

# Johnston Historical Society

## Historical Notes

Volume V #3 January 1990

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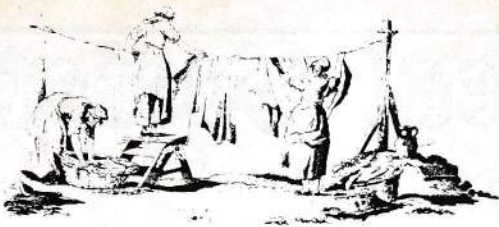
# ITALIAN FARMERS #  
THEY DEMONSTRATE THAT THE SOIL CAN  
BE TILLED WITH PROFIT...continued.

[From the Providence Journal-Bulletin  
of October 18, 1891, the first part  
reprinted our last issue.]

When one considers the constant toil and pursuit of the American dollar in which both the men and women are engaged, the neglected appearance of their domiciles does not seem unnatural. They regard their houses only as places of shelter at night or in severe weather, when no outside work can be performed. Two and three families, and sometimes even more, live in small cots that would be regarded as crowded by a native family of more than three or four persons. In such cases each family has one room to sleep in and all use the kitchen in common. The children are left to their own devices, and those not large enough to engage in the farm work are the household caretakers, and to them is committed the charge of infants who cannot receive the attention of mothers engaged in planting and harvesting. The little ones play about in the fields where the work is in progress and the mothers maintain a certain degree of watchfulness over them while they labor. A harvest scene among them presents an interesting picture. The women, with tanned, earnest faces and brawny arms, constantly engaged swinging rake, fork or scythe, are picturesque figures. Their attire is coarse and oft-times scant, but seldom lacks a wealth of color. A loose-fitting waist, short skirts and kerchief bound around their dark hair, coiled in braids close to the head, comprise their entire garb as a rule at this season of the year. The children romp about, free from care and apparently in perfect happiness and

contentment. The men load the teams and cart the crops to the barns to be assorted for the markets or stored. It is only on Sunday that household affairs receive any great measure of attention. Then the fences and brush in the vicinity of the house are covered with clothing and bedding spread out for a weekly airing. A substantial dinner is prepared and then the children receive a share of maternal consideration, and it is evidently appreciated. An erroneous impression prevails that on this day the cooking and mending for the entire week is performed. This is true only to the extent that the Sunday dinner is the most pretentious of any in the week. Neither is it true that these people deny themselves in food on the busy working days. They buy only the coarser grades of meat and their fare is very plain, but they have a faculty for making palatable dishes of cheap materials by long and thorough cooking and preparation in combination with herbs, preserved vegetables and legumes. While they do not incur any appreciable expense by fine clothing, there is not, perhaps, a woman of any nationality to whose heart finery is more dear than to these frugal daughters of Italy. This is manifest in the bright, hued raiment, grotesque earrings, massive finger bands and other jewelry with which they are adorned at all times. The men, too, are susceptible to pleasure afforded by gaudy apparel, but do not to any costly extent indulge their love of showy attire. Within the past few months a number of places have been sold to them, and there is some likelihood of their becoming the future owners of about all the farming property in the section. Italian names, corrupted into pronounceable nicknames, are becoming the substitutes for the old American titles of land marks in the town, 13





Italians having become the owners of many of the best known estates. The old Dan Harris place on Mount Misery is now known as Tom Parrelli's. The Nick Waterman farm of 100 acres, with its old homestead made picturesque by the gnawing tooth of time, and a "leaning tower of Pisa" chimney, is held under a lease to Cosmo Valotta and probably be owned by him at a future date. Vincenzo Bartollomeo, known throughout the town as "Chintz", works parts of the Pike & Tourtellot farms, and will own a good big place some day, he says. John Itzz leases the Sanford Knight place. These are the principal Italian tillers of the soil in and around Hughesdale, and a large number not mentioned own or lease small tracts in the vicinity. It is in the neighborhood of Simmonsville, however, that they are swarming. Carlo Telli is recognized as the pioneer and accepted leader of those in this section. He is a shrewd and energetic fellow who has earned the esteem of the community, and he owns a farm of 16 acres of as good land as there is in the surrounding country.

It is the old Titus estate on the Cranston side of Plainfield road. Every foot of the area, except what is required for cart paths, is under cultivation, and he lives in a substantial new house. His brother, Dan Telli, owns the old Elisha Lawton farm of 54 acres, with a well-built house and barn, for which he paid \$4000. Another brother, Paolo Telli, leases the Major Pirce farm of 60 acres. Cosmo Miranda, who was burned out in the Belknap district a month ago, has within a fortnight bought the old Hohler farm of 70 acres. Cosmo had been negotiating for this place and paid \$1000 on it when the fire swept away all else he owned, and he has raised some \$3000 more to complete the bargain. The ability to obtain so large a sum is an indica-



tion that he is worthy of confidence, for he was but a common farm laborer, working for a dollar a day a few yrs. ago. Louis LaFargi, another thrifty Italian, has within a few wks become the owner of the old Abram Atwood farm near Morgan Mills, comprising about 20 acres of good land, with substantial though old buildings.

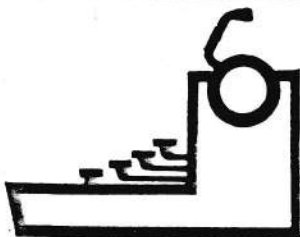
It is evident that these immigrants have come to stay and that they intend to become permanent residents and citizens of the land of their adoption is demonstrated by their eagerness to become naturalized. Almost every one of them who has been here long enough to procure the first papers of citizenship has done so, and a goodly number are already full fledged voters.



The time is not far distant when they will demonstrate that they are a desirable element in the community. Their industry and frugality will be appreciated as commendable traits when they become better known to their fellow townspeople. In the near future they will have passed the period in which they are regarded with scorn as cheap laborers and outcasts. They are the pioneers of their class and are living quite as all such have in every age, striving for a competency, with hopes of future ease and comfort. Already some of them who have accumulated sufficient of this world's goods to provide against immediate need are showing a disposition to enjoy comforts, which they appreciate as well as do others. In a few instances the wives have relief from manual labor of the coarser sort on the farms and are devoting themselves more closely to household matters and the care of their children. They manifest pride and ambition for their offspring, and even now begin to look forward to a less toilsome path in life for their sons and daughters, quite like the American farmer, whose desire is to see his children established in the city.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



7-28-89

Dear Mr. Burford:

It has been a few years since our last correspondence relative to a Powder Mill at Johnston and am glad that I was able to make you aware of the document in my collection. Well again I have come up with another item relative to Johnston R.I. I recently acquired a group of military items and within the collection was a Lap Desk that belonged to a Dr. Jeremiah Jackson Cole (died in 1843). He is shown on the Providence tax ledgers from 1828 to 1843. Any information that you may have about him would be greatly appreciated. Also, does a portrait of him exist? He had a son named Jeremiah who was the administrator to his estate.

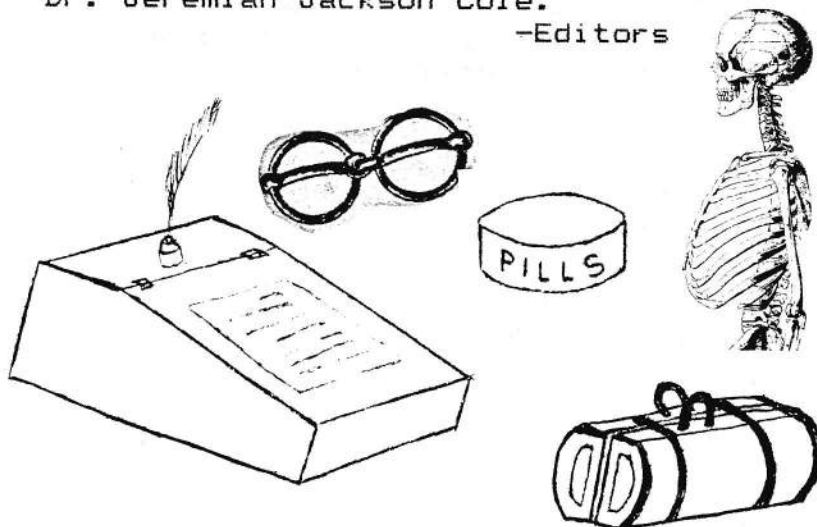
After I do my research, I will want to sell or trade this desk. Possibly you may know someone in the Johnston area who may wish to own this early piece of Johnston history.

Sincerely,

Stuart A Goldman 617-963-8808  
63 Highland Avenue  
Randolph, Ma. 02368

Mr. Goldman's letter was received at Johnston's Mohr Memorial Library where Bob Burford was formerly the Librarian. Mr. Goldman's previous correspondence included several documents about the Revolutionary War gunpowder mill at Graniteville which were printed in our Vol.IV Issue #1 (September 1987). We have done little research concerning Dr. Jeremiah Cole in Johnston, though we find the medical Day Book of Johnston's Dr. Moses Mowry notes a "consultation" with a Dr. Cole on May 11, 1812 over patient Stephen Waterman. The Cole family name occurs commonly in Rhode Island from early colonial times; it is not a common Johnston name, though Civil War veteran William H. Cole is buried in Johnston Historical Cemetery #24. Study of the Mowry manuscript and other sources continues but readers are encouraged to provide any known information about Dr. Jeremiah Jackson Cole.

-Editors



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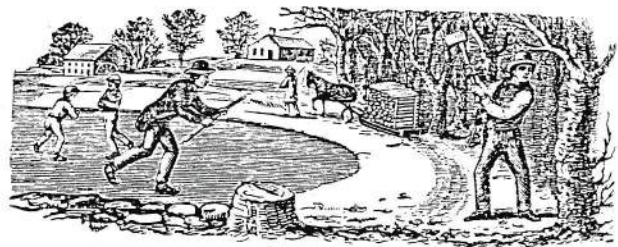
## EDITORIAL POLICY

This publication is to provide:

1) timely information to the members of the Johnston Historical Society, while 2) fostering the study of local history by sharing data and reasonably researched articles about town history. Five issues will be published per year. Back issues are \$1.00 per copy. The editor eagerly solicits manuscripts and notes of any length, style, and grammatical quality (generally not to exceed 2000 words). Topics can range from history and preservation of old houses (general or specific buildings) through biographical sketches and genealogy of local families, to facts and recollections of Johnston organizations and clubs, events, geography, archaeology, industries, folklore, crafts and local heritage from past decades. Documents and diaries of historical significance will be considered for reprinting.

Contributors sustaining  
this newsletter:

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JANUARY.

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