



# Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

May 2016

## Westerly Historical Society Officers 2016-2017

<b>President</b> Thomas J. Gulluscio, Jr.	<b>Membership Chair</b> Joanne Pendola
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<b>Babcock-Smith House Museum Liaison</b> Edward A. Fazio	

## Calendar of Events

### *Victorian Secrets: Under the Petticoat*



Join us for the opening event of the Babcock-Smith House Museum's exciting upcoming exhibit of Victorian lingerie on Wednesday, June 29 from 1-4 PM. This formal tea party in the Carriage House will feature Patricia Perry, the popular historical interpreter (you may remember her from our Doll Teas), as well as the usual delicious fare prepared by the Museum's docents. Tickets are \$25 and include the tea party and preview of the exhibit in the museum house. Advance purchase is required. To reserve, please call 401-348-8178.

## Calendar of Events-Continued

### *Early Westerly, 1660 to 1720*

*June 12, 2016 2:00 P.M.*

Presented by

**Meg Barclay**

The English settlement in Westerly from  
1660 to 1720.



*The Sabbatarian Baptist Meeting House in Westerly*

See the entire calendar of events for the  
Babcock-Smith House Museum at  
<http://www.babcocksmithhouse.org/>  
(Click on "Events")

**Sunday 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/>

## Editor's Notes

Ann L. Smith

It's official. Another season at the Westerly Historical Society has come to a close. The annual meeting and dinner reception was a success with the more than sixty people in attendance. We were saddened to learn of the passing of Harold Russell, husband of Gloria Russell just ten days before the event. The conferring of this year's *Julia* award on Westerly's most famous historical columnist took place with Gloria and Harold's daughter Lea Rockholtz accepting the award in Gloria's absence. We extend our deepest and most heartfelt sympathies to the Russell family at this sad time.

Attendees at the annual dinner were treated to an informative presentation by Westerly High School senior, Jack Duncan, who was accompanied by his faculty advisor, Steve Servidio of the Westerly High School Social Studies Department. We welcomed Thomas J. Gulluscio, Jr. as our new president, and warmly thanked Ed Fazio for his four years of dedicated service behind the gavel. Maria Bernier and I have agreed to stay on as secretary and treasurer, respectively. The position of vice-president now stands vacant, and we welcome the involvement of any parties interested in joining the executive board.

While plans were yet underway for our annual meeting and dinner reception, we were entertained on April 10 by Jane Maxson and Cherry Lee Bamberg who presented "A View of Watch Hill in the Early Twentieth Century." Jane is the granddaughter of George Hoxsie and her husband's grandfather was J. Irving Maxson. Both these figures are icons of Westerly's twentieth century history and the two men knew one another as they pursued their varied careers and avocations. A short program review appears on the following page.

On April 16, the Westerly Historical Society was joined by members of the Westerly High School lacrosse team for the RI Historic Cemetery Restoration/Awareness Day. Historic Cemetery #1, near the Haversham Inn on Post Road, was the focus of our efforts. We wish to thank Coach Bruce Brawley and his players, Lucas Hiltz, Latham Woodman, Berkey Jana, Spencer Terranova, Alex Chandy, Rhys Johnstone, Jack Duncan, TJ Dobson, Marcus Lamb, Zach Palmer, Dante Turano, Ben Ienzner, Ben Morrone, and Connor Pelouquin

for their efforts in helping to clear the overgrowth, remove debris, and restore this historic site. Thanks also to Tom Gulluscio, Westerly Historical Society President, for coordinating this effort.



THOMAS J. GULLUSCIO, JR WITH LACROSSE TEAM VOLUNTEERS. PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN LINTON

Lastly, we were deeply saddened earlier this spring by the untimely passing of Ron Brunell and Mary Nardone. Ron was a long-standing member of the Westerly Historical Society, past president of the Babcock-Smith House Docents, and he served as president of the Golden Rods Car Club. He was a former board member of the Westerly Armory, a member of the Westerly Elks Lodge No. 678, and of both the Mystic and Groton Gun Clubs. Our sympathies and prayers are with Ron's wife, Mary, their daughter Lisa, sons Eric and Sean, and their families.

Mary Nardone was the wife of 70 years of Henry J. Nardone who survives her. In addition to being a longtime member of the Westerly Historical Society, Mrs. Nardone was a volunteer at The Westerly Hospital for more than thirty years and was also a incorporator of the hospital. She was a member of the hospital auxillary and a strong participant in hospital philanthropy. She was a trustee of the University of Rhode Island Foundation and the Rhode Island College Foundation and was an active participant in development and philanthropy at Rhode Island College, which she adopted as her "alma mater". She took special pride in The Performing Arts Center and was the originator of the plan to name it The John Nazarian Performing Arts Center in honor of the president of the college, an accomplished musician and her dear friend. Mary Nardone will be deeply missed by all those whose lives she touched.



## Program Review: “A View of Watch Hill in the Early Twentieth Century”

Imagine yourself on a northbound train headed for Westerly, RI. It is a balmy day in mid-June. The year is 1911. Somewhere near Stonington the conductor calls out, “Westerly! Next stop is Westerly!” You wake your teenage daughter who is dozing near your side. The conductor helps you with a large trunk as you disembark. From the platform you catch sight of George Hoxie at the wheel of his truck. He approaches to help with your bulky luggage.

“Hop on ladies,” he smiles as you join him at the front. The weather is clear and calm as Hoxie’s wagon makes its way up Beach Street, through Avondale, and finally onto Bay Street. “We’ll need to get a crate at the garage before I take you on up to the cottage.” Some seagulls are circling behind the hotel and the cool air moving in over Napatree point seems to have made the sweltering hours aboard the train all worthwhile.

Hoxie brings your things inside and bids you good day. Once inside a thousand undone chores are waiting to be done. There are beds to make, china to unpack, silver to be polished, and furniture to uncover before the New York cottage owners arrive for the season. This “cottage” is spacious as summer homes go and just one of many built by J. Irving Maxson that dot the hill overlooking Little Narragansett Bay.

Jane Hoxie Maxson, granddaughter of George W. Hoxie, visited the Westerly Historical Society in April this year with her colleague, Cherry Lee Fletcher Bamberg to bring us back to a simpler time in and around Watch Hill. Jane is also the grand daughter-in law of J. Irving Maxson so it is no mystery how she has collected a wealth of information about these two men.



**The steamer *Watch Hill*, purchased by J. Irving Maxson in 1915 who maintained a regular schedule along the Pawcatuck during the summer seasons of 1915 and 1916. (POSTCARD: WWW.CARDCOW.COM)**



**George W. Hoxie sits at the wheel of his truck while his son, Porter Hoxie, rides in the rear on Bay Street in Watch Hill. Hoxie’s Taxi and Express carted belongings for the summer people of Watch Hill, and Hoxie also tended to their houses in the offseason. (PHOTO PROVIDED BY JANE MAXSON)**

J. Irving Maxson and George W. Hoxie were contemporaries. They knew each other and their paths would cross from time to time. Certainly they had no idea that their grandchildren would one day marry each other, but the fact that they did served to merge their histories into one story that has been lovingly preserved over time. Jane Maxson has compiled the diaries of J. Irving Maxson and published them so as to preserve his story. Her first-hand knowledge of life in Watch Hill in the mid twentieth century combined with the tales from J. Irving Maxson’s diaries made for a nostalgic journey through time as the audience was treated to slide after slide of the “old days” in Watch Hill.

J. Irving Maxson left Westerly in 1913 and settled in the Isle of Pines, near Cuba, to seek his fortune anew. His financial resources were depleted and he moved his entire family to the Caribbean to manage the Isle of Pines Cooperative Fruit Company. By 1915 they returned as seasonal residents to Stonington, having sold their home on Elm Street two years before. He bought the steamer *Watch Hill* (pictured at left) and ran it until 1916 but would return to the fruit business at the close of each season.

This lecture will be re-presented for the sole purpose of preserving it on video on May 24, 2016 at 10:00 A.M. in the Carriage House. Members may stop in for this informal “encore” presentation if they wish to meet Jane Maxson and learn more.

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



## *In the Good Ole Summertime*



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE  
WESTERLY HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES

In the early part of the last century, tents were pitched along the beach in Misquamicut, then known as Pleasant View, a practice that continued even after the cottages were built. These elaborate structures were built on top of wood plank floors and held up by a series of tent poles. Entire families, along with some basic furniture, could fit under one of these large tarps. For many visitors, they were an alternative when no indoor lodging was available, but some beachgoers camped out for a good portion of the summer season. Like the cottages, they christened their tents (albeit less glamorously), with such names as 'All Inn' and 'Iron Spoon.' As you can see, these tents were pitched in line with the cottages, not below the dunes where the beach was open; some cottagers even allowed campers to pitch tents on their lots. In these early years of Pleasant View's development, if Westerly residents had no beachfront cottage, they were apparently welcome to share space with those who did!