

HistWick Herald

!! Histwick Annual Meeting, Thursday, March 25th !!

March 2010

Volume 7, Number 2

*Annual Meeting to Provide 'Tour' of
Historic Wickford House & Presentation of Restoration Efforts*

by Mike Dacey

I hope you will be able to attend HistWick's March 25th Annual Meeting. It will provide a unique opportunity to tour and learn more about the extensive preservation and restoration efforts still underway at 68 Main St., the Alexander Huling House which most of us refer to as Wickford House.

As part of the program local Historian Tim Cranston will provide some insight into the history of the building and some of its residents. You'll also hear from Steve Tyson, Jr. of Architectural Preservation who is in charge of the restoration. He'll share some before and after photos as well as some of the interesting work that has been on-going over these past many months.

Our schedule for the Meeting:

5:15 to 6:15 Open House at 68 Main St., the Alexander Huling House

6:30 to 7:00 Social time at the Wickford Yacht Club- End of Pleasant St.

7:00 to 7:30 Brief HistWick business meeting

7:30 to 8:30 Presentation by Tim Cranston and Steve Tyson, Jr. on the history of and recent preservation and restoration process at 68 Main St.

8:30 Continue social time with friends and neighbors

A major purpose of the Annual Meeting is to elect members to serve as Directors and Officers of the Corporation. The Following members of Historic Wickford, Inc. have been nominated to serve for the coming year of 2010/2011.

President Mike Dacey

Vice President Kate Church

Treasurer Rick Moore

Archivist Dave Wrenn

Directors Mike Donohue Joe Harrison Bill Sabo Doug Somers Deb McHringer

Past President Nora Hall Advisors Nancy Gauthier Peter Galster

Nominations may be also made from the floor at the Annual Meeting. We have two openings on the Board for the coming year. If you might have an interest in joining the Board or learning more about that, please contact Nora Hall at norahall@verizon.net.

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.

'The Wickford House'

by Tim Cranston

It's hard not to get excited about all the remarkable goings-on at the 68 Main Street this past year. The Captain Alexander Huling III House, commonly known as "The Wickford House"; well, it's never looked better. New owners, Shannon and Tom, are overseeing a restoration the likes of which we haven't seen in the village since the "Roaring '20's" and the days of Norman Isham. So fellow HistWick members, before we get a firsthand look at these happenings as a part of this year's annual meeting; let's take a gander at the history of this extraordinary colonial era home.

Captain Alexander Huling III, grandson of the original Alexander, benefactor and founding member of the Stony Lane Six-Principle Baptist Church on Old Baptist Road, purchased his lot in Updike's Newtown in 1768 from Martha Updike. A former hero of the French & Indian Wars, he was at that time working for the Brown family of Providence as master of their sloop "Lucinda" which was in coastal service hauling goods like flour, molasses, and rum up and down the eastern seaboard. He had his home constructed in 1769 as an Inn (he styled himself as an Innholder on the deed of purchase) and moved in with his wife Susannah, daughter of Ebenezer Brown, and their sons. Sadly Susannah died in 1773 and eventually he remarried, this time to Mary (Havens) Allen the widow of his brother-in-law. By the 1770's he was spending less time at sea and more time working with his family at the busy Tavern/Inn they ran in their home. In 1777, Capt Huling had an epiphany of sorts while at sea on a run for the Browns, caught in an awesome gale off the coast of the Carolina's, fearing for his very life, he swore to God Almighty that if he'd see him and his crew safely through the deadly storm at hand he give up his life as a mariner and return to his family for good. The good lord kept his end of the bargain and so did Alexander – he returned to Wickford, his family and his Inn, and never sailed again. In fact in 1780, he sold the Inn to Capt. Nathan Brown, a relation to his beloved first wife, and moved his family to a land grant he had received for service during the French & Indian Wars, in what was to become Shaftsbury Vermont. He and his wife and three sons rest eternal now in that Vermont hamlet they helped found.

Nathan Brown master of the Wickford based sloop "Nancy" used the Inn in the same fashion that his predecessor Capt. Huling had; it was a business to operate to supplement his family's income from his work as a sea captain. The next owner, Thomas Cottrell, identified as a merchant, purchased the place in 1783 and, it appears, changed things a little. He ran a General Store in the house and rented out rooms as well. This business pattern was continued too with the next owner, Robert Eldred, who purchased it in 1793 to primarily run a General Store there. He let rooms out through a business arrangement with his brother, Bryer Eldred, who ran the Narragansett Hotel just across the street. Robert Eldred owned the home for forty-one years and sold it in 1834 to prominent Wickford merchant and banker Nicholas Spink. Spink only held on to it a short while, and then sold it to Abial and Helena Sherman.

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 March. Please contact Mike Donohue at 267-0104 or mdonohuework@aol.com with your ideas or articles.

Abial Sherman and his wife Helena, daughter of wealthy Wickford merchant Jonathan Reynolds returned the business plan at the Huling House to its original arrangement of an Inn and Tavern. This fit in nicely with Abial's other business, that of a teamster, expressman, and stagecoach operator. Indeed, it was most probably during their ownership that the barn in back of the house was expanded into the larger stable configuration that we see today. Sherman, operated a stagecoach run in the region, hauled goods and packages where ever they needed to go in a hurry as an expressman, and had teams of draft animals for hire as well. Having an Inn and Tavern to put his guests up in, here in busy Wickford, certainly must have given him a leg up on the other stagecoach operators of the day. Abial & Helena lived off and on in Wickford and also had property in Coventry as well. While they were away they may have had either one of their daughters and their families run the Inn or hired someone. The Shermans operated the property for 33 years, until 1869 when daughter Jane (Sherman) Nottage sold it to local manufacturer Asa Sisson. Jane's husband Charles Nottage, along with her sister and brother-in-law Helena and T. Hiram Rouse were among the partners who owned the Eldred & Sagendorph gold locket factory on Brown St. Sisson had just bought that property to open as Bay Side Iron Forge and bought the Huling House as his home. A year later, he sold that business and the home as a package to local businessman Syria Vaughn.

During the four year time frame that the house was owned by the Sissons and then the Vaughns, they rented the big stable out to George Prentice who ran it as a livery stable; putting up and caring for travelers and visitors horses while they were here in the village. Prentice though, had bigger dreams and when the house came up for sale in 1872, he and his second wife Ellen, with the financial backing of the prominent and wealthy Baker family who held a note on the property, purchased it with the idea of opening it as the Wickford House

George Prentice's plan was to take advantage of the opportunity in the village presented by the recently opened Newport Rail & Steamship Line and the large influx of wealthy visitors and tourists to Wickford. While there were already a number of inns and hotels nearby, George's "ace in the hole" was his young wife Ellen an exceptional cook practiced in the art of homestyle New England cooking. This human whirlwind, known as Mother Prentice, turned the little inn into one of the most popular destinations in all of New England. So popular in fact that the Prentices, after they paid off their note to the Bakers in the 1880's, purchased the large Updike House next door (now demolished and replaced by St. Paul's Parish House) and converted it into guest rooms. Additionally they eventually leased the eastern half of the Thomas house on the other side and did the same. Still their waiting list was legendary. Her cooking was so popular that she had to, on a number of occasions, politely fend off requests from the Vanderbilts and Astors in Newport to quit the village and come work for them. Mother Prentice was one of the region's most well-known women; her name was in the paper and heard on the radio. Poems were even written about her and the Wickford House. George Prentice's dream was a smashing success. Not bad for a somewhat stoic and even a little bit dowdy girl from Wickford.

In 1921 after 49 years at the helm, the Prentice's retired and sold the Wickford House to Clarence Parker. Parker ran it successfully until the end of that decade when it was hit by the double whammy of the Great Depression and the closure of the Rail & steamship Line. They continued to live in the building. Later owners included the Huntingtons, Daniels, and their daughter, our own Petra Laurie. I look forward to seeing all of you at the annual meeting where we will learn more about this wonderful place.

Wickford Garden Tour...*coming soon*

Plans are in the making for another fabulous Wickford Garden Tour. Many homeowners with yards of all sizes and shaped have agreed to open their gardens for this tour. Artists will again be painting in many locations enabling you to see how the artistic eye sees each garden while also getting new ideas for your own yard. Plans for music entertainment are in the making and chances to win a beautiful quilt of Wickford will be for sale.

Be sure to mark your calendar for Saturday, July 17th. It will be a time to view beautiful gardens, visit with neighbors and friends, talk with talented artists and perhaps learn about new flowers for your own garden. Best of all, your ticket purchase will help support the North Kingstown Food Bank as all proceeds from the tour are going to this most worthwhile organization.

Historic Wickford, Inc.

P.O.Box 261

North Kingstown, RI 02852

***Wickford Yacht Club (end of Pleasant St.)
'A Journey Into History, The Alexander Huling House'
Presentation by local historian Tim Cranston
and Steve Tyson, Jr. of Architectural Preservation***