

# EAST • PROVIDENCE • HISTORICAL • SOCIETY

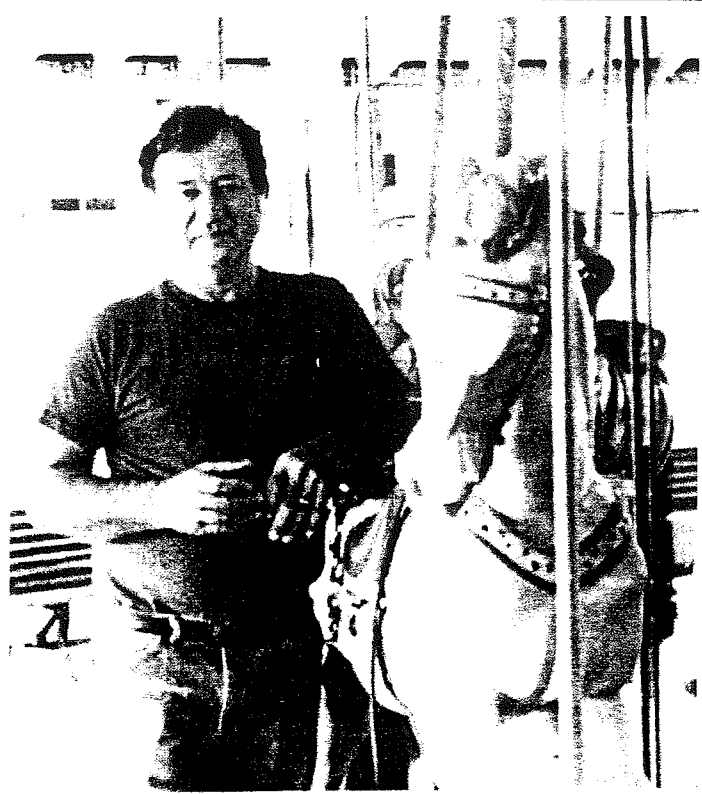


# G A Z E T T E



John Hunt House  
Vol. X No. 3

November 1998



*Ed Serowik and one of his famous charges at the historic Looff Carousel*

## Crescent Park Revisited

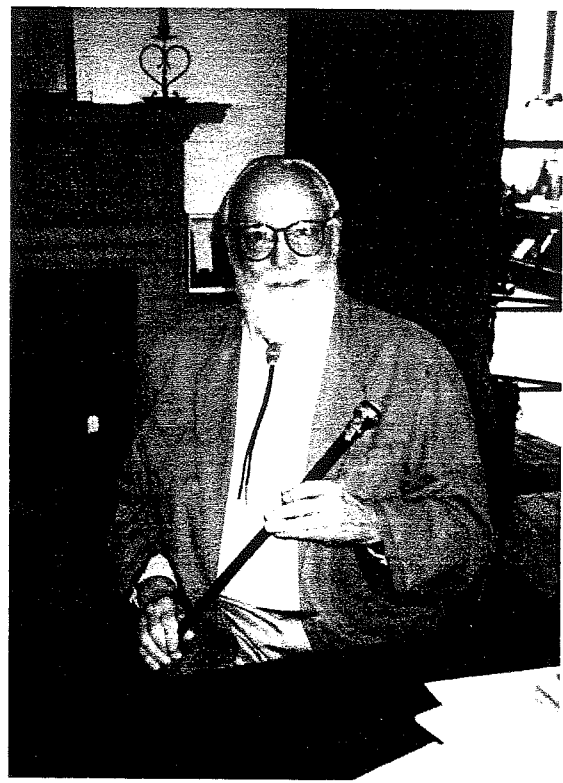
Monday, November 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7:30 p.m.

E. Providence Senior Center, 610 Waterman Ave.

Do you remember... the Tumblebug... the Caterpillar... the Pretzel ... the Comet... Tango... Magic Carpet... Music by Denishes Band... the Charlie Weygand Orchestra... Celia Moreau's Kadets (all-girl) Orchestra..... ??

If you do remember... please join us on November 23<sup>rd</sup> for an evening of Crescent Park Memories. Our memories will be jogged by Ed Serowik, 40-year veteran of the Park and present caretaker of the Looff Carousel. Ed will show us some pictures and other memorabilia from the great old fun days of Crescent Park.

All who remember the wonderland at the end of the carline are welcome to share memories with us.



*Irvin Chaffee Plough holds the walking stick presented to his grandfather, J. Irvin Chaffee, the first principal of East Providence High School.*

## J. IRVIN CHAFFEE

*by Irvin Chaffee Plough*

J. Irvin Chaffee was born on January 3, 1861. His parents, Oliver Chaffee and Abby Maria Gray Chaffee named him Jonathan Irvin, but he used only the latter name. Irvin Chaffee was raised in Oliver and Abby Maria's home at 284 Pleasant St., East Providence, RI, on the east side of the intersection where Pleasant St. and Pawtucket Ave. touch.<sup>1</sup>

The house had been built by Abby Maria's father, Church Gray, sometime between his marriage in 1812 and his daughter's birth in 1824.

*-continued on page 3*

<sup>1</sup> Statewide Historic Preservation Project P-EP-1  
Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission  
East Providence, Rhode Island September 1976

**Board Briefs**

Many thanks to **Florence Adams** and **Helen Smith** for the goodies they baked for the October meeting.

The **Building Committee** will meet at the Hunt House on Wednesday, November 18, 7:30 p.m. The main subject for discussion will be drawing up plans for the "summer kitchen". Other Hunt House projects are sure to be discussed. Society members are invited to attend.

Two important names were overlooked in the October *Gazette*: **Mark Charves**, who served as editor of the newsletter for a year, and **Jewel Drickamer**, who served on the telephone committee for many years. Both are still dues-paying members of the society. **Applause! Applause!**

The **Whitcomb Farm House**, one of East Providence's treasures, is for sale. It's located at 36 Willett Avenue, Riverside. Built around 1780, it features many colonial construction characteristics. It is on the **National Register of Historic Places**. We hope it finds an appreciative occupant. You can read about the history of the house on page 5.

**New Members**

**Warm Welcome to Our New Members**

- Lionel and Dorothy Raposa**
- Eugene and Gladys Carpenter**
- Peter and Catherine Allen**
- Dorothy Schmidt**
- Mary Schmidt**
- Robert Maravec**



**ACCESSIONS - GIFTS**

- Clint Sellew** - Antique hay rake.
- Rose Marie Sirenski** - Antique brass kerosene lamp.
- Mona Breault** - Ivory handled manicure tools.



*Thank you.*

*Your generosity is greatly appreciated!*

**EAST PROVIDENCE READS!**

Volunteer tutors are needed in the Kindergarten to grade 3 to help improve reading skills. The Retired Seniors Volunteer Program is holding an orientation/training session on Wednesday, November 18, 10 a.m. to noon at the East Providence Senior Center, 610 Waterman Avenue. The East Providence School Department supports this program, which is part of Rhode Island Reads. For further information, call RSVP at 435-7800, extension 205.

**The GAZETTE**

is published monthly by the  
**EAST•PROVIDENCE•HISTORICAL•SOCIETY**  
 P.O. Box 4774, East Providence, RI 02916-4774  
 (401) 438-1750

**OFFICERS**

- |                                |                     |
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| President                      | Les Haworth         |
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| Museum                | Mona Breault     |
| Museum Curator        | Virginia Berwick |
| Newsletter            | Edna Anness      |
| Preservation          | Doreen Bonney    |
| Publicity             | Les Haworth      |
|                       | Florence Adams   |

The  
**GAZETTE**  
 is printed at



3 Crescent View Avenue, Riverside

**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, RI 02916**

## J. IRVIN CHAFFEE

by *Irvin Chaffee Plough*  
(continued from page 1)

In fact Abby Maria lived her whole life in this house, for she was born, raised, and married in it in 1848 (to which marriage she brought the house), raised her family in it, and died there in 1896.<sup>2</sup>

After growing up in East Providence, Irvin Chaffee attended a preparatory school in Providence, and then Brown University from which he graduated in June 1883, a month after the death of his father. During his last year at Brown he had also served as principal of the Grove Avenue Grammar School in East Providence. In 1884 he was chosen as the first principal, and teacher of the first class, at the East Providence High School.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, in 1885 he married Betsey Marvel, daughter of John Cotton Marvel of Rehoboth, Massachusetts. He continued as both teacher and administrator of the high school until June 1889. Presumably at that time he received the gold headed walking stick (now in the hands of the East Providence Historical Society) inscribed to "J. Irvin Chaffee from the Classes of 1890, 1891, and 1892, E.P.H.S."

In September 1889 he went to Europe to undertake graduate work at the University of Berlin, studying there until he was called home in 1890 on the death of his elder brother. Later that year he attempted to continue his graduate study in mathematics at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, but returned to Rehoboth at the birth of his daughter in 1891. Until 1893 he was a school superintendent for the combine schools of Seekonk, Rehoboth and Swansea, moving then to be principal of the Stratford High School in Connecticut. In 1895 he became Professor of Mathematics, and later also manager, of the Webb Institute of Naval Architecture at Fordham Heights, The Bronx, New York, continuing until his death on December 3, 1919.<sup>2</sup> He is buried in the Lakeside Cemetery, East Providence, near his parents' grave, in the southeast corner near the intersection of Chaffee Street and Pawtucket Avenue.

The Oliver Chaffee home in East Providence came to Irvin Chaffee on his mother's death in 1896. Irvin Chaffee never returned to it, but his wife, Betsey Marvel Chaffee did after his death. She sold it about 1930 after her younger son had finished at Brown University. Irvin and Betsey's daughter, Frances, married Harold Plough, a professor at Amherst College. The writer of this note was born a year after my grandfather's death, and was named for him.

*Irvin Chaffee Plough resides in Bethesda, Maryland*

*The Historical Society sincerely thanks Mr. Plough for his informative and interesting letter. We apologize for misspelling his and his grandfather's name in the October newsletter.*

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished Manuscript by Betsey M. Chaffee  
Genealogical Pedigrees and Family Notes on the Chaffees and Marvels.  
Approximately 1940

<sup>3</sup> Conforti, Joseph. *Our Heritage: A History of East Providence*  
Monarch Publishing, Inc., White Plains, N. Y. 1971

## MUSEUM COMMITTEE

*Virginia Berwick, Chairman*

As you know, the Crescent Park Exhibit is open on Sundays through December 27 from 1 - 3 p.m. We still need volunteers to be at the Hunt House for December 6, 13, 20, and 27. It is only for two hours and, who knows, you might meet old friends, neighbors, or someone from another state.

Many people who come in say, "Oh, yes. I used to work there." Or "I remember going on those rides."

A video of Crescent Park made from home movies taken by some members goes back to the 40's, 50's and 60's. Come enjoy the exhibit and reminisce!

The Hunt House has been host to about 400 fifth graders to hear about the John Hunt House and also go on a trail walk through the Bridgham Farm area. When each bus arrives, half of the students go into the house and half stay on the bus and go on the walk. Then they return and switch places. The students learn how the families lived without central heat, running water and electricity. They also learn about Crescent Park.

We wish to thank trail guides: **Dave Kelleher, Fran Trafton, Charlene Underhill, Dave Fitton and Burt Chase.**

We also thank **Les Haworth, Dave Kelleher, Sophie Allen, Mona Breault, Janet Reagan, Diane McLean, Jane and Jesse Pacheco, Fran Gross, Ellen Frazier, Edna Anness, Ginny Berwick, Andy Valerio, Nancy Moore, Kit Rodman, Marion Kent, and Don Brothers** who have volunteered on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays at the Hunt House.

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 coupon below to:

**Mona Breault**

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# GROUNDS COMMITTEE

Ray Anderson, Chairman

The East Providence Parks Department has completed Phase I of the Searle and Searle historically accurate landscaping plan. The front lawn has been dropped about six inches to reveal the stone face of the Hunt House foundation. Sloped fieldstone carries roof rainwater away from the cellar. A new small stone/gravel walk to the front door is edged in fieldstone. Tiered plantings at the right of the Hunt House screen the air conditioning units. At this corner is also the lilac tree from Lura Sellew.

A corner planting near the flagpole hosts the John Hunt House sign: "Restoration Project of the East Providence Historical Society".

To the left of the Hunt House are two granite steps that will be the start of a path through a "cottage" rock garden to be constructed next year. At the present time, I am getting prices on the planned perennial plantings for members and friends of the society who would like to donate these as a memorial. A period quince tree is nearby.

Right now, moderate rain would help with seed germination. The potential grass areas have been staked and "lined" to prevent foot traffic and assist in winter plowing.

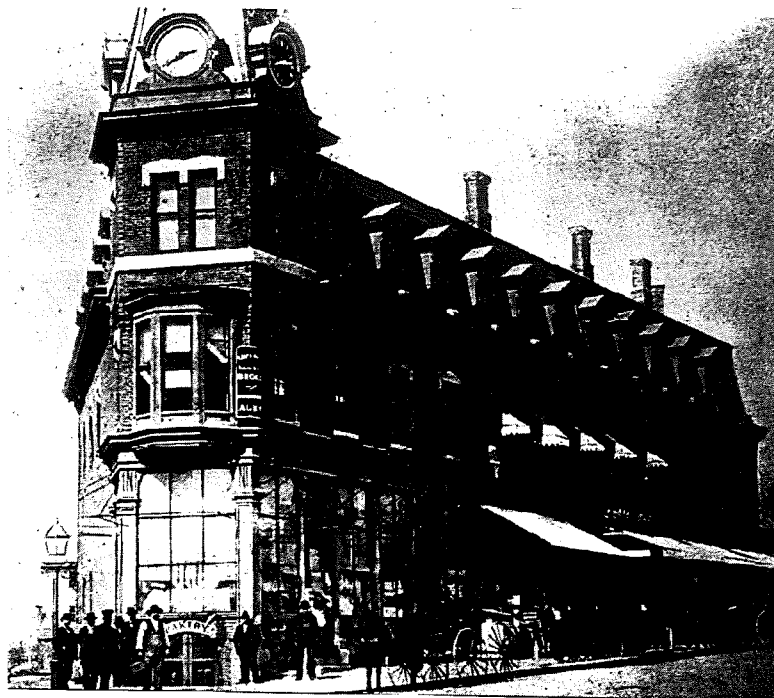
A well-deserved "Thank You" to Greg Gammell and the crew from the Parks Department! They were a pleasure to work with and their intensity showed their devotion to the city. A couple of the workers showed interest in joining the society!

A series of slides have been taken to show before, during and after construction. Even at present, we try to document for History.

# FROM THE ATTIC

by Edna Anness, Museum Curator

Thomas Ray, a noted businessman from Watchemoket, built the Ray Building, pictured here on the corner of Valley Street and Taunton Avenue in 1875. This corner is now under the eastern lanes of Route 195 as they cross the Washington Bridge. This building was the first "skyscraper" so to speak, built in East Providence as Watchemoket was expanding as the center of commerce in town. Note the gaslight and the great old clock in the steeple. On the third floor there was a large meeting hall.



In the accompanying photo are two chairs from this third floor assembly hall. When the building was demolished the granddaughter of Thomas Ray, Virginia Ray Whitcomb, saved twelve of the chairs. They were made by inmates of the Rhode Island State Prison in the 1870's in the rodback Windsor style, painted black with flower stencils across the back and decorative trim on the seat. (continued on page 5)



## Christmas Party



**ENTERTAINMENT** by **Historical Singing Society: US** in the **Greatest Sing-a-long ever**

Christmas Party? YES. We've reserved Newman Church Hall for the annual gathering. It will be held on Monday, Dec. 21 at 7 p.m. The Board decided that the recipients of the gift exchange would be the needy in our community. We are asking that each person attending the party bring a non-perishable food item or paper goods or personal care item. Pizza and beverages will be served. The telephone committee will be calling members for a head count and for home-baked goodies.

**Close-up of Historic Sites**

*By David Kelleher*

The Whitcomb Farm House, one of East Providence's treasures, is believed to have been built around 1780 based on a number of features that were vogue in the building of houses before 1800.

The house is constructed in the early English method called "studding". The studs are set in the brick walls and "clinched" from the inside. This means the walls are covered with clapboards and attached to the studs from the inside

There were no closets in the original house and the kitchen was in another building apart from the house (the present garage is built over the foundation of the original kitchen). These features again indicate that the house was built before 1800.

Being a house of the Georgian style, it has a center hall, corner rooms throughout the house, cellar, first, second and third floors. The ceilings are nine feet, six inches high. There is hand-carved piano key molding in the living room and a beamed ceiling in the dining room. There is also a hand-carved china closet with bonnet top and doors of

Upon Mr. Fales' death in 1925, the house entered a period of rapid successive ownership.

In 1929 the house was bought by T. Howard Ray, father of Mrs. Reginald Whitcomb, the present owner, and restored to its early colonial appearance.

The house was put on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.

*Reprinted from the East Providence Post, March 26, 1998. David Kelleher is Chairman of the East Providence Historic Properties Commission and Vice-president of the East Providence Historical Society. The Whitcomb Farm House is currently for sale.*



**WHITCOMB FARMHOUSE:** *This historic building, built around 1780, features many colonial construction characteristics.*

The "clinching" was done with hand wrought nails. Hand wrought nails were used in New England before the Revolution because of the high duty England imposed on the imported wire nails of the period.

The old time craftsmen did not work with mathematical precision. In the Whitcomb Farm House there are not two windows the exact same size.

The roof is steep without dormers which denotes early colonial construction. The roof is made of ship's planking. Another early colonial feature is the way the chimneys are built within the masonry wall, forming a part of it, on the inside of the house. Outside chimneys came later.

The sides of the house are made of English brick, smaller than American brick. These bricks were used as ballast on the colonial ships.

leaded glass. There are seven fireplaces.

The house was built for one of the sons of John Brown, who bought the whole area (present Riverside) from the Indians between 1638 and 1645. It was probably Nathan Brown.

The Brown Family sold the property to Captain Pearce Samuel Allin in 1805. The Allin Family owned the property for many years and Mr. Allin built the lightning splitter house across the street for his daughter Ardelia when she married Mr. Armington.

In 1864, Joseph Allin sold the property to Willard and William Whitcomb. Willard ran the City Hotel in Providence. The Whitcombs erected the stone gate posts bearing the family name that presently stand in front of the property.

William's daughter sold the property in 1910 to Warren Fales - well known leader of the famous American Band.

**FROM THE ATTIC**

*(continued from page 4)*

Virginia donated eight of the chairs to the museum in memory of her husband Reginald so that we would have matching chairs in the parlor. At present while the exhibition is "on", the chairs are located throughout the Hunt House. Thank goodness they were saved for they are the only things left from such a grand building.

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## Events Calendar

### NOVEMBER

Wednesday, November 18, 7:00 p.m.

**BUILDING COMMITTEE**

John Hunt House, Hunts Mills Rd.

*Members Welcome*

Monday, November 23, 7:30 p.m.

**MEMBERS MEETING**

East Providence Senior Center

610 Waterman Avenue

*Program: Crescent Park Slide Show*

Edward Serowik

### DECEMBER

Wednesday, December 2, 7:30 p.m.

**BOARD MEETING**

John Hunt House, Hunts Mills Rd.

*Members Welcome*

Monday, December 21, 7:00 p.m.

**MEMBERS Christmas Party**

Newman Church, Rumford



Start Your Christmas Shopping  
Early This Year

The Book

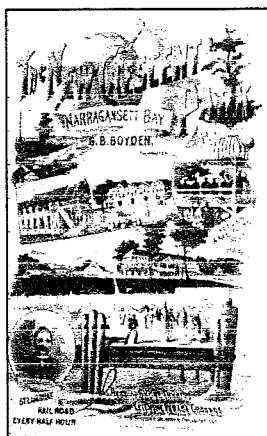
*“Images of America:  
East Providence”*

is a wonderful and inexpensive  
way to remember friends or  
relatives with roots in East Providence...



*...and*

The beautiful  
colored poster of  
*George Boyden's  
Crescent Park*  
would look great in  
any room of the house.



*Both items are easy to mail, and are available to  
purchase during visiting hours at the Hunt House.*