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Continuing the Tradition ~ Preserving Our History

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

Providence's Lost Snowtown Neighborhood Learn more about Snowtown and early race riots in Providence



Detail from 1880's photograph "The Cove from the top of City Hall," in the Pastore Collection at Providence College shows Snowtown. Image courtesy of Mr. Coleman

On April 24 at 2:00 p.m., Theodore Coleman will give a presentation at BVHS about the 19th century community of Snowtown in Providence, and the race riots that took place there in 1831.

Snowtown was a small, mixed race neighborhood of the early 19th century, initially developing around the area of Smith Street, and eventually expanding to encompass the entire hill where the State House is located, down to the Providence Place Mall. Snowtown may have experienced some growth after an earlier incident in Hard Scrabble, which was a predominately black neighborhood that is thought to have been locat-

ed near University Heights. In 1824, a mob destroyed around twenty homes of black residents in Hard Scrabble.

Snowtown was made up of homes of poor black and white laborers, small businesses, saloons and boarding houses, and the population fluctuated with transients and migrants. In 1831, a racially-motivated riot broke out, triggered by a saloon brawl, and the homes of black residents were targeted. Over the course of four days, eighteen buildings in Snowtown and nearby Olney's Lane were damaged or destroyed. Eventually, the state militia fired to disperse the mob, killing four people. Although the buildings in Snowtown were soon replaced, by the end of

the 19th century, the neighborhood was lost to railroad construction and other development, including the building of the R. I. State House

According to Wikipedia, after the Snowtown riot, Providence voters approved a charter for a city government with a police force.

Coleman writes that the

original location of Snowtown, close to Smith Street, only appears as background in photographs of other subjects. The 1880's photograph above is one of the few images of Snowtown. It shows a mix of small houses and larger tenements, *(continued on p. 2)*

BVHS Seeks Board Members

The BVHS Annual Meeting and Election will take place at 1:30 pm May 15 at North Gate on Louisquisset Pike, where board members will be elected and reports will be presented.

The Nominating Committee for the BVHS, Don Coelho, Robert Ferri, Richard Walker, Kevin Heskin and Kristina Guadagni, led by Chairman Bob Ferri, *(continued on p. 2)*

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

Upcoming Events

2:00 pm, Sunday, April 24: Theodore Coleman, a civil engineer who is a member of the Providence Center for Reconciliation's Snowtown research team, will give a talk about the Snowtown race riots in Providence in 1831 and the team's research.

2:00 pm, Sunday, May 15 (Christine Nowak Lecture): Donna Houle, of the Friends of the Loeff Carousel at Slater Park, will give a presentation about the Carousel. The BVHS annual meeting will take place at 1:30 pm before the talk.

3:00 pm, Sunday, June 12 Concert: Americana by Michael DiMucci.

Snowtown, continued

(continued from p. 1) with the Zion Church building prominent on the west side of Gaspee Street.

Theodore Coleman is a civil engineer by education and occupation. As a child, he pulled a copy of John Cady's *The Civic and Architectural Development of Providence* from his father's library. The evolving geography of Providence has been a passionate interest ever since.

He is the author of *The 1824 Providence House Directory*, and *Camp Hill, Hardscrabble, and Addison's Hollow in Early Nineteenth Century Providence*,

and he is currently working on a guide to the John Worrall Providence Theatre Curtain.

He has been a member of the Center for Reconciliation's Snowtown Research Team for the past two years. The team includes historians, archeologists, and other historical researchers. The objective of the Research Team has been to expand the story of Snowtown, beyond being the site of a nineteenth century race riot, and to provide a fuller picture of who lived there, and what it was like.

BVHS Seeks Board Members, cont.

(continued from p. 1) announces that the slate of officers/nominees for 2022-2023 remains the same:

Jason Dionne: President
Lori Melucci: Vice President
Francine Jackson: Secretary
John Houghton: Treasurer
Members at large:
Gail Harris
Bob Ferri
Don Coelho

If you are interested in joining the board, which organizes history-related activities, lectures, and exhibits, cares for the facility of North Gate and

its artifacts and collections, and works to build awareness and community around the historical origins of the Blackstone Valley, please contact Bob Ferri at bob_ferri@aol.com. We would also welcome you at board meetings, which are usually held at 6:30 p.m. on the first Monday of the month, excepting May and sometimes July.

Nominations also will be taken from the floor during the annual meeting, which begins at 1:30 pm. We hope to see you there.

Woonsocket Historic Cemetery Group Hosting Two Walking Tours and Two Cleanups

The Woonsocket Historic Cemetery Group, led by Greg Duhamel, is hosting cleanups and walking tours of two cemeteries.

A cleanup at the Bernon/St. James Cemetery, Woonsocket #9), located on Logee Street, will start at 10:00 a.m. on April 23. A walking tour will take place the following weekend at 10:00 a.m. on April 30.

A cleanup is planned at Zebina Cook Cemetery (the Cook Lot Cemetery, Woonsocket Historic Cemetery #13) at Bissonette Field on Elder Ballou Road. The following weekend, at 10:00 a.m. on May 21, there will be a walking tour of this cemetery as well. All are welcome. See <https://preservation.ri.gov/riew-calendar> for the full listing of cemetery events.

BVHS Executive Board

President: Jason Dionne

401-862-4202

Email: jjhdio70@gmail.com

Vice President: Lori Melucci

Secretary: Francine Jackson

Treasurer/Property Manager:
John Houghton

Members-at-Large

Gail Harris, Bob Ferri, Don Coelho



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