

RICHMOND REFLECTIONS

The Richmond Historical Society Newsletter



Volume 50 No. 1

March 2024

Greetings Members and Friends of RHS,

Spring forward to a busy season! The Richmond Town Council resolved to form the **Richmond 250 Commission** as part of the **RI 250** year of celebration in 2026. 2026 marks the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, and the goal is for each of RI's 39 cities and towns to commemorate in their own way. Six members have been appointed to the Richmond 250 Commission, including RHS members **Kristen Chambers** and **Dave Johnson**, Town Councilor **Samantha Wilcox** (Chair), **Victoria Vona** (Vice Chair), **Patricia Pouliot**, and school committee member **Karen Reynolds**. A seventh member will be appointed from the Richmond Recreation Commission. 2026 also marks the 200th anniversary of the **Bell School**, and we will be seeking volunteers to help with programming to recognize that as well.

Get ready to give! 401Gives, the annual online fundraising drive, takes place April 1 and 2. Our ambitious goal this year is to raise \$5000. These funds will be used for repairs to the Old Town Clerk's Office/Carolina Village Museum (OTCO/CVM), which would include re-siding the outer walls and reglazing the windows. Built in the mid-1800's, in 1869 the little building housed a cigar manufacturer. From 1908-1966 it became the Richmond Town Clerk's office. When the office was moved to the Town Hall, the building fell into disrepair. In 2009 a generous donation allowed for repairs, and the OTCO became the Carolina Village Museum, preserving the history of the mill village of Carolina. With the upcoming 250th Sesquicentennial, RHS seeks to bring the OTCO/CVM up to snuff in preparation for town-wide celebratory events! Please donate generously to help us reach our goal of \$5000. Be sure to head to the [RHS 401Gives page](#) on April 1 and 2, and invite friends to donate too!

Inside: Richmond Elementary School History; Rear Admiral Ian Johnson; The Search for Little Mary Paul; Archives News; Bylaws revisions

CEMETERY NEWS



**Rhode Island Historical Cemeteries
Awareness and Preservation Weeks**

APRIL - MAY
2024

Join tours, clean-ups, conservation workshops,
monument cleanings, talks, and other programs
throughout Rhode Island

Free and open to the public



Historical cemetery lovers, April and May are your months! There are multiple events around the state that you can take part in during *RI Historical Cemeteries Awareness and Preservation Weeks*. Visit the [website](#) and you will find listings for events around the state including tours, workshops, cleanings, talks, and hikes. Several events in Richmond are scheduled:

RICHMOND-

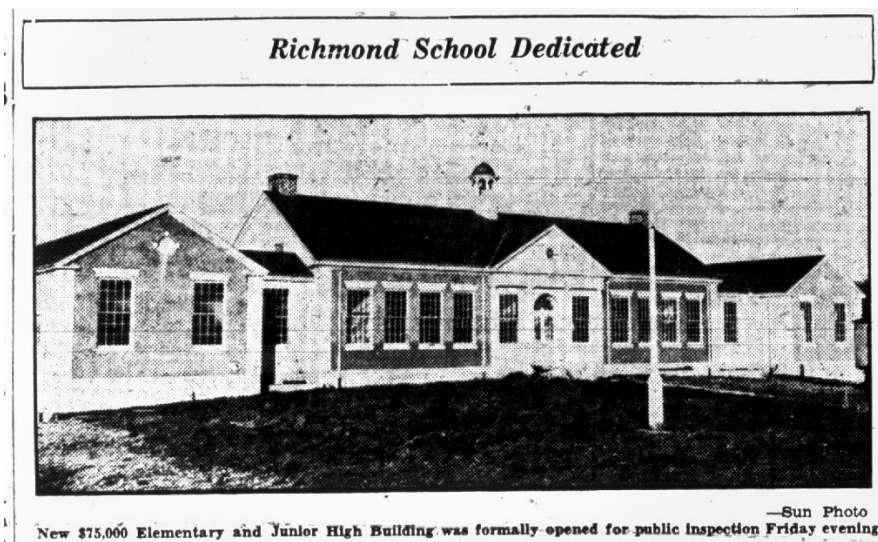
Clean & Flag – Sat. April 6th– 9am - (clean) Isaac Collins Lot RD#25 – located on Woodville Rd, Richmond – Telephone #31. (flag) a Civil War Veteran grave. Bring rakes and clippers – Contact – Dory Wagner dorwagg@aol.com

Flagging – Sat. May 4th – 9am – Place flags on Veteran graves. Meet at Clark Library. Will take approximately 2-3 hours. Some hiking involved. Contact Dory Wagner dorwagg@aol.com

HIKE – Sat. May 11th – 9am – 1.5-hour hike to visit Richmond cemeteries RD#6 and RD#59. We will also see Cairns, old stonewall lined farm road, old cellar holes, huge boulders, rock bridges, old barn walls and a well. **Meet at** telephone pole #91 Hillsdale Rd. - Small parking lot. From Route 138, go North on Hillsdale Rd for 1.7 miles to parking on left. Contact- Dory Wagner dorwagg@aol.com

Dory Wagner informs that in 2011 members of the RI State Historic Cemetery Advisory Commission got enabling legislation approved so that every city or town would have the ability to offer a tax abatement to property owners with a historic cemetery on their land. The property owners would be expected to properly maintain the cemetery if granted abatement. The legislation provides for reimbursement of expenses in cleaning and fencing costs for the cemeteries. Dory has worked to get a proposal for the tax abatement offer onto the Richmond Town Council agenda and has sent each member a letter explaining the legislation along with information on what other towns have done. She is offering the expertise of the Richmond Historical Cemetery Committee to help in the drafting of the plan and in monitoring the cemeteries.

RICHMOND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HISTORY ~Kristen Chambers



“If the plans of the town of Richmond go through and Federal and State aid is received in building the new school building, the town will have a modern structure for about half its cost. Richmond has stepped into the picture and taken advantage of the offer made by the federal government as well as the State. She probably is getting that building a good deal cheaper than would ever be possible in the years to come...Richmond

taxpayers got together the other day and talked it over. Those who believe in good schools helped put the project across. Now that the town has done its part, all that is necessary is for the State and federal government to cooperate. There is no question about the State doing its share as it has already offered to do it.”

You might mistake the above quote as current commentary about the upcoming bond referendum on May 7 to vote on the construction of three new elementary schools, one in each of the Chariho towns (Charlestown, Richmond, Hopkinton). However, it was printed in the February 9, 1934 issue of *The Westerly Sun*, following a special financial town meeting to decide whether to accept government aid to assist in the creation of a “consolidated school” for Richmond children in grades 1 through 9.

For over a decade, from 1929-1941, the Great Depression affected the lives of the American people and millions of people around the world. Many reading this will have heard stories from parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents of how difficult life was for them and their families during those times when a quarter of the country’s workforce was unemployed, and income fell an average of 42.5% for those fortunate enough to remain employed.

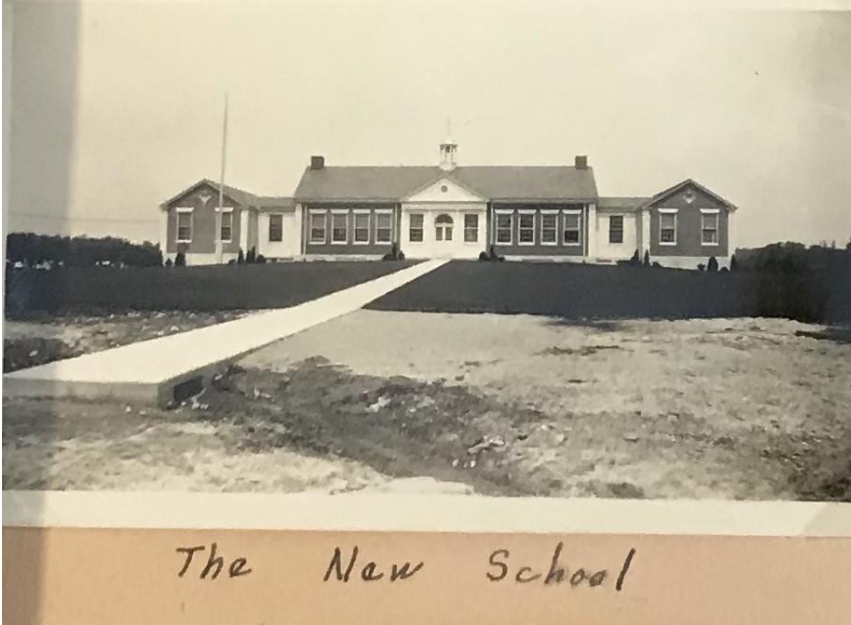
The RI Census records that the population in Richmond in 1935 was 1535 people. The local textile mills employed the greatest number of workers, both men and women. Many worked on the family farm or were hired farm laborers. Other common jobs for men included railroad work and construction; working women were often teachers, nurses, or did clerical work. None of these jobs would make anyone rich, especially in the Depression era.

Yet, in the middle of the worst economic disaster in America’s history, an amazing thing happened in the small backwater town of Richmond. On February 3, 1933, “the taxpayers in [a] special financial town meeting voted to avail themselves of the opportunity to construct a nine-room consolidated schoolhouse in the town, under the Federal Reconstruction Act, and with the generous aid to be supplied by the State Board of Education.” The taxpayers accepted the proposal by a 2 to 1 vote.

Superintendents and school committee members came and went over the first three decades of the 20th century, but the same issues came up year after year. For over twenty years, the annual Richmond School Committee reports bewailed a lack of equalization of school funding from the State which penalized rural towns- sound familiar? Concerns over attracting and securing well qualified teachers with better pay, planning for future development as the school population expanded, and consolidating the town’s multiple one-room district schools were continuing themes. Superintendent O.R. McCoy was a tireless cheerleader for Richmond schools and its students and teachers. It was during his tenure that the townspeople voted Yes to accept federal and state aid made possible by President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal government agency, the Public Works Administration (PWA). Federal aid amounted to \$22,500, state aid \$15,000, and town investment \$37,500.

Amazingly, less than two years after the voters approved the measure in February 1933, the new elementary-junior high school building was up and running! The architect was Robert Meikle of Pawtucket and the contractor was Anthony Corrado of Providence. Work began in July 1934, with 20 men on the relief lists at the Unemployment Relief Bureau in Westerly hired for the project. They worked in shifts of 30 hours a week. “Both skilled and unskilled labor will be provided with work until the building is complete.”

As the building was under construction during the start of the school year in September 1934, and completion was not expected for three or four months, temporary shifting of students to one of the smaller schools was



made, while two one-room schools (Bell and Beaver River) closed altogether. Junior high age students in grades 7, 8, and 9 attended space in the Town Hall, with some 7th graders assigned to Wyoming or Hope Valley; and grades 1-6 attended either Carolina, Arcadia, or Wyoming School.

The architect announced at the end of December 1934 that the school would be ready for occupancy in two weeks, and Richmond School opened for business on January 7, 1935, only 6 months after construction began! On Friday evening, March 15, 1935, over 500 people attended the dedication ceremony. No doubt many

attendees were excited students, proud to show their families their new school.

A host of notables attended, and speakers representing town, state, and federal government gave speeches. Roy Rawlings, Republican state representative from 1923-1934, and Speaker of the House from 1927-1933, was chairman of the building committee and of the dedication program.

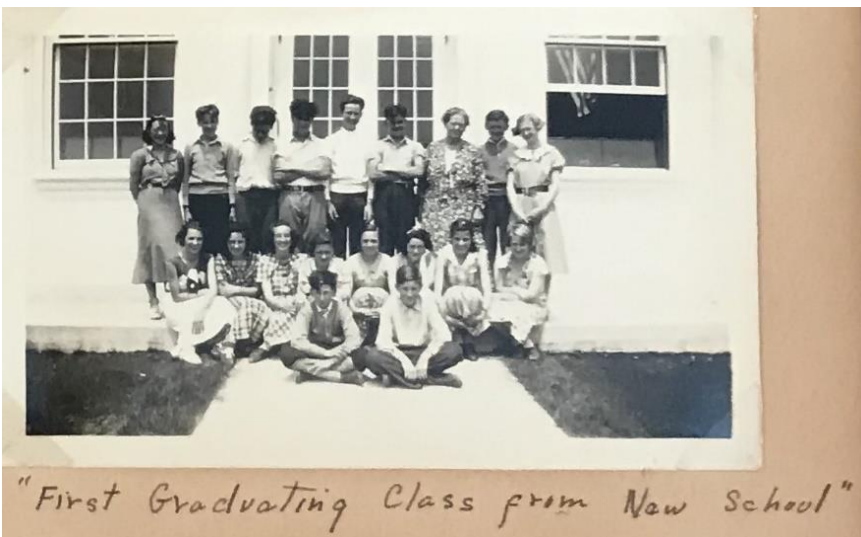
Rawling opened the program declaring, "This is the largest gathering of Richmond citizens I have ever witnessed... We are here, not only to commemorate the completion of the largest and most forward development in the history of the town, but also I hope to give recognition of the typical American cooperative spirit which has made this asset possible... [The accepted financial responsibility of federal, State and town has] put Richmond in the foremost ranks of desirable communities in which to live... Without cooperation we could not have taken advantage of this opportunity... Of the five or six hundred people here tonight there is not one but who has or will help this project in local, State, or federal taxes. We hereby express our appreciation to all."

He continued, "[N]o plausible way to finance such consolidation was obtained until the PWA of the Federal Administration came into being about two years ago. As your representative in the Legislature at that time... I felt I would be negligent of my duty if I did not make a thorough investigation of any opportunity open to my town and make it possible to accept the advantage or reject with no obligation to anyone."

Rawlings introduced other speakers, including State Board of Education representative Lucias A. Whipple, Superintendent O.R. McCoy, mill owners George P. Clark (Columbia Narrow Fabrics in Shannock) and Isaac Wilson (Richmond Lace Works in Alton), building committee member Fred. W. Smith, architect Robert Meikle, former town council president Alfred C. Browning, building committee clerk and school committee member Howard L. Hitchcock, and many others. All spoke in glowing terms of the cooperation which resulted in the new school in which the town could take pride. The building was up-to-the-minute in 1935, with "nine

classrooms, cloak rooms, lockers in the corridor, fire alarm and passing bells, automatic oil burning furnace supplying heat and running hot water, a 75-foot driven well, manual training room, domestic science room, cafeteria and auditorium with an overflow annex, storage rooms, teachers' room, principal's room and lavatories."

Before the crowd was released to a collation of ice cream, punch, and dancing to the music of Holland's Happy Trio, the speeches closed with general contractor Corrado handing the keys of the school to architect Meikle, who in turn passed them to Mr. Rawling, who presented them to school committee chair Florence Clark, who "expressed her wish that the keys should be the keys for the children of many generations." Miss Clark's wish has been fulfilled in the ensuing 89 years.



Top Left: First graduating class, grade 9, 1935. No names were provided.

Top Right: Who was the handsome young president of the Class of 1937?

Bottom: First Richmond School baseball team, 1934-35.

REAR ADMIRAL IAN JOHNSON
Commander, Navy Region Southeast



RHS members David and Roxanne Johnson, parents of Rear Admiral Johnson, proudly share the following:

Rear Admiral Johnson is a native of Wakefield, Rhode Island. He graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1994 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Aeronautical Engineering, and entered the submarine training pipeline, completing nuclear power training in Orlando, Florida, and Ballston Spa, New York. In 1996, he reported to USS Parche (SSN 683) in Bangor, Washington, where he served as electrical officer, main propulsion assistant and damage control assistant. There he completed three special ocean engineering missions, and earned three Battle "E" awards, two Meritorious Unit Commendations, and the Presidential Unit Citation. After completing the Submarine Officer Advanced Course in Groton, Connecticut, he reported to USS Maine (SSBN 741) in Kings Bay, Georgia, where he completed five strategic deterrent patrols as the ship's navigator from 2001 to 2004.

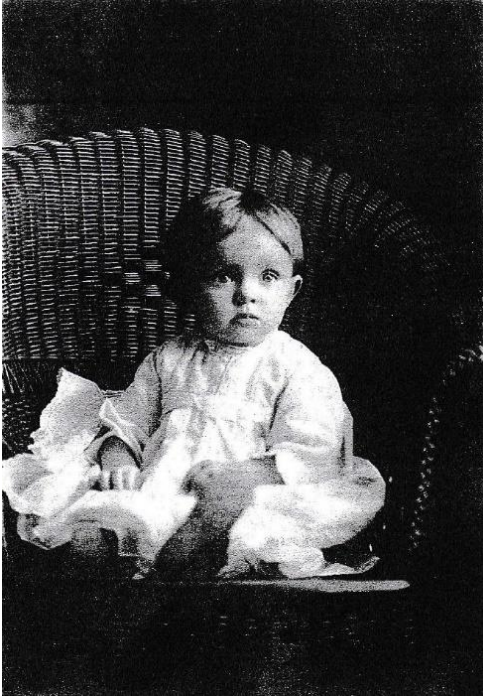
His next sea tour was the executive officer aboard USS Memphis (SSN 691) in Groton, Connecticut from 2006 to 2008, and then as commanding officer of USS Connecticut (SSN 22) in Bremerton, Washington, from 2011 to 2014.

Johnson's shore assignments include Strategic Systems Programs; Office of the Secretary of Defense; deputy commodore of Submarine Squadron 7 in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii; Submarine Force Atlantic Shipyard representative at Electric Boat Shipyard Groton, Connecticut; commanding officer of Naval Station Newport; chief of staff of Navy Region Northwest; and executive assistant to Commander, Navy Installations Command. In May 2023, Johnson reported as Commander, Navy Region Southeast.

Johnson holds a Master of Science degree in Engineering Management from Catholic University of America. He completed his phase II of Joint Professional Military Education at the Joint Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia in 2010.

He has been awarded the Legion of Merit Medals, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medals, Navy Commendation Medals, Joint Service Achievement Medal and Navy Achievement Medals.

THE SEARCH FOR LITTLE MARY PAUL ~Kristen Chambers



The subject line of the July 2022 message in the RHS inbox was intriguing: “Richmond Lace Works Fwd: Death Certificate search request - 1920 Little Mary Paul”. The email, from Mary Petretti of NYC, was accompanied by a photo taken in 1919 of an adorable toddler with soulful eyes. The message continued: *I am in need of information regarding my Mom’s eldest sister Mary Paul. I am hoping to add her information to her grave in Pawtucket.*

Little Mary Paul. The name and face, and the story as it unfolded touched my heart.

Mary had originally contacted the Richmond Town Clerk with what information she had on her aunt, Mary Paul. That was following Mary’s journey to RI in May 2022 to bury her parents’ ashes in Mt. St. Mary Cemetery in Pawtucket. On her drive back to NYC, she “drove through Richmond, Alton, Carolina on the way home. Driving over Alton Pond. Once the headstone is completed I will return for the dedication and will come by again.”

Mary Paul was the oldest child of Mary Petretti’s maternal grandparents, Jacob and Anna (Sypula) Paul, who in the 1910’s and 1920’s lived in Alton. Mary did not have exact dates of Mary Paul’s birth or death, but knew she died sometime on or around Good Friday, which fell on April 2 in 1920. Her name is not recorded in the Richmond census data taken in May 1920. Little Mary was buried in an unmarked grave in Mt. St. Mary’s Cemetery, but the cemetery did not have more information as records were lost in a fire. The Richmond town clerk had no information, and suggested she contact RHS. Archivist Richard Wolke informed Mary that since birth and death certificates are not housed in the archives, the best bet would be to contact the State of RI Vital Records, and that the RI Historical Society might also be of help, and links were provided.

Mary had mentioned incidentally in her request that nearly all the Paul family members living in Alton worked at Richmond Lace Works, and that the Pauls were lifelong friends of the local Cayer family, who lived on a farm just across the Alton Bridge in Hopkinton. As an Alton resident of 35 years, I’m always intrigued by stories of “olden times” in Alton. I emailed Mary back about how I lived in her family’s old neighborhood, that the mill building they worked in is still standing but no longer in operation, and that the Cayer farmhouse still stands on Cayer Trail. I emailed photos and articles about the village from the archives to her.

Mary was so appreciative of the information, and we corresponded back and forth for a while about Alton and her continuing search for Little Mary Paul. Mary sent the articles about Alton to relatives in New York, Florida, Australia, and to the last remaining child of Jacob and Anna Paul, her Aunt Ann in Texas (b. 1932). In October 2022, Mary sent a happy update. She had followed up with RI Vital Records and the RI Department of State to establish the birth and death, was successful in getting copies of Little Mary Paul’s birth and death certificates, and now the new headstone could be inscribed with the correct dates: Feb. 15, 1918 – April 3, 1920.

The Story Continues

In February 2024, I had some news for Mary:

Hello Mary,

It's been a long time since we corresponded, and I hope you are well!

"I have a little news about the Paul family in Alton. Our local newspaper, The Westerly Sun, recently made digitized copies of the newspaper from 1893-1950 available online. You can really go down a rabbit hole checking it out! Newspapers in those days contained a lot of useful gossip and a picture of everyday life, as well as "real news". The Sun archive has been very helpful in researching items for our newsletter with its [search tool](#), including for the article on the Bavasso family of Alton. I've attached the December newsletter to read about them.

"Little Mary Paul" crosses my mind every so often, and I used the Sun archive to see if I could find more info about your family when they lived in Alton. I typed "Jacob Paul" in quotation marks into the search bar, and several little articles popped up. I've attached screenshots...

"Oh my goodness, Mary- I just now on a whim typed in "Samuel Paul" after seeing his name in the June 29, 1925 article, and up pops an item about his farewell party given by Mr. and Mrs. Angelo Bavasso. (March 22, 1926) Angelo was the father of Ralph Bavasso, the man I interviewed for the December newsletter! This is the rabbit hole I'm talking about!

Kristen

I asked Mary if she would be willing to have her family's story told in the newsletter, and she agreed. She provided many family photos, not all of which can fit in the newsletter. But all will be digitized and saved in the archives, along with the full transcript of her answers to the interview questions.

The Paul and Sypula Families



Mary Petretti's maternal grandfather, Jacob Paul (b. Pulisic, 1891-1989) was born in Olib, an island of Croatia in the Adriatic Sea. He and brothers John and Samuel emigrated to Manhattan in 1907 where they worked as dock hands. Before their brother Martin joined them in 1911, the three teenagers at some point lived for a while in Moosup, CT, where a number of Olib immigrants had settled, and likely worked in one of the mills. (The eldest Pulisic/Paul brother, Mario, had emigrated to Argentina in 1900, where he served in the military. Unfortunately, they never saw him in person again, but they corresponded throughout their lives.) Their parents and sister, Mary, remained in Olib. Shortly after Martin's arrival, the brothers relocated to RI, likely to work in the mills of Pawtucket. *(At left: Photo taken when three of the Paul brothers lived in Moosup CT. Seated: John Paul, unknown man. Standing: Unknown boy, Jacob Paul, Samuel Paul)*

Mary's maternal grandmother, Anna K. Sypula (1896-1983) was born in Strogowa, Poland, as was her older sister Mary. "My Grandmother Anna's mother Katherine arrived 1902 and Anna in that year or soon after. It is believed that Anna's father, Joseph, arrived around the same time. Anna had to return to Europe, with a maternal uncle, as she was denied entry from the Port of NY due to pink eye, or some such. Anna returned at some point soon after, it is believed

through the port in Boston, MA.” The Sypula family lived in the Central Falls and Pawtucket area except for the time they lived in Alton. Katherine and Joseph had five more children after moving to America.

Neither the Paul brothers nor the Polish born Sypula siblings appear to have had formal schooling. The five siblings born in the US attended school in Central Falls. Still, both Jacob and Anna were multilingual, as was common especially among younger immigrants. Mary reports, “Grandmother Anna worked at Slater Mill [in Pawtucket] as a child, before the child labor laws were enacted. And also Coats & Clark [also in Pawtucket] where she lost a finger!”

Jacob and Anna likely met through neighborhood proximity and/or working in the mills. Mary’s mother told her that Jacob had first proposed to Anna’s older sister Mary, who was closer to his age, but she had another suitor whom she ended up marrying. Jacob’s attention turned to Anna, and in 1913 the couple eloped and were married in Central Falls. Anna was only 17 but recorded her age as 20 in the marriage register.

Sometime after the marriage, Jacob and Anna, along with Jacob’s brothers and their families and Anna’s family members moved to Alton. Richmond Lace Works was the likely draw. Most members of the Paul and Sypula family, except for Anna and her mother, worked at the mill. Alton Village was a close-knit community as the residents lived in the same small neighborhood and worked in the mill together. Friendships often lasted a lifetime even after families had moved far away.

Anna and Jacob’s first child, Marya Ana “Mary” (Little Mary Paul) was born February 15, 1918. The image of their solemn, wide-eyed baby girl is formally preserved in two studio photos taken in 1919. In one she is dressed simply in a white dress with pleated bodice and ruffled hem, seated in a wicker chair. In the second she sits on a furry drapery, wearing the same dress, a pretty lace-ruffled bonnet encircling her small face. A small notice in the April 7, 1920 issue of *The Westerly Sun* reports the sad news that two-year-old Mary had died of diphtheria on Saturday April 3, and that her funeral and burial took place the following day in Pawtucket. Jacob Paul was reported to be still seriously ill the following Tuesday, apparently with diphtheria, and was “under the care of a trained nurse from Boston.”



Little Mary Paul

Anna and Jacob’s grief must have been somewhat mitigated by the arrival of a second daughter, Elsie Frances Paul, called Frances, just 3 months after Little Mary’s death. Mary Petretti’s mother, Mary Louise, was born in 1924, followed by siblings George (b. Florida), John, and Ann. There was a scare just over a year after Little Mary’s death, when Jacob, who had been working or visiting in New Jersey for several weeks, was called home due to the “serious illness of his little child”. (*The Westerly Sun*, 4/18/1921) Thankfully little Frances recovered. Mary Petretti recalls that her Aunt Frances’s hearing was impaired by Scarlet Fever as a child and wondered if the illness reported in the paper in 1921 was the Scarlet Fever that caused the hearing loss.

After eight years living and working in Alton, eventually all four of the peripatetic Paul brothers, seeking greater opportunities, relocated to the Miami area with their families in 1925 and 1926. There Jacob, John, and Martin started the Miami Roofing Company. Mary’s grandmother Anna did not want to leave Alton, and perhaps her sisters-in-law wanted to stay put as well, but they would have had little say in the matter. In hindsight the men may have wished they’d listened to Anna. In 1926 the Samuel Paul family’s house was destroyed in the Miami Hurricane, and it is believed Jacob and Anna lost their home in the same storm. The Paul brothers threw in the towel and moved

back to New York City, where all four settled in the Bronx, working at the Liberty Lace factory until they retired. Anna and Jacob’s two youngest children were born in the Bronx.

The Bavasso Connection

When I emailed *The Westerly Sun* articles to Mary in my February 2024 email, I also attached the December 2023 issue of the *Richmond Reflections* newsletter containing the interview with Ralph and Gergi Bavasso. Though Ralph was born in 1931, several years after the Pauls had moved away, I thought Mary would be interested in the Alton references.



In return Mary sent a photo dated 1936 (*at left*). In it her grandfather Jacob is seated on a step in front of a cottage, the foundation of a human tower, with son George on his shoulders, son John on George's shoulders, and youngest child Ann atop George. Standing to the left is oldest daughter Frances, and to the right is Mary's mother Mary Louise. The sign attached above the entryway reads "ALTON". On the back of the photo is written, "*The Pauls. Angelo Bavasso Charleston [Charlestown] Beach. About 1936 RI*".

I was astonished that there was a close connection between the two families, with the Pauls enjoying a visit at least once to the Bavasso beach cottage when they visited RI in the 1930's. I was excited to show the photo to Ralph and Gergi, and Ralph immediately recognized the cottage. He corrected the caption on the back- the cottage was located in Misquamicut, before it was knocked from its foundation by the 1938 Hurricane. Ralph was quite young when the photo was taken and does not recall visits from the Pauls.

As noted above in my February 2024 email to Mary, I was very surprised to see a connection between the Paul family and Angelo Bavasso and his first wife, Jennie. A notice in the 3/22/1926 issue of *The Westerly Sun* reported that Mr. and Mrs. Bavasso had hosted a farewell party for Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Paul prior to their move to Florida, attended by over 20 neighbors. The paper also reported that Anna Paul's mother Katherine Sypula and her four unmarried children moved back to Central Falls, as Anna and Jacob had already relocated to Florida.

Though the Pauls never again lived in RI after moving to FL and finally to NYC after the hurricane, they made frequent visits to Anna's family in Central Falls and to their many friends in Alton, including the Bavassos, as mentioned above, and the Cayer family. They corresponded by letter as well. Anna and Jacob's children developed friendships with several of the Cayer children on their visits to Alton, and Mary Petretti shared a letter written to her mother in 1998 from Louise Cayer Burton, updating her on Alton family and friends.

A Heroic Act

When I interviewed Ralph Bavasso last fall, while talking about his friendship with several of the Cayer children while growing up (he still talks on the phone with the last living Cayer sibling, Wilfred) he mentioned in passing that three Alton boys had drowned long ago in Alton Pond, and at least one was a Cayer. He did not recall the details, but one thing stood out to him as he spoke about the event that first time, and when we revisited the subject during subsequent conversations, which gave me chills. "Old Joseph Cayer", the father, was working on his farm on the Hopkinton side of the pond when he saw a group of people "coming up the hill", one of them carrying the body of his son.

I checked *The Westerly Sun* archives for this event, setting the search parameters for the 1930's as I assumed that it occurred in that decade. Nothing came up, and I stopped searching. Then, in our February correspondence, Mary mentioned that one of her grandfather Jacob's brothers had attempted to rescue three boys who had fallen through the ice in Alton, but sadly they did not survive. She did not know the specifics. I gasped- it had to be the same incident mentioned by Ralph, and I related it to her. Mary sent me two articles

she had found in *The Westerly Sun* from 1921 that related the drownings, and I later found the initial report published the day after the drownings occurred. No wonder I had found nothing in my search- I had plugged in search dates over 10 years after it happened, and 10 years before Ralph was born.

The newspaper reported that in the late afternoon on Sunday, January 23, 1921 three little boys went out on the ice to play and cross over from Hopkinton to Alton. They were brothers Georges and Maurice Francois, ages 8 and 7 respectively, and Wilfred Cayer, age 7. (Cayer's last name is misspelled as "Cryer" in the Jan. 23 article. According to his prayer card, his full name was Joseph Wilfred Cayer.) *"A little sister of the [Cayer] boy had refused to go on the ice with the others in disregard of their father's warning. She had just returned home to report that the others were on the ice when the news of the drowning reached her parents. All three were carried under the ice making the work of rescue slow and difficult."*



Alton Pond and bridge, from the Hopkinton side looking toward Alton

A subsequent article published February 1, 1921 states that the boys fell through the ice 100 feet from shore. It then describes the heroic attempt by Martin Paul, brother of Jacob Paul, who would have been 26 years old at the time. *"A number witnessed the tragedy, but Martin Paul was the first to rush to the rescue. Running across the bridge from Alton, he reached the Hopkinton side as the elder Francois boy was going down the second time. Casting aside coat and hat, he plunged through the breaking ice and freezing water and made a heroic fight to save the child's life. After a desperate struggle he succeeded in grasping the body under the water and in an exhausted condition, brought it to the riverbank, where eager hands were outstretched to receive it. Mr. Paul is said to have had a narrow escape himself from being held under the ice and drowned."* The bodies of the other two boys were recovered by rescuers in two boats.

Mary noted that Martin and all the Paul brothers, having lived on the island of Olib in the Adriatic before emigrating, were powerful swimmers. Martin's son, Mary's cousin Rich Paul, whose beloved godmother was his Auntie Anna Paul, has compiled articles and details on his father's heroic act. The fact that Ralph Bavasso could relate part of the tragic story that occurred years before he was born attests to the sorrow that lingered in the village over the loss, and parents likely related the event as a warning to their own children. His friend, Wilfred Cayer, is the namesake of the brother who had died nearly ten years before Wilfred was born.

End of the Journey

When asked about her recollections of her grandparents, Mary stated, "I loved and miss them dearly. They were so kind to me and fun to be with. My grandmother was the nicest person on the planet, as was her sister Pauline. They lived in the present. It was my grandfather who would relate about his family and history which has influenced my love of history to this day."

I asked Mary to share a little about herself, and learned she was born and raised in New York and has lived in Manhattan since graduating from RISD and taking theatre classes at Brown. She worked as a prop master some On and mostly Off Broadway productions and did some film work, which she found boring. She left art employment behind and now only creates for herself "in a variety of mediums and inventions."



The search for Little Mary Paul ended in success. Mary Petretti had received the information she needed so that the correct dates could be inscribed on the new headstone memorializing her along with Mary's parents and her maternal grandmother, Anna. Mary gathered with members of her father's family in October 2023 to dedicate the headstone in Mt. St. Mary Cemetery and celebrate together.

P.S.

When asked if there were any other information she would like included, Mary insisted I include the following: "You and I met because you, dear Kristen, were the start and journey to locating information on my mom's eldest sister little Mary, and from that start point so much more! I am extremely grateful as that start has led me to a path of connecting with my mom's cousins on the Paul side (Rich and his brother Johnny). And an opportunity to sort out and perhaps reconnect with the Sypula side of the family. I couldn't have come this far without your kindness and generosity."

I have to add that I have thoroughly enjoyed "meeting" Mary via our email correspondence and hope it will continue. My invitation is always open to give her a tour of the old neighborhood should she visit RI again! Mary's love for her family shines in her determination to preserve their stories, and to honor Little Mary Paul, the aunt she never knew. "As long as you speak my name I shall live forever."

Ed. note: A follow-up to this article with additional information about Martin Paul, provided by his son Rich Paul, will appear in the June 2024 newsletter.

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### FROM THE ARCHIVES

Through the magic of Facebook posting, the RHS Archives has gained two new volunteers. Welcome **Kally Hanifin** and **Mackenzie "Kenzie" Lawlor**! Each member of "The A Team" will become familiar with all tasks so that we are not dependent on one person to do a particular job. Head Archivist Richard Wolke says Kally and Kenzie are more than up to the challenge. He has announced that since **Kathe Hawes** has worked for some time in the archives, and **Kristen** often pops in, with **Kally** and **Kenzie** now on board, he is officially changing his name to **Ken**.

## BYLAWS REVISION

In March 2024 the Board voted to revise Articles V and VI of the Constitution and Bylaws. The change in Article V allows for staggering officer elections in order to retain some continuity of leadership by not having all of the Officers leave office at the same time. The revision in Article VI acknowledges that members at-large are appointed rather than elected.

### ARTICLE V – Officers

#### Previous:

The officers of this Society shall consist of a President, a Vice-President, a Secretary, and a Treasurer. The officers shall be elected annually and shall hold their respective offices until their successors have been elected.

#### Revised:

The officers of this Society shall consist of a President, a Vice-President, a Secretary, and a Treasurer. **Terms of office shall be two years. Elections shall be staggered, with the Vice President and Secretary standing for election in one year, and the President and Treasurer standing for election in the following year.** The officers shall be elected annually and shall hold their respective offices until their successors have been elected.

### ARTICLE VII – Board of Directors

#### Previous:

There shall be a Board of Directors consisting of the Officers of the Society and two members at-large elected at the Annual Meeting.

#### Revised:

**There shall be a Board of Directors consisting of the Officers of the Society elected at the Annual Meeting. Two Members At Large shall be appointed at the Annual Meeting.**

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## RICHMOND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Website: <https://www.richmondrihistoricalsoc.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/RichmondRIHistoricalSociety/>

Email: [rihiso@gmail.com](mailto:rihiso@gmail.com)

Snail Mail: RHS, PO Box 408, Wyoming, RI 02898

### RHS Slate of Officers

President- **Kristen Chambers** - [krischambers1@gmail.com](mailto:krischambers1@gmail.com)

Vice President- **Chamoni Mossa-Simone**

Secretary- **Denise Stetson**

Treasurer- **Peter Stetson**

Member at Large- **Dave Johnson** - [oneshadowridge@gmail.com](mailto:oneshadowridge@gmail.com)

Member at Large- **Bruce Simone**

Cemetery Chair- **Dory Wagner** - [dorwagg@aol.com](mailto:dorwagg@aol.com)

Archives - **Richard Wolke, Kathleen Hawes, Kally Hanifin, Kenzie Lawlor**

Newsletter Editor- **Kristen Chambers**

**Email newsletter submissions and ideas to:** [krischambers1@gmail.com](mailto:krischambers1@gmail.com) or send by mail to:

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