



Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

April 2016

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Babcock-Smith House Museum Liaison Edward A. Fazio	

Calendar of Events-Continued

**The Babcock-Smith House Museum
Presents
John B. Coduri
"Bonner Monument Company
A Twentieth Century Company"
April 24, 2016 2:00 PM**



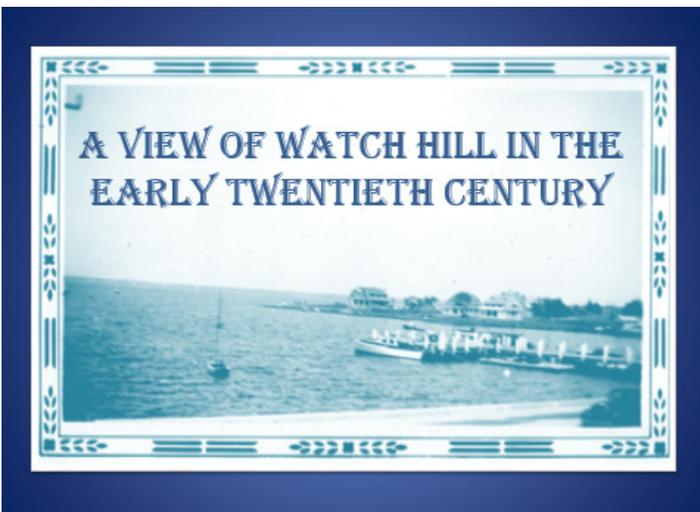
See the entire calendar of events for the
Babcock-Smith House Museum at
<http://www.babcocksmithhouse.org/>
(Click on "Events")

**Sunday Programs are held in the
Carriage House of the
Babcock-Smith House Museum
124 Granite Street
Westerly, RI**

Free Admission
to Westerly Historical Society Members and
Members of the Babcock-Smith House Museum
Admission for Non-Members: \$5.00
Memberships Available at:
<http://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/membership/>

Calendar of Events

**April 10, 2016 2:00 PM
Jane Maxson and Cheryl Bamberg
present
"A View of Watch Hill in the Early
Twentieth Century."**



*Annual Meeting and Dinner May 11
See Page 6*

Editor's Notes

Ann L. Smith

Anyone who has engaged in historical research has undoubtedly experienced some confusion in seeing the same names multiple times within a single family. As a beginner with no formal training in genealogical research I often erred by combining one person's history with another's due to the repetition of names across generations. Among Orlando Smith's descendants, for example, there are two more Orlandos, three Julias and at least three Sarahs. Maternal surnames carry forward as middle names among the many Smith descendants so the names Gallup, Chapman, and Raymond are seen over and over in different forms as well.

Here in Westerly I noticed how my husband's family had an affinity for the name "Dean" and all its variations. There was probably someone with the surname "Dean" way back in time, so we have relatives named D'Anne, Deanna (two), and two cousins named Dean born barely a year apart. (In case you are wondering, I have no connection to the Orlando Smiths, although the question comes up every now and then.) Those old maternal names like Koellner and Dean show up as middle names here and there too. Perhaps the perfect example of name duplication with our family is the fact that there are two Ann L. Smiths. A pair of gals named Ann with the same middle initial married two of the Spring Street Smiths. We have spent a good part of our adult lives keeping our identities separate ever since.

One way to enhance a family tree diagram (and avoid confusion) is to include likenesses of the members on the template itself. Managing media can be tricky though and is often very time-consuming. At one of my family reunions a couple of years ago we rolled out the old family tree diagram (about six feet wide) and invited everyone to match old photos to the names. While the project was great fun, the preparation was enormous. After sorting through mountains of old photos and emailed images, each chosen image had to be copied into a photo editor (our paper photos were scanned in) then digitally cropped and saved to a two-inch by three inch format. We chose a sepia finish for all the photos so as to disguise their age. Next came the printing and, finally, each image was inserted into a clear acrylic mini-document holder.

Of course, there are places like Charter Oak Scanning of Stonington, CT that specialize in transforming and printing old media and, looking back, I might have saved a lot of time (and money on supplies) if I had just taken the whole project to a professional.

The Westerly Historical Society was fortunate to have the good folks from Charter Oak Scanning on site in March and the owner, Robert Webb, gave a wonderful presentation on preserving historical media. Aside from gaining valuable knowledge on managing old photos, movies, and sound recordings, the program attendees were delightfully entertained by Mr. Webb's habit of peppering his presentation with varied nuggets of ethereal wisdom. Our program review of the Charter Oak Scanning presentation begins in this issue on page three.

Also in this issue we bring you our program review of the United Theatre talk given in February. Simon Holt and Tony Nunes shared their experiences with this ongoing project as well as giving us some insight into the rich history of this great Westerly landmark. We hope you enjoy "The United Theatre: Past Present and Future" beginning on page four.

Meg Barclay wrote us with a few comments about the photo we ran captioned, "Goodbye Winter (On Elm St.)! In part, "That does not look like 50 Elm Street to me. It looks like the house next door at 52 Elm St. The fence to the left would be in front of where 50 Elm St. is now. Number 50 is on a corner, so there would not be a fence next to it on the left." I too wondered if we had it wrong, and the fact is, there are several houses on Elm Street which sport black shutters against a white siding. We also learned that the house at 50 Elm Street was built for the head of the newly formed Bradford Dyeing Association but was sold back to the Sherman family, the builders, after only a short time. We thank you, Meg, for your comments and we look forward to your upcoming Babcock-Smith House Museum talk this June entitled, "Westerly, The First Years."

Lastly, our annual meeting and dinner will take place on Wednesday, May 11, 2016 at the Venice Restaurant on Shore Road in Westerly. This year's recipient of the "Julia" award, Gloria Russell, will be in attendance as we recognize another outstanding individual for her contributions to our local history over the years. See page six for complete details. An informative guest presentation is also planned.

Program Review: Preserving Your Memories at Charter Oak Scanning

By Ann L. Smith

"If you don't talk to your grandmother and she passes away, it's like the library burned down."

—Oscar Zeta Acosta

Robert Webb of Charter Oak Scanning began his presentation by talking about memories, histories, and trust. Even though most locals think of the bank by the same name when they hear "Charter Oak," the trust that the name suggests is more than appropriate whether your business is finance or preserving old memories.

History is created by societies. Pictures, videos, and film help to build our stories. When the VCR became popular several decades ago, many people took their old photos and home movies to scanning shops on order to preserve their memories on videotape. The "new" thing at the time was to sit around at family gatherings and play tapes of photo albums that had been converted into slideshows. A little guitar or piano music was usually added as background and voila! A good time was had by all.

Fast forward thirty years and the VCR is already a thing of the past. All is not lost, however. Whether your family history is deteriorating in a box full of videocassettes or kept as traditional photo albums, modern techniques can once again preserve whatever stories your family has to tell. With today's technology, modern scanning stores like Charter Oak Scanning are equipped to transform movies, slides, videotapes, paper photos, and sound recordings into the latest digital formats.



Before making the leap from old media to new, a few things relative to sorting old photos and slides need to happen first. Mr. Webb took us through the "ABC's of photo organizing" in order to explain what goes into making good photo collections.

"A is for Album," began Webb. Every good album should contain photos that are in focus, where the subjects' names are known, and that include as many different family members as possible. The aim is to create a collection that will provide value for future generations.

"B is for Box," is the second step to photo organizing. Duplicates, blurry prints, or photos of unknown subjects are best relegated to a shoebox or other suitable container for later distribution to family members. Mr. Webb recommends setting aside the "B" photos for family gatherings so that relatives can take them home and perhaps put names to the unknown faces or make albums of their own with the duplicates.

"C is for Can." Many of us find that we can't throw a photo away, but with the realization that some shots are not at all valuable, you can give yourself permission to remove certain prints or slides from your collection.

Once a person has a set of "A" photos the next step is to organize them for scanning. Mr. Webb recommends taking a set of related photos, putting them in chronological order, and placing them in a sandwich bag with a card that lists the subject(s), place, and year. A typical photo album will cost between \$30 and \$50 to scan and can be stored on DVD or thumb drive. A DVD album can hold about 200 photos and a thumb drive can store even more. For the nostalgic ones among us, albums can be saved to DVD for video playback in slideshow format. Audio soundtracks can be added for effect.

The benefits of digitizing one's photos include the fact that, once scanned, digital photos can be shared with a much larger audience. Most of us are already familiar with online pictures shared via social media. A single photo can be shared with an unlimited number of individuals in a mere millisecond. But the proliferation of digital photos presents another problem for techno-savvy, I-phone-toting shutterbugs. Sooner or later smart phones run out of storage space and valuable pictures sometimes wind up in the virtual trash bin.

Just as with old paper photos, an oversized collection of digital photos should be given the

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Program Review: The United Theatre, Past Present, and Future

By Ann L. Smith

At ninety years old, the United Theatre is certainly not the oldest building in Westerly, but after hearing a recent talk by the people who are working to preserve it, the United Theatre may soon be one of the most popular places in town. The Westerly Historical Society was joined on February 21st by Simon Holt and Tony Nunes who shared with us not only some history of the United Theatre but plans for programs and renovations to come.

For years after it opened The United Theatre was the place to go for live shows followed by a movie. For decades after that, it was where kids went on Saturday afternoons to catch the matinee. Their parents and older siblings would go there at night on dates, just like so many theaters in so many towns across America in the twentieth-century. For those forty-somethings and older, most remember how the movie *Star Wars* played at the United for an entire year in 1977. Not more than a decade later, however, the theater would fall into disrepair and be abandoned and shuttered for the next twenty years.

In 2006 the property was “rescued” by the Westerly Land Trust with the intention of making the United Theatre a new entertainment and cultural hub for Westerly and its environs. Delving into the long-forgotten artifacts found within the building led to much historical research about the physical structure as well as the types of entertainment that were once offered there. Simon Holt, the executive director, spoke about how the original marquis blew down during the great hurricane of 1938. Although it was preserved and put in storage, a more modern, triangular marquis was put up in place of the original and remained there until the theater closed in 1986.

Even before the loss of the marquis, other little-known events and circumstances make up the rich history of the United Theatre. The Bliven Opera House at 110 Main Street (between Union Street and the current McQuades Market) was actually the first theater in Westerly. Opened in 1888, it showed silent films until it was destroyed by fire in 1925. By 1926, the United Theatre had opened and was showing silent films accompanied by music performed on a pipe organ. The United Theatre was the only area theater to have a pipe organ on its premises.

In 1929, the United Theatre was the first movie theater in the area to showcase movies with sound, or “talkies,” as they were known. Patrons of the United Theatre were usually entertained by a stage show prior to the film showing, but by 1933 the vaudeville acts had mostly ended. The likes of Eddie Cooke and the Shaw Sisters were gone, but not before The United Theatre played host to the Will Mastin Trio, pictured below.



THE WILL MASTIN TRIO:
SAMMY DAVIS SR, SAMMY DAVIS JR, AND WILL MASTIN
(WIKIPEDIA)

In 1955 the United Theatre made the transition to Cinemascope, a new format for movies. The eighteen-foot screen was replaced by a forty-foot version and in 1956 all the seats were replaced. The old seats were saved in storage, however. An advertisement in the Westerly Sun ran seeking a candidate to fill the position of “movie theater matron” whose job it was to keep the underage (and mostly unaccompanied) patrons in tow.

Today the Westerly Land Trust’s vision for the United Theatre is still in the making. In 2014 a variety of programs were offered as a way to test different entertainment genres. A performance by classical pianist Vijay Venkatesh, “Jazz at the United,” “Vaudeville Variety,” and the showing of a silent film, “The Cameraman” were all part of the lineup.

The following year saw shows such as the Berklee
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Preserving Your Memories

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“ABC” treatment. That is, before dumping last year’s digital photos from one’s camera phone, it may be worthwhile to organize them and create albums for future generations. The finished product can be delivered on a disc or thumb drive, or the photos can be preserved in story-book format if the customer wishes. These photo-book albums have been available for several years from places like Shutterfly.com. Now Charter Oak Scanning also makes it possible for people to preserve their photo memories in a hard-bound volume that resembles a children’s story book.



Whether your aim is to convert slides and prints to digital format or create prints from electronically stored images, the staff at Charter Oak Scanning can handle almost any request. The Webb family offers a free one-hour consulting service to help you organize your memories into the perfect album. Damaged photos, prints that are stuck to one another, and fragile films and video can all be handled at their Stonington location. Their graphic arts specialists have experience in photo retouching and can remove faces and objects from photographs upon request. (This kind of request is more common than one might imagine, according to Robert Webb.)

Perhaps the best take-away from the time spent with the Webb family is Mr. Webb’s point that a society is made up of its stories. Its people’s desires, goals, and accomplishments form the character of any group at any given point in time. Aside from written accounts, preserving stories of various groups through visual and auditory media is the only way to stay connected in a real sense with people and events from our past.

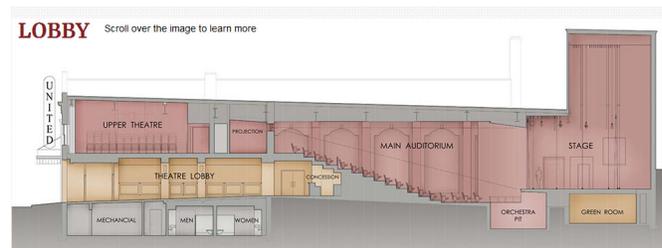
Charter Oak Scanning is located in Studio 4A at the Velvet Mill, 22 Bayview Avenue in Stonington CT. To learn more about preserving your memories, please visit www.charteroakscanning.com

The United Theatre

(continued from page 4)

Silent Film Orchestra, whose members are students at the Boston’s Berklee College of Music. The Berklee Silent Film Orchestra (BSFO) is dedicated to composing new, original scores for silent classics and performing them live. There was a sell-out crowd for 2015’s “Comedy Night” and “Movies in the Park” proved to be wildly popular with costumed movie characters interacting with the patrons.

Aside from testing the popularity of various programs, these kinds of events raise much needed funds to support the work of the Westerly Land Trust. There are three major phases of planned work on the drawing board for the United Theatre and the scope of the work described is daunting. A complete overhaul of the interior of the building including new lavatories, HVAC systems, and a 48-seat storefront “legacy” theater are all in the works. The unusual cooling system had used a system of copper pipes through which cool water was circulated. A fine mist was sprayed over the audience from an airplane propeller located at the center of the ceiling. The legacy theater will be set up with historic décor, (minus the propeller) adjacent to the main lobby and will be a fully functional viewing salon suitable for private parties.



CONCEPTUAL DIAGRAM OF THE UNITED THEATRE

The United Theatre website contains an interactive floor plan of all three levels under reconstruction. Users can “hover” over any section of the drawings to view expanded details of each area. When the project is completed, The United Theatre will be a multi-media, multi-cultural center of entertainment in the heart of Westerly. A perfect complement to our existing entertainment centers such as the Knickerbocker and the Granite Theatre, the United Theatre expects to offer entertainment that will appeal to every demographic. During the reconstruction, programs of different genres will continue to be offered. Plans for “Movies in the Park” this summer are already underway. For more information visit <http://www.unitedtheatre.org>

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



Westerly Historical Society Annual Meeting and Dinner Ticket Order Form

Location: Venice Restaurant
165 Shore Road, Westerly RI 02891

Please send me ____ tickets for the
Westerly Historical Society Annual Meeting
and Reception on May 11, 2016 @ \$26.00
each.

Enclosed please find my check for \$ _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____

State and Postal Code _____

Please indicate your entrée preference(s):

Chicken Piccata _____

Baked Cod _____

Cocktails at 5:30 PM
Dinner will be served at 6:00 PM

Send this form with your check or money
order before April 28th to:

Westerly Historical Society
PO Box 91
Westerly, RI 02891

**Internet orders may be placed on our
website at**
<http://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/annual-meeting>

**or click on the words “Annual Meeting”
from our home page.**