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Continuing the Tradition ~ Preserving Our History

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

The Train Wreck that Changed Time

On August 12, 1853, there was a terrible train accident just south of Valley Falls in Cumberland. Although it is known as the Valley Falls train wreck, it actually took place in Central Falls.

American railroads had had a fine safety record for many years, but 1853 was the turning point. The railroads had grown to the point where current practices were showing strain, and accident after accident was reported in the newspapers. Only a few days before the Valley Falls accident, on August 9, two Camden and Amboy trains struck head-on, killing four people. But it was the Valley Falls collision on August 12 that caused the



New York Illustrated News, August 1853 The Valley Falls Train Wreck
Courtesy of Dan Bethel

railroads and the public to take action. This accident was probably the first train wreck ever photographed. The photograph was taken by a Mr. L.

Wright of Pawtucket. It was reproduced in the New York Illustrated News and other illustrated papers, and "went viral."

Before 1853, time was

2:00 –4:00 pm Sunday,

November 19

Exhibit with

Presentation by

Francine Jackson

local time, Towns determined the time to set clocks by the sun, or a method using a star observation with the Big Dipper. However, traveling by railroad was fast enough that the difference in time as trains moved across the country became apparent.

Railroads needed a consistent time scheme, so the railroads maintained a single time all along their routes, and the source of their time

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Michelle Shea and Brianna Turner putting together stones at NP 05

Ken Postle Leads Restoration of Lost Cemeteries in North Providence

Ken Postle, BVHS Cemeteries Coordinator, has been working with volunteers including Michelle Shea and Nicole Loranger, the new North Providence cemetery contact, on North Providence cemeteries NP 04, on Sunset Avenue, (Smith, Harris and

Treadwell) and NP 05, the John Hutchinson Lot (inc. Hutchinson, Faxons, Harding, Tasker) at 9 Heritage Circle. They have been cleaning up debris and piecing stones back together, using notes by James Arnold, who catalogued local cemeteries in 1891. Read an article by Ethan Shorey from the Valley Breeze about their dis-

coveries: https://www.valleybreeze.com/news/volunteers-uncertain-another-lost-cemetery-in-north-providence/article_de7fa54c-7752-11ee-b921-cfd5d9966bcd.html?fbclid=IwAR1cMyz-1t4izd6Hggab-fD235is2x5nQ0P5MAoY4n_sNGhm45TxKK_W25Ws4

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

2:00 pm Sunday, November 19: Exhibit: *The Train Wreck that Changed Time,*

2:00 pm Sunday, January 21: **Amanda Quay Blount**, author of *Meet Me at the Biltmore: 100 Years of Providence's Most Storied Hotel*, will give a talk about her book and her research.

Train Wreck, continued.

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was chosen by the different companies. Timekeeping was important; many of the railroads in American were single track at the time, which meant trains had to "take turns" using the track in both directions.

On August 12, a crowded Providence and Worcester excursion train arrived at Valley Falls running late. The conductor checked his watch (which was later found to be incorrect and also borrowed from a milkman), and decided that he still had enough time to go through. The train started south toward Pawtucket around a curving portion of the track. In the meantime, another train waited out of

sight around the curve, and then started north. The two trains struck head on, and 14 people were killed and many others injured.

The investigations after the Valley Falls train wreck spurred railroad reforms and serious interest in public timekeeping, which eventually led to the establishment of standard time zones by the railroads in 1883. The time zones were made official by Congress in 1918.

The exhibit will be open from 2:00-4:00 p.m. Francine Jackson, staff astronomer at Ladd Observatory, will give a short presentation at 2:30 pm.

North Gate Christmas Ornaments for Sale

Lincoln's beautiful North Gate Christmas ornament is for sale at BVHS.

If you would like to purchase one, please ask at our next event. They are \$10 each.



BVHS Executive Board

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Donor Gives North Gate a Stair Lift



An anonymous donor has given North Gate a stair lift to access the upstairs meeting hall. It has been installed on the staircase by the kitchen.

We are grateful for this donation, which improves North Gate's accessibility. We are pleased to have this available for people attending programs on the second floor.



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