



Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

November 2025

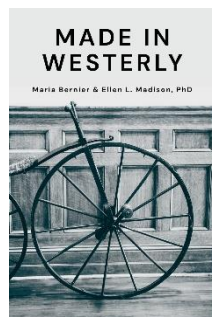
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Program Notes



**PLEASE WELCOME OUR
NEWEST HISTORY BOOK
PUBLISHED BY THE
WESTERLY HISTORICAL
SOCIETY AND WRITTEN
BY MARIA BERNIER AND
ELLEN L. MADISON, PhD.**

**“MADE IN WESTERLY” BOOK LAUNCH
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 12TH, 6:30 pm**

Please join us for the book launch of “Made in Westerly”. Join authors Maria Bernier and Ellen L. Madison, PhD to learn more about this new book of Westerly industrial history. The book will be available for purchase and signing at the event.

**“THE LARCHMONT DISASTER”
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11TH, 6:30 pm**

Please join us as Daniel Harrington shares the fascinating details of our version of the Titanic disaster. This 1907 accident, considered to be the worst maritime tragedy in New England, occurred off the coast of Westerly and resulted in tales of heroism and survival among hundreds of deaths.

**“RESTORING OUR ELM STREET HOME”
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11TH, 6:30 pm**

Please join us as Carly Callahan, discusses her family's efforts to accurately restore the exterior of their 1840 Greek Revival home on Elm Street.

TRIVIA QUESTION

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

**What Historical Cemetery in Westerly is owned
by the Westerly Historical Society and when did
we acquire it?**

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.

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Find us on Facebook

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President's Corner

Thomas J. Gulluscio, Jr.

Hello friends, Welcome to November!

By now you have received your membership renewal
letter and form. Please contribute to the best of your
ability. I promise you that we have many great things
planned for your society this year and we need all the
support you can provide.

Your society was thrilled to sponsor a new publication
produced by our own Board Member Maria Bernier
and our longtime Society member and friend Dr. Ellen
Madison, PhD. The book is titled "Made In Westerly"
and covers many early Westerly industries.

The book has just arrived and is a "must have" for all.
You can join us on November 12th at 6:30 PM to meet
the authors and to get yourself a signed copy. You can
also buy extra copies for awesome gifts for friends and
family!

On another note, Greg and I will be back in the studio
filming the last of our episodes of Reflections this
month. Look for our already released episodes
including the most recent episode with our previously
mentioned member and friend Ellen Madison!

And on a very personal note, Thank You to all of the
groups, organizations, and museums that participated
in our "Regional History Fair". The event was very
well attended and served as an excellent networking
opportunity.

Happy Thanksgiving to you all,

Tom

EDITOR'S NOTES

Robert Peacock

Thank you to

Jean Gagnier

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 Westerly Historical
Society owns Westerly Historical Cemetery #01
which was donated to the society in 1917 by the
Rathbun family who are now buried there.

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History of the Westerly Library

By Robert Peacock

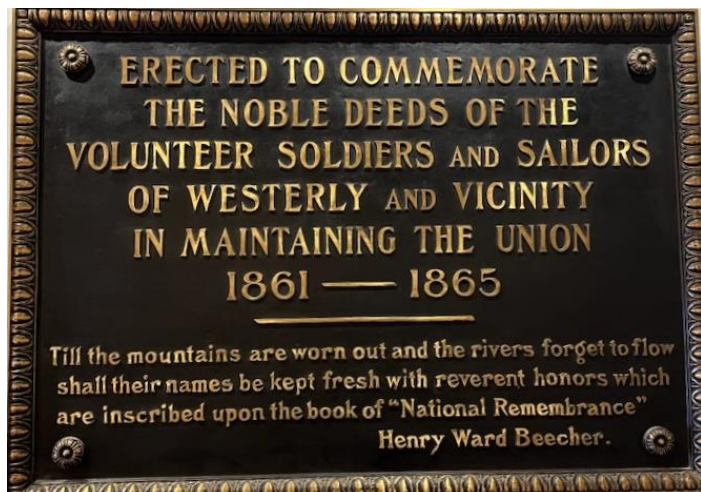
The Westerly Memorial and Public Library has been a significant and valuable partner to the Westerly Historical Society since we were formed in 1913. We sincerely appreciate their continued support and commitment. They have always been and continue to be an excellent resource and wonderful partner!

The following information is from their website.

The Westerly Library and Wilcox Park is a private non-profit owned and operated by the Memorial and Library Association. The Association was established in 1892 to commemorate the volunteer soldiers and sailors who fought in the Civil War. Designed by Longstaff & Hurd, architects from Bridgeport, Connecticut, Westerly Library opened its doors in 1894 through the initiative of local industrialist-inventor, Stephen Wilcox. Mr. Wilcox donated the land on which the library is situated, as well as \$25,000 to be matched by citizens of the community.

Originally the library included a bowling alley, gymnasium, art gallery, museum, and meeting space for the Grand Army of the Republic. On opening day, August 15, 1894, Westerly Library had a collection of 5,000 volumes, and the building was open for 24 hours each week. Additions were constructed in 1902, 1928 and 1992. The final addition, which won the 1994 Historic Preservation Award from the RI Preservation Commission, nearly doubled the size of the building.

Today, the library is open for 60 hours each week, and the collection includes books, audiobooks, magazines, and more totaling over 287,000 items. The library, a participant in a statewide-automated network, offers access to online databases, e-books, and over four million items from library collections across the state.



Tucked throughout the library are various artifacts and displays that stand as silent sentinels attesting to the history of Westerly.



For example, this ingenious wheeled contraption is found on the second floor.

In the late 1800's, it was referred to as a "Velocipede".

It is about four feet tall and more than six feet long.

It was donated to the Library in 1931 by Dwight Stillman and Herbert Kenyon.

This "Velocipede" was built in Westerly in 1865 by seventeen-year-old Dwight R. Stillman and his brother Fred A. Stillman. They were the sons of Sanford Stillman, who owned and operated a local carriage business. The brothers built their Velocipede using spare iron and wood with a carpeted seat for comfort.

We encourage you to visit the Westerly Library and admire the architecture and beautiful details as you roam the library and seek out the many artifacts that are displayed and sprinkled throughout the building.

If you have any questions about the treasures you find, please seek out Nina Wright, the Special Collections Librarian, or one of the wonderful volunteers who assist her in the "Local History Room". They are a wealth of knowledge!



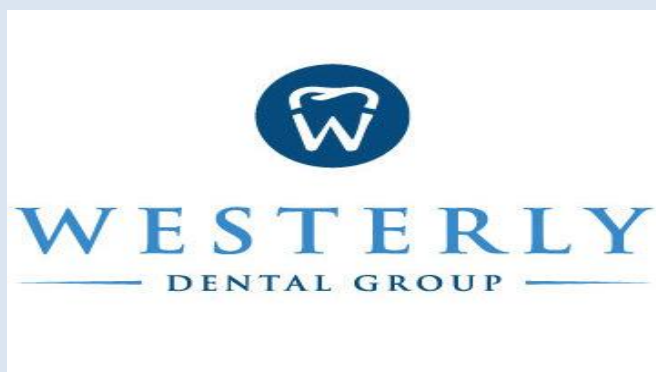
This photo was taken before the 1928 renovation and addition.

Notice the open deck without any windows on the third floor of the tower and the open porch on the second floor of the right side of the building.

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Announcements

THANK YOU!!!!

**CASEY JARRETT
OWNER OF
“DESIGNSCAPESRI”**

A very special thank you to Casey Jarrett and his company, **DESIGNSCAPESRI**, for generously providing the materials and the labor to reset and secure several of the metal fence poles into the granite blocks and boulders which support the dual chain perimeter fence surrounding Westerly Historical Cemetery #1 which is proudly owned and maintained by the volunteers of the Westerly Historical Society.

We appreciate his generosity and his support!

Casey specializes in hardscapes including patio and pool areas, as well as walkways and driveways. We recommend **DESIGNSCAPESRI** and urge you to consider them for your needs.

Casey can be reached at **401-741-8015** or by email **CASEYJARRETT1@GMAIL.COM**

REGIONAL HISTORY FAIR

Thank you to everyone who joined us for the Regional History Fair. A very special thanks to our wonderful co-hosts at the Westerly Armory. Roberta and her volunteers were very helpful and very welcoming! The collaborative event was well attended with approximately 300 people sharing and learning about the many historical societies, groups, and museums in the area. We sincerely appreciate the participants who represented the forty-two organizations and sincerely appreciate the hundreds of visitors who dropped in to learn.

Thank you all for a fascinating, educational, informative, and interesting experience!

SEEKING SPEAKERS AND WRITERS

We are always seeking speakers and writers to present programs for the society and to write articles for our newsletters. If you are familiar with a local history topic and enjoy talking or writing about your passion, please let us know.

From Our Archives

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

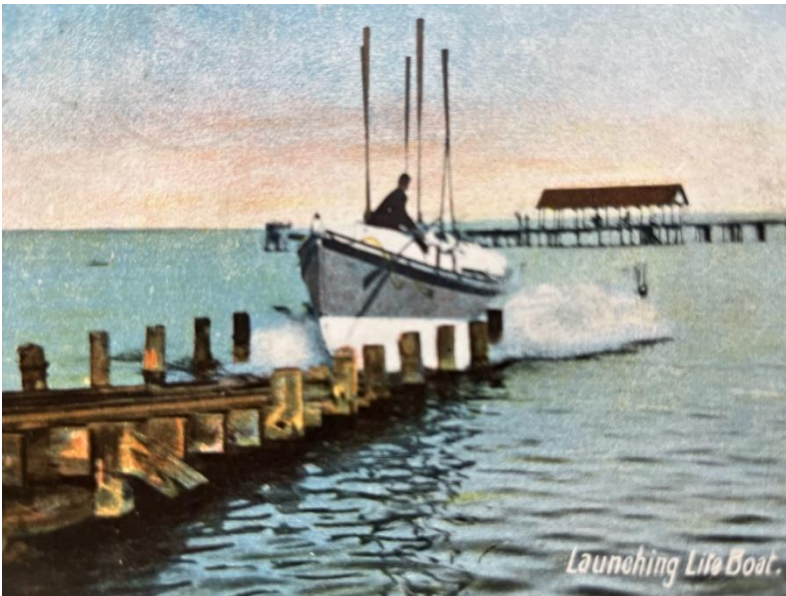
Two Post Cards depicting the brave Surf Men of the Watch Hill Life Saving Station as they conduct their weekly surf boat drills to maintain and improve their skills.



This Post Card is postmarked and dated as June 28th of 1907.

It is titled; "Return of Life Boat"

This card was sent to Mrs. Clinton Lathrop of Windham, Connecticut with the message, *"We were sorry not to see you again. I suppose we missed you at dinner time. Hope you found all well on your return. Elizabeth D. Bremner."*



This Post Card is postmarked and dated as August 26th of 1910.

It is titled; "Launching Life Boat"

This card was sent to Miss Isabel Helm of Cincinnati Ohio with the message *"My Dear Daughter, Hello Isabel. How are you? I am OK. Daddy is counting the days. Hope to see you and mother very soon. Love and Kisses to you and mother."*

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 # 001 – The Reverend Park Lot

By Robert Peacock

This was the first article in our “Discovering Westerly Cemeteries” series of articles.

It is being reprinted this month with updated photos in honor and recognition of the recent repairs to the perimeter fence which were generously donated by Casey Jarrett of DESIGNSCAPESRI.

The Westerly Historical Society owns this cemetery which was donated to the society in 1917 by the Rathbun family. The cemetery includes six graves marked with carved headstones, at least six additional graves marked with uninscribed fieldstones, and at least eight more additional unmarked graves. The most recent known burial was in 1926 and the oldest known burial was in 1747.

For the past one hundred plus years, the Westerly Historical Society has owned and cared for the cemetery with the assistance of society members and community members including the generous efforts of Denise Siravo Lucey, the owner of much of the surrounding land. After taking possession of the cemetery in 1917, the Westerly Historical Society installed a large granite monument with an inscription that reads “Memorial to Rev. Joseph Park M.A. Pastor of the Presbyterian Church Which Stood Near Here 1731 – 1758. He formed a Sunday School in 1752 nearly 30 years before the experiment of Robert Raikes.”

Included in the cemetery are the remains of Reverend Joseph Park whose headstone reads “In memory of Rev. Joseph Park, who died March 1st, 1777 in the 72^d year of his age & 45th of Ministry. He was a faithful minister of the Gospel, a great patriot, a kind husband, a tender parent, a great friend to the widow and fatherless, and an excellent neighbor died 1777, aged 72”

The cemetery also includes the remains of Abigail Park, the wife of Reverend Joseph Park. Her headstone reads “In memory of Abigail, wife of Rev. Joseph Park who died Oct ye 19th 1772 in the 68th year of age. A faithful wife, a tender mother, a kind neighbor, a compassionate and steadfast friend & an excellent Christian.”

Sadly, the cemetery also includes the remains of Samuel Park, the son of Joseph Park and Abigail Park. His headstone reads “In memory of Samuel, son of Rev. Joseph Park & Abigail P. his wife. He died Sep 29, 1747 in the 7th year of his age.”

Even sadder, the cemetery also includes the remains of Jonathan Green, the son of Benjamin and Hannah Park, and the grandson of Joseph and Abigail Park. His headstone reads “In memory of Jonathan Green, Son of Mr. Benjamin Park & Hannah Stanton his wife. He died March 25, 1761 in the 2^d year of his life.”

According to the 1878 book by Frederic Denison, “Westerly and Its Witnesses”, the cemetery was recorded in the 1860’s as being “Park Ground – this is on the north side of the post road, by the side of the highway, a few rods east of the residence of Christopher Rathbun, near where the shore road enters the post road.”

Denison also noted that the cemetery may also include the remains of Edwin Gavitt, a soldier of the Fourth Rhode Island Regiment who was wounded during the Civil War during a battle in Newburn, North Carolina and later died from his injuries in a hospital in New York.

The cemetery also includes the remains of William Clark Rathbun and Martha Rathbun. William was born in 1830 and died in 1926. His wife was born in 1832 and died in 1923. They were alive and perhaps living in the area when Frederic Denison visited in 1868 to document the cemetery. At that time however, the property was still owned by Christopher Rathbun, the father of William Rathbun.

The cemetery is surrounded on three sides by a double row of thick chains set between short metal poles driven into granite blocks and secured by a lead mixture and is bordered on the fourth side by a stone wall.

The cemetery is situated on a mild slope and is a slightly irregular rectangle shaped lot approximately sixty-five feet by twenty-two feet. Access is easy via a sloped access path from Route 1 on land owned by the State of Rhode Island.

According to town records, William and Martha Rathbun built a new home in 1902 on the property next to the cemetery on land that is now 342 Post Road. The property owned by the Rathbun's at that time included the cemetery, the house previously occupied by Christopher Rathbun, and a stone foundation of the former Presbyterian Church. The Church was also referred to as the Park Church and by Frederic Denison as the Meeting House.

Perhaps knowing that death was approaching and perhaps desiring to ensure that the graves of he and his wife would be well cared for, the now elderly couple in their late eighties, decided to donate the land on which the cemetery lies to the Westerly Historical Society.

After taking possession, the Historical Society installed a large granite monument with an inscription that reads "Memorial to Rev. Joseph Park M.A. Pastor of the Presbyterian Church Which Stood Near Here 1731 – 1758. He formed a Sunday School in 1752 nearly 30 years before the experiment of Robert Raikes."

A large contingent of approximately sixty members of the Westerly Historical Society met the Rathbun's at the site on the morning of June 19, 1917. A brief acknowledgement and appreciation ceremony was held with William Segar representing the Society as they expressed their appreciation to William and Martha Rathbun. The Memorial Monument to Reverend Park was also unveiled during this transfer ceremony.

The following day, on June 20th, 1917 at 10 AM, the Westerly Historical Society filed and recorded a deed with the Town of Westerly that read in part "Know all men by these presents, that I Wm Clark Rathbun in the Town of Westerly in the county of Washington in the State of Rhode Island hereinafter called the grantor in consideration of one dollar and other valuable considerations, to be paid by the Westerly Historical Society,... a certain tract or parcel land situated in said town of Westerly and known as the "Park Burial Ground" ... the Grantor hereby conveys to the Grantees the right to pass and repass over his land to said lot from the highway known as the Post Road."

The deed includes a description of the property as "beginning at a drill hole in a boulder at the southeast corner of said land thence running northerly twenty feet to a stone wall, thence running westerly sixty five feet along the line of said wall, thence running southerly twenty two feet to an iron pin in the ground, thence running easterly sixty five feet to the point and place of beginning." The deed also notes that "this land hereby conveyed is the land once occupied by the Presbyterian Church of which Joseph Park was pastor from 1733 to 1757."

As noted, the deed included an additional specification of "other valuable consideration" which was further explained in the deed with the inclusion of the following consideration that "The Grantor hereby reserves the right for himself and family to be interred in said lot." In compliance with their wishes, the Westerly Historical Society allowed two more burials after the land transfer occurred. Martha was interred in the cemetery six years later in 1923 and William was interred in the cemetery nine years later in 1926.

The deed was signed by the Grantors, William Rathbun and Martha Rathbun, and by the Grantees represented by Westerly Historical Society members Fred Stewart Greene, Byron J. Peckham, and Joseph L. Peacock.

For those using GPS, the cemetery is located at 41 Degrees, 20 minutes, and 54.4 seconds North by 71 degrees, 44 minutes, and 35.4 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.

Recent repairs were made to the metal fence posts that support the dual chain perimeter fence. They were previously secured into the granite blocks and boulders with a molten lead mixture. They are now secured with a strong form of concrete adhesive.



A very special thank you to Casey Jarrett and his company, **DESIGNSCAPESRI**, for generously providing the materials and the labor to reset and secure several metal fence poles into the granite blocks which support the dual chain perimeter fence surrounding Westerly Historical Cemetery #1.

We sincerely appreciate his generosity and his support!

Photos of Westerly Historical Society Cemetery # 1 after a recent cleanup.



The Westerly Historical Society owns this cemetery which was donated to the society in 1917 by the Rathbun family. The cemetery includes six graves marked with carved headstones and footstones, six additional graves marked with uninscribed fieldstones, and at least eight additional unmarked graves.

The most recent known burial was in 1926 and the oldest known burial was in 1747.

For the past one hundred plus years, the Westerly Historical Society has owned and cared for the cemetery with the assistance of society members and community members including the generous efforts of Denise Siravo Lucey, the owner of much of the surrounding land.

Letter Home From War

By Jean Gagnier

Sullivan Ballou was a Major in the 2nd Rhode Island Infantry. He was 32 when he wrote this letter home to his wife. A week after he wrote this letter, he was struck and killed as the Rhode Islanders advanced from Matthews Hill, at the first battle of the Civil War, Bull Run. His letter is eloquent and haunting. It is but one of the countless letters written home over the centuries by United States Service men and women.

Headquarters, Camp Clark
Washington, D.C., July 14, 1861

My Very Dear Wife:

Indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days, perhaps tomorrow. Lest I should not be able to write you again, I feel impelled to write a few lines, that may fall under your eye when I shall be no more.

Our movement may be one of a few days duration and full of pleasure and it may be one of severe conflict and death to me. Not my will, but thine, O God be done. If it is necessary that I should fall on the battle-field for any country, I am ready. I have no misgivings about, or lack of confidence in, the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how strongly American civilization now leans upon the triumph of government, and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and suffering of the Revolution, and I am willing, perfectly willing to lay down all my joys in this life to help maintain this government, and to pay that debt.

But, my dear wife, when I know, that with my own joys, I lay down nearly all of yours, and replace them in this life with care and sorrows, when, after having eaten for long years the bitter fruit of orphanage myself, I must offer it, as their only sustenance, to my dear little children, is it weak or dishonorable, while the banner of my purpose floats calmly and proudly in the breeze, that my unbounded love for you, my darling wife and children, should struggle in fierce, though useless, contest with my love of country.

I cannot describe to you my feelings on this calm summer night, when two thousand men are sleeping around me, many of them enjoying the last, perhaps, before that of death, and I, suspicious that Death is creeping behind me with his fatal dart, am communing with God, my country and thee.

I have sought most closely and diligently, and often in my breast, for a wrong motive in this hazarding the happiness of those I loved, and I could not find one. A pure love of my country, and of the principles I have often advocated before the people, and "the name of honor, that I love more than I fear death," have called upon me, and I have obeyed.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Letter Home From War

By Jean Gagnier

Sarah, my love for you is deathless. It seems to bind me with mighty cables, that nothing but Omnipotence can break; and yet, my love of country comes over me like a strong wind, and bears me irresistibly on with all those chains, to the battlefield. The memories of all the blissful moments I have spent with you come crowding over me, and I feel most deeply grateful to God and you, that I have enjoyed them so long. And how hard it is for me to give them up, and burn to ashes the hopes of future years, when, God willing, we might still have lived and loved together, and seen our boys grow up to honorable manhood around us.

I know I have but few claims upon Divine Providence, but something whispers to me, perhaps it is the wafted prayer of my little Edgar, that I shall return to my loved ones unharmed. If I do not, my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you, nor that, when my last breath escapes me on the battle-field, it will whisper your name.

Forgive my many faults, and the many pains I have caused you. How thoughtless, how foolish I have oftentimes been! How gladly would I wash out with my tears, every little spot upon your happiness, and struggle with all the misfortune of this world, to shield you and my children from harm. But I cannot, I must watch you from the spirit land and hover near you, while you buffet the storms with your precious little freight, and wait with sad patience till we meet to part no more.

But, O Sarah, if the dead can come back to this earth, and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall always be near you in the garish day, and the darkest night amidst your happiest scenes and gloomiest hours always, always, and, if the soft breeze fans your cheek, it shall be my breath; or the cool air cools your throbbing temples, it shall be my spirit passing by.

Sarah, do not mourn me dear; think I am gone, and wait for me, for we shall meet again.

As for my little boys, they will grow as I have done, and never know a father's love and care. Little Willie is too young to remember me long, and my blue-eyed Edgar will keep my frolics with him among the dimmest memories of his childhood. Sarah, I have unlimited confidence in your maternal care, and your development of their characters. Tell my two mothers, I call God's blessing upon them. O Sarah, I wait for you there! Come to me, and lead thither my children.

- Sullivan

On November 11th, Veterans Day, please remember that the purpose of Veterans Day is to honor and thank all of those who have served in the United States Armed Forces and to acknowledge their patriotism, their courage, and their sacrifices made in service to their country!

It is a day to appreciate and recognize both the living and the deceased veterans for their contributions during times of peace and times of war.

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