

A Portal to the Past

Clouds Hill Victorian House Museum

AT THE FAIR

In 1875, Clouds Hill was in the final stages of preparation for the family to take up residence. In that same year, the Washington County Agricultural Society held its first agricultural fair at its grounds in West Kingston across from the railroad station. Agricultural exhibitions and fairs have existed for many centuries. Man has depended on the fruits of the land keeping him alive; and the efforts to produce more and better products interested everyone. In a farming society, the annual fairs in later summer and early fall afforded an opportunity for friendly competition, free advertising of your products, and the chance to see the latest tools, methods, and

results of farming successfully.

As the bulletin for the 1922 fair stated, "the chief purpose of all agricultural exhibitions is to raise our ideals in regard to the quality and appearance of our agricultural products and to spur us on to attain these ideals."

The Washington County Agricultural Society grounds were well suited to enhance the products exhibited. The location 1/8 mile from the Kingston train station made the fair very accessible both to visitors and to exhibitors from other areas. The Society offered to pick up from the station and transport to the fairgrounds any entries which

were sent by train. The grounds included a 1/2 mile trotting track, well graded and 40 feet wide, with a grandstand seating 2000 people. Sturdy exhibition buildings housed the exhibits of vegetables, fruits, flowers, cooking, and hand work, as well as animals.

To encourage females to attend, the fairgrounds offered a ladies' resting room adjoining the exhibition building for ladies or children to use. It was equipped with chairs and kept supplied with good drinking water. In addition, ladies did not need to worry about their tender sensibilities being offended, as gambling,

Continued on next page

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| From the Collections | 3 |
| From the Kitchen | 3 |
| Local Talent | 5 |
| Inside Scoop | 4 |
| What's It? | 3 |

A FOCUS ON EDUCATION

Once again, the Victorian Society in America Newport Summer School visited the museum as part of their stay in Newport. Led by Director, Richard Guy Wilson, over 30 students toured Clouds Hill and enjoyed lemonade and cookies on the porch. Besides a display of wallpaper sam-

ples from the family homes of the late 1800s, there was a special exhibit and comparison of bills for the construction of two family homes. We have always had the bills for the construction and furnishing of Clouds Hill; but in May of this year, the bills for the

exterior construction of Alfred A. Reed's home at 232 Beacon St. in Boston were discovered in the carriage museum attic. It made an interesting display for the students, as the houses were built ten

Continued on page 5

Fair
continued

prize packages, shooting galleries, objectionable side shows and all intoxicating liquors were strictly prohibited - and a police force on duty 24 hours a day during the duration of the fair enforced these prohibitions.

Classes were offered for cattle, horses, sheep, swine, poultry and pigeons, with those classes for grade and native breeds open only to Washington County residents, while those classes for thoroughbreds of each breed were "open to the world"! The highlight of the Grains and Vegetables Division was the RHODE ISLAND HOSPITAL TRUST CO. PRIZE, open to anyone in the state. The Agricultural Department of the Rhode Island Hospital Trust Company of Providence offered a \$50.00 prize for the best exhibit of farm products - anything grown or produced on a farm by the exhibitor and his household. Exhibitors were required to limit their displays to 20 feet along a 3 foot wide table and the wall space behind it. We might all be better off today if our banks interested themselves in these types of activities and brought back a personal touch!

Other divisions offered prizes for fruits; plants and flow-

ers; dairy and other family productions (honey, baked goods, pickles, jams and jellies, canned items); domestic manufacture, fancy and needlework; fine arts; and children's exhibits.

In 1907, the first Pawtuxet Valley Fair was held along the banks of the Pawtuxet River in Fiskeville. Prominent Pawtuxet Valley residents offered their services for the success of the event. Robert Lippitt Knight of the mill owning firm of B.B. + R. Knight was a vice-president, as well as serving as supervisor of cattle, horses, sheep and swine in 1921, while his wife supervised the sewing and handcraft division of the boys' and girls' exhibits. Daniel Howland of Howland Hall in East Greenwich was a vice president, and Miss Alice Howland supervised the boys' and girls' clubs exhibit and assisted with vegetables and grains. The second vegetables and grains assistant was Miss Julia L. Mauran of the well-known Providence

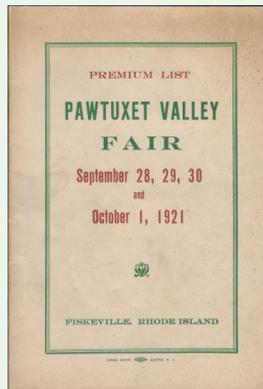
Tugboat Company.

This fair was also anxious to exclude anything deleterious to the sensibilities of women and children, so the program states: "All fakirs are shut out from the grounds, all gambling prohibited, all intoxicants barred, distribution of all propaganda banned and all beggars and maimed peddlars excluded."

The Rhode Island Hospital Trust Co. Prize was offered at this fair in the vegetables and grains division, also. Divisions included horses, cattle, sheep, poultry, vegetables and grains, plants and flowers, beekeeping, kitchen and dairy

products, arts and crafts (handwork, painting), boys' and girls' exhibits, boys' and girls' clubs exhibits, boy scouts, grange, firemen's department, and school exhibits. The school exhibits were divided into two sections - one for country or village schools of three rooms or less, and the other for graded schools of more than three rooms. The classes were for best exhibit of Industrial Arts, Drawing, Sewing, Manual Training, Language work, and Writing.

It is interesting to note that the cover of the 1927 Pawtuxet Valley Fair contains a written list of what Miss Anne Crawford Allen exhibit-



WHAT
YOU
HAVE
TO
SAY
. . .

"I am so happy this museum is here!"

Diane Gerardi
Portsmouth, R.I.



"Wonderful museum - still feels very much 'alive!'"

Mary M Giordano
Johnston, R.I.



"Wonderful visit to the past. A great find."

Cynthia and Richard
Wolbarsht
Providence, R.I.

FROM THE KITCHEN

The end of summer was always harvest time; and thrifty housewives looked to the fields, roadsides, and shores to find edibles from which to make sweet treats for the long winters ahead. Today, these same plants are awaiting harvest in the same locations; and delicious jams, jellies, and drinks can be easily prepared.

From THE YANKEE COOK BOOK, by Imogene Wolcott, first published in 1939, come the following two recipes, one from the roadsides and hedgerows and one from the shore:

The smell of ripening wild grapes hanging from roadside vines growing into the trees, will lead you to a bountiful harvest to use to make **GRAPE CATSUP**.

- 5 pounds grapes, cleaned and stemmed
- 2 pounds sugar
- 1 pint vinegar
- 1 Tablespoon each of cloves, cinnamon, allspice
- 1 Teaspoon each of pepper and salt

Boil grapes in enough water to keep them from burning. When soft, strain through a sieve. Add remaining ingredients, boil until catsup thickens. Makes about 6 pints.

To quote from THE YANKEE COOKBOOK:

WHAT'S IT?

Visit our website, www.cloudshill.org, for the answer.



“The beach plum is found rooted in the dunes along the beaches... As beach plum pickers know, there is something of the grape, the plum and the cherry about the beach plum. It is as though nature had combined the best features of all three. The thick, tough skin of the ripe beach plum is much like that of the wild purple grape. There is a resemblance in the pulp and also in the shape of the fruit to that of the cultivated plum, although it is much smaller. And its firmness and bitter flavor are not unlike those of the wild cherry.”

BEACH PLUM JAM

Wash beach plums that are red (not ripe), pick over and place in a kettle. Cover with water, heat to scalding. Pour off and discard this water. Pour on fresh hot water so that it can be seen among the fruit but does not cover it. Cook until the fruit is soft and press fruit through a sieve. Measure fruit and add 1 cup of sugar for each cup of fruit. Boil until jam is thick and clear, stirring to prevent burning. When sufficiently cooked, jam will sheet from a spoon like jelly. Pour into hot, sterilized glasses and seal.

In 1997, Pattie Lee Vargas and Richard Dale Gulling, Jr. produced **CORDIALS FROM YOUR KITCHEN**. Although a modern book, it still promoted harvesting from the wild. For a very special treat, try the following:

ELDERBERRY LIQUEUR

“In Ohio, where we live, elderberries grow wild along fencerows. Our first taste of them was in homemade elderberry jelly, and it was love at first bite. When we began making cordials, we were more interested in elderberries for their beautiful color...this liqueur has the most striking deep purple color of any liqueur we’ve made - and just wait until you taste it!”

- 4 cups fresh elderberries, picked over and washed



- 2 cups sugar
- 1 teaspoon lemon zest
- 2 tablespoons fresh squeezed lemon juice
- 1 cup water
- 3 cups 100-proof vodka

Crush elderberries and sugar together in bowl. Let stand for about 1 hour. Add lemon zest and lemon juice. Transfer to clean 2 quart container and add water and vodka. Cover and let stand in a cool, dark place for 1 month, shaking occasionally. Use a fine mesh strainer to strain out solids. Discard. Transfer liqueur to clean container and let stand for 1 week. Rack or filter into final container. Cover and age for at least 1 month before serving. Makes about 1 1/2 quarts.

FROM THE COLLECTIONS

The Housewares Collection



copper chafing dish with beautifully detailed brass legs, gift of Henry A. L. Brown

INSIDE SCOOP

Visitors

During the last three months, the museum has had visitors from 2 countries: Israel and Northern Ireland; Washington D.C., 8 states: California, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Utah, and Virginia and 10 R.I. cities and towns.

Donations

Clouds Hill has received a number of donations during the last few months. We would like to thank the following for their additions to our collections:

Eric and Ann Holmstedt have donated a wonderful Oriental rug, with accompanying rug pad, which will soon grace one of the museum areas where an existing rug needs to be "rested". Thank you so much.

Maryjane Moretti has given us six additional boxes of Christmas ornaments from the 1950s to add to those which she gave to us a year ago. We should be able to do an entire 1950s tree thanks to her generosity. She has also donated two wonderful wooden children's items - a walker and a potty chair - which are probably 1930-40s; and a small wooden paper cutter in excellent condi-

tion.

Nicki Hicks generously donated a beautiful black velvet cape, white long evening gloves, a red wool shawl, peacock feathers, and a feather boa. Thank you.

Many thanks to Henry Brown for the donation of a wonderful cane trunk, which one of his relatives had brought back from Japan at the turn of the 20th century and for a lovely copper and brass chafing dish.

The museum has also received a delightful 1860s doll and doll clothes from Laura DeFusco. Thank you so much.

Finally, thank you to Howard Leonard for donating a wonderful antique fly fishing rod and cloth case, which will be featured in our "Gentleman Sportsman" display.

Upcoming Events

Our annual fundraiser, the HARVEST SUPPER, is scheduled for Saturday, October 3rd, at 5:00 P.M. Featuring locally grown and prepared meats, vegetables, cheeses, fruits, and breads, the meal is deliciously prepared by Tom's Market Catering and served under a tent on the south lawn. This year, in

addition to a silent auction, guests will be invited to do the final dressing on a series of scare crows! Each table will have a scare crow to dress and accessorize from provided clothes, etc. Popular vote will decide the winning figure; and a prize will be awarded. For tickets, contact us at 401-884-9490 or by e-mail to: office@cloudshill.org. This is always an entertaining evening.

On September 13th and 20th, from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM, the museum is open for our Autumn exhibit "Home Grown". Focusing on the vegetables and fruits grown in R.I., including the historical methods of cultivating, harvesting and preserving them, the exhibit may also be seen by appointment from September 14th through the 23rd.

On October 24th, from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM, join our sleuth in residence to solve a dastardly murder. Founder of her own detective agency and the first professional woman detective in the world, Miss Cora M. Strayer and her male assistant, have been summoned to Clouds

Hill to unravel a knotty mystery. It seems that the house has been targeted for a series of dreadful events. Since a woman owns the house, she naturally feels more at ease with a female detective to solve the crime. Join us and help to determine if the fearful tragedy in each room is an accident, a suicide, or MURDER. Admission is \$5 for adults and \$1 for children 12 and under. A prize will be given for the correct answer drawn from all correct answers.

We are thrilled to announce that the MILLER-PORFIRIS DUO, of violin and viola, will be performing at a benefit concert for the museum, in the parlor at Clouds Hill in November. Last year's event was a spectacular evening; and we hope to repeat it this year. If you would like an invitation, please contact us at 401-884-9490 or e-mail at office@cloudshill.org. The date will be decided shortly; and this is an event not to be missed!



Just another day at Clouds Hill!

LOCAL TALENT

From time to time, Clouds Hill is fortunate to be able to offer the products of local artists and crafts people in our gift shop; and we would like to introduce these people to you. We are thrilled to offer the products of local wood turner, Daniel A. Dragon.

Dan makes bowls, pens, plates, wine bottle stoppers, and adorable mushrooms in several sizes - and best of all, those sold in the Clouds Hill gift shop are made with wood from the trees of Clouds Hill. Dan lovingly dries and cures the wood, obtained from downed trees and limbs, studies the shape, size, and markings in the wood, and turns out items that are true works of art.

Dan and Anne Holst go back a long way together, as both were Rhode Island Conservation Officers, working together monitoring the state's natural resources. Dan moved to Florida, then returned to R.I. after ten years or so. He and his wife have one son, who has followed his father's footsteps in law enforcement and is a New York City police officer. Dan works out of his garage; and his wares make wonderful gifts.

Education
continued

years apart - the brownstone on Beacon Street in 1862, and the granite Clouds Hill in 1872. Both houses had the same cost for their exteriors - approximately \$37,000! Both houses are still standing today, although the Beacon Street house is now sheathed in stucco. It was a great opportunity to learn from the old bills and receipts.

Clouds Hill is providing the location and project for a second senior high school student this summer. Alyssa Place, from East Greenwich High School, is completing her senior project by plan-

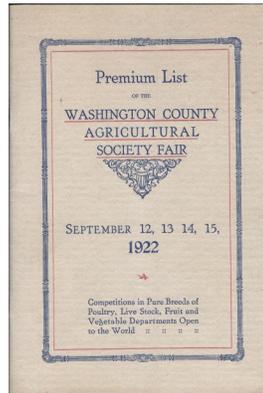
ed. It included an exhibit of R.I. grown maple syrup and a model of a sugar camp; a hand decorated gourd bottle; a winter basket of straw flowers and bayberries; 10 ears of Queen's Golden pop corn; 10 ears of Bear's foot corn; and 3 white scalloped squash.

1927 was the 20th anniversary of the fair, and the program promised that it "is now considered to be the foremost affair for the benefit of Agricultural, Horticultural, Live-stock and Textile interests in Southern New England". To make it easier for mothers to attend, the fair had, for several years, offered "a children's nursery, presided over by competent nurses,... and the babies are taken care of by a trained nurse provided by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company." Of course, a first aid station was available, especially with over 30,000 people attending in 1926.

After a number of years as the Washington County Agricultural Society Fair, that event became the Rhode Island State Fair at Kingston. In 1942, with

Fair
continued

the arrival of World War II, the fair suspended operations, but by 1948, it was back up and running - a 10 day event touted to "outstrip everything previously held in Rhode Island." Special attractions at the fair included a miniature circus of ponies, monkeys, and dogs; a bucking mule; liberty horses; trained seals; dancing elephants; and jungle killers among much more.



Rhode Island Fairs have faded away, with only the Washington County Fair in Richmond left as a statewide event. The Washington County Agricultural Society Fair ran from 1875 to 1942 (67 years) and then became the Rhode Island State Fair at Kingston from 1948 to 1951. The Rocky Hill Grange Fair at East Greenwich started in 1947, became the

Rocky Hill Fair by 1949 and then the Rocky Hill "State" Fair in 1959 and lasted into the 1970s. The Pawtuxet Valley Fair ran for 24 years from 1907 to 1931. These events were wonderful opportunities for young people to gain an understanding about the sources of food - something we badly need to replicate today.



ning and developing the new nature center in the shop building at the museum. Alyssa is polling teachers to determine what the center should offer student visitors, planning the layout of the center, participating in the physical preparation, developing a system of cataloging items, and planning interactive activities for visitors. The center will include historical collections, data, and demonstrations, as well as addressing current successes and failures in today's flora and fauna in New England.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE
WWW.CLOUDSHILL.ORG



Clouds Hill Victorian House Museum

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. . . a portal to the past . . .

Clouds Hill Victorian House Museum is a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation operating a historic Victorian home as a museum for the public. Originally known as "Cedar Hill", it is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The house is an important part of the history of the City of Warwick and the State of Rhode Island. It was built in 1872 by William Smith Slater for his daughter, Elizabeth Ives Slater, on her marriage to Alfred Augustus Reed, Jr. It has remained in the same family since it was built, passing from female to female until reaching the current owner. The lineage of the family can be traced to several notable figures.

In addition to the architecture and interior of the house, other collections include textiles, porcelain, carriages, and much more. The property on which the house sits has been referred to as the West Bay arboretum.

Donations to Clouds Hill are deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

Clouds Hill Victorian House Museum
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