Wyoming, Rhode Island 02898

N E W S L E T T E R

Vol. XIII No. 4 Page 15 April 1981

Patricia A. Millar, President
West Kingston, R. I. 02892

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## APRIL PUBLIC MEETING TO HERALD HERITAGE MONTH ACTIVITIES

Sunday, April 26, 1981 2:00 P. M. Richmond Town Hall

Mr. Robert Ornstein, Chairman of the Richmond Historic Preservation Commission, has been asked to give a slide presentation of old homes and related structures in the Wyoming-Hope Valley area with a narration from the architect's point of view. Bob will describe the buildings, highlighting the architectural features which give the buildings historic distinction.

Following the slide presentation at the Town Hall, the first of our village exhibits will open at the Bell School museum. Wyoming and Hope Valley are the subject matter for this exhibit which will be open on two consecutive week-ends.

There is also to be a special presentation made to the Society by a representative of the Rhode Island Heritage Commission at this meeting. It is the sponsorship of the Rhode Island Heritage Commission which makes this exhibit, and past Heritage Month activities possible.

This year the Richmond Historical Society is planning a series of changing exhibits, each to feature one or two villages in the Town. Through these changing exhibits we hope to reveal distinctive features which makes each village unique from its neighbors, and to help new generations and newcomers to the Town have a better understanding of what makes Richmond tick! A full schedule of events is on page 16.

Bob's program will be an exciting kick-off to two months of activity in the Bell School. Plan to drop by on week-ends April, May, and June.

H E R I T A G E  M O N T H

**Wyoming, Rhode Island 02898**

THE RICHMOND HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESENTS ITS HERITAGE MONTH PROGRAM AND EXHIBITS FOR 1981.

"VILLAGE LIFE IN RICHMOND"

The Town of Richmond's history centers in its villages. These villages will be given special and comprehensive consideration in our HERITAGE MONTH celebration. Members and friends of the Historical Society have loaned artifacts, costumes, photographs, books, tools and other historical articles to create informative and interesting exhibits on RICHMOND VILLAGE LIFE.

All events take place in the BELL SCHOOL, Wyoming, R. I. (at the junction of Rtes 112 and 138 near the Town Hall)

No admission is charged for any exhibit.

S C H E D U L E

| Village | Days | Times |
|---|---|---|
| Wyoming & Hope Valley | April 26th | 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. |
| | May 2nd | 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. |
| | May 3rd | 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. |
| Woodville & Alton | May 9th | 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. |
| | May 10th | 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. |
| | May 16th | 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. |
| | May 17th | 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. |
| Carolina | May 23rd | 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. |
| | May 24th | 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. |
| | May 30th | 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. |
| | May 31st | 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. |
| Usquepaugh | June 6th | 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. |
| | June 7th | 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. |
| | June 13th | 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. |
| | June 14th | 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. |

July 10, 1888 IN MEMORIUM February 20, 1981

Lucy Gammell Rawlings

Herein the Richmond Historical Society would like to pay tribute to one of its Charter members. Lucy Rawlings, mother of Rep. Lucy Rawlings Tootell and Sen. Rob Roy Rawlings, and wife of the late Roy Rawlings, former Speaker of the Rhode Island House of Representatives, was also actress, homemaker, and devotee to the welfare of the Town of Richmond. She was also an avid historian and authoress of several yet unpublished local history volumes. Mrs. Rawlings' theatrical career was not for the glory of the stage alone; she was also an educator and from 1925 to 1938 she directed and taught the first drama classes for credit at Rhode Island State College (now University of Rhode Island). The Society received an announcement of Mrs. Rawlings' passing. It was in the form of a playbill and was designed by herself to be issued upon her death. The poem therein attests to her imaginative approach to life and gives insight to her understanding of the strengths and frailties of human nature.

It is with regret that we mark the passing of this long-time contributor to Richmond history.

FIELD TRIP PAST

As the result of an interested neighbor reporting that an old cemetery located near the newly developed and controversial Woods Road off the New London Turnpike appeared to be seriously threatened, a few members of the Society and friends of the cemetery made a pilgrimage to the site on April 5th.

See correction p.22

The property we traversed was originally a king's grant to the Reynolds family and remained in that family until the late 1940s, early 1950s. At that time the property was sold to a Dr. George Young who split the property, selling part to William Stetson in 1967 and giving the remaining portion to the University of Rhode Island in 1978. The University did not find the property suitable to its needs and offered a builder, David LaRoche the option to buy the property. Not wishing to be classified as a builder, LaRoche chose to "upgrade" an existing road which had long been in disuse and develop along the resulting frontage. Exact location, true status of the road, and wetland violations questions brought the project to a halt for many months. Recently, however, perc testing of the area is being done.

We crossed streams and streamlets, avoiding wet feet as we feasted our eyes upon open meadows surrounded by heavy stone walls which separated openland from woodland. The landscape was open and expansive. The remains of several stone foundations

were pointed out as being those of a house, an old counterfeiting mill, well, and grist mill, and barns. Lephe Reynolds Smith and Amy Reynolds Payne, descendants of the original Reynolds owners were in out party. They had grown up on the property, in the existing house now owned by Stetsons and were familiar with the landscape. The trip was enlightening for the oral historian as well as the visual historian. The two sisters reminisced about walking to school on the road in question, pointing out where LaRoche had chosen to diverge from the original pathway, pointing also to sections of the land where much varied crops as peaches, potatoes, turnips, and corn were grown and recalling that one of their regular tasks was to scare the crows away when the seed was coming up. They remembered seeing portions of the buildings that once stood where we saw only the remnants of foundations, and discoursed on specific changes in the landscape.

Before long, we came to the cemetery itself. The stones were all lying down, largely covered by encrouching sod. Visible portions were largely due to the effort of Elizabeth Gould of White Oak Drive who had come upon the cemetery the previous year and began work on uncovering it. Her concern for preservation was heightened by the sight of a perc pipe only ten feet away from the cemetery. A light load of dirt could easily obliterate the cemetery forever if something was not done. We lifted three of the larger stones and supported them with rocks which had fallen from a nearby stone wall. We had no better tools than our notebooks and hands at this particular visit! Mr. LaRoche and the appropriate people concerned with cemeteries have been made aware of our concern over this particular site.

As a result of her effort at clearing, Mrs. Gould was able to decipher the following:

Stone 1 In Memory of ABBY daughter of 1839 (?)
Stone 2 Hannah wife of Perry G. Underwood 10/27/1952
Aged 61 years, 2 mo 14 Ds.
Within thy Presence Lord/Forever I'll abide
Thou art the tower of my (?)/The refuge where I hide
Stone 3 HONOR wife of Jesse Reynolds Died 1866 Aged 90 years
Stone 4 Jesse Reynolds Died 1834

More research will be done at the site as time allows.

Amy and Lephe believe the following is correct:

William Reynolds
Jessie Reynolds (called "Judge")
B. J. (Benjamin James Tillinghast Reynolds (Called Deacon)
James Clark Reynolds
Samuel Reynolds
Lephe and Amy

RICHMOND HISTORICAL SOCIETY 1747

Wyoming, Rhode Island 02898

NEWSLETTER

Vol. XIII No. 5 Page 19 June 1981

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## ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, June 20, 1981

4:00

A pot luck supper will follow the business session during which we will hear annual reports and the recommendations of the Nominating Committee.

For the supper, please bring a dish to share and your own place setting. We will meet at the Carolina Volunteer Fire Association fire barn.

Following dinner, Bob Jordan will discuss Indian artifacts, both mobile and stationary, found in the area. Bob will also display part of his collection of arrow heads. Anyone having artifacts that they would like to display is urged to bring them. Bring also a friend!

## FIELD TRIP

Slater Mill Sunday, June 21, 1981 Picnic Lunch

Pages twenty and twenty-one recount the story of Samual Slater as told by Mrs. William Stetson at our last meeting. If the program was designed to whet our appetites for a visit to the Slater Mill, it certainly did just that.

Reservations have been made for June 21, 1981 at 2:00.

This is Father's Day and the group in attendance at the meeting agreed that this would be a great treat for fathers. We will meet at the Bell School at 11:45 and car pool to the museum in Pawtucket. Picnic tables have been placed on the lawn behind the mill, beside the river; there we can enjoy the view of the

--Continued on page 22

LIFE AND TIMES OF SAMUEL SLATER
Program, Bell School, Feb 22, 1981
Mrs. William Stetson

Like all famous men, myths grew out of the story of the life of Samuel Slater. Unlike the textbook image of a poor man who diligently memorized machinery plans in order to bring them to America, Samuel Slater was really born into a wealthy family in England. He was able to construct his machinery in America because of years of experience working with textile machinery, not simple memorization.

Mrs. Stetson gave us a comprehensive and fascinating account of the life and times of this famous American industrialist.

Samuel Slater was born in England in 1768 and became apprentice to Jedediah Strut. Through Strut, and his partner Richard Arkwright, Slater was able to learn all phases of textile manufacturing. Since real estate was very expensive in England, Slater looked to American for less costly alternatives. At the time, the English government did forbid the written plans for the Arkwright machinery to leave England, so knowledge and experience with the machinery was crucially important.

In Pawtucket, R. I., Samuel Slater had heard of Moses Brown, who was attempting to start a manufacturing concern, but had so far been unsuccessful. Slater, however, must have seen the potential specifically in the Pawtucket area, because in 1793 he constructed his mill on the Blackstone River near Pawtucket. Pawtucket was a very prosperous industrial city at the time and there were many small mill complexes along the Blackstone River. In 1810, the Wilkinson mill was constructed next to the Slater mill. These two structures, along with a family residence comprise the modern Slater mill complex. The Brown house, although not original to the Slater Mill site, is a valuable addition because it shows noc only the condition of life in the 1790's, but how textile manufacturing was conducted in the homes. The Brown house, constructed and occupied by the Jenckes family, was moved to the mill site in 1960.

The most exciting and ambitious undertaking at the Slater Mill in recent years (1980 to be exact) is the installation of the water wheel in the Wilkinson mill Up until 1921, the mills had been used for a variety of enterprises, including jewelry manufacture and furniture making. In 1921, a group of eight men pooled their resources, contributed $100.00 each and incorporated the Slater Mill. By 1924, $53,000 had been raised for its purchase. Henry Ford was among the contributors. In 1925, some surrounding buildings were torn down. Until 1940, the mill offered only occasional exhibits for the public. By 1949 the staff grew and a curator was hired. 1955 saw the first full time staff and regular public exhibits. The long process of restoring the water wheel in the Wilkinson mill was begun in 1970 and completed in 1980. (Or should we say, nearly completed. The Wheel is still powered by an artificial source rather than the Blackstone River.)

Mrs. Stetson showed us slides of the construction of the water wheel, an enormous structure twelve feet high and the same in diameter. It is a "midshot" wheel constructed after careful research in Langhorn, Pennsylvania. The reconstruction project must have been a most laborious chore, since there were few pieces of the original wheel remaining and the wheel pit

was filled with dirt. A few artifacts were found, however, mostly broken boards. After the pit was completely cleaned, a new "breast" had to be constructed to cradle the new wheel. There is also a wooden base lining the sides and bottom of the wheel pit. One can imagine how tricky this operation must be, because the wheel must fit very closely to the breast, but not actually touch it. The Wheel, when under construction, is smaller than the actual working wheel because it is dry. The water wheel architects had to figure exactly how much the wheel would swell when it was finally exposed to the rushing water.

The new wheel, which replaces the last wheel installed around 1826, weighed eight tons and had to be transported from Pennsylvania by truck. There is one more complication --- once the wheel is in place and swollen, it must remain in operation. If it stops for any length of time, the top of the wheel, which is out of the water, will shrink and the bottom will remain swollen. This would surely ruin the effectiveness of the wheel.

Among the slides presented by Mr. and Mrs. Stetson, was a picture of the oldest spinning frame in America (frame is still in operation) at the Slater Mill. The slides also showed examples of the "ring spinner" and the "mule spinner". The latter was a very dangerous machine. Society member Ed Britland related how his father's leg was seriously injured by a mule spinner. In spite of its poor safety record, the mule spinner was considered "THE" machine on which to spin thread. It was noted that Slater did not weave cloth, he only manufactured the thread. The thread was parceled out to private homes where it was woven into fabrics.

Mrs. Stetson described the intolerable working conditions of the early textile mills. There were long hours, dirt, dust and danger. Small children were used, for example, to help run the mule spinner. Their smaller bodies could dodge under the machine and out again to help twist the threads. They had to do this in tune with the constant rhythm of the machine, or the mule spinner became a trap for injury and death. The operator of the machine was many times more interested in maintaining a constant rhythm with the machine than he was with the health and welfare of his young helpers.

Another staple of the mills was NOISE. Even one of these machines, according to Mrs. Stetson, is deafening when in operation. Imagine a whole room full of them! A modern film, Norman Rae will be on television February 22, 1981. The noisy monotonous environment of the textile mill is well portrayed in Norma Rae. It deals with the attemps to unionize the workers of a southern textile firm.

Mrs. Stetson concluded her lecture by emphasizing how important Samuel Slater was to the precipitation of the American Industrial Revolution. His theory was to keep mills in constant operation and worry later about selling the thread. The old method had been to wait for orders and then work to fill just those orders. This idea, along with the technology of the talented people in the Blackstone Valley were a significant contribution to changing the life style of America forever.

CSR.

REYNOLDS CEMETERY -- Update!

After our field trip to the Reynolds Cemetery off New London Turnpike, Archivist Carolyn Richard contacted the engineer for the current owner of the property surrounding the cemetery. He informed us that the cemetery had been duly noted on the plat of the subdivision called "Beaver River Estates". A new road will be constructed from Hillsdale Road westward (to be called "Amy Court") The cemetery will be marked adequately. It will be on a property line with a right of way from Amy Court to the Cemetery to allow descendents and interested historians the opportunity to visit the burial ground. The historical society will be watching the progress of the cemetery's preservation very closely. It looks like a happy ending for this one, unlike many other small burial grounds in Richmond which have been covered over and lost forever.

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Field Trip (Con't.)

falls, begin to feel the atmosphere of the mill, and have an old-fashioned Society picnic before viewing the mill and the nearby Brown House. The tour fee is $1.50 per person.

We will learn a great deal about the mills which helped to create the Town of Richmond when we tour this working museum. This is one trip you won't want to miss.

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Apologies: The page which gave advance notice of our June activities was inadvertantly omitted from your last newsletter. Therefore this will appear as very short notice for many of you. We do hope you will be able to include the entire week-end of activities in your schedule. The trip to the mill is well worth revising tentative plans!

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#63
Unknown Lot

Correction: In the last newsletter it was reported that the Reynolds property which we visited had been an original king's grant to the Reynolds family. While on the cemetery field trip, we traveled on to another cemetery on the same property. This cemetery lies west of the house now owned by William Stetson, on property deeded to his son Peter. This cemetery had about seven stones which were either without mark or the engraving had been completely obliterated by time. It was the cemetery of the Simion James family, Sam Reynolds' mother's family. These were mostly field type stones which stood in their places stoutly defying the blueberry bushes and the ravages of time while enjoying the protection of an ancient apple tree which marked the spot from a distance. We could do little here but quietly contemplate life in an earlier time. It was to the

time which enjoying the protection of an ancient apple tree which marked the spot from a distance. We could do little here but quietly contemplate life in an earlier time. It was to the James family that the king's grant had been given, not the Reynolds.

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FIRE AND FAIR

For those of you not receiving Rhode Island newspapers, the news of our near disaster will be new.

As a group of us were making the final touches to the opening Village Exhibit for our Heritage Month celebration, we commented on the delight of having a small fire to ward off the early spring chill. Everyone had left but myself and almost immediately I became aware of a crackling in the chimney. This was puzzling because our fire had died down and the stove been shut down by one of the departing members, but I could distinctly see flames licking around the chimney pipe where it entered the chimney. Anyway, I shall leave you to imagine the drama of the moment and dash on to the results and findings! Apparently a bird's nest nestled at the bottom of the chimney which lies just below the stove pipe entrance became heated enough to combust. The chimney bottom had (of all things) a wood frame which then started to burn. We discovered that there was morter missing between some of the chimney bricks and that the fire licked through these spaces to attack the beam behind.

The Carolina Firemen were prompt and extremely careful. They cut as little as they possibly could and still contain the fire, helped remove the exhibit items, and drew out the smoke before the interior suffered any damage. Our greatest loss was the blackboard which was a single board which extended the length of that wall. It was original with the building, was approximately 24 inches wide, and unsplit with age. The firemen had to cut a two-foot section from the center of this board.

Needless to say, this was the termination of our exhibits as planned. We did move the first display into the Town Hall for a week, but this greatly inconvenienced the workers there.

Again, we must remind you that the building belongs to the State of Rhode Island and the Departments of Parks and Recreation and Environmental Management are supposed to be responsible for the maintenance of the exterior of the

building. The Society carries a large insurance policy, but we do not have fire insurance because we had agreed that if the building should burn, we would not endeavor to reconstruct it. Also, the State of Rhode Island carries some sort of blanket policy on all of its buildings. We approached the State about repairs and possibly reconstruction of a different type of chimney even though this would be yet another change from the original, it might be necessary in order to preserve the building which is what the project is all about. Dialogue with the State people included once again the suggestion that they might like to just deed the building over to us entirely. This could possibly be done by deeding the building to the Town and then the Town deeding it to the Historical Society. And that is where we are at the moment--in dialogue.

We have not attempted to clean up the building, pending any fire inspection and any State inspection. At this time no one has officially inspected the damage.

Our annual Food and Handcraft Fair is scheduled for Saturday, July 11. At this time we would like to re-open with our Village Exhibits, building repaired or no. Donations of time, money, artifacts for display, and Fair participation would all be greatly appreciated!

With regard to the Fair, anyone wishing to participate with a table may do so by making reservations with Carolyn Richard. There is a space fee of $10.00 and participants must supply their own tables or display apparatus and sun protection. Of course, the more people that participate, the more fun we workers have, the more customers are attracted, and the more money we all make! If you know of someone who has handcrafts they would like to sell, here is a fine opportunity.

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CITATIONS

As you know, our Heritage Month exhibits have for several years been held in cooperation with the Rhode Island Heritage Commission. At our last public meeting (which was the opening day of our exhibits and the day following the fire), Peggy Fitzsimmons from the Heritage Commission presented the Society with two large framed citations for the Society's participation in the R. I. Heritage Month activities for 1980 and 1981. The citations are from the R. I. House of Representatives and we plan to hang them in the Town Hall so that all who pass through may become more aware of our activities.