



# Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

January-February 2014

## Westerly Historical Society Officers 2013-2014

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### Calendar of Events

#### *Color & Light:*

#### *The Stained Glass at Christ Church*

Sunday, Feb 2, 2014, 2pm

Lido Mochetti, owner of Classic Framers, Westerly, will give a talk on the stained glass windows of Christ Episcopal Church. These works span the period from 1892 to 1978. From Lido's informative brochure of the history of the church's stained glass, the styles of the windows "represent either the Victorian style of descriptive realism or the flat stylized designs derived from medieval stained glass." The windows are placed in chronological sequence beginning with Old Testament figures on the east side of the nave, continuing with events in the life of Jesus, and ending with New Testament figures on the west side of the nave. The high altar window, which engulfs almost the entire south wall, shows designs of The Nativity, Crucifixion, and Resurrection, and Christ as universal ruler. Lido will describe the history of the windows, and the involvement of several prominent Westerly families in their installation. Mr. Mochetti, a local art and architectural historian, has a degree in history and has authored several publications on historical topics in town.

At Christ Church, Elm Street, Westerly, RI.  
Free Admission

### Calendar of Events - Continued

#### *Joseph Coduri Granite Company— A Twentieth Century Company*

Sunday, February 9, 2014, 2 p.m.

John B. Coduri will share historic photos as he illustrates his talk about the Joseph Coduri Granite Company. He will also show pictures of some of the outstanding monuments produced on Oak Street.

At the Babcock-Smith House Museum  
Carriage House, 124 Granite St., Westerly, RI  
Sponsored by the Babcock Smith House Museum  
\$2.00 (Museum members free)

#### *Civilian Conservation Corps in RI and CT*

Sunday, February 23, 2014, 2pm

Marty Podskoch will present a program on the Civilian Conservation Corps in RI and CT.

At the Babcock-Smith House Museum  
Carriage House, 124 Granite St., Westerly, RI  
Sponsored by the Babcock Smith House Museum  
\$2.00 (Museum members free)

#### *Newport Preservation Society Gardens and Grounds*

Coming in March – Date to be Announced

Gardens and grounds director Jeff Curtis will present a talk on the preservation and history of the various trees and gardens at the Newport Mansions. Jeff's team has earned the 2001 Historic Preservation Award from the Newport Historical Society for the preservation of the Elms Gardens; an Historic Preservation Award from the Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission, and a Preservation Merit Award from Preserve Rhode Island.

At the Babcock-Smith House Museum  
Carriage House, 124 Granite St., Westerly, RI  
Free Admission

## WESTERLY'S POST\*

*\*This story was transcribed from its original which can be found in Westerly Clippings, Greene, Compiler, pp. 245-246. This valuable book of newspaper clippings, compiled by a former Westerly Sun Editor, Ed? Greene, can be found in the Local History Room, second floor, Westerly Public Library. Westerly's Doric-columned, white marble faced Post Office was constructed in 1912, five years after this 1907 story was penned. (T.A. O'Connell)*

Prior to the Revolution the nearest post office to Westerly was at New London. In 1776 Benjamin Franklin, acting postmaster general, appointed Dr. Joshua Babcock postmaster at a newly established office at Westerly. The same being kept at the doctor's store on "Rhodes" now known as Quarry Hill. The business of the post office was small as the records show the receipts for the first year to be only one pound, three shillings, six pence--equal to about \$6 of the money of today. [1907]

Rouse Babcock succeeded Dr. Joshua as postmaster, taking possession of the office in 1794. He was followed in 1802 by Paul Rhodes whose place of business was at or near the corner of what are now known as Broad and Main Streets.

In 1816 Amos Cross became the postmaster and in 1824 Jesse Maxson, who was followed by Lemuel Vose in 1832. In 1841 Jesse L. Moss was appointed, followed by Lyndon Taylor in 1844 and he by John H. Cross in 1849.

George Brown came next in 1853, and held that position for two terms. It is told that at the end of Mr. Brown's first term in 1857, John H. Cross made

an effort to secure the appointment for himself and to that end secured some signatures to a petition. Quietly and with it snugly stowed in his pocket, he took the train for Washington to secure the coveted place. But his mission was known to a few and the late John F. Vose, father to John F Vose of today who lives on Mechanic Street, without the knowledge of Mr. Cross, seated himself in another car of the same train arriving at Washington with the would-be postmaster early in the morning. Mr. Vose managed to avoid the eye of Mr. Cross and at once visited the post office department, where he represented himself to be a true and faithful Democrat from Westerly, showing his credentials and asked that the present postmaster, George Brown, a true blue Democrat be continued in that office. There appeared no objection and before long Mr. Vose had the appointment of Mr. Brown safe inside his pocket.

In the meantime Mr. Cross, resting in the belief that no one knew of his trip to the capital, went to a hotel secured a good breakfast, and proceeded to discuss the same in a leisurely manner. Later in the day he also visited the post office department to be politely informed that Mr. Brown was reappointed. Thus Mr. Cross learned the truth conveyed in the old fable of the swift fox and the slow tortoise.

In 1861 the Republican Party came into power and Enoch Burrows Pendleton was appointed postmaster instead of George Brown. While Mr. Pendleton was postmaster the Dixon House [Rhode Island Hotel] was built and

the east store now occupied by E.M. Dodge & Co. [Clothiers] was fitted for the post office. In this office the first iron or metal doors for private boxes were put into use. Peleg Clarke was the architect of the Dixon House and with Mr. Pendleton planned the box system for the new office room. Mr. Clarke visited L. [Linus] Yale [1821-1868], the inventor of Yale locks still in use, and arranged for a number of locks. He then planned a cast iron door, which was made in Providence, and the locks were fitted to the doors, the same being hung in a wooden frame. Soon after the same idea was put in use at the Ashaway post office and are still in use there, those in Westerly were changed when the present office [a two story wooden building on Dixon Square] was occupied. A similar set was made and installed at Washington, D.C. Thus the first metal doors with locks for the use of patrons of the post office were installed in Westerly.

A little later, parties in Tennessee secured a patent on metallic post office boxes and Yale sued, claiming priority of invention. A long litigation followed and finally neither party prevailed as to the whole matter, some parts of the claim made by each being sustained, and the two litigants pooled their issues and today metal boxes with Yale locks are used by all but the very smallest offices.

Eugene B. Pendleton succeeded his father, Enoch B. Pendleton, in 1875, as  
*(continued on next page)*

## WESTERLY'S POST (Continued from page 2)

postmaster, holding the office until 1887, thus for a period of twenty-six years the father and son were postmasters at Westerly. During their time many improvements were made and the work of the office greatly increased. In 1887, the Democrats elected Grover Cleveland as President of the United States and Frank E. Rich, a veteran of the War of Rebellion [Civil War, 1861-1865] and a Democrat, was appointed, holding the office for four years. He was succeeded in turn by a Republican, Samuel H. Cross, in 1891.

Cleveland being again elected President in 1895 William P. Clancy took charge of the office, remaining therein for four years. He was followed by the present postmaster, Walter Price, who is now upon his second term.

The growth of Westerly in the past 120 years is well shown in the increase of business receipts and expenditures at the post office. In 1776 when the office was established the receipts for the first year were only about \$6, as reckoned in our currency, and one man did the whole work and had leisure for other things.

Now over twenty are employed. They are Postmaster Walter Price, Assistant Postmaster Charles J. Butler, Mailing Clerk Henry Bryant, Money Order Clerk M. Alice Dove, General Utility Clerk Thomas F. Lenihan, Night Clerk James Spellman, Letter Carriers John Moore, Dudley R. Peabody, James Potter, John Allen, Augustus A. Law, Thomas V. Clancy, Edward W. Murphy; Substitute Carriers Bernard Lynch, Robert McGinis; Rural Carriers Arthur H. Clarke and Frank Picard; Substitutes Homer A. Clark

and Theodore Picard. At the Watch Hill Station: Clerk in Charge Winslow N. York; Money Order Clerk: Edmund P. York; Clerks: Abbie E. Barber and Edward Murphy.



View of the old Westerly Post Office. To the right stands the Westerly Free Public Library

The receipts for the year ending April 1, 1906, were as follows:

From sale of stamps, stamped papers, etc.	\$23,589.56
Postage, second-class matter	286.09
Box rents	881.14
Third-class matter, without stamps affixed	503.66
Total receipts	<u>\$25,260.45</u>

### EXPENDITURES

Salaries, postmaster, clerks, etc.	\$ 8,272.48
Salaries, carriers, and expense of delivery	5,365.51
Rent, light, and heat	950.00
Special delivery service	212.03
Miscellaneous expenses	154.58
Remitted to U.S. Treasury, net Income for year	10,305.75
Total outflows	<u>\$25,260.45</u>

The money order department handled \$120,132.67 within the same year.

## Ansel Bourne-Part 2 “The Later Years”

Ann L. Smith

In our last issue we published “The Strange (and Miraculous?) Case of Ansel Bourne” as the first in a two-part series about this little-known character.

The first part of our story recounts how Ansel Bourne, a Westerly carpenter, left his home on foot in the Fall of 1857 to walk to town. As he neared “Pawcatuck Bridge” as downtown was called, he entertained some musings about the Christian Chapel (now the Granite Theater). A confirmed atheist, he thought to himself, “I would soon be struck deaf and dumb than to ever go there.” At that very moment Bourne was indeed stuck deaf and mute, and lost his vision as well. Convinced that this was a sign from heaven, Ansel Bourne underwent a personal epiphany of sorts, and although his sight returned after only a day, he remained completely deaf and unable to speak for at least two more weeks.

During this time Bourne immersed himself in prayer and chapel services until, in mid-November before the entire congregation at the Christian Chapel, Bourne suddenly regained his hearing and his speech. Bourne’s faculties were completely restored and the whole town rejoiced and called it a miracle. The *Providence Journal* (known as the *Providence Daily Journal* at the time) ran several articles recounting the events at Westerly but largely dismissed it all as a case of “strongly excited imagination.” Before long many of those involved in the story weighed in, including Ansel Bourne himself. His doctor called it a “disordered condition of the brain” and others insisted it was a miracle. Bourne, not wanting to contradict anyone concluded that God had guided the good doctor’s hands in helping to restore him to perfect health.

Shortly after, Ansel Bourne abandoned his carpentry job and became an itinerant preacher. His wife Sarah died in 1881 and he married Belle Potter, a widow, in 1882. The new Mrs. Bourne insisted that he remain closer to home, so Bourne resumed the carpenter’s trade shortly thereafter.

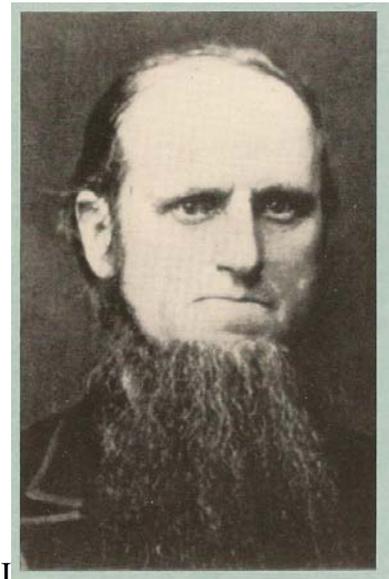
By 1887 the Bournes were living in Greene, RI and had managed to save enough money to buy a farm. On January 17, 1887 Ansel left home and set out for Providence. He left his horse at a stable near Greene Station, took the train to Providence and withdrew \$551 from his bank account. He visited his nephew’s store at 121 Broad Street and later headed for his sister’s home on Westminster Street. He never reached his sister’s place nor did he return home that evening.

Three days later the *Bulletin* of Providence ran a story on the “Missing Preacher Ansel Bourne.” He was described as sporting a long grey beard and a Derby hat. The Providence police investigated but Ansel Bourne was nowhere to be found.

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In far off Norristown, Pennsylvania, about 17 miles west of Philadelphia, A. J. Brown awoke early on the morning of March 14, 1887. He lived in the back of his store at 252 East Main Street where he sold stationery, toys, notions, and candy. His landlord, Pinkston Earle, lived with his family in another part of the same building.

A.J. Brown was relatively new to Norristown, having arrived in town around February 1, 1887. He had set up his shop with goods that he purchased in Philadelphia and made weekly trips there to replenish his stock. He was quiet and punctual and paid all his bills on time. On Sundays he attended the local Methodist church.



Ansel Bourne

As soon as it was light, Mr. Brown hurried to his landlord’s door and, in a frightened state, inquired as to the name and nature of the place they were in. Sensing some trouble, Mr. Earle tried to calm Mr. Brown and addressed him by name. Brown further inquired as to the date and was told that it was the 14<sup>th</sup> of the month. At this Mr. Brown exclaimed,

“Does time run backward here? When I left home it was the 17<sup>th</sup>!”

“17<sup>th</sup> of what?” asked Earle.

“17<sup>th</sup> of January,” replied Brown.

“It’s the 14<sup>th</sup> of March,” said Earle.

(continued on page 5)

**Ansel Bourne** (continued from page 4)

Feeling that “Mr. Brown” was not in his right mind, Mr. Earle sent for Dr. Louis H. Read who examined Brown. At that point “Mr. Brown” related that his name was Ansel Bourne and that he had no recollection of any events between the time he had left his nephew’s store in Providence and the time he woke up that day. Ansel Bourne’s nephew, Andrew Harris, was contacted by telegraph and eventually came to collect his uncle. They sold the goods in the store at auction, settled all the affairs of “Mr. Brown” and returned home to Rhode Island.

In 1890 William James was finishing his landmark work, *The Principles of Psychology*. He had heard about the case of Ansel Bourne and convinced him to come to Boston to be examined further. For five days, together with Richard Hodgson, Bourne underwent hypnosis sessions as a way for James and Hodgson to document and understand what they called a “dissociative fugue.”

Modern psychology was still in its infancy at that time and Ansel Bourne was one of the first documented cases of “fugue.” His case has been preserved in the annals of psychology, being described as a type of multiple personality disorder, and is sometimes compared to other famous histories such as those of Mary Reynolds and Laurancy Vennum (the “Watseka Wonder”).

Doctor James, using hypnosis, succeeded in piecing together the details of Bourne’s journey from Providence to Norristown, Pennsylvania. As “Mr. Brown” Bourne told how he went to Boston, traveled by train to New York City, stayed in the Grand Union Hotel (still in operation on E. 32<sup>nd</sup> St.), and then took another train to Philadelphia. There he stayed at the Kellogg House on Filbert Street for about a week before moving on to Norristown.

Nothing much more has been written about Ansel Bourne except that he eventually left Greene, RI and is thought to have settled in or around Providence to live out the remainder of his days. There is an account of an old-timer from Westerly who had reminisced in the local paper about Bourne’s conversion. He was quoted as saying that since Bourne “had another experience in after years, and as many of your readers are familiar with the incidents in the premises, I will let them form their own opinions in the matter.”

There is just a bit more in Dr. Hodgson’s research that sheds some light on both the deafness of 1857 and amnesia in 1887 of Ansel Bourne. There was a teenager in London by the name Thomas Russon who, after an epileptic seizure in 1843, became deaf, blind, and speechless. Like Ansel Bourne, his vision returned after a day or two, but his hearing and speech were affected for several weeks. And, like Bourne, Russon regained his faculties spontaneously but later suffered a reversal upon having a subsequent epileptic seizure. Again he struggled for several weeks but once again his senses returned. All the while he was able to write and understand the world around him, he just could not hear or speak.

Ansel Bourne is thought to have suffered from some form of epilepsy which interfered with his senses and his memory. His wife reported to Dr. James that she recalled four “fainting fits” during their life together where Ansel would simply fall down and remain unconscious, sometimes for several hours. And young Russon in England reported periods of memory “blackouts” where he could not recall where he had been or what he had been doing.

As much as some folks would like to believe that a miracle occurred here in the fall of 1857, the more likely truth is that the good doctor Thurston was correct when he suspected some “disordered condition of the brain.” At the very least, Ansel Bourne contributed to the good of mankind in more ways than one. He allowed himself to be subjected to psychological studies as a means to advance medical knowledge, and he preached the word of God in order that the world around him might be made just a little kinder in the process.

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References

- Kenny, Michael G., *The Passion of Ansel Bourne*, 1986. Washington, The Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Hodgson, Richard, LL.D., “A Case of Double Consciousness,” *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, Volume 7, Parts 18-20, 1891-1892.
- New York Times*. “In the Field of Psychology; Reports of the Scouts who Have Been Exploring.” November 19, 1893

## Letter to The Editor

Dear Ann,

Thank you so much for the work you put into the newsletter. I read with great interest your writing about holiday traditions and I remember great ones when I lived in Westerly.

But I think you might want to check the details of the Westerly Band concert you mention in the article about holiday traditions. You say that Charles O. Gavitt was the director of the Westerly Band in a concert in 1854. I played in the Westerly High School Band for Charles O. Gavitt's funeral in May 1951 so I am wondering if there is a date wrong (I was 16 at the time). He lived just two houses down from us on Newton Ave. I didn't really know him although he gave me some trumpet music which I think I still have somewhere.

I went through the little book about the Westerly Band with info by Larry Chick (Westerly Band 1852-1990), and it says that Charles O. Gavitt was the director of the Westerly Band from 1900 to 1946 which is probably accurate.

I vaguely remember the funeral as I have a great picture of that high school band (with me in it) standing in front of the former Baptist Church (across from the library) awaiting instructions for our place in the funeral procession. My father, Phil Benson, took that picture standing up on the stairs of the church and the picture is clear enough so that I can see all the faces in the band and have had great fun putting names to all those faces. Al Wood was the director and it was a great band. I also played in the Westerly Band in 1951 under the direction of Everett Perrin. They were both great bands and provide great memories for me.

Again, thanks for giving so much to the WHS and I look forward to seeing you at the annual meeting or sooner.

Jeffrey Benson  
Litchfield, CT

## Notes on the Westerly Band

Jeff Benson's letter was a welcome surprise because it set us on another quest for the truth. He is correct in his statement that Charles O. Gavitt took over the baton at the Westerly Band in 1900. Upon further research we found that no one really knows who the band's leader was in 1854 because directors came and went pretty quickly in those days.

Mention is made of the early politics at the Westerly Band; one leader would fall out of favor and quickly be voted out as director. The following month, all would be forgiven and the replacement director was unceremoniously removed as quickly as he came. We do know that some of the earliest directors ("instructors" as they were called) of the Westerly Band were Stephen Phalens, W.B. Lowery and A.J. Foster.

As to the funeral of Charles O. Gavitt, the following obituary appeared in the *Westerly Sun* on June 30, 1949:

**The funeral of Charles O. Gavitt, 77, of 82 Newton Ave, whose death occurred Sunday afternoon [June 27] while bathing in the surf at Misquamicut, was held yesterday afternoon at 2:30 o'clock from the Central Baptist Church with Dr. Alfred L. Murray, STD, officiating.**

**Interment was in River Bend Cemetery. The bearers, all employees of the Westerly Furniture Company of which Mr. Gavitt was associated as salesman and advertising manager, were Arthur E. Peckham, Charles Bliven, Clifford Casswell, David Johnson, Kenneth Smith, and Arthur Thompson.**

**The Westerly Band, of which Mr. Gavitt was director for 46 years, played at the church and cemetery.**

Jeff Benson gave us permission to print his letter and forwarded us this copy of the photo he wrote about. After some discussion, we surmised that the event taking place in the photo was probably a memorial to Charles Gavitt due to the lapse in time between his death and the date of the photo. We hope you will enjoy putting names to some of these faces--just for fun. Answers will appear in the next issue!



## Westerly 1922: "Dig We Must!"

In June of 1922 the repaving of a seven-mile stretch of Rte. 1 (Post Road) in Westerly was nearly complete. This work been ordered by the State Department of Public works as Rte. 1 is a state highway, and the pavement at the time was deemed to be completely worn out.

Around this same time work was being done on High Street to even out the pavement around the trolley lines. To make life even



more interesting, Langworthy Road and Atlantic Avenue up to Crandall Ave. had just undergone improvements. Finally, many roads in town were being torn up for the installation of new sewer pipes. It seemed everywhere one went, there was a detour, a lane closure or rough going of some kind.

George Street was just one of the many roads affected at the time. It is held in place by School, Cross, and John Streets. The following poem which pokes fun at the "improvement" his street received, was written by B. Frank Greenman of 15 George Street and was published in the *Westerly Sun*, July 5, 1922. Our thanks to Tom O'Connell for submitting it.

### GEORGE STREET

*By B. Frank Greenman*

I will sing you a song,  
Which shall not be too long,  
About matters and things of the day:  
The abundance of rains,  
And the need of good drains,  
To take surplus water away.

For many a dweller,  
Has too deep a cellar,  
Which takes in too much of the rain;  
And to make troubles fewer,  
When digging a sewer,  
They laid other pipes for a drain.

Well – one year ago,  
I suppose you all know,  
George Street was the finest in the town;  
But, when ditch-diggers came,  
They just ruined the same,  
And caused every traveler to frown.

Now every one knows,  
When by auto he goes  
Through here, as the street is now,  
With many a thump,  
He goes bump-i-t-y-bump,  
With many a scowl on his brow.

Milkmen have to drive,  
As though 'bout half alive,  
And often we hear them mutter,  
Because they can't hustle,  
And rustle and bustle,  
For fear that their cream will be butter.

He rattles his bones,  
And his wheels throw stones,  
Right into the grass by our door;  
And we, ere we mow,  
With a basket must go,  
And pick up a bushel or more.

Some one sure's to blame,  
And it's up to the same,  
To restore the good going we had,  
Before shovels and picks,  
Got us in such a fix  
For all know it's awfully bad.

If some poor rheumatic,  
Came down from his attic,  
An auto ride to endure,  
The length of the street  
(About nine hundred feet),  
Would kill him or cure him, I'm sure.

Now it's safe to conclude,  
That I may be called rude,  
And getting myself in a heat,  
While finding some fault,  
About how they do halt,  
In restoring to us our fine street.

As has often been stated,  
A long time we've waited,  
As have many others we meet,  
To have travel bettered,  
And not keep us fettered,  
By roughage along George Street.

So if some one will kindly  
Deal with us less blindly,  
And finish the job – well begun –  
We won't be so snappy,  
But try to be happy,  
And furnish our part of the  
"mon."

*(This poem can be found in a book of Mr. Greenman's poetry located in the Local History Room, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Westerly Public Library. -- T.A. O'Connell)*

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



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

Babcock-Smith House Museum Notes

**The capital campaign to expand the carriage house has been an overwhelming success. The latest figures show that the donations to date are within \$10,000 of the \$300,000 goal. Below is an artist's rendering of the new carriage house. If you would like to help close the funding gap, please send your donation to the Babcock-Smith House Museum, 124 Granite St., Westerly RI 02891.**



Correction

In the November-December 2013 issue of *Westerly's Witness* some text was inadvertently omitted from the page 4. In discussing the stone in Ansel Bourne's front yard the text should read, "He kept it as a memento of his experience and as a reminder of the 'stroke of the Almighty upon him.'" The corrected copy of our newsletter has been uploaded to our website. We regret the error.

Westerly's Witness E-Paper

If you would like to receive an email and password to alert you each time a new issue of *Westerly's Witness* is available online, simply respond to [whssecretary@gmail.com](mailto:whssecretary@gmail.com), and we will add your email address to our e-newsletter mailing list. Please let us know if you would also like to suspend your paper mailings of *Westerly's Witness* when you write. Remember, going paperless saves a tree!