

**JAMESTOWN  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
100 YEARS**



**1912 - 2012**

Jamestown Historical Society  
Occasional Paper #6

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Post Office Box 156  
Jamestown, RI 02835  
401-423-0784  
info@jamestownhistoricalsociety.com  
*www.jamestownhistoricalsociety.org*

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# JAMESTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY



100 YEARS



We the undersigned hereby pledge ourselves to pay the sums subscribed below for the purpose of purchasing and repairing the old windmill. It has been ascertained that the mill and enough land to drive around it can be purchased for a maximum sum of \$300, and repairs sufficient to keep the mill standing for many years can be made for about \$400. Through an agreement with the present owners, the purchase can be made at any time within a year from this fall, so that the money for the necessary repairs need be raised at present.

Unless these repairs be made at once, the old mill must soon become a thing of the past, for in its present condition it cannot stand through another winter. We believe it will be a cause of lasting regret if the mill be allowed to fall to ruin. Not only is it an object of beauty in itself, and a fine specimen of a type of building very rare in this country, but it is one of the few remaining links which bind us to the past, and almost the only point of interest of which Jamestown can boast.

We believe therefore that the above sums of money cannot be better expended than in preserving this old landmark for future generations.

## INTRODUCTION

The Jamestown Historical Society was founded in September 1912, the first small town historical society in Rhode Island. The RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission and Preserve Rhode Island recognized the Society's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the Antoinette F. Downing Volunteer Award. The award honors the contribution to historic preservation of multiple generations of volunteers.

This account documents the events leading to the formation of the Society, and the Society's effort to collect, preserve, and share the history of Jamestown.

## JAMESTOWN WINDMILL ASSOCIATION

The first organization in Jamestown formed to preserve the history of Conanicut Island – and the forerunner of the Jamestown Historical Society – was the Jamestown Windmill Association, founded in 1904. The organization's sole purpose was to purchase and preserve the Jamestown windmill.

### Background

The current Jamestown gristmill was built in 1787, shortly after the American Revolution. It was used primarily to grind dried kernels of white flint corn, also called Indian corn, into cornmeal for human consumption and into silage for animals.

Over 110 years, 14 millers successively operated the mill. Thomas and Jesse Tefft, the last millers, closed the mill in 1896, although Jesse occasionally ground cornmeal in 1897.

### Saving the Mill

For seven years, the mill stood neglected. Equipment was removed or destroyed, and weather took its toll. In 1904, the mill's pitiful condition led residents and summer visitors to form the Jamestown Windmill Association. The association circulated a petition (opposite page) to raise money to buy the derelict building.



**Jamestown Windmill, 1906**

Sixty Jamestowners contributed over \$700 toward the purchase and repair of the mill. The contributions varied in size from \$50 from each of three members of the summer community to 50¢ from Annie Barber, a native Rhode Islander who worked as a companion to a member of the Carr family.

On October 19, 1904, Thomas Tefft sold "the mill and land enough to drive around it" – about 3,600 square feet – to Mary Rosengarten, the representative of the Association, for \$300. Because of this early intervention, the Jamestown mill is the only one of its kind in Rhode Island to remain on its original site.

For eight years, the Windmill Association kept the mill from deteriorating further. Thomas D. Wright, a Jamestown builder and carpenter, was hired to make repairs, and a caretaker was appointed. However, the unincorporated group was loosely structured, and the stewardship of the mill rested heavily on Mrs. Rosengarten's shoulders.

## **JAMESTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

In the summer of 1912, Elizabeth Carr Locke, a California-based descendant of Caleb Carr who often returned to Jamestown for the summer, conceived the idea of forming a historical society in Jamestown. She had 200 posters printed and distributed around the island asking anybody interested in forming such a society to meet at Town Hall on August 19.

On the appointed day, 26 men and women gathered in Town Hall. The minutes of that meeting record the actions taken:

*A motion was made and seconded to organize the Society and name it later.  
Carried.*



**Lena Clarke,  
1<sup>st</sup> President**

*Voted to nominate officers and they were elected  
as follows:*

*President – Miss Lena Clarke*

*Vice President – Mrs. Chas. E. Weeden*

*Secretary – S[arah] W. Carr*

*Treasurer – Mrs. John F. Weeden*

*Voted that the President appoint a Committee to  
draw up a Constitution and by-laws: Mrs. Locke,  
Dr. [W. Lincoln] Bates, T. Carr Watson, Giles  
Carr Gardiner, S.W. Carr were appointed for that  
purpose.*

*Voted that membership fee is \$1.00.*

*Voted that yearly dues be \$1.00.*

*Voted, after some discussion that the Society be called the Jamestown Historical Society* [The alternative proposed was the Conanicut Historical Society].

...

*It was voted that a committee of three be appointed to consult Mrs. Rosengarten in relation to combining the Wind Mill Association with the Historical Society.*

The leaders of the new organization moved quickly. On August 26, at the second meeting of the Society, a constitution and bylaws were presented and accepted. On September 10, 1912, the state issued a charter to Lena H. Clarke, Elizabeth Carr Locke, Sarah W. Carr, Josephine A. Weeden, and Herbert Head that incorporated the Jamestown Historical Society with "the purpose of preserving old land marks and collection of historical relics."

On October 7, following a vote by the members of the Jamestown Windmill Association many of whom were also members of the new historical society, Mrs. Rosengarten transferred ownership of the Jamestown windmill to the Jamestown Historical Society. The deed included the 3,600 square feet around the mill itself and a half-acre of land to the south of the mill, which had been donated to the Windmill Association by Annie L. Carr of New York. The Carr gift provided direct access to North Main Road.

## THE FIRST YEAR

At the third meeting of the Society, on September 16, 1912, a structure of permanent committees was established.

A Building and Grounds committee was appointed to care for the windmill. The committee's first action was to secure the building with shutters on the windows and new padlocks on the doors. In December, a broken arm of the windmill was removed and stored for the winter at *Maplewood*, Dr. Bates's Sanitarium on Conanicut Avenue. The arm was repaired and replaced the following summer.

A Lecture committee took charge of the programs presented by the Society. The annual report in August 1913 lists its accomplishments:



**Paper read by Mrs. Chas. E. Weeden,  
1913**

*We have had one lecture by Mr. Thomas W. Bricknell, Pres. R.I. Citizens Hist. Ass'n. which covered a variety of subjects.*

*A paper read on "Early Conanicut," prepared some years ago by Miss Mary Tucker, and read by Mrs. Chas. E. Weeden.*

*A paper read by Henry W. Clarke of Newport, veteran school teacher of Newport, now retired, on his "Boyhood Days in Jamestown."*

*A short paper read by Dr. W. Lincoln Bates on his "Early Recollections of Jamestown," going back to the time of the Civil War when the 3<sup>rd</sup> R.I. Cavalry was encamped on Jamestown.*

*A short sketch of Potters Point read by Mrs. C.E.B. Carr.*

The Library and Museum committee organized the first historical exhibition. Thirty-five members and friends of the Society displayed between 300 and 400 articles in Town Hall on August 13 and 14, 1913. Admission to the exhibit cost 25¢ and netted the Society \$63.47

The Publications committee printed the Constitution and Bylaws and purchased a rubber stamp for the Curator to stamp all articles presented to the Society.

The Finance committee collected the annual \$1 dues and solicited donations. At the annual meeting, the chairman reported that the Society had 92 members and \$268.28 in the bank.

The fledgling Society was off to a good start.

## **CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS**

The constitution and bylaws of the historical society have been amended several times in the 100 years since they were first adopted. The most important changes were those made to the purpose of the Society and to the process for becoming a member.

### **Purpose**

The object of the early Society, as expressed in its Constitution Article II, was "to discover, procure and preserve what may relate to general history; especially to the civil, literary and ecclesiastical history of the United States, the State of Rhode Island, and more particularly of the Town of Jamestown."

As the Society and its collection grew, the scope of interest narrowed, so that in 1992 the purpose became "to promote interest in and preserve the heritage of Conanicut Island, as well as related events, issues, and places."



Concern that the reference to Conanicut Island might limit interest in the other two islands of Jamestown – Dutch and Gould – led to another change to the mission in 2007: “to collect, preserve, and share with others the heritage of Jamestown, Rhode Island.”

The major effect of the refinement of the Society’s purpose has been to focus collection efforts, programs, and exhibits more closely on Jamestown itself.

## **Membership**

Until the late 1960s, a person applying for active membership in the Society had to be “sponsored by a member and recommended by a second member the Society.” Although the minutes do not record any one being rejected for membership, the process projected the image of an elitist organization. And, indeed, many of the Society’s members were well-to-do, recently arrived or part-time residents, although often they had Jamestown roots.

When membership was opened to “all persons interested in the objects of the Society,” the requirement that application for membership “be made in writing to the Secretary of the Society who will present the names of applicants [to] the Executive Board” remained. This provision was finally dropped in 1979.



**Miller’s cottage, 1889**

The change in the membership application process has had a positive effect in attracting both long-time residents who felt uncomfortable with the elitist image and new residents who are interested in becoming part of the community.

## **FINDING A HOME**

The search for a permanent home for the Society and its collection began soon after it was founded. The miller’s cottage was the first choice, and in June 1916 Sarah Carr approached Thomas Tefft, who still owned the house and the property north of the mill. His price of \$1,500 was non-negotiable, and the Society – with less than \$500 in the bank – dropped the idea.

The research into the possibility of buying the miller’s cottage raised some concerns about the Society’s title to the mill itself. The

state grant in March 1787 gave the land on which the windmill stood to the residents of Jamestown on the condition that “they erect and keep in repair a good wind mill for grinding grain.” In 1919, Dr. Bates, the Society’s president, reported that the General Assembly had taken action to appoint a Commission “to determine the ancient bounds of the so-called ‘Wanton’ windmill property in the town of Jamestown” and to recommend if any action was necessary.

The Society was assured informally that nothing needed to be done. After the windmill had been added to the National Register of Historic Places, the easement granted to the state through the Historic Preservation Office formally acknowledged the Jamestown Historical Society ownership of the windmill property.

### **St. Matthew’s Parish Hall**

For 15 years, the members of the Society met in a variety of places – the Town Hall, Central Baptist Church, St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church, the schoolhouse, and *Maplewood* – and stored the collection in members’ homes and at *Maplewood* while a Committee on a Permanent Home for the Society researched possible sites.

Lots throughout the town were examined and priced. Safe storage areas were searched for unsuccessfully. An addition to the new fire station was suggested but the \$10,000 price tag for a wing with storage for the collection and an assembly room was too high.

In 1927, president Audley Clarke suggested that the Society build and pay for an addition to the St. Matthew’s parish house. The 18-foot by 25-foot addition would conform to the style of the existing building and would be a permanent home for the Society’s meetings and the storage of its collection. Objects from the collections would be displayed in cases in the room. Clarke estimated the cost of the building to be \$1,200. He pledged \$1,000 toward construction, warning that there would be additional costs for installing glass exhibit cases.

Charles E. Burrows, St. Matthew’s rector, was an active member of the Society. He approached James DeWolf Perry, Episcopal Bishop of Rhode Island, who supported Clarke’s plan on condition that no formal lease be signed and that the church be permitted to use the room when the Society did not need it. Construction of the room began that fall.

The parish hall was home for the Society for 35 years, although business meetings were often held in officers’ homes. When the parish hall was moved and expanded in 1963, the storage agreement with the church ended, although a display case was maintained at St. Matthew’s until 1972.

## Jamestown Museum

In 1885, the town built a one-room schoolhouse on Southwest Avenue for the primary grades. When the Carr School opened in 1898 to house all grades, the building was moved to 92 Narragansett Avenue to house the Jamestown Philomenian Library. The entryways were changed, shelves were built in, and in 1921 a small room was added to the back of the original structure.



**Jamestown Museum, 1973**

When the new library opened on North Road in 1971, the Society approached the town with a proposal to lease the old building for use as a museum and for storage of its collection. A 99-year, \$1-a-year lease was signed, and the Society took over responsibility for the building.

In the process of finding a home, the Society was also fulfilling its mission of preserving old landmarks. Renovation of the 86-year-old building was undertaken carefully. The Society's Archivist Mary Miner, writing about the project on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the museum, wrote: "Throughout the project we kept in mind our building's history, and we preserved what we could of its past identities. We were careful not to obliterate the scars on the floor where the school desks had been screwed down. . . . We kept all of the library bookshelves that lined the walls, but we had to eliminate most of the freestanding shelves."

For the first time, the Society had a place large enough to house most of its collection. From June to September, objects from the collection were exhibited in the main room. But, because the building was without the environmental controls that were needed to preserve the more fragile artifacts, some objects remained in members' homes.

## Renovation and Vault

A Capital Campaign conducted in 2006-2008 had three major aims: renovate the museum to provide the needed environmental controls, build an environmentally controlled vault in which to store the more fragile and valuable



**Jamestown Museum, 2010**



**Vault, 2011**

material in the collection, and establish an endowment to ensure an annual income to support the Society's activities in years to come.

The campaign raised over \$500,000. Forty-seven percent of the net, \$240,000, was placed in an endowment at the Rhode Island Foundation. The museum renovation cost

\$193,510 or about 38 percent, and building and furnishing the vault cost \$61,215, about 12 percent. The remaining 3 percent was allocated to an effort to computerize manual records and to education.

The completion of the museum renovation was celebrated at a gala opening in May 2008. Changes included insulation, heat and humidity controls, a new front stairs and patio, and a ramp to make the building accessible to those with mobility restrictions. The attic was refloored and the floor and woodwork in the original schoolroom exposed. In response to the renovations, the town and historical society signed a new 99-year lease.

In 2006, the town was in the process of building a new town hall. That summer, the Society reached an agreement with the town to build a vault – to be paid for by the Society – in the basement of the new building, which had just begun construction. With the help of the Town Hall architect, former Society president William L. Burgin, the cost of incorporating the vault was negotiated as a priced modification to the original construction contract. A 99-year lease was signed with the town for use of the area.

## **MISSION: PRESERVING**

In its 100 year history, the Jamestown Historical Society has taken formal responsibility for caring for four landmarks on Conanicut Island: the primary school/library discussed above and now used as a museum, the Jamestown windmill on North Main Road, the Conanicut Friends meetinghouse on Weeden Lane, and the 1776 battlements in the town's Conanicut Battery Historic Park.

### **Jamestown Windmill**

When the Society acquired the Jamestown windmill from the Jamestown Windmill Association, the windmill was in need of work that the new organization could not afford. Vandals had removed

everything moveable from inside the mill. The block and tackle for moving the stone had disappeared. The hopper and shoe that fed the grain into the grinding stones were gone.

Mill owner George Clark of Shannock, Rhode Island, a descendant of the Jamestown Carr family, donated a replacement hopper in 1915. Other missing parts were replaced slowly by purchase, gift, or construction.

The building itself was in reasonably good shape, but a report in 1917 from Ferdinand Armbrust and

George Anthony said that in order to have a working mill that could be used to grind grain virtually a new mill would have to be built.

Repairs in the first 20 years ranged from the replacement of a few shingles to the rebuilding of the second floor. Pillars identifying the entrance to the property and a stone wall on the west side as a fire break were erected in 1921. Maintenance costs fluctuated between \$25 and \$425 annually – even without major storms.

By 1933, it became obvious that a major restoration would be necessary even if the mill were never used again to grind grain. At the July meeting, the Society's president Peyton Hazard reported that the windmill "should be almost rebuilt." Over the next year, rotted sills were replaced, footings were leveled, and a firm concrete foundation was poured. The mill was opened for visitors again in July 1934 and survived the Hurricane of 1938 in relatively good shape.

The windmill suffered greatly, however, in the mid-1950s. The bonnet and shaft were already weak. A 1953 winter storm blew off two arms and some of the bonnet. The windmill lost another arm in Hurricane Carol in 1954. The Society did not have money for the repairs. Raffles, concerts, and house tours were held. Other organizations on the island were asked to help, and the garden clubs held flower shows to benefit the windmill.

A \$1,500 grant from the Rhode Island Foundation in 1957 allowed the arms to be restored in time for that year's tercentenary of the purchase of the island. But the funds did not cover repairs needed to the bonnet, and the arms were fixed facing southwest.



**After Hurricane Carol, 1954**



**Bonnet gears restored, 1968**

In 1967, Society president Magaretta Wood Potter applied for a larger Rhode Island Foundation grant. With the \$9,000 award as seed money, renovation designed to put the mill in working order began in June 1968. Some furniture and equipment were salvaged from a soon-to-be-demolished mill at Davisville. A new wind-shaft was hand-cut from yellow pine stock from South Carolina. The bonnet

was reframed and seated on the metal track that allowed it to be turned to the wind. The stones were sharpened, or “dressed.”

On August 29, 1970, at a cost of approximately \$25,000, the mill was once again in operation. Three years later, in 1973, the Jamestown Windmill was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, and in 1978, the Windmill Hill Historic District – which includes most of the land between East Shore Road and the West Passage from Eldred Avenue to the Great Creek – was added to the National Register.

Major restoration efforts at the mill were again required in 1981 and 2000-2001. Individual donations from Jamestowners and grants from the Champlin Foundations, the Rhode Island Foundation, and other local foundations funded the repairs. Howard and Brookie Harding oversaw the long process.

In 2010, the Society’s received a Conservation Assessment Program (CAP) grant to identify the outstanding needs and priorities for the preservation of its collections and buildings. The assessors recommended several improvements to the windmill, including exterior signage for those unable to climb to the top of the mill and improved displays and safety features inside.

A Rhode Island Council for Humanities grant helped pay for the exterior signage installed in 2012. A second RICH grant was awarded to improve the interior signage and displays. Incremental improvements continue to be made to enhance visitors’ enjoyment and understanding of the site.



**Vat, hopper, and shoe furniture installed in July 2012**

Concern about day-to-day upkeep of the windmill has been relieved by an endowment established in 1987 by two sisters, Nan Thompson and Margaret Evans. The annual income from the fund and from a smaller endowment at the Rhode Island Foundation is sufficient to pay for normal maintenance of the mill and grounds, if nothing exceptional occurs.



**Quaker Meetinghouse, 1890**

The Jamestown windmill has been open on a regular summer weekend schedule – except when repairs prevented it – since the late 1950s.

### **Quaker Meetinghouse**

The Society of Friends, or Quakers, was the dominant religious group on Conanicut Island before the American Revolution. The Quakers built their first meetinghouse in 1710 just north of what is now Route 138 and later moved the building to the corner of North Main Road and Weeden Lane.

The 1710 building was virtually destroyed by the British during their occupation of Conanicut Island from 1776 to 1778. In 1786, the current meetinghouse was built on the site of the earlier one. The building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973.

The number of Friends attending meeting fluctuated over the years, and for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century meetings have been held only in the summer months. In 1997, concerned that – despite a major restoration in 1976 – they would be unable to maintain the aging building in the future, the Conanicut Friends Meeting offered the property to the Society.

In a formal ceremony at the meetinghouse on September 21, 1997, Pieter Byhouwer of the Providence Friends Meeting deeded the meetinghouse to the Society. The conditions attached



**President John Howard (rear) looks on as Friends deed meetinghouse to the Society**

to the transfer enable the Conanicut Friends Meeting to continue to use the meetinghouse and restrict some other uses. A small endowment accompanied the transfer.

Structural issues have arisen because of the high water table on Windmill Hill. Support timbers beneath the building have rotted, and mold has accumulated in the ceiling.

### Conanicut Battery

The fortification on Prospect Hill at the northern end of the Beavertail peninsula was built in 1776 by order of the Rhode Island General Assembly to protect the West Passage of Narragansett Bay. The British occupied the fort in December 1776 and redesigned the earthworks to the shape seen today. Later in the war, the French occupied the battery.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the area was farmland and, while nothing was done to preserve the contours of the fortifications, no major changes were introduced.

The fort first came to the attention of the Society in 1915 when Lena Clarke, the Society's president, informed the August meeting that the property was about to be platted. She urged that the Society try to preserve the fort as a landmark. Maude Stevens reported at the next meeting that the old fort was to be preserved without Society involvement, and the following year the federal government built six observation posts on the hill above the old earthworks.

After World War I, the Daughters of the American Revolution took an interest in the fort. The organization placed a marker there in 1931 and maintained it at least until World War II, when the observation posts were reactivated.

The area was deeded to the town in 1963. Ten years later it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, and in 1974 a centennial park was proposed. The park effort was unsuccessful, and the Revolutionary War earthworks were soon covered with brush.



**Gov. John Chafee and Ed Connelly  
at the Battery reclamation kick off,  
1998**

In 1993, Edwin W. Connelly wrote in the historical society newsletter "Clearly the old Conanicut Battery on





### **Battery Day reenactors, 2011**

Prospect Hill had a fascinating past, has a deplorable present, and hopefully may have a bright future.” In 1997, he formed the Friends of the Conanicut Battery to reclaim the fort.

The reclamation took almost five years. Removal of trees and brush had to be done carefully to minimize damage to the contours of the earthwork fortification. Volunteers did most of the work.

The dedication of the reclaimed park was celebrated on June 29, 2002, with the ceremonial raising of the flags of the American, British, and French forces that had occupied the Battery.

The Society’s Battery committee now maintains the earthwork fortifications and the signage explaining the importance of the site, while the town takes care of the trails and fields in other parts of the town park.

At a Battery Day sponsored by the Society every other spring, the flags of the three countries that occupied the fort are once again raised above it. American Revolution re-enactors camp at the park and conduct military maneuvers.

### **MISSION: COLLECTING**

The Society’s collection is subdivided into four separate collections: objects, photographs, archives – which include newspapers, manuscripts, records, and most printed matter with the exception of books – and the library. Recently established guidelines for accepting donations direct that only “objects that pertain to the history of the community of Jamestown” be acquired and that the acquired objects must be “in sufficiently good and original condition to warrant the cost of preservation.” A Collections committee evaluates proposed accessions against the guidelines and cares for the collection.



**Harrison  
convention  
ribbon, 1840**

## Objects in the Collection

At first, the Society did not actively seek to collect objects since they had no permanent home in which to keep or display them. Nonetheless, small artifacts that could be stored easily were accepted.

Dr. Bates started the collection at the second meeting when he presented the Society with 50 cent paper currency issued by the postal service in 1862. Other small gifts – a 30 shilling note from the Colony of New Hampshire dated Nov. 3, 1775, a button and convention ribbon from William Henry Harrison's 1840 presidential campaign – followed.

The first large collection of objects – 54 items from the estate of Mrs. Mary H. Clarke – was catalogued in 1920. Some of the household items and articles of clothing date to colonial days and several were accompanied by Mrs. Clarke's notes on their provenance and use.

More than 150 objects were formally accessioned over the next 55 years. They included paintings of Jamestown scenes, samplers, household objects, and articles of clothing. Most were small enough to be kept in the cabinets at St. Matthew's.

In 1966, Mabel Brice Wheeler of Philadelphia left the contents of her cottage at 4 Walcott Avenue to the Society. Some of the 184 articles received had no Jamestown connection and were sold to create a fund to purchase more relevant material. Helen Tefft's bequest of household farm objects was received in 1969.

When the museum was leased in 1971, these objects found a home.

Objects continue to be added to the collection. By 2012, 1,500 objects had been catalogued and most of them had been photographed.



**Town Pound in Clarke album,  
1920**

## Photographs

The basis of the Society's photography collection was established in 1920.

In 1919, Lena Clarke, the Society's first president, and Maude Stevens cooperated on a

paper about the old houses in Jamestown. It was Stevens' intent to photograph every house on the island over 50 years old. Clarke presented the results of their research in a talk before the Society in July 1919. She also gave the Society an album of 42 photographs of old Jamestown – although not, as Stevens had hoped, pictures of all island houses built before 1870.

Many collections and individual photographs have been donated since. The most prominent collections are the prints from George Stanhope glass negatives by W. King Covell, the Whithall album – a collection of 220 photographs the majority taken in Jamestown about 1900 of a family that summered at Shoreholme on the East Passage – and the Meredith & Clarke album of 108 Jamestown scenes taken between 1898 and 1910. In recent years, file photographs from the *Jamestown Press* and the *Standard Times* have been given to the Society.

By 2012 there were about 7,000 photographs in the collection, including digital images of photographs loaned to Society by individuals who wished to retain the originals.

### Archives

The first archives donated to the Society in June 1913 were early copies of the *Newport Mercury*, including one with news of Alexander Hamilton's fatal duel with Aaron Burr.

In 1979, the town gave the Society custody of a trunk of 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century documents, ranging from bills submitted to the Town to indenture papers and reports on the poor. Mary Miner and Thayer Keeler sorted the documents and stored them in acid-free folders to prevent their deterioration. In 2005, interns unfolded, flattened, and refiled them. In 2012, two grants – one from the Rhode Island Foundation Ott Fund and one from the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities – enabled about 300 records relating to the Revolutionary War and life in Jamestown in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to be cleaned and encapsulated.



**Margaret Whithall and her friend Sadie, from the Whithall album, 1913**

Other papers, ranging from a dinner menu for the Bay View in 1907 to programs for Jamestown school graduations, were added over the years. Unfortunately books and archival materials were not formally accessioned until the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, so when material was received, and from whom, is sometimes unknown.

There are over 15,000 records, including obituaries, newspaper articles, and legal documents in the archives collection.

## **Library**

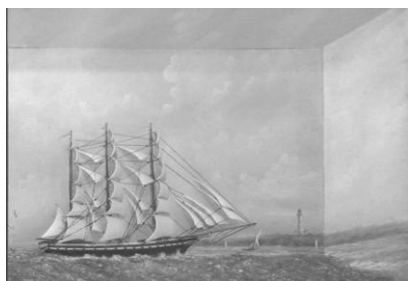
With only 215 books, the library is the smallest part of the collection. *Once Upon a Time in Rhode Island* – the first book in the collection – was purchased by the Society in 1915, and school books used at the Jamestown schools or owned by Jamestown children have been donated over the years.

While many books that relate directly to Jamestown history have been acquired, the Society relies heavily on the superb local history collection at the Jamestown Philomenian Library and has avoided unnecessary duplication of that collection.

## **Expanding the Collections**

The Society's collections continue to grow in a variety of ways under the direction of the Collections committee.

Members or friends of the Society have often donated objects. Objects as different as a painting of the West Passage by John Cook, lighthouse keeper at Dutch Island; a selection of uniforms worn by the Jamestown Emergency Medical Service and its predecessor organizations; and digitized copies of early photographs of Clingstone are now in the collection. In 2008, the Society was given two documents relating to the building of the second Beavertail Light. In giving the document to the Society, the donor said he was encouraged to do so by the care exhibited by the building of the vault.



**Half-model from Gardner House**

Purchases have accounted for a small but important portion of the collection. Among the objects bought with the fund established with the proceeds of the Mabel Brice Wheeler bequest are two half-models of square rigged ships that had hung in the Gardner House. An 1803 survey map of the Watson Farm was

obtained through a trade with a private collector.

Grants and individual gifts have contributed to the acquisition of objects beyond the resources of the Society. The 1657 pre-purchase agreement among the purchasers of Conanicut Island was purchased in 2005, partially with funds from grants and individual donations. The agreement is now on permanent display in Town Hall. More recently, a mailbox fashioned as a ferryboat model was brought to the Society's attention by a member who contributed to its purchase.



### Prologue of pre-purchase agreement

Members of the Collections committee have collected and generated material for the collection by reaching out to individuals to request donation of historic objects and soliciting programs and publicity material from local organizations and businesses. Data gathered for publications and programs or as a result of questions received are captured. Volunteers have routinely collected obituaries and stories about Jamestown residents, businesses, and events from all local media sources.

Two oral history projects – one on the Jamestown ferries and the other on the Jamestown Bridge – were conducted in the 1980s. An effort to collect reminiscences from native Jamestown residents about growing up in Jamestown in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was begun in 2011.

### Caring for the Collections

The search for a home for the society was in large part motivated by the need to care for growing collections. The risk of storing articles at the homes of members of the Society is dramatically demonstrated in the Society's minutes for August 27, 1934.

*Mr. Hazard said that an oil painting of the Old Mill was given to the Society by Admiral Davis. At that time the Society had no permanent home, so the picture was left with Dr. Bates who was the president of the Society. Mr. Hazard said that he wrote Mr. William Bates about the picture after the death of Dr. Bates, who replied that the estate was pending at that time and he could do nothing about it.*

The painting was ultimately recovered, but other objects were not, either because the record of their receipt by the Society did not contain enough detailed information to identify the object or, when the loss was discovered, the keeper of the object could not be identified.

A few objects were lost through improper care. A blueprint of the 1658 Fisher map used to illustrate William P Sheffield's lecture in 1913, was displayed for many years in the meeting room in St. Matthew's Parish Hall. By the time the room was dismantled, the print was faded and unreadable.

Originally, acceptance of gifts to the collection was recorded in the minutes. Later, about the time of the donation of the Mary H. Clarke collection, some gifts were recorded in an accession book and given identification numbers. As objects were moved from place to place, identification labels were lost. Considerable effort has been expended to correlate the material in the collection with the early records.

New standards of care were implemented in the 1960s and early 1970s. Society members, led by archivist Mary Miner, became more conscious of the care required, especially of photographs and other archival material. They began the careful cataloging of information about these objects and purchased acid-free folders for storage.

The 1972 lease of the museum allowed the collection to be stored and processed in a single area under more controlled conditions. This reduced the risk of loss and increased awareness of the vulnerability of the collection.

Increased awareness resulted in the development of plans for improving the care of the collection. The plans were formally documented in the 2006 Long Range Plan in preparation for the Capital Campaign to raise the funds to implement the needed changes.

Not all steps toward improved care waited on the formal plan.

In the 1990s, records describing the collection existed in several forms: hand-written accession records, typed accession records, 3x5 cards, computerized tables, and spreadsheets. In 2004, the Society purchased PastPerfect, a software program designed for cataloging the collections of museums and historical societies. In 2000, the Society received a grant from the Rhode Island Committee (now, Council) for the Humanities to digitize 5,000 of the photographs in the collection. Digitization

U. S. NAVY FERRYBOAT  
"NARRAGANSETT"  
Operated by Municipally Owned  
JAMESTOWN & NEWPORT  
FERRY COMPANY  
Effective October 9, 1938.  
EASTERN STANDARD TIME  
Limited to 150 Passengers, 8 Vehicles.  
Weather Permitting.

LEAVE JAMESTOWN	LEAVE NEWPORT
6:45 A.M.	7:30 A.M.
8:15	9:00
10:00	11:00
12:00 M	1:00 P.M.
2:00 P.M.	2:45
3:30	4:30
5:30	6:30
7:30	10:00

Subject to Change or Correction  
without notice.  
OVER

**1938 ferry schedule  
found in collection,  
cataloged 2007**

both protects the original photographs by reducing handling and encourages their dissemination.

The task of transferring all collection records from their various formats to the new computer system took several years. Much of the work was done by summer interns hired using grant funds from the Rhode Island Foundation and money raised during the Capital Campaign. By 2012, PastPerfect contained over 23,000 records describing material in the collection. The catalog is available online at [www.jamestownhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.jamestownhistoricalsociety.org) and is updated biennially.

In June 2010, professional conservators conducted an assessment of the Society's care of the collection under a federal CAP grant funded by Heritage Preservation and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. They complimented the Society on its progress in caring for the collection. They also put forth the following suggestions:

*Develop a stepped plan to maximize collection storage and management spaces*  
*Undertake a collection space and management needs assessments*  
*Plan for the separation of management and storage areas*  
*Installation of compactor storage system in the vault*

The recommended compact storage system was installed in the vault early in 2013 with a grant from the Champlin Foundations. The new system increased the Society's storage capability by 140 percent. At the same time collection management activities moved to an area adjacent to the vault. From four to ten volunteers spend two mornings a week maintaining the PastPerfect database and caring for the collection.

## **MISSION: SHARING**

Since its inception, the Society has committed itself to ensuring that the knowledge of Jamestown that its collection reflects is made available to anyone who is interested.

### **Historic Sites**

The sites that the Society maintains have always been open to the public during the summer months, usually free of charge although donations for their upkeep are readily accepted. All the sites are open by appointment at any time of year.

### **Exhibits**

Annual exhibits have been mounted at the Jamestown museum since 1973. Before 2006, ferry memorabilia was exhibited in the rear of the display area. In 2011, the back room of the museum was trans-



**Signs from Jamestown's resort era in the Town Hall stairwell, 2012**

formed into a "Ferry Room," allowing a larger permanent display of objects related to the ferries that served the island until 1969.

Some of the collection is on display in public buildings around town. Signs from the ferryboats hang in the Recreation Center across from

the pier where the ferryboats to Newport landed. The pre-purchase agreement and signs from Jamestown's resort era are on display in Town Hall. An exhibit in the lobby of the Jamestown Philomenian Library is changed at least quarterly, and a new exhibit is mounted at the Lawn Avenue School each semester.

The Society continues to look for public venues in which to display material from the collection.

### Events and Programs

The first major town-wide event in which the Society took a major role was the 250th anniversary of the incorporation of the town of Jamestown in 1928. The occasion was celebrated with an eight episode pageant. The Society's Lena Clarke and W.L. Watson drafted the pageant script and wrote a 23-page historical sketch of Jamestown for the event program. The Society sponsored the final episode in the pageant, *George Washington at Jamestown*.

Watson also wrote an historical sketch of Jamestown for the 1957 celebration of the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the purchase of the island. For the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the town in 1978, the Society mounted an exhibit covering the whole 300 years, and for the 325<sup>th</sup> in 2003 created a time line of Jamestown history, which was included in the program. Selected highlights from the time line were displayed along Narragansett Avenue from Four Corners to East Ferry.



**Students from the Melrose Avenue School watch videos during the 2011 museum exhibit: *Jamestown on Stage and Screen***

The 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the purchase of the island coincided with the opening of the new Town



Hall in 2007 and was celebrated with Jamestown 350 Week. The Society sponsored a historic walking tour of Narragansett Avenue, co-sponsored a scavenger hunt through Jamestown's history, and again posted a time line of Jamestown history.



**Jamestown 350 logo**

The number and types of lectures and activities changed over time. Until the mid-1920s, about half the meetings included a talk. Because attendance at winter meetings was low, by the 1930s meetings were held only in the summer. Talks usually followed sometimes contentious business meetings. The papers read were most often on historical topics: in 1931, for example, *Colonial Gardens*, *Early Rhode Island Silversmiths*, *Old Settlers of Jamestown*, and *Life and Business of the Old Mills*.

Since the 1970s, programs have – except for the presentation at the annual meeting – been separated from business meetings, encouraging greater attendance by non-members. In 2011 and 2012, talks were most often co-sponsored with other Jamestown non-profits. The *Jamestown on Stage and Screen* theme in 2011 led to a particularly successful collaboration. Seven films, five programs, and a teen workshop were sponsored by a coalition of 13 organizations, spearheaded by the historical society.

Visits to sites other than the windmill increased. In the early 1950s, three fundraisers featured visits to old houses owned by members who were willing to open their doors to visitors, and occasional house tours were organized in the 1980s and 1990s. Since 1999, September house tours have been major fundraising events for the Society. In 2008, a members-only preview party was added to thank members for their support and attract new members.

### Publications

Between 1920 and 1942, the Society published nine bulletins, most of them based on papers presented at Society meetings. Since 2002, six similar

**Jamestown Historical Society**  
**2008 House Tour**  
**featuring "Riven Rock" and "Onarock"**  
 Riven Rock is located at 113 Melrose Avenue, Onarock at 105 Walcott Avenue  
**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 13**  
**10am-2pm ~ Tickets \$20/each**  
 Tickets available for purchase at Baker's Pharmacy and at the Houses on September 13  
 For more info, visit: [www.Jamestown-HistoricalSociety.org](http://www.Jamestown-HistoricalSociety.org)

**Poster for 2008 house tour**

publications have been published. A booklet explaining the history and operation of the Jamestown windmill came out in 1926; it has been revised and updated several times, most recently in 2005.

The Society celebrated the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the publication of John Howard's *100 Years of Jamestown: From Destination Resort to Bedroom Town*. It actively supported the development of several commercially published books, including *Images of America: Jamestown* (2003) by James C. Buttrick, *Jamestown Bridge, 1940-2007: Concept to Demolition* (2007) by Sue Maden, and *Jamestown: Narragansett Bay's Island Town* (2010) by Rosemary Enright and Sue Maden.

An annual newsletter, begun in 1980, became biannual in 1985. The newsletter reaches out to members with news of the organization and, especially in the 1990s, with short articles of historic interest.

### Jamestown Historical Society in the Media

Ads and newspaper stories about Society events have always been used to attract new members and to bring visitors to the Society's sites. The first meeting of the Society was reported in detail in the *Newport Daily News*, which continues to cover Society exhibits and events.

A monthly column in the *Jamestown Press* publicizes Society news to both members and non-members. In celebration of the Society's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, twice-monthly historical articles were also published in the *Press* in 2012. The historical articles continue on a less frequent basis.

Since 2004, a Society website, [www.jamestownhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.jamestownhistoricalsociety.org), has offered news of Society activities, descriptions of places to visit, and links to the newsletters, occasional papers, and the latest *Jamestown Press* column. A link to the PastPerfect catalog was added in 2008. Access to the online catalog was upgraded in 2011 and finding material in the collection is now a simple "search" function.



The Development committee set up a Facebook page in 2008. Facebook and email "blasts" alert members and friends of events. Videos about the Society and of Society events, including a tour of the windmill, are hosted on YouTube and on the *Jamestown Record*. The Society website has links to all the videos.

**Access to the collection catalog on  
the Society's website**

## *JAMESTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESIDENTS*

1912-1915	Lena Clarke
1915-1925	Dr. William Lincoln Bates
1925-1932	H. Audley Clarke
1932-1951	Peyton R. Hazard
1951-1953	Hazel Collins
1953-1954	Thayer Keeler
1954-1961	John H.N. Potter
1961-1965	James H. Little
1965-1966	Captain Theodore Waterbury
1966-1973	Margaretta Wood Potter
1973-1978	Henry W. Armbrust
1978-1982	Mary Brooks Harding
1982-1985	Captain Wilbur Holmes
1985-1988	Mary Brooks Harding
1988 -1990	Patricia Sheehan
1990-1992	Mary Brooks Harding
1992-1997	Jane Miner
1997-2002	John Howard
2002-2005	William L. Burgin
2005-2010	Rosemary Enright
2010-present	Linnea Petersen

# JAMESTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY SITES

## 2012

