

Historic Wickford, Inc. P.O. Box 261, North Kingstown, RI 02852

HistWick Herald

!! Armchair Walk with Tim Cranston - October 22nd !!

October 2008

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Message from the President by Nora Hall

Dear Fellow HistWick Members,

I hope that we will see you at HistWick's upcoming event—an "Arm Chair Walk" with Tim Cranston, Local Historian and Elizabeth Donovan, Photographer. Their contributions to preserving the history of this community are tremendous, and we owe them deep gratitude for their commitment to unearthing many of the secrets of our area.

The evening is open to all HistWick members and to those who are considering becoming a member. It also promises to be informative and fun; do join us.

Our annual Pot Luck Supper is also coming soon. Mark your calendar for December 7th, and pull out your favorite recipe to prepare and share with your friends and neighbors. The "pot luck" evening is a wonderful time to catch up with one another and to get into the mood of enjoying winter in New England.

Good news...at the time of this writing, it appears that the Main Street project will move ahead as planned. Soon we will be able to walk around our village without fear of tripping so go ahead and make that commitment to power wash your house, give it some paint or new siding—or even plant a new garden.

In the meantime, walk cautiously first, to the Wickford Yacht Club at 7 p.m. on October 22nd for the "Arm Chair Walk" then to St. Paul's Parish House on December 7th for our Pot Luck supper.

We look forward to seeing you.

Histwick is a not for profit corporation dedicated to historic preservation and community information for those interested in the village of Wickford. All dues and contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Tim Cranston on the origins of Wickford

(an ongoing series)

Wickford and the Age of the Automobile

I like to call the next phase of the village's history "The Age of the Automobile", as again, changes in the way Americans moved themselves around, had a profound effect upon the village itself. As "a car in every driveway" became the norm in the area, less and less people utilized the Sea View Trolley Line and the Newport & Wickford Line and both closed.

In retrospect, a most ironic and symbolic event occurred in 1922, when Henry Ford himself, while in the area, purchased one of the steam engines used by the Sea View for display in his museum village in Dearborn Michigan. This timeframe is also marked by two events which occurred one after another. First, the great Hurricane of 1938, wreaked havoc on the village and ruined its resident's wells thereby initiating the construction of a municipal water system and secondly the rapid paced construction of the military complex at Quonset/Davisville caused an influx of residents, both for construction and then base staffing purposes, that overwhelmed the local housing stock and brought about the carving up of many of the villages larger homes into apartments to handle the added people.

The one-two punch of the Hurricane and the dredging associated with the base construction also fatally wounded one of the village's most prominent industries, oyster farming, which at its peak employed more than 100 locals and affectively ended large scale fishing and aquaculture as a major employer in Wickford Harbor and the surrounding areas.

With all this going on, businesses that depended upon the fisheries trade and tourism began to suffer the consequences as well.

Thankfully though, due to all this tragedy and drastic change, came the impetus that forever preserved the village in the state we see it today. Local residents, who had already banded together into a group called the Main Street Association, whose charge and charter originally was solely focused on attempting to save the rapidly dying American Elms that gracefully lined all of the village's streets and lanes, changed their focus in reaction to developmental pressures brought to bear on the village's ancient housing stock.

As a result of their foresight, Wickford has survived into the 21st century largely intact, due to the unique set of circumstances that brought it into the 1930's and as a result of the groundbreaking use of comprehensive historic zoning that was subsequently pioneered by local residents united as The Main Street Association. In retrospect, a group that began with a passion to save their village's signature trees, ended up preserving the entire village itself; a unique window looking backwards through time towards our beginnings as a community and indeed, a nation.

Spirits of Wickford

Once again the Spirits of Wickford will invade our streets. This year it will be on October 25th at dusk. HistWick is helping support this program by decorating St. Paul's Parish Hall for the dance that follows an evening of wandering the streets of Wickford while listening to the Tall Tales of our Spirits.

If you are interested in helping to decorate the hall, carving pumpkins or providing an adult presence to save our children from being engulfed by the Spirits, call Nora Hall at 295-8372. We will be sure to put you to work.

Histwick Supports Plum Beach Garden Club

The fruits of HistWick's 2009 garden tour were bountiful, and HistWick was able to donate \$6600 to the Plum Beach Garden Club for their *Three Island Project* at the corner of Route 1 and West Main, the Gateway to Historic Wickford. Because this is a state road, many hurdles must be jumped to get state approval on the project. Nancy Harrington of the garden club reports below:

From Nancy Harrington of the Plum Beach Garden Club

Like the fable of the tortoise and the hare, the hare will win out in the end. The Plum Beach Garden Club's Island Project is moving along, slowly but surely. There are a few regulatory milestones yet to be reached. The exodus of some state employees has made our approval slightly more challenging. The efforts of HistWick Members in raising money for this project are greatly appreciated. We are hopeful that we will see the fruition of your efforts in the spring of 2009.

Ask the expert...

(Questions on the history of Wickford...answered by Tim Cranston)

Recently a number of folks, both HistWick members and non-members, have been asking me questions regarding various dates associated with the beginnings of our wonderful village. 1663, 1674, and 1709 are all timeframes, at some point or another, that have been associated with the beginnings of Wickford. Let's sort this out, because as I've always said "History is all about the truth!"

The Wickford Village that we all know and love began as a speculative real estate venture surveyed and platted out for its owner, Lodowick Updike, in 1709. The year 1674, as any long time resident who saw the Tri-Centennial Parade probably remembers, is the date associated with incorporation of the town of North Kingstown itself and 1663 is the first time that the word "Wickford" shows up in Updike family documents as a possible name for the area they decided to continue to call Co-cumscussoc.

So then, its 1709 as the birth date for Wickford itself, and if you do a little math, it's plain to see that Wickford's Tri-Centennial is fast approaching. I'm pleased to say that HistWick and Swamptown Enterprises will be continuing their partnership and together we will make 2009 Wickford's year to shine!

Historic Wickford, Inc. - Program Schedule 2008

October 22nd Historic Armchair Tour of Pleasant Street with Tim Cranston
and Elizabeth Donovan - 7 p.m. at the Wickford Yacht Club
December 7th Pot Luck Community Dinner - 5:30 St. Paul's Church Hall

Other Programs of Interest

October 25th Spirits of Wickford - Main St, Wickford - at dusk

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Save the date!

Annual Holiday Potluck Supper!

December 7th, 5:30 to 8:00 p.m. : St. Paul's Church Hall

More information will be sent in November

The HistWick Herald is published three or four times a year for members of Historic Wickford Inc, and for the Wickford community. We welcome your comments and encourage HistWick members to submit articles for publication. We will print our next issue in June. Please contact Mike Donohue at 267-0104 or mdonohue@aol.com with your ideas or articles.