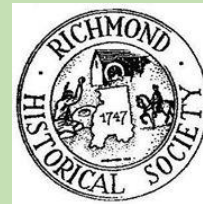


# RICHMOND REFLECTIONS

## The Richmond Historical Society Newsletter



Vol. 47 No. 1

March 2021

### Greetings Members and Friends of RHS,

Though we haven't met in person for a year now, there is definitely activity going on behind the scenes at RHS. Archivists **Richard Wolke** and **Denise Stetson** continue to catalog accessions, organize the archive files, and answer questions from the public. Cemetery Chair **Dory Wagner** has made plans for this year's cemetery cleanup (see inside for details). I'm slowly compiling a master index of nearly 50 years' worth of RHS newsletters. What a fascinating resource these newsletters are! The ultimate goal will be to make the newsletters accessible online.

Recently the town of Richmond conducted its **Comprehensive Community Plan**. The RHS Board reviewed public comments on Question 20 of the Plan, which asked residents to identify "What are the most important cultural or historical aspects that need to be represented?" It was noted that several commenters stated they were unaware of or knew little of the history of Richmond. Several mentioned wanting to learn more about the history of Indigenous peoples in the region. These responses indicate that many residents are just not aware of what is available- they don't know there is a Richmond Historical Society, or the Tomaquag Museum. We've learned through these responses to the CCP that the Society needs to work harder on visibility in the community, including through our website, Facebook page, and programs.

We've been seeking ways to include more young people in the Society, and were pleased to learn that member **Rev. Bettine Besier** is on the Board of the Chariho Youth Task Force. We look forward to conversation with Director Dan Fitzgerald and members of CYTF to explore ways that the two groups can collaborate on community issues.

### We are looking for volunteers to help us in a couple of ways.

**First:** This year marks the **50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the relocation of Bell School** from its original site in Tug Hollow to its current site next to the Town Hall. We're putting on our thinking caps for ways to commemorate the event. If anybody out there took part in the move, had family members who took part, or remembers the occasion, we want to gather your recollections to share. In this issue we are pleased to share memories of the move from **Narda Butler**, daughter of RHS charter members **Patty and Richard Millar**. Due to Covid-19, the school was not open to visitors on Saturdays during the summer. This summer we are planning to be open again, following all health protocols. Please consider donating a few hours of time to be a docent.

**Second,** the task of indexing the Society's newsletters has me once again wishing that our other invaluable source of Richmond History, *Driftways Into the Past*, were indexed. It is divided into chapters by sections of town, but a topic index would make it so much easier for us to locate information for people making inquiries. **If you are interested in creating an index for the book**, contact me.

**Third,** I'm throwing this out here again: It would also be great to have someone write the **Upcoming Events** column. That person would scout newspapers and the web for events of interest offered locally or further afield, since most events are now offered online.

There are a few more exciting plans in the works that have not yet been fully developed, so stay tuned!

Kristen Chambers

RHS President

## 1918 Influenza Pandemic by Kristen Chambers

The world has been in the grip of the Covid-19 pandemic for over a year now. Thankfully, effective vaccines were developed relatively quickly, and many reading this will have already received at least one of a series of two inoculations. As of this writing over 2.6 million people have died worldwide from Covid-19. Approximately one fifth of those deaths, 530,000 people, were Americans. It is astounding that the U.S., with only 4% of the world's population, has suffered more than 20% of the total deaths from Covid -19.

Epidemics and pandemics have ebbed and flowed throughout human history. The following information on some of the most deadly epidemics in history is from [MPHonline.org](http://MPHonline.org).

### Plague of Justinian - Death Toll: 25 million

Cause: Bubonic Plague

Thought to have killed perhaps half the population of Europe, the Plague of Justinian was an outbreak of the bubonic plague that afflicted the Byzantine Empire and Mediterranean port cities, killing up to 25 million people in its year long reign of terror. Generally regarded as the first recorded incident of the Bubonic Plague.

### The Black Death - Death Toll: 75 – 200 million

Cause: Bubonic Plague

From 1346 to 1353 an outbreak of the Plague ravaged Europe, Africa, and Asia, with an estimated death toll between 75 and 200 million people.



### 1918 Flu Pandemic - Death Toll: 20 -50 million

Cause: Influenza

Between 1918 and 1920 a disturbingly deadly outbreak of influenza tore across the globe, infecting over a third of the world's population and ending the lives of 20 – 50 million people. Of the 500 million people infected in the 1918 pandemic, the mortality rate was estimated at 10% to 20%, with up to 25 million deaths in the first 25 weeks alone. What separated the 1918 flu pandemic from other influenza outbreaks was the victims; where influenza had always previously only killed juveniles and the elderly or already weakened patients, it had begun striking down hardy and completely healthy young adults, while leaving children and those with weaker immune systems still alive.

Approximately 675,000 Americans died in the 1918 Pandemic, yet at the time, as WWI was occurring simultaneously, the devastating [illness was downplayed](#) by the government, which had enacted the 1918 Sedition Act. The Sedition Act led journalists to self-censor news about the severity of the flu out of fear of retribution. Because of the news blackout, it's possible that many Americans were unaware of the extent of devastation, depending on how severe the outbreak was in their own towns. Scholars have noted the [surprising dearth](#) of contemporary literary novels dealing with the 1918 Pandemic. Some that touched on the theme are Willa Cather's *One of Ours*, Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*, and Katherine Ann Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*.

RHS Member **Marion Ziomek** reports her family was among the fortunate ones. "My mother was born July 17, 1918. She survived as the child of new immigrants to America and she and my father raised a family of ten. My grandparents also raised a large family here, all of whom survived the Spanish flu." In my own family, there were vague stories of my yet unmarried paternal grandmother, a nurse, contracting the flu which prevented her from being sent overseas during WWI. She recovered and married a few years after.

Member **Virginia Williams** sent this poignant story of the flu's impact on her family:



*My daddy, Dan Miller (left), was born and raised in Utlely, Texas, a small town near Austin. His parents ran the "mercantile" and post office. During the terrible 1918 influenza epidemic, both parents became infected and were in critical condition. His mother was pregnant and lost the baby. Because of the illness in the house it was decided that Daddy should go by train to stay with Aunt Edith in Robstown. Dressed in his "Sunday-go-to-meeting" clothes with a note attached to his jacket telling his name, where he was going, and who would meet him, he set out by himself. When he arrived in Robstown he learned Aunt Edith had gotten the flu and passed away. He was put back on the train and sent back to Utlely. When he got home he learned his daddy had passed away the same day as Aunt Edith. His mother was still extremely ill and was not told of her husband's death and did not learn of it until after the burial when she was somewhat recovered. His mother recovered and took over running the store and post office with help from Daddy, the "man of the house".*

### **Bell School Memories** By Narda Butler

There were only two times I can remember my Mom (Patty Millar) allowing me to stay home from school. The day Bell School came down Hillsdale Road on a trailer was one of them.

We had visited Bell School on the occasional Historical Society Sunday outing prior to this and I was always enamored with my grandfather's (Earl Smith) stories of having gone to school there. He was my real-life connection to the stories I read in the Little House in the Big Woods series. He told of the time he swung on his arms between two desks and scraped his bare foot on the floor and got a large splinter. His teacher pulled out her jackknife and dug the splinter out! He also told about having to memorize the history of the United States for a school recitation day. He said he would walk down Hillsdale Road until he got to where Beaver River crossed the road and then walk back, memorizing along the way. As an adult, I realize that he probably didn't memorize the entire history, but I was impressed as a young girl. I also remember a story about one of the big boys chewing tobacco at school and spitting into his boot because he wasn't allowed to chew in class. Again, as an adult I have to question my memory, but it seemed awfully plausible to me as child. And Grandpa Earl was not one to make up stories simply for effect.

The day Bell School was moved, we were allowed to watch from the yard. We waited with anticipation, not really knowing when it would appear. We waited and waited until we saw it lumbering slowly down the road. I remember it being preceded by a truck or vehicle to "clear the way." (On Hillsdale Road? Not much to clear...) I remember being aware of the enormity of the event. I had no part in any of the logistical conversations, but I recognized that this was a triumphant day - to see Bell School moved to be preserved as a part of Richmond History.

## A Brief History of St. Thomas' Episcopal Church, Alton

By Rev. Bettine Besier



In October 1860, 37-year-old David L. Aldrich, a prominent manufacturer, paid \$350 for 36 acres of land between the Wood and the Pawcatuck Rivers, on which he proposed to build a mill village. Aldrich's mill was modern in every respect and it ran entirely by water power for years. The highway was laid out (now known as route 91), a dam was built, and several multi-family homes were constructed along the road. Because of its location, the village was named Plainville Mill Estate.

In 1880, Aldrich sold his property to William A. Walton for \$1000 who then renamed it the Walton Woolen Mill. Walton was from England and was trained to be an expert weaver. It was his dream to own a mill and create a model mill village. One of the first acts of the new owner was to construct sidewalks along the road and line it with 200 maple trees (some of the remnants of those trees can be found beside route 91 in the village). More mill tenements were built. At the general store, mill families were allowed to buy groceries and merchandise at cost. Each household was supplied with an acre of land for a garden. Walton used his influence to get a post office for the residents, and thereafter the village was known by his shortened name, Alton.

The history of the mill and the church intertwine. In 1865, before Aldrich sold the mill property, he deeded a lot on which to erect a place for worship. A group of subscribers, who had pledged funds, met and appointed a committee. They were to collect the subscriptions, select the style and builder. There were some eighty-eight people subscribed to the list circulated for the purpose of erecting a place of worship and holding of Sunday school. They incorporated under the name "Wood River Chapel Society." The wooden structure was built in the Carpenter Gothic style (1) and the total cost was \$1,205.60. The Chapel was completed in August 1878.

In the late 1800's, services were conducted by itinerant preachers from an assortment of denominations including Baptist, Congregational, Episcopal and Seventh Day Baptist. One noteworthy preacher, the Rev. Daniel Davis, was an Alton resident. He was born into slavery in Baltimore, MD, but escaped. He came north and in 1865 attended a school for freemen that had been established by Carolina Mills (2). He went on to seminary and was ordained in the A.M.E. Zion Church. He married a woman from Alton named Almira Bundy. She was the daughter of the Rev. William and Esther Browning Bundy and their family owned property in the village. Daniel and Almira are buried in a family plot not far from the church.

For many years, the Wood River Chapel was the social and cultural center for Alton. Sometime, in the early 1900's, the name was changed to the Alton Chapel. Not only was it a church, it was also the center of life for the village. The greater part of its funds came from socials, fairs, festivals, and suppers that were held in the building. It received additional rent from clubs, singing schools, and lodges. It hosted a variety of readings, lectures, concerts; and shows by local talent and traveling troupes. The emphasis was usually on music, however the hall could be used for anything not judged to be immoral. The chapel society always operated on a shoestring. It depended on these social affairs to put shingles on the roof, wood in the stove, or to buy a new piano. What really eased the budget was a new form of entertainment called moving pictures. These were first shown in November 1912. An evening's profit ran from \$3 to \$10.

In 1912, an annex was built on the rear of the church for use as a kitchen and gathering room. During the years of World War I, things were quiet at the Chapel. The Red Cross met there as did the Weavers Union, the Triple Whist Club (a card-playing group), and the Richmond Lace and Social Club. Sunday school continued, but preaching services were held spasmodically. Across the US, there was waning religious interest. This is documented in some church records from 1929 indicating that the preacher was paid \$46, while the janitor earned \$65 (one of the janitor's duties was to ring the church bell daily at 6:30 p.m.). After the years of World War II, the chapel on Church Street in the village of Alton stood almost unused.

In 1948, under the leadership of Bishop Bennett of the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island, Canon Anthony Parshley, priest and Archdeacon of the Diocese, and Deaconess E. Suzanne McNulty, surveyed the community to see if it would be feasible to start an Episcopal congregation in the Alton chapel. Most Episcopalians in the Alton area attended services at Christ Church in Westerly. As a result of the survey, Alton Chapel Society granted the property to the Diocese. The new congregation was named St. Thomas, and it was started as a "mission church," since it was partly supported by the Diocese. Holy Communion was offered once a month, with Morning Prayer services on the other Sundays. The first priest-in-charge was the Reverend Arthur Leaker, who also served two other mission churches at the time- St. Elizabeth's, Canonchet, and Church of the Holy Spirit, Shannock (note-in 1951, that building was moved from Shannock to Charlestown). Morning Prayer was usually led by a layperson, Mr. Calbraith Perry, who traveled each week from Bristol.

Annual reports from 1949 to 1971 show a congregation ranging in size from 23 to 64 communicants. During the 1960's and 70's, the church membership grew in numbers. A committee of parish officers was established. An altar guild and chapter of the Episcopal Church Women were formed and there was a large Sunday school for children. In 1953, an organ from a church in Warwick was installed to replace the piano that had been in the Alton Chapel. In 1967, pews were donated from St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in Jamestown. In 1986, ground was broken for another addition which was completed in 1994. Other major building projects were undertaken in the late 80's and early 90's, including the installation of vinyl siding.



In January 2017, the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island changed the status for St. Thomas from a mission congregation to a parish. It is a small parish, with a part-time priest, but it is financially self-sufficient and is home to important ministries. St. Thomas' has been served by many dedicated priests during its history as an Episcopal church. A plaque listing each priest and their years of service hangs in the parish hall. The current priest, the Rev. Bettine Besier, has been there since January 1997 and works on a part-time basis. The current active membership is 34 families. Outreach to the local community has always been important to St. Thomas' congregation. This is based, in part, on the church's origins as a local community center in Alton. The parish collects food for RICAN in Charlestown and prepares monthly meals for the WARM Center in Westerly. It supports veterans in the congregation

and beyond. It is a meeting place for scout groups and other community organizations and it is home to Tuesday Tutoring-an after school program for local students.

Worship services are held every Sunday at 9am. During the pandemic, the congregation has expanded its online presence and has virtual services. Throughout the decades, St. Thomas' has learned to adapt to the

challenges of the times and is always looking for new ways to reach out to the Alton community. To learn more about St. Thomas', visit their website at [stthomasalton.blogspot.com](http://stthomasalton.blogspot.com)

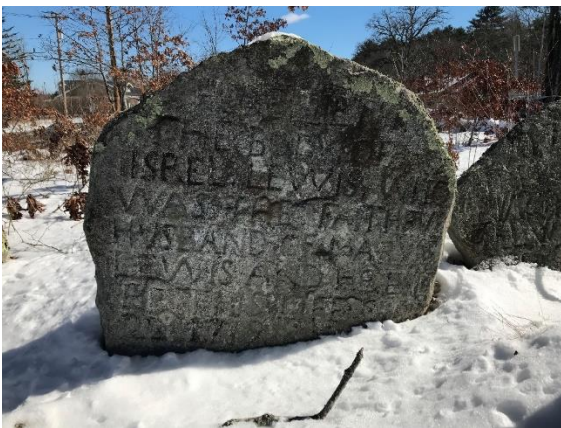
Author's note: Much of the information for this article was taken from *Driftways Into the Past* published by the Richmond Historical Society, 1977.

### Sources

William H. Jordy et al., "St. Thomas Episcopal Church," [Richmond, Rhode Island], SAH Archipedia, eds. Gabrielle Esperdy and Karen Kingsley, Charlottesville: UVaP, 2012-, <https://sah-archipedia.org/buildings/RI-01-RI6>

Kelly Sullivan, "[Local historic burial ground holds generations of stories.](#)" Chariho Times, Feb. 9, 2019

## Historical Cemeteries Calendar



*Israel Lewis headstone*

RHS Cemetery Chair Dory Wagner informs us that the annual cemetery preservation and awareness program is scheduled for April. RHS is holding its cleanup on Sunday, April 18, from 10 AM – 12 PM, a week after the "official" day, in order not to conflict with Opening Day of fishing season. This year we will be cleaning up the Israel Lewis Lot, #37, which is located at the Park and Ride next to Richmond Farm Fresh Market on Route 138. This is a highly visible spot so we hope some curious people wander over. There will be a table set up with flyers and information on joining RHS. Masks and social distancing must be observed.

Checklist for those planning to help out: rakes, clippers, clothes appropriate for the weather, masks, work gloves, water. Long pants and sleeves are recommended- lots of thorns were noted on a recent visit.

**Also, Dory is looking for volunteers to place flags at Richmond veterans' graves for Memorial Day.** If you can help out please email Dory at [dorwagg@aol.com](mailto:dorwagg@aol.com)

## About Ghost Walks by David G. Johnson

**Definition:** Ghost Walks are short 15 to 20-minute presentations made by four or five reenactors, at the grave site of deceased persons. Ghost Walks are usually sponsored by local historical societies as an educational and fund-raising event and are associated with other activities during daylight hours such as a special presentation or lecture sponsored by the local historical society in a nearby church vestry or one of several events held during an all-day village fall festival.

**Planning:** Considerable planning goes into a ghost walk. Volunteers are needed to carry out such tasks as event coordinator, historical advisor, docents, tickets, brochure design as well as finding persons to research and costume others or themselves as a chosen character. Ghost walks rarely stand alone as a single activity, rather they are associated with and usually follow a related event.

**Example 1- North Sutton, NH:** On Saturday, 10 August 2019 I attended a ghost walk which immediately followed a talk sponsored by the North Sutton, NH Historical Society. The featured presenter, Glenn Knoblock, was provided by the NH Humanities Council which listed the event state wide on their monthly event calendar. The talk was held in the vestry of the North Sutton Free Baptist Church. Conveniently located beside the church

was a large hillside cemetery surrounded by stone walls. It was a perfect clear, warm summer day and approximately 100 persons were in attendance. The title and description of the talk follows:

*New Hampshire Cemeteries and Gravestones*

*Presenter: Glenn Knoblock- Rubbings, photographs, and slides illustrate the rich variety of gravestones to be found in our own neighborhoods, but they also tell long-forgotten stories of such historical events as the Great Awakening, the Throat Distemper epidemic, and the American Revolution. Find out more about these deeply personal works of art and the craftsmen who carved them with Glenn Knoblock, and learn how to read the stone "pages" that give insight into the vast genealogical book of New Hampshire. This program is also available as an online presentation.*



Following the talk, attendees migrated outside and entered the cemetery through an opening in the stone wall, "guarded" by a society toll keeper who collected \$5.00 per person for the ghost walk tour. When 15 or 20 persons accumulated, a group was formed and an assigned docent led the group to a particular gravesite to meet its resident ghost. The ghosts introduced themselves and continued describing their early lives, daily routines, education, family, professions, etc. in the first person. Following each 15-minute talk, the ghost asked if there were any questions from the group. Many questions were answered, surprisingly, "in character". At a signal from their docent, each group was led off to visit another nearby ghost. Of the six ghosts visited that day, I especially like

listening to Dr. Robert Lane (1786-1872), who, "with only meager knowledge of medicine known at the time, healed and comforted citizens in the area". Dr. Lane was portrayed by Charlie Forsberg, a short wiry man who wore black pants, a white shirt, and a black vest complete with pocket watch on a chain.

**Example 2 – Peacham, Vermont:** The Northeast Kingdom Fall Foliage Festival, held each year during the third week in September, is the place to be for all or a part of seven days. The local fall foliage is at peak and seven contiguous towns take turns having all day (breakfast to supper) events during the week. The Peacham Historical Association conducts a ghost walk at the extensive and scenic Peacham Cemetery beginning at 2 PM each year when it is the town's turn in the week's festival series. I last attended the Peacham Ghost walk in September of 2019. Again, tickets (\$4.00) were purchased in advance or at the entrance to the cemetery, and groups were formed by docents who directed group traffic. The theme of that year's Ghost Walk was The Roaring 20's, inspired by a recent donation to the Peacham Historical Association of a quilt made in the 1920's. It was made as a fundraiser for street lights in East Peacham. The 1920's were a time of tremendous change and contrast in Peacham. There was electricity in the villages, which transformed people's lives in many ways, but it took another 20 years to reach the farms.

Four ghosts were featured within the theme of the Roaring 20's,

- Water Thorn (1864-1954) - Town Clerk and Local Electrician
- Mary Craig (1870-1952) - Quilter and Mother of Eleven
- Eleanor Bayley (1914-1999) Basket Ball Coach and One Who Moved Away
- Crane Brinton (1898-1968) The First Academic Summer People

**Ghost Walk Takeaways:**

- Ghost Walks are usually associated with another local activity or program such as a lecture of historical interest or a community festival, activities that draw in interested participants from near and far.
- A historical cemetery located within a village near a venue where people can gather for a lecture or festival activities provides an ideal setting.

- Ghost Walks are usually built around some theme or time period such that the characters portrayed were contemporaries.
- Ghost Walks are typically planned and executed by a dedicated small group within the membership of a local historical society or association.
- Ghost Walks provide an additional means of fund raising for the organization by charging a nominal entrance fee to the Walk.
- Such programs provide knowledge of the town's history, folkways, and characters, thus providing a unifying identity and story of the town's past to its current residents and visitors.

### Seeking Information

A request from member **Laura Orabone**: "I haven't yet been able to do any research on our house, but if anyone in the Society has any information on when Carolina Village was originally wired for telephone service, I'd be interested to know. A neighbor who grew up in our house told me that the original **telephone switchboard** was located in our front parlor, which was, according to him, leased out to the phone company. I have no way of verifying this, short of removing paneling etc. to look for evidence of this inside our walls."

### Medicine Stone

*Virginia Williams shares another family story:*

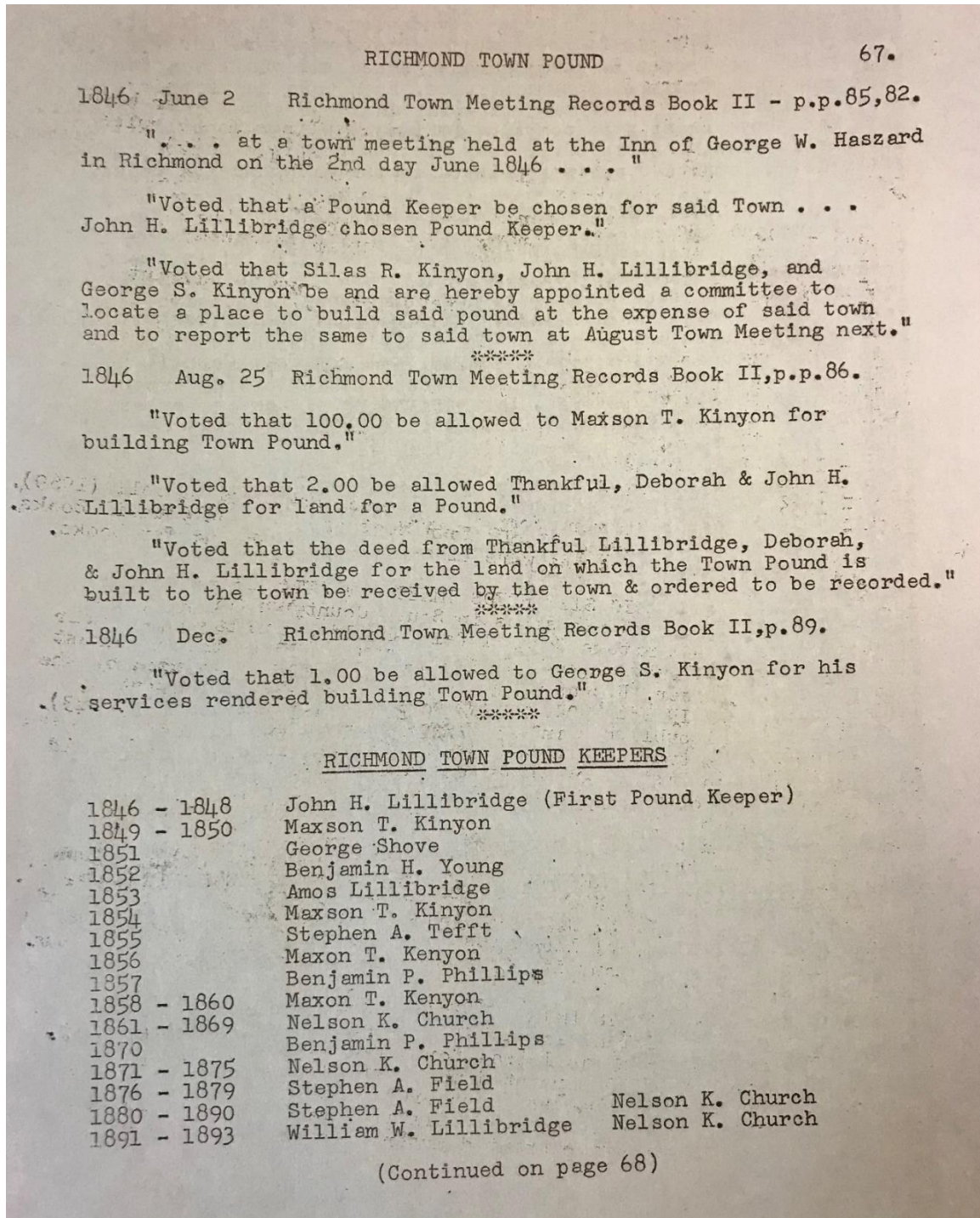
Elizabeth Morgan Miller was born in Manor, Texas, in 1832. She kept a special medicine stone in a wooden box with a sliding top. When someone became ill, she would put the stone in a cup and add boiling water. When the water cooled, she removed the stone and gave the water to the patient. Upon her death the stone went to her grandson; on his death it went to his son, my grandfather; then to my daddy, and now I have it. Although no one has used the stone since Elizabeth's time, it is an interesting item.

I had thought of offering it to help cure Covid-19, but so far no one has asked to use it.



### Town Pound Questions Answered

Dave Johnson reported on the Town Pound in the September 2020 newsletter. His article left him with many questions: "Did this replace an earlier structure? How much did it cost to build? Who built it? Who or what determined the size? What was the source of the quarried stone? How long did it take to build? What were the names of the first pound keepers?" Some of these questions have been answered after coming across this article on the Town Pound in the very first volume of the RHS newsletter, No. 13, March 1969.



RICHMOND TOWN POUND  
(Continued from Page 67)

68.

1894 William W. Lillibridge, Nelson K. Church, Herbert E. Lewis  
 "June 16, 1894 Resolved that the Town Council be instructed to establish a pound, at or near Wood River Junction, for empounding of horses, mules, neat cattle, sheep, etc." (1894 Tax Book)

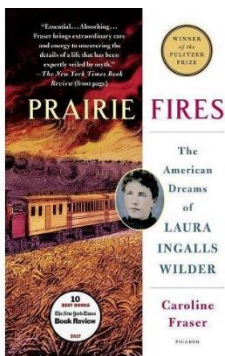
1895 - 1900 Nelson K. Church  
 1901 - 1903 William G. Gardner Henry E. Wells  
 1904 - 1905 William G. Gardner Elmer A. Smith  
 1906 - 1916 Wendell Phillips  
 1907 Wendell Phillips, Janetta L. Brown, Assistant  
 1918 - 1920 Wendell Phillips  
 1921 - 1933 Orville M. Meserve  
 1934 - 1935 Earl Woodmansee  
 1936 - 1937 Frank E. Dawley  
 1938 - 1948  
 1949 - 1953 Francis L. Hoffman  
 1954 - 1956 Thomas F. Tefft  
 1957 - Henry A. Kenyon

The above facts were compiled by Lucy Rawlings Tootell (1969). Information was found in early Town Meeting and Town Council Books. After 1877, Pound Keepers were listed in the Richmond Tax Books.

**Book Review** by Kristen Chambers

*Prairie Fires: The American Dreams of Laura Ingalls Wilder*

Written by Caroline Fraser



On Christmas morning when I was seven years old, I opened one of the best gifts of my life- a hardcover copy of *Little House in the Big Woods* by Laura Ingalls Wilder. From thereafter on each birthday and Christmas I received the next book in the series, until I had the complete set. I read them over and over, and though my dad, who also enjoyed the books, told me that they were autobiographical but probably not the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, I stubbornly believed every word. (Though I did look with disdain on the awful, sentimental 1970's TV series and boycotted it. Michael Landon as Pa Ingalls, WITHOUT A BEARD? Just. No.)

As I grew up, and into adulthood, I continued to read every new book that was published about the Little House series and about Wilder. And of course my father was right. The books were largely based on her life but were embellished, with fictitious events and characters added. And it was not until decades after Wilder's death that the fact emerged that her daughter, Rose Wilder Lane, collaborated with her mother and

heavily edited and ghostwrote much of the series. Wilder and her daughter had a sometimes rocky relationship. Lane, a widely-known journalist and writer on her own merit before encouraging her mother to write about her childhood memories, had been a precocious child and suffered from depression and “breakdowns” throughout her adult life. She often went for years without seeing her parents. Their secret collaboration on the *Little House* series for the most part went smoothly, though Wilder put her foot down if Lane attempted to alter her story too much.

*Prairie Fires*, published in 2017, earned Caroline Fraser the Pulitzer Prize. It explores Wilder’s life and that of her Ingalls and Quiner families before her, within the context of American history. It answers some questions I had had for some time, but had never seen addressed, such as: Had Charles Ingalls been a soldier in the Civil War? Did Laura ever see her parents again after moving from South Dakota to Missouri with her husband and child in 1894?

Born in 1836, Charles “Pa” Ingalls would have been the right age during the Civil War to report to the Wisconsin county draft commission as required by the Secretary of War. Ingalls did not enlist, and his whereabouts for over a year from 1862-63 are unknown. Contrary to popular belief, just as in the Revolutionary War, not every able-bodied eligible male was clamoring to sign up; in fact great numbers of men provided excuses for being exempt, paid someone else to take their place, or simply made themselves scarce. Fraser posits that Ingalls fell within the latter group, noting that historians noted a “sudden, suspicious increase” in 1862 in northern and western Wisconsin, and that by 1863 “so many men had fled to parts unknown that the exodus was characterized as a ‘stampede’”.

The answer to my second question is sad. The loving relationship in real life between Laura and her parents, and her special bond with her father, are a constant throughout the series. Though doubtless letters between Laura and her parents must have been frequent, it is heartbreaking to learn that the only time Laura saw her father again was when she traveled to be at his deathbed in 1902. In fact that was the last time she saw her mother as well. Caroline Ingalls died in 1924. Her mother’s death was the spark for memories of the past, which ultimately led her to write the *Little House* series.

Fraser describes the impact of the Westward movement on both the trajectory of American history and on the American landscape itself. The effects of massive clearcutting for logging in the upper Midwest led to massive fires. The economic Panic of 1873 which drove Charles Ingalls and countless others West in search of a better life led to continued displacement of Indigenous people. The Panic of 1893 in turn drove his daughter to Missouri on the same search for escape from a fairly hand-to-mouth existence. The Panic of 1893 was caused by a number of factors, a prime one being the stripping of the rich prairie soil for poorly managed agriculture leading to extended droughts, a precursor of the Dust Bowl decades later. This poor management continues to haunt the environment today in the [degradation of the formerly hyper-fertile prairie soil](#).

The mother and daughter team of Wilder and Lane instilled a “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” vibe throughout the series. As a matter of fact Lane became one of the founders of the Libertarians, and it is easy to hear her voice in some of the later *Little House* books in sections that feel preachy and out of place. (Lane’s protégé, Roger Lea MacBride, ran for President on the Libertarian ticket in 1976, supported by Charles Koch. In 1980 brother David Koch was the Libertarian’s vice presidential candidate. The Koch brothers eventually switched to backing Republican Party candidates. The fallout from Lane’s political views thus continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.)

Both mother and daughter loathed FDR, Eleanor Roosevelt, and the “government handout” called the New Deal. Ironically, Wilder and her husband took advantage of Federal Farm Loan plans, and for years Wilder acted as a loan officer for the program in their town.

Like many authors whose work I admire but whose real-life actions or values rub the wrong way (i.e. Charles Dickens, J.K. Rowling), my childhood idol Laura Ingalls Wilder has feet of clay. It doesn’t stop me from separating the person from the work and enjoying her books.



*Bell School, Tug Hollow, ca. 1898*

## RICHMOND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**Renewed memberships December 2020:** Carla Ricci, Russell Ricci, Joyce House, Kirk House

### Find us at:

Website: <https://www.richmondrihistoricalsoc.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/RichmondRIHistoricalSociety/>

Email: [rihiso@gmail.com](mailto:rihiso@gmail.com)

Snail Mail: RHS, PO Box 408, Wyoming, RI 02898

### RHS Slate of Officers

President- **Kristen Chambers** - [krischambers1@gmail.com](mailto:krischambers1@gmail.com)

Vice President- **Richard Wolke** - [cloud11@cox.net](mailto:cloud11@cox.net)

Secretary- **Johanna Wolke** - [hansicloud@cox.net](mailto:hansicloud@cox.net)

Treasurer- **Merrill Moone** - [mkmoone@gmail.com](mailto:mkmoone@gmail.com)

Member at Large- **Dave Johnson** - [oneshadowridge@gmail.com](mailto:oneshadowridge@gmail.com)

Member at Large- **Denise Stetson** - [den.stetson@verizon.net](mailto:den.stetson@verizon.net)

Cemetery Chair- **Dory Wagner** - [dorwagg@aol.com](mailto:dorwagg@aol.com)

Archives - **Denise Stetson, Richard Wolke**

Newsletter Editor- **Kristen Chambers**

Proofreader- **Laura Orabone**