



# THE LANDMARK

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*Continuing the Tradition ~ Preserving Our History*

[bvhsri.org](http://bvhsri.org) ♦ 1873 Old Louisquisset Pike (Rte 246) ♦ PO Box 125, Lincoln RI, 02865

## The William Aldrich Papers: Life in 19th Century Lincoln Coming to BVHS on March 14

Don't miss this fascinating exhibit by Dan Bethel, noted collector of ephemera related to the Blackstone Valley. Learn about living in Lincoln in the 19th century through seeing letters, papers and documents belonging to William Aldrich who lived at 1882 Louisquisset Pike in Lincoln.

Aldrich served as road supervisor for the Town of Lincoln, ran for various town offices, participated actively in local social events, and was a member of the Lime Rock Masons.

Items on display include everyday correspondence, an 1866 subscription to the Woonsocket Patriot, items related to the lime quar-



Papers of William H. Aldrich. Part of the Exhibit on March 14

2:00 pm–4:00 pm  
Saturday,  
March 14, 2026

Exhibit:  
The William  
Aldrich Papers:  
Life in 19th  
Century Lincoln

Free Event

ry, a dog license issued by the Lincoln town clerk on April 25, 1885 for his dog "Shep," and his wedding invitation to Phoebe Tucker.

## Historic DeNevers Building Tells Stories of Central Falls

The DeNevers building was purchased by the city of Central Falls in 2022, with the intention of converting the building into a community center. The RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission requires research and an archival quality report when a historic building is put to new use. The DeNevers building was determined to be significant to the economic, social, and cultural history of Central Falls, particularly as a center of French-Canadian immigrant life in the late

19th and early 20th century. Brent Runyon, a historic preservation professional who leads [Runyon Heritage Associates](http://RunyonHeritageAssociates.com), prepared the report and gave a copy to BVHS. He kindly abridged his report so that we could share it in the newsletter.

### DeNevers Building by Brent Runyon

#### Historical Context

The history of Central Falls is a history of immigration and industrialization. In 1822, *(Continued on p. 2)*



William Aldrich's Dog License, 1885

# DeNevers Report Brings History to Life



DeNevers Building, photo credit Brent Runyon, 2025

(Continued from p.1)

what would later become the village of Central Falls, then in the Town of Smithfield, had only about sixty residents and a few buildings, none of which survive. Central Falls began its transformation from a remote riverside outpost to a more populated community with the building of three mills along the Blackstone: the Thurber, Horton & Wood (1824, not extant), Kennedy/Stafford Manufacturing Company (581 Roosevelt Avenue, Central Falls Mill Historic District, NR, 1825), and Pawtucket Thread Manufacturing Company (527 Roosevelt Avenue, Central Falls Mill Historic District, NR, 1827). With increased productivity came the need for more workers, for institutions to serve their spiritual needs, places for them

to spend money, and streets and other infrastructure to support a growing village.

Between 1800 and 1870, Smithfield's population grew from 3,120 people to nearly 15,000, of which nearly 9,000 were in the Central Falls area. New residents flocked to Central Falls (fig. 4), straining the resources of the Town, such that, in 1871, Smithfield was partitioned into the towns of Lincoln, North Smithfield, and Smithfield.

Between 1870 and 1890, the population of Central Falls increased to 14,000, largely a result of French Canadian immigrants moving to the area. In 1894, rural Lincoln residents were clamoring for Central Falls to become either a separately incorporated district within Lincoln or for it to be annexed into Pawtucket. The

General Assembly authorized a vote and, in 1895, the voters of Lincoln decided it should be incorporated as a separate city.

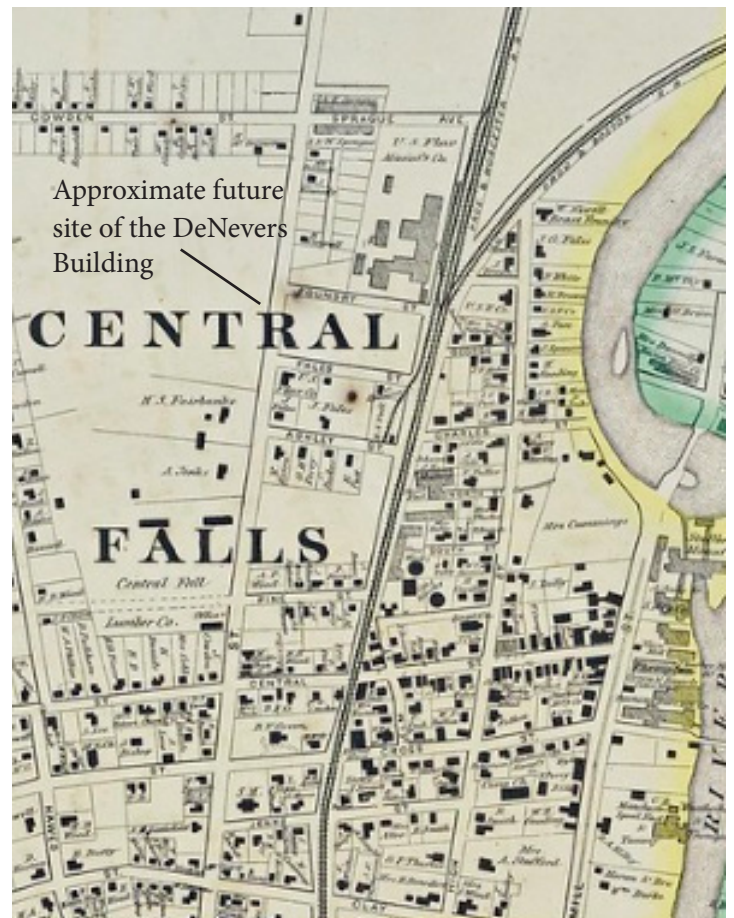
## Broad Street as Commercial Center

By 1880, Broad Street north of Fales Street was emerging as Central Falls' new commercial center. This shift was influenced by residential development patterns and the launch of horse drawn streetcars on Broad Street in 1864. There were also large undeveloped expanses of land, such as the Nathaniel G.B. Dexter estate which stretched west of Broad Street nearly to

Dexter Street, and north from Fales Street nearly to Cowden Street.

On the west side of Broad Street, between today's Fales and Lincoln streets, there were fourteen stores, a blacksmith, a livery, a harness shop, a photo studio, an undertaker, and one Chinese laundry. On the east side, between Foundry and Sheridan streets, there were thirteen stores and a hall.

In 1892, the horse drawn street railway was replaced with the first electric streetcar in Rhode Island, connecting Pawtucket and Central Falls. The more efficient transportation system made it easier for people to live (Continued on p. 3)



Detail of Fig. 4: D. G. DeBeers & Company, Atlas of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations., 1870



Detail of Fig. 9: Everts & Richards, New Topographical Atlas of Surveys: Providence County, Rhode Island, 1895 "Central Falls." The site of the DeNevers Building at 702 Broad Street is within the dashed lines.

(Continued from p. 2) farther away from where they worked. In 1895, both sides of Broad Street between Fales and Cowden were almost entirely built out, with many stores, a few saloons, a hotel, drug stores, paint purveyors, a photography studio, two lunch wagons, a blacksmith, a Chinese laundry, wagon sheds, and de Nevers' furniture store (fig. 9). In 1930, there were 257 retail businesses, many in converted residential dwellings and the population reached an all-time high of 25,808.

### French Canadians in Central Falls

Before the Civil War, population growth in Central Falls was driven by Irish

immigrants who moved to the area to construct the railroads and mills. They were a constant source of new labor for the industries of the Blackstone Valley. After the Great Famine in Ireland abated after 1852, far fewer Irish immigrated to America.

The next large immigrant group to arrive in Central Falls were French Canadians. Agricultural modernization and change in Quebec drove landless laborers and small farmers to seek opportunities elsewhere, including Rhode Island, where an estimated 35,000 arrived between 1860 and 1910. In 1895, the year Central Falls became a city, there were approximately 6,000 French Canadian residents, nearly a third of the population, concentrating primarily in the

eastern and western parts of the City.

In 1874, approximately 200 families established the Parish of Notre Dame du Sacre Cœur (Our Lady of the Sacred Heart). Centrally located, the church served French-speaking Catholics living in Cumberland, Pawtucket, and the southeastern portion of Lincoln. In 1901, an ad for Le Jean Baptiste newspaper stated there were 55,000 "Franco-Americans" in Rhode Island, many of them in the Blackstone Valley.

In 1893, the Central Falls chapter of Cercle Jacques Cartier erected their new facility at the location now known as 708 Broad Street, half a block west of the original Notre Dame Church.

The four-story building served important roles in French-Canadian life in Central Falls. On the top floor of their building was the largest hall in the Blackstone Valley, providing a location for rallies and public meetings in the burgeoning commercial center of Central Falls. The second floor was home to the French Republican Club, while the first floor housed retail shops.

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the city's population grew from approximately 18,000 to nearly 25,000. Part of this growth was due to the arrival in Rhode Island of another 22,000 French Canadians between 1910 and 1930. Notre Dame Parish continued to grow, building a large stone church in 1926-1933 (668 Broad Street) to replace the wood-frame church on Fales Street. In 1935, Notre Dame

**Rent Northgate for gatherings!**  
**Members receive a discount.**  
<https://www.bvhsri.org/rent-historic-northgate/>

was the largest Roman Catholic parish in the Blackstone Valley, with 6,400 members and 1,500 families.

### Ernest Boisvert de Nevers and DeNevers Furniture

Ernest Boisvert de Nevers was one of sixteen children in a farm family from Baie-du-Fevre, Quebec. He arrived in the United States in 1886 and was soon joined by other members of his family. He boarded at 36 Washington Street, Central Falls and established Ernest Boisvert & Bro. Furniture at 267 Broad Street in 1890 and 285 Broad Street in 1891.

In 1892, his new enterprise, DeNevers Furniture, was advertised at 499 Broad Street which would have been near the intersection of Broad and Lincoln streets. His brother Ulric worked as his clerk and boarded nearby at 21 Lincoln Avenue, while Ernest boarded at the Benedict House hotel in Pawtucket. (As a note, "de Nevers" is the family name, but the building was always referred to as the "DeNevers Building.")

In July 1892, Ernest purchased lot 66 of the Dexter Plat (the location of the existing building) and began building soon after. He erected a three-story, wood-frame building, with dwelling units ("tenements") on the second (Continued on p.4)

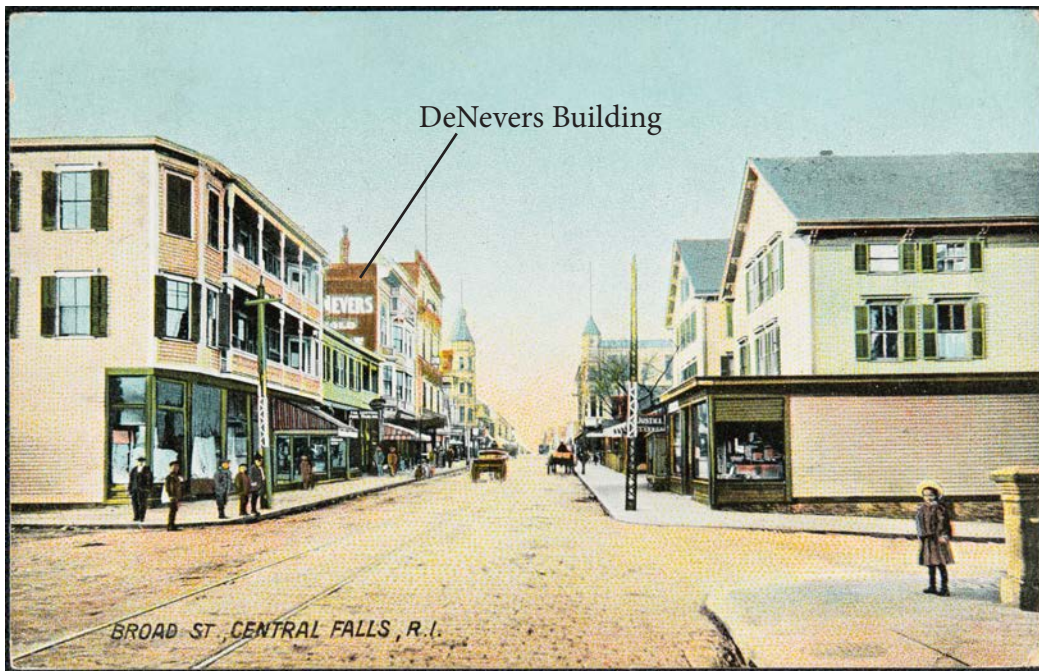


Figure 12. "Broad Street, Central Falls" F. M. Kirby & Co., 1908, <https://provlidigital.org/islandora/object/PC6833>

(Continued from p. 3) and third floors and his furniture store on the first (fig. 12). On a second lot located behind the store, he erected four one- and two-story wood-frame storage buildings.

In 1893, Ernest advertised his new "de Nevers Building" and furnishings store in the Pawtucket and Central Falls Directory. At "The Cheapest Place to Buy for the Least Money," one could find "parlor suites, chamber sets, stoves and ranges, carpets, oil cloths, etc." as well as "silverware and crockery" (fig. 13).

The establishment of his business was apparently impressive enough to merit

media coverage; the French column of the Pawtucket Evening Times remarked on "a pretty sign put up" on Ernest de Nevers' shop on Broad Street, December 12, 1893.

His choice to build at this location was probably influenced by two factors: it was in the center of the French Canadian community in Central Falls, just a half-block west of Notre Dame Church and adjacent to the Jacques Cartier Building, and it was on a major transportation corridor. The de Nevers family were also parishioners at Notre Dame Church.

Ernest de Nevers would become a prominent citizen,

serving in 1895 as "honorary Staff, mounted" in the city's first Fourth of July parade. His building was a success as well. In addition to his furniture store on the first floor, the upper two floors were rental apartments, providing much needed housing to the growing population and income for de Nevers. In 1898 and 1899, he was identified as one of relatively few people in Central Falls with property valued at more than \$5,000, with a total valuation in goods and property of \$11,000.

On January 9, 1902, de Nevers married Germaine Boivin, who came to Central Falls from Montreal. They had three children: Carmen

(1905), Margarine (1906), and John (or Jean) (1908), and the couple became naturalized citizens in 1907. Carmen and Margarine would both be married at Notre Dame Church.

### 1908 Fire and the Construction of the Current Building

On December 18, 1908, the largest fire in Central Falls history destroyed the Jacques Cartier and DeNevers buildings and five two-story structures



Figure 15. Above photo from "Fighting the Flames," *Evening Times*, December 19, 1908

nearby (figs. 14 and 15). Ernest de Nevers kept his furniture stock in four of them; the fifth was a separately owned barn..

The DeNevers Building was completely consumed by fire.

(Continued on p. 5)

**E. BOISVERT de NEVERS,**  
— DEALER IN —  
**PARLOR SUITES, CHAMBER SETS, STOVES AND RANGES, CARPETS, OIL CLOTHS, Etc.**  
**SILVERWARE AND CROCKERY.**  
The Cheapest Place to Buy for the Least Money.  
**de NEVERS BUILDING, BROAD STREET, - - CENTRAL FALLS, R. I.**

Figure 13. Sampson, Murdock & Co., *Pawtucket and Central Falls Directory* 1894, 706.

## DeNevers Building

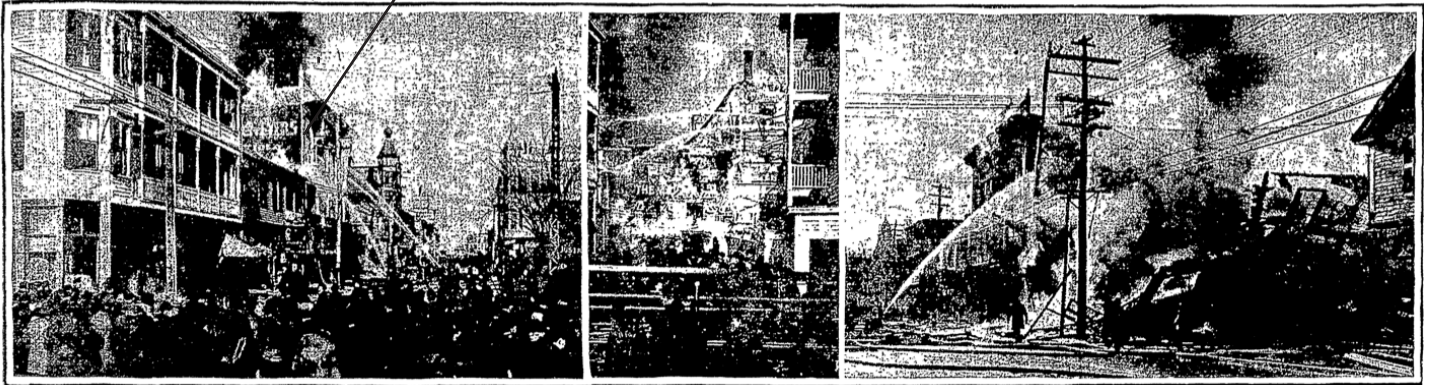


Figure 14. Above photos from “Scenes at Fire in Business District of Central Falls,” Evening Bulletin, December 19, 1908. 1. From left: “Firemen Vainly Striving to Save DeNevers Block,” “Fighting the Flames from the Rear,” and “Jacques Cartier Block Reduced to Ashes and DeNevers Block Ruined.”

*Continued from p.4)*

Undaunted, he established a temporary store three days later at Broad and Lincoln streets and was preparing to open for the Christmas shopping season (fig. 16).

Within a few months after the fire, the Frank J. Rowley Company was engaged to construct the new DeNevers and Jacques Cartier buildings. Rowley was a major contracting firm based in Pawtucket and founded in 1904 by brothers Frank G. Rowley

and Clifford H. Rowley. In Pawtucket, the firm built the Fairlawn School (1916, not extant) near 528 Smithfield Avenue, Central Falls High School (1927) at 24 Summer Street, and the Slater Trust Building (1960, Downtown Pawtucket Historic District, NR) at 208-210 Main Street, among others.

*The story of the DeNevers Building will be continued in a later issue. It will highlight the history of the new building up to the present day.*



Figure 16. Ad from *La Justice*, December 25, 1908, 1.

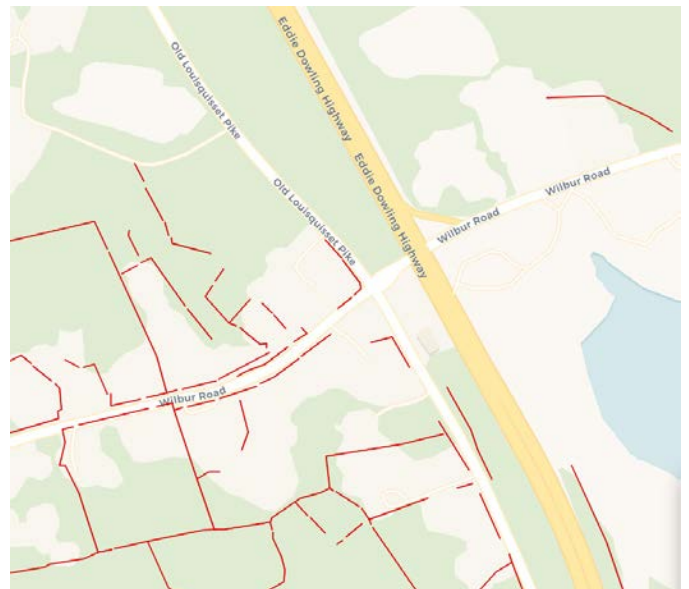
## R.I. Project Maps Stone Walls with LiDAR

Elliott Vosburgh, the founder of the RI Stone Wall Mapping Project (RISWMP), has inventoried over 5,000 miles of stone walls in Rhode Island using an “original methodology applied to the 2022 Rhode Island Statewide LiDAR Dataset.” This project was completed in 2025.

LiDAR, which stands for Light Detection and Ranging, is a remote sensing technology that uses pulsed laser light to measure distances, creating precise 3D, high-resolution mod-

els of the environment. The equipment is used from an airplane or helicopter. In New England, LiDAR can map stone walls and the remains of structures hidden in woodlands which used to be farmland.

Explore the data here at: <https://vosburgh.dev/walls/> and <https://edc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?webmap=3d4b-64856da84283adb-20d0ecf68445f>



A screenshot from the interactive map at <https://vosburgh.dev/walls/>, showing stone walls near BVHS. Elliot Vosburgh (2025), RISWMP.

## Upcoming Events

2:00 p.m., Saturday, March 14, 2026. Exhibit: **William H. Aldrich Papers, Collection of Dan Bethel.**

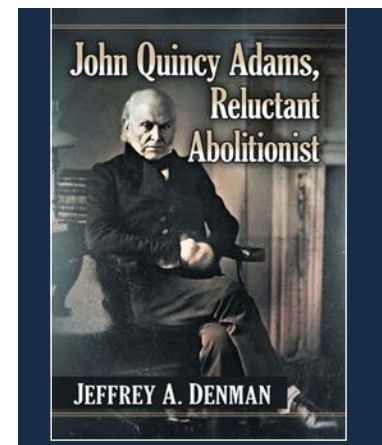
6:30 p.m., Monday, April 13, 2026. **America 250: Revolutionary War Pension Files Transcription Event**, organized by **Allison Horrocks**, Ranger, Blackstone Valley National Historic Park. Participants will learn about the value of wartime pensions and hear service stories about patriots from the Blackstone Valley. The rangers will offer a training on how to transcribe records online for this project. If you wish to participate, please bring a laptop or tablet.

2:00 p.m., Sunday, April 19, 2026: **Jim Bailey**, the amateur historian and metal detectorist who found 17th century Arabian coins in Middletown will be returning to BVHS to update us on his latest finds, research, and discoveries.

1:30 Annual Meeting, 2:00 p.m., Sunday, May 17, 2026 **Jeffrey Denman** will talk about his book “John Quincy Adams, Reluctant Abolitionist.” (Christine Nowak Lecture)



17th Century Arabian Coin found by Jim Bailey in Middletown



John Quincy Adams, Reluctant Abolitionist by Jeffrey A. Denham

## Grant's Mill Considered for Nomination to the National Register

Grant's Mill, an early 19th-century sawmill in Cumberland now undergoing restoration, will be considered by the Rhode Island State Review Board for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places on Monday, April 6, 2026 at 9:30 a.m. at the Providence Preservation Society. This property is at 36 Grant Mill Road, where Diamond Hill Road meets Pine Swamp Road.

If you are interested in attending the meeting, please contact [marykate.harrington](mailto:marykate.harrington@preservation.ri.gov)

@[preservation.ri.gov](mailto:preservation.ri.gov) for more information.

The owners, Jeffrey and Deborah Cook, have been working to restore the mill and hope to someday open it for tours.

The property includes a circa 1818 up-and-down, or “sash” (long straight saw blade with wood frame) sawmill and an attached mid-19th century grist mill, according to the report prepared by Runyon Heritage Associates and Edward Connors and Associates.

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