

The Historical Society of Smithfield, Inc.
Smith-Appleby House Museum
220 Stillwater Road, Smithfield, Rhode Island 02917 (401) 231-7363

March 2012 Newsletter

Dear Friends and Fellow Members:

I hope you will join us on March 29, 2012, at 6:30, for our first membership meeting of the year. As of this writing, it doesn't appear that snow will keep us from meeting – however it is New England, and if we should have snow forecast for that date, we will meet the following Thursday, April 5. A message on our voicemail at the museum will confirm a cancellation (401) 231-7363.

I heard from several members saying how touched they were regarding the last newsletter, which included two pieces of writing, from two of our members, Jim Maloney and Anthony Duskey. Please send along your own written contribution for our newsletters, I will be glad to include it. My own contribution is included this month.

We are as ever, so grateful for the many volunteers who help with the upkeep and support of the Smith-Appleby House. So it's time to dedicate a little space to express appreciation for some of the unsung heroes at the museum. If you have explored our web site, you have seen the work of Bill Pilkington, volunteer extraordinaire. Along with Don Goncalves, (publicity), they have elevated the visibility of the Smith-Appleby House. This has resulted in more guests enjoying the property, more interest in weddings and receptions, and an outreach in the community. A "thank you" doesn't cover their enthusiasm or professionalism, but there it is, thank you Bill & Don! Another thank you goes out to Lonnie & Carol Thurber, who not only donated, but also shoveled a truckload of cow manure onto the gardens. The property was very aromatic for several days – reminding me of my days on a farm, likewise shoveling manure! Lonnie managed to fell a very large tree by the corn field, so we can expect a little more produce from the lower garden.

A few members have sent me little notes with their membership dues, saying they never got a reminder. By way of an explanation, our By-laws read: *Section 3- Annual dues shall be ten dollars (\$10.00) per individual, and twenty (\$20.00) per household payable on the **first day of September** of each year. Dues paid by a member joining in June, July, or August shall continue said membership until the end of the following membership year.*

Our fiscal year ends August 31 each year. We typically provide four newsletters each year, some of which may be sent via email, if we have your email address. Your Membership Chair (me) attempts each mailing to advise members if their membership is in arrears, usually by an insert in the envelope – which is marked with a red dot. I hope this provides some clarity.

Our last official event last year was our Christmas open house December 4. We greeted 145 adults, and 137 children. Mr. & Mrs. Claus were as gracious and welcoming as only Don & Claire Mercier can be, and were once again the most wonderful part of the day – thank you Don & Claire.

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Peter Giammarco, and June Giammarco have been keeping the house active since Christmas, with a series of open houses at the museum. Several weekends each month, either a Saturday or Sunday, the museum has been open for tours. One very busy January day 93 guests visited the museum to see the decorations from Christmas. If you have ever been at the museum for one of these open houses, you know that the Giammarco family dog, Sassy, barks hello and goodbye to everyone...that was a lot of barking! June has been doing a lot of baking, to offer the guests, so if you would like to help out with cookies, or bread, I'm sure they would be appreciated. Hands are also needed to collect money at the door, pour cider or coffee - so if you were able to assist on one of the dates it would be helpful. Michael Korba has been assisting with tours, along with members of the United Train of Artillery. The upcoming dates for tours are: March 17 (1:00 – 4:00), March 25 (12:00 – 3:00), April 1 (12:00 – 3:00), April 7 & 14 (1:00 – 4:00), and April 22 (12:00 – 3:00).

While doing a little research in our archives recently, I saw a letter dated November 22, 1834. It began simply, Dear Father. It's a heartfelt letter written by a son, Albert T. Branch to his father, Steven Branch with a request for forgiveness, and for a loan of \$25.00. He writes in this letter, of how he left home at the age of 11, and had no one to blame for his circumstances, but himself. I tried to imagine an 11-year-old supporting himself today. Young Albert, nearing the age of 20, admits in his letter to being of a roving disposition. Of late, he had been in different places in different vessels; but for the previous two months he had been in Philadelphia, where he had taken sick. All the money he had made was used to pay for his lodging, or doctor bills. Albert writes that he had learned the printing business in Providence, and would be able to work journey work any where else. However, only signing on to a vessel to go whaling would provide him with an advance for clothing, and the cash to pay his debts.

He writes, "If you send me 25 dollars and I do not profit by it never more will I come to Providence but if I do which I know I shall, I shall return next summer and I hope the past will be forgotten. If you will send it me I will go to work as quick as possible and I promise to send you the money in two or three months and if you do not send it I must go a whaling for I must have advance to get some clothes. I shall go to the post office on Tuesday and if I don not get an answer I shall ship on Wednesday."

What father, or parent could refuse such a plaintive request? Today a parent might practice "tough love," and even as early as 1861 the phrase "you have made your bed, now you must lie in it." It made me wonder about the fate of Albert Branch, if his father sent the money, or if Albert went a-whaling. We do not know. This is only one, of many different kinds of archival documents at the museum that hold a little piece of life, from a long time ago.

Ask to see the letter at our membership meeting, March 29, at 6:30, I'm looking forward to seeing you all.

Sincerely,

Maggie Botelho
Membership Chairperson