

Notes and News

for members and friends of the Rhode Island Historical Society

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Springtime for History



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Be Part of History

The Rhode Island Historical Society is a nonprofit organization sustained by our many generous donors, members and volunteers. While we preserve the past, our members and donors ensure our future through membership fees, special gifts, and donations. Rhode Island's history is the story of all the people who have lived here. We need your help to tell those stories.

Membership - Whether you join at the Basic Level or opt for a Lifetime Membership, your membership in the Rhode Island Historical Society supports our mission to collect, preserve and share the Ocean State's rich history. For more information please contact Ms. Mary Lou Upham at 401-331-8575, ext. 33.

How You Can Donate

Cash - Monetary donations are an important source of operational support for the Society programs including research and collections, exhibits, educational program support, equipment and staff development.

In-kind gifts - Donations of in-kind gifts may include equipment and/or materials to build or enhance exhibits, programs and special events. Donations of services are also a valuable way of contributing to the Society. Let us discuss your in-kind gift with you.

Stock and Bonds - Appreciated stocks or bonds make for a gift that benefits not only the Society but also benefits the giver with a significant tax advantage.

Gifts made through a will - Consult your estate planner to prepare the perfect gift for future generations of The Rhode Island Historical Society patrons

Life insurance - Declare the Rhode Island Historical Society as a beneficiary on a new or existing policy. This will ensure the Society's success for generations to come.

For information on ways to give, please call the Development office at 401-331-8575, ext .33, or mleeroy@rihs.org. All gifts are tax deductible to the extent provided by law. 

186 ANNUAL MEETINGS SO FAR, AND LOOKING FORWARD TO THE 187TH!

On Wednesday, November 7, 2007, the RIHS celebrated our progress, achievements, strength, and momentum toward the future at our 2007 Annual Meeting. Mayor David Cicilline brought greetings from the City of Providence and presented the Society with a Municipal Grant of Operating Support from the city.

We were honored to welcome as our speakers Dr. Patrick T. Conley and Judge Robert G. Flanders, Jr., co-authors of *The Rhode Island State Constitution: A Reference Guide*, a legal and historical compendium of Rhode Island's constitutional development. This book's historical introduction is the most succinct yet comprehensive survey ever written of Rhode Island's constitutional history. Members and guests were treated to a lively and participatory discussion with Dr. Conley and Judge Flanders, with engaging conversation among RIHS trustees, members, and staff continuing at the festive reception after the program.

Seeing Is Believing

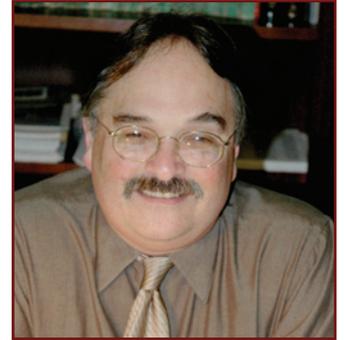
By Bernard Fishman

Our new public access online catalogue, the most important advance in the Society's collections-related management capacities and public service, is a stunning success! But even this triumph has put online only about 110,000 collection records, perhaps 20% of our whole collection; we still have years of work ahead to include the rest, besides future digitization of objects and images.

So how much remains to catalogue and put online? Well, we don't really know... but we are getting much closer to answers! Recent inventories and cataloguing projects have put many of our collections in good professional order. We know we have 6,000 manuscript collections, about 90,000 printed items, about 8,000 textiles, and perhaps 20,000 three-dimensional objects. But the most uncharted of all our collections is the Graphics collection, including all formats of photographs, negatives, movie films, maps, two-dimensional works of art, and sound recordings.

Over the years we have claimed to have anywhere from 150,000 to 250,000 photographs. Only partially catalogued, and afflicted by incompatible 'systems' imposed by successive curators, this bear of a collection has called (or roared!) out to be tamed by the application of professional management and standards. Now, thanks to a generous grant, Deputy Director Kirsten Hammerstrom, Special Collections Curator Karen Eberhart, and Graphics Assistant James Da Mico have begun our first

Graphics collection inventory, to include counting, basic cataloguing, re-housing in proper storage materials, and condition assessments. At a little more than a year into this project, we have reviewed about 75,000 photographic items, and now think there may be 300,000, or even 400,000 photos to assess! We will need several years of extra work, and much more grant money, as this collection appears to be twice as big as we thought. But this kind of effort is fundamental to what we do: if we don't know what we have, how can we share it with YOU?



And as a collector of photographs myself (I have some 21,000 late 19th and early 20th century photographs, mainly in stereo view format), I am personally invested in this kind of endeavor, as much of my historical sense is based on seeing images and believing through them what history tells us. So I am excited to realize that within a few years we will really know what our whole treasure of images contains. And for you photo sleuths who would like to know what my own collection contains, watch for the presentations I will be giving at our library about the fascinating World of Stereo views.

A Rich History with RIHS!

On January 16, 2008, the Rhode Island Historical Society said "Farewell!" in grand style to Carol Holscher, retiring after nearly twenty-one years as the Society's Executive Assistant. Nearly fifty Society staff and trustees attended to express their thanks and best wishes to guests of honor Carol and her husband Herman, and to shower the Society's longest continuously-serving employee with gifts and fond remembrances. We will all miss Carol, who sets an almost impossibly high standard in work and in life, showing kindness to all, quiet diligence and effectiveness at work, and a cheerful disposition no matter how tough the times or how difficult a day. When approached for some parting remarks, she wrote:

I am sitting at home relaxing with a book in front of a lovely fire burning in our fireplace, my thoughts drifting back to the twenty years spent working at the Rhode Island Historical



Society. The last five years have been exciting as I've witnessed the Society make great strides into the digital age as well as preserving our past with the restoration of our physical assets. I have truly enjoyed working with all the staff and

board members. What will the next twenty years bring – it will be exciting to find out!

Fondly,
Carol Holscher

Body, Body, Who's Got the Body? A Rhode Island Mystery....

Where in the World IS Roger Williams?

Many Rhode Islanders know the story of the apple-tree root that grew into something like the shape of a body where Roger Williams is supposed to have been buried. The root, with its own coffin-like display board, came into the Society's collections after Zachariah Allen excavated what he thought was William's grave in 1860.

Williams, who had died in 1683 (probably), was buried, as was typical for the time, in what became a small family plot at the edge of his property, now at the corner of Benefit and Bowen Streets in Providence. But within 50 years only the ruined cellar of his house could still be seen, with hardly a trace of the graves remaining. One Nathaniel Packard claimed that when a boy (about 1740) he saw the actual bones of Roger Williams when they were accidentally exposed by the digging of another grave nearby. The remains, he told his daughter (he never wrote down his story), were covered with a "mossy substance." By 1836 the aged abolitionist Moses Brown said that the grave of Roger Williams "is unknown."

But Allen thought he knew better and dug up what he believed were seven graves, at the corner of the old lot, including that of Roger Williams, intending to move Williams to a dignified place and give him a fine monument. He thought he had identified William's grave by its position, but when he opened it "not any vestige of any bone was discoverable...so completely had disappeared all earthly remains of the founder of the state...." He did, however, discover the now famous root. William Ely, who was present, wrote 46 years later (1906): "Roger Williams--body and blood--had passed into this root and risen from his earthly bed into the apple tree of the Dorr family above." So some greasy earth was scraped up, 'buried' in an urn in the North Cemetery (with a dollop put in a jar for the Historical

Society), and a mystery was born. Where is the body of Roger Williams? Other skeletons and artifacts were discovered within blocks of his 'grave,' so there don't seem to be any special flesh-eating qualities to the earth at the corner of Benefit and Bowen. More likely, they didn't find the grave, or the body had been already moved and is now lost. Whew! How could they lose one of the greatest of all Americans?!

If anyone finds him, please call the Society.

An Award to Treasure Indeed!

RIHS Receives Save America's Treasures Grant

The Rhode Island Historical Society has been awarded \$243,000 for the John Brown House restoration thanks to the highly competitive Save America's Treasures Grant Program. This much sought-after grant is awarded jointly by the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities and the National Park Service. Only 16 grants for historic building restorations were made nationwide in this year's competition, making the Rhode Island Historical Society one of a very select number of recipients.

The Save America's Treasures program helps conserve significant U.S. cultural and historic treasures associated with great events, ideas, and individuals that have contributed to our nation's history and culture.

In the last two months of 2007 the Society raised \$696,000 from five different funds for Phases III and IV of the John Brown House restoration project. Over the past three years a total of just under \$2 million has been raised for this effort. Given this recent success, we believe that we are within \$500,000 of reaching the final amount needed to complete the entire plan for rehabilitating one of Rhode Island's most important historic structures!

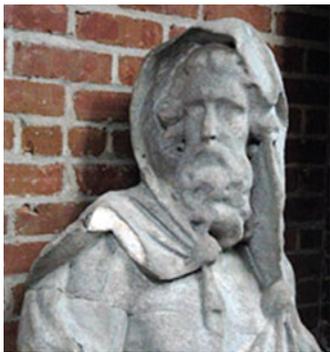
Museum of Work & Culture Kick-Off Capital and Endowment Campaign

With spirited assistance from volunteer-actors, Erik Eckilson, Romeo Berthiaume, and Danielle DeRotto, Museum Co-Directors Anne Conway and Raymond Bacon announced the launch of the Capital and Endowment Campaign. They were able to report the encouraging news that a silent phase, including donations from individuals committed to becoming Incorporators of the future Museum of Work & Culture Foundation, had already raised over \$200,000 of the Campaign's overall goal of \$750,000!

The main project of the Campaign, the development of the Treasury of Life Exhibit, was also unveiled. Once built, The Treasury of Life Exhibit will resemble a bank vault, only one containing items far more valuable than money. Over 250 safety deposit type boxes, each engraved with the family name, will be offered to families and individuals, in which to store such memorabilia as letters, photographs, birth certificates, immigration forms, and other precious, irreplaceable papers documenting family history. One hundred percent of the proceeds from the sale of the Treasury of Life boxes will go to the Museum's endowment.

Statues for All Seasons: the John Brown House Busts of Summer and Winter to Return, Restored!

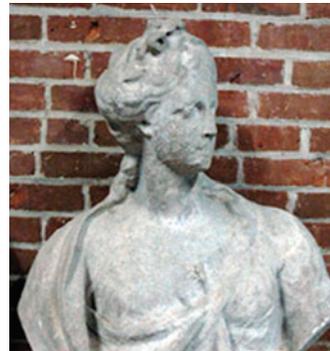
For nearly two centuries two dignified busts stood on the exterior gateposts of the John Brown House. Based on a 1790 letter in which John Brown asked his son-in-law, John Frances, to buy some busts while in Versailles, France, we believe that these pieces, along with the four similar sculptures that remain in the house, were bought there.



Hades

The six busts represent divinities from classical mythology, and they would have expressed the cultured learning and sound education that the owner of the house would have wished his visitors to assume he had. Inside the house are Apollo (God of the Sun), Artemis (Goddess of the Moon), Dionysus (God of

Wine), and Ceres (Goddess of the Harvest). The identifications are based on appearance or attributes, and are thus not in every case certain. On the gateposts outside were Hades, God of the Underworld, bearded and cloaked, and Persephone,



Persephone

his unwilling bride, who shuttled between earth and the underworld and brought the growing, fertile seasons of the year only when she was actually with the living on the surface; in her absence, the earth was shrouded in deathly winter. Naturally, to the people of Providence these

busts came to be known as Summer and Winter, and rarely have two statues witnessed so much history: George Washington's visit to the John Brown House, the agitation of the Civil War, the Gilded Age renovation of the house under tycoon Marsden Perry, and the Depression. By the 1980s, however, they had become so eroded by the elements that they were brought inside the house, leaving the gateposts bereft ever since.

But their return is assured! By the end of 2008, Summer and Winter will again take up their vigil outside the John Brown House, or at least reproductions of them, watching knowingly over life on Power Street. Be sure to look for them! ❧

RIHS IS RESTORED

Phase II of the John Brown House restoration has now been completed, at a cost of nearly \$500,000. Our deep thanks go to the Champlin Foundations and the 1772 Foundation, the largest supporters of this phase of the work. We completed all the repairs needed for the north exterior of the house: roof, drainage systems, woodwork, masonry, new storm windows, new lightning protection, new exterior lighting systems, and new plantings inspired by Marsden Perry's plan of 1900. Since 2004 we have spent about \$1.2 million on the John Brown House, and we are now engaged in raising the funds for Phase III, which will complete the exterior work by rebuilding the now-collapsing pergola and the front gate, and replacing a great deal of deteriorated brownstone on the building. After that, there is plenty to do on the inside – no rest for the weary! But make sure you come and admire our progress so far – our outstanding historical landmark is looking better than at any other time in the past century!

RIHS IS IMPROVED

We have just finished repainting the outside of Aldrich House and repairing and rebuilding chimneys so deteriorated that a strong wind might have blown them off the roof. We are now repainting the front hall and dining room, and new carpets are on the way. With the house refurbished, we can resume renting out this glorious historic place. So think of your spring and summer events, and imagine how much more special they'd be in the unique and beautiful setting of Aldrich House!

RIHS IS ENRICHED

In November and December 2007 we received the delightful news that we would receive a total of \$448,000 in new grants for the continuing renovation of the John Brown House. Our heartfelt thanks go to the Champlin Foundations, the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, and the Felicia Fund for their tremendous generosity in furthering this complex and multi-stage process. These grants will allow us to complete Phase III of the restoration project in 2008, including all remaining work on the outside of the building.

Summer Like It's SUPPOSED to Be:

A CLOSER LOOK AT STEREOVIEW PHOTOGRAPHY

Take a closer look at the world of stereoview photography with RIHS Executive Director Bernard Fishman. This Spring, Mr. Fishman will be giving an illustrated three-part lecture series on the historical value of photographic stereoviews. The dates of these lectures are Wednesday March 5, Wednesday April 2, and Wednesday May 7 at 5:30 pm and all take place at the RIHS Library.



talks on the anti-slavery movement in Woonsocket, the collapse of New France, and the history of Burrillville. For more details on these lectures, visit our website: www.rihs.org.

THE WALLS ARE STILL TALKING...

Gallery Night Providence returns this March, and so does the lecture series *If These Walls Could Talk...* at the John Brown House Museum. The series runs from March – June, and again from September – November. This season, expect to become quite familiar with Rhode Island history. Stanley Lemons starts the season off with a lecture on the First Baptist Church in America, followed by Paul Eno and Glenn Laxton speaking on their joint work, *Rhode Island: A Genial History* in April. For a complete schedule and more information, visit our website: www.rihs.org, or contact Dalila Goulart at (401) 331-8575 x45.

Starting April 6, the Museum of Work & Culture's gallery will be showcasing Robert Godin's photography exhibit entitled "Along the Atlantic Seaboard," which will feature idyllic views of familiar coastal scenes from New Jersey to Prince Edward Island.

As always, the Museum will be hosting its Annual Labor Day Open House, this year on Monday, September 1 from 9:30 am – 4 pm. Admission is free inside the Museum and to all its events today, including the annual book sale. Stay tuned to the website for more details.

COME CELEBRATE HISTORY IN THE MAKING

Make sure to mark your calendar to attend the RIHS's History Makers 2008 Gala on Saturday, June 7. This year, the signature award ceremony and fundraiser takes place at the Johnson & Wales Culinary Arts Museum in Providence. For more information on this spectacular event, see back page.

LET RHODE ISLAND HISTORY MOVE YOU!

SummerWalks – historical walking tours of Providence, June 15 – October 15, 2008. Made possible in part by generous support from Parkside Rostisserie & Bar, AAA Southern New England, the Providence Biltmore Hotel, and Whole Foods Market.

The Benefit Street and RiverWalk tours begin at the John Brown House Museum. For more information, please contact Barbara Barnes at bbarnes@rihs.org or (401) 273-7507 x62.

AT THE MUSEUM OF WORK & CULTURE

The RIHS officially welcomes Spring with the annual "Salute to Spring Celebration!" at the Museum of Work & Culture. This year, the event is on Sunday, March 9 from 1 pm – 5 pm, and includes musical entertainment by Josée Vachon and two history presentations. Tickets are \$15. For more information, call Anne Conway, (401) 769-9675.

The Ranger Days series will be continuing at the Museum until March 30, with

BENEFIT STREET: A MILE OF HISTORY

Two hundred and fifty years of history in one action-packed mile: trace the steps of George Washington and Edgar Allan Poe, find a 19th century armory, a 17th century burial site, a world-class art museum, and the homes of a Declaration of Independence signer and a Civil War general!

Tuesdays through Saturdays at 11 am; Adults \$12; Seniors and RIHS members \$10; Children under 12, \$6

RIVERWALK: BEFORE THE FIRES ARE LIT

Discover the winding history and continued importance of Providence's rivers! Evenings of full WaterFire lightings at 5:30 pm; \$10 per person. RiverWalk tours are presented in collaboration with WaterFire Providence. For schedule of WaterFire lightings: www.waterfire.org, or (401) 272-3111.

DOWNCITY: A 21ST CENTURY DEBUT!

The Providence renaissance meets the Victorian city center in Downcity Alive!, perhaps RIHS's most dynamic summer tour. Learn the fabled pasts of such glorious icons as Grace Church, the Providence Biltmore Hotel, the Turk's Head Building, and the Arcade. Downcity Providence is an award-winning urban neighborhood and the heart and soul of a proud capital city. Tours depart from the Providence Biltmore on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 4 pm, \$10 per person.

CELEBRATING H.P. LOVECRAFT: A LITERARY WALK

This walking tour celebrates the life and work of Providence native and author Howard Phillips Lovecraft. Lovecraft's "Providence stories" provide the basis for this walk. The tour will be offered on Saturday, March 15, the anniversary of Lovecraft's death, and on Saturday, August 16, the anniversary of his birth. Tours start from the John Brown House Museum at 11 am; \$12 per person.

A FOX POINT FOURTH OF JULY!

On Saturday, June 28 and Saturday, July 5, the scheduled 11 am walking tours will be patriotic strolls through Providence's Fox Point neighborhood. Come learn about the life and works of Providence native George M. Cohan, the original Yankee Doodle Dandy, and discover the history of 4th of July celebrations in the city.

Also, the June 19 *If These Walls Could Talk...* lecture will feature music scholar Michael Fink to speak about Cohan, and don't forget The American Band will be kicking off this year's Concert Under the Elms on June 26 with some pieces of rousing American music.

CONCERTS UNDER THE ELMS 2008

- June 26** **The American Band**
Patriotic music and “pops” repertoire
- July 10** **Duke Robillard Band**
Classic blues, R & B, and swing
- July 17** **Magnolia**
Cajun music
- July 24** **Pendragon**
Celtic-inspired “roots music”
- July 31** **Greg Abate Jazz Quartet**
Swinging melodic jazz standards and original music in the same style
- August 7** **Driftwoods**
Beach Boys tribute band

Adults \$8; Children under 12 free; RIHS members and accompanying minor children, free.

All concerts begin at 6:30PM on the John Brown House lawn. 52 Power Street, Providence.

NO PETS ALLOWED

For more information contact Mary Lou Upham 401-331-8575, ext. 33 or mlupham@rihs.org

DON'T MISS HOME MOVIE DAY AT THE RIHS!

Pull out those old home movies and join other devotees of homemade cinema at Aldrich House on Saturday, October 25th, to screen films and celebrate amateur filmmaking - all while learning how to protect and save your family's films for generations to come! Mark your calendars now, and don't miss this event to preserve your favorite filmed memories!

Home Movie Day Wish List

For the past two summers the RIHS Library has hosted our state's Home Movie Day, and we're looking forward to doing it again. What do we need from you? We need your home movies: 8mm, 16mm, VHS, whatever you've got. **CLOSE-UP ON..... YOUR OLD MOVIES!**

For more information please contact Karen Eberhart, Special Collections Curator, at 273-8107 x20, or keberhart@rihs.org, or visit our website: www.rihs.org/grcollfilm.htm.

AT THE CENTER OF IT ALL: THE NEWELL D. GOFF CENTER FOR EDUCATION AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Many of you have been enlightened by our *If These Walls Could Talk* lecture series or taken tours of the newly reinterpreted John Brown House Museum. In the summer, you've treated your out-of-town relatives to an eye-opening walking tour of Benefit Street. Or perhaps you've participated in our Teaching American History Professional Development courses or enjoyed one of our annual Goff Lectures. Well, if you've engaged in any of these activities, then you're a beneficiary of the Newell D. Goff Center for Education and Public Programs—the outreach and education arm of the Rhode Island Historical Society.

Created in 2004, thanks to the foresight and generous funding of one of the Society's best friends, the Goff Center plans the public programs for the RIHS, including lectures, workshops, teacher training, walking tours, and the tours of the John Brown House Museum. In a fortuitous partnership rare among historical societies, the Goff Center educators work directly with the experts of the collections staff to interpret the Society's museums.

The broad scope of the Center's mission is thankfully matched by the equally broad talents of its strong and cohesive team. Goff Center Director, Dr. Morgan Greffe, has the distinct honor of working with Marie Parys, Teaching American History Program coordinator; Dalila Goulart, programs and tours coordinator; Barbara Barnes, special tours and conventions manager; and Dan Santos, education and tours manager at the John Brown House Museum. Each brings a level of skill and enthusiasm without match to his or her work, and together they keep the Goff Center at the center of the Society's public mission.





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 HISTORY MAKERS 2008

DON'T MISS A CHANCE TO MAKE HISTORY HISTORY MAKERS GALA, JUNE 7TH 2008

Join us for the Rhode Island Historical Society's biennial fundraising Gala, History Makers, on Saturday, June 7, 2008 at 6:00pm, and celebrate with us the contributions of individuals whose accomplishments have enhanced the quality of life in Rhode Island and who stand as inspiring role models for generations to come!

Our 2008 History Makers honorees are individuals who, by direct and positive achievements, contributions, actions, and ideas have shaped the past and present of our state in the areas of arts and humanities, business, education, government, and sports. Honorary Chairpersons Mr. and Mrs. Malcolm and Elizabeth Chace and Chairpersons Ms. Lisa Churchville and Mr. Alex (Skip) Carlin graciously invite you to join us at the Johnson and Wales Culinary Arts Museum for a historic evening! The Gala begins at 6:00 with a cocktail reception, followed by the speaking program, when we will recognize the accomplishments of the evening's

honorees, including Dr. Robert Ballard, one of the world's foremost oceanographers and the discoverer of The Titanic; The Honorable Bruce Selya, senior federal judge on U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit; and Mr. Jim Taricani, highly respected and award-winning investigative news reporter. Dr. Ballard will deliver the keynote address. Guests will then enjoy dinner, music and dessert – how else to end the perfect summer's night?

Proceeds benefit the Rhode Island Historical Society – please help us make and preserve history!

Tickets are available at a range of prices, starting at \$150 per person. For more information or to purchase tickets, please call 401-331-8575, ext. 33. 