



CHARLESTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 100
Charlestown, Rhode Island 02813

2009 NEWSLETTER

President, Pam Lyons - Vice President, Jean Pellam
Treasurer, Paul Kelley - Secretary, Sandra Puchalski
Board of Directors: Mary Taylor, Molly Decker,
Alan Angelo, Dan Alves, Dawn Horstman, Jodi Lacroix

Greetings to all and we hope you enjoyed a safe and happy summer. Our annual newsletter for 2009 is filled with a great deal of information for our membership. We hope you enjoy!

At this point in time, we have completed two of our three scheduled presentations for the year. The first event was an afternoon at the Perry-Carpenter Gristmill (1703) with hosts Bob and Diane Smith. It was a well-attended and interesting time for all, followed by a good dose of jonnycakes to top off the day. Thank you to Bob and Diane for your expertise and community spirit! We will plan future demonstrations at the grist mill due to popular request.



More recently, we gathered at the Quonnie Grange on July 23rd which CHS co-hosted with the Quonnie Historical Society to present the Life and Times of Thomas Stanton. Our presenter was Thomas Howard, a direct descendent of Thomas Stanton. With over 100 people in attendance, we enjoyed a very interesting evening of local history.

Our final presentation will be a walking tour of old Shannock village, led and narrated by Sanford Neuschatz. Sandy is currently the President of the Pettaquamscutt Historical Society and teaches in the Westerly School District. Sandy has been instrumental in the historical preservation of the mill village of Shannock and will follow up his presentation of last September at the Meadowbrook Inn on the Clark Family of Shannock, with this excursion, on Sunday, October 18th at 1:00 pm. Some projects that will be taking place in the village soon are the expansion and modernization of the Shannock Water District as well as the dam removal and fish passage. There will be more to follow on this in late September, but please mark your calendar now. Participation will be limited and advance registration required.

Fort Ninigret

As most of you are aware, our liason with the RIDEM to update the historic Fort Ninigret is making some progress. To date we have a completed kiosk interpretive panel of the fort's history by state archaeologist, Charlotte Taylor, which will be in place shortly. The kiosk will display not only the history of the fort, but drawings and archaeological excavation information from the past 100 years. A memorial bench will also be placed on the east side of the site in upcoming weeks, and was donated by CHS member Joseph Turino in memory of his late wife, Betty. A view of the beautiful salt pond can be enjoyed from the bench site. Our last order of business at the fort is to clean up the

old lead-painted fence (c. 1883), and on this end we continue to work with the state. We have also established a collaborative relationship with Salt Ponds Coalition in an effort to correct the situation, as the park abuts Ninigret pond, and the lead leaches into the pond.

Cross Mills

This year marks the 300th Anniversary of the purchase of the Cross Mill by Joseph Cross in 1709 from Joseph Davil. According to Ninigret's deed to the young colony, the mill was already "in good working condition" at that time. We do know that there were already many settlers along the King's Highway (later, the Post Rd.) here in Charlestown during the later 1600's, as well as a great deal of activity. (Charlestown did not officially separate from Westerly until 1738, so much of our early history is recorded in the Westerly town records.)



To commemorate this 300th Anniversary, CHS, with the help of local businesses and private donations, collected funds to construct and install a beautiful wooden sign commemorating the Cross family and its namesake, the village of Cross' Mills. The granite posts, which were donated by Grandscape of Charlestown, also help to symbolize the "granite" grinding stones of this old historic mill site, some of which is still present within the ground of the village. We plan to erect a sign in the future to direct the public to its actual location. Please check our website for photos of the sign raising.

The village of Shannock, or Clark Mills, is also celebrating the 300th Anniversary of the "Shannock Purchase", paralleling the Cross' Mills anniversary year. It will be a special time to recognize the history of this old mill village during our October 18th stroll through its streets with our guide, Sandy Neuschatz (see page 1).

Farmers Market

This has been another successful season for the Charlestown Farmers Market, and our collaboration with the South County Conservancy. By the last market date in September, we estimate that the District No. 2 Schoolhouse will have had over 500 visitors – many attendees of the Farmers Market. Books and T-shirt sales have made a significant contribution to CHS's funding needs – more on this topic further on in the newsletter. The market has once again provided us with great networking amongst fellow townspeople, their histories and interests in the Society, and especially the new membership we have enrolled. A great deal of skill and talent has been offered through these memberships which enables us to grow. Thank you to all of our old and new docents, it has been an enjoyable time with new friendships and community bonding.

Charlestown History Goes National and International

This past spring, CHS was contacted by author, John Briggs, who has been researching and writing a book on the Revolutionary War Militia Generals of the United States. Of course, our own General Joseph Stanton was one of his men, and so he approached us for information and photos of various Stanton-related sites in Charlestown. Upon his receipt of these items, he informed us that he will acknowledge CHS in his new book, and we will also obtain a copy for our own library. We'll keep you posted on this in the future.

On a larger scale, CHS Board Member Jodi LaCroix recently relayed news to us regarding a request for a copy of our History Book which the Town Hall has received from France. The letter was sent

by a Professeur Gerald Dadart, University of Paris, who is compiling histories of not only the Charlestown in France, but also of those in the rest of the world! We were happy to send along a copy of each of our history books. Professor Dadart will quote us "in the documentary of his sources". Looking forward to sending you additional news regarding this publication.

As we near the end of our second printing of the "Historical Story of Charlestown, Rhode Island - 1669-1976, we will look into the cost of doing a third printing, since this is a popular book and details the early history of our town from when it was still a part of Westerly.

Rhode Island Foundation

Last month we received formal notice from the RI Foundation that our application for grant money to purchase the much-needed PastPerfect Museum Cataloging Software had been approved. This software will enable us to step into the 21st century, along with the many other societies who are already using PastPerfect to catalog and photograph historical collections, as well as maintain all other aspects of managing the needs of an organization on a daily basis. Thank you to Collections Committee member Sheila Whelan for the many hours she put into pulling this grant application together. Sheila brings years of grant-writing expertise to CHS. Last spring the RI Foundation also granted us \$300.00 for the purchase of archival storage material to preserve the documents we have, dating back to the 1700's. We are most grateful to the Foundation for their acknowledgment of our needs.

To facilitate this new software, we are pleased to announce that through our fundraising efforts at the Farmer's Market, some of our earnings will contribute to this much-needed laptop computer. Presently, the laptop will remain at the Town Hall where the Collections and Research Committees meet and our archives are maintained. Board member Dan Alves has researched and advised us on the acquisition of the proper model and will continue to help facilitate the new software.

Summertime Display

Our Collections Committee has installed an entertaining display at the Cross Mills Library this spring, entitled, "In The Good Old Summertime". Please stop by the lower, original 1913 room of the library to check out this display with photos dating back to the early 1900's, along with an original 1920's Jantzen, wool bathing suit - it will be sure to bring a smile to your face and some appreciation of how former residents enjoyed their summertime here in Charlestown!

Early American Trestle Table

This past week CHS was the recipient of a rare antique donated by Mr. Richard Grills of Ashway, RI. Mr. Grills is a private collector who contacted us this past year. It seems that at this point in his life, he wanted to share an object from his collection of furnishings with those who will appreciate it and in turn, gain the tax incentive by doing so. Our licensed appraisal reads as follows: "Early pilgrim century tables of this high quality and condition are extremely rare. Pilgrim furniture has always been at an extreme importance to the American market. There was very little of it made and very little that survived. This table may be one of the only ones left in existence". We are extremely pleased to add this item to our collection and look forward to making it available for your viewing.

Upcoming Project: House Dating Plaques

Throughout much of Charlestown there are old homes that proudly display their history with name and date information. CHS, and in particular our Research & Response Committee headed by Chairperson Suzanne Ferrio, will look to continue to research and date our older, historical buildings. Sometimes it is hard to imagine that local homes we have been accustomed to viewing could be two and even three hundred years old, however the "bones" of the house are ever present

and neatly covered up by aluminum siding and other modern renovations. A recent example of this is the Betsy Babcock house, two houses to the right of the Charlestown Mini Super. The Babcock house is now accurately being dated to the 1680's-1690's by the men in charge of her restoration – they bring a great deal of expertise to their job and were amazed by what they uncovered as their work progressed. Please contact us at our e-mail address below if you have any information or would like to help out with this future project.

Thank You's

There are so many people who have stepped up to the bat this year to help CHS become a stronger organization. Let us first thank the Charlestown Police Station – they have supplied us not only with a meeting room, appropriately named the Community Room, but with storage area as well. We also thank the many members who have been docents at the District No. 2 Schoolhouse on the Cross Mills Library Grounds, during the normal summer Wednesday and Saturday hours, and now also during the Farmers Market on Friday mornings. We have enjoyed the help of new membership as well – thank you to all. We thank Jodi Lacroix at the town hall for all she does, including maintaining our website: charlestownri.org. And a sincere thank you to all members who have been able to make tax deductible donations to support CHS in its endeavors. During these past two years we have made great strides within the organization thanks to the support, in many ways, of our membership.

The Best for Last

As most of you know CHS has been actively looking for a permanent home base for the past few years. This building would encompass a museum for the town, as well as an archival storage area and meeting/workshop area. We are extremely pleased to announce to our membership that we have recently been offered a 99-year lease on property abutting the District No. 2 School-house for the purpose of erecting a modest building to address all of these needs. (Our benefactor wishes to remain anonymous.)

At this point, we have much to do before an 'official announcement' can be made. We have met with Town Officials, as well as a site plan engineer and have also formed a capable building committee. We have begun researching the building structure and funds, and hope that we can meet these goals in the near future. We look forward to making available a rendering of the building along with our projected financial goal. We will seek approximately \$120,000 for the building itself and an additional \$30,000 for the purpose of an endowment for future maintenance. We will be working with the Washington Trust Bank to ensure the safety and organization of these funds, and will look to both the public and private sector to achieve our goal. Please keep us in your thoughts if you have input or access to contribution in this regard. We will be most appreciative!

In closing, we are most grateful to you our membership for your annual support and most importantly for your respect of the history of our town. Please refer to us at our website and/or e-mail address, and feel free to contact us at any time.

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THANK YOU