

Portsmouth Historical Society (PHS) September 2019 Newsletter

VOLUNTEERISM

Our volunteers are the core of our society, and there are many opportunities to join the fun! You don't need to be an historian, and you will certainly learn interesting things along the way! We have a lot of small projects that would only require a few hours of your time and talent, here are a few ideas:

Can you help coordinate a lecture, book club or other event? Do you like to play "detective" at classifying and dating historic items? Are you handy at sorting or fixing things? Can you write grants or do other things to help raise funds? Can you spend an hour or two on a Sunday to be a host at our museum? We welcome you!

HIGHLIGHTED ACQUISITION

1704 Benjamin Shearman Tombstone

Last month utility workers uncovered the tombstone of 16-month-old Benjamin Shearman, son of Benjamin Shearman and Mary Lawton, randomly placed in a wooded area in Portsmouth. While its whereabouts since it was last seen 123 years ago remains a mystery, we are grateful that the utility worker recognized the significance of the tombstone and made sure it was properly cared for. It traveled from the Portsmouth Police Dept to the Newport Historical Society then back to Portsmouth to our museum, a wonderfully cooperative effort by all involved. It has been added to our display of early settler tombstones similarly displaced in Old Town Hall. This finding has generated a lot of interest, as it was carved by prominent gravestone carver John Stevens I, whose Newport shop is still standing. John Stevens is known to have used uppercase letters for his first ten years in Newport, then switched to lower case letters in 1714, which indicates this tombstone was likely carved around or after 1714 and back dated to 1704 to commemorate a life short lived but not to be forgotten, a common practice.

We are always looking for Portsmouth-related books, diaries, photos and interesting items to add to our collections. Do you have anything you would like to donate?

PAST EVENT

Wednesday Aug 21st we hosted a very well attended lecture by noted RI Historian Christian M. McBurney about Spies in Revolutionary Rhode Island, based on his book of the same name. Aquidneck Island had some interesting ones! Our audience room on the second floor of the museum was a great venue, and attendees enjoyed an added bonus of being able to tour the museum and church!

SEPTEMBER EVENT REMINDERS

Sunday Sept 8th 4 PM at the Museum-Ghostly Witness performance by Portsmouth Community Players: This is one of Portsmouth's most infamous true stories about the 1673 Rebecca Cornell murder trial, presented in play format. Find out all about it!

Thursday Sept 19th 6 PM to 7:30 PM at the Portsmouth Free Public Library-PHS book club will discuss Killed Strangely: The Death of Rebecca Cornell, by Elaine Forman Crane. Our moderator will be noted local historian Gloria Schmidt. The event is free and always welcomes new attendees who enjoy reading about our rich local history. Copies of the book are available at the library.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Friday Oct 11th you are invited to pedal the rails at Portsmouth Rail Explorers with fellow PHS members at a deeply discounted PHS Member Appreciation rate of \$25 per person! We have reserved the 5:30 PM "Lantern Tour" where we will enjoy unique views along Narragansett Bay during sunset hours. Please check the flyer we sent for all the details about this great opportunity, which should be a lot of fun!

Sunday Oct 13th 2 PM to 5 PM will be our last open hours for the season, it costs a lot to keep the building heated all winter! Please join us on that day for our "History Comes Alive" event where members of the Portsmouth Community Theater will portray various people of Portsmouth's yesteryear as you tour our museums grounds!

Thursday Oct 17th 5:30 PM to 7:30 PM we are hosting our Annual Member Harvest Social at Greenvale Vineyards, thanks to the continued generosity of Bob and Nancy Parker Wilson. This year's entertainment will be provided by guitarist Michael Barclay de Tolley. Light refreshments, donation only admission-come out and say hello!

DID YOU KNOW?

The great grandfather of Benjamin Shearman of the 1704 tombstone was a prominent, wealthy, early settler of Portsmouth, Judge Philip Shearman (aka Phillip Sherman). The home he built in 1670 is located at 168 Fairview Lane and is still used as a a private residence. Some famous direct descendants of Philip Shearman allegedly include Susan B.

Anthony, VP James Sherman, Sir Winston Churchill, Presidents George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush, Mamie Eisenhower, Lizzie Borden, Janis Joplin, Marilyn Monroe, Christopher Lloyd and Ken Burns. Who knows, maybe you too?!

Yours truly,
Anne Northup Burns