



Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

November-December 2017

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Calendar of Events

Saturday, December 2, 2017

***Babcock-Smith House Museum
Holiday Open House***

10:00 AM to 2:00 PM

- * **Free tours of the 1734 Museum House and Granite Museum**
- * **Free refreshments**
- * **Handmade holiday decorations and winter apparel for sale in Joshua's Store, the museum store.**
- * **Fresh holiday sprays and homemade cookie platters for sale**

* **Basket raffle**

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

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Sunday, January 14, 2018

***Westerly Historical Society
Members Only Potluck Dinner and
Research Sharing Event***

Please bring your choice of appetizers, entrees, sides, or desserts. Beverages and bread /rolls will be provided. Interested parties are invited to speak (5-10 minutes) on their current historical research or projects. Please contact Pamela Scott, Program Director, with your topic.

Email: whsprograms@gmail.com or phone

(401)-741-8705.

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Editor's Notes

Ann L. Smith

Last month we ran an in-depth article about the history of the Bradford Dyeing Association and discussed the work being done at the site of the former Bradford Dam. What a sad surprise it was to see how the work on the new “fish-friendly” step-pool dam has been damaged by the recent storm on October 29. High waters breached the cofferdam and the Pawcatuck River quickly took up its original course, flooding the work in progress. Scott Comings, Associate State Director for the Nature Conservancy, which is leading the project, estimates that the project's completion has been delayed by several weeks. Comings told the *Westerly Sun* that Sum-Co Eco-Contracting, which is doing the demolition and restoration work, seemed to be up to the challenge and has not been daunted by this minor setback. The full article can be found at: <http://www.thewesterlysun.com/News/Westerly/Bradford-dam-removal-project-flooded-must-be-reset-setback-not-considered-serious.html> (Note: online subscription may be required to view the entire text. The article appeared on November 2, 2017.)

Our partners at the Babcock-Smith House Museum are gearing up for another wonderful holiday open house. Dates and times for this event are listed on Page 1. All proceeds benefit the museum, so we hope you will come out and join our friends for this seasonal event.

In January we are anticipating the third annual, members only, potluck dinner and research sharing event. The date is subject to change if inclement weather strikes, so we will re-schedule if necessary. Please know that **not everyone who attends is expected to present a topic**. We need listeners as well as speakers, so please consider joining us for a relaxing afternoon with friends as we share our most interesting topics and yummiest recipes. See Page 1 for details.

Earlier this month, Zachary Garceau, our archivist, presented an informative talk on the collections owned by the Westerly Historical Society. Zack has devoted many hours to reorganizing our archives since joining the Westerly Historical Society in May of this year and has made great progress in this area. We would like to run regular archive updates in *Westerly's Witness* as time and space allow, but to start we decided to offer our readers an expanded view into what this job entails

and how Zack is dealing with his new duties.

Last month one of our favorite speakers, Lido Mochetti, spoke at the Westerly Library on the history of newspaper publishing in Westerly. Entitled “Black and White and Read all Over” and based on a research project of his from 1983, Lido entertained a packed auditorium with a fact-laden account of the newspaper trade in Westerly from its beginnings to the current time. Lido's talk was offered as part of the library's 125th anniversary program of events. We met some familiar faces after the program and were gratified to know that, in addition to Lido Mochetti, Westerly's brightest and most dedicated historians continually give their time and resources in support of the Westerly Library. Seen among the attendees were Robert (Bob) Benson, Ellen Madison, PhD, and Mary Weiss, just three of the many, many volunteers who have been active on the library's anniversary committee this year. For those who were not able to attend “Black and White and Read All Over,” a recap of Lido Mochetti's talk begins on Page 5.

Just a quick reminder, membership renewal letters were mailed last month. If you have not already done so, please renew your membership by December 31st. A membership renewal form appears on the back page (Page 8) of this month's newsletter, or you can log on to our website at <https://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/membership/> and renew using a credit card or PayPal.

As we move ever closer to the holiday season, we hope you will take time to reflect on the past, give thanks, and celebrate all that is good in your lives. Whatever your holiday and no matter your faith, the entire executive board wishes you our sincerest and warmest blessings now and for the coming new year.

Peace

Correction: Last month in “Editor's Notes” we mistakenly referred to Lido Mochetti, guest lecturer at the Westerly Library, as Leo Mochetti. We regret the error.

Westerly's Witness Interviews Archivist Zachary J. Garceau

Recently, we sat down with the Westerly Historical Society's new archivist, Zachary J. Garceau, who took up the position in May. We took the opportunity to ask him a few questions about the Society's archives.

Q: Did you know what you would be getting into when you volunteered for the position of archivist at WHS?

ZG: To an extent, I did. I had done some archival work before, having interned at the archives of the National Building Museum in Washington D.C. and also at the Rhode Island State Archives. I also had a strong background in local history, which has been an interest of mine for many years. I was born and raised in Westerly, but I had been away for four years when I lived in Baltimore and Boston. My wife and I moved back to Westerly in 2016 and I knew I wanted to become involved in the preserving and presenting local history. I was very excited when I read in the monthly newsletter that the Westerly Historical Society was looking for a new archivist and I immediately jumped at the opportunity and I haven't looked back since.

That all being said, I wasn't quite sure what to expect in terms of both the items contained within the Society's archives and the organization of all of the items in our collection. I was pleased to find that there were many people who were able to help me transition into the position. I am very grateful to Westerly Historical Society Secretary Maria Bernier, as well as Brenda Linton and Joanne Pendola, the members of the archival committee which meets once a month.

Q: Were the holdings what you expected to find?

ZG: In some ways yes, and in other ways, no. By this, I mean that the holdings do contain quite a bit of what one would expect from a town historical society, including photographs, books, maps, and documents relating to the history of the town. This is largely what I had expected to find when I entered the vault for the first time. What I did not expect to find were some of the items which quickly became my favorites. I'd like to take a moment to give a little background on each item.

Ship logs signed by two United States Presidents

Perhaps my favorite items in the entire collection

are the charters for the brig *Harlequin* (1806) and *Freeman* (1811). The charter for the *Harlequin* was signed by two men who were very important to the history of the United States, the first was then-President, Thomas Jefferson, and the other was his Secretary of State, and a man who would become President after Jefferson, James Madison. The charter for the *Freeman* was also signed by Madison in 1811, when he was serving as President.

Mathematics School Books

Another series of items that I find fascinating are the hand-written school books which were used in teaching mathematics to children. One of these books dates from 1764 and the others are from 1817 and 1827. The books are truly intriguing as they show the changes over time in the lessons plans and how students were taught different mathematical concepts, making them valuable historical pieces.

Postcards

Being an avid collector of postcards myself, I was enthralled by the collection of postcards I found in our vault. The postcards we own are historically significant for two reasons, the first being that they provide us with information about interactions between different people throughout Westerly and the second is the changing physical landscapes they portray. For instance, we have numerous postcards showing the same angle of Bay Street in Watch Hill from different time periods ranging from the beginning of the 20th Century to the 1960's. When looking at these postcards side by side, we can see how one street in Westerly has changed so much over half of a century.



(Continued on Page 4)

Zachary J. Garceau

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World War I letters, notebooks, and documents

I've never really considered myself to be a military historian, however, the items we have in our vault from World War I are possibly my absolute favorite, as they are truly unique and provide a picture of the war effort of local soldiers I have never witnessed before. We have letters from Westerly soldiers which give a great sense of the day to day lives of these individuals. We also have medical books which give a sometimes grim, but always interesting account of the patients that were taken to surgeons and how they were treated in the field.

Q: What has been the biggest surprise for you?

ZG: Honestly, it was the absolute size of our holdings. I wouldn't have thought from the size of our vault that we had nearly as many items as we do. We have thousands of non-photographic items ranging from roughly the size of a half dollar (two of the tercentenary celebration coins from 1936) to books which are over 1500 pages long (a history of Washington County, Rhode Island). We also have thousands of photographs in several different mediums including: glass plate negatives, glass slides, stereogram cards, tin types, and Kodak slides.

Also surprising to me was the sheer number of items we possessed with a great deal of genealogical information. Aside from volunteering as the WHS archivist, I work full-time as a genealogical researcher, so these items stood out to me immediately. We have a significant number of family group sheets, deeds, probate documents, and military documents, many of which involve some of the more well-known names in Westerly history including: Babcock, Ward, Wilcox, Hiscox, Brown, Steadman, Pendleton and many others. In many ways, it surprises me that we don't receive more genealogical inquiries than we do, however, I suspect that may be because our genealogical holdings aren't well known to our members, a fact which I certainly hope to change.

Q: Please talk about the changes you have made and are yet to make. How will these new procedures help the WHS and folks who contact us?

ZG: Recently, we have begun using PastPerfect Museum software which will help the society in a lot of ways. This software allows us to create individual

records for each and every item in our collection and to make these records searchable by keyword. Say for instance a member asks us what we have that discusses baseball in Westerly. We could then search for any records in our database which mentions baseball and share it with that member. Using PastPerfect will also allow us to better organize our records and be fully aware of every item in our possession.

Another change which we will be making is an increase in preservation efforts for all of our items. We will implement this plan by re-housing many of our older items which require more intensive care. In doing so, we can ensure that many of our most treasured items will be around for generations to come and can benefit members for many, many years into the future.

Lastly, we would also like to make our collections as accessible to the public as possible. In my position as archivist, I would like to make as many items as possible in our holdings viewable by as many people. My educational background is in public history, so I have always been a large proponent of promoting historical knowledge to the public and I feel that the best way to do this is to make our collections as available as possible to all.

Q: Can you comment on the implementation of the new rate schedule?

ZG: We have recently installed a new fee schedule for our archival services which will benefit us in a few different ways. The new schedule is a more uniform way for us to charge for the services we perform. The services we will be charging for include in-depth research, photo reproductions, and document reproductions.

By providing a standardized rate of fees, those individuals who make inquiries can be more aware of the depth of the services we provide. By informing people that we will charge a fee for some services, we hope to convey that we will be providing a service which requires a good amount of research and will be of the highest quality. It is also important to make those who seek information from the Society aware of how these fees are used. The money which we will collect from our inquiries will be used to further fund our increased preservation efforts and to perhaps even expand our collections when possible. Supporting the Westerly Historical Society through archival inquiries will further our efforts to make and keep our collections well-preserved.

Review: Lido Mochetti on The History of Newspapers in Westerly

By Ann L. Smith

If you're like most people around Westerly and someone asked you to take a wild guess as to how many newspapers have ever been published in Westerly, RI, your estimate would probably be woefully short of the mark. As researchers, many of our readers will undoubtedly recognize a few of the old-time names, such as the *Narragansett Weekly* or the *Literary Echo*, but most would be surprised to learn that some two to three dozen newspapers have come and gone from Westerly since 1825.

Charles Perry, who would later become the president and a director of the Washington National Bank (later known as the Washington Trust Company), began publishing the *Bungtown Patriot* at the young age of fifteen. A one-sheet, handwritten update of the local news and commerce, this first attempt at newspaper publishing was well-received by its readers.

The next regular newspaper in Westerly was the *Literary Echo*, edited by George H. Babcock and E.G. Champlin. Begun in 1851, the *Echo* was primarily a literary review and Babcock was a mere nineteen years of age at the time. It should be noted that George H. Babcock was later a famous mechanical engineer and inventor. Babcock, in partnership with Westerly native Stephen Wilcox invented the water-tube, or "non-explosive" boiler which has had many applications, particularly in ship-building. [Editor's note: Babcock also invented the polychromatic printing press and was partner to C.B. Cottrell before the company became C.B. Cottrell and Sons. George H. Babcock also invented the first printer's bronzing machine.] The *Echo* soon expanded its name to *Literary Echo and Pawcatuck Adviser*. By the end of 1853 Babcock had moved on and the publishers were listed as Champlin and Hoyt. In 1856 the name was revised to the *Westerly Echo and Pawcatuck Adviser*. In 1857 the *Echo* was sold to H. H. Farnham but was run neither regularly nor profitably. The *Echo* was sold to J. H. Utter in 1858.

J. H. Utter reinvented the *Echo* under the name *Narragansett Weekly*. It was printed at Segar's store in Westerly, the same place as the *Echo*. The *Narragansett Weekly* moved its operation several times, and was eventually produced at the former location of the *Westerly Sun*. The *Narragansett Weekly* later became the *Westerly Narragansett Weekly*, and ceased publication in March of 1899.

Another Utter of publishing notoriety, George B. Utter, started the *Sabbath Recorder*, the newspaper of the Seventh Day Baptists, on June 14, 1844 in New York City. Utter moved the *Sabbath Recorder* to Westerly in 1861 and published it here until 1872 when it was sold to the American Sabbath Tract Society and moved to Alfred, NY. George B. Utter was a member of the Seventh-Day Baptist, or Sabbatarian, sect. Westerly claimed a large Sabbatarian population and the Seventh-Day Baptists continue worship services to this day at their current location on Main Street. In addition, the *Sabbath Recorder* is still in print and is one of the oldest continuously running newspapers in the United States.

The 1880s saw a flurry of short-lived newspapers in Westerly as many entrepreneurs entered the business. Most were very short-lived but some were noteworthy, nonetheless. J. Warren Gardiner had been publishing the *Rhode Island Telephone and Genealogical and Historical Repository* out of Wickford, Rhode Island from 1883. He saw the need for a publication in Westerly and so launched the *Westerly News* in 1884. It was printed in the Vose Building at 20 Main Street. Gardiner soon merged his two papers and so the *Westerly News and Rhode Island Telephone* was born. This publication had just a two-year run and ended in 1886.

In 1888 The *Westerly Journal* was published by Frank H. Campbell and was later taken over by the Tribune Company. The last issue appeared on July 25, 1890. The year 1888 also saw the debut of Westerly's first daily newspaper, the *Westerly Daily Tribune*. It was published by Thomas H. Peabody and Alva C. Lowrey owners of the same Tribune Company that bought the *Westerly Journal*. Peabody bought out Lowrey's interest in the Tribune Company around 1890 at which time the *Tribune* boasted a circulation of over 9,000. *Westerly Daily Tribune* fared better than most of its counterparts at the time and ran until 1898. The paper might have continued beyond that time had its new owner, J. H. Wood, been able to relocate from his home in Pennsylvania. For unknown reasons, Wood never arrived in Westerly and the paper's publication was suspended.

By this time the *Westerly Daily Sun* had appeared

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History of Westerly Newspapers

(Continued from Page 5)

on the scene, having launched on August 7, 1893. The *Westerly Daily Sun*, which later became the *Westerly Sun*, was owned and operated by the Utter family for over one hundred years until it was sold the Record Journal Publishing Company of Meriden, Connecticut in 1999. George H. Utter, the founder, was a strict Sabbatarian. Because of this the *Sun* did not publish on Saturdays, and its Sunday edition arrived on the stands each week late in the afternoon, the same as its weekday editions. When Japanese planes attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the *Sun* was the first newspaper in the country to report the news, carrying the story that same night.

The *Westerly Sun* has a long tradition of service to its community. When the hurricane of 1938 destroyed much of the town and flooded the printing presses, the *Sun* still published a shortened version. The first edition after the storm was done on a hand-fed press on the second floor of its headquarters, directly above the storm waters that had swamped the main presses below. During World War II, copies of the *Sun* were sent to area servicemen all over the world at no charge. George H. Utter himself served as the governor of Rhode Island from 1905 to 1906. He later was elected to the United States House of Representatives.

Another short-lived Westerly newspaper was the *Westerly Herald*. Appearing on April 1, 1899 and run out of a shop at 34 Canal Street, the *Herald* seems to have filled the void left by the demise of the *Tribune*. The first owners were Frank J. Brunner and George H. Benson, two men from New London, Connecticut. The *Herald* was sold twice, changed from daily to weekly in 1901, and folded that same year.

A fellow by the name of Frank W. Dewey had a relatively long run with his publication, the *Westerly Times*. Appearing in August of 1901 and running until Dewey's death in 1935, the *Times*' success may have been due in part to its frequent running of "gossipy and scandalous stories," according to Mochetti.

A bizarre little contribution to Westerly's publishing history was the *Critic*, a one-hit wonder that disappeared no sooner than it had arrived. Its one and only known issue promised to publish certain political truths in upcoming editions, but no record of

any subsequent editions exist. The *Critic* came and went in February, 1904.

In 1916 Charles W. Hammond reused the name *The Westerly News* and ran a successful publication for three years. This same Charles Hammond had already been publishing *Seaside Topics*, the Watch Hill summertime newspaper since 1905. *The Westerly News* continued for three years and suspended publication on September 5, 1919.

There were many lesser-known "news sheets" put out by various parties in the latter part of the nineteenth century and continuing into the first part of the twentieth century. Many of these were printed in the shop of local stationer, E. A. Stillman. Tourist publications such as the *P.V. News* or the informal sheets like *Little Rhody* or *Stillman's Idea* relied more on social events, advertising, and gossip over hard news.

The image shows the front page of the *Westerly Sun* from Friday, September 23, 1938. The masthead reads "HURRICANE Edition THE SUN Local and Shore News". Below the masthead, it says "Vol. 46, No. 29 WESTERLY, R. I., FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 23, 1938 Price Three Cents". The main headline is "Misquamicut Wiped Out; Napatree Point Gone; 50 Dead; Scores Missing". A sub-headline reads "Westerly Paralyzed by Tropical Hurricane; Cottages at Charlestown Beach and Quonochontaug Washed Away; 4 Dead, 4 Missing In Stonington". There is a section titled "List of Dead and Missing" with two columns of names. On the left, under "Bodies Recovered", are: Mrs. Henry Bennett, New York City; Mrs. Ella Brown; Mrs. Ralph Brown, Misquamicut; and Mrs. George Bradley. On the right, under "Bodies Recovered", are: Mrs. Kingsbury; Mrs. Kinschick; Evelyn Brown; Mr. Stone; Elliot Crocker; and Freda Passant. There is also a small text block on the left side of the page mentioning that Misquamicut with 300 cottages was entirely wiped out, all cottages on Napatree Point, which still, destroyed and more than 50 people killed and millions of dollars of property damage resulted from a tidal wave and hurricane which struck Westerly late Wednesday afternoon.

The going rate for annual subscriptions to the earliest newspapers was one dollar per year. The *Westerly Sun* was at one time sold for a penny per copy. Even though the invisible hand of economic competition governed the prices of publications, most of the early newspapers suffered financially and were closed or sold after only a few years of operation.

Another interesting aspect of this Lido Mochetti's presentation was that listeners learned of the brilliant talents displayed by some of Westerly's first publishers. From Charles Perry to George Babcock and on to G. H. Utter, it seems as though newspaper publishing was but one of many gifts these individuals possessed.

The presentation on the history of newspaper publishing in Westerly concluded with a brief question and answer session, but not before Lido Mochetti left us with this witty quip of Oscar Wilde, "The President reigns for four years, but journalism reigns forever and ever."

Westerly Historical Cemetery Number One

Rhode Island is unique when it comes to cemeteries because, rather than making use of large centrally-located burial places, settlers customarily maintained small family cemeteries, or burial grounds near local meeting houses. The practice of burying people in places not affiliated with churches or other houses of worship traces back to our roots as a colony founded on religious freedom. As a result, Rhode Island has over 3,200 registered historical cemeteries, and 96 of them are located within Westerly alone.

To gain designation as a historical cemetery, a burying place must contain at least one marker that is over 100 years old. Obviously, many cemeteries owned or run by churches are on the list, but there are thousands of small (and often un-cared for) historical cemeteries within our state that contain only a handful of individuals. As time passes, grave markers deteriorate and eventually become illegible.



WESTERLY HISTORICAL CEMETERY #1
PHOTO: ANN L. SMITH

The Westerly Historical Society owns one such historical cemetery. It is Cemetery #1 located near the Haversham House Restaurant and Tavern on Post Road (Route 1). Like many of the historical cemeteries, this place had fallen into deep disrepair since it was donated to us years ago. In April, 2016, members of the Westerly High School Lacrosse Team with the coordinating effort of their coach Bruce Brawley volunteered to clean up this historic landmark. This overgrown patch of vines and debris was transformed by day's end into a clear patch of land with visible grave markers. Shown below is a photo of the volunteers' results.



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

Since the cleanup of 2016, the Siravo family, owners of the adjacent property that includes the restaurant, has taken it upon themselves to improve this cemetery even further. As seen in the larger photograph at left, the cemetery has a covering of dark-colored bark mulch and continues to be free of weeds and debris. We would like to express our appreciation to the Siravos for lovingly maintaining this historic place. The Westerly Historical Society is considering a long-range plan for this spot that would include a stone staircase so that visitors can access the site a bit more easily.

About Cemetery #1: The Rev Frederic Denison recorded this lot around 1867. It contains sixty burials with nine inscriptions from 1747 to 1926. This cemetery is known as the Reverend Joseph Park Family Lot and there is an informational monument there in addition to Joseph Park's original gravestone.

To learn more about Westerly's Historical Cemetery #1, please visit
http://rihistoriccemeteries.org/newlistgraves.aspx?cem_e_no=WY001

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



Westerly Historical Society Membership Renewal Form

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