



CHS Newsletter

Summer/Fall 2025

SEPT. 16 7:00 pm CHS Membership Meeting

Topic: Cranston Restaurants Through the Years

Presented by John Hill



Up Coming Events

Gaspee Celtic Jam - Aug. 23

A Taste of Cranston @ Sprague Mansion – Aug. 26

Fall Tour with Tea – Sept. 26

Ghost Party with Jared the Mentalist – Oct. 24

The Cranston Historical Society's mission is to protect, document, interpret and expand understanding of Cranston history.

1351 Cranston Street ~ Cranston, RI 02920 (401) 944-9226
facebook.com/cranstonhistoricalsociety

www.cranstonhistory.org

President's Message

President's Message

By Sandra Moyer

Following the success of our 75th Anniversary Gala at the end of last summer, the Cranston Historical Society's Board has decided to hold another fundraiser on August 26 on the grounds of the Governor Sprague Mansion. Instead of honoring people who have done a lot for Cranston like we did in the Gala, this year we will be honoring an important business sector in our city – restaurants.

We invite you to participate in ***The Taste of Cranston*** which will offer samples of foods of many area restaurants. We are still adding to the list of participating restaurants but so far it includes well known ones like Twin Oaks, Avvio, and Macera's, as well as lesser known establishments such as LaEskina Gastronomia Mexicana. This will be a chance for you to enjoy signature dishes of restaurants you already like as well as to acquaint yourself with other restaurants that are new to you. As a special treat, Chef Jesse Tate, a Cranston resident, will also do a food demonstration. The details of ***The Taste of Cranston*** are on the inside back cover of this newsletter.

Since we have restaurants on our minds, we have asked Board member, John Hill to speak at our next general membership meeting on September 16 on ***Cranston Restaurants Through the Years***. John, who is the chair of the Cranston Historical Cemeteries Commission, will be familiar to readers of the Cranston Herald where he frequently writes on Cranston cemeteries. Previously, he was a reporter for the Providence Journal. In his Power Point presentation, John will highlight our very earliest eating establishments right up to some of our longest running restaurants still operating today.

In keeping with this theme, our newsletter covers early eateries in Cranston. John Hill, our speaker, has an article on Cranston Taverns and Jim Hall, our curator, writes about an important artifact in our collection from the historic Caleb Arnold Tavern. Mary describes the type of foods that were served in taverns and I wrote on the difference between a tavern, a hotel and a stand and give an example of each from Cranston's history.



Membership News

In Memoriam

Henry A.L. Brown, Rudy Sanda, Gerald Sherman

New Members

Cranston: Logan Archer Brown-Life, (*gift from Robert Stetson Cocroft*); Kathleen/Joseph Crowley; Anthony Defusco/Dale Venturini; Christina Donato/Ralph Walton; Frank/Lolly Iacobbo; Virginia Kowal; Charlotte Toolan/Jonathan Halmi; Ralph DeFusco/Ralph's Catering; Susan Skorupa (*joined in memory of mother Louise Skorupa*)

Warwick: Adrien Beaulieu; Paul Long-Life

Scituate: Hon. Frank J. Williams-Life

Smithfield: Bonnie Reisman

Membership Dues — Reminder

Don't forget to send your membership dues for 2025 – 2026

NEW -- Email Updates: To receive email communication, please send your contact info to:
cranston.historical.society@gmail.com

Please support our Other Business Members and Donors:

All The Answers, Inc.-Warwick, Mailing & Printing Services alltheanswersinc.com

PPA, LLP-Certified Public Accounts info@ppallp.com

Rhode Island Civil War Round Table-RI's premier Civil War
discussion group ricwrt.com

Rhode Island Dental Arts-Cranston, All dental services ridentists.com

EMC (Energy Management & Control Services)-Cranston, providers of
building control/energy & integrated facility management systems emccontrols.net

Forest Hills Nurseries Inc.-Cranston, Retail/Wholesale plants/nursery foresthillsnurseries.com

After 5 Party Rentals-Rumford james@after5partyrentals.com

Home Depot-Johnston Lowes-Cranston

Goldstar Landscaping & Irrigation-No. Prov. rmacari@cox.net

Tasca Auto Group-Pontiac Ave.-Cranston tasca.com

North Eastern Tree Services-Cranston northeasterntree.com

JTN Landscaping Services-Central Falls jtnlandscapingservices@gmail.com

Rotary Club of Cranston rotaryclubofcranston.org

Vonsol Construction Management-Cranston vonsolpartners.com

Thanks from Curator James Hall / Recent Donations to CHS Collections:

Christine Charest – Gorham Silver plate tea set with 2 pots, cream & sugar, tray

Don D'Amato - some Cranston Photos

Betsy Nelson - Joy family items - engraved spoons, Joy sampler, Joy documents

Marie Parys - Cranston Books

Port Jefferson Historical Society - Cranston History Papers

The printing of CHS Newsletters is done by All The Answers, Warwick

Spring/Summer Happenings

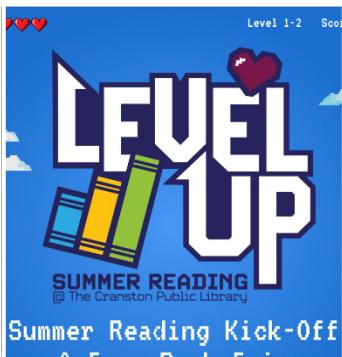


Jim Ignasher makes a presentation about early Cranston Fire Fighters

New Life member Paul Long Donates 1865 map of Cranston



Joy Strawberry Biscuit Tea with Betsy Nelson presenting CHS w/Joy Family artifacts



Cranston Library Book Fair at the Mansion

At Joy - April Tree Planting & CleanUp by Western Cranston Garden Club



American Girl Doll Tea in June



Gaspee Celtic Jam Musicians Summer Performances



Shakespeare Under the Stars Returned for 3 July Performances



Yarns of Yesteryear

Cranston Taverns

By John Hill

Today, bars may add the word ‘tavern’ for a touch of quaint charm, but in the 1700s and early 1800s, taverns were much more than a place to eat. Situated along main roads, they offered rest for stagecoach passengers bound for Boston, Hartford or Providence. And before newspapers, out-of-town travelers gave the locals a chance to find out about the goings-on elsewhere.

In the 1700s taverns were often the only buildings in a town that could accommodate a large crowd, so they would double as public meeting venues. Caleb Arnold’s Tavern on Phenix Avenue, near the Atwood Avenue intersection, did just that for many years. It hosted the first Cranston Town Council meeting in 1754. It was also, in a way, the first town jail, Howard Murdock Taylor wrote in the Cranston Herald in 1953 that a pair of stocks were built behind the tavern to hold ‘disturbers of the peace and quiet.’ The favored beverage at Arnold’s was a drink called “flip”. Arnold’s recipe called for a mug or pitcher of beer sweetened with sugar or molasses or dried pumpkin. He’d then add some rum and stir it with a red-hot rod – a “flip” – from the fire.

Another well-known stagecoach stop was the Anthony Aborn’s Tavern in Pawtuxet, which stood between Aborn and Bridge Streets, right along the road to Providence. The quality of the meals served in colonial era taverns varied widely, but Aborn’s fare was considered superior. Howard G. Belcher noted in a 1957 Herald article that besides stagecoach passengers, Aborn’s was “a popular resort for young blades from the neighboring town looking for a good dinner.” Like Arnold’s tavern, Aborn’s served a civic purpose; the Pawtuxet Artillery met and organized there for the War of 1812.



The Arnold and Aborn taverns are gone now, left to deteriorate to where they were knocked down to make room for more modern commercial purposes.

Hospitality for Colonial Travelers

By Sandra Moyer

In colonial times, most dining was done in the home - either your own or socially in a friend's or relative's house. The exception was that on well-traveled roads, there were places for travelers to stop for refreshment and sometimes to stay overnight. In Cranston, there were examples of three types of these establishments: the tavern, the hotel and the stand house.

Taverns, such as the Caleb Arnold Tavern and the Nehemiah Knight Tavern on Monkey Town Road (now Cranston Street), served alcohol and simple meals as well as often offered a few rooms for travelers. However, taverns were also used by locals as social site for the community. They offered a place, mostly for local men, to exchange gossip and drink ale, rum and cider. Sometimes, they even served a political function when they were used for town meetings. Minutes of such meetings in Cranston recorded lively exchanges between citizens, often fueled by too much alcohol.

Hotels, such as the Sandy Fenner Hotel on the corner of the New London Turnpike and Knightsville Road (now Reservoir Avenue and Park Avenue) were more formal accommodations that would have appealed to a wealthier, more refined clientele, including women and children. Often these travelers arrived in stage coaches from a great distance. There were rooms for overnight stays and more elaborate meals were served. Stables were provided for horses to eat and rest.

The third type of establishment was the stand house which were informal places that accommodated travelers who wanted to eat and perhaps rest their horses. In Cranston, there was the Gorton Arnold Stand on New London Turnpike (now known as New London Avenue.)



The stand also served as a toll house for the turnpike that connected Providence to New London, Connecticut. It is said that the cook would lean out of the kitchen window to collect tolls before letting travelers continue. These tolls helped pay for the upkeep of the turnpikes that connected larger town and cities. They were often built by businessmen who expected a return on their investments.

of Long Ago

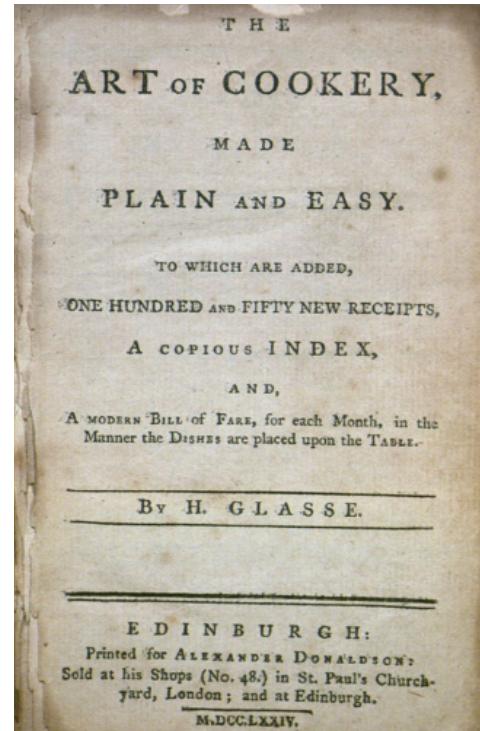
A Favorite Served at RI Taverns By Mary Mierka

By 1770 there were over 6000 taverns across the country. And traveling from the beginning of Boston Post Rd. from New York (in RI along U.S. Rte 1) to Boston, there was a tavern or inn approximately every 8 miles. Taverns and inns were considered the hub for information, places to socialize and even attend a ball, dine and stay the night. They became early voting centers on issues of the times, places to hold town meetings or political forums as well as court sessions, even a mail center.

In Cranston, there were several taverns frequented by not only Rhode Islanders, but travelers from afar including the Caleb Arnold Tavern and Nehemiah Knight's Tavern. Meals were pretty hearty: breakfast was served between 6 to 7am; lunch/dinner was ample and served around noon to 2pm, and supper, a lighter fare, served from at 5 to 7pm, some included desserts of the day. The menu could consist of meat or fish stews or several main meat/fish/shellfish fares with a variety of vegetables, soups, johnny cakes (or journey cakes as they were called since the cornmeal-made small round flat cakes kept well by travelers). At any one of these taverns, perhaps a favorite ordered by travelers would be Scotch Collops (collops: slices of meat or potato pounded thin) – a Scottish beef dish with mushrooms and sauce. Enjoy this recipe from Washington's Mount Vernon.



In the Kitchen:



Scotched Collops

Hannah Glasse: The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy, 1747

2 lbs beef $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick	Nutmeg	Flour	Beaten egg
$\frac{1}{2}$ med. shredded onion	1 tsp lemon peel grated		
Cup cream	Salt & Pepper	Some White Wine	
Herbs (parsley, marjoram, thyme, tarragon tied together)			
Flour & Butter formed into a small ball		Mushrooms	

Pound meat thin with mallet & dredge in egg and flour, then fry in butter until brown. Add all the ingredients, stir until gravy consistency. Remove herbs. Serve with Ale Bread.

1800s meat tenderizer, also known as a meat mallet or meat pounder, is a tool used to even out or break down the tough sections of meat, and reduce cooking time. Sometimes a rolling pin is used. Evidence exists that stone meat pounding tools found date to at least 2 million years ago.

Two Relics from the Caleb Arnold Tavern

By Jim Hall, Curator

Tucked away in the 1790 Room of the Governor Sprague Mansion are two humble but powerful reminders of Cranston's early days—relics from the old Caleb Arnold Tavern, a building steeped in history and memory. Though the tavern was demolished in 1943, these objects—a wrought iron door hinge and a wooden fireplace column—speak volumes about the city's colonial past.



The Caleb Arnold Tavern, once located at what now 227 Phenix Avenue, was the site of the first Cranston Town Meeting in 1754. It was in the tavern's main room, likely warmed by the hearth framed by the now-preserved column, that early residents deliberated and prepared their petition to the Rhode Island General Assembly to set Cranston apart from Providence and establish it as a town. The wooden panel, salvaged from that fireplace, is a fine example of colonial craftsmanship—its joinery and finish showcasing the skill of 18th-century carpenters.

The iron hinge, meanwhile, was taken from the door that led into this very room. It once swung open to welcome townspeople and travelers alike. These two pieces, ordinary in function, are extraordinary in meaning.



Credit for saving these artifacts goes to John Stuart, then Commissioner of Public Works for the City of Cranston. In 1943, recognizing the importance of preserving the city's heritage even as the old tavern was being torn down.

Stuart ensured the hinge and panel were set aside for the Cranston Historical Society. Mayor Edward S. Lind formalized the gift in writing. The rest of the tavern—known to some old-timers as “Granny Westcott's Place”—was carted off to Field's Point, where it was used as landfill.

Corner

Over the years, the tavern went by other names, reflecting its varied owners and roles. It was at times known as “The Josiah Westcott Hotel” and “The Major Westcott House.” But no matter the name, its role as a social and civic hub in early Cranston remained constant.

There's even reason to believe the Caleb Arnold Tavern was passed by one of the most historic marches in American history. In 1781, French troops under General Rochambeau marched from Providence to join General George Washington. Baron Ludwig von Closen, an aide to Rochambeau, wrote of the route: “We went by the Knightsville and Kent to the first night's encampment at Waterman's Tavern in Coventry.” That path would have taken them directly past the Arnold Tavern.

Today, these two modest relics—the hinge and the fireplace panel—stand as witnesses to centuries of Cranston's civic and social life. They are displayed with a plaque in the Governor Sprague Mansion, where they continue to inspire curiosity and respect for the city's beginnings.



A TASTE OF CRANSTON

PRESENTED BY THE
CRANSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



AT THE GOVERNOR SPRAGUE MANSION

Join us for a fundraiser at the Governor Sprague Mansion in support of the Cranston Historical Society and enjoy a sample from a selection of Cranston's local restaurants and businesses.



Purchase your ticket today as space is limited

08.26.2025

5-7PM | GOVERNOR SPREAGUE MANSION
1351 CRANSTON ST, CRANSTON, RI 02920

RESTAURANTS INCLUDE

TWIN OAKS

AVVIO

MARCHETTI'S

MACERA'S

LA ESKINA

EDGEWOOD
CHEESE SHOP

MAKMAK EATARY

CATANZARO'S

TEXAS ROADHOUSE

DEL'S LEMONADE

TICKET PRICE

\$20.00

CHILDREN 5 & UNDER ARE FREE

MORE INFORMATION AT

WWW.CRANSTONHISTORY.ORG

401-944-9226

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.

Calendar of Upcoming Events



Enjoy Celtic Music on Aug. 23 in the Sprague Carriage House at 4 pm. The Gaspee Celtic Jam musicians will entertain guests with lively Irish and Scottish music. For song list at this performance, visit www.gaspeecelticjam.org. If you wish, bring along an instrument and join the group in song! Tickets: \$13; \$5 for 12 and under. 944-9226.

Aug. 26 5 to 7pm. A Taste of Cranston at the Gov. Sprague Mansion grounds. Sample a taste from some of Cranston's best restaurants! A fun family evening -- Good eats! Tickets: \$20 adults; \$5 for 10 & under. 944-9226



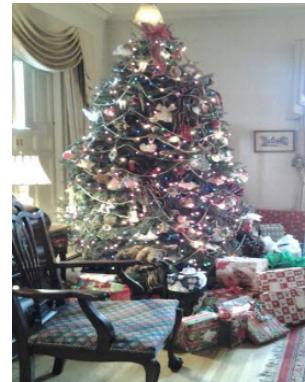
Sept. 26 6:00pm Fall Early Evening Tour with Tea at Sprague Mansion. Enjoy a relaxing evening tea & special sweet served in the Sprague dining room. A&W Sprague Manufacturing Co. presentation w/Mansion tour. Must RSVP/limited seating. Call 944-9226. \$18 nonmembers; \$16 members, payable by Sept. 21 to Cranston Historical Society, 1351 Cranston St., Cranston 02920. Accessible/parking in back.



October 24 Friday 7:00 pm at the Spoooooky Sprague Mansion. Charlie the Butler Ghost Party features Jared the Magician & Mentalist. Will Jared really read your mind? Get a scary picture taken with one of the Mansion ghouls! \$20 payable by Oct. 20 to Cranston Historical Society, 1351 Cranston St., Cranston 02920. Light refreshments. Cranston 02920. Age appropriate 14 & older. Accessible/parking in back.



December 7 Holiday Open House Governor Sprague Mansion Museum Sunday 3:00 – 5:00 pm with 4:30pm Outdoor Tree lighting. The **Joy Homestead Open House 11am to 1pm at 156 Scituate Ave.** More details to come!



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

Cranston Historical Society
351 Cranston Street
Cranston, RI 02920

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No.663
PROVIDENCE, R.I.

Save the Date: August 26 5 - 7pm

A Taste of Cranston

Gov. Sprague Mansion Fundraiser

**Family Fun ~ Try Samples from some of
Cranston's Best Restaurants**
Cranston Chef Jesse Tate will also do a food

demonstration

**Stop by John Hill's table to learn about early
Cranston Taverns/Restaurants**
Tickets: \$20: 5 & under free

inside:

- President's Message
- Membership News
- Spring/Summer Happenings
- Cranston Taverns
- Hospitality for Colonial Travelers
- A Favorite Served at RI Taverns
- Two Relics from the Caleb Arnold Tavern
- Calendar