



1351 CRANSTON STREET
CRANSTON • RHODE ISLAND 02920

NEWSLETTER

Next Meeting
Tuesday, January 20, 1981
8:00 p.m.
At Sprague Mansion

CRANSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
1351 CRANSTON STREET
CRANSTON, R.I. 02920

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 663
PROVIDENCE, R.I.

B. . . Historical Society January C
121 Hope Street
Providence, R. . . 02906

f89 c8 c83
Jan. 1981

Guest Speaker - Hugo Bert

Whether you just save old elastic bands and buttons or go in for more expensive Hummel figurines or crystal paper weights, you are a collector and one of the largest groups of this or any other society. Most all of us collect something, and our speaker this month will tell us about some of the unique things that he has made a hobby of acquiring. Almost everything that has ever existed has been collected by someone for some reason. You'll be surprised, and we'll guarantee interested, by some of the collectable items.

* * * * *

Welcome to the following new members:

Mr. Calvin B. Dewey
80 Lyndon Rd., Cranston, RI 02905
Mr. Ralph Sword
157 Fiat Ave., Cranston, RI 02920

* * * * *

In Memoriam James Scott

Although we have a policy of not elaborating on obituaries, we felt that it was only fitting that we should point out to those who might have missed it that Jim Scott passed away on Dec. 12th while visiting with his son and family for the holidays.

Betty and Jim were so much a part of our lives during the years that they served as residents of Sprague Mansion and Jim's abrupt illness can only leave us with the happiest memories of the once genial host of Sprague Mansion. We will always remember the hearty handshake and the friendly smile as he opened the door at 1351 Cranston St. and greeted friend and stranger alike with equal warmth.

Let's say it was quality rather than quantity — About 500 people attended Christmas Open House last month, and although the numbers were fewer those who came seemed to enjoy it more. For one thing there were no lines in the

cold waiting to get in. At any rate, the decorations seemed lovelier than ever, the endless supply of cookies was delicious, as usual, and everyone had a chance to leisurely enjoy what they had come for. Our gratitude to everyone who helped make it a success!

* * * * *

Now's the time — It's that time of year when IRS sends out your tax forms and we must remind you that your dues of \$5.00 are now payable. You may either pay Virginia Jennison at the January meeting or send a check to her at 10 Richard St., Cranston, R.I. 02910 - just remember to make the check payable to the Cranston Historical Society.

* * * * *

Come rain or snow — Let's try to get a large turnout for the January meeting. Don't forget we need your vote on the sale of the 1880 House.

* * * * *

Tips from the Curator — The old rhyme goes:

“As the days begin to lengthen
The cold begins to strengthen.”

And as it does, we need to bundle up when we go out of the house. At this monthly meeting we'll have a display of outside clothing that was used to keep people warm in the olden days. We'll put out what we have for all ages — babies to adults.

* * * * *

Gift Shop Sale — Not to be outdone by all the department stores, we are having our own after-Christmas sale on holiday items.

Large size Red Farm Christmas cards are now selling at \$2.25 (originally \$3.50 a box)

Smaller size Red Farm Christmas cards now selling at \$1.75 (originally \$2.50 a box)

Christmas wrapping paper marked down from 79¢ to 50¢. You may have missed the sales in the stores the day after Christmas, but come in and browse at the January meeting. You can still find a bargain.

CURATOR'S CORNER STRANGE VISITORS IN NARRAGANSETT BAY

by
Gladys W. Brayton

There have been some strange visitors in Rhode Island waters over the years, both interesting and frightening. Many came in the earlier days when our bay waters were clear and clean — free from the contamination of later day progress.

In the summer of 1862 a seal was reported traveling about the Providence River and in July a 20 foot blackfish drew crowds to Crawford Bridge and vicinity. Blackfish are a small species of toothed whales which feed on smaller sea creatures. They usually swim in schools, but Willie, as the crowd had named him, had strayed from the group. For six days he cavorted between Point St. and the Providence River bridges, much to the delight of his big audiences. But then he was found floating on the surface. However, Willie had still another surprise for his audience, for Willie turned out to be a female. Weighted, the body was towed out in the bay to be sunk for burial but continued to float, block in tow. It was finally interred in the Great Swamp.

The winter of 1800-81 brought seals back to Narragansett Bay. Passengers on the steamer Eolus on her regular trips from Newport to Wickford frequently saw them during February 1881. On one occasion 35 were seen at play and 14 on one piece of ice. They seemed not at all afraid at the approach of the boat.

In 1894 Lon Crandall of Pawtuxet spotted a porpoise in Pawtuxet Cove trying to get into the Pawtuxet River. A crowd gathered and attempts were made to capture it. Wounded in several places by a spear, Charles Gorton and Walter Case finally succeeded, after a hard struggle, in getting a rope fastened to it and it was secured. It was 7 ft. in length and weighed 300 pounds. Many people came to view it, for such a fish had never been seen here before. It was later placed on exhibition.

Fifteen years elapsed before the next unusual visitor is on record. This event took place in Greenwich Bay. While oystermen were raking for oysters there on October 8, 1909 one of the group brought a tiny sea horse to the surface. Quite in contrast to earlier visitors it was only 6 inches long, including its long curling tail, a real find in these waters.

Four years later on September 4, 1913 a small boy was bathing at Pawtuxet cove when he suddenly saw a fin approaching and the next moment was confronted with a set of teeth. With a shout of fright he whirled about and made for shore as fast as he could. The visitor proved to be a shark which made itself quite at home for a day or two in the cove. It was frisky and friendly and, whenever the boys went fishing in the cove, went over to enjoy the fun. Attempts, of course, were made to catch it, but no one succeeded in getting it to swallow any bait or come within reach of a harpoon. It enjoyed its stay and then disappeared.

A rare hair seal was seen at the foot of Armington St., Cranston in 1926. Workmen from Johnston's Boat Yard chased it in a rowboat and got close enough to touch it with an oar. Later it was reported near Gaspee Point. The seals are said to be common on the northern Massachusetts coast and it is believed the visitor here made its way through the Cape Cod Canal.

Seals have been occasional visitors near the mouth of the bay and in the bay. On May 6, 1919 a white fur seal was shot off Block Island, but seldom has one ventured so near the city.

One of two seals which had been covorting near the Edgewood Yacht Club and the Rhode Island Yacht Club for ten days was found dead June 24, 1955 near the high water line of the Naval Reserve Training Center. The Providence River water was just more than it could take.

Thus are recorded in old records, newspapers and remenicenses visitors in our bay waters during the 19th and 20th centuries. Times have changed and our bay waters have changed. Only time will tell whether we have written finis to these unusual visitors.