

The old Jamestown Bridge lives on in museum

By Michaela Kennedy

The Jamestown Historical Society Museum at 92 Narragansett Ave. re-opens for the summer on Saturday, June 30. This season is special, as the museum building boasts interior restorations that reflect its late 19th century origin and protect local antiquities in a climate-controlled atmosphere.

All are invited to an opening reception on Saturday from 1 to 4 p.m. Historical society members encourage guests to enjoy a new exhibit, "The Jamestown Bridge, 1940-2007: Concept to Demolition," and to celebrate the restored interior. Del's Lemonade will flow freely, along with other refreshments.

The air, at once cool and bright, envelops visitors with one step inside the museum. The structure, built in 1886, is no longer the stuffy old library of yesteryear. Whitewashed walls, restored windows and polished wood floor beams transport each guest into a bygone era.

Rosemary Enright, president of the historical society, points down at filled-in nail holes in the wooden beams. Desks and chairs were bolted to the floor in the original schoolhouse at the turn of the last century, according to Enright. The floor boards change directions towards the front of the room where separate boys and girls cloak rooms were located. "The floor on the side where the boys' cloak room was is in much worse shape," she laughs.

Above, delicate round lamps hang from the ceiling on rods.



Readying for opening day

Sue Maden, at left, and Rosemary Enright prepare the exhibit on the history of the old Jamestown Bridge, which opens this Saturday with an open house and reception. With them is a mannequin dressed in a uniform once worn by a toll collector.

Photo by Jeff McDonough

"The lights came from the old ferry building (on the east side) when it was torn down," Enright notes.

The exhibit in spotlight this year tells the story of the Jamestown Bridge through panels of pictures and artifacts saved from the legendary island connector. A uniformed mannequin stands ready, reminding locals of the many coins handed to the toll collector who smiled and tipped his hat to every driver. Chunks of steel grating seem to echo ghostly rumblings of

car tires crossing the bridge. The rusty latticework evokes images of fascinated children peering out windows, and apprehensive adults repeating the prayer posted at the toll booth (see shaded box).

Phases of the bridge's demolition are shown with photographs and technical reports. Visitors relive the experience from the initial environmental planning through the final explosions that destroyed the underwater portions of the

piers. "Almost everything was recycled," Enright says.

The showing is a joint project of the Jamestown Historical Society, and The Public Archeology Laboratory, Inc. (PAL) and is sponsored by the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration.

The display premieres RIDOT and PAL's traveling exhibit that documents the demolition, and

will go on the road at the end of the summer. Additional pictures and artifacts of the bridge's history, on show from the historical society's collection, will not be part of the exhibit when it travels to other locations across the state.

For more information, contact Rosemary Enright at renright@jamestownri.com, or call 423-2674.

Barber takes four at flower show

Quononoquott Garden Club member and Jamestown artist, Jillian Barber, came away with four awards from last weekend's Newport Flower Show, "Sea Fever: A Salute to the Tall Ships." The three-day event was held at Rosecliff mansion on Bellevue Avenue.

Barber won a blue ribbon for her horticultural entry and another for her Class 8 exhibit, "The Vagrant Gypsy Life." Barber also won the Judges' Commendation and the New Exhibitor's award.

A gypsy shawl, which she decorated with dried plant material, was worn by a mannequin dressed to interpret the "Vagrant Gypsy Life," a theme found in John Masefield's 1902 poem, "Sea Fever." The poem asks the question "wouldn't we all want to set sail to wherever the wind blows us?"

One judge commented on Barber's shawl, "This is an extraordinary masterpiece of textural design." The design on the shawl was fashioned with many dried flowers including achillea, allium, eucalyptus, yarrow, flowering dogwood and other materials from Jamestown backyards.

Barber's horticultural blue ribbon was given in the "Lonely Sea and Sky Division" for the container garden she created using an air scoop from a Norwegian Freighter. She filled the scoop with foliage plants of greens and blues to simulate ocean colors.

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A Jamestown Prayer

Oh Lord, please help me over the bridge
I get so nervous approaching the ridge
The mesh at the top makes me so queasy
I forgot the alt air is so cool and breezy
Lord Jesus, I need you, please give me your hand
To get me back safely rolling on land!

—Anonymous

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