



# Exploring History

Barrington Preservation Society Newsletter

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**Barrington Preservation Society Museum**

Lower Level, Public Library

**Hours**

Open Wednesdays 10:00-12:00pm  
or by appointment

**Phone**

(401)289-0802

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Dr. Luther Spoehr, Senior Lecturer Emeritus at Brown University, will give an illustrated talk on the history of The Barrington Players at the Barrington Preservation Society's Annual Meeting on Saturday, January 25, from 1-3 pm in Peck's Salem Auditorium.

The Barrington Players was a local, community theater group active in Barrington from the 1930's until the mid 1970's, usually staging three productions/year: a drama, a comedy and a musical. Each production was performed multiple times.

The musicals were particularly ambitious. In 1962, "South Pacific" was performed six times with a 17-piece orchestra from the Rhode Island Philharmonic. The 37-member cast was supported by a backstage crew of 75. Myrna Lapides, a frequently-featured performer, played the role of Nellie Forbush. She later starred as Dolly in *Hello, Dolly!* in 1972 (see photo).

Serious dramas included *Inherit the Wind* (see photo), *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial*. Among the comedies were *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Harvey*, *Lovers and Other Strangers*, and *Barefoot in the Park*.

*BPS Annual Meeting to feature*  
**A HISTORY OF THE BARRINGTON PLAYERS**

**BROADWAY IN BARRINGTON**  
SATURDAY, JANUARY 25, 1-3 PM



**BARRINGTON**  
RHODE ISLAND



*Inherit the Wind* (February 1960)

# museum news

## RECENT ACQUISITIONS

- **Richard and Rosemary Danforth** contributed a significant group of educational materials related to their long involvement with the interpretation of the Prince's Hill Cemetery, including biographical information about many of the cemetery's occupants.
- **The Richard Divver family** donated a family Bible dating to 1872.
- Photographer **Richard Donnelly** gifted albums of postcards, photos and portraits (cartes de visite) relating to Barrington and dating to the 1860-1880s.
- **Blithewold Mansion** donated two 19th century, silk wedding gowns that did not belong to members of the VanWickle/McKee family.
- **Laura Barton** gifted several items of 19th century women's clothing as well as a child's outfit made with an American Flag motif and worn at the fourth of July by a family member.
- **Tom Pezzullo** donated two turn-of-the-century family albums belonging to Herbert M. and Annie Steele Adams of Sagshamas on Nayatt Point.



**Jack and Marjorie Fenny of Plymouth, MA, recently donated a large, still-life painting, a family Bible and stuffed birds that once belonged to Olive Mathewson.**

Jack and Marjorie Fenny bought the house at 4 Olive Lane in Barrington that once belonged to Olive Mathewson, a great granddaughter of Allen C. Mathewson (1808-1878), a Providence jeweler and early developer of Mathewson Road. Olive never married and left no heirs, so as well as the house, the Fennys acquired a family Bible that belonged to Olive's mother, a still-life painting of flowers by her Uncle Frank Mathewson, an artist trained at the Rhode Island School of Design, and a male and female grouse, stuffed and displayed under a glass dome by Olive's father William Mathewson.

The Fennys now live in Plymouth, MA, and have previously donated other Mathewson-related items, including photographs, documents and a Mathewson Road plat plan. The Barrington Preservation Society greatly appreciates their generosity and welcomes donations of any item that helps tell the story of Barrington's early development.



Native Americans hunted, farmed and fished in Barrington, Warren and Bristol for thousands of years before the Pilgrims landed in Plymouth in 1620. Barrington was primarily a farming community until the Wampanoag Trail was improved in the 1950s, but the clay pits provided material for brick making as early as the eighteenth century, and the RI Lace Works in West Barrington was an important part of Rhode Island's textile manufacturing. When the railroad connected the East Bay to Providence in 1855, Bay Spring, Nayatt Point, Barrington Beach and Mathewson Road became vibrant summer communities. ***If you want to know more about Barrington's rich history, join BPS and become a volunteer!***

When you visit a museum, do you often wonder what happens behind the scenes? How exhibits are planned and put together? What is in those storerooms that you haven't yet seen on display? Would you like to know more about Barrington history and learn from a pro? Barbara Hail, the current Chairman of the BPS Museum Committee, is a former Deputy Director and longtime curator at Brown University's Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology and is eager to train new BPS volunteers.

# FROM THE COLLECTION: GEORGE A. CHURCH JOURNALS, 1855-1859 & 1863

by Jean Douglas

Almost everyone keeps a diary at some point in his or her life: as a teenager, on a trip or to record a special event. BPS is lucky to possess these 1855-1859 and 1863 diaries, penned by a teenaged and young adult George Church. In the six diaries, Church documents his daily experiences, thoughts, and observations about a period of time when the country was on the cusp of great change, and the diaries offer an intimate glimpse into mid-19th-century life.

The early diaries describe George attending school, interacting with friends and relatives, and reflecting on events of local importance, and they give the reader a sense of both the challenges and simple pleasures of life in the 1850s. His entries include details about weather, theater performances, his education, and his family and friends, and although there is little mention of the threat of the imminent Civil War, the later diary entries describe local infantry parades and drills.

George Church was born in 1850 and grew up in Providence, although he visited his mother's relatives at Nayatt. By July, 1855, the first steam trains traveled from Providence to Barrington in a few hours. Church, however, generally took a carryall, a light, covered, four-wheel carriage, drawn by a single horse. The trip took almost a full day. Church had a particularly close relationship with his cousin Sophia Tillinghast, who lived in Barrington. He also occasionally describes attending services at St. John's Church on County Road.

**Our special volunteer, Jean Erler,** has been busy transcribing the handwritten Church diaries. The transcriptions will allow BPS to both preserve and share this youthful voice and worldview with a wider audience. Once fully transcribed, we will have a vivid picture of a young boy's life at an important historical turning point.

*Friday, July 9*

*I went down to Nayatt this evening with Aunt Louisianna. Father went to New York. I got down there at a little past nine.*

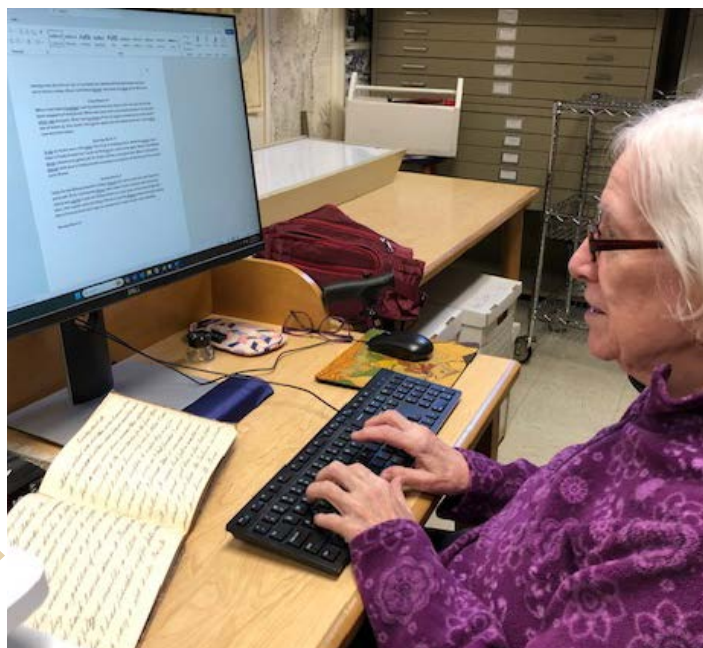
*Saturday, July 10*

*I tried to get some clams this afternoon for supper but did not succeed. I went to see Mrs. [Chapin?] with Aunty afterwards she went to Mrs. Staples.*

*Sunday, July 11*

*I went to bathe twice today once this morning and again this evening. I read up all the newspapers that were down here. The weather has been warm.*

## Diary entries



# **museum news, cont.**

## **STORIES IN STONES**

*Researching Barrington's cemetery records* by Jean Douglas



**Frederick Prescott Church** was born in Chelsea, MA in 1858 and orphaned at the age of 10. He first came to Barrington for the town's 100th anniversary celebration in 1870, and at that time he was encouraged to stay in Barrington with his grandparents.

He married Florence N. Heath on November 14, 1883. They made their home on County Road and were

members of the Congregational Church.

Church was initially employed as a bookkeeper and general manager by Royal Dexter Horton, who was a manufacturing jeweler in Providence. Horton lived in a large, Victorian home that still stands at the corner of Winsor Drive and the Wampanoag Trail in Barrington. When his jewelry business started to decline, however, Horton let Church go as general manager. Church was then encouraged by the political leaders in Barrington to run for the office of Town Clerk. Church was hesitant at first and then hoped to be defeated, but he was elected and took over his duties as Town Clerk in April 1898. He served in that office for more than thirty years from 1898-1932 and is remembered for his long and dedicated public service.

Since Barrington did not have a Town Manager, the Town Clerk in 1901 filled all the following roles:

- Town Clerk – \$ 350.00
- Superintendent, Town Hall –\$ 350.00
- Tax Collector – \$ 200.00
- Canvasser –\$ 20.00
- Tax Assessor –\$ 27.50
- Raking Town Hall lawn – \$ 7.50
- Care of Town Hall lawn – \$ 25.00
- Mowing Cemetery – \$ 12.00
- Care of drives in Prince's Hill Cemetery – \$ 25.00
- Cutting Town Hall lawn – \$ 5.00
- Registering voters, births, marriages, deaths – \$ 24.60
- Postage, stationery, etc. – \$ 27.60

**Total paid to Church as Town Clerk – \$1114.20**

The Churches eventually moved to 66 Rumstick Road, and Frederick and his wife became deeply involved in the life of the community. Frederick Church's appreciation for the town only grew as he worked with the residents and managed town affairs. His long tenure and faithful service are a lasting legacy in Barrington's long history.



## **BARRINGTON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REVISIT THE 1903 BARRINGTON SLAVERY MEMORIAL IN PRINCE'S HILL CEMETERY** by Stephen Venuti and Luther Spoehr

The history of slavery in Barrington and the slavery memorial erected in Prince's Hill Cemetery in 1903 were subjects of a recent project for a group of 10th graders in the American Studies course taught by Barrington High School teachers Logan Bonney and Jennifer Bergevine.

After reading several articles about Barrington's involvement with slavery by Barrington Preservation Society Trustee Stephen Venuti and a 2020 **Barrington Times** article describing a recent controversy over what to do with the monument, the 40 students

and their teachers visited the cemetery site in early October and met with Venuti and BPS Trustee Luther Spoehr. Venuti gave the students an overview of Barrington's (and Rhode Island's) involvement with slavery,



*"Stepping Stones", Second place Replacement Monument*

beginning in the 17th century and during the extensive slave trading voyages run out of Bristol and Newport in the 18th century.



*"Dark History", First place Replacement Monument*

The 1774 Barrington Census indicates that 39 residents were listed as "Black" or "Negro," and 18 as "Indians" in a total population of 601, and Venuti pointed out that, "Most, if not all, of these 57 people are presumed to have been either enslaved or indentured."

In 1784, however, Rhode Island passed a Gradual Emancipation Act, and by 1830, the Census identified only one enslaved person in Barrington. In 1903, with the Civil War and Reconstruction behind it and prompted by Thomas Bicknell, a prominent citizen of Barrington, the town decided to dedicate a memorial at Prince's Hill to the "negro slaves and their descendants who faithfully served Barrington families." The New York Times covered the dedicatory event and quoted the inscription, describing the monument as "a white quartz boulder, buttressed at the corners by large black

stones emblematic of the interdependent relations of the white and black races." Today the boulder and its plaque are the only visible surviving elements of the monument.

After visiting the memorial, small groups of students created "a conceptual model and a curatorial statement for a counter-narrative monument" that would "acknowledge the true history of slavery in Barrington", and on October 18, Venuti, Spoehr and BPS Member Dianne Wilkin visited the high school to review and discuss the students' memorial projects. The students were eager to explain the messages they hoped to transmit with their 16 models, and Venuti and Spoehr hope that this will be the first of many joint ventures between BPS and Barrington High School.



*"Freesia", Third place Replacement Monument*

## ACCESSING HISTORY THROUGH TECHNOLOGY: BARRINGTON PUBLIC LIBRARY LAUNCHES THE *BARRINGTON TIMES DIGITAL ARCHIVE* by Maria Bruce

While local newspapers such as the *Barrington Times* are an invaluable resource to communities large and small, accessing archived information has arguably been challenging at best. Whether it be degrading newsprint, or the lack of indexes and finding aids, both seasoned historians and super sleuths alike have been deterred by this daunting task. However, through technology, the Barrington Public Library has recently placed free access to our local history literally at our fingertips!

Located on the Library's website ([www.barringtonlibrary.org](http://www.barringtonlibrary.org)), under the "Borrow" tab, the *Barrington Times Digital Archive* was officially launched in August 2024. This easily searchable database of digitized editions of the *Barrington Times* (1/1/1958 - 12/31/1983), includes almost 33,000 pages of information. Spearheaded by Benjamin Hanley, Head of Information Services, under the guidance of Library Director, Kristen Chin, the project supports the Library's Mission to provide "... free access to

empowering, life-enriching knowledge..." While the bulk of this project's initial responsibilities (including collection assessments, grant writing, and establishing corporate partnerships) can be credited to Benjamin, the on-going point person, responsible for assisting the aforementioned seasoned historians and super sleuths, is Digital Services Librarian, Kyle Lee Sousa. Whether it be with Kyle's assistance, or through the search tips and tutorial (found under the "Resources" tab), accessing the *Barrington Times*, our treasure trove of local history, has never been easier.

[www.barringtonlibrary.org](http://www.barringtonlibrary.org) → "borrow"



# PLAQUE PROGRAM NEWS & UPDATES

by Maria Bruce

For the Barrington Preservation Society's Plaque Program, 2024 continues to be a year of change. Building upon our revised Plaque Program Guidelines and Application, which we rolled out in March 2024, we made a deliberate effort to implement additional updates, geared to improve the program moving forward.

Our first change was to contract with historical researcher and plaque artist, Eleanor Dobson, to conduct our research, compile our dossiers, and hand make our iconic house plaques. With an educational background and work experience in both history and museum studies, Eleanor's talents and enthusiasm have meshed seamlessly with our Program. Having worked in several museum and historical society settings in Rhode Island, Eleanor has contributed to the Bristol Historical & Preservation Society's award-winning project *The Timeline of Enslavement in Bristol, RI*, and currently spearheads her own complementary project, the *Mapping of The Timeline of Enslavement, Bristol, RI*. Additionally, Eleanor also creates the historic house plaques for the Bristol Historical & Preservation Society. Welcome Eleanor!

Also, in order to be more responsive to both new and replacement plaque requests, homeowners will now have the option to receive their dossier and plaque once they have been completed, or to receive them during our annual Plaque Program. While we will continue to present the history of all properties during each year's Plaque Program, this option offers greater flexibility for both recipient homeowners, and plaque volunteers alike. However, as plaque research remains a very time consuming and labor-intensive process, with no two properties following the same path for build date and original owner determinations, we ask that all homeowners remain patient and responsive to our occasional requests.

Lastly, our annual **Fall Plaque Program**, (originally scheduled this year for early October), has now become our annual **Spring Plaque Program**. While the program continues to be rooted in Barrington's history, and focused on each year's plaque recipient properties, this much needed change allows us to better plan, coordinate, and produce this annual showcase event.

We hope that all of this year's changes will benefit both the homeowner applicant and Plaque Program alike. By continuing to explore Barrington's history and common heritage through the unique lens of our historic buildings and their original owners,



*This historic house at 28 Jennys Lane is already recognized as a contributing property to the National Register's Jennys Lane Historic District, and is currently a candidate for a Barrington Preservation Society plaque.*

*Photo courtesy of Lee Ann McQueary*

the BPS Plaque Program remains committed to researching and documenting architectural examples of our past, while raising awareness of the importance of historic preservation and restoration. As such, all property owners are encouraged to view our Plaque Program Guidelines and Plaque Application by selecting the "Plaques" tab at our website: [www.barringtonpreservation.org](http://www.barringtonpreservation.org).

Please send all questions and/or completed applications (now a fillable PDF) directly to the Plaque Program at: [plaques@barringtonpreservation.org](mailto:plaques@barringtonpreservation.org).

## GENERAL THOMAS ALLIN HOUSE (20 LINCOLN AVENUE) NOMINATED FOR NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES *by Nathaniel Lane Taylor*



The General Thomas Allin House at 20 Lincoln Avenue has reached the final round for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and is on the agenda for the RIHPHC's State Review Board meeting on December 2, 2024.

Only three private houses in Barrington are currently listed on the National Register: Belton Court (the Frederick Peck estate on Middle Highway); the Benjamin S. Jackson House on Nayatt Point; and the Allen-West House on George Street adjacent to Nockum Hill.

Thomas Allin (1742-1800) owned over three hundred acres of land on the west side of Barrington, and he and his wife Amy (Bicknell) Allin built their house shortly after 1769 and raised twelve children there. Allin served as a town and state government official as well as a militia officer during the Revolutionary War.

The Allin house was expanded in the 19th century, and Allin descendants still lived in part of the house until 1924. The 300-acre Allin farm, however, was eventually subdivided into house lots in Drownville, Bay Spring, Lincoln Avenue, Roberta Plat, and North Lake Drive.

The General Thomas Allin House was nominated for the National Register in two categories: 1. the house is a good example of

Georgian and Federal-style architecture, with its massive center chimney and meat-smoking chamber, interior wood paneling, and seven-room floor plan, and 2. the house has been documented as once being a slave-holding property.

Thanks to research conducted by Roger Williams University students Courtney Garrity, Kristen Black, and Lucas Laager interning with the Barrington Preservation Society in 2021-22, we know that the Allin family owned slaves, beginning in 1704 and extending through the Revolutionary War, and the Allin house will be one of the first houses in Rhode Island listed in the National Register for its slave-holding significance.

Once the General Thomas Allin House is approved, the application will be sent to the National Park Service in Washington, D.C. for final review.



*Thomas Allin house interior paneling.*

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## A Grant for \$199,973.60 from the National Park Service Allows Research to Continue at Nockum Hill *by Stephen Venuti*

Just outside the entrance to the Doug Rayner Preserve on George Street at Nockum Hill, a granite monument with a bronze plaque memorializes a mid-seventeenth century colonial meetinghouse and settlement. Thomas Williams Bicknell erected the monument sometime around 1900, and in determining its location, Bicknell relied on the living recollections of people familiar with the area and their memories of seeing what looked like old foundations.

Based on the written records kept by the general court of Plymouth Colony and other related documents, there was once a settlement,

including a meetinghouse, somewhere in the general vicinity of the Bicknell monument, and this settlement, like the lost colony at Roanoke, vanished sometime after the King Philip's War of 1675-1676.

With the financial support provided by an NPS grant, the Town of Barrington, in partnership with the Barrington Preservation Society and the Public Archaeology Survey Team (PAST), Inc., hopes to discover both the full extent of the seventeenth century settlement at Nockum Hill as well as how and why it vanished following the King Philip's War.

# *It's time to join or renew your BPS membership for 2025*

*Please complete this form and return with dues.*

\*\*\* Be a member and help preserve Barrington's rich history. 2025 dues cover from January 1 to December 31.

## **Join the Barrington Preservation Society!**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail\* \_\_\_\_\_

New member \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal \_\_\_\_\_

\*Stay connected and help BPS reduce costs by giving us your email address. Dues are tax deductible.

The Barrington Preservation Society  
P.O. Box 178, Barrington, RI 02806

Join or renew online at [barringtonpreservation.org/membership](http://barringtonpreservation.org/membership), or clip and send this form with a check payable to:

- |                 |                          |        |                            |                          |      |
|-----------------|--------------------------|--------|----------------------------|--------------------------|------|
| Supporting      | <input type="checkbox"/> | \$100  | High School Student        | <input type="checkbox"/> | \$5  |
| Patron          | <input type="checkbox"/> | \$250  | College/University Student | <input type="checkbox"/> | \$10 |
| Business Member | <input type="checkbox"/> | \$250  | Individual                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | \$35 |
| Life Member     | <input type="checkbox"/> | \$1000 | Family                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | \$50 |

### **Membership Categories**

Barrington Preservation Society  
P.O. Box 178  
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