



Portsmouth Historical Society March 2020 Newsletter

We hope this newsletter finds you happy and healthy, with good books handy to read! Please know that we are thinking of all our community members, and are doing our part by postponing any events we had planned through the end of April. Several board members have also volunteered for the Town of Portsmouth Emergency Operations Center, so if you need assistance, help is available by contacting COVID@portsmouthri.com.

Past Event Updates:

We are very gratified with the incredible turnout that we have had at all of our events so far this year. We tested the waters and expanded our history outreach beyond Portsmouth with a book club and lecture about the Burning of the Gaspee, and a visit to Varnum Armory. We enjoy learning and broadening our horizons, and it is obvious many of you agree! You may look forward to more of this kind of programming in the future, and of course our continued exploration and sharing of Portsmouth history.

Our annual showing of the original 1638 Portsmouth Compact commemorating Founder's Day was held on March 6th at Town Hall, and Portsmouth's Copy of the Southwick Declaration of Independence was displayed as an added bonus. Board member and Town Historian Jim Garman gave an insightful and informative talk at this event, and also at the Open House held the next day at Portsmouth Evangelical Friends Meeting House, attended by 100 people interested in seeing this historically significant property preserved, as it is currently for sale. Continued explorations are under way, and while there is nothing to report at the moment, there have been some potentially positive findings that will be shared when appropriate. Please email Craig@oceantateair.com if you are interested in helping with preservation efforts.

Acquisitions: An abundance of riches!

David Sanford Chase and family members Jill, Jon and Shirley Chase shared an extensive, carefully collected portfolio of documents, photos, stories, genealogy and family heirlooms from the descendants of Portsmouth early settler William Chase down to David's father, Isaac Chase III, of Isaac Chase Farm lineage. The collection includes antique farm equipment, household items and children's toys, and will be of interest to related Lawton and Hall families.

We were thrilled to receive the special gift of two log books of the Newport and Providence Railway from Mrs. Beverly Hall. This trolley company (1903-1925) was the builder/operator of one of the two trolley lines on the island back then; the other being the Newport and Fall River



Street Railway Company (1898-1925). The records have been abstracted by Jim Garman, highlighting all the important names, votes and decisions of the company's officers and stockholders. Mrs. Hall's father, George Towle, was the manager of the trolley line and the bus line which replaced it. It is an important historical record related to Aquidneck Island mass transportation a hundred years ago.

(above) Passengers wait for the ferry BRISTOL after debarking from Newport and Providence Railway open trolley cars at the Bristol Ferry terminal

Last but not least, David R Durfee Jr sent his family genealogy from early settler Thomas Durfee of Portsmouth, who was admitted as an inhabitant in 1662. It includes information from T. Reed's genealogy Thomas Durfee of Portsmouth Rhode Island, with added references to court records and other materials that shed light on Durfee and Portsmouth at that time. This family moved to upstate New York shortly after they fought for RI in the Revolution. Interestingly, some of the families who moved to the same part of upstate New York originated in Portsmouth, in particular the Cornell, Brownell, and Sherman families. This interesting read is available on our website PortsmouthHistorical.org under the "People" tab.

We are honored to be entrusted with the safe keeping of all of these collections, and grateful that these supporters of Portsmouth history generously made them available to us for viewing by our visitors when the museum opens in the spring!

We are still conducting the business of the Portsmouth Historical Society, and look forward to our May 15th Navy Chorister Concert, May 24th Museum Opening Day, and May 31st Suffragist Celebration. Naturally we are monitoring the situation, and trying to find comfort in the knowledge that "this too shall pass".

Stay well, and reach out to us at phsinfo@portsmouthhistorical.org if you need anything!

Very truly yours,

Anne Northup Burns, President