



Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

October 2017

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Calendar of Events

November 12, 2017

2:00 PM

From the Archives: The Collections of the Westerly Historical Society

Zachary Garceau, researcher at the New England Historic Genealogical Society and our Society's new Archivist, will speak about the Westerly Historical Society, its collections, and future plans.



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Saturday, December 2, 2017

Babcock-Smith Museum Holiday Open House

Musical Entertainment – Museum Tours

Refreshments

~ Details to be Announced ~

Please Consult

<http://www.babcocksmithhouse.org/BabcockSmithHouse/events.htm> for latest information

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**Lecture Programs are held in the
Carriage House
of the**

**Babcock-Smith House Museum
124 Granite Street, Westerly, RI
Free Admission**

**to Westerly Historical Society Members and
Members of the Babcock-Smith House
Museum**

Admission for Non-Members: \$5.00

Memberships Available at:

<http://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/membership/>

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MILL COMPLEX AT BRADFORD CIRCA 1903

PHOTO COURTESY OF DWIGHT C. BROWN PRIVATE COLLECTION

Editor's Notes

Ann L. Smith

We were again pleased to welcome Christian McBurney to our midst on Sunday, October 1 where he spoke about his new book, *World War II Rhode Island*. Co-authored with another of our previous lecturers, Patrick Conley, and several other contributors to McBurney's website, smallstatebighistory.com, attendees were given a unique insight into Rhode Island's role in World War II. See Page 3 for the program review of Christian McBurney's lecture.

Board member and recent *Julia Award* winner, Dwight C. Brown, Jr. has been following the Nature Conservancy's work at the Bradford Dam. As a Bradford native and local authority on the history of the Bradford Dyeing Association, Dwight has co-authored this month's detailed account of the history of the Bradford Dam area and the industries that surrounded it since the earliest times. Dwight Brown, we discovered, is known as "Brownie" among the folks who still work at the old Bradford Dyeing location. A frequent visitor to the current dam reconstruction site, Dwight has amassed over 1,500 photographs of the work in progress. The property now operates as an industrial park and serves a collection of small businesses tenants.

Visitors to the Bradford Bridge along Main Street can witness for themselves what is taking place in the now exposed bed of the Pawcatuck River. Water runs into a temporary raceway to the right as one looks downstream from the bridge above. The former Bradford Dam is gone, having been removed in less than a day. Gone too is the decades-old fish ladder that was attached to the dam.

This project is part of a multi-year project in partnership between the Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In addition to federal monies from the USFWS, it is supported by a host of grants from sources such as the Baffin Foundation, the Champlin Foundation, the Horace and Ella Kimball Foundation, the Forrest and Frances Lattner Foundation, the Lattner Family Foundation, and the Rhode Island Foundation.

The removal of the White Rock Dam in 2015 and improvements to the Potter Hill Dam fishway in 2016 were made possible through this initiative. The project has as its goal to improve fish proliferation along the entire length of the Pawcatuck River. We hope you will enjoy

"Bradford Dam: A History Told in the Murmurings of a River." This feature article begins on Page 4.

On Sunday, November 12, Zachary Garceau, researcher at the New England Historical Genealogical Society and our Society's new archivist, will speak about the Westerly Historical Society, its collections, and future plans. Please join us for this informative presentation. Details are on Page 1.

If you haven't visited the Westerly Library lately, we highly recommend the "Treasures Through Time" exhibit in the Hoxie Gallery. "Treasures through Time" celebrates the library's 125th anniversary and features items from the library's special collections. Artifacts like the velocipede, a six-foot-tall bicycle made in Westerly; the Stillman clock that was recently on display at Yale; and portraits of famous (and infamous) people are on display. The exhibit runs until November 25th and is free, accessible, and open to the public. On October 14th the library will host a family-friendly fun day in Wilcox Park and later in the month (October 24th) Leo Mochetti will present "Treasure Talks: 'Black and White and Read All Over: Newspaper Publishing in Westerly'" For more information on library events visit <https://www.westerlylibrary.org/all-events>

Lastly, to set the mood for this month's feature article, we leave you this quote for your consideration:

"Have you also learned that secret from the river; that there is no such thing as time? That the river is everywhere at the same time, at the source and at the mouth, at the waterfall, at the ferry, at the current, in the ocean and in the mountains, everywhere and that the present only exists for it, not the shadow of the past nor the shadow of the future."

— **Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha**

Correction: Last month in our article on the Ninigret Theatre we wrote that Snuffy's Restaurant operated in the space that had been previously occupied by the theater (and later Fiore's Market). Thanks to the alert comments from Jane Maxson and others, we can now inform our readers that the acclaimed Snuffy's Restaurant was located further to the north along Bay Street in the building formerly known as Sisson's Restaurant. We regret the error.

Program Review: *Christian McBurney on WWII Rhode Island*

By Ann L. Smith

When Christian McBurney lectured on the spies of the Revolutionary War, we heard about the espionage activities among some of the lesser-known figures of colonial Rhode Island. A military history that sometimes reads like a romance novel, *Spies of Revolutionary Rhode Island* was a delightful introduction to Christian M. McBurney's works. Now just two short years later, McBurney returned to showcase his latest effort: *World War II Rhode Island*. While this new book may not contain all of the intrigue of the previous work, it appears to hold promise for every WWII hobbyist with ties to Rhode Island.

The first thing one notices about *World War II Rhode Island* is the abundance of photographs. With over sixty images in all, this book is as much a pictorial history of the war as it is a written one. As for the history itself, much information about Quonset Point and the U.S. Naval Air operations is included. For lovers of Quonset Point history alone, this book is worth the cost.

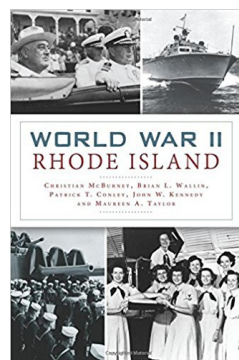
Perhaps the best way to know what is covered in *World War II Rhode Island* is to read from the book's preface. Here McBurney writes with one of his several coauthors, Brian L. Wallin.

During World War II, Rhode Island was an armed camp. The U.S. Navy had some of its most important facilities in the country there. At Newport, the Naval Torpedo Station produced most of the torpedoes used by Navy submarines, PT boats, destroyers and torpedo bomber aircraft. The Naval Training Station at Newport trained more than 500,000 officers and enlisted men during the war. The PT boat training center at Melville trained some 14,000 officers and enlisted persons.

At Quonset Point, the U.S. Navy established the largest Naval Air Station in the Northeast. At its peak, more than 350 navy aircraft were at the station. Pilots were trained to fly on airplanes off aircraft carriers bound for the Pacific. Patrol flights were flown from Quonset to search for and destroy German submarines prowling the New England coast. At the nearby Naval Auxiliary Air Facilities at Charlestown and Westerly, pilots underwent risky radar-equipped night-fighter training.

Next to Quonset, at Davisville, more than 100,000 sailors known as Seabees were trained at the Naval Construction Training Center. Each year during the war, the Advance Base Depot next door shipped hundreds of thousands of tons of equipment to naval bases around the world. At the Advance Base Proving Ground, cutting-edge research was done on pontoons. The ubiquitous Quonset hut was designed and first manufactured at Davisville.

Three special, top-secret German POW camps were based in Narragansett and Jamestown. Meanwhile, Rhode Island workers from all over the state--including, for the first time, many women--manufactured military equipment and built warships, most notably the Liberty ships at Providence Shipyard.



Christian McBurney and his fellow authors from the Rhode Island history blog smallstatebighistory.com have documented Rhode Island's outsized wartime role, from the scare of an enemy air raid after Pearl Harbor to the war's final German U-boat sunk off Point Judith. Filled with the personal stories of unknown as well as well-known people, *World War II Rhode Island* brings the most interesting facts of the second world war to the reader's doorstep. McBurney's work makes the ultimate point that Rhode Island contributed more than its fair share to the national effort during World War II. *World War II Rhode Island* is available at Amazon.com.

Do you have a WWII story to tell?

World War II Rhode Island Volume II is in the works! Author Christian McBurney is currently collecting oral histories on video and interviewing those who were involved in the war effort in Rhode Island.

If you would like to contribute to the sequel to *World War II Rhode Island*, please log on to <http://smallstatebighistory.com/contact-us/>

Bradford Dam: A History Told in the Murmurings of a River

By Dwight C. Brown, Jr. and Ann L. Smith

At some point in our lives we tend to wax nostalgic about the places we've lived and the things we've seen. We reach a certain age when we play the "I remember when" game in our minds and with those around us. Sometimes, as in a scene from H. G. Wells' *Time Machine*, we can sit and visualize in a moment's time all the things that have come and gone over the years in a particular place.

When we witness changes taking place, our nostalgia runs high: a favorite store or café says goodbye to the neighborhood, or a building that stood as a landmark is suddenly flattened under the heavy machinery of progress, and the place where we made our living is now owned by someone else.

As children the most exciting times on any summer day may have involved watching the streets being repaved or seeing an old building being torn down. The child in all of us still draws us out of our homes whenever we see progress taking place. How often have we wondered, "What are they building over there?" whenever some crane or front-loader arrives in the neighborhood. But no matter how many changes we witness over the course of a lifetime, we tend to ignore the histories of our favorite places that stretch beyond our first-hand awareness and into the generations of long ago.

This story is about a place that meant many things to many people. It is about a river and a workplace that together provided food, livelihoods, raw goods, and recreation to a small community known as Bradford, RI. It is a story that ends where it starts—in a river where melting snows will once again call spawning fish to swim upstream, just as they had for hundreds of years before Bradford was even a place.

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The Pawcatuck River is just 34 miles long, originating in Worden's Pond in South Kingstown. It meanders on a southwesterly course before emptying into the ocean waters of Little Narragansett Bay at Watch Hill. Canoeists and kayakers have enjoyed this river for ages, but dams have existed at various points making impossible the uninterrupted trip across the entire length by boat. The seasonal migration of fish, especially shad or "alewife" has also been hindered by the placement of these dams. The Native people of the Rhode Island enjoyed the ready availability of fish, and a favorite trapping

place in what is today known as Bradford, was at Shaddock's Weir.

Named after an Indian named Shaddock or Shattuck, the area called Shattuck's Weir was listed as such on the 1796 map of Washington (or "South") County. According to some listings, this weir was in an area somewhere downstream of the present Bradford Bridge. A system of poles comprised the weir and it was built in such a way as to trap any fish that ventured through the area.

According to the Rhode Island Historic Preservation Commission, Shattuck's Weir saw its first settler in 1732 and a bridge was erected across the river around 1758 by Stephen Saunders and Deacon Gardner. A sawmill known as Gardner's Mill or Gardners Mills was located on the northern (Hopkinton side) but it, along with the dam was destroyed by a "freshet," or flood.

In 1778 a gristmill took the place of the old sawmill. In May of 1795 Deacon Samuel Gardner sold the property that he had used for grinding corn to his son, Samuel Jr., he in turn sold the property to Col. Joseph Knowles, adding to the Colonel's purchases of adjacent land from George Clarke of Newport. The Colonel immediately built a mill facility to be powered by the dam erected for the grist mill. This mill was a carding* mill, which had as its employees farmers wives who, working at their homes, would spin the output from the carding mill into yarns needed by the weavers in other mills for manufacturing cloth for all purposes.

Knowles gave some of his land to his son John, but had already established stringent mill privileges concerning the use of the river. So stringent were these restrictions that John Knowles sold out his portion of the land and departed for Shannock, RI. There he was able to establish a business of his own and run it unencumbered. John Knowles' brother Joseph Knowles Jr., incidentally, was a printer and publisher and later was part owner of the Providence Journal.

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*Wool carding is the process of brushing the wool fibers to organize them. It creates a continuous web of fibers that can be laid out flat into batting, rolled into rovings, or split into spinning rolls.

Bradford Dam: A History

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By 1819 Col. Knowles' had added eight looms to his operation so that the production of woolen cloth could be done on site. The carding, spinning and weaving of wool was all then done within the walls of Knowles' mill. Even with these improvements, the mill was not consistently successful under Knowles and it changed hands several times before being destroyed by fire in 1846.

In that same year, the Knowles property was sold to William Arnold and Peter Collins. Arnold had a close relationship with Thomas Dorr, a controversial voting rights advocate and Rhode Island legislative reformer. Arnold renamed this mill village "Dorrville." With hopes of producing cotton cloth, William Arnold built a new mill in 1846 which straddled the raceway and was probably powered by a breast wheel. The mill also used an auxiliary race which ran off the main raceway. (Turbines, such as the Francis Turbine might have provided a more efficient means of power but were a few years away from general use.)

An enterprising doctor by the name of John Weeden leased the mill from Arnold and Collins soon after it was rebuilt. Dr. Weeden eventually purchased the property from them in 1852. In 1856, Dr. Weeden received financial assistance from his father Judge Wager Weeden and his Aunt Elvira Weeden. With this financial aid Dr. Weeden was able to expand his woolen business at Dorrville and at the same time he purchased the Burdickville Mill from Stephen Burdick. The Burdickville Mill used discarded material from the Dorrville mill, producing what was then called "shoddy" (hence the expression "shoddy material" which refers to poorer-quality goods).

The two mills were run successfully for a few years. In 1859, according the *Narragansett Weekly*, Dr. Weeden installed a new and powerful water wheel in his Dorrville mill to further increase the output of his mills. Weeden's attempt at modernization was thwarted by the raising of a new dam at Potter Hill which affected the head of the river at Dorrville. Weeden's complaint was heard in court, but after some delays, he did not eventually win his

case. In 1857 Dr. John Weeden sold the property to Wager Weeden who built what was later known as the old stone mill. Built of blue granite and occupying a footprint of 40 by 100 feet, its construction was begun in 1863. The stone mill was completed in 1864 and still stands today. From 1866 to 1868 the mills were leased and run by the Niantic Woolen Manufacturing Company, of which Theophilus R. Hyde was the manager. The operation of the mills under Niantic failed after two years and their operation was then returned to Dr. John Weeden and his family.

The residents of the village had become accustomed to calling their town "Niantic" and sought to do away with the name Dorrville. A petition to change the town's name to Niantic was started by storekeeper Enoch W. Vars but was unsuccessful. Another shopkeeper and Dorr sympathizer, Joseph Hiscox, quietly drafted a counter-petition and sent it off to his congressman, (possibly the Westerly native Nathan Fellows Dixon II, but this fact is not immediately verifiable). The villagers awoke one morning to the news that their town would continue under the name "Dorrville" by federal authority. The villagers eventually succeeded, with the help of the railroad, in having their village renamed "Niantic." This change of name was not without its complications, however, as the Connecticut town of Niantic was situated a mere twenty miles to the south and west. To avoid the misdirection of deliveries by rail, the train depot continued under the name "Charlestown and Hopkinton," as it had since 1837, even though it lay within the borders of neither place.

From the 1860s and into the 1870s the millworks expanded rapidly. The demands of the Civil War played a part in this expansion. The Union Army needed uniforms and other goods such as blankets. A long narrow building with cast-iron columns in its interior and large, double-hung windows was erected. A drying room was put up in 1865, and even though the war had ended, a boiler room was built in 1870. A singe house was added in 1872.

In 1876 Dr. John Weeden was taken to task for controlling a greased pig contest that was planned to be held on the Sabbath. He noted his displeasure by informing his workers that work at the mills would

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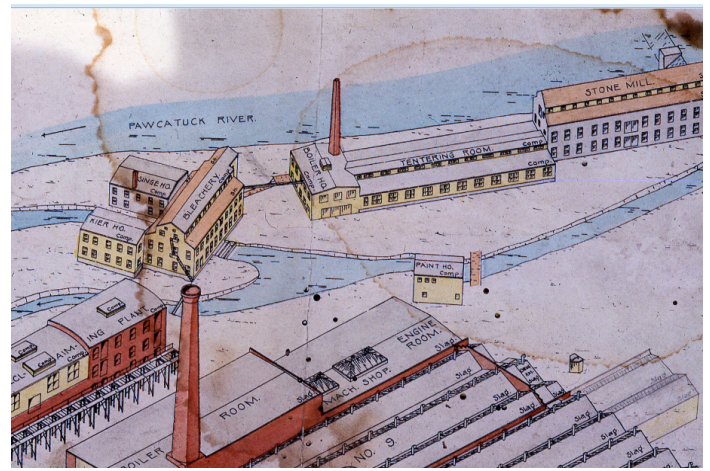
continue and that those who would be found to have taken part in the contest would have to find employment elsewhere. The contest did not take place.

Between the end of the Civil War and the 1880's, Weeden built several worker's houses which were later moved to Bowling Lane. Niantic had expanded with the prospering of its mills such that by the second half of the nineteenth century Niantic had a church, several stores, the post office, a boardinghouse, and a blacksmith in addition to several homes. By the 1880s, however, the textile industry was suffering from overproduction, and small operations such as at Niantic were extremely affected. The Niantic mills were sold off in public auction to the Carmichael Manufacturing Company of Westerly. The Carmichael concern found itself overextended, being the owners of many local mills, and it soon failed along with many other mills of the time.

On and off, the Niantic mills were operated for brief periods, and by the 1890s were soon shuttered up. In 1902, James Pike of Sterling, Connecticut, who operated a mill in that area, purchased the property. He added a wooden section to the stone mill and was soon producing a "fast black" dye of his own propriety. The waters of the Pawcatuck were especially desirable for the "fast black" process due to their low calcium content. James Pike ran this business successfully until his death in 1910.

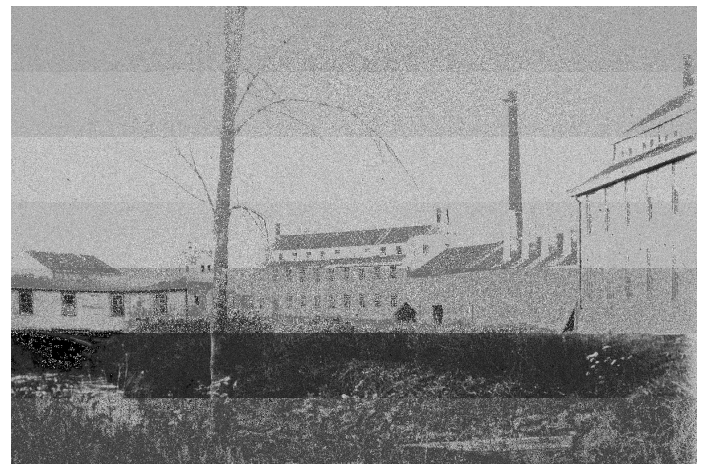
The millworks were sold to a British concern, who wished to establish a large business in the woolen trade on American soil. These foreign investors had as their intention a means to avoid the Payne-Aldrich tariff (enacted 1909) which affected the importation of foreign goods to U.S. soil. (This political device, designed to attract or keep industry on American soil, is still employed in current times.) The new company was to be a subsidiary of The Bradford Dyers Association, which operated textile mills throughout the world at that time. In 1911, the village of Niantic was officially renamed "Bradford."

A local business, Sherman Company of Westerly, R.I. won the multi-million dollar construction of Bradford Dye's business. Throughout the ensuing years, the parent company in England complained that the business failed to produce any profit. The



TWENTIETH CENTURY MAP OF THE BRADFORD DYEING PLANT.
THE BRADFORD DAM IS SHOWN AT THE TOP RIGHT CORNER.
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE
DWIGHT C. BROWN, JR. PRIVATE COLLECTION.

local response was to build an addition which would increase the facility's size by about one third. This build-up was to accommodate the added production of silk fabric, whose popular craze was then in full swing. This expansion was completed despite the fact that only about two thirds of the existing mill space was being used for production. The parent company sought legal recourse against the construction of the expanded facilities and many of the American managers were terminated from their jobs.



A PHOTOGRAPHIC VIEW OF THE BRADFORD MILL
COMPLEX AROUND 1910.
BRADFORD DYEING WAS WESTERLY'S LARGEST
TAXPAYER FOR SEVERAL DECADES THROUGHOUT THE
20TH CENTURY.
PHOTO COURTESY OF
DWIGHT C. BROWN PRIVATE COLLECTION.

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Bradford Dam: A History

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BRADFORD DAM PRIOR TO REMOVAL
PHOTO COURTESY OF U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Even with new management in place, the parent company still complained that the Rhode Island plant was not showing enough profit. In the 1930s the textile industry underwent heavy unionization and the Bradford Dyeing Association became a union operation. World War II saw employment increase to over 1,200 workers with females and older men filling the government orders for khaki, parachute cloth and nylon.

After World War II, many businesses which were supported by the war effort failed, but the Bradford Dyeing Association found its niche by producing goods for certain specialty markets, such as wash-and-wear cotton blends, and double-knit polyesters. Competition became brisk by the 1960s and profits at BDA once again began to dwindle. British ownership continued until 1963 when the mill was sold to the E. J. C. Corporation of Rhode Island. Mill ownership of the Bowling Lane properties continued until about 1968 when those houses were sold to a developer.

In the 1970s the U.S. economy suffered under a recession and the international oil crisis. On June 25, 1974 Bradford Dye closed with the loss of 460 jobs. Through the cooperation of the Town of Westerly, union representatives and new ownership, the Bradford mill was reopened in January, 1975. The mill continued to struggle even with the continuation of some military contracts, and closed again on

March 3, 1987. Some problems with military order were resolved quickly, however, and the mill soon resumed operations. Fabric processing and finishing continued at BDA until the company closed its doors for good in 2008.

Most of the old buildings at the site still stand. The iconic smokestack, the granite mill of 1864, and the saw-tooth monitor roofs of the processing plant are still visible. In 1978, when a fish ladder was installed at the Bradford Dam, workers uncovered two grindstones inscribed with the year “1778.” These two large stones were preserved as monuments and placed at the base of the Bradford Dye’s flagpole, where they have remained to this day. During that same renovation, some oak timbers were removed from the Hopkinton side of the river and these are believed to have been parts of the first dam from 1758.

Today wildlife experts have removed the old dam and the 1978 fish-ladder, noting that the fish were unable to access the old structure effectively due to its faulty design. The fish-ladder had also fallen into severe disrepair, having been in place for nearly forty years as of this writing. The riverbed is now being reshaped, using hundreds of large boulders, to build eight rock weirs set at precise elevations. By December, 2017 the Pawcatuck River will return to its normal course, but drop gradually through a series of pools. Shad and river herring will once again swim upstream to spawn in a pristine, eco-friendly environment. The glory days of the fabric milling at this spot, on the other hand, will live on only in the annals of history.



THE PAWCATUCK RIVER TEMPORARY RACEWAY LOOKING DOWNSTREAM FROM THE BRADFORD BRIDGE. BEHIND THE BLUE BARRIER IS THE DRY RIVERBED WHERE THE NEW FISH WEIR IS UNDER CONSTRUCTION.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DWIGHT C. BROWN, JR.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED
The Westerly Historical Society
P.O. Box 91
Westerly, RI 02891



Westerly-Pawcatuck “Bricks and Murals” Event

Hundreds of talented volunteer artists called “Walldogs” travelled from all over the world to Westerly-Pawcatuck in September 2017. In just four days, they painted fourteen unique artworks on local buildings throughout the downtown. This project highlights the history, heritage, and culture of Westerly-Pawcatuck through the visual arts and connects two states as one community, creating an exciting destination for locals and visitors alike. Westerly-Pawcatuck was the first community in the northeast to host the annual Bricks and Murals event, making it a source of local pride and inspiration, and opening the area to opportunities for future events and activities. The Westerly-Pawcatuck community and Bricks and Murals brought together the best parts of our community to showcase and celebrate why this is a region like no other. The Westerly Historical Society is proud to have been a financial supporter of this project.



For more information, photos, and videos of the Bricks and Murals artwork, visit <http://bricksandmurals.org/>.

To obtain a map of the murals’ locations, visit the Savoy Bookshop & Café at 10 Canal Street in Westerly, RI. Telephone: (401) 213-3901.