

# The Historian

BURRILLVILLE HISTORICAL & PRESERVATION SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2005

## Bell Tower Gang Strikes Again !

After the flooding rains on October 15th we were pleasantly surprised to learn that the basement in the Bridgeton School was dry. The two pump systems installed by Basement Technologies worked perfectly. So while many other homes and businesses were experiencing wet basement problems, for the first time since probably the school was built, the school's basement was dry! However, the driving rains found their way through the rope hole in the bell tower. The rope acted like a wick and rainwater dripped down to the hallway floor. Also, the lead collar that the rope is threaded through had recently been chewed on. A week later, the bell tower gang chewed through the bell rope and we found it in a pile in the hallway. Betty and Carlo Mencucci installed a 14" length of 1 1/4" PVC pipe into the lead collar and it was then sealed with butyl rubber to prevent anymore leaks. The rope was rethreaded and so far, this solution has thwarted any further attempts by the gang to break into the bell tower.



## Burrillville celebrates 200 years of history

Burrillville will be 200 years old in 2006. To help celebrate this bicentennial, BH&PS will be putting on a series of slide shows throughout the year. So mark your calendars, as we will be showing some photos that have not been seen in some time. Other tentative plans for the celebration include the publishing of the Ross diary, publishing the histories from past newsletters, printing more glass plate negatives, Burrillville birthday T-shirt, and a birthday party at our Open House in October. Also don't forget the 2006 calendars and the 200th Birthday Video project.

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### *President's Message*

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2006 will be a busy year for the Society as we celebrate Burrillville's 200th birthday. The Town Bicentennial Committee is planning a number of events and I hope we can participate in those events as well as our own.

Unfortunately, we did not receive a State Preservation Grant, Champlin Foundations

grant, or the Transportation grant so there will be no restoration work done on the two front porches this year. I would like to spend some of our own money to deal with all the water being pumped out of the building. In the winter time it freezes, causing a major ice flow in the parking lot. I would also like to create a plan for our existing closet space and install better shelving, so that we can have better access to all of our

archives.

I continue to ask you to keep saving those Dino's and IGA receipts. We beat last year's total by several hundred dollars. Let's try to beat that total in 2006!

*Merry Christmas and*

### **Upcoming Meetings/Events**

January 24 - Indian Acres Slide show by Pam Cardin

February 28 - Bridgeton slide show by Patricia Mehrtens

March 28 - Harrisville slide show by Betty Mencucci & Mabel Hopkins

April 25 - Wallum Lake slide show by Joyce McKenna

## Burrillville Teachers meet at the Bridgeton School

On December 1 a group of about 20 teachers visited the Bridgeton School to learn about the Society's collections and how they may use the resources of the Society in their classrooms. Betty Mencucci made the presentation which included a slide show of old photos. After the presentation, Denice Mitchell, Shirley Richard and Carlo Mencucci helped answer questions and assisted in providing tours of the building.

### 200th Birthday Video Project

We are looking for photos of any of the old class pictures and school buildings in town. We are also looking for any photos taken of the Bridgeton School even when it was a kindergarten. If you have photos, please contact Betty at 568-8449.

### Book Sale

We are planning to have a book sale at the Bridgeton School in January or February. Pam Cardin initiated this event with her offer to donate "a ton of books." If you have any books you would like to add to the sale, please contact one of the officers.

### Past Meetings

At our September meeting, Ginnie Leslie showed slides on historic sites along the North/South Hiking Trail. She gave us an interesting tour beginning at the ocean in Charlestown and ending with views from the top of the tower on Buck Hill. At our October meeting, Tom D'Agostino gave a presentation titled "The Haunts of Burrillville." He told stories of strange happenings in town and gave us an insight into the tools used by those investigating the paranormal. Tom has written a book titled "Haunted Rhode Island," a collection of legends, folklore and haunted places in Rhode Island. It will be available in bookstores soon and is available online now at [schifferbooks.com](http://schifferbooks.com).

### Pascoag Victorian Holiday Celebration

A new addition to this year's event was a bus that transported people from downtown Pascoag to the Bridgeton School. People came to see the Old Photo display and to do a little holiday

Please note: Joyce McKenna has resigned as treasurer. Ron Lapierre will continue to do the job

## Butter Churning highlights "Footsteps in History" weekend

Butter churning using the Davis Swing Churn with readings from the Nancy Ross diary was the feature event during the "Footsteps in History" weekend. Thanks to everyone who helped bake, clean, set up displays, and to those who devoted their time during this three-day event.



Linda Straube and Betty Mencucci churn the butter

## 3rd Annual Victorian Holiday Bazaar

The bazaar, which was held on two separate Saturdays, was a big success this year making over \$1,400. A big thank you to all the businesses who donated prizes for our raffles and to all the hard workers who helped make this a success. Also thanks to Affordable Tent Rental for the use of their tables. Congratulations to Ashley for being our highest raffle ticket seller.



Kathy, Ashley and Ken Hopkins anxiously await the results of the drawing of the penny social.

### \$1000 Grant from Ocean State Power

We are pleased to announce that we have received a \$1000 grant from Ocean State Power to aid in the purchase of a video projector. This projector will allow us to show PowerPoint presentations, computerized slide

2006 Historic Calendars  
on sale now.  
Limited supply, only \$15.00

## Donations

Dick Farnum donated meeting record books from 1884-1942 belonging to the Odd Fellows Granite Lodge.

Life Magazines - Claire Cunningham

Mona Begin - let us scan photos of the 1976 bicentennial parade.

Joyce Knibb donated two yearbooks (1927 + 1928) and *History of Burrillville* by Ralph Peters. She also donated a box of historical papers including information on historic districts, miscellaneous old photos and an old map of the estate of Samuel Ross of Bridgeton and how it was divided among the heirs.

Lucille Brown donated photos of the 1927 flood.

Virginia Parkin McGrath donated a copy of her genealogy going back to the Mayflower.

Tom and Arlene D'Agostino donated recent photos of the Hannah Frank and John Burke graves in Tarkiln.

Jesse M. Smith Library donated extra copies of yearbooks 1951-1954, also 1985, 1996, 1999.

Beverly Soderlund donated an old wooden bowl.

Betty Mencucci donated an old decanter found in Tarkiln Mill ruins.

Russell Lacey let us scan photos of the 1978 firemen's parade.

Joyce McKenna donated 11 old school books and an a copper inkwell-filler.

Pam Cardin donated a collection of genealogy

## Flooding Rains Rival Storm of 1927

On October 15 Burrillville experienced flooding rains similar to the flood of 1927. Sections of roads were washed out in Glendale and Nasonville. Streams overflowed their banks onto the roadways forcing many roads to close. The entire ballfield was flooded at the Callahan School as well as the road in front of the school. On Centennial Street, the Clear River overflowed its banks and ran through several houses. The Branch River in Nasonville overflowed into residents' houses as well. The Clear River running under Railroad Avenue was a raging torrent. But the most threatening high water was at the Harrisville dam. Officials closed a section of East Avenue fearing that the dam might let go. The fast moving water was brown as it poured over the dam filling up the area below at a level near the top of the stone arch bridge.



### Flood photos taken by Carlo Mencucci

Top - Harrisville dam

Center - Stone arch bridge and foot bridge at Harrisville dam

Bottom - Callahan School with School Street under several feet of water.

## The Animals of Christmas

We are all familiar with the Christmas Nativity – Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the Three Kings and perhaps an angel and a shepherd. Usually, along with the humans are the animals – a cow or ox, goats, sheep, a donkey and, perhaps a camel. Some of the more elaborate Nativity scenes put the three Kings on a camel, a horse and an elephant to be more representative of the areas the Kings came from. All of the animals of the Nativity played special roles. There were other animals, too, whose roles are not as well known.

Legend has it that the donkey was given something very special to mark it for all time as the animal that so loyally served Jesus, Mary and Joseph. All donkeys have a black stripe going down the center of their backs and another that transects it at the shoulder – forever marking the little grey donkey with the sign of the cross.

There is a story about a very old, very lame grey horse who stood in the cold waiting for his master to pay his respects to the Christ Child. For his loyal service, he was cured of his lameness and made young again. Horses play a more modern role, too, in that it is horses pulling sleighs frequently depicted in old fashioned winter scenes – especially those shown in the prints of Currier and Ives. It is the horses' harnesses that are decorated with "jingle bells" that announce the arrival of the sleigh.

As the Holy Family lay sleeping in the stable that night, the fire began to burn low. A little brown bird flew into the stable and lit by the fire. He began flapping his wings, fanning the coals until they glowed hot once again. The little robin's breast reddened with the heat but he did not give up his task until all the coals burst into flame. The robin's breast remains red today as a sign of his service to the Christ Child.

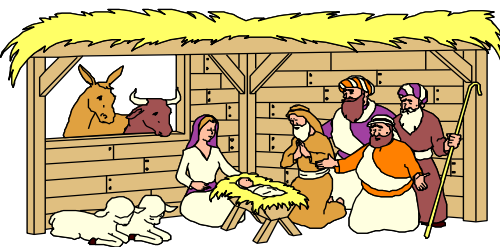
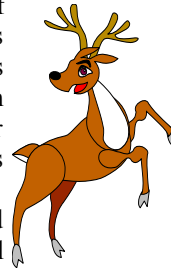
The nightingale flew into the stable that night at a time when the Christ Child was restive and could not be comforted. He added his voice to Mary's lullaby and helped to calm the Christ Child. For his help in calming her son, Mary told the bird that from then on all nightingales would have her own voice. The nightingale's song is the loveliest of all bird songs and, it is said, the forest grows quiet to hear the song of the little bird who helped to sing the Christ Child to sleep.

The stork, long associated with bringing children into the world, was said to have given some of her own feathers to line the manger for the infant Jesus.

The much-maligned and often-feared spider even has a place among the "animals" of Christmas. An old Polish folk tale tells of the little grey spider who had spun her web in a far corner of the stable in Bethlehem away from the other animals who thought her ugly. When Jesus was cold and began to cry, the spider brought her silken web to cover him. In return, Mary offered the spider anything it wanted. It wished to be beautiful but Mary told her she could not change the way the spider looked. Instead, she told the spider that from then on whenever people saw a spider in the evening it would mean good fortune. Today, we preserve the little grey spider's memory by decorating the tree with angel hair. Oh, yes, and it is supposed to be bad luck to kill a spider.

Reindeer have been associated with Christmas and Santa Claus for many years. The "eight tiny reindeer" of Clement Moore's "The Night Before Christmas" – Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner and Blitzen – became very real to children everywhere. Of course, reindeer are as much a beast of burden in the "frozen north" as the donkey is in warmer climates. They are used to pull sleds and as pack animals just as donkeys are used to pull wagons and as pack animals. They are also somewhat flashier with their spectacular antlers than the little grey donkey (both male and female reindeer have antlers and, so say the experts, the ones who pull Santa's sleigh are females because the males would have already dropped their antlers).

On Christmas Eve, as you trip over Rover or step on Boots' tail as you head for your well-deserved rest, think about this. Legend has it that the animals rest until the stroke of midnight on Christmas Eve. It is then that they begin to talk – proclaiming the birth of Christ. It is said that even the insects sing carols as they fly. The animals may even predict the future. Another part of the legend says that Christ gave animals the gift of speech for one night a year in return for giving him and his family shelter in Bethlehem. Still another says that the animals discuss the treatment they receive from their masters. I wonder what mine would say.....



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year  
Pam Cardin

### BH&PS Officers

#### President

Betty Mencucci  
1777 Victory Hwy  
Glendale, RI 02826  
(401) 568-8449

#### Vice-President

Denice Mitchell  
41 Merrimac Road  
N. Smithfield, RI  
02895  
(401) 769-8174

#### Secretary

Rose Shaw  
725 Wallum Lake Rd.  
Pascoag, RI 02859  
(401) 568-8872

#### Treasurer

Ron Lapierre  
1050 Mt. Pleasant Rd.  
Nasonville, RI  
02830  
66-9195

#### Directors

Shirley Richard  
611 South Main St.  
Pascoag, RI 02859  
(401) 568-6295

John Shaw  
725 Wallum Lake Rd.  
Pascoag, RI 02859  
(401) 568-8872

Liz Morin  
424 Church St.  
Pascoag, RI 02859  
(401) 568-7986

**Burrillville Historical  
& Preservation  
Society  
Box 93  
16 Laurel Hill Ave.  
Pascoag, RI 02859  
(401) 568-8534**

[www.bhps.org](http://www.bhps.org)

**The BH&PS meets on the fourth  
Tuesday of each month at 7:00 p.m.**