

# Notes and News

*for members and friends of the Rhode Island Historical Society*

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## Fall for History



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**LIBRARY**  
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401.273.8107

**MUSEUM OF WORK & CULTURE**  
42 South Main Street  
Woonsocket, Rhode Island 02895  
401.769-9675

**FRONT COVER PHOTO . . .**  
Laquer pen case and leather bag carried by General Nathanael Greene during the Revolutionary War, photographed on a contemporary writing desk. Photograph by David Schultz (c) Rhode Island Historical Society 2006.

Pen case (1928.1.3) and leather bag (1928.1.2) both gift of Mrs. A. Maxwell Greene, desk (1977.27.1) gift of Mrs. Thomas L. Johnson, Jr.

# Be Part of History

The Rhode Island Historical Society is a nonprofit organization sustained by our many generous donors, members and volunteers. While we preserve the past, our members and donors ensure our future through membership fees, special gifts, and donations. Rhode Island's history is the story of all the people who have lived here. We need your help to tell those stories.

You can now become a member, renew membership or donate **ONLINE!** Go to [www.rihs.org](http://www.rihs.org) and click where you see the **DONATE BUTTON.**

## MEMBERSHIP

Whether you join at the Basic Level or opt for a Lifetime Membership, your membership in the Rhode Island Historical Society supports our mission to collect, preserve and share the Ocean State's rich history.

## WAYS TO DONATE


**Cash** – Monetary donations are an important source of operational support for the Society programs including research and collections, exhibits, educational program support, equipment and staff development.

**In-kind gifts** – Donations of in-kind gifts may include equipment and/or materials to build or enhance exhibits, programs and special events. Donations of services are also a valuable way of contributing to the Society. Let us discuss your in-kind gift with you.

**Stock and Bonds** – Appreciated stocks or bonds make for a gift that benefits not only the Society but also benefits the giver with a significant tax advantage.

**Gifts made through a will** – Consult your estate planner to prepare the perfect gift for future generations of The Rhode Island Historical Society patrons.

**Life Insurance** – Declare the Rhode Island Historical Society as a beneficiary on a new or existing policy. This will ensure the Society's success for generations to come.

For information on ways to give, please call the Development office at 401-331-8575, ext. 33, or [mlupham@rihs.org](mailto:mlupham@rihs.org). All gifts are tax deductible to the extent provided by law. 

# Elegance Returns to the Aldrich House Rental Program Re-Opens!

Enjoy your wedding, special occasion or event in the elegant setting of the newly renovated Aldrich House located on the beautiful and historic East Side of Providence. A reception area serves as the foyer entrance to the cozy 800 square foot ballroom, and our four French doors open to large and beautifully landscaped grounds.

Discounted rates are available to Rhode Island Historical Society Members. For more information or a personal tour, please contact Ms. Renata Luongo at 401.331.8575 ext. 34 or [rluongo@rihs.org](mailto:rluongo@rihs.org).

## The Torch Is Passed

By Bernard Fishman

**A**n era is ending at the Rhode Island Historical Society: after seven years, Roger Begin is stepping down from the Presidency of the Board effective November 5th. He had only recently become President when I was hired to be the Executive Director, and together we immediately had to face the most severe crisis to threaten the Society in a generation or more.

In 2002 it looked like the Society might not survive the huge financial deficits, organizational difficulties, technological backwardness, and deterioration of all our buildings that beset us then. But Roger provided the board leadership we needed at that critical time. His calm and optimistic demeanor, his ability to look at old problems with fresh eyes and re-assess them on their merits, and his willingness to take brave action to support the Society and its core mission helped save the organization for Rhode Island and for the future. In these seven years the Society has returned to sound financial health, modernized our collection access and management, invested \$2.5 million to repair our buildings, added \$3 million to our endowment (making it at \$7 million, the largest in our history), greatly expanded our educational programming, and wholly re-invigorated our interpretive activities and the way the John Brown House is presented to the public.

Roger can take great pride in his role in making these huge improvements possible. I will miss him as President, though I'm glad to say he will remain on our board of trustees. I hope many of you will attend our annual meeting on November 5th,



at which time we will honor Roger and his accomplishments.

Naturally the work of rebuilding and strengthening the organization goes on, and ample challenges await our next president. We are still reeling from a \$150,000 cut in our grant from the State of Rhode Island, in response to the state's own

financial crisis. This substantial reduction in funding threatens many of the public services we have only recently added or strengthened. We must continue to build our endowment to secure the stability needed to carry on our work. We must finish the restoration of the John Brown House, now mainly complete but needing about \$500,000 more to bring the five-year project to a successful end, and we must finish the library renovation we are just beginning to plan: this will require, ultimately, about \$1.5 million, but it will hugely advance our capacity to look after our collections for the next generation. And of course we must continue to develop good public programs, fashion sound educational projects, and advance the care of our collections and good public access to them.

I believe all Rhode Islanders should be proud of the Society's work over the past 186 years, take pleasure in our ability to sustain our services to Rhode Island and our organizational integrity through so many changes, and continue improving our work for you and our capacities to care for and promote our state's history. You can count on us to continue to be an essential part of what Rhode Island is, and what it means, generations and even centuries from today. ❧

## Sweet Sounds of Summer!

Thanks to our sponsors and enthusiastic attendees, the 2008 Concerts Under the Elms summer series was a smashing success! We welcomed over 1500 concert-goers and new members this summer. Attendees relaxed on lawn chairs and blankets, savoring delicious food and wine, and enjoying sensational music week after week.

Sadly, the American Band was rained out AGAIN this year, but we are certain to enjoy them all the more in summer 2009! Our members and guests couldn't get enough of the Duke Robillard Band, and folks young, old, and in-between danced with the Cajun of Magnolia, Greg Abate's jazz, and the legendary music of The Driftwoods.

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## Summer School at RIHS

School was out for the summer, right? Well, not if you were a history teacher in East Providence, Cranston or Cumberland. For the last three years, teachers from these three districts have been participating in a Teaching American History grant directed by the Rhode Island Historical Society. This summer, working with the American Revolutions Collaborative, our teachers headed down South to better understand the complexity of the American Civil Rights Movement—a revolution in its own right.



*Monument to the Children's Crusade  
Kelly Ingram Park, Birmingham, Alabama.*

Just a week after the school year ended, 16 Rhode Island teachers and two members of the RIHS's Goff Center for Education and Public Programs boarded a plane for Birmingham, Alabama. They were met there by a group of Connecticut teachers traveling with the Gilder-Lehrman Institute of Yale University and Professor Jim Campbell, former professor of American Civilization and Africana Studies at Brown University.

They were about to embark on the trip of a lifetime: one week, on a bus, traveling in the footsteps of the men, women and children who put their lives on the line in the quest for equality.

The trip was exhausting both physically and emotionally for this education team. They flew to Birmingham, Alabama and spent two days working with the staff of the Civil Rights Institute and the famed 16th Street Baptist Church, all the while contemplating the fate of those children who lived and died for the cause.

Early on the morning of the third day, they woke and boarded the bus for Montgomery, the state capitol and home of the maverick Southern Poverty Law Center. Here the teachers took in the historic landscape, such as Dr. King's famous Dexter Avenue Church. At the Southern Poverty Law Center, progenitor of the Teaching Tolerance Program, our fellow New Englanders learned about the on-going battle against hate and violence

that the center still wages every day, lest any of us think that the work of The Movement has been completed.

From Montgomery, the teachers continued south to Selma. They spent the day grappling with issues surrounding voting rights. They saw the memorabilia and reckoned with the stories of the Selma to Montgomery march, including the fateful Bloody Sunday March, as it came to be known. The day was completed with a solemn march over the Edmund Pettis Bridge to remember those who confronted a mob, all for the opportunity to vote—a poignant reminder for everyone this year who might consider skipping their turn at the ballot box this November: people died for this right only 45 years ago.

In Selma the exhausted and contemplative team returned to the bus to head to the final stop of the trip: New Orleans, Louisiana. New Orleans was chosen not because of its nightlife, but because this year it was the location of the summer institute at the University of Mississippi's William Winter Institute of Racial Reconciliation. Rhode Island teachers were to meet the Winter Institute's participants, as well as other educators taking part in another organization of learning, the Transatlantic Slave Trade Institute.

Friday saw an exciting convergence of these teachers from across the country. They eagerly gathered to hear the words of people who had been part of The Movement, such as Dave Dennis, Charlie Cobb, John O'Neil and Hollis Watkins. And in other sessions teachers learned about the work being done today in Louisiana to expose and mediate the continued discrepancies in rights and opportunities faced by minorities.

Wearied from five days of intensive workshops and travel, they were revived by a fascinating and revealing trip to New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward. Gathering in an elementary school, the group learned the history of the Mardi Gras Indians and members of local Second Line Clubs—an important African-American cultural tradition in the city. The presenters explored not only the history of this tradition, but also how a catastrophe like Hurricane Katrina changed the lives of participants and threatened, but could not quell such traditions.

It was an exciting trip, but certainly no vacation. The teachers spent day in and day out immersed in the history of our troubling past and questioning our present and future. They received materials to bring home to their students. But more than that, this summer experience gave the educators a greater enthusiasm for their subject because the ideas and the stories became more real and tangible. Through the Rhode Island Historical Society, Selma was no longer just a place on a map to them; it had a face and voice. In fact, it had many. And now, it had ours. ❧

## House Proud

Phase III of the John Brown House restoration is proceeding apace! This \$400,000 phase, supported by grants from the Federal Save America's Treasures program, the Champlin Foundations, and the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, will result in a rebuilt and repaired pergola, substantial replacement of the deteriorated exterior brownstone, the repair of an interior staircase, and initial work towards the planning of a new climate control system in the 222-year old building. The pergola, an arbor with two parallel rows of columns supporting a wisteria vine on rafters, was erected around 1900 by Marsden Perry; it has been completely rebuilt. Its stonework has been repaired, the rafters are new but made of durable Douglas Fir, and the mysterious zodiac carvings that embellished the original have been painstakingly recreated by Robert Lamb, a master carver from Rhode Island. The brownstone replacements and repairs are on-going at the front gate, porticos, and various other places, necessitating the occasional scaffolding of the building. The reproduction busts of 'summer' and 'winter' anxiously await their imminent re-employment on the newly rebuilt gateposts. We expect all this work to be completed by November, marking the end of the greatest amount of work done on the John Brown House's exterior in the last hundred years!

## NEW ACQUISITIONS

African American opera singer Matilda Sissieretta (Joyner) Jones (1869-1933).

She was often given the title "Black Patti" in reference to Italian soprano Adelina Patti.



Portrait of African American opera singer Matilda Sissieretta (Joyner) Jones  
RIHS Graphics Collection, RHIX5358

## "In their absence:"

ARTIST'S INSTALLATION AT THE  
JOHN BROWN HOUSE MUSEUM

In May and June, the John Brown House Museum was transformed by Katherine Mangiardi, a Master's in Fine Arts student at the Rhode Island School of Design. Ms. Mangiardi installed several pieces based on the Brown family—specifically Abby Brown Francis—in the second floor bedrooms as the major part of her thesis. While studying last summer at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine, Ms. Mangiardi completed an installation in an 18th-century farmhouse inspired by the history of New England lace and lace makers, an experience which led her to the John Brown House Museum when she returned to Providence.



The curatorial staff at the House was intrigued by her desire to create pieces that interacted with its architecture and objects, and appreciated the different way of thinking that she brought, particularly about the

presence/absence of the women of the John Brown House. As she put it, "The women of the House are identifiable but still remain vague. They left fragments of themselves behind, but it is mostly their male counterpoints that are known. The House and its décor feel like a stand-in for their lives. The home is a space between their absence in history and the remnants they left behind."

Watching the pieces evolve, and talking with Ms. Mangiardi about her research into Abigail Brown Francis's life, and those of 18th century women, provided the curatorial staff with new ways of seeing the House and the people who lived here and inspired them to consider new approaches to interpreting and presenting the House's history in the future.

## Renew and Celebrate:

THE 187TH ANNUAL MEETING

On Wednesday, November 5, 2008, the Rhode Island Historical Society will hold its 187th Annual Meeting to renew the past year and celebrate the progress, achievements, strength, and momentum toward the future!

This year, Society President Roger N. Begin is stepping down after seven highly successful years. A reception in honor of Roger N. Begin will immediately follow the conclusion of the business meeting and speaking program. All RIHS trustees, members, guests and staff are invited to attend this festive reception. ❧

History Makers, the RIHS benefit gala honoring individuals who have made significant, lasting contributions to our state was held June 7, 2008 at Johnson & Wales University's Culinary Arts Museum. Dr. Robert Ballard, one of three honorees of the evening, gave the keynote address. He is discoverer of the RMS TITANIC and the German battleship BISMARCK, Director of the Institute for Archaeological Oceanography at URI, and President of the Institute of Exploration in Mystic, CT. The other honorees were Justice Bruce Selya and investigative reporter Jim Taricani.

"We proudly recognize these three exemplary Rhode Islanders who discover, educate and advocate – much like the Historical Society itself," says Board President Roger Begin.

Executive Director Bernard Fishman adds, "History Makers 2008 underscored the important work of our educational programs in local schools, community lectures, outstanding collections, and events that enhance the lives of all Rhode Islanders. Support for the gala helps us to continue these vital programs".

Honorary Chairpersons were Elizabeth and Kim Chace III, and Chairpersons Lisa Churchville and Skip Carlin. Over one hundred and fifty guests enjoyed delectable fare by Fine Catering by Russell Morin. The exclusive media sponsor was NBC 10; bronze sponsor was Lifespan Corporation; other sponsors were Bank of America, BNY Mellon Wealth Management, Brewster Thornton Group Architects, LLP, GTECH Corporation, Hinckley, Allen & Snyder LLP, Nortek, Inc., Trust Wealth Management, Brown University, Donoghue Barrett & Singal, PC, Mr. and Mrs. Evan Granoff, Gray's Point Investments, LLC, Hasbro, Inc., Pratt Radiation Oncology Associates.



*Dr. Robert Carothers, President of URI, presenting History Makers award to Dr. Robert Ballard*



*History Makers award recipient Mr. Jim Taricani and wife, Ms. Laurie White*



*The Honorable Bruce Selya receives History Makers award from longtime friend, Mr. Jack Renza.*

## Spring/Summer 2008 Library Programs

### A 3-D VIEW OF HISTORY!

RIHS Executive Director Bernard Fishman presented a series of three programs in the Spring featuring the unique 3-D photographs popular from the 1850s through the 1930s, when sets of stereo views, often depicting international scenes, were sold for viewing in the parlor as an entertaining and educational pastime.

### CARING FOR THE FAMILY TREE

On Saturday, April 26, 2008 sixteen Rhode Islanders attended "Family History for Families," a workshop at RIHS Library designed for newcomers to the country's most popular hobby, genealogy. Local genealogist Jonathan Galli talked about how to make the best use of census records, newspapers, city directories and other library materials to trace ancestors.

### OPEN THE DOORS!

On May 17, 2008, the RIHS Library Open House was held to introduce neighbors and visitors to the Library. In addition to a tour of the Reading Room, many unusual items from the Library's collections were on display, including a letter from Martha Washington to four young Rhode Island women (with an actual lock of her hair!).

### THE LIBRARIAN'S LIBRARY

Over twenty librarians from academic, public and special libraries all over Rhode Island participated in a June 24th program on RIHS Library services and collections. The program, offered under the State Office of Library and Information Services' Continuing Education for library staff, was presented by RIHS staff members: Jim D'Amico, Graphics Project Archivist; Karen Eberhart, Special Collections Curator; Phoebe Simpson, Technical Services Librarian/Conservation Specialist; and Lee Teverow, Reference Librarian.

# RIHS Library Restoration: Volume One

We are thrilled to report that the Rhode Island Historical Society has received a \$295,000 National Park Service grant toward the restoration of the Society's library building at 121 Hope Street! This will be the start of a \$1.5 million effort to repair and refurbish the library building to increase its ability to serve future research and collection care needs. The library building, originally the Hope Street Methodist Episcopal Church, was acquired by the Society in 1964. There has been no major overhaul since then, and it needs almost everything, including a new concrete reading room floor to support the weight of the books and microfilm cabinets, under which the old wooden floor is starting to sag. The library contains the cream of Rhode Island history on paper, some 550,000 collections. When the restoration is completed, the library building will be in excellent condition, with room for expanding collections, better office and public spaces, and improved climate control to better preserve the state's priceless historical treasures. Raising money for this project will be the Society's number-one priority for the next several years. ❧

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*Year End APPEAL 2008/2009*

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*401.331.8575 ext. 33*

## NEWS FROM THE MUSEUM OF WORK AND CULTURE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN & ENDOWMENT RECEIVES GENEROUS GIFT

Museum Co-Directors Raymond Bacon and Anne Conway are happy to announce that the campaign has received a very generous gift from long-time Museum friends, volunteers and artifacts contributors: Frederick and Alice Reinhardt.

On August 28th, the Museum's farmhouse exhibit was re-named the Frederick and Alice Reinhardt Farmhouse Exhibit at a reception held in their honor. With this generous gift, the Museum's capital and endowment campaign reached a remarkable \$265,000.



### TREASURY OF LIFE: PRESERVING HISTORY

The construction of the Navigant Credit Union Treasury of Life exhibit is nearing completion and several museum supporters have already purchased a family box.

This innovative exhibit, which resembles a bank vault, offers a one-of-a-kind way for families to preserve their history. By purchasing a museum safety deposit box, families can store items such as birth certificates, immigration papers, photographs and other keepsakes. A plaque bearing the family name will be displayed on the front of the box. The exhibit will include the history of Navigant Credit Union, formerly known as Credit Union Central Falls. We especially wish to thank Navigant Credit Union for their generous \$50,000 sponsorship. A limited number of boxes are available; please contact Anne Conway for more information.

In order to allow space for the Treasury, the Museum's 1920's baseball exhibit was re-located. In its new location, you will soon be able to visit a new and improved exhibit. The grand re-opening is planned for November.

### LABOR DAY COMMEMORATIVE CELEBRATION

On Monday, September 1, the museum held its 10th Labor Day open House. The Museum hosted the event to commemorate Woonsocket's first Labor Day celebration in 1899. More than 500 people coming from all over RI and MA visited the museum and were entertained by various costumed interpreters.



110 BENEVOLENT STREET  
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## THIS HOLIDAY GIVE THE GIFT OF MEMBERSHIP

Delight your loved ones, students, friends or neighbors and share your passion for Rhode Island history with a gift that keeps on giving year round. And with each gift purchased, YOU will receive the Society's popular note cards and envelopes featuring a beautiful drawing of the John Brown House.

The cost of an annual gift membership is only \$45 and includes our two popular twice-yearly publications; News

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& Notes newsletter and Rhode Island History Magazine.

Other membership categories are also available. Membership makes a wonderful gift, and helps the Society fulfill its mission of preserving history so you can enjoy it today. For further information call 401.331.8575, ext. 33, [www.rihs.org](http://www.rihs.org), or simply fill out the form below and mail back to us. We will send a gift acknowledgement to the recipient in your name!

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110 Benevolent St., Providence, RI 02906

# Fall Returns: Fall 2008 Calendar

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 16, 6:30 P.M.

**GALLERY NIGHT**

**JOHN BROWN HOUSE MUSEUM**

52 Power Street, Providence  
Free Admission, To R.S.V.P.:  
Dalila Goulart (401) 331-8575 x45 or  
programs@rihs.org

**IF THESE WALLS COULD TALK...  
FURNITURE MAKING AND BUYING IN  
EARLY AMERICA**

Come learn about historic furniture from an expert woodworker. John Brown House Museum volunteer Michael Carroll will highlight pieces in the RIHS collection to explain how a furniture buyer's desire, and sometimes their pocketbook, influenced the final design of their purchase. Reservations required.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25

1:00 P.M. – 4:00 P.M.

**ALDRICH HOUSE**

110 Benevolent Street, Providence  
Contact: Karen Eberhart  
(401) 273-8107 x20 or keberhart@rihs.org

**THE RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY PRESENTS**

**HOME MOVIE DAY 2008!**

Do you have home movies on film you haven't seen in years? Don't throw them away – drop them off for Home Movie Day. Don't have any films of your own? Come on down and watch someone else's! Local film archivists will be on hand to discuss film preservation, home movies, and amateur films of regional interest. Films will be screened on a first-come, first-serve basis. For more information and drop-off days, please contact Karen Eberhart: (401) 273-8107 x20.

NOVEMBER 1 & 2, DECEMBER 6 & 7

**MUSEUM OF WORK & CULTURE**

42 South Main Street, Woonsocket  
For more information: Anne Conway  
(401) 769-9675 or aconway@rihs.org

**MUSEUMS ON US: FREE ADMISSION  
FOR BANK OF AMERICA CUSTOMERS!**

Visitors to the Museum will receive free admission the first weekend in November and December by simply presenting their Bank of America card.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1

1:00 P.M. – 4:00 P.M.

**RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY LIBRARY**

121 Hope Street, Providence  
For more information: Lee Teverow  
(401) 273-8107 x10 or lteverow@rihs.org

**OPEN HOUSE AT THE  
RIHS LIBRARY!**

The Library opens its doors free to the public. View a selection of photos, maps, letters, early newspapers, diaries, and drawings from Rhode Island's past, learn about donating your historical artifacts and documents for posterity, and become a card-carrying RIHS member or Library Patron.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 5:30 P.M.

**SAVE THE DATE!**

**ALDRICH HOUSE**

110 Benevolent Street, Providence  
For more information:  
Mary Lou Upham (401) 331-8575 x33  
or mlupham@rihs.org

**187TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE  
RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

You are cordially invited to attend the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Rhode Island Historical Society for a review of this past year. For more information, see page 4.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8

TO SATURDAY, JANUARY 3, 2009

**GALLERY EXHIBIT**

**MUSEUM OF WORK & CULTURE**

42 South Main Street, Woonsocket  
For more information: Anne Conway  
(401) 769-9675 or aconway@rihs.org

**“WOONSOCKET NOW AND AGAIN”**

Woonsocket-based Riverzedge Arts Project has collaborated closely with the Museum of Work & Culture to develop this exhibit which compares and contrasts the city of Woonsocket “then and now.” The exhibit will feature paintings and digital photographs by Riverzedge students based on their research of the city's history.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 6:30 P.M.

**GALLERY NIGHT**

**JOHN BROWN HOUSE MUSEUM**

52 Power Street, Providence  
Free Admission, To R.S.V.P.:  
Dalila Goulart (401) 331-8575 x45  
or programs@rihs.org

**IF THESE WALLS COULD TALK...  
FROM ROOTS TO BRANCHES: TODAY'S  
FAMILY CONNECTIONS WITH THE  
FRANCISES, HERRESHOFFS, AND THE  
MASON-EATONS**

The history of the John Brown House Museum remains vital and dynamic today! Join us in welcoming Nathanael G. Herreshoff III and Henry A.L. Brown, descendants of the historic Herreshoff and Brown Francis families. They will speak about their experiences growing up in and researching their respective families. Reservations required.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2:00 P.M.

**JOHN BROWN HOUSE MUSEUM**

52 Power Street, Providence  
Reservations required, Contact:  
Dalila Goulart (401) 331-8575 x45 or  
programs@rihs.org

**A CHRISTMAS CAROL: DRAMATIC  
READING BY ROBB DIMMICK**

Warm up your Christmas spirit inside the John Brown House Museum with a dramatic reading of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. Sit back and enjoy as Robb Dimmick, well-known local actor and artistic director, reads aloud the beloved story.

