

# NSHA RELEASE 2018 CHRISTMAS ORNAMENT



**North Smithfield** – The original “Slater Building” which became the North Smithfield Public Library at 20 Main Street, Slatersville, in 1966 is the featured historic site of this year’s gold filigree Christmas ornament issued by the North Smithfield Heritage Association. The ornament is 3.5” wide x 2.25” high and .25” deep.

“The ornament will be introduced at the Town’s Great Pumpkin Festival celebration, Saturday, Sept. 15 on the grounds of the Town High School and will be available in North Smithfield at several area establishments after that,” according to Richard Keene, Association president. Donations of \$15 for each ornament go towards the preservation of the Forestdale School House and the organization’s other historic building, Heritage Hall, on Green Street, Slatersville.

The history of the library (beginning in 1797) is as equally interesting as that of the building which became its home in 1966. Called the “SLATER Building,” it was constructed in 1821 when the Slaters built an eight building mill complex, known as the Western Mills, on the western side of Railroad Street (the beginning of Rt 5 – Providence Pike. ). One of the last buildings standing from that Mill site, it had been the former Mill’s store house. The building was 26’ x 100’ and was built with granite walls three feet thick. Its rubble-stone construction shows what the old Western Mill complex looked like.



View of the Western Mills in Slatersville (looking West) before their demolition.

Libraries in Smithfield began in 1797, when the RI General Assembly established a corporation by the name of the Smithfield Third Library Company naming 53 incorporators whose purpose was to establish a library of useful books in that Town. (The Village of Slatersville was still a part of Smithfield at this time. North Smithfield was not incorporated as its own Town until 1871.) By 1848 several libraries had been established in Smithfield – including one in Slatersville.

Five hundred dollars was raised to establish this early library by Messrs. John Slater and Amos D. Lockwood, among others. It was open to all at a cost of one cent per week for each volume if properly used and not kept longer than two weeks in the hands of the reader. The well-stocked library, located in the bank building near the mill provided a useful service for more than half a century. Then in 1875 a new era in the history of libraries in the state began when a state law giving aid to libraries was enacted. As early as 1878 it was noted that the village library had 1,500 volumes.

At some point, the town's public schools also served as public libraries. But at a meeting of the Union Village PTA in 1928, a suggestion was made that a library be established for the residents of the neighborhood. The Library was officially incorporated as the Union Village Public Library in 1931 and established its headquarters in a tiny room in the Union Village School. In the early 1940's libraries were added to Bushee, Forestdale and Kendall-Dean schools and as a result, the Union Village Public Library was renamed the North Smithfield Public Library in 1944.

In March of 1966, the Library trustees decided to consolidate all these libraries and leased the John SLATER Building in Slatersville to provide better service. The library opened there later that year with 12,000 volumes. The Library corporation subsequently bought the building for \$30,000 in 1968 (equal to \$232,570 in 2018 dollars) and five years later, additional land was purchased for a larger parking lot and future expansion. That expansion occurred in 1989. Currently the Library has more than 58,000 items available to the public and there are more than 33,000 visits to it yearly.



*Library/Slater Bldg. then (1966)*



*and now (2018)*

The ornament will be available in North Smithfield, starting at Pumpkinfest this Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.. Thereafter they will be available at **North Smithfield Library**, 20 Main St.; **Wright's Dairy Farm & Bakery**, 200 Woonsocket Hill Road; **Lil General**, 659 Great Road; **the Town Administrator's Office, Town Hall**, 1 Main Street; **Town Clerk's Office**, Town Hall Annex, 575 Smithfield Road;; and by appointment by calling Louise Vanhouwe (769-8177).

This is the twelfth such ornament produced by the ChemArt Company of Lincoln, RI, for North Smithfield. A limited number of prior year ornaments are still available: Forestdale Schoolhouse; Slater Mill; North Smithfield Town Hall; Horse Drawn NS School Bus; John Slater House; Wright's Dairy Farm and Bakery.

With the help of the Town of North Smithfield, many Town civics' organizations plus foundation and private donations, the North Smithfield Heritage Association continues to maintain two historic buildings in Town, the "Little Red Schoolhouse" in Forestdale and Heritage Hall, at 101 Green Street, Slatersville. The NSHA is a certified 501.c.3 non-profit organization. Tax deductible donations and new members are always welcome.

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