



Richmond Reflections

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The Richmond Historical Society Newsletter Winter 2019

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings Members and Friends of RHS,

The Society has had a busy and successful series of events this Fall, including the memorial reception for Patty Millar and Betty Mowchan, and a presentation on Prudence Crandall (articles and photos below). The revised Constitution and Bylaws were voted on and accepted at a special meeting on October 24, 2019. The bylaws spell out in greater detail the duties of officers and committees. A most important change is the provision for members to vote in absentia, via letter or email sent to the Secretary. From hereon members who cannot physically attend a meeting will be able to vote on any issue and thus enjoy full member benefits.

The Board was sorry to accept the resignation of Carolyn Richard as Treasurer of RHS. Carolyn has been a member since RHS's earliest days and has served in a variety of offices, most recently as Treasurer. Her meticulous record keeping and attention to the details of the job have kept the financial side of things running smoothly. I am pleased that Assistant Treasurer Laura Orabone has agreed to accept the Treasurer position. Laura has been easily taking on the accompanying duties and we are happy to welcome her as a member of the Board.



I'm grateful for all of you who support RHS by renewing your membership, by attending our sponsored events which often entail much planning and hands-on help, and in other ways. If I might mention just a few: New member Russell Lacey lives in faraway Glendale, RI (I've never heard of it either!) and though he may be unable to attend events, kindly made a donation towards refreshments. Chamoni Moss-Simone ensured that the audio-visual equipment worked flawlessly for the Prudence Crandall presentation. And, Ron Mowchan has been putting in many hours restoring the rolltop desk destined for the Museum of Carolina History.

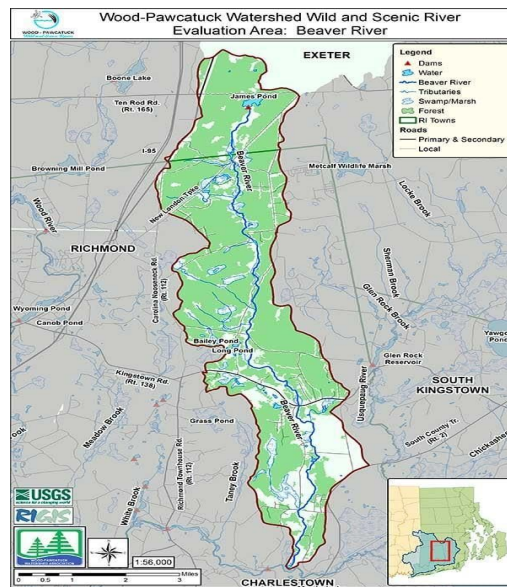
There are many ways that you can help our organization grow and thrive. Reach out to us and let us know how you'd like to become more involved. We always welcome ideas for programs of interest.

Kristen Chambers

RHS and Richmond Town Issues

This past year RHS has been asked to comment or take a stand on two town issues that relate to our stated Purpose, which includes: “...to aid and encourage the maintenance, support and preservation of historical sites, properties and landscapes.” Those issues relate to solar ordinances and to the proposed demolition of the de Coppet Lodge by DEM. You are probably aware of the controversy over the location of solar installations in Richmond and Hopkinton, and have seen them popping up around the town and state. While most would agree that renewable energy sources are the way to go as our planet faces serious environmental deterioration, it is crucial that siting of those sources be done wisely and in a manner that is not detrimental to existing natural resources. It is heartbreaking to see acres of trees clearcut for solar panels, when trees are a major source of air purification and beauty, as well as habitat for thousands of species.

The Beaver River Valley Community Association (BRVCA) was organized in reaction to what often appears to be haphazard, for-profit-only siting of solar arrays in Richmond. BRVCA’s goal is to “protect the characteristics, qualities, and features that define our community and our town, by preparing and planning for its future”. The watchdog group is specifically focused on preventing solar installation in the Beaver River Valley. The area contains “historically significant indigenous sites, farms, mill villages, and wildlife habitat”. In 2001 it was designated a Historic and Unique Landscape by the State Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission. The Beaver River is part of RI’s first federally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers.



Because of the recorded significance of this area, and following a survey of RHS members, then-RHS President Wolke wrote a letter to the Town Council in June 2019 requesting that the siting of solar arrays in the Beaver River Valley not be approved, and “that a moratorium on all commercial solar arrays be enacted until the problem can be more carefully addressed”.

The second issue about which we were asked to provide input was the de Coppet Lodge located on Hillsdale Road. There is a long background story and a large file in the Archives about financier and conservationist Theakston de Coppet, and the land he cherished and wished to be preserved for posterity. The de Coppet Lodge is on this property. Per Mr. de Coppet's will, the property was deeded to the State after the death of all remaining heirs. Subsequently, the DEM is seeking to demolish the building which it claims is too costly to repair. The following letter was sent to Town Manager Karen Pinch from RHS President Chambers in October to state our position:

Dear Ms. Pinch:

Thank you for seeking public input on the proposal by DEM to demolish the de Coppet Lodge. The Richmond Historical Society stands in opposition to its demolition.

The de Coppet property is an often overlooked gem in Richmond, an amazing gift from Theakston de Coppet, a most generous man who was ahead of his time in his vision of the conservation of natural resources. Though his prime concern was to protect the flora and fauna on the property, the Lodge that he had specially built was of importance to him, and he took great pains in his will to ensure that his heirs and tenants would be able to enjoy it. The Lodge is located within the Hillsdale Historic and Archaeological District, which was entered in the National Register of Historic Places on November 24, 1980. Apparently the Lodge was in habitable condition through 2013, when the final tenants had to move out before the State took over the property. It is difficult to understand how after only six years it is now deemed irreparable, especially when the de Coppet endowment provides for \$20,000 a year for preservation and care of the property. We would like to know what has been done with what would now be \$100,000 since the State took over the property in 2014. There must be means for the DEM to repair and make appropriate use of the Lodge rather than to destroy it.

The Purpose of the Richmond Historical Society includes aiding and encouraging the maintenance, support and preservation of historical sites and properties. As the de Coppet Lodge is a building of significant historic interest which lies within the Hillsdale Historic and Archaeological District and the National Register of Historic Places, the Society believes its demolition by the entity which was entrusted with its care would be a travesty of local preservation. The Richmond Historical Society stands in opposition to the demolition of the de Coppet Lodge.

These two issues highlight the fine line a little historical society may need to walk when items of a political tinge crop up. Not all members may agree with the positions taken, and of course individuals must act as they see fit regarding personal beliefs and actions, but in making our decisions as a Society we are guided by the Purpose stated in our Constitution and Bylaws. As of this writing there has not been any further input from DEM as to the future of the de Coppet Lodge.

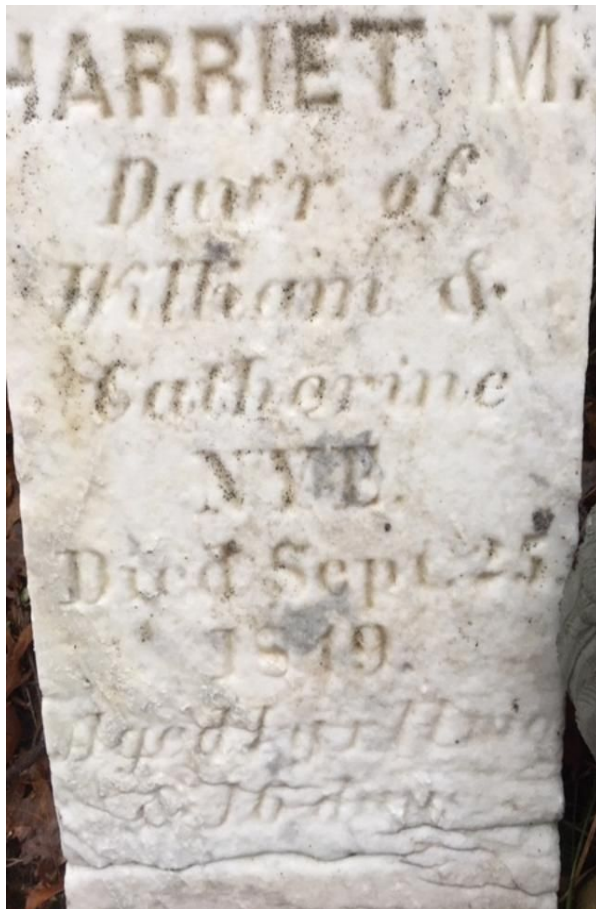


Kristen Chambers

A Newly Discovered Richmond Historic Cemetery

A property owner in the village of Usquepaugh, RI contacted RHS to say they had seen an historic cemetery. The cemetery has been recorded and submitted to the RI Historic Cemetery Commission. They will assign it a number (probably #94) and enter it into their state database of historic cemeteries. It contains 3 very young children of the Nye family who died in the 1840's. Their parents are believed to be buried in Coventry, RI. A cemetery sign will be installed.

Dory Wagner



Richmond Historical Cemetery Committee

Interested in old cemeteries? An organizational meeting of the RHCC will be held on **Thursday, January 9, 2020 at 6:30 PM** at the Clark Memorial Library. RHS Cemetery Chair Dory Wagner will facilitate the meeting. There is much to be done to maintain the town's 89 identified cemeteries. Projects can include cemetery adoption and cleanup, locating lost cemeteries, photographing graves, flagging veteran graves, and more. A great opportunity for student community service as well !

RHS Remembers Patty and Betty

The weather was glorious as family and friends of Patty Millar and Betty Mowchan gathered at the Town Hall and Bell School on September 22nd for a reception to honor the memories of the two dedicated RHS members who passed away in April. Patty was a founding member and Betty a longtime member of the Society. Both worked together in the Archives for many years.

The Town Hall was filled to capacity with guests. There were smiles and even some tears as family and friends shared memories of the two women. VP Richard Wolke presented husbands Dick Millar and Ron Mowchan with plaques that were later hung in the Bell School entryway. Following the testimonials, the group walked to the schoolground, where two lilac bushes had been planted by Patty and Dick's son, Dana Millar. Guests then proceeded inside the school to peruse the exhibit dedicated to Patty and Betty, "Driftways into Their Pasts". Refreshments followed back at the Town Hall.



