

Portsmouth Historical Society November/December 2019 Newsletter

Happy Holidays to all our members from a deeply grateful Portsmouth Historical Society Board of Directors! I was wondering what the holidays looked like for the congregation of the Christian Union Church during the time of its early establishment, and we are fortunate to have the diaries of David Durfee Shearman to get a glimpse of Portsmouth life in the mid 1800's. During that time, religious holidays were treated as ordinary work days, and with few exception were not acknowledged by farmers in early Portsmouth. They sometimes began the day with a church service, or culminated with a family meal. The quintessential American holiday, Thanksgiving, was not widely recognized in D.D. Shearman's time, although we know from church records in the mid 1800's that turkey dinners and ice cream socials were held to raise money to help pay for the church building!

Holiday entries from D.D. Shearman's diaries:

Wednesday, 25 December 1850

"Christmas, went to church forenoon, went to shop afternoon."

Christmas was not mentioned on December 25 until many years later. In 1858 the day is labeled Christmas but it was business as usual with a book delivery and a visit to the ten-pin alley.

Thursday, 25 November 1858

"This is the day set by the Governor (Elisha Dyer) of this state for fasting and thanksgiving."

Shearman did not heed the message, as the remainder of the entry relayed a day of work framing a hen house, carting meal from the mill and delivering a mare to his father. The energy for these chores was fueled by a hearty breakfast.

Portsmouth Historical Society Events:

Tuesday Dec 3rd we participated in worldwide Giving Tuesday campaign, and thank our generous donors for their contributions! If you missed it, visit our website www.portsmouthhistorical.org and Facebook page for some interesting posts, and as always, we gladly accept donations all year round. This year we are set up to accept donations of stocks, so if you have end of year donations to make, please think of us!

Wednesday December 11, 2019 at 6:30 PM Town Historian **Jim Garman** will present a lecture on "**Steamboats on Narragansett Bay and the Sakonnet River**" at the Portsmouth Free Public Library. This illustrated lecture is co-sponsored by the Library, and will include many photographs and information on many of the Bay/Sound steamboats, including the Fall River Line and the Sakonnet Line.

Thursday January 16, 2020 at 630 PM Town Historian **Jim Garman** will also give a lecture titled "**Last Call: The Beginning of Prohibition**" with emphasis on the local aspect of "The Noble Experiment". This date is carefully chosen because it commemorates the night Prohibition went into effect at midnight exactly 100 years ago on that date.

Both lectures are co-sponsored with us by the Library. With limited seating, please call the Library at 683-9457 to make a reservation.

Tuesday January 14, 2020 6:00 PM to 7:30 PM Book Club “The Burning of His Majesty’s Schooner Gaspee: An Attack on Crown Rule Before the American Revolution” by Stephen Park tells the story of the bold colonists who stood up to British rule and burned HMS Gaspee in Narragansett Bay in 1772. It was one of the first acts of violent uprising against the British crown’s authority in America, preceding the Boston Tea Party by over a year, yet the Gaspee Affair is much lesser known.

Our relaxed and fun discussion will be led by Nancy Crawford’s, Head Curator of the Portsmouth Historical Society. Copies of the book will be available for checkout at Portsmouth Free Public Library. We recommend that you sign up in advance on the library’s website or by calling the library at 683-9457 so we may contact you if a reschedule is necessary due to weather or unforeseen circumstances!

What’s up for 2020:

Our museum is closed for the season but we are busy getting ready for next year’s exhibits with a theme focused on significant national and local events from 100 years ago. Plans are underway for new lectures, book clubs, 3rd Annual Trivia Contests, a Navy Choristers Concert in May, and a Suffragist Celebration in June, among many other events. We are renovating our restroom to make it ADA accessible, and continue to work on our Strategic Plan, important endeavors always with our mission to preserve, protect and promote the rich history of Portsmouth RI!

We wish you all a happy healthy holiday season, and a peaceful and joyous New Year!