

FALL RIVER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

IN FOCUS

ISSUE 01 | SPRING 2021

UPCOMING EVENT!

Please join us for the Fall River Historical Society's **"Spring into Summer"** 2021 virtual silent auction.

The dates of the auction are Saturday, June 20 at 9 a.m. through Sunday, June 26, at 9 p.m.

This auction will include a variety of items to bid on that have been specifically donated for this event, as well as to provide

the opportunity for you to make a direct donation to the FRHS.

With your continued support, we can sustain our mission to collect and exhibit artifacts pertaining to the history and multi-cultural people of Fall River. We serve the public through exhibitions, educational programs, publications, and cultural events, and frequently partner with the city and

other non-profit organizations in presenting events for the benefit of the community.

All proceeds from this auction will directly benefit the museum.

Please save the date and join us! Stay tuned for more details.

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So you think you know Fall
River?

FALL RIVER
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
451 Rock Street
Fall River, MA 02720
508-679-1071
fallriverhistorical.org

ROBERT SPEAR DUNNING (1829-1905)
Oil on canvas, 8"x 13"



PASTORAL LANDSCAPE

Robert Spear Dunning (1829-1905), the founder of the Fall River School, is an artist best known for his opulent still life compositions, but his oeuvre also included countless portraits of the city's grandees, coastal marine paintings, and landscapes. The 19th century was the golden age of landscape painting; Dunning embraced this movement and produced beautifully rendered pastoral scenes of exceptional quality, but they are often overlooked – and inevitably overshadowed – by his still life work.

The location of this rural farm scene, painted in 1882, is not identified – it was his custom to do so – but nonetheless, be it rural

Massachusetts, or New Hampshire, or some other locale the artist frequented with easel and palette, and captured with brush, this painting is a choice example. It is a fine addition to the FRHS collection.

The painting was in the collection of David Mason Anthony (1835-1915) of Fall River, and descended in his family until 2008; subsequently in a private collection until late 2020, it was acquired for the FRHS by an **Anonymous Family Foundation**.

The painting will be featured in an upcoming Curator's Corner article.



FALL RIVER MEETS LITTLE EGYPT

BY BOB KITCHEN

In the early 20th century, Fall River mills were producing large quantities of cotton cloth, and the city was one of the world's top producers. Mill workers toiled long hours for small pay; in what little leisure time they had, looked for entertainment. In the summer, there was the arrival of the many circuses that criss-crossed America—as many as five a year. In the winter, live shows were popular, and Fall River had a number of venues. Vaudeville offered a variety of singers, dancers, and circus acts. The Academy Theater presented more sophisticated shows, including legitimate plays and concerts. There were also theaters that offered shows of what some might have considered lower-class entertainment. As early as the 1880s, we find citizens testifying against the renewal of the license of the Fall River Opera House with Robert K. Remington leading the opposition. Another theater was under attack for offering “indecent” entertainment—Rich's Empire Theater on Second Street, formerly Rich's Dewey Theatre. This theater faced Main Street and became one of the major vaudeville and movie houses in later years. The Little Egypt episode occurred here in March of 1900 and brought some notoriety to the city.

The Columbian Exposition was held in Chicago in 1893 to celebrate the arrival of Columbus in America some 400 years earlier. Countries exhibited their products and varied entertainments were offered. One venue was called “A Street in Cairo” and it featured, for the first time in America, the belly dance. At the time, it was called the hoochie-coochie or shimmy and shake, the latter term aptly describing the motions involved in the dance. Fareda Mazar Spyropolis performed it at the Exposition and was a sensation, drawing worldwide recognition. Another notable belly dancer was Ashea Wabe—stage name Little Egypt—her real name was Catherine Devine, a Canadian girl of Lebanese extraction. She became known internationally and appeared in many cities in America, including Fall River.

Little Egypt knew how to attract attention. In 1897, she was dancing in New York City and was hired to perform at a bachelor party for Clinton Barnum Seeley, thrown by his brother Herbert Barnum Seeley, both grandsons of P.T. Barnum. P.T. left them a fortune with the stipulation that they use Barnum as their middle names. Clinton was the favorite grandson and was supposed to help run the circus. He had little interest or skill in show business and lasted one year on the road. Herbert was the playboy type and P.T. had no faith in him. P.T.'s very able partner, James Bailey, didn't feel that the Barnum boys were up to the task of running the circus and even threatened to end the partnership if Clinton stayed.

The party featured a 17-course meal and scantily clad young ladies distributing gifts and tokens. In the early morning hours, Little Egypt was to do her dance, ending in a finale posing in the altogether. Word got out and the police raided before Little Egypt got to her finale. The police captain that led the raid came under considerable criticism from the newspapers for interfering in the simple fun of these gentlemen. Coming to the defense of the captain was none other than New York City Police Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt. The story of the party was covered by the press and it appeared in the Fall River papers.

Ms. Wabe continued to dance for her supper and formed the Little Egypt Burlesque Company. In Fall River, her show was called “The Little Egypt Farce and Extravaganza Company.” (You have to make it interesting for the rubes.) The show played three days in Fall River with three matinees and three evening performances. Word circulated that it was interesting and it attracted large audiences. The police saw the Friday matinee and deemed it unacceptable for the city. Little Egypt was told to eliminate the belly dance from her show. However, the dance was not cut out of the Friday evening show and a warrant was issued for her arrest. Captain John Brocklehurst and Lieutenant Fred T. Barker went to Rich's Theater to serve the warrant, but Ms. Wabe had been tipped off and escaped to the McKinley Hotel where she hid until friends obtained a hack and aided in her escape over the Slade Ferry Bridge to Somerset. It was reported that she boarded a train at the Brayton Station in Somerset, to Providence and safety.

To their dismay, the Saturday matinee customers heard an address by the theater manager announcing that Little Egypt wouldn't appear as “such a wave of morality had suddenly swept up Second St. as to render it impossible for honest people to make a living dancing for the public.” There were many sad faces that day at Rich's Theater. One newspaper reported part of the sadness was that the city officials would miss the dance in court; perhaps they should have just bought a ticket. There was a rumor that there was a dinner performance on Thursday evening in which Little Egypt gave a parlor recital to a very select coterie of Fall River men, but no indication was given of whom these gents were. The scenario is entirely plausible.

This was not the end of the Little Egypt affair. The police were still holding the warrant and smarting over the fact that they couldn't serve it. It was learned that Ms. Wabe would be traveling from New York City to Boston via the Fall River Line and boat train. Officer Bartholomew Leary, whose beat was the Fall River pier, was designated to serve the warrant. Since he had never seen the dancer, he had to rely on the passenger list and could not find anyone who he thought looked like the subject leaving the ship for the train. Maybe Little Egypt used her real name for the ticket. Regardless, the warrant was never served, and Little Egypt again escaped.

In late October, Little Egypt's manager arrived in Fall River to smooth things out with the city officials. The manager suggested that she be allowed to deliver herself, plead *nolo contendere*, do a couple of steps on the probation officers' table in the District Court to determine the degree of her offense and open up at a local theatre for another run. An advertisement was posted for a November 1-3 stand at Rich's Theatre featuring Little Egypt's Burlesque Company. We find no documentation that the show was ever presented.

Miss Devine proved to be a good businesswoman. She died young in 1908, by asphyxiation when her gas heater malfunctioned; her estate was estimated between \$100,000 and \$200,000.

Special thanks to George Petrin for his contributions to this article.

FALL RIVER HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESS NEWS

Local history is the bedrock of the FRHS Press, established in 2016 to publish non-fiction works on various local and specialized topics. Our maxim: providing the reader with compelling, informative works ... and a great read!

Press editors have been busy, as the following attest:

American Textile Colossus: The Story of Fall River, Massachusetts, Its Cotton Manufacturing Industry, and Its People by Jay J. Lambert, was published in November, 2020, having been long anticipated. A decade in the making, it is a sweeping saga of Fall River's old cotton textile industry—the managerial hierarchy, the workforce, and the events and issues that shaped their lives. Documenting the industry from the local perspective, it is an unpretentious effort to understand the city's role in the industrialization of America. It is a brilliant work.

Jay very generously donated 100% of his authorship rights to the museum. Additionally, he and his wife, Barbara, funded the entire production costs, ensuring that all proceeds fully benefit the FRHS.

Exciting News: At the request of Historic New England, the book was just submitted for consideration in their 2021 Book Prize competition. Good luck, Jay!

Soft cover edition, illustrated, 700 pages, \$28.95

First edition hardback (100 signed copies), dust jacket, illustrated, 807 pages, \$100.00 – very limited quantity still available.

The soft cover edition of **The Commonwealth of Massachusetts vs. Lizzie A. Borden: The Knowlton Papers, 1892-1893** was published by the FRHS Press in October, 2020. This landmark work, originally published by the FRHS in 1994 in a limited edition, was edited by Michael Martins and Dennis Binette; the first collection of primary source material ever to appear in print on the Borden case, its publication made news world-wide.

This new edition was undertaken as a time-consuming volunteer project by Stefani Koorey, who surprised us with the publication; her intent—to help the museum raise funds during the pandemic. It is doing exactly that. Thank you, Stefani!

Softcover, illustrated, 550 pages, \$27.95

FORTHCOMING TITLES

Frank Warren Knowlton & Edmund Lester Pearson Correspondence, 1923-1930 – Annotated, consists of a fascinating collection of previously unpublished letters and telegrams between Frank W. Knowlton (1878-1932), the son of Hosea Morrill Knowlton (1847-1902), who served as prosecuting attorney for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts vs. Lizzie A. Borden, and librarian and true crime author, Edmund Lester Pearson (1880-1937), who was researching his book, *Studies in Murder*.

Pearson, who is credited with inventing a short form of the true crime genre, first wrote to Knowlton, his former Harvard classmate, requesting assistance in tracking down primary source material on the Borden case. Knowlton readily obliged, even granting unprecedented access to his father's files.

These letters detail the particulars – and the intrigue—as the two men, working at a time when Lizzie A. Borden still lived—contacted aged attorneys and legal professionals who participated in the trial.

A rare insight into the methodology employed by the two men.

Edited by Michael Martins, Dennis Binette, and Stefani Koorey, the book will be released in 2021.

The Jennings Journals, 1892-1893: Unpublished Notes and Documents from the Files of Defense Attorney Andrew Jackson Jennings, is the long-awaited publication of material donated to the FRHS in 2011 by the estate of Edward Saunders Waring (1924-2011), the grandson of Atty. Jennings. Originally part of the famed “Hip Bath Collection” of Borden trial material retained by Jennings following the acquittal of Lizzie A. Borden, these notebooks were among the few items kept by the Waring family when the material was donated in 1968. The entirety has since been gifted to the FRHS. It was Mr. Waring's intention to edit the material for publication, and he devoted many years to the project; it remained incomplete at the time of his death.

These meticulously detailed notebooks – one with handwritten notes, the other, with cross-referenced newspaper clippings – offer the first glimpse into how members of the defense team worked in building a case for Lizzie's innocence. Jennings and his associates interviewed many individuals—prominent citizens and ordinary folk alike—in the effort to preserve their recollections of the Borden family and the day of the murders, August 4, 1892.

This volume is, without doubt, the most significant collection of primary source material on the Borden case to be published since *The Knowlton Papers* in 1992.

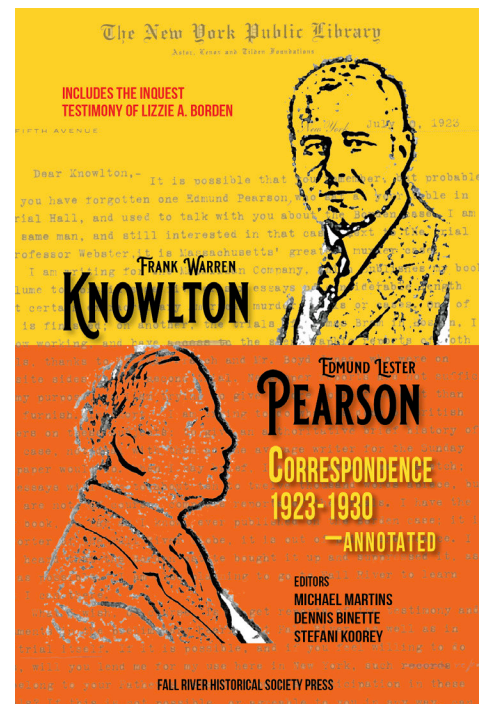
Edited by Michael Martins, Dennis Binette, and Stefani Koorey, the book will be released in 2021.

IN THE WORKS

Work is nearly complete on a major, yet-to-be-titled book, documenting the career of entrepreneur and philanthropist **Earle Perry Charlton Sr.** (1863-1930). The project was undertaken at the request of the Trustees of the Charlton Charitable Trusts. The book will explore Charlton's extraordinary rise from retail store manager to Five-and-Ten-Cent-Store magnate, as well as the family legacy of philanthropy.

The text is being written by Bill Moniz, author of **Granite, Grit, and Grace: An Exploration of the Fascinating Side Streets of Fall River's History**, published by the FRHS Press in 2017. Bill's business acumen and captivating writing style—he is a retired executive and newspaper writer—positions him as the keystone in a research team that includes Michael Martins, Dennis A. Binette, and Charlton's great-granddaughter, Stacey Charlton.

The work draws heavily on important Charlton family archival material in the FRHS collection, and primary source material gathered nationwide.



GRANTS AND FUNDING

The challenges resulting from the global pandemic have been devastating for cultural institutions world-wide; for the FRHS, closure, in compliance with Commonwealth of Massachusetts and Center for Disease Control mandates, saw significant museum revenue vanish.

Many members and friends immediately came forward with financial support and, importantly, encouraging words, the latter at a time when they were sorely needed.

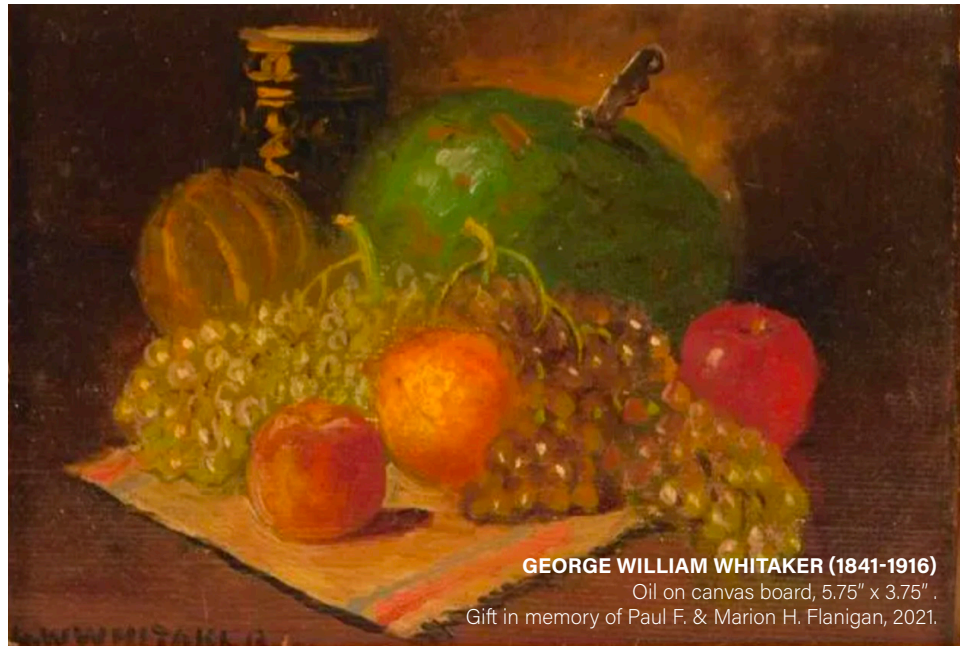
Thank you!

The FRHS has been extremely fortunate to receive significant grants from the **Ida S. Charlton Charity Fund** and the **Twenty-Seven Foundation** that provided generous unrestricted operating support, ensuring that day-to-day expenses be met and that the museum continue to thrive, despite many challenges. These grants remain the FRHS's lifeline during this critical time.

Additionally, the FRHS received emergency aid in the form of two **Paycheck Protection Program** (PPP) loans. This U.S. Small Business Administration-backed program provides businesses with funds to keep staff employed during the COVID-19 crisis; qualified expenditures are forgiven once the funds are expended.

A generous grant from **The Manton Foundation** provided funds for the creation of a Master Plan and site survey to identify and address critical deferred maintenance issues and internal facility/collections needs. Existing conditions have been thoroughly investigated, requiring input from specialists in multiple disciplines, including: architectural; electrical; mechanical; plumbing; structural; fire protection; and cost estimating. Architectural drawings, with floor plans of each level, a roof plan, and exterior elevations have been executed, and the structure has been thoroughly photographed.

The Master Plan will establish priorities, goals, and objectives, thus providing the framework for a successful, proactive approach. The resulting comprehensive operations and maintenance plan will dictate a strategy for phased restoration/rehabilitation, subsequent upkeep, and direction to extend the service life of critical building systems. The project



GEORGE WILLIAM WHITAKER (1841-1916)

Oil on canvas board, 5.75" x 3.75"

Gift in memory of Paul F. & Marion H. Flanigan, 2021.

is being overseen by Civitects, a full service architectural and planning firm with considerable experience in the preparation of Master Plans, including those for historic structures. This plan will be instrumental in securing funding from potential grant sources to implement various phases of restoration and/or rehabilitation.

An Anonymous Donor has funded the conservation of three 19th century gilt picture frames in the FRHS collection; this delicate work is highly-specialized and costly. Work included surface cleaning, consolidation of damaged areas, casting lost decorative elements, gilding, and glazing newly-gilded areas in harmony with the original patina. The frame conservation program is ongoing, with work undertaken only when specifically designated funds are secured.

An Anonymous Donor provided funds for the software and technical support package required to conduct Palette Pictures, our annual fund-raising event, as an online auction. The new format was well received by bidders, making Palette Pictures XII the most successful to date! The virtual auction sale featured works in various mediums, all donated by local artists.

GRANT APPLICATIONS PENDING FUNDING DECISIONS INCLUDE:

A request to the **Fall River Community Preservation Committee** (CPC) for funds to undertake major restoration/rehabilitation on the exterior of the museum building, specifically, replacing the roof, and restoration

of all areas above the third-floor gutter line, including the cupola. This critical work was identified as a priority in the Master Plan.

An application has been submitted to **The Fan Association of North America** (FANA) for the conservation of an important hand fan, dating to the 1880s. It was painted by Francis Houghton, a renowned English fan-painter, and features a silk leaf inset with handmade *Point de Gaze* lace, mounted on deeply carved and pierced mother-of-pearl guards and sticks, inset with gold and silver. Houghton fans are prized by museums and collectors alike, with examples held in the Royal Collection Trust, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and prominent institutions in North America. This example is one of over 200 hand fans in the FRHS collection.

CHALLENGES

The challenges resulting from the global pandemic have been devastating for cultural institutions world-wide.

FROM THE ARCHIVE

Cynthia Tobojka is creating catalogue records for books, unpublished works, and archival materials held by the FRHS, and entering the information into the SAILS, Inc. Enterprise Online Catalogue; the list of library/archival holdings, which is ever-growing, is accessible world-wide.

Irene Fernandes has processed a collection of 298 criminal cards, or mugshots, taken in Fall River from 1911 to 1948. The cards have been arranged chronologically, marked with object identification numbers, and housed in acid-free materials. She is currently indexing an extensive scrapbook of obituary clippings of Fall Riverites.

Susan Lavoie has been researching the operational history of select businesses via the Fall River city directories to aid in dating various objects in the FRHS collections.

Bonnie Davis Mendes has been carefully reassembling a large collection of the papers of Robert Adams (1816-1900) and his family, donated to the FRHS in 1948. Adams, who immigrated to Fall River from Scotland as a young man, was a highly successful bookbinder, entrepreneur, and philanthropist; an abolitionist, he was an active "conductor" of the Underground Railroad.

When the documents were donated, the collection was disassembled, as was the unfortunate practice at that time, and "catalogued" by filing them in boxes arranged by year, mixed in with other manuscripts. This goes against all archival standards. A fundamental archival principal is to respect the original order of the collection and catalogue it as such, because the manner in which papers are arranged provides evidence of how the documents were created or used. Furthermore, it is imperative that they be kept together.

To *organize* a collection of manuscripts is a labor-intensive process; to *reorganize* a collection, in effect to recreate it, is painstaking. To that end, Bonnie has been sorting through thousands of documents, and extracting those from the Adams estate. Ultimately, the papers will be catalogued, housed in archival materials, and made fully accessible to researchers and scholars.

This project was prompted by an inquiry from Dr. Kelly Ann Kolodny, a professor at Framingham State University, who was

researching for her book, *Normalities: The First Professionally Prepared Teachers in the United States* – Adams' wife, formerly Lydia Ann Stowe (1823-1904), was a graduate in the first class of the nation's first state normal school, established in Lexington, Massachusetts, in 1839.

Providing Dr. Kolodny access to the collection in its disassembled format was time consuming, making it clear that they had to be reassembled and properly catalogued. Enter, Bonnie.

There remain many similar projects yet to be tackled; unfortunately, in years past, many collections were disassembled in like fashion.

Connie Mendes has been working from home, answering genealogical research inquiries received via the website. She recently returned to the archive and is working on the FRHS's extensive postcard collection.

Trish Rebello has been cataloguing a collection of 2,130 handwritten business checks from the Durfee Mills, dating to the 1870s. The process has included arranging the checks alphabetically by payee; in the case of multiple documents per payee, they were further categorized in date order. Each was marked with an accession/object identification number. She is currently housing the documents in acid-free materials.

In addition, Trish is recording accession data on photographs in the FRHS collection in preparation for recataloguing the images.

David Roseberry has performed myriad tasks in the archive, most recently researching people and businesses for various FRHS projects or forthcoming publications.

Suzie Mills Shaw is cataloguing a set of probate records, dating from 1890 to 1970. She is entering pertinent biographical data on the individuals mentioned into the People/Biography field of the museum software program, making the records searchable and easily accessible to researchers.

Marilyn Pelto has been overseeing the herculean task of cataloguing an extensive collection of thousands of photograph negatives – and some prints – taken in Fall River by Mullen Studio; the images date from the 1960s to the 1980s and include portraits, groups, and businesses. The negatives were chaotically placed in storage boxes when the studio closed, at which time they were donated to the FRHS. This project has been underway for four years.

FRHS Staff members have been working on various projects, among them:

Conserving, cataloguing, and housing in acid-free materials, large collections of Durfee Mills accident reports, payroll records, and insurance cards, dating from the first quarter of the 20th century, all precious held in storage; these records are now fully searchable by employee name and available to researchers. The FRHS collection of primary source material pertaining to the city's once-thriving cotton textile industry and its multicultural workforce is the largest extant. Our goal is to make all of this material easily accessible to researchers and scholars.

Cataloguing and housing in acid-free materials a collection of Louis Hand, Inc. business records, trade catalogues, and photographs; the firm was Fall River's largest manufacturer of window dressings, in business from 1945 to 2008.

The process of cataloguing two extensive collections of 19th and 20th century personal letters, previously held in storage, is underway; they have been sorted by recipient, and further arranged chronologically and by sender. Identifying, researching, and recording basic biographical data on each sender is ongoing, a necessary step in fully cataloguing and interpreting the material.

Two scrapbooks containing hundreds of Fall River obituaries were disassembled, with the clippings deacidified, mended when necessary, and transferred, in their original order, to a single, acid-free volume; the original pages on which the clippings were affixed were disintegrating, posing a threat to the articles. This delicate work required several months to complete.

Several thousand examples of ephemera in the FRHS holdings have been reassigned standardized accession and object identification numbers, in keeping with current museum standards, and catalogued in the collections management system.

Note: Archival-grade materials are purchased only when specifically designated grant or private donor funds are secured.

Our goal is to make all of this primary source material easily accessible to researchers and scholars.

RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Why does the FRHS collect?—

Because our fundamental role as a historical society museum is to collect, document, and display historical and cultural objects for the benefit of the public—in this case material pertaining to the city of Fall River and its multicultural people. Additionally, the FRHS acquires associated objects in various categories to further our ability to interpret artifacts in the museum holdings. Acquisitions must fill a particular need, or upgrade or broaden the scope of the existing collection.

One example: To fully understand the artists of the Fall River School and their influence on 19th century American art – specifically the

still life genre – it is necessary to study and compare their paintings with the output of their contemporaries, working in other regional schools. Only then can one recognize the distinct characteristics that epitomized the Fall River School.

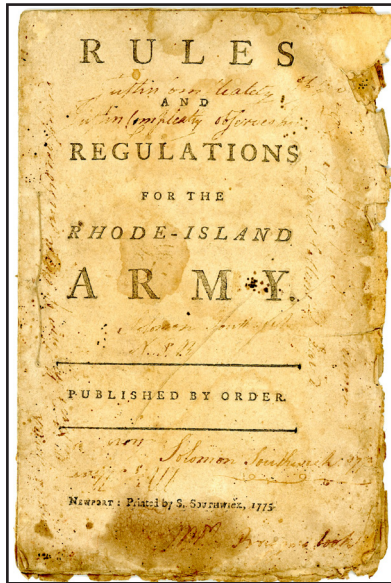
It is imperative that the FRHS continuously broaden the scope of its collections by acquiring pertinent primary and collateral material. The collection must not stagnate. When opportunity for significant acquisition arises, every attempt must be made to bring it to fruition, expanding the range of the collections for present and future generations.

Collections must be exhibited. As a historic house and history museum, we must strike a balance between period room settings and exhibition space. This is a difficult proposition; one must be sympathetic to the remarkably well-preserved interior of the building, and, in tandem, present exhibits in gallery settings. A gallery must be created to meet the changing needs of the collection.

Acquisitions are made by donation or purchase, and thanks to the generosity of private donors and philanthropic foundations, the FRHS is doing just that.



Miss Paine by Mary Lizzie Macomber (1861-1916); oil on panel, 10" x 8". Macomber, a Fall River native, was noted for her allegorical paintings in the Pre-Raphaelite style. Gift of the Grimshaw-Gudewicz Charitable Foundation.



Rules and Regulations for the Rhode-Island Army, 1775; laid paper, S. Southwick, Newport, RI, 5.5" x 8.5". This scarce early American imprint descended in the Morton family. Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Bernard L. Brown.



Fall Riverite Grace (Hartley) Howe and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt at Easter Sunrise Services, Arlington National Cemetery. Photograph; Gelatin print, 6.5" x 8.5", International News Photo, NY, 1933. Gift of Hilario J. Soares.

TRIVIA

SO YOU THINK YOU KNOW FALL RIVER?

Did you know that the Sagamore Mill #3, which closed in 1965, produced the last cotton cloth in Fall River?

Did you know that the town of Fall River, Rhode Island, extending from Columbia Street south to what became State Avenue, including Globe Village and Mt. Hope Village, lasted only five years, from 1856-1861?

FROM *AMERICAN TEXTILE COLOSSUS* BY JAY J. LAMBERT, FRHS PRESS, 2020.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Cynthia Tobojka

What is your occupation?: I am a retired librarian/cataloguer.

What is the scope of your volunteer work at the FRHS?: I create MARC records for Fall River Historical Society materials. MARC stands for Machine Readable Cataloging. Anyone from anywhere may view the Society's records on SAILS at <https://sails.ent.sirsi.net/client/en_US/default/>

What is the best part of your volunteer work at the FRHS?: I most enjoy learning the history of Fall River. It's also satisfying to know that the records I create will help others to learn about Fall River and her past.

The FRHS is such an interesting place and Michael Martins is a walking encyclopedia who always has answers to satisfy my incurable curiosity about the city.

Volunteers profiled in the SPOTLIGHT are chosen at random.