CHS Newsletter
March 2019

Upcoming events:
March 19, 7pm CHS Meeting
Presentation by
Jeffrey Herman
Silver Conservator

Sprague Mansion Holiday Creations by Western Cranston Garden Club for the Christmas Open House

Laura Johnson, Historic New England will present “Head to Toe: Hat & Shoe Fashions 1750 to Present” at the Governor Sprague Mansion Annual Victorian Tea on April 14

Joy Homestead-Mayor Fung & Mrs. Barbara Ann Fung enjoy tea with CHS President Sandra Moyer

Mayor Allan Fung & Col. Ronald Barnes, Pawtuxet Rangers, hang a Rangers Ornament on the Sprague Mansion Archive Tree. Col. Barnes also brought an ornament honoring his father—a pilot with the US 8th Air Force.
The Cranston Historical Society's mission is to protect, document, interpret and expand understanding of Cranston history.

1351 Cranston Street
Cranston, RI 02920

(401) 944-9226
www.cranstonhistoricalsociety.org
e-mail: cranston.historical.society@gmail.com
facebook: www.facebook.com/cranstonhistoricalsociety

OFFICERS

Sandra Moyer
President

Tom Worthington
Vice President

Mary Mierka
Secretary

Tristan Poirier
Treasurer

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Katy Cabral (Social Media)
Frank DelSanto (Bylaws)
Ed Garcia (Finance)
David Griswold (Publicity)
James Hall (Curator)
Fred Joslyn (Ways and Means)
John Lonardo (Hospitality)
Gregg Mierka (Property Management)
Mary Mierka (Events and Rentals)
Sandra Moyer (Endowment)
John O'Leary (Nominations)
Lydia Rapoza (Joy Homestead)
Herbert Zakrison (Buildings and Grounds)

Directors at Large

Kathy Sprague-Cyr
Eleanor Sasso
This issue of the newsletter starts the 70th year of the Cranston Historical Society. We started in 1949 with meetings in members’ homes or churches. Our goal then, as now, was to protect, preserve and promote our city’s history. For that reason I was saddened to hear recently on the news that the Nathan Westcott House on Scituate Avenue is being threatened. This two hundred and fifty year old historic home is located right next to our Joy Homestead.

The former owners were two men who lovingly maintained the house as their residence. However, when one of the men died, the other put the house up for sale in 2016. Our Society briefly thought about buying it, but the price was prohibitive. As the house stayed on the market for many months, our biggest fear was that someone would buy it only to knock it down or modernize the exterior so that it would lose all historic value.

Finally an out of state buyer did purchase it. We didn’t see a lot of activity but the outside of the house stayed intact, complete with its historical plaque. However, we were shocked when Channel 12 news recently carried the story that the owner had been indicted for using the house to grow illegal marijuana. The worst revelation was that she had gutted the house, even taking down the second level’s floor. A few days later, Walt Buteau, WPRI investigative reporter did another story in which he interviewed Gregg Mierka, who gave the historic significance of the house. I’ll keep you posted on this important Cranston landmark.

On a more pleasant topic, our speaker for the March 19th meeting will be Jeff Herman, who once was a designer for Gorham Silver and now owns his own silver conservation business. He will demonstrate the proper care of silver and will even answer questions as to the rarity, maker, and history of pieces of silver that members may bring in to the meeting. By the end of the meeting, you will be able to care for your silver like a professional conservator.

Elsewhere in this issue is information about our annual fund and our next event which is the Victorian Tea on Sunday, April 14th. Please read the details on page 3 and in our Calendar on page 5. You will also find articles about silver to go with the topic of our next meeting.
We started our Annual Fund campaign last December, but we haven’t heard from many of our loyal members who usually contribute. If it had slipped your mind and you are still willing to contribute, please take this opportunity to send in your check.

Dear Friend and Member,

We would like to once again thank you for all your support over the years for the Cranston Historical Society. With your help, for seventy years, the Cranston Historical Society has been able to preserve and promote Cranston's heritage. Your donations to last year's annual fund allowed us to remove the seven trees that had fallen at the Sprague Mansion and Joy Homestead during several severe storms.

This year we will use the funds collected through the annual fund to replace part of the air conditioning system at the Sprague Mansion. Every year, we try to repair the 35 year old units so they will survive another season. So far we have succeeded, but we know that can't be done indefinitely. Without a functioning air conditioner, we would be unable to rent the mansion during the hot months.

All contributions to the Cranston Historical Society are tax deductible. Once again, thank you for the generosity you have shown in the past and we hope you will continue to be generous this year as well.

Sincerely,

Edward Garcia
Finance Chairman

Please enclose this slip with your check made out to the Cranston Historical Society.

Name _________________________________________________________________________

Address______________________________________________________ Amount___________

If you itemize deductions and would like a letter designating this as a charitable deduction for the IRS, please indicate by circling Yes.

YES          NO
New Members
Diana Donovan - Cranston
Josephine DiMonti - Cranston

Annual Fund Campaign
Thank you to Regine Printing-Providence & Copy World-Warwick for printing the enclosures this year.

Membership Dues — Reminder
We are still accepting dues -- Don’t forget to renew now -- it is never too late!

Holiday Open Houses ~ Thank You
A heartfelt thank you to all our Holiday Volunteers helping us make our Open Houses at the Sprague Mansion and Joy Homestead a success: Kathy Sprague-Cyr, Gregg & Mary Mierka, Denise Moretti-Foggo, Kyle Johnson, Cranston East H.S. Community Service Members, Lydia Rapoza, Diane Reisman, Judy and Fallon Miele, Marilyn Walaska; Stop & Shop-Atwood Ave. & Shaws-Chapel View-Cranston.

A special Thank You to Western Cranston Garden Club for creating Holiday Arrangements throughout the Mansion and musical selections by pianist Andrew Kaplan.

Please support our Other Business Supporters and Donors:
All The Answers, Inc.-Warwick, Mailing & Printing Services alltheanswersinc.com
C. Wheaton Construction Chrisw_80_98@yahoo.com
Climate Controlled Systems Inc.-Cranston, A/C & Heating Services climateri.com
CWS Gases Co. (Cranston Welding Supply)-Cranston Since 1946 cranstonwelding.com
EMC (Energy Management & Control Services)-Cranston, providers of building control/energy & integrated facility management systems emccontrols.net
Forest Hills Nurseries Inc.-Cranston, Retail/Wholesale plants/nursery foresthillsnurseries.com
North-Eastern Tree Services-Cranston northeasterntree.com
PPA, LLP-Certified Public Accounts info@ppallp.com
Rhode Island Civil War Round Table-RIs premier Civil War discussion group ricwrt.com
Twisted Roots Lawn Care-W.Warwick, Landscaping/lawn care facebook.com/twistedrootsinc

Thanks from Curator James Hall / Recent Donations to CHS Collections:
Marjorie DeCristafaro: 1923 Photo of Pettaconsett School & family papers
Donna Longo DiMichele: Copy of A.W. Sprague horse team, signed by Amasa Sprague
Marcia Forte: Knight family papers

The printing of CHS Newsletters is done by All The Answers, Warwick ~ Mailing, Printing & Design Services
Meetings & Events

March 19 Tuesday 7:00 pm in the Sprague Mansion
General Membership meeting with speaker Jeffrey Herman, Silver Conservator. Bring in a silver item to learn how to care for it.

April 14 Sunday 2:00 pm-4:00 pm Annual Victorian Tea
Guest speaker: Laura E. Johnson, Ph.D., Historic New England, will present “Head to Toe: Hat & Shoe Fashions 1750 to Present from the Historic New England Collection”. $30.00. Seating Limited. Ms. Johnson indicates that hats and shoes were the most luxurious and decorative aspects of dress for women and men. Head to Toe explores creations of these fashion accessories and their effect on New England’s economy, workforce, and environment & how fashion influences our self-image. Checks payable to Cranston Historical Society by April 10. 944-9226.

Name: ________________________________ Number Attending: ______
Address/City/State: ________________________________
Phone or Email: ________________________________ Amount: $ ______

☐ I am unable to attend, but here is a donation for the event: Amount: $ ______

April 23 Tuesday 7:00 pm in the Sprague Mansion. Board of Directors’ Meeting

May 5 1pm Sunday Cranston Historical Cemetery #36 – Sheldon Cemetery (near 266 Park Ave). Ceremony honoring Revolutionary War Soldiers hosted by Pawtuxet Rangers & CHS. Presentation by Col. Ronald Barnes-Pawtuxet Rangers & musical selections by Pawtuxet Rangers Fife & Drum Band. Greetings from Mayor Fung and other dignitaries. Dedication of Cranston Discovery Network Sign describing the importance of this historic Cranston cemetery. Collation: Pawtuxet Rangers Headquarters-Pawtuxet Village-59 Remington St., Warwick. pawtuxetrangers@aol.com

May 21 Tuesday 7:00 pm in the Sprague Mansion. General Membership meeting. Speaker TBA.

June 25 Tuesday 7:00 pm in the Sprague Mansion. Board of Directors’ Meeting

July 16 Tuesday 7:00 pm in the Sprague Mansion. General Membership meeting.
Presentation Silver
By Jim Hall, Curator

Presentation silver takes the form of cups, pitchers, plates, and other objects and is presented to persons or organizations for extraordinary successes and achievement. Over time they may not only become more valuable as the price of silver rises but may even grow into a source of historical interest. The Cranston Historical Society is fortunate to have such a piece.

It is a coin silver presentation water pitcher having two marks on the bottom: "Pure Silver Coin" and "J. Gorham & Son". Coin silver is 90% silver and 10% copper which is the same composition of early American coins and in fact much of it was made by melting them down. Even so, coin silver contains 2-1/2% less silver than Sterling. The Gorham Manufacturing Company was located right here in Providence and was the largest manufacturer of silver items in America. Gorham is famous for high quality and beauty and even today commands high prices.

The pitcher shown here was engraved by Gorham’s Babcock and reads as follows:

“Henry Bowen Anthony. Editor of the Providence Journal presented by Citizens of Rhode Island to testify their estimation of the valuable services rendered by that paper to the cause of Law & Order, during the insurrection against the Government of Rhode Island AD1842.”

The insurrection was the Dorr Rebellion led by Thomas Wilson Dorr who mobilized citizens who could not vote because they didn’t own at least $134 in property and who were not white. A failed attempt to take the Providence arsenal, a round-up of radicals in the State, and Dorr leaving the State all worked to squash the rebellion in quick order. A return to the status quo resulted. However, the rebellion left its mark and led eventually to equality and changes.

Apparently Mr. Anthony, editor and part owner of the Providence Journal, was sympathetic with the old order and received this presentation pitcher from the grateful majority. Such was their appreciation that he became Rhode Island’s 21st Governor.
Although having silver was perhaps the surest way to display wealth in colonial society, possessing silver had a dark side. Because it had intrinsic value as well as extrinsic social value, silver coins and dinnerware became a common target for thieves. Simply put, stolen silver in various forms could be melted down and made into money. The wealthy colonists were frequently tricked by fake silver coins or lost their silver to a clever thief.

Counterfeiters devalued coins by adding copper in the silver alloy and putting them into circulation as true silver coins. Silversmiths were frequently the culprits of this fraud.

After the middle of the eighteenth century, counterfeiting became a widespread problem in New England. The counterfeiters were situated at sites in New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. The prevalence of counterfeiters cast a shadow over all silver money, although the exact volume of counterfeit coins in circulation could not be determined. When a patron paid at a store or tavern or used such coins to repay a debt, no one knew for sure if the silver coin was real.

Thieves, as well, dealt in silver, stealing from homes and shops. The frequency of theft involving silver objects created an environment in which silver offered for sale aroused suspicion. Sellers of silver often had to prove provenance to be sure it was not stolen. Wealthy colonial society had to view their own social position as similarly precarious.
**Victorian Tea Sets & Kettles**  
**By Mary Mierka**

Formal silver tea/coffee sets consisted of 5 to 9 serving pieces on a large tray: a large tea kettle with moveable burner, 1 or 2 teapots, coffee pot, sugar bowl, creamer and waste bowl. The set was proudly displayed at large gatherings. China tea sets were believed to have originated during the 2nd Century BC in China and the teapot developed during the Song Dynasty. Kettles were mobile and could be moved to different tables or areas when entertaining, rather than have someone travel to the kitchen to refill the kettles or tea pots with boiling water from the hearth caldrons.

It was Queen Victoria who first presented a ‘modern’ silver 6-piece tea set during a formal tea party. It was an honor to be chosen to pour the tea—the guardian of the teapot! Kettles usually sat on a small burner affixed to a stand and could be poured by tilting the kettle. Some burners used alcohol and when ignited kept the moveable kettle water hot; thus some kettles were referred to as ‘Spirit Kettles’. Later bone, wood, ebony or ivory handles were added to prevent the handles from getting too hot when pouring. Kate Chase may have had several ornate silver sets when entertaining her special guests.

Make your reservations for the April 14 Victorian Tea soon—there are still some tables of 6 and 8 available! Enjoy the afternoon hearing about **Head to Toe** fashions with Laura Johnson-Historic New England. Maybe you still have your favorite shoes or hat from gone by days you would like to wear. Pianist Andrew Kaplan will greet guests playing musical selections on the Mansion’s rare 1880s Steinway Grand Piano.

**In the Kitchen: Tea Strainer/Basket, Mote Spoon**
Every host would have these tea accessories on hand. Tea strainers/baskets fit into the spout of the tea kettle or pot and was filled with loose tea. After use, the strainer would be emptied into the waste bowl then refilled with fresh tea leaves. The long handled mote spoon has a pierced bowl used to take out loose tea leaves in a tea cup. The long narrow end was used to unclog the spout of the tea kettle or pot. Some early silver manufacturers include: Francois-Julien Doyen, Christofle, Sheffield, Henry Wingfield, Martin & Hall, Reed & Barton, Gorham, Tiffany.
George Richardson
Adapted from an article
by Tom Worthington

While silverware has been enjoyed by the wealthy for centuries, objects made from this valuable metal were out of the financial reach of the average person. Instead they used a metal called pewter to make their flatware, cups, plates and other dining necessities. An alloy of tin and lead, pewter was the base material of domestic wares for five centuries and was used for everything from candlesticks and cups to cutlery.

Although Cranston did not seem to have a well-known artisan who worked in silver, we did have a famous maker of pewter - George Richardson. Little is known about his early life except that he was born in England around 1782. Learning his craft in London, Richardson sailed to New England shortly before 1818 and went into partnership with Samuel Greene of Boston. It was there that he started the first block tin teapot manufactory in this country, while Greene, a much older man, made only flat ware. Although Richardson is listed in Boston as a pewterer until 1828, their partnership lasted only four years.

Richardson had moved to Cranston, Rhode Island by 1839. He started the Glennore Company near the intersection of Phenix and Natick Roads. This site, located on Furnace Brook, had started as Herrrod’s Mill in 1662 and been used as a place for producing textiles as well as being a furnace and a smithery. Richardson and a couple of his sons operated a thriving pewterware business there until 1845.

Ruins of Glennore Company off Phenix Avenue
Artisans always put their touchmark on their work and these are now used to identify the maker of particular pieces and help establish value. Richardson’s touchmark was distinctive because it was struck "heavy" to the lower edge, so much so in fact that it caused the metal on the inside of the teapot to "telescope" inward.

Richardson made many forms of teapots, including an inverted-mold or double-ender teapot, as well as an earlier pear-shaped design which he may have fashioned from styles popular in London during his apprenticeship. Coffee pots and sugar bowls were also produced by him. Richardson’s pewterware designs maintained the virtues of function while elevating the aesthetic and simplicity of form to an elegance rarely found.

Old pewter is today highly valued by collectors. A few examples of Richardson’s work can be viewed in such notable places as the Boston Museum of Fine Art, and the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum at Colonial Williamsburg, and right here at the Governor Sprague Mansion. An online search reveals that Richardson’s products are still available for purchase.
Inside:

• Next Meeting March 19th with speaker Jeffrey Herman, Silver Conservator
• Upcoming Events
• Presentation Silver
• Downside of Silver
• Victorian Tea Sets and Kettles
• George Richardson, Famous Cranston Pewterer