1968 the famous old **Sabin Lighthouse** went up in flames (too early for the Fourth) and was lost forever. And of course the September 3, 1969 fire when the **Alhambra Ballroom** burned to the ground. This not only erased a landmark, but signaled the beginning of the end of Crescent Park.

**St. Mark's second church building** burned on January 22, 1965, but it was rebuildable. And we can't forget the day in November, 1968 when **two houses on Vincent Avenue** were destroyed in a gas explosion. Ask **George Page** about that fire when he recounts how they were trying to douse the flames just before the explosion and narrowly escaped being killed.

The 1970s are most notable for the loss of our historic **Town Hall** building on Taunton Avenue, built in 1889. The fire occurred ironically as we entered the Bicentennial Year on January 14, 1976. That loss was in a way a final blow to Watchemoket as it related to the loss of so many Victorian buildings from fire and/or demolition for the construction of Route 195.

The night after our City Council voted to find a new use for the **Shore Dinner Hall in the old Crescent Park**, the site where so many had enjoyed shore dinners burned on July 18, 1984. In September, 1988 the second **St. Margaret's Church** building was lost to fire from a worker's torch.

Of course there were many other fires in our town/city which were of great loss to the property owners, but those that have been selected here affected all of our citizens in some way. We are indebted to our firefighters who put their lives on the line every day... on into the next century.

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*References: The Providence Journal; George Page and his two scrapbooks of Fire Dept. memories; oral histories of Eunice Russell, Hope Ivers, Milton & Doris Miner, Bill Rix, Earl Berwick, Nancy Hazard, Caroline Hurdis.*

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FIRE PHOTOS ARE CURRENTLY ON EXHIBITION AT THE HUNT HOUSE.

# Gifts to the Museum

- George Kent** - Kent Dairy pog.
- Helen Smith** - Juice bottle from Fiske Dairy.
- Marjorie Welt** - Photo of Haven Church choir and a plate bearing a picture of the Church.
- Bob Moravec** - Papers relating to St. Mark's Church, and East Providence High School mementos.
- Virginia Berwick** - Several copies of "Birds of the East Providence Reservoir".
- George Chalko** - Dairy receipts from *another* dairy - Wood's, 1892 and 1893.
- Marion Coop** - First Baptist Church program; a silver pin worn by Marion's great-grandfather as a volunteer fireman: "Centre-Volunteer-Hose #3 E. Prov."
- Audrey Partridge** - Minutes of original E. P. Charter Commission, 1954.



*Applause! Applause!*

*Memorialize a Loved One  
in the Hunt House  
Cottage Rock Garden*

*Please make checks payable to  
East Providence Historical Society  
and mail to the society at  
P. O. Box 4774  
East Providence, RI 02916-4774  
Attn: Ray Anderson*

*For additional information, call the  
Society at (401) 438-1750*

*Your donations are greatly appreciated*

**Next Month in the GAZETTE:  
"WHAT PRICE PROGRESS?"  
Losses due to the urban  
modernization during our Century.**

**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 with form below to:

**Mona Breault**

**34 Josephine Avenue**

**Rumford, RI 02916**

New       Renewal

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Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_



## MEMORIAL FUND



The Society's Memorial Fund was established in 1993 in memory of past members for "the betterment of the Society and with no specific purpose."

The Memorial Fund is a qualified endowment administered by the executive committee. Members and friends wishing to contribute may make checks payable to the

**East Providence Historical Society**

and mail to the Society at:

**Box 4774**

**East Providence, Rhode Island 02916-4774**

### HOLIDAY CAFÉ '99

*Florence Adams*

So...the cornbread was too salty and a little bit too dry.  
And it took a bit too long to get the heat source up to high.

But how about the broccoli soup, corn chowder and "DeMilo"?  
The crusted bread, the softer bread, the pumpkin squares? Oh-my-Oh!

The chocolate cake, the carrot cake, the butter from Armando.  
The coffee and the tea and punch. We reached a grand crescendo!

The wait staff: Billie Arden, Doreen Bonney, Margie Welt,  
(One whose grandson checked the menu; found "potatoe" was misspelt!)  
Not only served the patrons but each served as a cashier.

Thanks to all café partakers. Perhaps we'll meet again next year.



# Christmas at the Hunt House

By Virginia Berwick

Wednesday the 4th, Helen Smith, Mona Breault, Gladys Panzarella, Earl and Ginny Berwick went to the Hunt House to sweep, dust, and put candles in the windows. We also set up some of the articles for sale.

Saturday turned out to be a beautiful day, warm enough to have the front door open. There was a steady flow of people and many stayed to have lunch at the *Holiday Café* run by Florence Adams and her servers, Midge Welt, Billie Arden and Doreen Bonney.

Ruth Peirce, Sophie Allen, Audrey Partridge and Sophie Fredrick were selling at the *Food Table*. Helen Smith and Gladys Panzarella were in the parlor selling *Crafts*, while Rose Marie Sirenski and her granddaughter were selling *White Elephants*.

Lisa Berwick sold *Grabs* and Ginny Berwick painted names on *Ornaments*. David Kelleher, Earl Berwick and Dorothy Maciel sat in rooms upstairs; quite a few people went up to see the rooms. As usual, Lois Driscoll sold *Raffle Tickets* for a doll made by Mona Breault, a doll dress and wreath made by Pat Henry, a table runner with a candle in glass made by Gladys Panzarella and a clown made by Pat's friend Madeline. The raffle winners were:

- |                 |                  |
|-----------------|------------------|
| Doll            | June Balcewicz   |
| Doll Dress      | Mrs. A. Melfi    |
| Runner & Candle | Ginny Berwick    |
| Clown           | Mary McManus     |
| Wreath          | Dorothy Marshall |

Many people donated food, crafts, white elephants, knitted articles and soup for the Café. George Adams took pictures for the newsletter. It was a successful day and we appreciate all the helpers. **Thanks to all!**  
Ginny, Helen, Mona, Edna, Pat, and Gladys (Craft Group)



Helen Smith at the Craft Table



Lois Driscoll and Dave Kelleher in the Holiday Café



Pat Henry and Mona Breault



Florence Adams and Doreen Bonney in the kitchen



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## EVENTS CALENDAR

### NOVEMBER

Monday, November 22, 7:30 p.m.  
Members Meeting  
Riverside Congregational Church  
Program:  
*"Riverside 2000: What will be new?"*

### DECEMBER

Wednesday, December 1, 1999 7:30 p.m.  
Board Meeting (*Members Welcome*)  
John Hunt House  
Hunts Mills Rd., Rumford

Monday, December 20, 7:00 p.m.  
Members Christmas Party  
Newman Church  
Rumford



*Billie Arden and Midge Welt were servers in the Holiday Café during "Christmas at the Hunt House"*