



Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

January-February 2023

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Program Announcements

February 2023 Program

“The Cemeteries of Westerly”

By Larry Hunter

Wednesday, February 8, 2023

6:30 PM to 7:30 PM

**Babcock Smith Museum Carriage House
124 Granite Street, Westerly, RI**

This presentation will include a review of the many small historical cemeteries in Westerly and the continued efforts to maintain, document, preserve and protect them. The speaker will also include a review of the goals and objectives of the Rhode Island Advisory Commission on Historical Cemeteries and a review of the roles and responsibilities of the Commissioners.

The speaker is Westerly Resident Larry Hunter. Larry is one of the Washington County Commissioners to the Rhode Island Advisory Commission on Historical Cemeteries (RIACHC). He is also a Board Member of Rediscovering History, Inc. and a Volunteer and Cemetery Steward for the Westerly Land Trust. Larry can often be found in town working at one of the 90 plus Westerly cemeteries. Larry was an integral part of the recent efforts to clean, restore, and improve access to Westerly Cemetery #001 which is owned and maintained by the Westerly Historical Society. Besides working at cemeteries, Larry loves to share his knowledge as well as listen to others share theirs.

The event is free and open to the public.

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WESTERLY'S WITNESS

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year in January, March, April, June, September,
October and November

The mission of the Westerly Historical Society is to
research, study, and preserve the local history in
our community. We are a dedicated, all-volunteer,
non-profit organization that owns numerous
historical artifacts and an extensive photographic
collection.

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Find us on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/WesterlyHistoricalSociety/>

President's Corner

Thomas J. Gulluscio, Jr.

Dear Friends,

In this issue you will see a new look as we have
encouraged some of our friends who operate local
businesses that are very civic minded to advertise in
this newsletter. Frank and Donna Celico of The Wine
Store and Jen and Alan Brinton of Grey Sail were
eager to take us up on this offer. We are looking for
two more business to join them and help us offset the
cost of printing.

In this edition we here at the WHS get the pleasure
of thanking our members for supporting the society
and all the work we do!

As a result of our very successful history fair last
September we met some wonderful people
representing other historical societies and these new
relationships are leading us into a collaborative effort
to present new programs and events to our members.

Thank you all for your continued support,

Tom

EDITOR'S NOTES

Ann L. Smith

A new year has brought a new outlook to the
Westerly Historical Society. Under the leadership of
President Tom Gulluscio, we have been
implementing our goals of increasing board
membership and participation, and expanding the
rolls of our general membership. Our new programs
committee has brought some fresh and exciting ideas
to the table, and we look forward to seeing what
develops regarding our public outreach efforts and
web site enhancements.

Speaking of our membership, in this issue we are
pleased to list all of our members for 2022. We
sincerely thank all of you for your continuing support
of the Westerly Historical Society. Your dues provide

the funding necessary to carry out our mission. If you
don't find your name listed in this issue of *Westerly's
Witness*, and would like to continue your membership
and newsletter subscription, and/or **gift a subscription**
to friends or family, please send \$20 Individual, \$30
Family, \$50 Sustaining, \$100 Patron, or \$250
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PO Box 91 Westerly, RI 02891.

Memberships can also be renewed via our website at
<https://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/membership/>

Bradford Elementary Remembered

By Ann L. Smith

Most businesses and organizations treat a hundred-year anniversary as a pretty big deal. Pride in their longevity is a cause for celebrations, special events, and promotions. Inevitably they tout what's in store for their next hundred years.

For Bradford Elementary, marking the school's hundredth year will be different from what many had hoped it would be. Most locals already are aware that the school building was torn down in December 2022, but what people may not know is that the site might continue to serve the community in years to come.

The idea for an elementary school in Bradford was conceived in 1923 when the town of Westerly paid \$1,725 for the land at 15 Church Street in the village of Bradford, a borough of Westerly.* The school's construction took several years, and although a granite wall bore the inscription, "1932," newspaper accounts report that school was in session there from at least 1929. On December 24, 1929, The Westerly Sun ran a story entitled, "Bradford Presents *A Christmas Carol*." Other events made the news there both in 1930 and 1931.

For years the school continued as most schools do. School fairs, fundraisers, more plays and pageants—even two operettas—were all woven into the fabric of the school's day-to-day life. In 1940 the students issued their first school newspaper. Following World War II a newly-formed PTA supported the school by raising funds for the school library, sponsoring guest speakers, forming a cub scout pack, offering dance classes, and holding receptions for incoming teachers.

By 1981 the Westerly School Department had weathered its share of financial ups and downs. A shortfall followed was followed by a windfall, only to be extinguished by an unexpected hike in insurance costs. The post-war baby boom had ended and financial belt-tightening meant the Bradford Elementary would need to close. The parents and teachers weren't prepared to go down without a fight, however. In February 1981 residents organized in opposition to the plan to close the Bradford school.

*Town records contain a 1922 deed transfer for ten dollars from Valentino and Olivia Campo to the Town of Westerly. The document was not recorded until March 6, 1929. The Westerly School Department's records reflect an acquisition date of 1923 at the value stated.

On June 17, 1981 a hearing took place at the Rhode Island Department of Education to hear the residents' complaint on the closing of the school. That same morning the teachers' lounge at the Bradford School was set on fire by unknown arsonists. The school survived and the Department of Education sided with the town in their decision to close the school. In August of that year residents took their fight to court and lost. The State Supreme Court heard an appeal in 1982 but upheld the earlier decision and the Bradford School remained closed.

Even though Bradford Elementary School had closed, the Town of Westerly continued to work on a playground construction plan that was in the works since 1980. The concept included a ball field, three tennis courts, a basketball court, and a children's playground with swings. The estimated cost was \$106,583. With partial funding of \$30,516 from a federal grant through the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the playground was constructed ahead of the funding deadline. By using federal funds to complete the project, use of the recreational part of the land was restricted, seemingly in perpetuity, to recreational uses only. A full description of the deed restrictions relative to Land and Water Conservation Fund grants can be seen via this link: <https://dem.ri.gov/natural-resources-bureau/planning-development/land-water-conservation-fund>.

With the school closed, the town decided to cover overhead costs by taking on tenants at Bradford and in its other vacant schools. Head Start, a federally funded preschool program, became a tenant at the Bradford school. The new recreational facilities at Bradford served the community in many ways, and were used by the town as part of its summer recreation program.

In 1986 a second, devastating fire destroyed the roof at the Bradford School. The fire marshal's office concluded that the fire was caused by an electrical malfunction. Upon closer inspection the damages were more extensive than originally thought. But after much planning and expense, the school was restored and an addition built. In September, 1989 Bradford Elementary School saw the first public school students walk through its doors since 1981.

In our next issue: Bradford School makes the National Register; residents still struggle to save their school.

WESTERLY HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND BABCOCK-SMITH HOUSE MUSEUM HISTORY AWARD



An annual award of up to \$500.00 will be given to a person or persons, grade 5 through adulthood, who furthers the mission of researching, studying, and/or preserving local history in our community. Secondary consideration will be given to someone who exhibits a passion for history unrelated to the local community.

Application or nomination must be submitted by **April 1, 2023** by mail to

Westerly Historical Society
PO Box 91
Westerly, RI 02891

or by email to whspresident@gmail.com.

Note: Additional supporting material or information may be submitted with an application, but will not be returned

The application form can be found on the Babcock- Smith House Museum website and on the Westerly Historical Society website.

<https://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/history-award/>

or at:

<http://babcocksmithhouse.org/>

A copy of the application form appears on Page 5 of this newsletter.

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WESTERLY HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND BABCOCK-SMITH HOUSE MUSEUM HISTORY AWARD



APPLICATION AND/OR NOMINATION FORM

An annual award of up to \$500.00 will be given to a person or persons, grade 5 through adulthood, who furthers the mission of researching, studying, and/or preserving local history in our community. Secondary consideration will be given to someone who exhibits a passion for history unrelated to the local community.

Applications are available online at babcocksmithhouse.org or westerlyhistoricalsociety.org.

Application or nomination must be submitted by April 1 by direct mail to Westerly Historical Society, PO Box 91, Westerly, RI 02891 or by email to whspresident@gmail.com.

Name of candidate:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

If this is a nomination, please list your name and contact information:

Please describe the candidate's contribution to local history research, study, or preservation. Additional supporting information may also be submitted, **but will not be returned.**

Many Thanks to Our 2022 Member Supporters

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



The WHS Archives: Memories of People, Places and Things

On January 4, 2023, the Westerly Historical Society Executive Board convened an hour earlier than usual in order to tour the Historical Society's archives. The informal event was sponsored by WHS Archivist and Vice-President, Zachary J. Garceau. Board members received an inside look at some of the Society's most treasured holdings, which include not only photos and other printed matter, but physical artifacts of nearly every description. Attendees were surprised to learn that the archives contain literally tens of thousands of items.

The large collections of photographs and postcards comprise a significant portion of the Society's archived items. However, not every item, whether it be a glass-plate negative, 35mm slide, printed image, or postcard is counted individually, making the true number of items in the archives difficult to ascertain. So an examination of the records for the collections suggests a total numbering perhaps in the thousands.

The use of glass-plate negatives was largely abandoned by the 20th century when film became the preferred method. Images produced from glass plates

have the quality of being extremely sharp and clear. With the advent of at-home personal photography, 35mm slides grew to become the most common means of preserving images.

Other items of note shown during the archives tour included military records such as field notebooks and enlistment rolls dating back to the early 1800s. School yearbooks, vintage newspapers, clothing and uniforms, trophies, artwork, and personal items from the archives were also displayed. Aside from photographs, the most frequently requested items are from the Society's numerous genealogical records which have helped many researchers answer questions about their ancestry.

A large collection consists of artifacts donated by the family of former board member, archivist, and local historian, Dwight C. Brown following his death in 2018. This collection contains one-of-a-kind photos, documents, and memorabilia from Bradford Dyeing Association and hundreds of pages on local maritime history.