



Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

March 2025

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Program Notes

DISCOVERING THE 1811 WRECK OF THE NAVAL SCHOONER "USS REVENGE"

Please join us for a short program discussing the discovery and salvaging of two cannons from the 1811 wreck of a Naval Schooner which sank on Watch Hill Reef with Divers and Discoverers Charles Buffum and Craig Harger.

March 12th, 6:30 PM

In The Carriage House of the
Babcock Smith House Museum

124 Granite Street

Westerly RI 02891

**Co-Sponsored By The
Watch Hill Lighthouse Keepers Association**

BRADFORD HISTORY PROGRAM

The February program was very well attended! We sincerely appreciate all of the members and guests who joined us to learn more about "A Century of Fire Protection in Bradford".

SPECIAL MEETING NOTICE

The President of the Westerly Historical Society has called a special meeting of the membership on **Wednesday, April 2nd at 6:15 PM** to vote on changes to the bylaws. A notice will be sent via email to all current members outlining the minor changes. The brief meeting will be held at the Carriage House at 124 Granite Street.

TRIVIA QUESTION

Welcome to a new monthly feature recommended by the Westerly Historical Society Executive Board.

In what year was the first footbridge constructed near Margin Street to allow workers in Westerly to quickly cross the Pawcatuck River in order to get to work at the factories on the Stonington side?

The answer is on the next page!

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WESTERLY'S WITNESS

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P. O. Box 91, Westerly, RI 02891, nine times per
year in January, February, March, April, May, 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.

CONTACT US

President *Thomas J. Gulluscio, Jr.*
WHSPresident@gmail.com

Vice President and Archivist *Zachary J. Garceau*
WHSArchivist@gmail.com

Secretary *Becky Jacoinski*
WHSSecretary@gmail.com

Treasurer *Robert Boucher*
WHTreasurer@gmail.com

Membership *Cory Jacobson*
WHSMembership@gmail.com

Programs *Robert Peacock and Becky Jacoinski*
WHSPrograms@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor *Robert Peacock*
WHSNewsletterEditor@gmail.com



Social Media *Jane C. Perkins*

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

President's Corner
Thomas J. Gulluscio, Jr.

Hello Friends, Welcome to our March newsletter.

To begin, I would like to announce that a special
meeting will be held on April 2nd at 6:15 prior to
our regular monthly business meeting to present a
few minor changes to our by-laws for a vote.

Remember that nominations for our co-sponsored
history award will be accepted until April 1st.

Around this time every year, I have the distinct
privilege of announcing the selection of the Julia
Award, our prestigious annual award presented to
someone who contributes significantly to the
preservation of our local history.

This year your board of directors, minus myself,
nominated and selected yours truly for this year's
award. I had no idea when I conceived this award
in 2013 that I would ever have the distinction of
being a recipient. I have the utmost respect and
admiration for the amazing folks that comprise
our Executive Board so I accept their nomination
with great pride!

Your society is considerably the best it has been
due to the selfless efforts of this amazing Board
and we strive to make it considerably better for
you, our devoted members!

Be well! Tom

EDITOR'S NOTES

Robert Peacock

***Thank you to Anngie Stanfield for
contributing a fascinating article and related
photos for this month's newsletter.***

***As always, we welcome guest authors to
contribute articles and we enjoy including
them in the monthly newsletter!***

TRIVIA ANSWER – The first of several versions of the
footbridge was built in 1873. These crude temporary
pedestrian bridges alleviated the need for a one mile walk
to and from the downtown bridge crossing on Main Street.

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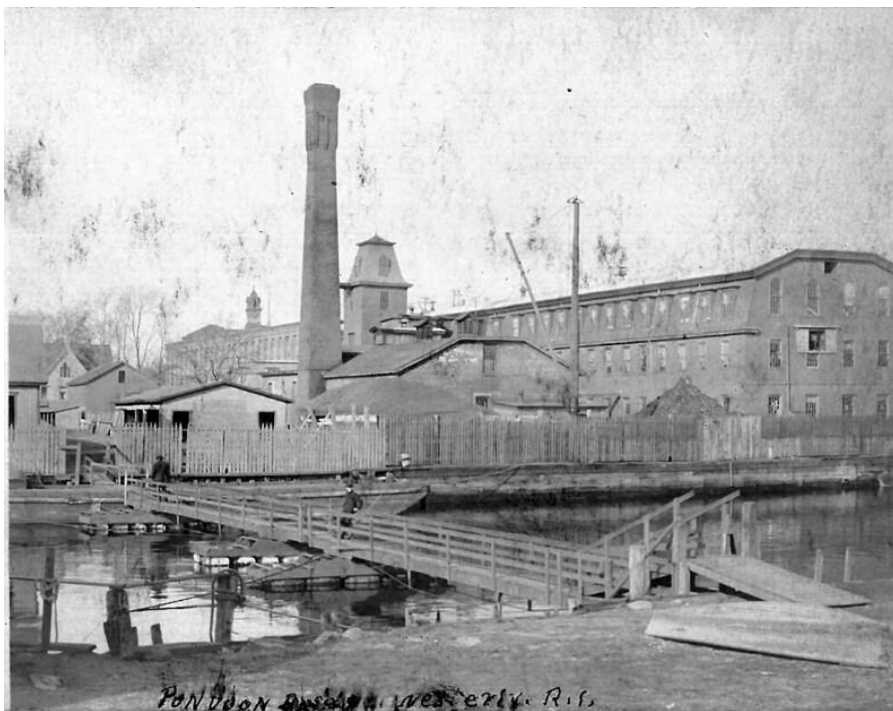
We encourage you support these fine businesses!

Crossing the River The Story of the Pontoon Bridge

by Anngie Stanfield (great, great, granddaughter of C.B. Cottrell)



*Above and Below Photos – The Pontoon Bridge Over Pawcatuck River
From the Westerly Library Online Photo Collection – Dates Unknown*

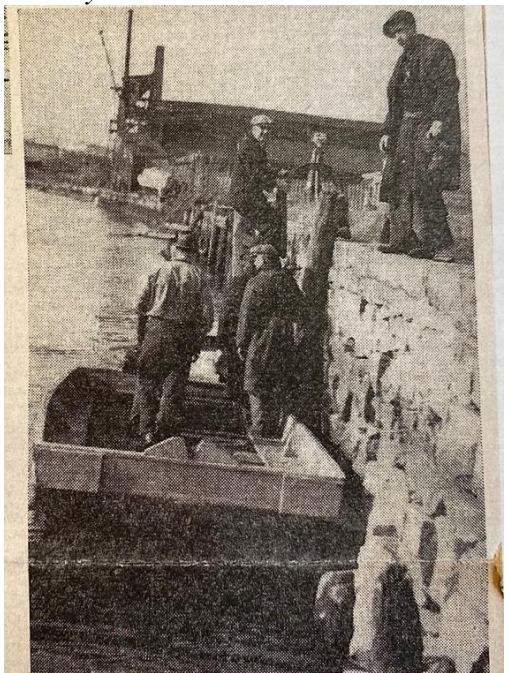


One of our members submitted a fascinating story for publication on the temporary pedestrian pontoon bridge which crossed the Pawcatuck River and allowed workers to easily get from their homes in Westerly to their work in Pawcatuck.

The article that describes the bridge can be found on pages 10 and 11.

We sincerely appreciate the efforts of Anngie Stanfield in researching and writing this wonderful piece.

The photo below shows the use of a scow (a small boat) to cross the river after the last bridge was removed. From the Westerly Library Local History Files



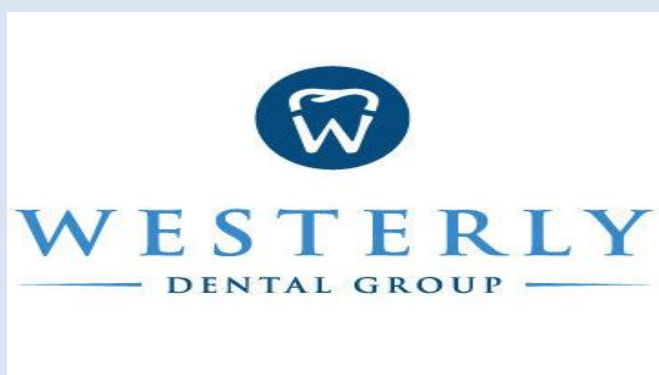
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Announcements

WESTERLY HISTORICAL SOCIETY & BABCOCK-SMITH HOUSE MUSEUM

ANNUAL 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.

The applications or nomination must be submitted by **April 1, 2025** by post 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.

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

www.babcocksmithhouse.org

From Our Archives

The following historical artifact was donated to further expand the historical collections of the Westerly Historical Society. As always, we sincerely appreciate all donations!

Photo of the Watch Hill Lighthouse Barn, the Watch Hill Lifesaving Station, the Steamboat Ticket Office, and several of the Hotels of Watch Hill

Included in the archives of the Westerly Historical Society is this beautiful photograph of Watch Hill Point taken from the Tower of the Watch Hill Lighthouse and looking towards the mainland.

The building in the foreground is the barn which was used by the Lighthouse Keepers and the Life Saving Station crews. On the back side of the hill is the original United States Life Saving Station. In the center of the photo is the Steamboat ticket office. In the background are several of the large wooden hotels.

The hotels in the background indicate that the photo was taken prior to the Great Watch Hill Conflagration of 1916 which burned several of these hotels to the ground and damaged several others. At the time, the Watch Hill Fire Department fought fires solely by hoses attached directly to fire hydrants and did not have a motorized pumper fire truck. When the hotels caught fire in 1916, the nearest fire department with a motorized pumper was in Mystic. They responded to the scene and pumped seawater from the Watch Hill Harbor for hours.

The Watch Hill Fire District purchased its first motorized pumper truck the following year in 1917!



If you are interested in obtaining additional information or arranging for a donation of a locally related item to our collection, please email our President, Thomas Gulluscio, at whspresident@gmail.com or our Archivist, Zachary Garceau, at whsarchivist@gmail.com

Discovering Westerly Cemeteries

Westerly Cemetery # 028 - The Daniel Peckham Lot

By Robert Peacock

There were reportedly eight burials in this cemetery marked by six unmarked small rectangular granite headstones, two larger relief carved granite stones with “Mother” on one and “Father” on the other, and two tall and intricate granite monuments. The most recent known burial was in 1918 and the oldest known burial was in 1843.

The cemetery includes two very large monuments with relief carving of the family name, a variety of intricately carved patterns, and large top sections. One top is an urn partially covered in a blanket and the other top is a decorated monolith. The shared family monument with the monolith top is eleven and a half feet tall and is mounted on a three foot by three foot square base. The monument is dedicated solely to Daniel Peckham, the patriarch of the family, and has a carving of a three dimensional urn and blanket on top. It is also eleven and a half feet tall but is mounted on a larger four foot by four foot square base.

The larger based monument dedicated solely to Daniel B. Peckham has the normal expected information carved into the stone including his name, birth date, and death date but also includes an inscription of an additional and apparently important fact that reads “Born in Hopkinton R.I.” (Author’s Note – the apparently unusual spelling of Hopkinton as Hopkington is not that unusual for that time period)

Buried here are the remains of Daniel B. Peckham, who was born on September 12th of 1796 and passed on April 8th of 1861 along with his wife, Olive Kenyon Peckham, who was born on November 3rd of 1804 and passed on August 26th of 1843, and their young son, Herbert E. Peckham, who was born on November 2nd of 1856 and passed on July 6th of 1858. Herbert was less than two years old when he passed.

Also buried here are Samuel Peckham who was born on March 6th of 1828 and passed on March 20th of 1907 and his wife, Mary E. Potter, who was born on February 19th of 1836 and passed on February 20th of 1918, and their daughter, Ginevra H. Peckham, who was born of June 13th of 1867 and passed on August 20th of 1884. Ginevra was 17 when she passed. The inscription beneath her name on the shared family monument reads “She faded like the flowers tho bright and fair as they and we have laid her here to sleep until the judgement day.”

According to the 1878 book by Frederic Denison, “Westerly and Its Witnesses”, the cemetery was recorded in 1860’s as being “found in the northeastern part of town, on the farm of Samuel Peckham, Esq., about thirty rods east of the farmhouse, on a knoll, enclosed by a fence, in a pasture.” At that time, he noted that “Though without lettered stones, here lie Daniel B. Peckham, and his wife Olive Peckham, and their children.” Only one child, Herbert, is listed on the family monument that was installed after Denison’s visit and there is no apparent record of any additional children prior to that date.

The cemetery is located approximately fifty feet in from the road on the left side of Laudone Drive and approximately four hundred feet in from Church Street. It is directly across from Pole number 4 and across from 1 Laudone Drive. The cemetery is visible from the road, located at the top of a steep hill. It is surrounded by thirteen rough carved granite posts which previously supported a wooden fence.

The slope is very steep and difficult to climb. For easier access, go approximately 100 feet back towards Church Street to a point directly across from pole number 3 and look for the path which gradually leads up to the cemetery at a much better slope and angle.

For those using GPS, the cemetery is located at 41 Degrees, 23 minutes, and 45.4 seconds North by 71 degrees, 44 minutes, and 15 seconds West.

In addition to a personal visit to the cemetery, information for this article was obtained from and sincere appreciation is extended to the research of Reverend Denison in the 1860’s, the files of the Rhode Island Historical Cemeteries Commission, and the personal knowledge of Cemeteries Commissioner Larry Hunter.



The cemetery is easily accessible, wide open, and well maintained. The ground is covered in just a light layer of fallen leaves and pine needles.





There were reportedly eight burials in this cemetery marked by six unmarked small rectangular granite headstones, two larger relief carved granite stones, and two tall and intricate granite monuments. The cemetery is enclosed by thirteen rough cut granite pillars.



The markers include two larger relief carved granite stones with the word “Mother” on one (seen in the upper left photo) and the word “Father” on the other (seen in the lower right photo). The markers also include six unmarked but finished granite headstones. (Three are visible between the large monuments in the upper photo and three are visible in the background of the lower right photo.)



The cemetery includes two very large monuments with relief carving of the family name, a variety of intricately carved patterns, and large top sections. One top is an urn partially covered in a blanket. This monument is dedicated solely to Daniel Peckham, the patriarch of the family, and is eleven and a half feet tall and is mounted on a four foot by four foot square base.



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Crossing the River

The Story of the Pontoon Bridge

by Annie Stanfield (great, great, granddaughter of C.B. Cottrell)

In the fall of October 1873, a call went out: "A bridge or ferryboat connecting Main and Mechanic Streets in the southern part of our village is needed! Now, if anyone wants to cross the river at this locality he must walk, perhaps a mile, it may be more, to go up around by the bridge. Men living in Bungtown and working in the Steam Mill or at Cottrell & Babcock's have to keep a boat but in several months of the year, ice cuts them off from this costly convenience. Who will make a suggestion as to what will best meet the wants of our citizens in this respect?" Stonington Mirror, October 30, 1873.

The need was there for a way to cross the river. Many of the employees of the Cottrell & Babcock Co., and various other manufacturing enterprises lived on the Westerly side of the Pawcatuck River in an area along Main Street directly across from their places of employment. So close and yet so far. The closest bridge crossing was about a half mile away. Small skiffs were used in the warmer months to get back and forth to work, but what about when the river iced over, as it did most winters (sometime as thick as a foot or more)? During the warmer months the Pawcatuck River was a bustling waterway, accommodating fishing boats, and many barges loaded with supplies for the industries, so a permanent bridge was not an option. A footbridge was an ideal solution, one that could be set up when the ice impeded navigation and taken down after the spring thaw. Employees of Cottrell & Babcock were up to the challenge to make this happen. By December 1873 a footbridge was available!

The first footbridge was suspended from two wire cables resting upon piles in midriver and could be removed in short notice if needed. Unfortunately, this bridge was used for only one year. "It was later cut and cast adrift by one Mr. Vars and not proving a self-sustaining venture, the promoter sold the cable to the Smith Granite Co. as a partial recompense for the loss sustained".

The next winter in 1874, Charles Pendleton took on the challenge and constructed another type of footbridge made up of five scows lashed together with planks from one to another. It went from the crane on Quarry Wharf to the Cottrell & Babcock Wharf. Like the former it proved a failure in regard to operating expenses.

The third in line to experiment on bridge promotion was Charles A. Stillman, who "after two years of varying success and failure, succumbed to the inevitable, as had his predecessors, and pocketed his losses."

Various foot bridge ideas were proposed in the following years. One of the main challenges was financial. Keeping and maintaining a crossing was a costly endeavor, an expense of \$50-\$75 per year. A bridge committee made up of Cottrell & Babcock employees was put together to come up with a way to make the bridge financially sustainable. Many of the regular users became subscribers. In 1894, a catch-penny box was installed on the west side of the bridge for donations from others. "If persons using will drop a cent in the box whenever they feel that they have received that value from the use of the bridge we think that it will be a help to a good cause." In 1894, there were two bridges in place. "The people at the William Clark Thread Mill were not going to be outdone by the people at the press works!" and built their own.

In 1896 a newly designed improved footbridge was introduced at an expense of \$200, one that was elevated so that the approach and the draw of the bridge was just one height. It was deemed safe for "even a child crossing alone". A bridge committee of four; Foster Jagger R.A. Mason, Col. E.E. Whipple (town treasurer,) and J.K. Barber solicited donations to cover the costs, "more or less a begging job."

In 1908, Foster Jagger, superintendent at the Cottrell plant, who had taken over the ownership and maintenance of the pontoon bridge several years earlier, applied for and attained official permission from the U.S. War Department Corps of Engineers to allow the bridge to remain in operation. The government granted permission to operate the bridge from December 1 to April 1 every year, as long as it did not interfere with navigation. The cost of the bridge was partially covered by contributions of some of the employees of C.B. Cottrell & Sons and yearly donations from the agents of the American Thread Co. and the Lorraine Manufacturing Co.

Crossing the River **The Story of the Pontoon Bridge**

by Anngie Stanfield (gg granddaughter of C.B. Cottrell)

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In the winter of 1918, the pontoon bridge was carried away by ice drifts in the river and had to be replaced by a new structure. The new bridge, 92 feet in length, spanned the river at the same location, from the wharf on Main Street at the foot of Cross Street to the wharf at the Cottrell Company, but was drawn from docks and not scows.

Beginning around 1922 the pontoon bridge became a permanent year-round fixture on the river and a man was hired to keep charge of it and to draw the bridge three times a day so there would be no interference with navigation on the river. It was described as “a board catwalk supported by barrels. Half of it stayed out in the river all the time, while the other half hinged back to let the boats go up and down the river.”

On January 1, 1924, tragedy struck. At 11 P.M. 13-year-old Harold Rasmussen was on his way to his home on Moss St. from a visit with his sister in Westerly. He and his friend Edward Heath decided to cut across the pontoon bridge. Unfortunately, the bridge had been disconnected during the day but only the Pawcatuck section had been drawn back to the dock. Unaware of this, Harold stepped off the end of the structure into the frigid water of the channel. He wore a heavy coat and couldn't swim. His friend heard him gasp, “I can't make it” and that was the last time he was seen. Edward tried to save him by throwing boards into the river, but to no avail. An extensive search was made, but it was three days before the young man's body was discovered 80 yards beyond the bridge.

In May of 1930, after over 40 years, The Cottrell company announced that the bridge would be taken out of the river for good. It was reported that the government ordered the removal of the pontoon bridge, but authentic information verified that The Cottrell Company took it out on its own accord. According to Arthur M. Cottrell, the bridge was discontinued because its upkeep was terrific, and the influx of the automobile lessened the need for it.

This was a blow to the hundreds of Westerly men and women who were employed in Pawcatuck. It was hoped that the towns of Stonington and Westerly would get together and perhaps erect a drawbridge across the river for the convenience of these people, but this was not to be.

For fifteen resourceful Westerly men a large scow provided the means of getting to and from work after the bridge closure. “Instead of all that useless walking, they scull”. In the morning, they gathered by the river on the Rhode Island side. When all were present, they clambered down a ladder into a large flat bottom scow. Standing up in the scow, they let one man scull them across the river directly to the Cottrell plant. There they climb up the ladder and presto – at work! The sculling took about four minutes. The scow was 17 feet long and 7 feet wide and has benches on all sides. Only a few times have they been unable to scull to work. (1939) Once was during the hurricane high water and a few winters ago when the ice was too thick. Where there's a will, there's a way.

***Our sincere thanks is extended to Westerly Historical Society member
Anngie Stanfield, who is the great, great granddaughter of C.B. Cottrell,
for contributing this well researched and very detailed article.***

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