

# The Hinterlander

Vol. 16 No. 8

Bulletin of the Western Rhode Island Civic Historical Society

May 1973

## MAY MEETING

May 22, 1973 — 8:00 p.m.  
Smithfield Sr. High School  
Rte. 116 - Pleasant View Ave.  
Greenville, R.I.

SPEAKER: Albert Klyberg  
—*R.I. Hist. Soc.*

TOPIC: Planning The Bicentennial  
In Rhode Island

Please pay dues on or before the annual meeting to make our bookkeeping easier. Send dues to the Membership Committee; Box 207, Mapleville, R.I. 02839.

On April 24, 1973, at 8 p.m., we met in the Phillips Memorial Church, 565 Pontiac Ave., Cranston, R.I.

President Stuart Allen presiding. Alden Saunders gave the invocation. Allegiance was pledged to the flag.

Count by towns showed 45 present.

Minutes of the March meeting, read by Mrs. Mullins, were accepted. Treasurer reported: General Fund \$1,075.02; Building Fund \$435.27. Warming Pans, passed by S. B. Mowry and Robert F. Spencer, collected \$17.20.

Membership Secretary, Mrs. Thomas Bland, reported that "dues are coming in good."

Shirley Greene announced that Paine House will be open during May, "Heritage Month," on Tuesdays, and Sundays at 1 p.m. and for the rest of the summer only on Tuesdays at 1 p.m.

Webb W. Wilder, program chairman, introduced our speaker, Mr. Ronald A. Sullman. His topic "Flags of America." Mr. Sullman is a sergeant Major in the Varnum Continentals. He wore the uniform of the Kentish Guards. This military organization, established in 1774, is the 5th oldest guard unit in the United States. The uniform black with red and white trim and brass buttons. Tricorn hat, stock black, with white lace jabot; swallow-tail coat and tight knee length breeches with leggings.

He showed the flags as he gave us their history. The first one used in America was the Cross of St. George. It was the flag of the mother country and was a red cross perpendicular and horizontal, on a white field. It was used here for more than a hundred years.

The next was the Cross of St. Andrew and then in 1608, King James I chose the St. Andrew flag and superimposed the St. George cross on it. It was used until 1801. The next British flag was the Red Ensign; red back-ground with the Cross of St. Andrew under the Cross of St. George in the canton. These flags were used in the colonies until 1775.

June 14, 1775, Congress decreed our flag to be 13 stripes, alternating red and white, with 13 white stars in a circle on a blue field, in the right hand corner (canton), symbolizing a new constellation.

Between 1795 and 1818 our flag by Act of Congress, Jan. 13, 1794, was 15 five pointed stars and 15 red and white strips. The stars in five alternating rows of three stars each. The two additional stars and stripes were for Vermont, 1791,

THE HINTERLANDER  
Bulletin of the  
Western Rhode Island  
Civic Historical Society  
Paine House, Coventry, R. I.

SECOND CLASS  
POSTAGE PAID  
AT  
COVENTRY, R. I. 02816

PUBLISHED MONTHLY EXCEPT DEC., JAN. AND FEB.

R. I. Hist. Soc. Library  
121 Hope St.  
Providence, R. I. 02906  
02906

RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED

THE HINTERLANDER  
Editor—Box 207, Mapleville, R. I. 02839

and Kentucky, 1792, when they were admitted to the Union. This flag was carried by Lewis and Clark on their expedition May 1801-1806. It flew in the Battle of Tripoli and inspired Francis Scott Key to compose the "Star Spangled Banner."

On April 4, 1818, Congress passed the Flag Act. They realized that to add a star and a stripe, particularly stripes, when a state was admitted to the Union would make for a very unwieldy flag.

A number of other flags were used by the young nation: one which used six pointed stars and thirteen stripes, the Betsy Ross flag, June 14, 1777; the Bennington Flag was the first one flown in a land battle, the Battle of Bennington, Aug. 16, 1777. This flag was five feet by ten feet. The canton blue with the numeral 76 at the bottom of an arc of eleven stars with one star in each top corner. Another flag the Rattlesnake Flag, its motto "Don't Tread on Me" and at one time a flag of only 13 stripes, alternating, red and white was used. Sizes of the flag maybe 2 x 3 - 3 x 5 - 5 x 8. The regulation flag used to cover a casket is 5 x 9½.

He told us that most flags of the states were adopted in the 19th century (1775-1818).

Refreshments were served by Caroline Burton, Ethel Spencer and Shirley Greene.

The meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

Elizabeth L. Mullins  
Recording Secretary

## ANCIENT SIGNS

If we could have a "convention" of these old ghosts of days that have passed, we might meet up with the badly dilapidated Anawan House sign having a conversation with a board that was decorated with a crown and a rose. This old sign swung from the Daggett Tavern up in Slater Park for nigh on to two centuries. A modest little sign over in the corner was old and wrinkled and tired. Her pretty complexion was gone and she complained that some ignorant cobbler had hung her out in 1718 and didn't even spell her name properly. Her trade name was "Butes and Shoes" and she felt that she had been the laughing stock of Providence ever since.

The bunch of grapes had a lot to say about the shops when Westminster Street was a muddy country road. She bragged endlessly about her fame of hanging before the door of the oldest dry goods store in Providence. The Spicer Eagle loosed her tongue and boasted of the old stage coaches and dashing horses, of turkey dinners and plenty of good ale the genial master of Spicer's Hotel in Hopkinton City always had in plenty. Even the old Smithfield Avenue toll-board warmed up a bit and sputtered about the poor business of the '50's and '60's and her final bankruptcy when the State took over the turnpike and her prosperity vanished like the winds. What tales these signs could tell us today. Tales of galloping steeds checked suddenly before the tavern door; of dusty travelers, riders of the stage; of gentle ladies and their gallant escorts; of midnight carousals and mellow ale; of fiery personal and political differences ending in duels; of patriots and of beggars; of "cabbages and kings." There would be tales of the shops, spices and teas from the South Pacific; brilliant silks and sweet smelling incense from China and Japan; of ships wrecked when homeward bound of making plain old boots and shoes, square-toed and clumsy, but matching the rugged strength of homespun and woolsens.

The three categories of signs that we are telling about here are the tavern, the shop and the toll-gate signs. These three classes of business activities covered most of the field where simple advertising was necessary. They were guide-posts in the community, landmarks known far and wide, and inviting sociability as well as trade. They showed crude attempts at artistry. They strived to create an easily recognizable figure. The fame of a particular business was spread by the picture of a black horse, a lion's head, or an American eagle and so on. The swinging sign was the first and last thing that a traveler saw while riding atop of a stagecoach. It was also the important part in the route that the driver took. The oldest sign was at the Daggett Tavern. It dated to 1725. It pictured a crown in dull gold set upon a huge rose of red. One may wonder if the owner of that tavern might have still had a partisan interest in the English 15th century civil conflict? After the Revolutionary War, Washington and the American eagle were favorite subjects to paint. James Angell selected the eagle for his Centredale Hotel, which he built in 1824. Though the picture of the bird was not all that one might expect of the national emblem, it displayed loyalty and patriotism, as well as an attempt to execute elaborate artistry. The N. Mowry Inn sign was the only one to be enclosed in a frame standard and was probably designed to be moved about the premises of the tavern as fancy dictated. The keeper may, however, have sought something distinctive as well as utilitarian and the picture of a man leading a fine black horse swinging from an ivory painted standard must have attracted the attention of all passer-by on the main road through Lime Rock. From the Anawan House in Rehoboth comes a sign-board that is distinctly different in design as it features an Indian seated upon a pony and gazing across the country with his hand raised to his eyes. It was hung in 1836 while the country was still wild enough to suggest the hunting and battleground activities around the now famed Anawan rock.

Very modest in appearance is the sign marked in large black letters, "M. Goffs Inn." Formerly it was suspended from a large Buttonwood tree standing in front of the Henry C. Goff residence, east of Rehoboth. The inn was kept by Levi Goff and later by his widow, M. Mehitable Goff. Faded and cracked paint that suggests in bare outline the picture

of a coach drawn by four horses was all that remained of the painting on the oblong sign from the H. Cady Hotel long a landmark in West Gloucester. This inn was opened in 1810 by Hezekiah Cady on the turnpike between Providence and Springfield. (It is still standing today). The "W. Carder-1834" sign formerly hung at the corner of Greenwich mail road and Rocky Point turnpike. Names of three successive owners appeared upon the board. S. Carpenter's name was obliterated above the eagle and supplanted by William Hancock below the figure. This was subsequently covered by the next keeper, W. Carder. A well-executed figure of an eagle on a background of blue filled with gold stars—the emblem of independence—was featured on a sign formerly suspended from a sycamore tree in front of the J. W. Spicer Hotel, built in Hopkinton City about 1824. In the class of ship signs there is none more grotesque than that of "Butes and Shoes" dating back to 1718. That was in the days before streets were numbered and few persons could read. The painted and carved sign-boards were used by men of all trades who sought characters or designs of quaintness or queerness in order to attract the attention of the customer and to fix in his memory the exact location of his business. One source that I found says, "Our streets are filled with blue boars, black swans, and red lions; not to mention fluing pigs, and hogs in armour, with many other strange creatures more extraordinary than any in the deserts of Africa." Two of the signs that swung before the Capin and Thurber drug store, about 1840, were made of tin. One had a painting of an old man seated before his furnace, bellows in hand, while around him are books and accessories of the chemical trade. The other represents a large glass container marked "vitriol 160." The original sign of the Bunch of Grapes with which Thurber and Cahoon notified their customers in 1768 that they "had opened a large, new and fashionable assortment of English and India goods which they sell extraordinarily cheap, for cash, at thier New Shop and Store, the Sign of the Bunch of Grapes, at the North End of Providence," was presented to the Historical Society and kept as an important relic. Also shown in this class was the original "Gorham and Co." sign a real elegant one of dull gold on a background of black. The toll-gate signs were pretty much alike, proclaiming the rates and distances. One sign of note was one used at a gate kept by William Wilder at the corner of Lindsay Pike and Bridge Road, near what is now Smithfield Avenue and Weedon Street. The gate was surrounded by a dense forest. Some of the people objected to paying toll and went around the gate through the woods. Mr. Wilder cleverly prevented the continuance of this travel by having his family dig trenches at places where passage was attempted and thus forced the people to use his gateway. The toll board used on the old Powder Hill turnpike, now Smith Street, outdid all others in size. It was hung first at the corner near the Old Fruit Hill Tavern in 1815, then it went to the corner of Smith Street and Belvidere Boulevard, then to Smith and Eaton Streets and finally to Centredale at the junction of the George Waterman Road and Putnam Avenue, where it remained until the road was sold to the State in 1873. The rates of toll seem never to have changed. This is a short discourse on some of our famous old signs. There were more of course, Bowen's Tavern, Vernon Stiles Inn in nearby Thompson, Conn. had a beautiful sign featuring Lafayette. The Grinnell Tavern sign of 1762. Some were well executed and others resembled a child's drawing. The figures may have been crude but they were unmistakable. Travelers knew what they were. They played an important part in our State and served the purpose well.