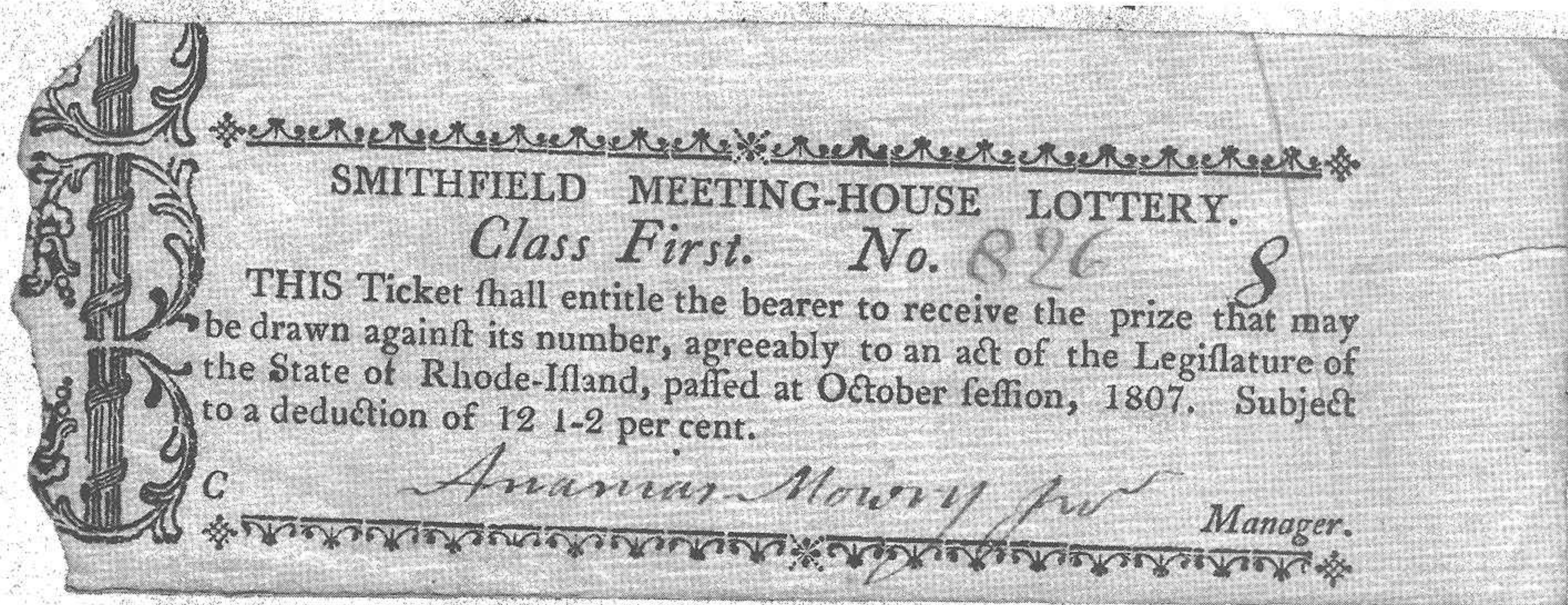


The Smithfield meeting house lottery of 1807



By Jim Ignasher

Question: How many lottery tickets survive more than 200 years?

Answer: Not many.

That's why the discovery of an envelope containing dozens of old tickets and paperwork from a long ago Smithfield lottery is so significant, for not only have the documents survived, they are in remarkably good condition considering they date to 1807!

The tickets were for a lottery held to raise funds for a "Meeting House", which in the early nineteenth century generally meant a church, and not a town hall as one might imagine today. Such lotteries were common for that era, often used for building projects such as schools, bridges, and roads, and even houses of worship. All such lotteries had to be sanctioned by the state to be considered legal.

Discovering such a find raises some interesting questions; where was the meeting house built, and is it still standing?

The tickets were printed on plain white paper (Now yellowed with age.) using a printing press. The printer had taken the extra time to include fancy scroll work on every ticket which no doubt added to the labor costs, but helped to deter counterfeiting.

Each ticket reads:

SMITHFIELD MEETING-HOUSE LOTTERY

THIS Ticket shall entitle the bearer to receive the Prize that may be drawn against its number, agreeably to an act of the Legislature of the State of Rhode Island, passed at October Session, 1807. Subject to a deduction of 12 ½ per cent.

Each was signed Ananias Mowry, Manager.

The tickets are hand numbered and were printed in a series of "classes" from one through six. Evidently quite a few tickets of each class were sold due to the numbers printed on them.

For example, one second class ticket was numbered 1495, and one sixth class ticket was numbered 1729.

In 1807, the Town of Smithfield included the present day towns of North Smithfield, Lincoln, the City of Central Falls, and a portion of Woonsocket south of the Blackstone River. When one considers the fact that at the time of the lottery, the entire town had a population of less than 4,000 people one can surmise that this was a big lottery for the day.

Included with the tickets in the envelope was a document titled; "A COPY OF THE ACT FOR THE MEETING HOUSE LOTTERY" which reads as follows:

State of Rhode Island
And Providence Plantations
In General Assembly
October Session AD 1807

Upon the motion of John Slater and others, praying that they may be enabled to raise the sum of four thousand dollars, by lottery, to be appropriated to build a meeting house in the Town of Smithfield. It is voted and resolved, that the prayor of said petition be granted and that Seth Mowry, Robert Harris, Enos Mowry, and Ananias Mowry, of us therein named be appointed managers of said lottery, who are hereby empowered to raise said sum of money in one or more classes, provided they shall first give Bonds to the general treasurer, in the sum of four thousand dollars conditioned for the faithful discharge of the trust hereby reposed in them -

A true copy
Witness Samuel Eddy Secry.

There was also a piece of paper with accounting costs of managing the lottery submitted by Ananias Mowry. It reads;

"The account of Ananias Mowry Jr., one of the managers of the Smithfield Meeting House Lottery. The accountant charges

himself with the following number of tickets – viz.”

In the first class 333 tickets at 2 dollars each	666
In the second class 500 tickets at 3 dollars each	1,500
In the third class 500 tickets at 3 dollars each	1,500
In the fourth class 800 tickets at 3 dollars each	2,400
In the fifth class 700 tickets at 3 dollars each	2,100

	\$ 8,166

The envelope did not contain any tickets from the fourth class, yet there were tickets from all of the other classes including a sixth class which was not mentioned in the itemized list. On the opposite side of the same piece of paper was an itemized list of expenses incurred by Mr. Mowry in the performance of his duties as manager of the lottery.

“The accountant prays allowance of the following charges and payments – viz”

1807 Nov. 13 to my going to Providence to give bank cash to the treasurer and other expenses \$ 2.00

Dec. 3 to my going to Providence to send a copy of the Act authorizing the lottery to the general treasurer \$2.00

To cash paid for copying and postage .50

To tickets unsold in the first class fifty one at two dollars each \$102.00

To cash paid for prize tickets in the first class \$565.50

To tickets in the hands of Seth Mowry that were in a policy of his and mine. \$58.00

To cash paid for prizes in the second class \$1,850.63

Add to this sum \$3.50

To cash paid for tickets in the third class \$1,366.75

Add to this sum recd. of Arnold Mowry \$10.50

Add to this sum \$24.50

\$3,927.88

\$4,031.95

\$7,959.83

One interesting thing about this document is that the math is wrong. When the figures are added up it should come out to \$3985.88 and not \$3927.88, a difference of \$58. This was most likely an oversight, but the actual final total should have been \$8017.83. Where the additional \$4031 came from is not indicated.

So, what was the Smithfield Meeting House and where was it located?

A book by Thomas Steere titled, “History of the Town of Smithfield from its Organization in 1730-1, to its Division in 1871,” published in 1881, makes a small notation about the 1807 lottery on page 62 that reads;

“1807. October. John Slater having petitioned therefore, Seth Mowry, Robert Harris, Enos Mowry, and Anamias Mowry were empowered to raise four thousand dollars by lottery, to

be appropriated to building a meeting house in the town of Smithfield.”

John Slater was born in England in 1776, and came to America in 1803. In 1807 he built a mill along the Branch River in what is today known as the village of Slatersville in the town of North Smithfield. That same year he obtained permission to hold the Smithfield Meeting House Lottery to erect the first church or “meeting house” in the village.

Houses of worship were important to village development in early America, for they represented civilization, propriety, and community stability. As a point of fact, the old Smithfield Meeting House has survived, and according to the Town of North Smithfield website, it still stands at 55-57 Green Street, however it was originally located a little farther down the road where the Congregational Church stands today. After serving as a meeting house, it became a school, and is today a private residence.

Lotteries such as the one to build the Smithfield Meeting House are no longer used for building projects, but one has to marvel at the fact both Meeting House and the lottery tickets sold to build it are still in existence. Will anyone today think to save useless lottery tickets? And how many modern public buildings can we expect to still be standing in two hundred years?

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Barbara A. Scanlon
ABR, CDPE, CRS, e-PRO, PMN, SRES

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barbara@barbarascanlon.com
barbarascanlon.com
949-1689

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