



Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

May 2026

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Program Notes

ANNUAL DINNER MEETING REMINDER

The Westerly Historical Society Annual Meeting and Dinner will be held on Wednesday evening, May 27th, starting at 5:30 PM at the Haversham Banquet Hall. Cocktails will be at 5:30. Dinner will be served at 6:00. Meeting will start at 6:30. Please email your request to Bob Boucher at treasurerwesterlyhistorical@gmail.com to reserve your tickets. Tickets are \$45 and the Historical Society will be subsidizing the remaining costs.

THE WATCH HILL LIGHTHOUSE AND THE WATCH HILL LIFESAVING STATION

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13TH, 6:30 PM

Please join us as Bob Peacock and Jane Perkins discuss the history of the Watch Hill Lighthouse and the Watch Hill Life Saving Station.

They will also provide an advanced view of the new artifacts and new displays in the recently renovated and expanded Watch Hill Lighthouse Museum.

This program is being co-sponsored by our friends at the Watch Hill Lighthouse Keepers Association.

“WRECK OF THE ONONDAGA”

Thank you to Bob Peacock and Jane Perkins for the informative presentation on the “Wreck of the Onondaga” last month and thank you to the Watch Hill Lighthouse Keepers Association for co-sponsoring the program. It was very well attended!

TRIVIA QUESTION

What Westerly resident designed and patented the Dunn Stockless Anchor in 1889 which became the Navy standard for many years?

The answer is on the next page!

In this Issue

Program Notes	Page 1
Presidents Corner	Page 2
Editors Notes	Page 2
United States Lifesaving Service... ..	Page 3
Special Announcements	Page 4
From Our Archives	Page 5
Discovering Westerly's Cemeteries	Page 6
Discovering Westerly's Cemeteries	Page 7
Discovering Westerly's Cemeteries	Page 8
Westerly Time Capsule Project	Page 9
The Wreck of the Clio Chilcott	Page 10
The Wreck of the Clio Chilcott	Page 11
Sponsor Recognition.....	Page 12



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.

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

President's Corner

Thomas J. Gulluscio, Jr.

Hello friends,

We made it to May which is the month your society
conducts our annual meeting dinner. I sincerely hope
you all join us for this meeting dinner for it is a great
opportunity to see what we have done in the past year,
to see what we have planned for your society, and
most importantly, to help us recognize and celebrate
our award winners and dedicated board members. The
award winners are carefully selected and more than
worthy of their selection.

The Board has nominated and selected Robert Peacock
for the 2026 Julia award. Bob should be familiar to all
of you as he has proven to be one of our busiest board
members. Bob produces and edits our award-winning
newsletter, co-chairs our popular programs committee,
organizes annual historical cemetery clean ups, and
has written several historical books and articles.

The selection committee for the Annual History
Award presented by the Westerly Historical Society
and the Babcock-Smith House Museum chose John
and Brenda Linton for their dedicated research,
recording, and presentation of the historical
significance of Westerly granite, the documentation of
the many monuments created here, and a plethora of
other items and subjects.

Please join us and attend the annual dinner on May
27th at the Haversham House for a delicious meal and
wonderful friendship! We look forward to seeing you
as we support the hard work and dedication of
everyone who makes the WHS the very best it can be!

See you soon, Tom

EDITOR'S NOTES

Robert Peacock

***Thank you to
Jane Perkins and James Wolfe
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 Dunn Stockless Anchor
was designed and patented by Herbert Omar Dunn who
was raised with his extended family and lived in the part
of Westerly that is now known as Dunn's Corners.*

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Reports of the United States Lifesaving Service

By Jane Perkins

The following report was transcribed from the 1887 “Annual Report of the Operations of the United States Lifesaving Service”. This report was donated by members of the Nash Family, descendants of the original Lighthouse Keeper, to the Watch Hill Lighthouse Museum.

UNITED STATES LIFESAVING SERVICE OFFICIAL INCIDENT SUMMARY

WRECK OF BRIG TORONTO

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OPERATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES LIFESAVING SERVICE

November 25.1886 – At forty minutes past seven o'clock in the evening the west patrol of the Watch Hill Station, (Third District) coast of Rhode Island, discovered a vessel close inshore heading directly for the beach. He quickly burned a Coston signal and then hastened to alarm the lifesaving crew. A southeast gale of wind prevailed and the weather was thick and rainy. The sailing vessel struck the beach broadside a short distance northeast of the station, and lay in a dangerous position, more than a hundred yards from the shore, with the heavy surf breaking over her. The beach apparatus was immediately manned and got in readiness, but owing to the almost impenetrable darkness, and to the fact that the furious onset of the waves, together with the motion of the vessel, made it next to impossible for the sailors to get around on deck and into the rigging, it was not until the sixth shot was fired that the line was finally secured on board. The gear was then speedily put in working order, and five of the crew were rescued in the breeches-buoy. The captain and the two mates, declined to leave and were not landed until the following morning. She proved to be the brig Toronto on her way to New York with a cargo of coal. She became a total wreck, nothing being saved but sails, rigging, anchors, and chains.

Editor's Note – Additional information and a photo of the Brig Toronto beached near Watch Hill is on display in the Watch Hill Lighthouse Museum.

The following report was transcribed from the 1888 “Annual Report of the Operations of the United States Lifesaving Service”. This report was donated by members of the Nash Family, descendants of the original Lighthouse Keeper, to the Watch Hill Lighthouse Museum.

UNITED STATES LIFESAVING SERVICE OFFICIAL INCIDENT SUMMARY

WRECK OF SCHOONER NELLIE VAUGHN

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OPERATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES LIFESAVING SERVICE

July 12. 1888 - The schooner Nellie Vaughn, of Provincetown, Massachusetts, bound thither from Elizabethport, New Jersey, with a cargo of coal and crew of four men, at half past 6 in the morning struck a rock off Watch Hill Point, coast of Rhode Island, and commenced to fill. The captain was obliged to run her ashore, three quarters of a mile northeast of the Watch Hill Station, (Third District.) A strong west breeze was blowing at the time, with a rough sea. The crew took to their yawl and succeeded in making a safe landing and were conducted to the station by the keeper, who gave them a warm breakfast. As soon as the surf sufficiently moderated to admit of working on the vessel, the keeper, who at this season was the only member of the life-saving crew on duty, assisted the sailors to save the sails and rigging. This was not accomplished until the 13th. On the 14th work was resumed and the starboard anchor and nearly all the cable were recovered. The vessel became a complete wreck, only about five hundred dollars being realized from her sale. Three of her crew were sheltered and cared for at the station five days.

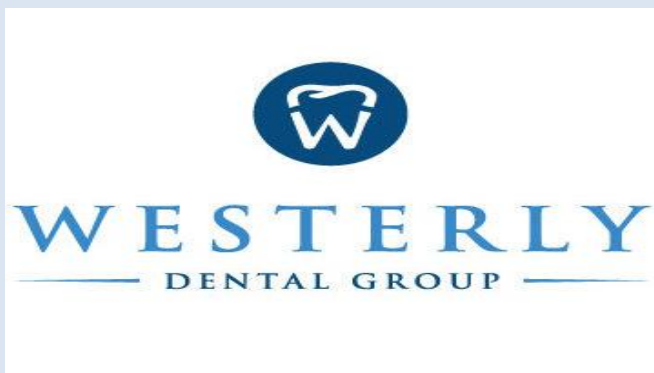
Editor's Note - The extensive collection of the Watch Hill Lighthouse Keepers Association includes the Annual Reports for the years 1884 through 1889.

Our sincere thanks to the Watch Hill Lighthouse Keepers Association and to Jane Perkins, the Curator of the Watch Hill Lighthouse Museum, for transcribing and sharing these research materials!

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Announcements

BABCOCK SMITH HOUSE MUSEUM

Our friends at the Babcock Smith House Museum are offering the following educational programs.

May 2nd at 2 PM to 5 PM OPEN HOUSE

May 3rd at 2 PM John Concannon will present
"Conspiracy to Destroy the Gaspee in 1772"

May 17th at 2 PM Sara Champlin will present
"Babcock Portraits by Joseph Blackburn"

June 17th at 6 PM Robert Madison will present
"Philip Freneau's War Poetry Reading"

NOTE This event is at the Westerly Library at 6PM

September 13th at 6 PM Lawrence Erhart will present
"Early Currency in Our Area"

Please visit their website for more information on
these and other interesting programs!

www.babcocksmithhouse.org

250 TIME CAPSULE REMINDER

Take part in a moment that will
connect generations.



HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WESTERLY TIME CAPSULE PROJECT:

Write or type your letter to the future residents of the Town of Westerly,
including a photo of you and/or your family.
Be sure to sign your letter with your own handwritten signature!

Place your letter and photos in a sealed envelope
clearly labeled "Westerly Time Capsule 2026."
Please include your return address on the envelope.

MAIL OR DELIVER ALL SUBMISSIONS TO: Westerly Time Capsule 2026
Westerly Town Hall
45 Broad Street
Westerly, Rhode Island 02891

And join us in front of the Westerly Town Hall for the Time Capsule burial
ceremony on Saturday, July 4, 2026 at 9:00 am!

Have any questions or interested in volunteering?

CONTACT: James Wolfe
Chairman, 250th Anniversary Subcommittee
Westerly Time Capsule Project
jawolfe01@gmail.com
202-498-6176



Be a part of history - make your contribution to
the Time Capsule by scanning the QR code!

ANNUAL DINNER MEETING REMINDER

The Westerly Historical Society Annual Meeting
and Dinner will be held on Wednesday evening,
May 27th, in the Haversham Banquet Hall with
Cocktails at 5:30, Dinner at 6:00, and Meeting at
6:30. Please email ticket requests to Bob
Boucher treasurerwesterlyhistorical@gmail.com

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!

While we normally expand on items donated to the Westerly Historical Society, this month we focus on an item that was donated to our friends at the Babcock Smith House Museum.

The Westerly Historical Society has images of the Clio Chilcott beached on the shores of East Beach near Watch Hill but feel that this image of the original oil painting owned by the Babcock Smith House Museum and currently on display in the Carriage House is a much better representation to go along with our story examining the Wreck of the Clio Chicott and the friendship that resulted between the victims and the rescuers as described on pages 10 and 11 of this newsletter.

This painting, in oil on masonite, of the The Wreck of the Schooner Clio Chilcott was painted by Calvin Thurber in 1886 and hung for many years in the home of Orlando Raymond Smith of the Smith Granite Company. The frame measures 26" by 39" and the painting is 16" by 28".



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

Riverbend Unique Story

By Robert Peacock

In a slight departure from our normal article describing a particular historical cemetery in Westerly, we thought you might enjoy personal look at the history behind one of the thousands of monuments located in the Riverbend Cemetery. HERBERT OMAR DUNN



Captain Herbert Omar Dunn



Rear Admiral Herbert Omar Dunn

Herbert Omar Dunn was born in Westerly on May 19th of 1857. In 1877, he joined the Navy as a cadet and sailed on the sloop of war Constellation on a voyage to the South Atlantic. He steadily climbed the ranks within the United States Navy. He was appointed Ensign in 1881, promoted to Junior Lieutenant in 1887, promoted to Lieutenant in 1893, and promoted to Lieutenant Commander in 1900. He was later promoted to Captain and to Vice Admiral in 1917. He retired in 1921 as a Rear Admiral.

During World War I, he was appointed as the first commander of U.S. naval forces stationed at the Naval Base in the Azores. Dunn distinguished himself with the assistance he provided to the civilian population in the Azores when the 1918 flu pandemic killed approximately 2,000 people on the island. Dunn retired in 1921 with the rank of Rear Admiral.

Rear Admiral Dunn died in Baltimore on March 6th of 1939 and is buried in Riverbend Cemetery.

As an inventor, Dunn designed and patented the Dunn Stockless Anchor in 1889. This new anchor had many distinct advantages over the older style stock anchors being used in the Navy at the time. The Dunn Stockless Anchor had incredible holding power due to its moveable shanks and could be applied in applications of 200 to 20,000 pounds. It was accepted by the American Bureau of Shipping and became the standard for ships worldwide. Dunn also held patents for several other marine appliances.



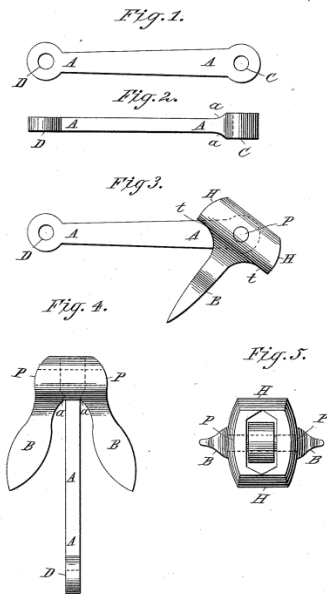
HERBERT OMAR DUNN MAY 29, 1857 FEB. 13, 1939 REAR ADMIRAL U S NAVY

Rear Admiral Dunn’s monument in Riverbend Cemetery is meant to be seen as the front angled bow of a boat moving through the water towards you, creating waves flowing along both sides of the lower bow, while a Dunn Stockless Anchor proudly hangs from its bow.



A postcard showing an example of a 16,500 pound Dunn Stockless Anchor made for the United States Navy by American Steel Foundries, a subsidiary of Thurlow Works, in Chester Pennsylvania.

(No Model.)
 H. O. DUNN.
 ANCHOR.
 No. 395,429. Patented Jan. 1, 1889.



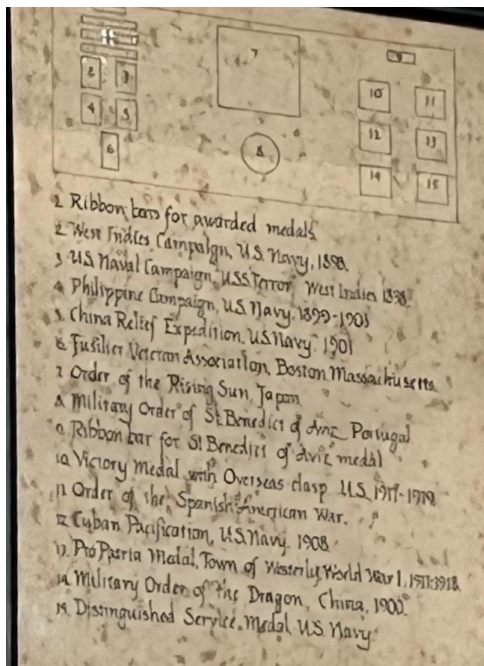
Witnesses:
H. S. Wiley
W. W. Denfeld

Inventor:
H. O. Dunn



A page of his patent application with specifics of the Dunn Stockless Anchor.

A 1913 Painting of Rear Admiral Dunn hanging in the Westerly Town Hall.



Also hanging in the Municipal Court Room at the Westerly Town Hall, in addition to the 1913 portrait, is a shadow box with his service ribbons and medals and a framed handwritten list of the awards he had received during his distinguished Military career.

The Westerly Time Capsule Project - Be Part of Westerly's Legacy!

Seal Our Story for 100 Years - To Be Buried July 4, 2026 and Opened July 4, 2126

By James Wolfe

As our town celebrates America's 250th Anniversary, Westerly invites every resident—young and old—to take part in a once-in-a-lifetime project: The Westerly Time Capsule Project, to be sealed on July 4, 2026, and opened a century later on July 4, 2126.

We are asking Westerly residents (all 23, 259 of us) to write a personal and heartfelt letter to the people of Westerly in the future—tell them about you, your life, and what it's like to live in Westerly. These submissions will create a living portrait of our town in 2026.

Your letter might include: A short biography – who you are, your family, your job or school or a few reflections – your favorite memories of Westerly, hopes for the future, or thoughts on America's 250th year or a few photos. Your story will give future generations a priceless glimpse into the lives, dreams, and spirit of our Westerly community from today.

Imagine Westerly residents opening the time capsule on July 4, 2126 and finding a letter written more than a century ago. Each envelope feels like a secret slipped across time. The 100 year old Time Capsule holds more than just the names of residents of Westerly, it also holds their life stories! Who you were, what your life was like, and much more. You will become a confidante to the life and times of someone from long ago.

How to Participate

Write your letter (typed or handwritten) and include a family photo, a personal photo, a photo with your friends, a photo of your favorite pet, a photo of your favorite hangout in Westerly.

Place the letter and photos in a sealed envelope labeled "Westerly Time Capsule 2026." and mail or drop it off at Westerly Town Hall – 45 Broad Street, Westerly, RI 02891.

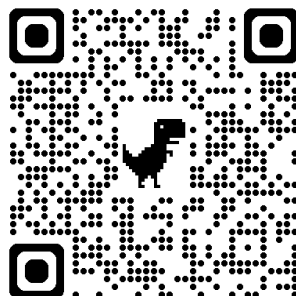
You may also add your story and photos digitally with the QR Code below.

Then join us on July 4, 2026, at 9 AM at the Westerly Town Hall in the Heart of Westerly when the Time Capsule will be buried for 100 years! Together, we will seal and preserve our stories for the people of 2126 to discover and remember us as the greatest generation from Westerly!

Let's Tell Our Story -- Let's Preserve Our Legacy

For updates and participation details, visit: www.Westerly250.org

For questions concerning the Time Capsule or to volunteer, contact jawolfe01@gmail.com



The Wreck and Salvage of the Clio Chilcott

By Jane Perkins

The Wreck of the Clio Chilcott

The schooner Clio Chilcott, from Ellsworth Maine, was caught in a severe snowstorm on January 9th of 1886. She was pushed ashore by strong winds and waves about a mile and a half east of the Watch Hill Lighthouse.

As the schooner was pounded by the raging surf and the waves broke over the deck, the three crew members climbed the rigging to escape the freezing surf.

Unfortunately, one of the crew members eventually became exhausted and was unable to maintain his grip on the rigging. He fell from the rigging and was washed overboard to his death.

Benjamin Clark, the surf man assigned to the East Beach nightly patrol, discovered the wreck and ran at full speed the mile and a half back to the station to alert the crew.

The crew of the Watch Hill Lifesaving Station, alerted by Benjamin Clark, rushed to the scene in the blizzard conditions pulling the rope cannon and carrying the breeches buoy and rope system. After much difficulty, they were able to secure lines to the vessel and were able to rescue Captain Fullerton and the remaining crew member.

Both were almost frozen and were carried back to the warmth of the Watch Hill Lifesaving Station in an exhausted condition and treated for their injuries.

The Salvage of the Clio Chilcott

By February of 1886, the schooner Clio Chilcott, beached in a severe snowstorm on January 9th of 1886, was determined to be unsalvageable and her cargo of Maine granite was sold to the Smith Granite Company of Westerly.

The salvagable portions of the ship including rigging, spars, and other items were sold while the hull was left to the ravages of the seas. It was eventually broken apart by the pounding surf and reclaimed by the ocean bit by bit.

The Smith Granite Company built a catwalk from shore and installed large lifting devices and cranes to offload the granite from the schooner onto the beach for transport into Westerly.

Although the sale price is not known, given the considerable expense and effort of salvaging this granite when so much granite was readily available in the many quarries of Westerly, it is assumed that the cargo was of very high quality and was therefore of considerable value.

A beautiful oil painting of the wreck was created in 1886 by Calvin Thurber, an employee of the Smith Granite Company and hung inside the home of Orlando Raymond Smith for many years. It was donated to the Babcock Smith House Museum and is now hanging in the Carriage House. Please see the photo of the painting on page 5.

Letters From The Wreck of the Clio Chilcott

By Jane Perkins

1886 Letter From Captain Fullerton

After the schooner Clio Chilcott was wrecked on East Beach during a severe snowstorm on January 9th of 1886 and the Captain and another crew member were rescued by the crew of the Watch Hill Life Saving Station, the Captain of the Clio Chilcott sent this letter of appreciation to the local paper.

Watch Hill, January 17th, 1886

To the Editor of the Westerly Weekly:

I wish to thank, through your paper, Capt. Nash and the crew of the Life Saving Station at Watch Hill, for their exertions and timely aid in rescuing the crew from the wreck schooner Clio Chilcott, driven ashore about two miles east of Watch Hill, on Saturday morning, January 9th, in the violent gale and snowstorm.

We were wet and nearly exhausted when we struck, at about half past six in the morning, having been driven before the gale, and the sea making a clean breach over us most of the night, and we could not have held out much longer, Mr. Clark, the patrolman, discovered us three quarters of an hour after we struck, and realizing our perilous situation, he ran all the way to the station. Considering the condition of the beach at the time, that was a feat of endurance that few could accomplish.

To the great exertions of the crew in dragging their apparatus through snow drifts, water and sand, to reach us, and to their promptness, and their kind treatment while at the station, we owe our lives.

Yours Truly, E. L. Fullerton.

1889 Letter From Captain Fullerton

On the third anniversary of the wreck of the schooner Clio Chilcott, Captain Fullerton sent this letter to William F. Saunders, the Captain of the Watch Hill Life Saving Station, reaffirming his appreciation for their valiant efforts which saved his life and allowed him to return home to his family and continue his career as a captain.

Somerville January 9, 1889

My Dear Friend Saunders,

My thoughts often wander back to three years this day when I landed in Westerly and grasped your hand and welcomed the warm place under your arm for my cold hands when I first stood on terra firma clear of the breakers.

The same gratitude remains now as then to the life savers, volunteers, and all. The sensation of the boom, the first shot can better be imagined than described.

Thankful to you all that I am here. We have a special place in the Family Album for the little girl's picture sent us. It's an often reminder of you and your family's kindness.

I am grateful to the people of Westerly. I am home for the winter, have been and am still in the same old business – freighting granite from Clarks Island to New York in the schooner Lzyonia.

Wishing you and your family all a Happy New Year and kind regards.

Sincerely your friend, E.L. Fullerton

Editor's Note – Copies of these two letters are in the collections of the Watch Hill Lighthouse Museum which is owned and operated by the Watch Hill Lighthouse Keepers Association.

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