

# FALL RIVER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# IN FOCUS

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## FRHS PRESS NEWS

*The Knowlton-Pearson Correspondence, 1923-1930: Unpublished Letters Between Frank Warren Knowlton and Edmund Lester Pearson – Annotated* has been released by the FRHS Press and is now available in the museum shop or via mail order.

The files were donated to the FRHS in

1998 by **Frank Warren Knowlton Jr.** (1912-2002), the son of the man addressed in this volume.

The book was edited by Michael Martins, Dennis A. Binette, and Stefani Koorey.

This fully annotated correspondence will fascinate those interested in the Borden

case as well as any individual interested in the investigative process. The FRHS stands at the forefront in publishing primary source material pertaining to the Borden Trial and related subjects and is pleased to make available this material from its extensive archive.

Paperback, 313 pages, \$19.95

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FALL RIVER  
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### BRYANT CHAPIN (1859-1927)

Still Life, 1910  
Oil on canvas, 15" x 11"



Gift in memory of Joan Louise (Goodreau) Borden, 2021.

## A STILL LIFE PAINTING

Bryant Chapin (1859-1927), a noted member of the Fall River School, was a man of many talents—artist, instructor, and lecturer on art. A master of the still life genre, he specializing in realistic depictions of fruit that fall into two distinct categories: compositions arranged on a highly polished tabletop, often with an elaborately carved edge molding; or outdoors on the ground, with fruit displayed in direct contact with the soil.

A still life painting by Chapin, dating to 1910, that was recently acquired by the

FRHS is a fine example of the artist's later work, significantly filling a gap in the collection. The museum's holdings including several works by the artist, among them landscapes and marines, still life of fruit, game, and fish, and two self-portraits.

Until the acquisition of this painting, an exceptional example of his *nature morte* from the early second decade of the twentieth century was lacking.

(continued on page 4)



Members of the Fontaine family on the Watuppa steamboat; courtesy of Matthew Fontaine

# ADARONDAK GROVE

BY BOB KITCHEN

The American Civil War ended in 1865 and, by 1870, Fall River was beginning to “loom up.” With a population of 27,000, the city had grown steadily since its incorporation in 1854 when it boasted a population of 12,000. Manufacturing had prospered in that period, but the city was to experience a building boom that would be unparalleled in its history. While no mills were built in the city in 1870, some 16 mills would be built between 1871 and 1873. These mills were: King Philip; Border City; Weetamoe; Osborn; Narragansett; Fall River Bleachery; Sagamore; Richard Borden; Slade; Flint; Crescent; Montaup; Shove; Wampanoag; Stafford; and Chace. The mills were constructed mostly of granite, a building material easily found in the city, which sits on a large plug of granite called a batholith and mining the stone was simply a case of pushing back the topsoil covering of the rock and then cutting the stone. Most mills were constructed close to the site of the quarry. In addition to granite, other building materials were needed, including large quantities of sand for the mortar mix to cement the stones together.

Anticipating this need for sand for the mill construction, a company called the Watuppa Sand Company was formed with Southard H. Miller as its president and Gilbert Wordell its manager. The 1870 City Directory lists Miller as a carpenter living on Second Street and Wordell as owner of a wood yard on lower Pleasant Street. When the few sand deposits existing in the city proper were exhausted, a new source had to be found. The company purchased from Spencer Macomber between six and seven acres of land on the east side of the North Watuppa Pond that included a large sand bank and a grove of full-grown trees. This sand deposit was what geologists call a kame deposit, created by water running off and through the retreating ice sheet. The deposit left behind is made of sorted material and was ready to use. These deposits could be found throughout the area, and many have been mined over the years.

To move the sand to the city, Miller and Wordell decided to construct a flat-bottomed stern wheel steamboat at Wordell’s wood yard. The boat was some 40 feet in length with a shallow draft and was named the *Enterprise*. Joseph Terry built the boat on site. He usually built boats at the Iron Works Wharf to run on the Taunton River. The engine was supplied by Gifford, Houghton & Company, which built portable and stationary hoisting engines. Since the boiler and engine occupied most of the boat, a barge was constructed to carry the sand. This barge was some 60 feet long and 12 feet wide and was also built at the Wordell wood yard site, just east of the Troy Building

on Pleasant Street. The *Enterprise* was captained by Henry Wordell. Wood and farmers goods were also carried, but the main product was the sand mined on the shores of the North Watuppa Pond. The *Enterprise* sailed up the Quequechan into the South Watuppa, thence into the North Watuppa. The grove lay a mile or so from the Narrows, where the two ponds joined.

The steamer was launched on August 3, 1870, and the barge on August 19. The first trip was made at 9 a.m. on the 19th, followed by a second trip in the afternoon. About 200 friends and members of the city government were on the two trips. The bridge at the Narrows was six feet above the water to allow the boat to pass under it into the North Watuppa. The smokestack on the boat was hinged so that it could be folded down to get it under the bridge. The total time for the trip from Pleasant Street to Adarondack Grove was 70 minutes. The *Fall River Daily Evening News* reported that a pleasant and fine sail was had. They took a band of musicians with them to entertain the patrons and the shores were lined with people anxious to see the first steamer on the Watuppa. A clam dinner was served at the Grove. After an inspection of the Grove, a singing group called Quadrilation, clad in naval uniforms and accompanied by the band, sang “The Star Spangled Banner.” A sail around the North Watuppa shoreline was had before returning to the pier at Wordell’s wood yard.

Noting the comments of the passengers, the owners decided that running excursions to the Grove would be profitable. They then built a barge expressly for passengers and launched it on September 8, 1870. The barge was named the *Excursionist* and could be chartered along with the *Enterprise* for \$25 per day. It was a popular charter with Sunday schools and picnic parties, and moonlight excursions held sway for the warm summer months.

The Watuppa Sand Company operated for only two years. The advent of the railroad line running through the South Watuppa and Quequechan Rivers made the operation of the steamboat difficult, if not impossible. The *Enterprise* was sold to David M. Anthony who moved her to the Taunton River and changed her design from a stern to a side wheeler. Her name was changed to the *Lark*. Anthony, who started as the owner of a meat market, would eventually become associated with the meat packer Swift & Co., and would become a wealthy provisioner. The *Lark* did a bit of towing, but Anthony primarily used her for fishing and clamming trips and to travel to his summer home, Bay Point, in Swansea, Massachusetts.

## GRANTS AND FUNDING

The Preservation Master Plan (MP) and site survey, funded by a generous grant of \$55,000 from **The Manton Foundation** and detailed in the last issue of *In Focus* is complete; the project was overseen by Civitects, a full service architectural and planning firm based in Fall River. The comprehensive document provides the necessary framework for a phased approach to restoration and maintenance of the structure housing the museum, as well as critical building systems.

The document has already proved instrumental in securing funding to address three projects identified as priorities in the MP: Roof replacement and exterior restoration; a gallery for rotating exhibits; and Phase I of a project to install an HVAC system in the museum building.

The **Fall River Community Preservation Committee** (CPC) has awarded a grant of \$389,943; this funding was approved by the Fall River City Council. The grant provides funds for replacing the roof on the museum building, and restoration/rehabilitation of all areas above the third floor gutter line, including the cupola, and the mansard roof that retains the majority of its original slate shingles.

This grant meets the requirements of the Community Preservation Act in the category of Historic Preservation, with the structure being significant to both the architectural and cultural history of the city.

The existing roofing system is approximately thirty-years old and is approaching the end of its life expectancy; it must be replaced to prevent failure or moisture penetration that would result in damage to the building, its remarkably preserved period interior, or objects in the museum collections.

All exterior wood decorative elements will be restored or replaced with reproductions, and the ornamental cast iron roof cresting will be reset. The majority of the original decorative components remain in situ on the building, which has remained virtually unaltered since its reconstruction in its present location in 1870. Indeed, the building is a unique survivor in Fall River, and remains the city's finest example of the Second Empire style of architecture.

The completed project will ensure the structural integrity and long-term

preservation of the building and will result in cost savings due to enhanced energy performance. Work will commence in 2022.

Longtime FRHS member and supporter **Douglas H. Borden Jr.** has made a contribution of \$250,000 to be used for the creation of the **Douglas Hills Borden Jr. and Joan Louise (Goodreau) Borden Gallery** that will be utilized specifically for rotating exhibits.

In a letter to the curator, Doug put to words his reason for the gift, which further cements the relationship he and his late wife, Joan, have enjoyed with the organization:

"Completion of this action will satisfy a long-time desire to be a permanent part of the Society. From the day we first met Florence Brigham, we have come to know and appreciate your mission and our heritage. It is intended that they blend in this action I am taking for Joan and me."

The project is being undertaken with the full support of Doug and Joan's four children, all of whom have become Life Members of the FRHS, continuing the familial relationship into the next generation. The family has deep roots in the city, being direct descendants of Fall River industrialist Jefferson Borden (1801-1887); many artifacts pertaining to their heritage are contained in museum collections.

The south-west room on the first floor of the museum building is being adapted to provide much-needed and easily accessible gallery space for rotating exhibits that can be drawn from FRHS collections and a variety of other sources. The room is the largest in the building and was used a music room when the house was a private residence. In keeping with the FRHS's high standards of preservation, the design, by the Fall River architectural firm Civitects, is sympathetic to the original interior; period woodwork, polychrome stenciling, and lighting will remain in place and any modifications will be nonintrusive and easily reversible. Work on the gallery commenced in late August.

The project will be featured in an upcoming issue of *In Focus*. Stay tuned!

**The Manton Foundation** has approved a grant of \$72,870 to underwrite Phase I of a major infrastructure project to install an HVAC system in the entire museum building. This project was identified as the top priority in the MP due to the present inability to control temperature and relative humidity – essential elements of collections

care – making it impossible for the FRHS to prevent ongoing physical damage and deterioration to the building and organic/inorganic material housed in the collection. It is imperative that a stable and controlled museum environment be created and maintained.

The existing heating system is of immediate concern: Of the twenty-five radiators in the building, only ten are currently functioning and of those, three are leaking; only two radiators service the entire second floor; and none are in operation on the third floor. There are no mechanical cooling, dehumidification, humidification, or ventilation systems in the building, posing a threat to museum collections. The only means of ventilation currently available to the staff is to open windows, providing limited air circulation when weather conditions permit. This practice is extremely hazardous, causing the formation of harmful micro-climates, and allowing various airborne pollutants and unfiltered ultraviolet light into the museum environment, damaging fragile collections.

Phase I includes the MEP engineering design, hazardous materials inspection, and consulting services for the bidding process/contractor vetting. Following the successful completion of Phase I, funding will be explored for Phase II, which encompasses all aspects of the HVAC system installation.

The proposed installation of an HVAC system will be transformative and will have lasting impact, ensuring the long-term safety and preservation of museum collections, and providing a healthier environment for visitors and staff. The FRHS is indebted to the Trustees of The Manton Foundation for their generous support and interest in the work of the museum.

*(continued on page 4)*

**"Completion of this action will satisfy a long-time desire to be a permanent part of the Society."**

**—Douglas Hills Borden Jr.**



## BEHIND THE SCENES

Housekeeping is tedious, essential, and enjoyed by very few. In an historic house/museum setting, containing thousands of objects of cultural and intrinsic value, the task is exacerbated by the extreme caution employed to safeguard museum collections. Case in point: 17th to 20th century glass, earthenware, and silver, displayed in the dining room cabinets at the FRHS.

Just ask Caroline Aubin. She spent nearly four months cleaning 1078 objects in three built-in corner cabinets in the dining room, marked each piece with both accession and individual object identification numbers, and entered the information into the collections management software.

With no area on the first floor of the museum building equipped for collections care, it was necessary for Caroline to transport each piece downstairs to the archival area – 49 steps at her normal walking pace, including 14 stairs, one way – where she cleaned them, using various techniques and agents that were evaluated on a case-to-case basis. During the process, archaic accession numbers were removed and replaced with a standardized identification system in keeping with accepted museum practices.

In truth, the task was long overdue. The process was a herculean one, but the results are breathtaking, with glassware, glazes on earthenware, and silver sparkling.

Asked to comment on the project: "I didn't break anything ... so there was that."

Well said, Caroline!

in 2020. Doug was shown the piece during a recent visit to the FRHS; he was very pleased.

The painting depicts an assortment of choice fruit – purple grapes with waxy bloom, a mottled pear, an orange, a Lombard plum, a velvety peach, and a crisp Baldwin apple – artfully arranged on a highly polished wooden tabletop. The composition is centered by a luscious orange, broken open and presented almost in the manner of an anatomical fruit specimen, a bravura tactic that allowed the artist to display his myriad skills. The disparate textures of the pebbled skin, soft pith, and fuzzy central core are realistically captured, as is light, playing off the transparent, veined membrane that protects the juicy flesh of each segment. The oil on canvas painting measures 15" x 11" and is housed in its original gilt gesso frame, with elaborate cast laurel leaf, berry, and strapwork ornamentation.

Research into provenance is ongoing: The painting was consigned to auction by a private collector who had acquired it from a picker in Columbus, Ohio, in 2006; when recently contacted by the consignor, at our request, the picker said he purchased it "from a private individual," but could not recall the name.

Intriguingly, the painting appears to have once been in a Fall River collection. The remnants of a small label affixed to the reverse of the canvas stretcher bears the name "Dorothy Remington", handwritten in ink. Dorothy Remington (1897-1985), later Mrs. John Lear Severance Jr., was a Fall River native. The daughter of Berthold Montgomery Remington (1870-1951) and Helen Anne Remington, née Francis (1868-1936), Dorothy was the great-great-niece of Robert Knight Remington (1826-1886), whose mansion now houses the FRHS.

The piece has survived in excellent condition and requires very minor conservation of the painting and frame. Treatment consisting of a light surface cleaning by a picture conservator will remove the discolored varnish and surface grime that is obscuring the

vibrant palette, restoring it to its original appearance. A specialized conservator will clean the lightly soiled finish on gilt frame that, remarkably, has suffered no losses to cast gesso ornamentation. Conservation will take place shortly.

The FRHS is delighted to add this painting to the permanent collection of works by Bryant Chapin, allowing us to more fully interpret the artist's mature style; thank you, Doug!

## GRANTS AND FUNDING CONT.

A gift of \$10,000 has been received from FRHS members **Donald and Linda (Stafford) Harrop** for the purchase of archival supplies for safely housing museum collections. The contribution came with the following message:

"I was just reading the recent newsletter from the FRHS and was amazed at the work your volunteers are accomplishing. Kudos to them and to your staff as well. I think many people do not realize the plethora of documents and information the Society has on hand. I particularly noted the blurb about archival materials being funded by private donations, so Donald and I are enclosing a check to assist in this area."

In the last issue of *In Focus* it was noted that archival grade materials – vital for conservation yet prohibitively costly – are purchased only when specifically designated funds are secured. As such, undertaking archival cataloging and collection maintenance projects is governed by the ability to obtain the necessary acid-free materials: no funding, no supplies, no progress.

Thanks to Donald and Linda, several projects are currently underway, secure in the fact that the FRHS has the ability to make the required purchases.

## A STILL LIFE PAINTING CONT.

The painting was offered for sale by a New Jersey auction house and was acquired for the permanent collection of the FRHS with funds donated by long-time member Douglas Hills Borden Jr., in memory of his wife, Joan Louise (Goodreau) Borden, who passed away

**"I was just reading the recent newsletter . . . and was amazed by the work your volunteers are accomplishing. Kudos to you and to your staff as well."**

**—Linda (Stafford) Harrop**

## FROM THE ARCHIVE

Ruth Virginia Charlton (1891-1995), the eldest daughter of five-and-ten-cent-store retail magnate and philanthropist Earle Perry Charlton Sr. (1863-1930), was a prolific letter writer; fortunately, a large collection of her correspondence, spanning the years 1911 to 1918 has survived, providing a glimpse into her privileged world. The letters, along with other personal family and business documents, are preserved in the Charlton archival collection at the FRHS.

In addition to providing details of Ruth's day-to-day activities, the correspondence is peppered with references to her parents and siblings, providing rare insight into family life that does not appear elsewhere in the historical record. For the nearly complete book documenting the life and career of Earle P. Charlton that is being written by author Bill Moniz and researched by the FRHS and Stacey Charlton, the letters are a font of important primary source material.

But accessing the information has been challenging due to Ruth's difficult handwriting; reading the text is time consuming and not for the faint of heart. Fortunately, a transcription project, funded by a grant from the **Ida S. Charlton Charity Fund**, is currently underway.

The project is being undertaken by Danielle E. Cabral, a current graduate student in history at Providence College; during an internship at the FRHS when an undergraduate at Salve Regina University, she helped catalogue a portion of the Charlton family archive. During that time she honed the ability to decipher Ruth's particularly difficult handwriting.

Danielle holds the distinction of being the first graduate student doing specific grant-funded work with the FRHS. The museum is currently exploring ways to expand its ability to offer opportunities to college graduate students focusing on collections management, education, public relations, conservation, and independent research. An exciting prospect!

Danielle was asked to update *In Focus* readers about the project:

In 2019 I began my undergraduate internship with the FRHS where I fell in love with the people, the work, and, of course, the history. I began working in the archive with the Charlton letters and,



*Ruth Virginia Charlton in Paris, France, August 1914.*

ever since, it has been a dream of mine to work here.

When Michael asked if I would like to work with the museum on a grant-funded project I do not think I let him finish his question before answering with a resounding "yes!" In that moment I was beside myself with excitement and knew that no matter what the project was I would give it my all. I very soon realized I would be revisiting old friends from the early 1900's – the Charlton family.

I had worked with their family papers during my internship when I spent time going through the letters of Virginia Charlton (1895-1982) from her 1921 world tour, and sorting Ruth Charlton's letters, which was difficult because her handwriting can be almost hieroglyphic at times. It was a real challenge.

Little did I know at the time but I was foreshadowing my own future endeavor. It has taken me some time to get used to her handwriting "style", but it does become progressively easier to read her letters every time I open an envelope, so the transcription process is moving along steadily. Spending the vast majority of my summer with Ruth has made me chuckle with her wit and her silly jokes. However, "Ruth Virginia", as she called herself, was one strong willed woman!

It has truly been a wonderful experience seeing the world through the lens of a young woman writing during a time in history when many women did not have much of a voice. While Ruth gives me some difficulty with her penmanship, her letters give me joy because through them I can better understand what the life of an elite woman of Fall River was like. To be honest, I have spent so much time with her that I find myself using her anecdotes

in my emails or conversations and I laugh when I catch myself, thinking: "Oh, there's Ruth!"

I hope that I am doing justice to the project and to the Charlton family history through my work. Ruth had an incredible life, and I feel profoundly grateful to be tasked with transcribing the record of her travels, thoughts, and emotions. Better still, once the project is complete and the letters are more easily accessible, future researchers will understand the complexities of Ruth's life, her personality, and her family dynamic, as I do.

A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to meet Ruth's great-niece, Stacey Charlton, who was visiting the FRHS. It was fascinating to discuss the project and the contents of the letters with a family member.

To me, the whole experience is quite wonderful.

As Ruth would say, "Think you not so?"

**The museum is currently exploring ways to expand its ability to offer opportunities to college graduate students.**



# COLLECTION RESTORATION

The FRHS maintains an extensive collection of fashion accessories, including many hand fans; the majority date to the 19th and early 20th century and have detailed provenance.

This fan belonged to Mrs. Harold Brown (Georgette Wetmore Sherman 1872-1960), a prominent Providence and Newport, Rhode Island, socialite, who was also an early member of the FRHS; she donated several personal fashion accessories to the museum in 1937. She was a close friend of Fall Riverite Alice Brayton (1878-1972), whose Portsmouth, Rhode Island, summer estate, Green Animals, was famous – then and now – for its whimsical topiary. Alice was an original incorporator of the FRHS and a financial mainstay of the organization during its early years. She enlisted many of her friends for support, Mrs. Brown among them.

Georgette's wealth ensured that she was dressed by the foremost couturiers of the day, and her wardrobe included accessories obtained from the leading purveyors of luxury goods in the United States and Europe. The hand fans and parasols she donated to the FRHS are among the finest in the museum collection.

This fan is a choice example. The leaf, of handmade Belgian, Point de Gaze lace, is

inset with a silk panel featuring a scene of a coquettish, nymph-like young woman, with sheer robes billowing in the wind, standing in a waterside foliate grove; it was painted, c 1900, by Francis Houghton, a renowned English fan artist. The leaf is mounted on lustrous, opalescent mother-of-pearl sticks and guards, pierced and carved with rococo scrollwork, floral sprays, butterflies, and a bird, heightened with gold and silver. Surprisingly little is known about Houghton's career, but fans painted by this prolific and exceptionally talented artist are prized by collectors and museum's alike.

Conservation was funded by a grant from the **Fan Association of North America (FANA)**, a non-profit, membership-based organization, dedicated to the study, conservation, acquisition, and identification of hand fans. The group, in which the FRHS maintains a membership, encourages the research, education, and exhibition of fans and is an important source of reference material and knowledge on all things fans. They are very welcoming!

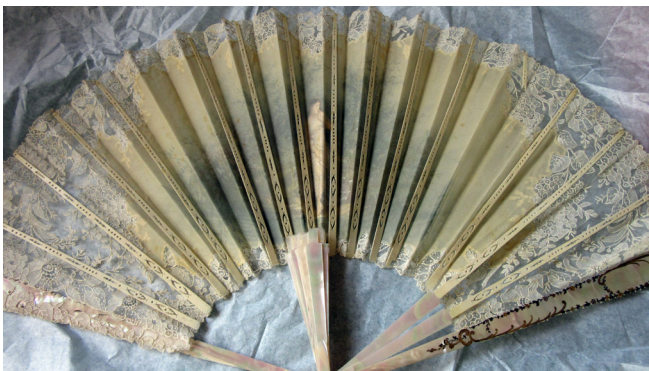
The individual components of the fan were in an overall fine state of preservation, but condition issues were present that required stabilization and conservation. Fourteen of the sixteen mother-of-pearl sticks has become

detached from the pierced bone ribs, due to the degradation of the original adhesive used when the fan was manufactured. Two of the ribs were disconnected from the mount; one was intact and the other, fragmentary. The lace leaf had lifted in several areas from the guard sticks, also due to glue degradation, and a small stress fracture was present in the silk leaf panel, along a fold.

The work was undertaken by Betty Smith, a noted master hand fan conservator working in Mesa, Arizona. Conservation entailed: lightly cleaning the fan; re-gluing the fourteen sticks to the ribs; reattaching two ribs, one of which she reassembled from the original fragments; repairing one small split in the leaf; and adhering the lace to the guards. In Betty's masterful hands the fan was restored to its original condition.

Caroline Aubin explored funding sources, wrote the grant, and oversaw this project for the FRHS. The fan is currently on display in the parlor and will be included in an upcoming online exhibit, now in the planning stages.

The FRHS acknowledges, with gratitude, the grant committee, board of directors, and membership of FANA, for unanimously supporting this funding. Special thanks to Dr. Abby Block Cash, of FANA, for her advice and encouragement, and to Betty Smith, for undertaking the conservation. Thank you, all!



Back of fan before conservation.



Front of fan after conservation.

## TRIVIA

SO YOU THINK YOU KNOW FALL RIVER?

Did you know that as a result of the Granite Mill Fire of 1874, laws and regulations were enacted to require mill buildings to have more than one exit?

Did you know that the fire debris from the Great Fire of 1928 was taken to the Globe Pond, where the first cotton mill was established in 1811, and used as fill to create Father Kelly Park?

FROM HISTORIC FIRES OF FALL RIVER  
BY STEFANI KOOREY, PHD, HISTORY PRESS, 2016.

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

### Irene Fernandes

**What is your occupation?:** I am a retired paraprofessional.

**What is the scope of your volunteer work at the FRHS?:** I volunteer in the museum shop, manning the sales counter, checking-in and pricing inventory, and answering and directing telephone calls – basically all aspects of shop business. When the museum is closed for the season I volunteer in the archive. I recently processed a large collection of mugshots, and just finished indexing a scrapbook of obituary clippings.

**What is the best part of your volunteer work at the FRHS?:** I really enjoy being with the people here – the staff and other volunteers. I love working in this house.

Volunteers profiled in the SPOTLIGHT are chosen at random.