



Westerly's Witness

March 2014

Westerly Historical Society Officers 2013-2014

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Babcock-Smith House Museum Liaison Edward A. Fazio	

Calendar of Events - Continued

Jeff Curtis *Newport Preservation Society* *Gardens and Grounds*



Sunday March 30, 2014, 2 PM

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 Historical Society Annual Meeting and Reception

Friday May 16, 2014, 5:30 PM

Masonic Lodge

20 Elm St, Westerly, RI

Reservations required.

Tickets are \$18.00 and may be obtained by sending your check or money order to:

Westerly Historical Society

PO Box 91

Westerly, RI 02891

Calendar of Events

Dwight C. Brown, Jr.

The Bradford Story

Thursday, March 13, 7 PM

Westerly Historical Society board member and archivist emeritus will present a history of the textile industry in Bradford, including some artifacts associated with the enterprise.

At the Cross Mills Library

4417 Old Post Rd, Charlestown, RI

Phone:(401) 364-6211

Free Admission

Susan Sullivan Brocato

Sullivan Granite Company

Sunday March 23, 2014, 2 PM

Susan Sullivan Brocato, great-granddaughter of John B. Sullivan, will trace the history of the Sullivan Granite Company, explain the quarrying process and show examples of monuments made from Sullivan Granite.

Sponsored by the Babcock-Smith House Museum

Carriage House, 124 Granite St., Westerly, RI

Admission \$2.00. Museum members free.

Editor's Notes

Ann L. Smith

Here it is nearly spring and the Westerly Historical Society has plans already for our annual meeting and reception in May. This year's event will be held at the Masonic Lodge on Elm Street on Friday, May 16. To reserve tickets via email, send me your info at whstreasurer@gmail.com and we'll take it from there. Payment this year is by check or cash only.

Around the holidays we ran two sketches of the Granite Theater in connection with our Ansel Bourne story. This historic building was in the news last week because of the renovations currently taking place there. Gil Bricault, President of the Renaissance City Theatre, Inc., (the theater's parent organization) spoke at our March board meeting to raise awareness of the importance this building holds as a historic place in our community. Stay tuned for upcoming details of the capital campaign being launched this spring to "Save the Granite."

In this month's issue of *Westerly's Witness* we present a reprinting of a *Westerly Sun* article from 1919 on Colonel James Rhodes and his family. Commentary from Thomas A. O'Connell follows at the conclusion of the article. Tom O'Connell can be found most Mondays in the local history room at the Westerly Library where he faithfully volunteers from 1-3 PM each week. Tom contributes regularly to *Westerly's Witness* after serving as editor for the last twelve years and is currently editing another book for publication by the Westerly Historical Society later this year.

While researching our September 2013 story about the Joseph Pendletons and the Pendleton-Chapman Farm, I noticed that the numerals denoting the years often appeared as 1752/53. Not knowing why this numbering convention was in place, I simply ignored it at the time. Later while reading "*The Gavitts of Westerly*" (also found in the local history room) I found this little tidbit: "In 1752 the beginning of the new year was changed from 3/1 to 1/1. This the days from January to March were one year old by the old calendar and into the next year by the new one." So folks labeled the years with two sets of numerals whenever the date under discussion fell between January 1 and March 1.

And speaking of the Pendleton-Chapman Farm, we hope to run updated photos showing the reconstruction progress in our next issue.

If it's not too late to make plans, we hope you will catch Dwight C. Brown's talk on the history of the dyeing industry in Bradford, RI at the Cross Mills Library this Thursday evening, March 13, at 7:00 PM. Dwight will be available from 6:30 on for those who would like to get a close look at some of the historical dyeing artifacts that will be on hand during the lecture.

In our last issue we ran a photo of the Westerly High School Band taken in May of 1951. Our correspondent, Jeff Benson, has provided a key to the names and faces of those present in the scene. Hopefully some of our readers will recognize a few of these individuals from "back in the day." See page six for details. See our E-newsletter to zoom in.

Lastly, we will be pleased to welcome Jeff Curtis of the Newport Preservation Society Gardens and Grounds on March 30th. Jeff joined the Preservation Society in 1985 as Assistant to the Grounds Supervisor. In 1990, he became Grounds Supervisor, and today is Director of Gardens and Grounds. He supervises a staff of 20 full-time and part-time employees who maintain more than 80 acres of gardens and grounds on the Society's historic properties.



424 BELLEVUE AVENUE, NEWPORT

PHOTO BY MACIE J. DUTKIEWICH

The Gardens and Grounds Department also operates several greenhouses in which it cultivates trees, plants and flowers that are used in the Society's houses and grounds.

Jeff Curtis is a graduate of the University of Rhode Island College of Resource Development, with a degree in Greenhouse Management. He is also a licensed arborist.

THE RHODES FAMILY

By Charles Rush – *The Westerly Sun* – September 4, 1919

The *Westerly Sun* mentioned recently the purchase of the property at 56 Elm Street, Westerly, by Frank Coy, and to most people this meant very little, if anything. It is, however, connected in a way with the very early history of Westerly.

In the latter part of 1895, Mrs. Judith A. Burdick, a daughter of Dr. Francis Murphey, a noted physician of Westerly a generation ago, bought the property at 56 Elm Street as a home preparatory to the time when Capt. Benjamin F. Burdick, her husband, might retire from business. Both having been born in Westerly, or just across the river from there, naturally their thoughts were towards their native home as the proper place in which to spend the remaining years of their lives, but Mrs. Burdick did not live to realize her dreams, and the property passed under her will to Capt. Burdick. It is not necessary to speak of Capt. Burdick's noble and useful life, because that is too well known to the people of Westerly to require repeating. On his death the property passed to the present Mrs. Burdick, who is Mary Sherman Burdick, but it is not generally known that she is in any way connected with the early history of Westerly. Such is the case, however, she being a lineal descendent of Col. James Rhodes [1730-1806], who was her great-great grandfather.

The story of the life of Col. Rhodes, as it is handed down to history, reads like fiction, but is vouched for by the records of the town of Westerly in the days preceding and succeeding the Revolutionary War.

In about the year 1730, a family named Rose, living in the

Narragansett Bay district of the Colony of Rhode Island, on the island of Conanicut (now the town of Jamestown, R.I.) was applied to for a night's lodging by an English officer, a woman, and a child. The officer was on horseback, and the woman rode on a pillion [a cushion behind a saddle for an extra rider, esp., a woman] on the horse's back, and carried the child in her arms. The child was apparently a few months old and the woman was its nurse. They stayed overnight at the Rose dwelling, and in the morning, the officer asked Mrs. Rose to board the child, saying he would return shortly. Mr. Rose had left home, but his wife decided on her own responsibility to take the child, and the officer gave her a green purse filled with guineas, and left taking the nurse with him. Before leaving he said, "Call the child James."

Nothing was heard from the officer until about a year later, when he rode up to the Rose house at about dusk and asked for the child – whether it was alive and well. Upon being shown the child, he took it in his arms and kissed it, and wept for a moment, and returned it to Mrs. Rose with a further sum of money. He then mounted his horse and rode off.

It seems that Mr. Rose never approved of the presence of the child in his house, but Mrs. Rose was so overcome by the suddenness of the visit of the officer and its brief duration, that she did not get her wits together until after the officer was gone. Her husband came in just after she was recovering her presence of

mind, and she told him of the new visit. Rose immediately gave chase, finally lost all trace of the visitor at Pawcatuck Bridge.

Whether the officer became aware in some manner of the objections of Rose, or whether he died, or whatever the reason may be, the fact is that he never visited the child again, nor was he ever heard of in any way.

The boy, thus abandoned, found his position less and less agreeable as he grew up. The Rose family was but poorly supplied with cash or property, and resented being compelled to share what they had with the little stranger. He was given no advantages, and received many reminders of his condition. He was known as James Rose.

At the age of thirteen, he decided that his place was valued more than his presence, and so he decided to leave the Rose family, and try to carve a place for himself in the outside world. His course was towards the setting sun, and so he arrived at Albany, N.Y. He was lucky enough there to fall into the company and employment of a physician with whom he made his home for many years. It was while in Albany that he obtained whatever of education he was fortunate enough later to possess.

He remained in Albany until he was a young man, and during this period changed his name from Rose to Rhodes.

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THE RHODES FAMILY *(Continued from page 3)*

The death of his patron, the physician, put an end to his prospects in Albany, and knowing no other home, he turned his footsteps towards Rhode Island. Apparently he fretted constantly over the uncertainty as to his parenthood, and he hoped against hope almost to the day of his death, that he would receive some sign of his parents.

Having these thoughts in his mind, the young man went from Albany to Westerly, the nearest point to the Pawcatuck Bridge, which was the last place at which the person whom he supposed to be his father had been seen. All his life was spent in this immediate neighborhood, waiting for a voice and a face that he never heard nor saw.

His first marriage was at the age of 22 at Westerly, his wife being Ann Langworthy Crandall, a descendant of John Crandall, Robert Burdick, Andrew Langworthy, and Samuel Hubbard, men who have made history in that and adjoining colonies, citizens of whom their neighbors were proud. She bore him six children, four boys and two girls, and died on November 13, 1767, after a happy married life of fifteen years.

He was married again at Westerly on February 21, 1768 [by Rev. Joseph Park] to Abigail Greenman, daughter of Silas and Eunice Babcock Greenman of Westerly. She was the mother of three children, two daughters and one son, and she died 1799.

During the time of his second marriage, he lived successively at Westerly, Hopkinton, and Stonington never leaving the neighborhood of

the Pawcatuck Bridge, and these being important times for America, he plunged fearlessly into public life, and took a large part in the events of his day and time.

He was a Deputy [Representative] to the Rhode Island General Assembly in the years, 1767, 1770, 1771, and 1773.

The Boston Tea Party stirred the hearts and the blood of men as they had not been stirred before, and everywhere throughout New England preparations went forward for what was felt was certain to ensue, war with England.

The General Assembly of Rhode Island adopted a Declaration of Principles within two months after the Boston Tea Party and the name of James Rhodes is written upon the Declaration.

In February, 1774, he was appointed at a town meeting in Westerly as a member of the Correspondence Committee, a dangerous position, and one that would be taken only by a courageous man. It was these Correspondence Committees, at work in every town and colony, that were responsible for the co-operation and cohesion of the various colonies, lacking which there would never have been a successful outcome of the Revolution.

The Rhode Island General Assembly in June, 1775, appointed James Rhodes and others to take an inventory in their respective towns of all arms and ammunition available, granting them powers of search and seizure, they to report to

the deputy governor, in order that he might report to the Continental Congress.

He was commissioned as a colonel by the Rhode Island General Assembly, and appointed commander-in-chief of the men sent to New Shoreham [Block Island] to seize cattle and sheep and other provisions needed. This was done in August, 1775, and, thereafter he was always known as Col. Rhodes.

He lived in Stonington from 1777 until the early eighties, and then returned to Westerly, where he remained until his death in 1806.

His residence during the last years of his life, was located opposite the site of the Dixon House at Westerly.

His third wife, Martha Babcock Rhodes, bore him no children. She survived him, dying in 1809.

Col. Rhodes, in 1786, donated the land upon which was erected the first meeting house of the "Church of Christ in Westerly and Stonington in Union," commonly known as the "Hill Church." The location was then known as James Rhodes' Hill [later called Quarry Hill]. Col. Rhodes also donated the sum of three pounds, four pounds, and nine pounds for the house, which probably had a much larger purchasing power then than it would have in these days.

At the time of Col. Rhodes' death, as disclosed by his will in the probate records, he owned his residence in Westerly above mentioned, and a very large farm at

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THE RHODES FAMILY

(Continued from page 4)

Watch Hill, consisting of 400 acres or more. Other farms are mentioned in his will.

Col. Rhodes' instincts were of an aristocratic nature. He seemed to find his pleasure in the company of educated and brilliant people. He mingled with the important men of his day as an equal.

He had the pleasure of owning the first chaise introduced into Westerly, at a time when almost the only means of getting about for men and women was on horseback.

The Rhodes' burying ground [Rhode Island-Westerly Historical Cemetery 16, now called the Stillman Crandall Lot] was a mile or so north of Pawcatuck Bridge in the town of Westerly, on the west side of the road to Potter Hill. Here he and his wives and several children were interred within an enclosure, while outside this enclosure were fifteen graves marked simply with small stones and said to contain the bodies of some poor people and some slaves.

The fences, etc., having fallen into decay in 1907, Mrs. Alexander Thompson, now deceased, who was the great-great granddaughter of Col. Rhodes, had the remains removed from the old burying ground to River Bend Cemetery, where they now lie under a simple stone.

Mrs. Alexander Thompson, like Mrs. Mary S. Burdick, traced her relationship to Col. James Rhodes through Capt. Joseph Rhodes, one of the heroes of the Revolutionary War, and a son of the first wife of Col. Rhodes.

Capt. Rhodes married Nancy Champlin in 1781 at Newport. Miss Champlin was at that time known as "the Belle of Newport." She was the mother of eleven children by

Capt. Joseph Rhodes, of whom Margaret Rhodes, the oldest daughter, was the grandmother of the late Mrs. Alexander Thompson of Westerly. The two youngest daughters of Capt. Joseph Rhodes, Lucy and Elmira, were born at Westerly, but in the latter part of their father's life, they moved with him to Guilford, N.Y., where their father died in 1830. Lucy, the youngest, became wife of Charles Ralph Sherman, and was the grandmother of Mrs. Mary Sherman Burdick.

Elmira, next to the youngest, married Judge William Gilbert, and removed to Caton, Steuben County, N.Y. Her three sons, all physicians, were in the Union Army during the Civil War, and her son, Rufus Gilbert, became Surgeon General of the Union forces. At the end of the war, Dr. Rufus Gilbert settled in New York City, where he practiced his profession, and he was also the inventor of the elevated railroad, now found in many large cities as well as New York.

Thus, the ability and energy displayed by Col. James Rhodes in the eighteenth century has been handed down to his descendants, and they have proved worthy of him. In all public emergencies they have been found ready. When their country called, they shed their blood freely, and in times of peace they adorned the professions and marts of trade. The women were devoted wives and mothers and inspirations to their offspring.

Commentary by *Thomas A. O'Connell*

Many of Westerly's well-known men rose to prominence during the Industrial Revolution, the late nineteenth century. Their achievements as inventors, bankers, machine and textile manufacturers, and in the fields of communication and transportation, etc., have mostly overshadowed the accomplishments of Westerly men of an earlier age. So it was with some interest that I discovered an important Colonial figure, James Rhodes. The foregoing article which you have just read appeared in the September 4, 1919 edition of *The Westerly Sun*. I found it in *Westerly Newspaper Clippings*, Volume 12, pp. 137-139, Harriet M. Greene, Compiler. There are numerous volumes of her gathered newspaper cuttings to be read in the Local History Room at the Westerly Public Library, 2nd floor.

Charles Rush used as the source of his story the "A Brief Account of Colonel James Rhodes of North Kingston, Hopkinton, and Westerly, R.I., and Stonington, Conn., with Some of His Descendants," written by Edwin Rhodes Booth in 1896. Readers can view the manuscript in the vertical files of the Local History Room of the Library.

Col. James Rhodes poses an interesting topic for the curious student. For example, how did he gain his wealth? Did he own slaves? What did he look like? etc.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



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



1. Alfred Wood, Band Director
2. Clark Maxson, Drum Major
3. Bob Ferendo
4. David Wright
5. Charles Schriver
6. Hope Whitehead
7. Bill Croasdale
8. David Benson
9. John Koulbanis
10. Herb Dobson
11. Emma Benn ?
12. Barbara Finizio
13. unknown
14. Al Dowbekin
15. Barbara Lloyd
16. Shirley Wright ?

17. Fred Lanphear
18. Mary Downes
19. unknown
20. Carolyn Baton
21. Joan Maxson
22. Jim Wills
23. Ken Babcock
24. unknown
25. Ben Carpenter

26. Doris Heinhold ?
27. Diana Crandall
28. unknown
29. Buddy Gavitt
30. Norman Tougas
31. Barbara Lawton
32. Ray Dowd
33. Jeff Benson
- 34 - 37. unknown

38. Polly Timperly
39. unknown
40. Wayne Strawderman
41. Carol Hebb
42. Bob Strawderman
43. Jack Marriott
44. unknown

Westerly HS Band May 1951
 PHOTO BY PHILIP BENSON