



Westerly's Witness

October 2014

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The Babcock-Smith House Museum
is proud to present

A World of Needlework

Sunday, November 9, 2014, 2:00 P.M.

Nancy Ballentine will present a variety of embroidery, knitting, quilting, needlepoint, and hooking samples from Panama, Russia, Egypt, Canada, and Laos along with their techniques and stories. Nancy's own work will illustrate the many and surprising sources of needlework design.

At the Carriage House

Non-members \$2.00;
Museum members free.

Calendar of Events

November 2, 2014

Associate Professor
Sarina R. Rodrigues,
Special Collections Librarian, will give a talk on
local history and doing
research with the special collections at the
University of Rhode Island.

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Wednesday November 12, 2014

5:00 – 7:00 PM

Thomas A. O'Connell  
*Fair Westerly* editor and author  
will sign copies of this new publication  
sponsored by the Westerly Historical Society.  
Join us at the Carriage House for wine and cheese.  
Copies of *Fair Westerly* will be available for  
purchase at this event.

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November 23, 2014

Julie Nathanson from the
Pawtuxet Valley Preservation and
Historical Society Cemetery Group will speak
about her work on the RI Cemeteries database and
the related transcription project.



Except as noted, programs are held in the
Carriage House of the
Babcock-Smith House Museum
124 Granite Street
Westerly, RI

Sundays at 2:00 P.M.
Free & open to the public.

Editor's Notes

Ann L. Smith

Two letters came in response to the article on the 1938 hurricane and the letter from Leola Craig. Madlin Algieri kindly gave us some genealogy about George Bliven, and Jane Maxson (who lived through the storm) wrote with some of her personal recollections. Their letters are reprinted here.

The excitement continues over our latest publication, *Fair Westerly*, and Tom O'Connell, the major contributor and editor of this collection of essays, articles and photographs will hold a book signing November 12 (see page 1) at the Babcock Smith Museum Carriage House. The sales are going well and once again we want to thank Tom for a job very well done.

This issue of *Westerly's Witness* deals with two other books of note, *Ninigret, Sachem of the Niantics and Narragansetts: Diplomacy, War, and the Balance of Power in Seventeenth-Century New England and Indian Country* by Julie A. Fisher and David J. Silverman and one of the *Westerly Historical Society's* own publications, *Veterans War Stories 1933-1993*. Ordering information for *Veterans War Stories* and *Fair Westerly* appears on page 5 of this month's newsletter. Information about how to obtain *Ninigret* appears at the end of the article on page 3. We invite our readers to visit our website, www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org, and click on "Gift Shop" to see a full list of our offerings.

We hope you will join us at our upcoming programs or take advantage of the presentations planned by the Babcock-Smith House Museum. (Museum events for the coming season are listed on their website at <http://www.babcock-smithhouse.com/>. Click on "Events" to see the full calendar.)

Casual and serious researchers alike will benefit from Sarina Rodrigues's talk on November 2 about the special collections at the URI library and, later in November, we will meet Julie Nathanson from the Pawtuxet Valley Preservations and Historical Society Cemetery Group. Aside from the physically intensive labor involved in restoring historical graves and cemeteries, (see sample "before and after" photos on page 1) the Cemetery Group is involved with their new database project which should be of interest to us all. (For a glimpse of the group's past restorations, visit them on Facebook.com.)

Letters to the Editor

On George Bliven, Rescuer of Leola A. Craig

My uncle George Willard Bliven was the recipient of the letter from Leola Craig. He is actually my great uncle, born Nov 21, 1896 died June 26, 1964. He lived on Klondike Rd, Charlestown, RI; served in the Army from 08-26-18 discharged 05-21-19 and I believe was disabled from there.

He married Annie Wardman on July 15, 1922 they had one child, Betty Mae who died before she was a year old I believe in 1932. He served as Charlestown Town Council President in the late 40's.

His brothers and sisters were Percy E. Bliven, Frank E. Bliven, Charles L. Bliven (my grandfather), Jessie Bliven Norton, Minnie (Ermina) Bliven Raithel. Their parents were Frank E. Bliven and Minnie (Ermina) Bliven.

If I can locate anymore information I will pass it on.

Thank you,
Madlin Algieri

1938 Hurricane Recalled by Jane Maxson

Perhaps you have seen Gloria's two columns in the Sun featuring my father's letter and my reminiscences as an eleven-year-old in 1938. I hope this qualifies me as someone who knows a bit about the '38 hurricane, especially at Watch Hill.

A couple of additions: the house in the pond was actually in the small pond adjacent to Ocean View Avenue. For many years, there was a road across that pond to a house on the beach. That was the only house in the pond that I can find in my books. To the best of my recollection, it was eventually demolished.

I think the Sun was printed in Norwich until power was restored. Whether that first post-storm paper was printed on a hand press, I can't say.

Starling's Garage was referred to as Lanphear's Garage in my father's letter written in January 1939. It was previously Starling and Farrell's Garage. It is the building at the corner of Bay Street and Sunset Avenue.

I don't recall that the Moore cottage was "the last" cottage to be swept from Fort Road, just one of many. The family's story is available in one of the books. The local history room at the Westerly Library has copies of the local hurricane books and Other Tiger had reprints of the one published by the Sun.

If you read the published recollections of survivors, you'll see where some of Scotti's stories came from. Besides the Sun's publication, *Seaside Topics* had one with stories from survivors who rode across the bay to CT and Helen Joy Lee printed an account of her experience.

Thanks for an interesting newsletter,
Jane Maxson

(Note: the Moore cottage was said to be the last one standing on Napatree Point. See the PBS transcript of their television special referred to in our last issue.)

Who Was Ninigret?

by Ann L. Smith

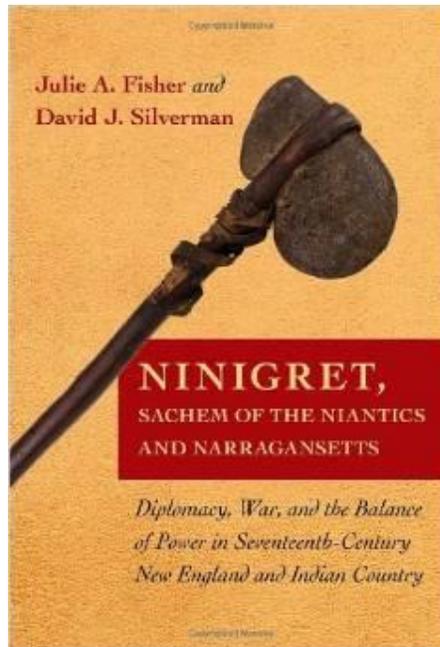
When we hear the name Ninigret most of us give little thought to the Niantic Sachem who bore that name. Our thoughts may stray to Ninigret Pond, Fort Ninigret, or perhaps to the statue of Ninigret in Watch Hill. All these things are part of our quotidian lives.

As a girl growing up in Hackensack, New Jersey, we too were surrounded by the lore of the native Chief Oratam and the Oritani (Hackensack) Indians. We had the Oritani Theater, the Oritani Savings and Loan, and a statue of Chief Oratam himself outside the Johnson Free Public Library. I always liked to think that Chief Oratam had welcomed the Dutch to his land along the river (“Hackensack” means “hook in the mouth [of the river]”) without much strife or bloodshed. Whether or not that is true is a matter for further investigation and perhaps a story for another day.

But many a village and town across the country can claim a history with one tribe or another. For the non-historian, the vestiges of those native tribes and their ways are but mere names on signs or a random statue on the local green.

Authors Julie A. Fisher and David J. Silverman spent an interesting afternoon with the Westerly Historical Society on October 5th as they presented their new book, *Ninigret, Sachem of the Niantics and Narragansetts: Diplomacy, War, and the Balance of Power in Seventeenth-Century New England and Indian Country*. This important biography of Sachem Ninigret details the early history of our region in the mid 17th century. The book is probably the most complete work on the life of

Ninigret and focuses on the forty-year period between the Pequot War (1637) and King Phillip’s War (1675-1678).



The authors have done an excellent job of piecing together Ninigret’s life in the absence of any primary documents from the Niantics themselves as neither Ninigret nor any of his people practiced alphabetic literacy. Fisher and Silverman relied on documents and accounts by the English and early colonists to get a sense of who Ninigret was and what he was like. While the English had no special affinity for the Indians (and vice versa), Ninigret’s messages, as translated by the English, show his decisiveness and strength as a tribal leader.

Perhaps the most interesting take-away from the authors’ presentation is that the various tribes, colonists, English, and the Dutch partnered with one another in different ways to serve their particular interests at any

given time. Our mental constructs of settlers against natives all need to be set aside in order to grasp the depth and complexities of the major conflicts taking place in Ninigret’s time.

By 1643, for example, Roger Williams and Samuel Gorton had partnered with the Narragansetts against Connecticut and Massachusetts (The United Colonies of New England) who would have liked to annex Rhode Island. The Dutch of New Netherland meanwhile were the largest suppliers of guns and ammunition in the region. In 1653 Ninigret went to what is now New York to meet with Peter Stuyvesant to form a trade alliance for weapons. The United Colonies of New England chastised Ninigret for his alliance with the Dutch and the Montaukets of Long Island fearing the new threat that these alliances posed.

The entire Ninigret book is filled with accounts of the tribes of our region. The reader will learn how the original Niantics split into two groups, the Western Niantic who allied themselves with the Pequot and Mohegans, and the Eastern Niantic who allied with the Narragansetts. From the conflict at Manisses (Block Island) to the alliances with the Pocumtucks, Mohawks, and others, this book is filled with intrigue, crisis and political upheaval and is told from a uniquely balanced point of view. Copies are available in hardcover from Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble, and other major booksellers for about \$22.36 plus shipping.

Veterans War Stories

A Book Review by Ann L. Smith

November 11 is Veterans Day (celebrated this year on November 10) and each year we all try to pause from our shopping and leisure activities to give tribute to those who served in our armed forces. For the baby-boomers of my generation, World War II and Korea are abstract realities. What we remember about Vietnam is the flag burnings, the protests at Kent State University and elsewhere, or maybe Country Joe and the Fish singing their war protest at Woodstock.

Folks born after us are even more estranged from the war stories of the veterans around us. Members of the younger set know only what they have seen in movies or taught in history class. Add to that the reluctance of our veterans to talk about themselves. The fact is, most are humble and often the memories are painful.

I recently picked up a copy of *Veterans War Stories* thanks to a timely donation from Robert Utter (of the now-closed "Other Tiger" bookstore). When the store closed earlier this year, two cases of this important work were returned to the Westerly Historical Society which sponsored this military history project and we wish to thank Mr. Utter for his kindness.

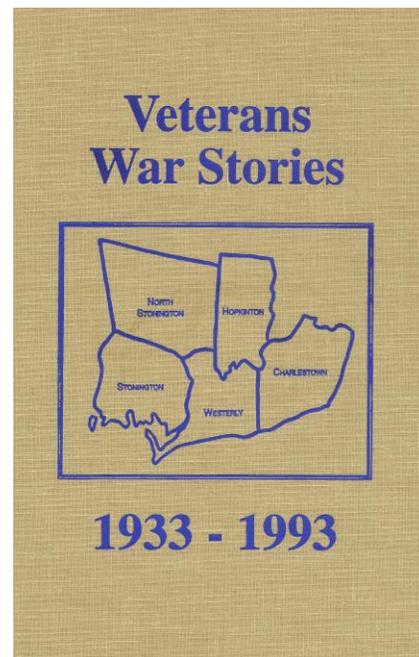
Veterans War Stories contains nearly 100 accounts of duty by brave men and women from Westerly and the surrounding area who served selflessly in our country's conflicts from 1933 to 1993. The profiles are of people our readers know, have met, or perhaps are related to. At least a few of the stories are about members of the Westerly Historical Society, like John Leach, Daniel LaPointe, and Henry Nardone.

Many of the interviews conducted during the compilation of this book were done by Julia B. Kerr who died just before the work was published. Dwight C. Brown, Jr., current board member of the Westerly Historical Society, and others contributed countless hours of their time to make this book a reality.

The stories themselves are poignant and up-front. Frank Canastar speaks openly about drug use by our troops in Vietnam. Lawrence Chick recounts the details of recovering stolen art treasures from the Germans in the salt mines at Merker. Michael (Micky) Levcowich talks about D-Day on the shores

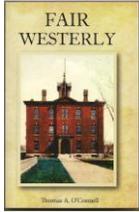
of Normandy and the liberation of Paris in August of 1944. Andrew S. Low, Jr. recounts how he was captured by the Germans and spent 273 days as a prisoner of war before being liberated in April 1945.

Anthony Leonetti's story about his role in the evacuation of about 1,000 Amer-Asian "orphans" out of Vietnam is particularly moving. The term "orphans" is used loosely here because many of the families willingly turned their children over to orphanages fearing the arrival of the North Vietnamese. They claimed that the children's parents had been killed when that may have not been the case. Some were days-old infants and others were older, up to about six or eight years of age.

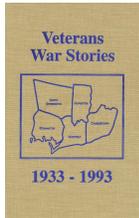


Many of the humble men and women whose stories appear in *Veterans War Stories* have died since this book first appeared in 1997, and many are still around. A great number suffered injuries and a few still have metal in their hips or shoulders to prove it.

We here at the Westerly Historical Society hope that you will spend some time this Veterans Day reading about our local military men and women. There is no better way to pay tribute to our veterans than by reading their stories. The reader will be moved and enlightened... guaranteed.
(See page 5 for ordering information.)



Fair Westerly (2014) Written, compiled, and edited by Thomas A. O'Connell, the book also includes essays written by Brad Benson, Dwight C. Brown, Jr., Joanna M. Burkhardt, Roberta M. Burkhardt, Anna North Coit, David P. Erskine, Gloria Russell, Bill Sullivan, Lorraine Tarkett-Arruda, Elizabeth A. Wood, and Thomas E. Wright. The book contains a complete index of people, events, and place names as well as lists of the society's publications since 1913 and other local history titles. 278 pp.



Veterans War Stories 1933-1993 (1997) Edited by George H. Utter II. This book was sponsored by the Westerly Historical Society and compiled by the Military History Committee, Julia Kerr, Chairwoman. Contains photographs of the men and women whose stories are compiled in this work. 235 pp.

Westerly Historical Society Book Order Form			
	Price	Quantity	Extended Price
<i>Fair Westerly</i> Written, compiled and edited by Thomas A. O'Connell	\$19.95		
<i>Veterans War Stories 1933-1993</i> George H. Utter, II editor	\$20.00		
Rhode Island Residents Add 7% Sales Tax			
Shipping within the United States			\$5.00
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Parting Shots

“Here’s Looking at You, Kid”

Here is an image of the Chief Ninigret statue as it looks today. It is located in the Watch Hill Village Park on Bay Street. Readers may not know that this statue was once part of a fountain that stood at the corner of Ninigret Avenue and Westerly Road -- water ran from the mouths of the two fish.

For more details of the history of the Ninigret fountain and an excellent account of Watch Hill’s Indian history (including Chief Ninigret and others) see *Watch Hill Through Time*, by Chaplin Bradford Barnes, published by the Watch Hill Conservancy in 2005. A .pdf version of *Watch Hill Through Time* is available for online viewing at <http://www.thewatchhillconservancy.org/books.html>

Hard copies of this book are also available for \$80.00 via the same web link.

PHOTO BY MARCEL KARSSIES

