



Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

September 2025

Westerly Historical Society Executive Board 2024-2025

President Thomas J. Gulluscio, Jr.	Membership Chair Cory Jacobson
Vice President Zachary J. Garceau	Newsletter Robert Peacock
Secretary Becky Jacoinski	Programs Robert Peacock Becky Jacoinski
Treasurer Robert Boucher	Web Master Maria Bernier
Archivist Zachary J. Garceau	Social Media Jane C. Perkins
Babcock-Smith House Museum Liaison Edward A. Fazio	Videographer Greg Pettys
At Large Member Mary Jo Girard	At Large Member Paul Gingerella

In this Issue

Program Notes	Page 1
Presidents Corner	Page 2
Editors Notes	Page 2
Hurricane of 1938 History.....	Page 3
Special Announcements	Page 4
From Our Archives	Page 5
Discovering Westerly's Cemeteries	Page 6
Discovering Westerly's Cemeteries	Page 7
Hurricane of 1938 Photos	Page 8
Hurricane of 1938 Photos.....	Page 9
Hurricane of 1938 – Inland Damage	Page 10
Hurricane of 1938 – Coastal Damage	Page 11
Sponsor Recognition.....	Page 12

Program Notes

SEPTEMBER PROGRAM

Our September program will be presented by Jean Gagnier and will focus on the roles of Westerly residents including Samuel Ward in declaring Rhode Island's independence prior to the American Declaration of Independence.

Please join us on Wednesday, September 10th, 6 PM in the Carriage House, 124 Granite Street.

REGIONAL HISTORY FAIR

We will be co-hosting a regional history fair with the Westerly Armory on Saturday, October 25th, from 1 PM to 4 PM. Please save the date and plan on joining us to meet and learn from our friends from the various historical groups and museums throughout Rhode Island and Connecticut.

Please save the date and plan on joining us!

CALLING ALL OCTOGENARIANS AND OLDER

If you or a friend is at least 80 years young or older, and you were born and raised in Westerly, please consider being interviewed for our "Reflections" series. Please contact Westerly Historical Society President Thomas Gulluscio at WHSpresident@gmail.com to submit information for review and possible selection.

We would love to preserve your memories!

TRIVIA QUESTION

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

Why was the Great Hurricane of 1938 not given a name like Hurricane Carol was in 1954?

The answer is on the next page!



WESTERLY'S WITNESS

Published by the Westerly Historical Society
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*

WHS Treasurer@gmail.com

Membership *Cory Jacobson*

WHSMembership@gmail.com

Programs *Robert Peacock and Becky Jacoinski*

Westerlyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor *Robert Peacock*

Westerlyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com



Social Media *Jane C. Perkins*

Find us on Facebook

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

President's Corner

Thomas J. Gulluscio, Jr.

Hello friends, Welcome to my favorite month, September!

Always a bittersweet month but my favorite just the same.
In my youth it meant the beginning of school, Blah, and the
beginning of a new line up of Saturday morning cartoons,
Yea! Now it's the end of summer weather and longer days,
Blah, and the end of summer traffic, Yea! It also means that
your board of directors gets back to work in earnest.

I can admit that I forgot to turn off the WHS switch after
the May annual dinner and I have kept a few members busy
with me. Bob and Becky have been busy lining up the Fall
programs schedule and the next "Regional History Fair"
scheduled for October, Cory, Mary Jo and Zack joined me
at our summer program for Jack Spratt's lecture on the
grand hotels of the coastline from 1800 to 1890.

Mary Jo has offered to assist Cory and I in launching a
membership drive with our local realtors presenting gift
memberships for the Westerly Historical Society to new
property owners in Westerly, already a welcomed idea to
several realtors we have approached.

I have been working on an article for a future newsletter on
the genesis for local street names in town and I promise it
will be educational as well as entertaining.

Greg and I wrapped up two more wonderful episodes of
Reflections in June and July with Hatsy Moore and Paul
Gencerella Sr. Both were great participants with amazing
stories to tell. We even did Paul's interview on location in
the Toscano's Mens Shop because it's difficult to find Paul
anywhere else!

I look forward to seeing you at our program on September
10th. Please consider that September is a great time to join
us at a meeting and consider joining the esteemed board of
directors!

Please stay well, Tom

EDITOR'S NOTES

Robert Peacock

***Thank you to Jane Perkins
for contributing an article this month.***

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

**TRIVIA ANSWER – The National Hurricane
Center did not begin naming Hurricanes until
1950.**

***As always, thank you for patronizing our
generous newsletter sponsors including:***

***MICHELLE'S SCHOOL OF DANCE
THORP & TRAINER INSURANCE
WESTERLY DENTAL GROUP
GREY SAIL BREWING
THE WINE STORE
SERVPRO***

We encourage you to support these businesses!

History of the Great Hurricane of 1938

By Robert Peacock

HURRICANE OF 1938

This month we explore and remember the devastation of the Great Hurricane of 1938.

The headline of the Westerly Sun reported;

Misquamicut Wiped Out; Napatree Point Gone; 50 Dead; Scores Missing

The headline of the Evening Bulletin reported;

Hurricane Kills At Least 125 In State; 29 Dead, 52 Missing In Westerly; Loss Put In Millions

The 1938 New England Hurricane was one of the deadliest and most destructive to strike the United States. The storm strengthened to a Category 5 hurricane before making landfall as a Category 3 rated hurricane on Wednesday, September 21st, around 3:00 pm.

Estimates are that the hurricane killed 682 people, damaged or destroyed more than 57,000 homes, and caused property losses of \$306 million. It remains the most powerful and deadliest hurricane to strike New England.

Interesting Fact – The National Hurricane Center now names all Hurricanes to streamline messaging and gain attention. The short and distinctive names are easily identifiable and cause less confusion when sharing important information with the media and the public about a storm's predicted impact.

The National Hurricane Center began formally naming storms in 1950. At first, they were named from a phonetic alphabet, but this method was changed in 1953 in favor of using alphabetized female names.

In 1978, men's names joined the storm list, alternating with the female names. As an example, a storm name with an A, like Anne, would be the first in any given year, followed by a storm name with a B like Bernard.

NAPATREE POINT DAMAGE

Below are before and after photos of Napatree Point taken from approximately the same spot looking from the carousel beach towards Stonington.

The photos were originally printed in "The Hurricane" by L. R. Greene and reprinted in a 1983 Ocean Views magazine article.

The buildings include from right to left; the Watch Hill Public Bathhouses, the Watch Hill Private Beach Club, and several private homes on Napatree.

Note - There was generally only a small amount of beach between the buildings and the ocean on an average day.

For perspective and comparison purposes, note the two concrete jetties stretching out into the water in front of the Beach Club (second building from the right) On the day after the storm, only the concrete jetties and small piles of wood and bricks remained.

PRIOR TO THE HURRICANE OF 1938



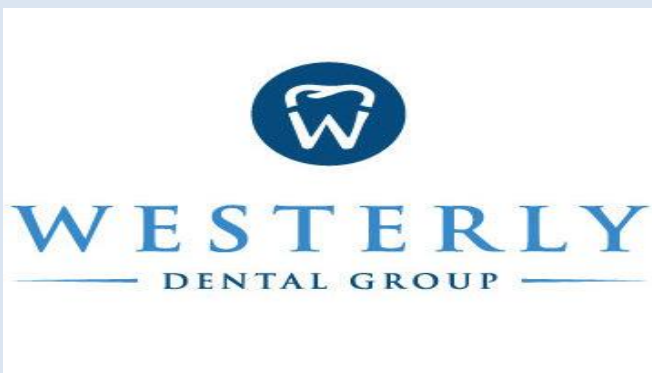
AFTER THE HURRICANE OF 1938



*Please Patronize Our Generous
Newsletter Sponsors*



Since 1910
401-596-0146



401-596-2848



401-315-2337



Babcock Smith House Museum
401-596-5704

Announcements

SAVE THE DATE
OCTOBER 25TH 1 TO 4 PM
REGIONAL HISTORY FAIR

We will be co-hosting a regional history fair with the Westerly Armory on Saturday, October 25th, from 1 PM to 4 PM. Please join us to meet our friends from various historical groups throughout Rhode Island and Connecticut.

This free public event will showcase the numerous historical societies and museums in the surrounding area and allow a unique opportunity for the public to meet and greet members of these various organizations while viewing their favorite treasured artifacts.

The event is free and open to the public. Complementary drinks and light refreshments will be provided.

A VERY SPECIAL THANK YOU

Our wonderfully supportive friends on the Board of the Babcock - Smith House Museum have generously provided us with a bit more storage space in the lower level of the carriage house. Their support and willingness to share this space has arrived not a moment too soon as our collection of historical artifacts has been expanding exponentially in the past year due to the extreme generosity and consideration of members and friends.

Thank you to the Babcock Smith House Museum for their support!

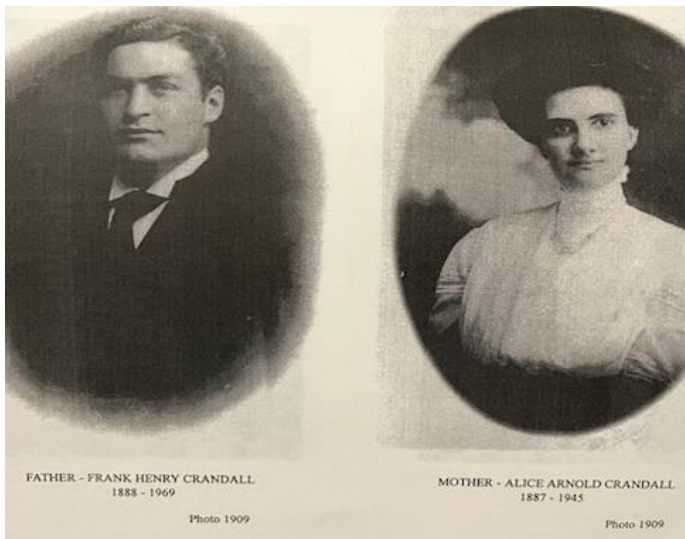
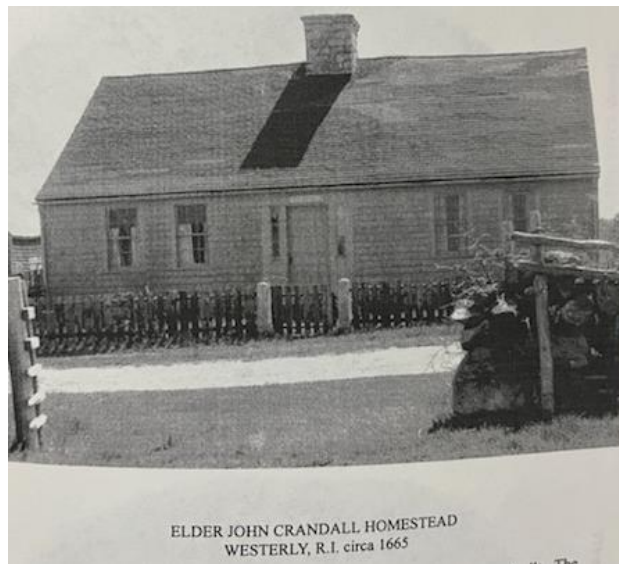
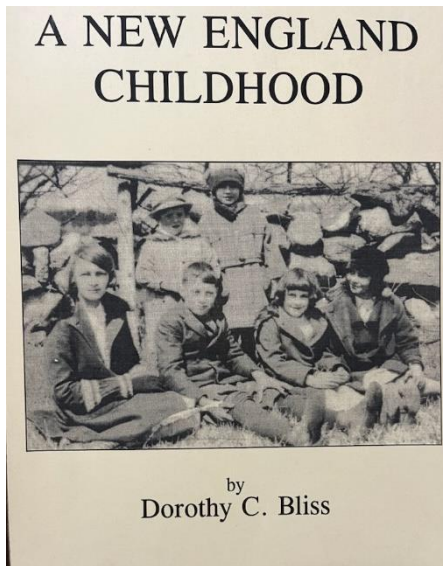
Thank you to the many people who have generously donated artifacts this year!

Thank you to our archivist, Zack Garceau, for working diligently to record and add the items to our collections!

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 your donations!

The bibliography book “A New England Childhood”, written by Dorothy Crandall Bliss, was recently donated to us by Judith Harbold Crandall. The book discusses the daily life of a child and teenager in Westerly. It describes her life in detail from the moment of her birth in 1916 to Frank Henry Crandall and Alice Arnold Crandall in a white clapboard house on Granite Street, through her early years living in a house on Franklin Street, then her teen years living in her grandfather’s home, and finally her young adult years living on one of her grandfather’s farms. The book includes a vivid account of the Great Hurricane of 1938.



Please remember to consider us when disposing of old documents, photos, and artifacts. We would love to add it to our expanding collection to be preserved for future generations.

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 # 033 – Deacon Oliver Dodge Ground

By Robert Peacock

There were reportedly 8 burials in this cemetery with 6 marked by fieldstones and 2 marked by carved headstones. The most recent known burial was 1815 and the oldest was 1799.

Included are the remains of Deacon Oliver Dodge, born in 1727 and passed on March 11th of 1815 and his wife, Mary Dodge, born in 1738 and passed on August 18th of 1799.

The graves of Deacon Oliver Dodge and Mary Dodge are marked by marble stones with rounded tops. The markers are approximately 30 inches tall (above ground) and approximately 14 inches wide. The stones have no special carving designs but do have the basic information including name, birth date, and death date carved into the stone.

According to the book “In and About Westerly” by Thomas O’Connell, one of the worthy witnesses in Westerly was Deacon Dodge who served faithfully as a Deacon for more than 40 years for the Wilcox Church, also known as the Third Church of Christ, which was organized in 1765. After meeting in the homes and yards of various members for twenty years, the group had grown to 177 members and a church was built in 1786 on the Old Post Road in Dunn’s Corners.

According to the 1878 book by Frederic Denison, “Westerly and Its Witnesses”, the cemetery was recorded in 1860’s as being “situated north of the post road, by the side of the drift-way, on the land of the late Henry C. Gavitt, some rods northeast from the house, on the east side of the highway, and is well enclosed by a wall.” Denison also noted that the cemetery included “a half dozen unlettered graves” and noted some “bodies have been removed to River Bend Cemetery.”

One of the carved stones is broken and missing a large portion from the top while one of the footstones has apparently sunk completely into the ground while the other is barely visible. The six fieldstones are no longer visible. Although both carved stones are now barely readable or legible, they were transcribed by Frederic Denison in the 1860’s. He noted that Oliver’s headstone read, “Deacon Oliver Dodge, died March 11, 1815, in his 80th year”, and that Mary’s headstone read, “Mary (wife of Deacon Oliver Dodge) died Aug. 18, 1799, in her 62d year”

The cemetery is located approximately one half of a mile in from Route 1 on South Woody Hill Road just before the Woody Hill Gardens sign and directly across from house number 54 and Pole number 111 (which also has yellow stickers with black letters that read 40K). The cemetery is hidden within a small grove of tall scotch pine trees and is partially surrounded by a broken stone wall and several large boulders.

For those using GPS, the cemetery is located at 41 Degrees, 21 minutes, and 17.4 seconds North by 71 degrees, 45 minutes, and 43.3 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, the personal knowledge of Cemeteries Commissioner Larry Hunter, and the book “In and About Westerly” by Thomas O’Connell.

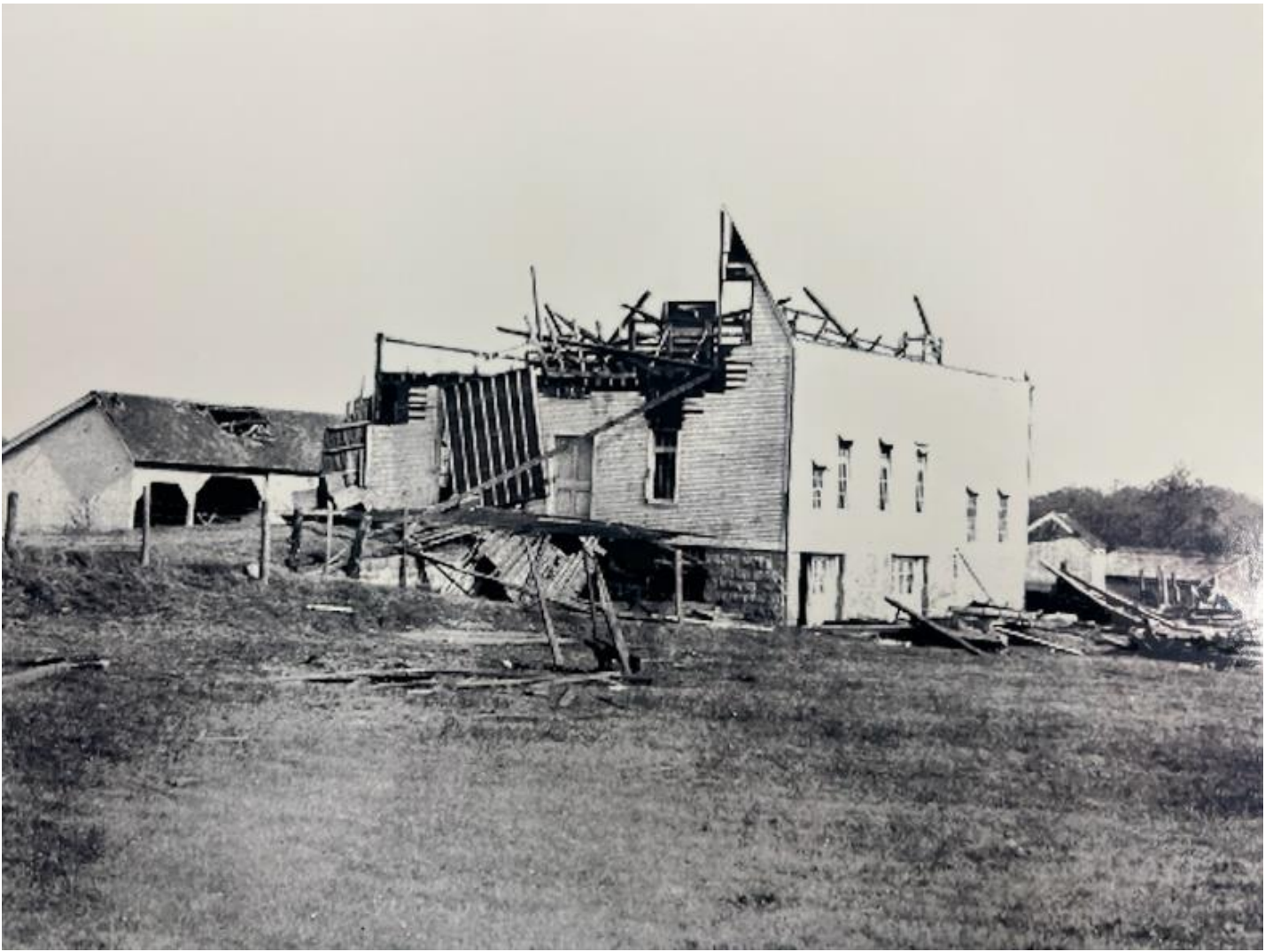


The graves of Deacon Oliver Dodge and Mary Dodge are marked by marble stones with rounded tops. The markers are approximately 30 inches tall (above ground) and 14 inches wide. The stones have no special carving designs but have the basic information including name, birth date, and death date carved into the stone.



The cemetery is well hidden within a small grove of tall scotch pine trees and is partially surrounded by a broken stone wall and several large boulders. All of the fieldstones and one of the granite footstones have sunk completely into the ground.

Inland Photos of the Great Hurricane of 1938



Coastal Photos of the Great Hurricane of 1938



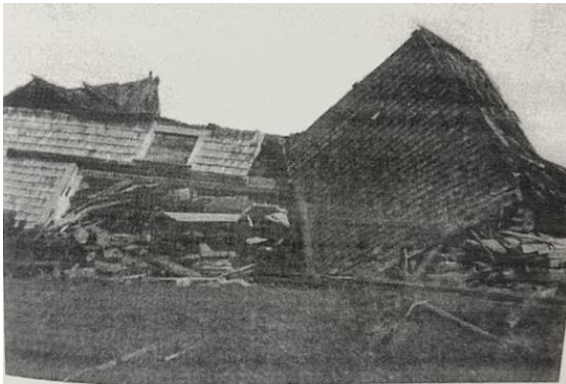
Hurricane of 1938 – Inland Damage

By Robert Peacock

While much has been written of the extensive damage along the coast during the sudden surprise arrival of the Great Hurricane of 1938, much less has been discussed and written about the terrible damage throughout the Town of Westerly.

In a book recently donated to the Westerly Historical Society by Judith Harbold Crandall and written by Dorothy Crandall Bliss, Dorothy describes first-hand the extensive damage to one of the Crandall Farms on Pound Road in Westerly. She was 22 years old and living with her family when the storm arrived.

These photos from the book were taken by Dorothy using a Hawk Eye Box Camera.



OLD BARN (1845) AS SEEN ON MORNING AFTER
'38 HURRICANE



AFTERMATH OF '38 HURRICANE
DEMOLISHED GARAGE

Following the storm on September 21st of 1938, Dorothy wrote a personal and detailed account of her experiences. A few selected excerpts of her account are below.

Warnings of an approaching hurricane came over the radio this morning. It had been expected in Florida but was traveling northward, and the radio reported, would go out to sea. About 3:00 in the afternoon the wind began blowing in gusts. The air was murky and gray....

The wind increased in violence. The trees twisted and bent to the ground. The wind was so powerful and the air so grayish-yellow that it was difficult to see.... The huge elm by the barn was the first thing to crash to the ground. Then, one after another, the other trees in the yard were ripped up and tossed around.

Several of the farm buildings are destroyed and the dairy barn is twisted on its foundation. The old barn in which they stored a carload of grain was demolished... To our horror we saw the east side of the garage was torn off and the whole building was swaying... we saw that the old barn with thousands of board feet of lumber was in a twisted heap... For hours the wind continued at the same furious rate, tearing up buildings, breaking off branches, and uprooting whole trees...

A terrific crash in the back of the house sent us scuttling out to the kitchen. The chimney had gone. A portion of the ceiling in the entry had come down and the back steps were a cluttered mess of bricks and shingles... With unabated fury the storm continued for hours...

Meg and I went to bed in her room as there were two window lights blown out in mine. To quiet our nerves we talked and talked, finally falling into a restless sleep.

Hurricane of 1938 -- Coastal Damage

By Jane Perkins

A copy of a typed letter sent to Augustine Miller, by her husband Louis Miller, and dated September 28 of 1938, was recently donated to the Westerly Historical Society by Rebecca Purdum. The letter, describing the damage to the Ocean House by the Hurricane of 1938, was given to her by Jacqueline Moran (formerly Beattie), the great granddaughter of Louis and Augustine Miller, the owners of the Ocean House.

A few excerpts of the letter are transcribed below which provide insight into the damage.

Dear Augustine,

September 28, 1938

I arrived yesterday afternoon (Tuesday) and went straight to the hotel. The damage is considerably more than I expected it to be. The entire roof, not only the tin, on both wings was blown away, and you could find boards and rafters, and pieces of the sprinkler system down on Bay Street near the wharf.

The Marine Deck is entirely gone, and the roof of the sun-parlor on the same side where the Marine Deck is, is also entirely crushed in. Part of the shingle roof on the front part of the building is also blown off, and even some of the fire escape is laying in the road on the front of the building. The large columns holding the part of the porch where we had the circular seats are gone and the railing with the fancy wooden grill work is also down and blown all over the place. There was considerable damage through the rooms from top to bottom when the sprinklers burst.

On the southeast side there is hardly a window that isn't broken including the large plate glass windows in the dining room and in the bar room. Flying timbers, pieces of wood, and what not were flying in the air, struck right and left, and smashed in windows all over.

There were two rooms on the top floor of the wing over the dining room, the walls have simply disappeared, and you could look right into the rooms. The water tanks of the water closets and wash basins are lying down in the yard, also the window screens.

The chimney coming from the ladies' parlor where we had the stove in the winter, was also blown over. Pieces of the sprinkler system and the roofs are laying in the garden, and way down towards the cottages near the annex. Part of our roof is hanging on a broken telegraph and electric wire pole across the street leading down to Plimpton.

Interestingly, the letter indicated Louis was already concerned with the following summer season, taking steps to control the story and convey hope to avoid future loss of business.

I wish you would have Mrs. Hodgkin send me a list of the permanent guests we had at the Ocean House, so that we can write them from here. I do not want to exaggerate things – we want to keep things as quiet as possible, and tell them from here that the Ocean House, being a strong and sturdy building, withstood the storm, and while we have had minor repairs, the damage wasn't very great and we will open the Ocean House in better shape than ever. I also wish that when anyone inquires, you would write them along this line in order not to scare them enough to cancel their reservations for next year.

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



A very special thank you to our generous newsletter sponsors!

When you choose to shop
at **The Wine Store**
you help us fund local
non-profit organizations



The
WineStore®

BEER - WINE - LIQUOR

86 Franklin St, Westerly, RI 02891
401-596-6160 Next to TJMaxx, Home Depot

Your Partner in Community Service ©



\$15.00 Gift Card
From Frank, Donna and Tim

GreySail®
BREWING of RHODE ISLAND



**VISIT OUR CAMPUS IN WESTERLY'S
HISTORIC NORTH END!**

Brewery:

Facebook.com/GreySail

@greysail

www.greysailbrewing.com

Distillery:

Facebook.com/SouthCountyDistillers

@southcountydillers

www.southcountydillers.com

63 Canal Street, Westerly

