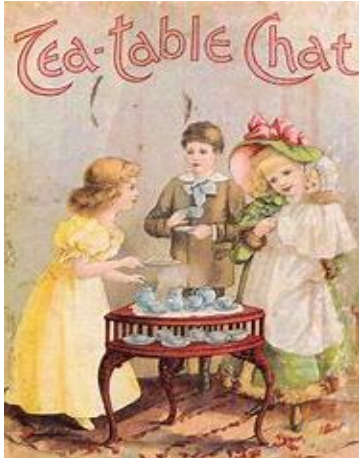
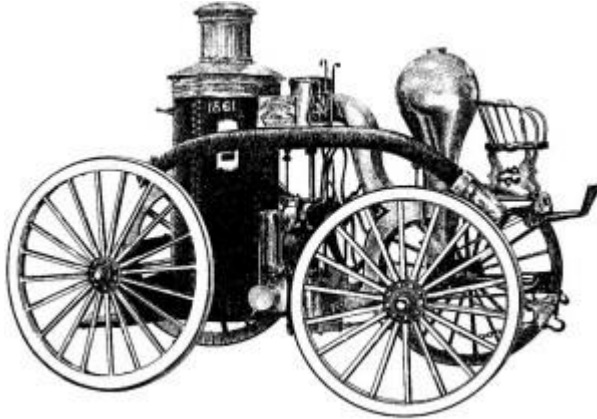


CHS Newsletter

Spring 2025

APRIL 22nd 7:00 pm CHS Membership Meeting
A History of Fire Fighting in Cranston, R. I.
Speaker: James Ignasher



1351 Cranston Street ~ Cranston, RI 02920
(401) 944-9226

facebook.com/cranstonhistoricalsociety
email: cranston.historical.society@gmail.com

Up Coming Events

Spring Cleanup - April 12

American Girl Doll Tea at the Mansion - June 1

Rochambeau Strawberry Biscuit Tea at Joy Homestead - June 18

Gaspee Celtic Jam - May 10, July 19 and Aug. 23

Shakespeare Under the Stars - July 24, 25 and 26

President's Message

By Sandra Moyer

Welcome back to the 76th year of the Cranston Historical Society. We had a great 75th anniversary celebration last year. The Gala in September was a big success where we honored nine wonderful people who have done a lot for our city and hopefully, made more people aware of the Society.

Raising awareness is something we are looking forward to continuing this year. We are currently working on a new website to replace the one that was previously hacked and taken offline. I'd like to thank our members who are working with me on the content for the website including Barbara Polichetti and John Hill as well as Gregg and Mary Mierka. But most of all, I would like to thank Ron Barnes who helped us immensely with the technical aspects of creating a website. In the meantime, you can keep up with the Society's doings by visiting our Facebook page.



Our general meeting will be on April 22nd at 7 pm in the Sprague Mansion. Jim Ignasher, who has entertained us before with his presentation on the history of the Cranston Police Force and a presentation at Halloween on True Tales of NE Macabre Happenings, will be back with an all new presentation on Cranston firefighters entitled A History of Fire Fighting in Cranston, R. I. He will trace their history from the days of an all volunteer force to the modern force that we have today. To see more about his presentation, see Jim's article on page 4 of this newsletter.

Continuing with firefighting as a theme, Jan Ragno has written an article on a famous fire that happened in Cranston in 1939, Jim Hall has some photos of firefighting artifacts we have in our collection and Mary Mierka has written about the type of meals that firemen made for themselves in their stations.

Check out our list of upcoming events on the next page. We will once again have an American Girl Doll Tea, this time featuring the Rebecca Rubin doll from the early 1900's. There will also be raffles and a chance to win your own American Girl Doll. Later in the summer, we will hold the Rochambeau Strawberry Biscuit Tea at the Joy Homestead as well as three Celtic concerts and a Shakespearean play on the Sprague Mansion grounds.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

April 12 Saturday 1 to 3pm Sprague Mansion. Spring Grounds Beautification/Clean-Up (weather permitting). Bring gloves, rake, & clippers. (Leaf bags, a chain saw/leaf blower would be helpful.)

April 22 7:00pm at Sprague Mansion. Free. General Membership meeting. **Speaker: James Ignasher, A History of Firefighting in Cranston, RI.**



May 16 6:00pm Early Evening Tour with Tea at Sprague Mansion. Enjoy a relaxing evening tea & special sweet served in the Sprague dining room. A&W Sprague Manufacturing Co. presentation w/Mansion tour. Must RSVP/limited seating. Call 944-9226. \$18 nonmembers; \$16 members, payable by May 9 to Cranston Historical Society, 1351 Cranston St., Cranston 02920. Accessible/parking in back.



June 1 2:00 to 4:00pm at Sprague Mansion. American Girl Doll Tea ~ Grand Ballroom. Young folks can bring an American Girl doll or favorite doll along with an adult. By Reservation Only: (401) 944-9226: \$22 per person. Payable by May 23 to Cranston Historical Society, 1351 Cranston St., Cranston 02920. Accessible/parking in back. Call Mary 944-9226 to volunteer.

June 18 6:00pm at Joy Homestead. 156 Scituate Ave. **Rochambeau Strawberry Biscuit Tea** celebrating the 244th anniversary of Rochambeau and his French troops marching to join Washington at Yorktown. Donation: \$5

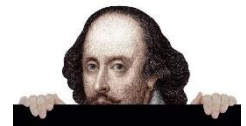
June 27 6:00pm Early Evening Tour with Tea at Sprague Mansion.

Enjoy a relaxing evening tea & special sweet served in the Sprague dining room. A&W Sprague Manufacturing Co. presentation w/ Mansion tour. Must RSVP/limited seating. Call 944-9226. \$18 nonmembers; \$16 members, payable by June 20 to Cranston Historical Society, 1351 Cranston St., Cranston 02920. Accessible/parking in back.



Enjoy Celtic Music on May 10th in the Mansion and July 19th and Aug. 23rd in the Carriage House at 4 pm. If you wish, bring along an instrument and join the group in song! Tickets: \$13 each concert.

Shakespeare Under the Stars is back! July 24, 25, 26 at 7 pm on the grounds at Governor Sprague Mansion. Bring a lawn chair or lawn blanket. Please no pets. Donation.



October 24 Friday 7:00 pm at the Spoooooky Sprague Mansion. Charlie the Butler Ghost Party features Jared the Magician & Mentalist.

December 7 Holiday Open House Sunday 3:00 - 5:00 pm with 4:30pm Outdoor Tree lighting

Call to volunteer at any of our events (401) 944-9226.

**The printing of CHS Newsletters is done by All the Answers, Warwick
Mailing, Printing & Design Services**

Winter Happenings



Decorating the Tree & Mansion Holiday Open House



Thanking the City of Cranston for their support



Outdoor Tree Lighting with Bain Chorus and Band



Frank DelSanto, Past CHS President and Bd. of Directors member, turns 100!



The History of Firefighting in Cranston By Jim Ignasher

Today we take it for granted that in the event of a fire, summoning help is just a phone call away, but such was not always the case. In fact, organized fire protection in Cranston is a relatively modern convenience, for the city's first fire company wasn't established until the 1890s – and with obsolete equipment!

From bucket brigades, to volunteer companies, to a full-time paid fire department, Cranston's firefighting history is varied and colorful. For example, the city's earliest fire engines were pulled by hand and took twenty or more men to operate. At one time Cranston had eleven volunteer fire companies, and three quasi fire companies, all of which are now defunct.

Why did it take nearly 140 years after Cranston's incorporation to establish the first volunteer fire company? Why was the police department's only patrol wagon turned over to the Arlington Fire Company in 1911? When did the city establish a paid fire department? If you want to know the answers to these questions, join us on April 22, at 7:00 p.m. author and historian Jim Ignasher will give a talk on the history of firefighting in Cranston.

Did you know Cranston has a fire museum? The Cranston Volunteer Firefighters Museum is located at 470 Hope Road in Cranston. To check the museum out virtually, visit its website at <https://cranstonvolunteerfirefightersmuseum.com/> or visit their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/p/Cranston-Volunteer-Firefighters-Museum-100094904487286/>



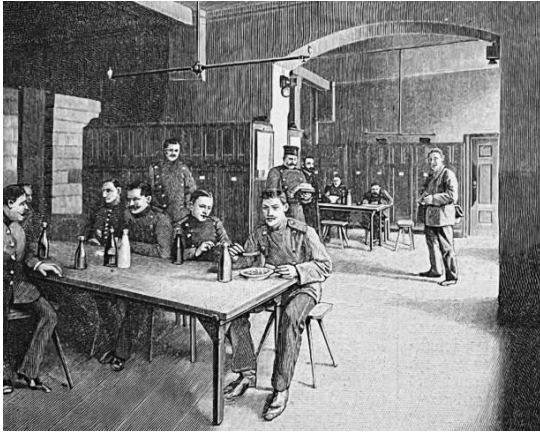
Here are some interior shots of the collections of historic artifacts from the museum.



Long Ago

The Firefighters' Meal Together

By Mary Mierka



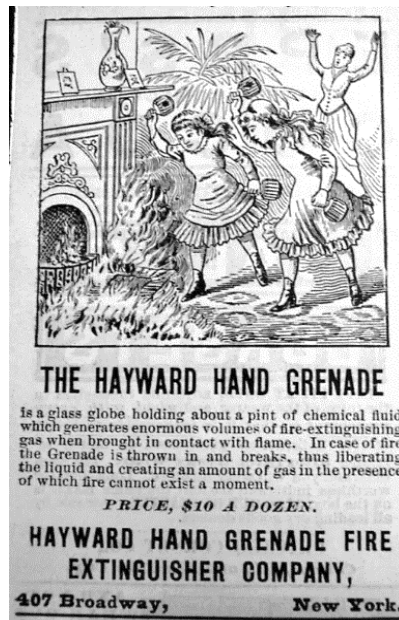
Back in the 1700s and 1800s, the motto at fire halls, when 'rookie' fire fighters took to the kitchen to cook the meals on their assigned shift, was "it doesn't matter what it tastes like as long as there is enough!" They cooked large quantities at a time and focused on fast, hearty, and filling fares like stews of pork, beef, fish and lamb as well as soups. Vegetables, whatever they had available in the pantry, were boiled, roasted or grilled. But a favorite throughout the early decades was steak and potatoes!

Meals where the firefighters gathered around were very important times. They told stories, shared the good things in their life like a birth or marriage, and shared sad occasions such as a death in their family . . . and always trying to be humorous. Cooking together instills harmony and teamwork and makes them family. Our friends at Cranston Fire Station #3, across the street from the Sprague Mansion, share a favorite recipe often made as an afternoon meal.

In the kitchen: Fire Grenades or Extinguishers



A glass bottle, usually with a narrow neck and gradually wider at the bottom, was used to put out kitchen fires. In early times, they were filled with salt water since it has a lower freezing capacity. Mounted on the wall in various locations in the house including the kitchen, they could be grabbed easily, thrown against the wall to shatter, and try to put a flame out. The design and concept dates back to the Roman Empire.



Cranston Fire Station #3 Red Lead Pasta

A tradition for years, every Sunday, all the fire stations in Cranston serve pasta. Fire Station #3 calls their pasta: Red Lead. A hearty dish of red sauce, pasta, meatballs, and sausage.

We'd love to give out their recipe but we are told it is a guarded Station #3 secret!



Fire Fighter Essentials

By James Hall, Curator

We have quite a few artifacts concerning the Cranston Fire Department in our Collection.

A leather fireman's helmet shield, embossed with "A & W. Sprague Co. 1 Hose," c.1860. This would have been worn by a fireman in the 1st Hose Company at the A. & W. Sprague Print Works. His assignment was to transport hoses on reel carts or hose carts, then stretch them to connect with the water supply at the fire scene.



Firefighting units had distinct roles:

- Hose Companies handled hose transport and water supply.
- Ladder Companies transported and erected ladders, using axes and saws for access and ventilation.
- Engine Companies operated pumps to supply water for firefighting.
- Rescue Companies provided medical aid and life-saving equipment.

While modern departments usually combine these functions, the tradition of using helmet shields for identification persists, especially in historical and volunteer fire departments.



A badge consisting of a pin-top bar, ribbon, and round medal. The top bar has an inscription, "Hand Engine Muster Pawtuxet, R.I. Aug 31, 1905". The front of the medal has an image of a fire man wearing his fire helmet in color. Surrounding the fire man is the inscription, "Firemen's Celebration". A "Muster" event was a celebration or competition where local fire companies would showcase their skills and equipment, such as hand-pumped engines (which were often used before motorized fire trucks). The specific date, August 31, 1905, suggests that this was a notable celebration, possibly marking an anniversary of the fire department, a community-wide event, or a special dedication. The "Firemen's Celebration" inscription further implies this was a festive occasion to honor firefighters and possibly to raise public awareness or camaraderie among the community's firemen. It could have included parades, demonstrations, or a social gathering, with the badge serving as a commemorative keepsake for those involved.

Corner

A white metal fireman's badge engraved with "Meshanticut Fire Dept. R.I." Fire companies were traditionally volunteer-based organizations responsible for firefighting tasks in the 18th and 19th centuries. These companies were often organized by neighborhoods or local communities, one of which was the Meshanticut Company. Fire departments, however, emerged as more formal, professional entities, often staffed with paid personnel. The transition to fire departments, which included professional management and paid firefighters, became widespread in the 1920s. Over time, the companies were merged into the Cranston Fire Department. This badge was likely produced during the period of this transition.



The hose reel in this photograph dates back to a time when firefighting equipment was manually operated by fire companies. These early hose reels, pulled by a team of men, were used to transport and deploy hoses to fight fires. Constructed with sturdy wooden spindles and large, steel-rimmed wheels, these reels were designed to carry long coils of hose to the scene of a fire. Once there, firefighters would quickly unroll the hose, connect it to the water source, and begin battling the blaze. The Hope-Jackson Fire Company loaned the hose reel to the Cranston Historical Society in 1988.

This fire wagon, crafted in 1797, is an example of early firefighting technology, used before the advent of motorized engines. Initially, the fire wagon was a horse-drawn cart equipped with buckets and hand tools, designed to transport firefighters and basic firefighting gear to a fire. These early wagons were often the backbone of volunteer fire companies, which relied on human and animal power to move equipment to the scene.



In 1814, this fire wagon was converted into a pumper, marking an important advancement in firefighting equipment. The conversion added a pump mechanism, allowing firefighters to actively force water through hoses to combat flames, significantly improving firefighting capabilities. The addition of the pump was a game-changer, reducing the reliance on manually drawn water and enabling quicker response times. The Woonsocket Fire Department eventually incorporated this wagon as part of its operations. The wagon is on loan to the Cranston Historical Society by the Rhode Island Historical Society.

Fiskeville Fire

By Jan Ragno

Betty Searle woke up to the crashing thunder and a blast that brought the whole family out of their beds. A horrific electrical storm raged outside their home on Seven Mile Road in Fiskeville. It was August 17, 1939 and Betty, her sister, brothers and parents looked out the windows to see what that last blast had brought to the neighborhood. Her father had heard the crash and knew that something in the area had been hit by lightning. Looking out the window, he could see flames coming from a neighbor's property. He directed his family to stay in the house and not leave.



Edward Searle ran to help his neighbor, knowing how quickly a fire could destroy everything it touched. He had a more major concern; he knew that his neighbor, Israel Brayton and Brayton's family were at a dangerously high risk. Searle knew of an imminent danger stored in that barn which could destroy their whole farm.



Arriving at the scene, Searle saw that the cupola of the Brayton barn had been hit by lightning. There were animals inside the barn that would perish if they were not released. Brayton had tried to reach the local fire company, but the electrical and telephone services were out due to the storm. Twenty-one prize Guernsey cows, a blue-ribbon Guernsey bull along with three horses were trapped in the barn.

The blaze had spread down from the cupola, engulfing the barn in flames. Brayton tried to rescue the animals, but the heat drove him back. He went to the back of the barn and, assisted by neighbors, he was able to free the horses from a fiery death. The pitiful bleating and mooing of the trapped animals brought the whole village to action. Tragically, the cows and blue-ribbon bull all lost their lives that morning.

Yesteryear

Then the Fiskeville and Hope-Jackson fire companies arrived on the scene. The firefighters had fumbled in a dark fire station to gather the supplies needed to fight the inferno. Hope - Jackson took the east side of the barn and Fiskeville attacked the fire from the middle. Oaklawn, Pocasset, and No. 3 Hope and Ladder Companies of the Cranston regulars led by Chief Daniel Young responded within the hour; six companies and over 50 men poured tons of water from the Brayton hydrant and the Battery Four Corners hydrant across the street on the blaze, The Cranston regulars took positions at the rear of the barn but to no avail. The terrible fire took the entire barn, although firefighters were able to save the house and other farm buildings from being destroyed.



The next morning, as 40 tons of hay still smoldered and burst into flames in spots, Brayton expressed his appreciation for all the firefighters who worked tirelessly to contain the blaze, including companies from Warwick and Coventry. Neighbors and wives of the men had fed the firefighters.

Poor Mrs. Brayton, Israel's mother, a prominent socialite in the area had to take to her bed for several days and be treated by a physician due to the shock. Not only the cows and bull were gone but a new milking machine and a plethora of farming tools were lost in the blaze.

The terrible storm moved on throughout the area causing power outages and hitting more than one Cranston residence without significant damage.

Edward Searle, having helped to put out the flames returned to his home and family, very happy in the knowledge that the store of TNT under the stairs in the Brayton barn that only he and a few neighbors had knowledge of had not exploded.

AMERICAN GIRL DOLL TEA

The Cranston Historical Society
Invites you to:

AMERICAN GIRL DOLL AFTERNOON TEA

June 1, 2025 2pm
Governor Sprague Mansion
1351 Cranston St, Cranston, RI

OUR HOST THIS YEAR IS AMERICAN GIRL REBECCA RUBIN. REBECCA REPRESENTS
EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICA DURING THE SECOND WAVE OF EUROPEAN
IMMIGRANTS AND JEWS-AMERICAN CULTURE.
HER FAMILY SETTLED NEW YORK CITY BUT WE ARE THRILLED THAT SHE'LL BE OUR
HOST FOR THE TEA.
BRING YOUR DOLL OR BORROW ONE OF OURS. THIS EVENT IS PERFECT FOR
CHILDREN AND PARENTS



The cost of the tea is \$22.00
per person.

There will also be raffles and a
chance to win your own
American Girl Doll



Call 401.944.9226
to make a
reservation



Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address/City/State/Zip: _____

of Guests: _____ Amount Enclosed: \$ _____ Ck #: _____

Email: _____



I am unable to attend--Here is a donation to support the fundraising event.

\$ _____

Cranston Historical Society
1351 Cranston Street
Cranston, RI 02920

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- Firefighters' Favorite Meal to Share
- Curator's Corner: Fire Fighters' Essentials
- Fiskeville Fire
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