



Jamestown Historical Society

HERITAGE

Spring 2002

To promote interest in and preserve the heritage of Conanicut Island.

CONANICUT BATTERY PRESERVATION NEARS COMPLETION

by John Howard

On Veterans Day, November 11, 1997, the late Ed Connelly gathered some 30 Jamestowners to mobilize an effort to rescue Conanicut Battery from years of neglect and vandalism. He envisioned a town historic park centered on the Revolutionary War gun battery and the underground 20th Century gunfire control posts on the ridge to the East. He could foresee the battery site free of bush and bramble, the open field cleared and regularly mowed, walking paths connecting these sites, a few benches from which to contemplate the history and take in the striking view of West Passage, and a few interpretative signs to tell the story. That vision is nearly realized, and I think Ed would be pleased.

In the year since Ed died, a few of the original organizers - Lisa Breyer, Mary Hutchinson and Bill Burgin - have been meeting twice a month to see the project through and Dennis Webster has been working with me as Co-Chair. Mick Cochran has contributed his time and talent to design the interpretative signs. Numerous committees have been working to prepare the grounds, to raise funds, to plan a community banquet for April 27th, and to organize the dedication ceremonies on June 29th. In the meantime, Donna Drago has been writing a history of the property that we expect to have in print by June 29th dedication.

By now you regular readers are well aware of the history of the place. The sites are unsurpassed on the

East Coast for their evocation of our military past. The gun battery retains the exact formation the British created in 1776 when they occupied and rebuilt the Colonial earthworks. The intervening 225 years have only eroded and rounded the parapets and partly filled the ditch. Possible damage from development was probably forestalled when the US Government took the land in 1916 to build the underground fire control stations. These stations are now among only a few of their kind remaining on the East Coast and are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, where the Battery already resides. The Town's new historic park is indeed a special place.

Fundraising for the project is nearly complete; as I write this on March 31 the Friends of Conanicut Battery have raised a little over \$115,000 against the goal of \$125,000. Incomplete pledges give us confidence that we can complete the project by June 29th. There are sponsorships still available for the interpretive signs, which will be handsome, full color, imbedded fiberglass signs as currently approved by the National Park Service. Please call Dennis, Bill, Mary or me if you are interested in sponsoring a sign. Additionally, an endowment has been established and now stands at \$14,000, seeded by a grant from the Town as well as by donations in Ed's memory. This fund will help ensure that the site will be maintained and not again abandoned.

Spring and Summer Program 2002

April 27, ANTIQUES APPRAISAL Jamestown Library, 1-3 PM

Jamestown's version of the "Antiques Roadshow." Sponsored with the Friends of the Jamestown Library. \$5 per item appraised; 3 item limit.

April 27, BATTERY BANQUET BASH Portuguese American Club, 6 PM

A community event to celebrate the near-completion of the Conanicut Battery preservation project. Grog and dinner hour with fife and drum, piano music and songs, followed by live auction featuring Jamestown items. Tickets \$18 in advance, \$20 at the door. Call Lee at 423-0608 to book a table.

June 1, SOCIETY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF NEW ENGLAND ANTIQUITIES

Windmill and Meetinghouse, 1-4 PM

Annual Meeting and Community Day in Jamestown and Narragansett. The event is centered at Watson Farm, and the Historical Society will participate with talks at the Windmill and Meetinghouse. We will raise the canvas and attempt to get the mill turning.

June 15, Orientation for Windmill volunteers Windmill, 10 AM

June 19, Orientation for Museum volunteers Museum, 1 PM

June 20, Museum opens

Museum hours 1 to 4 PM, Wednesday through Sunday until Labor Day. Special exhibit on Charles Lovatt Bevins, the late 19th Century Jamestown architect who designed many houses, large and small, in Jamestown. Guest curator is James Buttrick, author of the enclosed Occasional Paper on Bevins and his work.

June 22, Windmill opens

Windmill hours, 1 to 4 PM. Saturday and Sunday until Labor Day.

June 22, Meetinghouse opens

Meetinghouse visiting hours, 1:30 to 3:30 PM. Saturday and Sunday until Labor Day.

June 29, BATTERY DEDICATION DAY Conanicut Battery, 10:30 AM

The Friends are planning a exciting program to officially open the park. Reenactors with musket and cannon will help us dedicate the park and raise the national flags of those men who served in support of their respective American, French and British interests. Mark your calendars Come join the festivities to mark the official opening of this new town historic park.

July 31, SLIDE LECTURE: "So, Who Was Charles Bevins?" by James Buttrick. Jamestown Library, 7:30 PM

James Buttrick is the author of the enclosed Occasional Paper of the same title.

August 29, ANNUAL MEETING. Jamestown Library. 7:30 PM

Slide lecture by Walter Schroder entitled, "The Hessian Occupation of Newport and Rhode Island, 1776-1779." Hessian troops were part of the British occupying force on Conanicut Island in the Revolutionary War. Mr. Schroder has a book in process on the subject.

September 7. HOUSE TOUR Clingstone, 10-3 PM

This year's house tour will take us to Clingstone, the "House on the Rock." See page 5 for the story of Clingstone and watch the Jamestown Press for tour details.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members:

Ideas developed at the planning retreat last October are moving towards implementation. A modest reorganization, approved in principle at the April meeting of your Board of Directors, will divide activities along functional lines among six committees: Buildings and Grounds; Programs; Collections; Publications; Finance, and Nominating. Presently, committees are a mix of function and facility: Windmill; Museum; Meetinghouse; Finance; and Programs. These are augmented by the appointed jobs of Curator, Archivist, Newsletter Editor, and Membership Chair. We expect that the new alignment will better distribute the work of the Society and facilitate the involvement of more volunteers, while folding the specialized appointments into a committee structure. We hope to staff the committees with members and expect that they will meet and conduct business with reasonably independent authority. Complete functional descriptions are in the process of being written. Each committee will be headed by an elected director or officer.

Once the functional descriptions are complete, the next step will be to enlist volunteers to staff the committees. Finally, with the new organization in place, we can work to develop a strategic plan to consider such thorny questions as: What long term goals should be defined? Can we improve the collection storage environment in the museum? Do we need some level of professional staff support? How can we dramatically increase our membership?

The digital project is drawing to a most successful conclusion. The photo collection is now available at computer terminals in the Library. Thanks to a grant from the Champlin Foundation, a computer, printer

and scanner have been acquired to manage the database and, eventually, other functions of the museum. Many hundreds of hours have been invested in this project by many members, but the two key people who saw it through were Mary Miner and Joe Logan. Mary's knowledge and care ensures that the database is as accurate and complete as we can make it, while Joe's facility with programs and computers was essential to integrating our records with the software and making the whole thing work. We and the community owe them both a huge thank you.

The summer program focuses entirely on Jamestown this year. Jim Buttrick has been interested in the work of William Bevins, Jamestown's own architect of the 1880's and 90's, for some years, and we are delighted to offer the fruit of his work as an Occasional Paper enclosed in this newsletter. He is also preparing the special exhibit and will be our July lecturer. Walter Schroder has been researching the Hessian experience on Conanicut Island during the Revolutionary War and will speak about his findings at the Annual Meeting -- especially appropriate as the Conanicut Battery preservation project nears completion. The House Tour of Clingstone promises to be another bang-up success.

As always, much going on and much still to do. As my five years in this job wind down, I wish to thank you all for your frequent words of encouragement and almost universal willingness to step forward when asked. I've made many new friends, learned a great deal, and actually have enjoyed the experience. I hope to see you all at one or another of our summer events.

Sincerely yours,
John Howard

Historic Preservation Zoning

Responding to the Society's resolution on Historic Preservation (see box at right), Pamela Kennedy,



Pamela Kennedy addressing an open meeting on Historical Preservation at the Jamestown Library

Deputy Director of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, was invited by the Jamestown Historical Society to explain Rhode Island's historic district zoning provisions to an open meeting at the Jamestown Library.

At the March 21 meeting, Ms Kennedy explained how historic districts are created by local ordinance as special zoning areas. Building permits for new buildings and external alterations, including demolition, within a historic district are reviewed by a Historic District Commission to ensure that the changes are appropriate to the historic character of the district. The commission, which is appointed by local elected authorities, also advises on how to preserve the historic character of the district.

The audience asked about challenges to a commission's decisions and was told that since a Historic District Commission is a special zoning board, its processes and decisions can be reviewed

Historic Preservation Resolution

The Jamestown Historical Society's purpose is to promote interest in and preserve the heritage of Conanicut Island. In this context the Society is certainly interested in houses and other structures that reflect or offer visual evidence of the town's history. Still, we believe that buildings are organic not static things and know that through the years owners have modified some of our most historically significant buildings and that they are no less significant for those alterations.

The Society does not endorse any particular means, program or plan to preserve our old buildings and neighborhoods. An historic preservation ordinance and consequent Historic District Commission may or may not be a positive thing for Jamestown. Rather we wish to be a source of information on town history while working to help educate the town about the issues involved in historic preservation.

Adopted by the Jamestown Historical Society
Board of Directors
December 6, 2001

by the zoning board. In response to a question on the effect of historic district zoning on property values, Ms Kennedy explained, "I don't think it has any direct effect. Other market forces control that. I have seen zoning applied to areas on their way up and they continue up and to areas on their way down and they continue down."

The Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission will help a community with the process for establishing a historic district and provides sample ordinances and commission charters. The possibility of historic district zoning is allowed for in both the existing and proposed Jamestown Comprehensive Plans.

CLINGSTONE: ANNUAL HOUSE TOUR DESTINATION

By Mary Miner

J.S.L. Wharton's *Clingstone*, perhaps better known as the House on the Rocks, was described recently as "surely Jamestown's most unique and widely publicized abode." Mr. Wharton built *Clingstone* to replace *Braecleugh*, his handsome cottage that was demolished when Fort Wetherill was built. *Clingstone* had views as splendid as *Braecleugh's* and its shoreside installation – which later became the Wharton Shipyard – was better than *Braecleugh's* cove for mooring and storing the family's growing fleet.

Completed in 1905, the Wharton's new cottage was completely self-sufficient. A vast cistern held rainwater that was collected throughout the year, and a diesel engine pumped the water through the house and provided electricity. An underwater telephone cable connected the cottage to the captain's house on shore, and the captain stood read to provide transportation to and from the cottage. *Clingstone* was ideal for a family that loved the sea and boating. The Wharton boys, at an early age, were given free rein to sail anywhere in the Bay as long as they could see *Clingstone*. Boaters of all ages continue to rely on this unique summer cottage as an aid to navigation.



The central fireplace at *Clingstone*

The Whartons summered at *Clingstone* until 1941. The house stood empty for the next 20 years and suffered greatly from the ravages of water and vandals. Henry Wood bought *Clingstone* in 1961 and started a long program of restoration. Over the years this fine old cottage has been the subject of many newspaper articles and anecdotes – some accurate, some not. In 1980, Mr. Wood set the record straight in a lively lecture at the Jamestown Historical Society. This year he has graciously agreed to open his house to us for a tour. We look forward to his further comments and to the exciting opportunity to visit *Clingstone*.



Curator's Comments

By Elizabeth Connelly

Island artist Evelyn Rhodes has given her painting of Stonewall Cottage to the Jamestown Museum in memory of the late Pamela W. Mitchell. Ms. Mitchell, a long-time Society supporter, owned this historic house, which was built in 1873. The house is one of a handful of cottages that survives from the late 19th century Conanicut Park development at the North End of the island.



Island artist Evelyn Rhodes presents her painting of Stonewall Cottage to JHS President John Howard.

A second picture, a framed watercolor of the wheelhouse of the ferry *Jamestown*, was donated by Dolores Hellewell. The painting by Jamestown's Patsy McCandless was commissioned by Dolores as a gift for her late mother, Lillian Matoes. Dolores said that she always had a hard time finding something for her mother, but one day her mother saw a similar painting Patsy and admired it greatly. So Dolores called Patsy and asked her to paint one that she could give to her as a gift.

A deaccession policy to allow the Society to remove from the museum items that are not appropriate for retention was approved by the Board of Directors.

Windmill Report

By Brookie & Howard Harding

The windmill appears to have survived its two hundred and fifteenth winter well. At his request, Andy Shrake will come to open it and check for any evidence of insect damage sometime during April or early May.

In prior years the mill hasn't opened until mid-June, but this year we are cooperating with the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA) for their Annual Meeting / Community Day festivities on Saturday, June 1. These will include programs and workshops at both Watson Farm and Casey Farm from 12 to 4 PM, with jitney service doing a constant loop to connect people to each site. Jamestown Historical Society members and their families are cordially invited to attend and participate. Admission is free, but advanced registration is required for some of the workshops.

A brochure describing the events and containing a registration form will be mailed all Society members, so be on the lookout for it and mark the date on your calendar. As the brochure describes it, "There will be plenty of family fun, hands-on activities for every age, walking tours, and educational clinics. Bring family treasures for identification, learn about caring for your old house, and enjoy traditional foods." Our windmill and Quaker meeting house are part of the Jamestown attractions. Hope to see you there!

The mill will open for the summer on Saturday, June 22, with an orientation day for volunteers the Saturday before, June 15 at 10 AM. As always, we welcome new volunteers.

Museum Report

By Joe Logan

Over the winter, the objectives of the photo digitization project have been realized. First, the errors were meticulously corrected by Archivist Mary Miner. Then the database was updated and a copy transferred to the Jamestown Library where it is now available for the public to view.

A new computer, scanner, and printer were purchased using money from a Champlin Foundation grant. This computer is now set up with appropriate software for managing and viewing the photo collection. The system will be available in the Museum building this summer for visitors to use.

Meetinghouse

By Bill Smith & Harry Wright

The new heating unit and the electrical connection put in last year allowed meeting to be held for eight months during the past year, rather than the usual four. Quaker meeting is held each Sunday at ?? AM. Visitors are welcome.

[Theses are just my words. I called Harry this morning and told him I need 100 words on the meeting house.]



Larry McDonald, a member of the Varnum Continentals and a volunteer with the Conanicut Battery project, stands with Jane Bentley, a Society Director, at the Jamestown Historical Society table at the Holiday Craft Sale.

Publications

By Rosemary Enright

Inserted within this issue of the newsletter is the Society's first "Occasional Paper." Occasional Papers are essays on subjects of historical interest that will be published, as the name implies, when the occasion demands. Additional copies of the paper will be available at the museum's Bevins exhibit throughout the summer for a nominal donation.

Letter to the Editor

It was a genuine pleasure to have the opportunity to edit the Society's newsletter the past nine issues. I learned so much about Jamestown's history, the dedication of the Board members to our heritage, and the mechanics of publishing a newsletter for the membership. I was especially grateful for everyone who submitted articles, reports, and photographs that enhanced every issue, and always on time! Particularly significant was the advice and help of Jane Miner who steered me through every step from working with the printer to addressing, sorting, counting, and mailing.

*Nancy Logan
Retiring Newsletter Editor*

Officers, Directors & Chairmen, 2001-2002

President	John Howard
Vice President	Bill Burgin
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Directors to 2002	Jane Bentley Linda Warner
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Directors to 2004	Janie Harris Mary Webster
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Meetinghouse	Bill Smith and Harry Wright
Windmill	Brooke and Howard Harding
Museum (Building)	Joe Logan
Museum Curator	Elizabeth Connelly
Membership	Jane Miner
Newsletter Editor	Rosemary Enright
Finance Committee	Dick Hines

When Is My Membership Due?

By Jane Miner

To determine whether or not you need to renew your membership dues, please look at the address label on this newsletter. Just after your name, enclosed in parentheses, you will see a letter or the abbreviation "Exp." followed by a number. The number is the month and last two digits of the year (e.g., 6.02) when your current membership expires. A letter means you are a contributing (C), life (L), or honorary (H) member, and do not need to renew your membership annually (although we always welcome voluntary contributions). Please note that for this issue of the newsletter the membership form is printed on the enclosed remittance envelope.

Thank you for your support.

Jamestown Historical Society
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