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bvhsri.org • 1873 Old Louisquisset Pike (Rte 246) • PO Box 125, Lincoln RI, 02865

Michael DiMucci in Concert

Americana: Songs from America's History, from the Revolution to World War I

**CONCERT
SERIES
Live at
North
Gate**

Join us Sunday afternoon on November 5 to welcome Michael DiMucci, pianist and vocalist, to North Gate for BVHS's fall fundraising concert.

Michael DiMucci studied piano with the late Chester Fruscione of Trenton, New Jersey, and at the Westminster Conservatory of Music in Princeton, NJ, where he also studied pipe organ. Mr. DiMucci has played at various RI venues for special events, concerts and recitals, such as Linden Place, Blithewold Mansion, Mount Hope Farm, and the Dunes Club.

As a singer, Mr. DiMucci apprenticed at Boheme Opera in Trenton, NJ for two seasons with Maestro



Michael Di Mucci

Joseph Pucciatti and currently studies voice with RI baritone and artistic director of Opera Providence, Rene de la Garza.

He has performed throughout the New England area in large and small venues for concerts,

private recitals, special events and weddings, and was a regular guest artist at the University of Rhode Island's Opera Workshop. There Mr. DiMucci performed many lead tenor roles including Tamino in *The Magic Flute*; Nanki-Poo in the *Mikado*; Ralph Rackstraw in *H.M.S. Pinafore*; Rinuccio in *Gianni Schicchi* and Matt/Larry in *Face On The Barroom Floor*.

Mr. DiMucci also performs in concerts and recitals for Opera Providence as a guest singer. Because of his diverse musical background, Michael is at home singing Broadway/Musical Theatre, Opera, classical litera-

**Michael DiMucci
Concert 3 pm
Sunday, November 5
North Gate
1973 Old Louisquisset
Pike, Lincoln, RI 02865
Exhibit of WWI
Memorabilia by Kevin
Heskin**

ture, as well as jazz and the American Songbook.

Tickets for the concert are \$20.00 (21.69 with service fee) and are available at BrownPaperTickets.com or by calling 1-800-838-3006 (24/7). Tickets also may be purchased at the door, or reserved by calling Jason at 401-862-4202.

Commemorating World War I: An Exhibit

In honor of the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I on November 11, 1918, BVHS is having an exhibit of



WWI era decorations

World War I materials from the collection of Kevin Heskin. Mr. Heskin has put together an interesting exhibit that we hope you will enjoy on the day of the concert. Please don't miss this! Visit the Historical Society on November 5th!



Helmets

Remembering the Lonsdale Speedway



Number 94 was driven by Caroll Sleeper

Reminiscences:

The Lonsdale Speedway

Compiled by Charlotte LaPrade from interviews with her cousin Arthur L. Angell and Robert A. Silvia, historian at the ProNyne Motor Sports Museum in Pawtucket.

The Lonsdale Speedway was a 1/3 mile high-banked paved oval on Mendon Road in Cumberland, near the Blackstone River. The track operated from 1947 to 1956. The entrance to the arena used to be where the Stop and Shop plaza on Mendon Road is currently located. The area suffered damage in the floods after the 1954 hurricane. Projected changes in Cumberland tax rates and dwindling crowds helped lead to its closing.

This is the second part of a two-part article.

By Charlotte LaPrade

Lonsdale had midget racing, modified racing (cars that have been hopped up for racing), jalopies, and bombers, motorcycle racing, and bicycle racing. It ran five nights a week: Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

Its seating capacity was 30,000. They reached capacity many times. The largest attendance ever was for a football game. It was over 30,000—standing room only. And it caused the largest traf-

fic jam ever. It may have been between Hope and Cranston High Schools.

The only fatality that can be recollected was Arthur LaPlante from West Warwick. He was in a '35 or '36 Ford. They used to run Powder Puff Derbies. He was going to race following the Powder Puff Derby. His girlfriend (or wife) was going to be driving first in the Powder Puff Derby. He had adjusted the seatbelt to fit her, so he didn't wear it for his race—not wanting to re-adjust it. He got tipped over. He was



Crash

What are?

Bombers were stock American cars with 8 cylinder engines and few or no modifications. The engine had to be stock for the automobile. Bombers were also described as non-Ford cars in the interviews.

Jalopies were stock American cars made before 1941.

Midgets are a class of racing cars which are very small with a very high power-to-weight ratio and typically use four cylinder engines. They originated in the United States in the 1930s.

Wikipedia and Yahoo Answers

thrown from the car, which had a fabric roof. He hit the track and was killed. The fatality was simply considered part of racing.

It is amazing that there was only one fatality, because Lonsdale was a really fast track.

There was a wedding that took place there—Chet Gibbons. His best man was Bill Schindler, the best midget racer going. He was married on the infield. The audience were the witnesses to the ceremony.

Bill France brought NASCAR racers from down south to up to Lonsdale Speedway. And Tim Flock was the winner of that race. And Bill France, who became the biggest name in stock car racing, almost bought the track. The starter was Jim Costello. The initial announcer was Chris Schenkel, the news announcer.

The Speedway had a drivers' strike in the mid-fifties. The drivers felt they weren't paid enough.
(continued on p. 3)

(continued from p. 2)

They also had problems as a result of the flooding to the back side of the track. Ed McNulty was feuding with the town over the tax assessment.

In the last race run there, a guy named Ed. Ridlon in a Ford midget won. They had the finest racing around, and the best drivers in the area (and then some). Every class of races had great drivers. There were a tremendous number of midget racers. The same was true of all the other classes.

Lonsdale was known as a great track, the best of its kind at the time, which is why it attracted so many renowned racers.

Lonsdale Arena closed in 1956. The reunion celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the defunct track was held at Canteen Di-Marco at Mendon Road and Marshall Avenue, which would have been 1997. This was organized by R.A. Silva. They had a reunion of some of the old drivers who had brought pictures.

When the track originally opened, stock cars weren't run in New England. They were just emerging. Stock car racing began in the south with an organization running moonshine.

Buddy Shuman was a southerner. He drove number 24. He met a tragic end ten years after the photo of him with his car was taken. He fell asleep smoking. He came up to Rhode Island when NASCAR came to test out the track.

Number 14 was driven by Fonty Flock. Red Cumming drove number 42. He was from Whitman, Massachusetts. His car was called the "Firecracker Special" because he had a picture of a firecracker exploding on the side of the car. Milt Hiny was from Medway, driving number 12.

Bill Fitch from Long Island drove number 8. He was famous in the automotive world. He put a Cadillac or Oldsmobile engine into a Ford, which would have had a smaller engine.

The big cars looked like midgets, but they were, of course, larger. They had been around since the '20s. They related to the Indianapolis cars of the day, because they were the same size. The midgets came along in the '30s. They had much smaller engines.

The stock cars lined up to get the starting flag. In number 21 was Don Hall,



Number 22 was driven by 'Red' Bolduc of Pawtucket

22 was Red Bolduc, who crashed, and number 40 was Bob Sprague of Mansfield. Number 59 was driven by Ray Denheny. He and it were featured in a national racing publication: the *Illustrated Speedway News*.

There was a father and son racing duo. Harold drove number 100 and Donald had 101. They owned a barroom.

Jim Styles, another driver, was from Merrimack, New Hampshire.

Moon Burgess drove number 2. He was from Meriden Connecticut. Number 2 was driven by Dick Shurick.

In the late '40s, stock cars arrived at tracks in southern New England. They were wildly popular. However, many midget drivers at the time viewed them with contempt. They weren't actual race cars, but were converted passenger cars. Many of the midget racers tried out racing stock cars. Some were successful. Most, however, returned to midgets. Dick Shurick became a stock car owner.

Number 28 was driven by Ralph Moody, who came from Taunton. He came out of midgets, but was eminently successful at stock cars. He wintered in Florida and raced all winter down

there. He ended up staying there in the so-called hotbed of racing in the South. There was a two-page sequence of him rolling over in Daytona. He went on to be one of the most prominent stock car builders. He partnered with a man named Mr. Holman, who was a business man. Holman had the money, while Moody had the know-how.

Number 86 was from Crosby's garage driven by Al Ratcliff from Taunton.

The first successful race was in 1947 and it was the first stock car race.

Number 11 was driven by a guy who grew up in Pawtucket, named Ralph "Hop" Harrington. He was one of the best. He also drove number 9. Number 81 was driven by Lewis Pizzaralli. His sponsors metamorphosed into midgets and were successful. Number 94 was driven by Carroll Sleeper. Number 22 was driven by 'Red' Bolduc of Pawtucket. Number 1 Red Foote of Meridan, CT. Number 45 was Jim Styles. Number 103 was driven by Al Delp, who crashed. Number 100 was sponsored by the IGA Market and driven by Don Rounds of Apponaug. Number 10 was driven by Bill Tibbet of Natick. He won a ton of races in one year in both Lonsdale and Westborough.

(continued on p. 4)



This photo was from September 1949.



Aerial View of the Speedway

Remembering the Lonsdale Speedway

(continued from p. 3) He had won so many races that they challenged other racers to beat him for extra prize money (called a bounty). This happened to many Lonsdale drivers, such as Ralph 'Hop' Harrington, Fred LeCasse, Don Hall and Red Boulduc.

The ProNyne Museum has a photo of a car on its side, number 12, a jalopy. It was driven by Roland Champagne. The car's battery rolled into the car through the windshield. He was doused with battery acid. The photo of number 59 shows a crash of jalopies.

There is a photo of the track during the flood of the

Blackstone in 1956.

There is a shot of a midget race car and a couple of fans. The young man in the car is the son of a former governor of Rhode Island: Jon Nolte. He went on to be an official with NAS-CAR.

#24 was a car owner, Roland Henault from Woonsocket. He never drove. But he had three cars which raced at Lonsdale. Don Hall drove number 24. Henry 'Red' Barbeau drove number 25, and George Sawyer drove 26.

The ProNyne Museum

has an actual midget race car fully assembled in one of its galleries. They have countless photographs of drivers, owners, fans, and actual races. In addition they have some movie footage.

85, 187 and 169 were driven by Fred Robinson were jalopies. They were in a 1949 crash. Their sponsor was from North Attleboro.

There was a race track in South Attleboro called the Interstate Speedway Park. It was located where Home Depot is now.

Number 5 had an engine which overheated. It was an early Ford driven by George Pendergast. He was a character—a raconteur. He lived by his wits. Ed. Hoyle and the owner, Forest Dame drove a 'big' car. Midg-ets with small Ford engines tended to be smokers.

There is a photo of car 53, which shows the very last race at Lonsdale. It was September, 1956. The driver was Fred Meeker. The starter hold-

ing the flag is Nick Fornoro. The other guy was the car owner, Charlie Wozniak. That car is still around.

There is a photo of the driver of 24, Jake Jacobs. It was probably taken at Thompson Speedway in Connecticut, which was the only place around with a road course. In the mid '50s in New England, they had international races in which they had sports cars racing against contemporary American cars set up for racing. This photo is of one of those races that he won.

There is a color photograph of a 1954 crash. 28 was owned by a woman, Bertha Small out of Providence. Her garage was at an intersection with North Main Street. It was near the location of an African-American night club. Those cars are cut-downs, narrowed, lowered, and dropped over the frame. They moved the sides out. She owned three or four cars and had different drivers, one of which was Slim Ingdalls.

Car 97 was a cut down. The driver was Gavin Cooper, a Scotsman.

(continued on p. 5)



Car advertising Gershkoff Body, Providence, RI



Program



Nature reclaiming the Arena

Remembering the Lonsdale Speedway

(continued from p. 5) The car was owned by Palmer Oil Company of Cranston.

There is a cut-down lining up for the start of the race. The starter was standing on the track. We can see the Ann & Hope mill in the background. The force of the water during the flood twisted the rails of that railroad bridge. The pits were on the river side of the track.

There is another shot of the last race. Wozniak is in it.

It is a V860, small Ford midget. The two fellows who look alike are the Kelley brothers, the car owners—Ray and Wendell. The driver was Al Pillion.

#22 was driven by Red Bolduc. Gold Bug's junkyard in South Attleboro

Some comments refer to photographs in the ProNyne

Motorsports Museum, 18 Cleveland St, Pawtucket, RI 02860 is operated by R. A. Silvia and Ric Mariscal. It is open by appointment and has a Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/Pro9museum/>

was the car owner and sponsor. Red Bolduc was killed in Norwood, Massachusetts racing a cut-down. #85 was driven by another Taunton boy, Basil 'Jug' Menard. He died of cancer in 1958.

In 1947, the paint on the track was fresh, but it didn't last long. There is a photo of midgets 2, 37, 24 and 8.

There is a shot of the flood looking north. One of the bridges over the Blackstone is in the background. There are the mill houses for the Ann and Hope Mill in one photo. Twin River/Lincoln Downs can be seen in the far right background of it.

Number 16 was driven by Tommy Dupont from Chepachet. He was good.

#24 was a powder puff. Women raced jalopies, the slower stock cars. 711, 93, 14, 5, and 71 were cut-downs. They ran in 1954, '55, and '56.

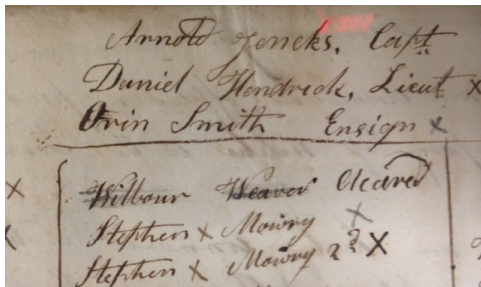
There is a shot showing the damage to the parking lot after the flood. Large amounts of dirt washed away, causing gullies.

The ProNyne Museum has a photograph of the straight-away taken in 1979, when Mother Nature was reclaiming the Arena.

There is an advertisement from the Woonsocket Call for the Labor Day Race in 1956 in the Museum, along with an aerial view taken in 1948, which shows a trail of oil streaking the field. R. A. Silvia came to the track after church in 1946 and someone took his picture standing next to a 1946 midget race car.

In 1950, in a midget race, Johnny Thompson, driving #5, won. He went on to great success at Indie racing.

The Papers of Arnold Jencks



From Arnold Jencks's list of the members of his militia company

and his children didn't want the house. It had just been purchased by Dr. Raymond Houghton, who had spent summers on the farm when he was young. Since no one was living there, vandals

kept breaking into the house.

Elli and Margie found the house open and empty, and daringly went inside. In the attic, they found a box of partially mouse-eaten papers that were the personal records of Arnold Jencks (1797-1873), a cooper and farmer who lived near Rt. 116. They were fascinated. They took the box, organized the papers, and

framed some of them. Margie wrote a short biography of Arnold Jencks based on the papers, which included receipts, bills, his commission in the militia, and other ordinary documents. Finding the cemetery, Margie felt so close to Mr. Jencks that she took his footstone and kept it in pristine condition, "keeping Arnold's feet warm."

The two women met with members of the Phetteplace family to ask about the papers, but they knew nothing about them.

Margie died recently and Elli decided to find a new home for the papers. She donated them to BVHS. We asked Ken Postle to help return the footstone.

Unfortunately, in the inter-

vening years, the cemetery (Lincoln #8, the Jencks-Mowry Lot) has been vandalized and suffered a washout. Although Ken and Peter Sarazin had done work in the cemetery a few years ago, it is in poor condition, with nearly all of the stones down and scattered. We uncovered more bases where the stones had stood, but we were unable to determine Arnold's actual resting place without more research in Providence. We returned the stone temporarily, waiting to place it in the correct position. Ken flagged the footstone, since Jencks was a captain in the militia.

We thank Mrs. Costa for the documents, and we are planning to bury a pair of warm wool socks with Arnold's footstone, at her request. We look forward to sharing the papers.

Upcoming Events at Northgate

Most events are free.
Everyone is welcome.
Donations are gratefully accepted.

3 pm, Sunday, November 5: *Americana: Songs from America's History, from the Revolution to World War I*, a concert and fundraiser for BVHS, performed by pianist and vocalist Michael DiMucci. \$20 plus service fee. (\$21.69) A WWI-themed exhibit from the collection of Kevin Heskin will be on display. **Help support BVHS and buy your tickets now at <http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/3086746>.** or by calling 1-800-838-3006 (24/7). Tickets may be also purchased at the door.

2 pm, Sunday, December 3: Christmas Party at Northgate! All Welcome. Free. Maybe there will be a visit from Santa!

2 pm, Sunday, January 21: Movie Matinee. The Sequel! The long awaited second part of *Senetchonet to Manville: A Journey Through Time*, the historical documentary of Manville by Betty and Carlo Mencucci, which includes many pictures and other material collected by Roger Gladu. Upstairs at Northgate. Popcorn. Free.

2 pm, Sunday, February 25: Exhibit: The Lime Kilns of Lime Rock. Free.

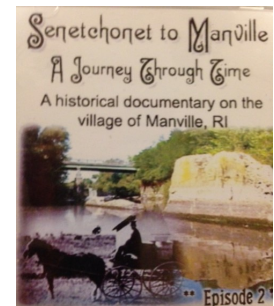
2 pm, Sunday, March 18: Lecture by Jim Ignasher, Smithfield historian. Title to be announced. Free.

2 pm, Sunday, April 22: Lecture by Rick Beyer, author and documentary filmmaker, will speak on *The Ghost Army of World War II*, the deception unit in the U.S. Army. For more information, see <http://rickbeyer.net>. Free.

2 pm, Sunday, May 20: The Christine Nowak Lecture by Kevin Klyberg, Ranger, Blackstone River Valley National Historic Park. Title to be announced. Free.



Christmas at Northgate



Movie Matinee!



Lime Kiln near Louisquiset Pike

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Visit AmazonSmile at smile.amazon.com and select BVHS as your charitable organization, before beginning shopping. See more about this program at <https://smile.amazon.com/>.

Valentine Whitman Holiday Craft Fair

10:00 AM-3:00 PM

November 4, 2017

The Valentine Whitman House is holding its Annual Holiday Craft Fair at

North Gate

Blackstone Valley Historical Society

1873 Old Louisquiset Pike,
Lincoln, RI 02865

Please stop by!



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