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Continuing the Tradition ~ Preserving Our History

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The General and the Adman

Bill Robinson from Central Falls became chairman of Coca-Cola and advisor to Eisenhower

Even as a young girl, Madeleine was always fascinated by the career of her cousin, Bill Robinson.

Brought up in Central Falls, Bill was drafted into the army shortly after he graduated from LaSalle Academy in 1918. However, the war ended before he completed his training in New York City. He decided to stay there, and enrolled as a student at New York University. To support himself, he reported campus news to a local newspaper as well as gathered ads. Thus, he began his career in advertising.

At times Bill would come home to Rhode Island to visit. Some of these visits included ones to Madeleine's family in Cumberland, especially to see her father, Thomas "Tom" Robinson, who was one



President Eisenhower at Eisenhower House at Fort Adams, with William Robinson, Chairman of Coca-Cola, and George Allen, 9/14/1958. Photo courtesy of Madeleine O. Robinson and the DEM.

year younger than Bill and a childhood friend. Both attended Holy Trinity School in Central Falls.

Over the years, her father would keep Madeleine and family updated on Bill's activities. Those

reports became more and more interesting as Bill advanced in the newspaper world in New York.

Beginning in 1944, Bill became involved with Eisenhower in attempt-

Talk by
Madeleine O. Robinson, PhD
2 pm Sunday, Oct. 15
at BVHS

ing to revive the international edition of the New York Herald in France. Gradually they became friends as Ike took over the presidency of Columbia University, then through the presidential campaign, into the White House years and beyond.

Madeleine's talk on October 15 at BVHS will emphasize the unique relationship of two boys who began life in opposite directions, and who might not ever have met in ordinary life.

Copies of the bound and printed article will be for sale at the lecture for \$2.00 each.

The Lonsdale Speedway and Sports Arena

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, Pawtucket. This is the first part of a two-part article.

By Charlotte LaPrade

Robert Silvia went to the Lonsdale Sports Arena as a very young man and fell in love with the place. He went to auto races beginning at age five, even before Lonsdale was built.

Set on the banks of the Blackstone River within view of the Ann and Hope (where the Stop and Shop is located today), the Lonsdale Speedway was a 30,000-seat open-air arena that attracted the finest racers of its day.

Another local boy, Arthur Angell, started going there the day it opened in 1947. He had been interested in racing since he was 7 or 8 years old. The first race he had ever attended was in Franklin, Massachusetts.

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Spectators watch midget cars racing. Up to 30,000 people filled the bleachers at the Lonsdale Speedway in its heyday.

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In 1951, he had a stock car himself at Lonsdale. It was number 00—double nothing. It was a blue and white '34 Ford coupe. The best it ever did was fourth in a semi-final race. He had two other drivers besides himself, Leo Boutiette, and another fellow they called 'Shadow'.

Lonsdale was originally built for midget car races in 1947. In 1948, the stock cars were added, that is, Fords and Chevys. They were modified street cars—coupes, etc. They became expensive to race, so they added what was called jalopy class. Jalopies had no modifications to the engines. The tires were street passenger car tires. They were a lower-budget car to build. The speeds weren't as great, though. Jalopies were popular competitors. There were hundreds of them. Rollover bars and

seatbelts were mandatory, but they were all that had to be added in order to race a jalopy.

The midgets would come back sporadically, but never as a regularly scheduled event. The last race at the Speedway was a midget race in September of 1956.

What Are Midget Cars?

Midget cars or midget racers 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

As racing entered the nineteen-fifties, stock cars went through various incarnations. In 1954, there was a little change. The primary class was a

stock car, but at the time, the bodies were allowed extensive modifications. The body could be taken off the chassis and lowered and cut down the middle. They were devilishly fast. They had several late model races around 1954, '55, and '56. Brand new Chevys, Fords, Mercuries and convertibles with roll bars were racing. They were modified with regard to their handling.

Although primarily thought of in the context of auto racing, the Lonsdale Speedway/Sports Area hosted bicycle, motorcycle, midget, stock car, jalopy, and bomber races. They also held wrestling and boxing matches. They hosted semi-professional and high school football games, but never had 'big' car races there.

Now, although the

Lonsdale Speedway Internet site says that Fonty Flock won a NASCAR race at Lonsdale, Mr. Angell thinks it was actually won by Fonty's brother, Tim.

The material to build the Lonsdale Speedway and Arena was brought in from the gravel bank adjacent to the Admiral Inn in Cumberland. The walls were exceedingly thick. That was before 1947, because the Speedway opened in the Fall of that year. It was built by Edward McNulty as a business. Racing was becoming popular after the Second World War. The Speedway was built primarily as a midget track; a third of a mile. The turns were banked at 33 degrees and the straight-aways at 18. The manager was Jimmy Farley. The office manager was Dorothy LaPrade. Those were the three people who basically ran the place.

The seating rose about 50 feet from the ground, on an angle towards the center of the track. The banks were sloped on an angle inward. There was a wide path around the top of it that one could have driven a vehicle around. On top of the rim were the food concession stands—six to eight of them.

The Arena had seats all the way around, accommodating 30 to 30,000 people. (continued on p. 3)



"Fonty" Flock #14

Upcoming Events at Northgate

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

2 pm, Sunday, October 15: *The General and the Adman*, a lecture by Madeleine O. Robinson, PhD (URI '80) about Rhode Island native son William "Bill" Edward Robinson, friend and advisor to President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Refreshments served after the lecture. Free. See lead article.

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 BVHS events and at the door.

2 pm, Sunday, December 3: Christmas Party at North Gate! All Welcome. Free.

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.

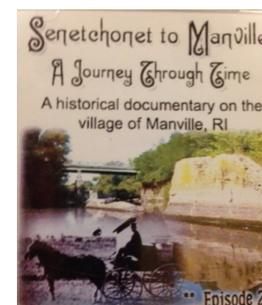
2 pm, Sunday, March 18: Lecture by Jim Ignasher, Smithfield historian. Title to be announced. Free.

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.



Michael DiMucci



Movie Matinee!



Lime Kiln near Louisquisset Pike



Charlotte LaPrade's father, Edmund LaPrade, owned number 77, a 4-door, dark purple sedan. Driven by Ray Collette, it never won, but he did come in fourth place once. Ray Collette had a garage on Mendon Rd at the intersection with Broad St.

Remembering the Lonsdale Speedway

(continued from p. 2)
Sometimes there were people sitting in the walkways and aisles.

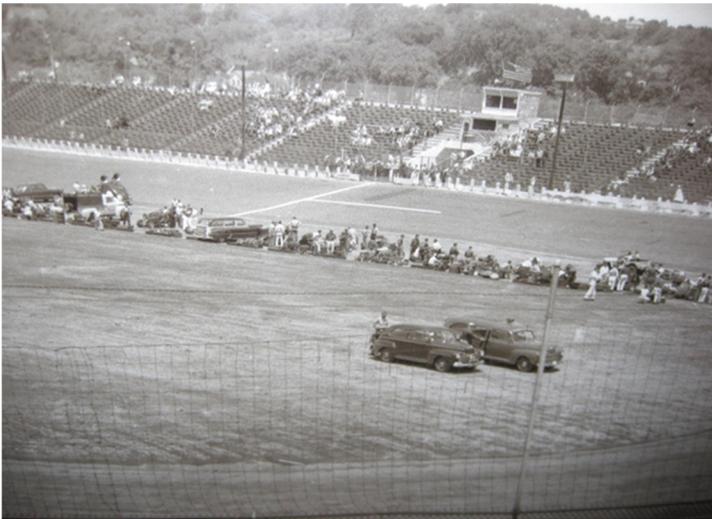
They sold beer, soda, hot dogs, hamburgers, chips, candy bars, but the best were the clam cakes. The clam cakes were sold in little brown bags. They were so greasy that the grease would soak through the bag.

The outer banks were all

loamed. And there were red roses planted all the way around the banks. The actual name was the Lonsdale Sports Arena. But it was popularly known as the Rose Bowl.

In 1955, there was an inland hurricane that came down the Blackstone River from Worcester. The Blackstone raged. It wiped out the parking lot of the Arena. There was a (continued on p.4)

Remembering the Lonsdale Speedway



There were two tunnels under the grandstands. There was a parking lot on the Mendon Road side. The Blackstone River side had pits outside of the track between the embankment.

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railroad line that crossed the river. The water was so strong, that it took out railroad tracks and twisted them.

Shortly after the hurricane, the owner of the Arena took out half of the grandstands. Everybody thought it was because of the storm-related damage. But it wasn't. It was the political climate in the Town of Cumberland that was part of the Arena's demise. There was not a drop of water inside the bowl of the Arena. You see, as stated earlier, dirt had been brought in to build its embankment—it hadn't been dug-out. It was solely the parking lot which was damaged.

The town wanted to apply a tax to derive income from the popular venue. Town government thought they would tax every seat for every event. So, Ed McNulty, the owner of Lonsdale Arena, took out half of the seats.

But there were other

factors leading to its end. There were many tracks running throughout the country, so there weren't as many cars racing at Lonsdale as there had been following the Second World War. Racing was sanctioned by an organization out of Connecticut. The organization had taken out a full page advertisement in the program touting its upcoming season. The United Stock Car Club for 1957 said that they were racing in Lonsdale, but it never came to pass. And, by this time, the principal people were gone.

This article will be continued in the next issue, with more pictures and memories of the Speedway.

An Elaborate History: The Cumberland Ballous

An extensive display of photos and historical information on the Ballou family of Cumberland was presented at the Open House on Sept. 23. If you were unable to attend, the display is still in place and available for you to enjoy.

New Signs for 32 Lincoln Cemeteries

September 8: Ken Postle and John Houghton picked up the State Cemetery signs for 32 of the Lincoln yards. As Ken says "Many of these have never been signed before. They were waiting for us at the Warwick DOT Facility on Lincoln Avenue. Now we just need to find the time to get them pounded in, put together and photographed, but it's a good start. Ed Golden and Ed Kalunian were very helpful in helping load up the truck and answering questions for us—They repped the State of RI very well!"

Ken and John need help putting them in place. Call John at 401-651-6463 if you would like to help.



New Cemetery Signs

October is Archaeology Month

The list of archaeology talks and demonstrations this month in Rhode Island from RIHPHC is at <http://www.preservation.ri.gov/archaeology/17october.php>



Marker at Nipsachuck Dig, N. Smithfield 2014

Don't forget to renew your membership! Donations are always welcome to help keep up North Gate, the Fire Station and the Bakery! Thank you

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