

CURATOR'S CORNER

continued

and early 1800s and carries the names of people from Providence to Scituate, he was so popular and his practice so wide. His homestead was about where Waterman Avenue is now.

In the Oak Lawn section, Job Wilbur, the tavern keeper of Knightsville, made his influence felt when he moved to Searle's Corner and changed the name of that village through his generous offer of a thousand oak trees if the name could be changed to "Oak Lawn". The name of the main street in the village was given his own name, "Wilbur Avenue". Perhaps his good wife, Phoebe, should share in the glory too, for it was she who originated the idea of the May Breakfast which has raised so many thousands of dollars over the years for churches and societies, not only in Cranston and Rhode Island but in other areas as well.

All the wars seem to have contributed to our Cranston directory. In Oak Lawn the Spanish War contributed Warman Avenue. It was first named "Dewey Avenue", but there seems to have been another street of that name; so it was changed to Warman, for Dewey was a war man -- as someone put forth as an argument for its adoption.

We have Legion Way in Auburn, for the first World War, and all our Memorial Parks and Squares are dedicated to veterans of the various wars.

Before 1890, Cranston roads were dirt and often mud roads. To Phineas Conley, Cranston's first Road Commissioner, goes the credit for the first improvement in road building and the laying of the first macadamized roads in our city. Conley Avenue, Oak Lawn honors him for his contribution to the betterment of our highways.

So, by reading street signs and knowing their stories, we find we have a "Ladder of Learning" as the title of an early children's book suggests.

May, 1980

CRANSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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CRANSTON, R.I. 02920

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NEWSLETTER

Next Meeting

Tuesday, May 20, 1980

8:00 p.m.

At Sprague Mansion

GUEST SPEAKER

Lisa Silander

Unless you attended their recent Fair at Brown, probably not many of us are familiar with the functions of International House, whose base of operations is on Stimson Avenue in Providence. Our guest speaker, who serves as Program Coordinator for International House, will tell us about the aims and many activities of this organization. Her talk will be accompanied by slides.

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— IN MEMORIAM —

Miss Dorothy M. Mitchaem
21A Forand Circle
Johnston, Rhode Island 02919

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Dues still dribbling in --- Most of our current membership of four hundred and twenty five have dutifully remitted their dues, but we still have a few members who may have been out of state or out of touch for a variety of reasons. Those members will be reminded by our billing system until June, and then will have to be removed from our files. \$5.00 sent to Virginia Jenison, 10 Richard Street, Cranston, Rhode Island 02910, will keep you in touch with us through the Newsletter whether you are able to attend the meetings and various functions or not.

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Spring marches on --- By the time this Newsletter reaches you the bloom in the Winsor's Azalea Garden will be gone, but we do want to thank the many members who donated a few hours of their time, and perhaps froze to death, staffing the garden during its scheduled opening from Sunday, May 11th to Wednesday, May 21st. It's one of the pleasanter opportunities offered our Society rather than a duty. Again, we are grateful to the Winsors for sharing their garden for our enjoyment and betterment.

Antique Show creeping up --- One hundred and ten letters have been sent out to antique dealers by Elmer Armstrong for our Antique Show to be held on the grounds of Sprague Mansion on Saturday, May 31st, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Rain date: Sunday, June 1st). Now we just have to wait for the good weather and try to be in a receptive mood when someone asks us to buy a raffle ticket or donate food to the food tables, which will be one of our main sources of income from this affair. We also hope to see crowds of people browsing and munching that day. Where else can you go so conveniently on the holiday weekend where there is no admission charge and free parking, a chance to win a \$50.00 Liquor Basket or twenty gallons of gas, a variety of foods available all day and homemade food to take home with you besides. Until then -- *THINK SUN—SHINE!*

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Upkeep on property going forward --- As soon as the weather will permit, the front and two sides of Sprague Meeting House will be painted. The fourth side may be tackled by the Cranston Vocational Technical School as part of a class project. The latter plan is still under consideration.

Renovation of the inside of the Carriage House is scheduled to start in May. Brick on the outside has already been sand blasted and pointed up, and the woodwork has been repainted.

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Tips from the Curator --- Because this is the election year of 1980, it seems appropriate that we should have a display of our possessions that have to do with past elections.

For two years now, our May monthly display has been arranged in the French curio-cabinet in the Ballroom and left for the summer open-houses. The small items will be arranged there this time with some larger ballots, voting list, etcetera on exhibit in the sun room.

We have just four political buttons -- two for Wilkie and two for Coolidge. If anyone has old political buttons they would like to loan to be in the display for summer, they would add color to our election exhibit.

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CURATOR'S CORNER

What's In A Name?

by

Gladys W. Brayton

To pursue our adventure in "Signs of the Times" further, we will perhaps jog the memories of some and introduce others to a bit of local lore.

Ocean Street in Pawtuxet is surely worthy of mention for it is said to be the first street laid out in that village. It was originally called "Distill House Lane" because Caleb Rhodes had a gin distillery and wharf at the end of the lane. The Rhode Island Yacht Club is now established at the end of Ocean Street as well as Cranston's first park -- a strip of land at the entrance to the Club House.

Fort Avenue, also at Pawtuxet, derived its name from the fort built there at the time of the Revolutionary War. The inhabitants expected forays from the English ships in Newport Harbor and ordered forts to be built at Warwick Neck, Pawtuxet Neck, and Field's Point on the west side of the bay.

Pawtuxet Neck seemed a particularly likely place for the English to attack before trying to enter Providence. Substantial earthworks were thrown up; the Pawtuxet Rangers were organized and batteries placed in the fort. The house of Mr. Crandall, a ship builder on the cove, was turned over to be used as a magazine. (Within this century a few cannon balls were found in the second cellar of the house, I have been told, relics of these stirring times.) During the years 1777 - '78 and '79, Cranston men manned the batteries and a constant watch was kept for the enemy. Later, it is interesting to learn, the stones that

went into its building were used for many of the foundations of the houses built on the Neck. Later a plaque marked the spot on Fort Hill where the fort stood, and the street, laid out the length of the Neck adjacent to it, bears the name "Fort Avenue".

The third street in this group is Narragansett Boulevard. In 1895 it was known as "Allen's Avenue" and the *Cranston City Times* was asking, "Will Allen's Avenue be worth its cost?" Someone was wise enough to think that it would be and plans for its improvement went ahead. Electric cars were wanted on it by some, but residents who had built fine homes there objected. A battle arose as to how it should be treated. Was it to be for the benefit of a few or for the many? The residents seem to have prevailed, for the time, and in 1897 its name was changed to Narragansett Boulevard, a street for the elite of the town.

Important events were not always the ones that were the source of street names. Humble acts figured as well. As I read the sign in Howard called "Eddy Street", I always like to think of the dear old lady, Grandma Eddy, who lived in a house there. She established a Sunday School for the children of the neighborhood in her kitchen before the Franklin Congregational Church was built.

She always wore an apron on these occasions, but what was of the greatest importance to the children, she stocked it with plenty of peppermints to make the ordeal of sitting still during the lesson just a little bit easier. Such understanding was a lesson in itself and deserves the recognition it received.

There are many streets throughout our city named for developers of the plats where they are situated. In Auburn, Grace and Beckwith Streets are so named. Auburn has honored some of its settlers too, and we find Potter Street and Waterman Avenue among these. The latter is for Dr. George Waterman whose account book is dated in the late 1700s

(turn over)