



# Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

April 2017

## Westerly Historical Society Officers 2016-2017

<b>President</b> Thomas J. Gulluscio, Jr.	<b>Membership Chair</b> Joanne Pendola
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<b>Babcock-Smith House Museum Liaison</b> Edward A. Fazio	

## Calendar of Events

### *Annual Meeting May 17*

Westerly Historical Society  
**Annual Meeting and Dinner**  
Wednesday, May 17, 2017  
Cocktails 5:30 PM  
Dinner 6:00 PM  
Annual Recap of Activities  
Financial Report

Guest Speaker: Dwight C. Brown, Jr.

### "The Wreck of the Granville R. Bacon" (Weekapaug 1933)

Presentation of the "Julia" Award  
This Year's Julia Award Recipient is  
*Dwight C. Brown, Jr.*  
See page 6  
For Ticket Order Form

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BATTLE OF LAKE ERIE ENGRAVING  
PHOTO: ONONDAGA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

The Babcock-Smith House Museum  
Will host a Free Children's Program  
**"Sampling History's Mysteries"**  
Saturday, May 13, 2017-10:00-12:00  
Presented by the  
South County Sampler Initiative  
Recommended for grades K-6  
**Reservations Required**  
Call 401.315.2768 or see

<http://www.babcocksmithhouse.org/BabcockSmithHouse/events.htm>

## Editor's Notes

Ann L. Smith

While the quote, "The only thing constant is change" is commonly misattributed to Heraclitus, scholars generally agree that he did say, "Life is flux." And so it is at the Westerly Historical Society as we recently learned of the resignation of our archivist, Janice Tunney. After years of dedicated service to both the Westerly Historical Society and the Babcock-Smith House Museum, Jan will continue as a general member of the Westerly Historical Society while focusing her volunteer efforts on the Babcock-Smith House Museum. Jan has graciously offered her ongoing assistance as we transition her duties to our next, and yet unnamed, archivist. (See the insert below for a full description of the archivist's duties if you or a friend might be interested in taking on this worthwhile and fulfilling job.)

Our most recent lecture was presented by Elizabeth D. Warburton, Senior Architectural Historian, Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, who spoke on the National Register of Historic Places and historic preservation in Westerly. What a great lead-up to the Commission's annual statewide conference which will be held here in Westerly on April 29, 2017. This all-day event features seminars and tours to educate attendees about our area's historic places. Conference locations include the Watch Hill Chapel, the Ocean House, and One Bay Street at the recently rehabbed Lanphear Livery Stable. Registrants will explore historic Watch Hill on foot, from the lighthouse to the Ocean House, the Flying Horse Carousel to the summer cottages perched on the bluffs. There will be a cruise up the Pawcatuck River or by Napatree Point. Tours will showcase exciting projects and special places from the United Theatre and Grey Sail Brewing in Westerly to the villages of Quononchontaug and Cross Mills in Charlestown. Registration is filling up quickly and closes on April 17. Interested parties can gather more information by visiting <http://www.preservation.ri.gov/> (Then click on "Register for the Annual Conference" in the upper right corner. Cost is \$50.00 per person.)

We are pleased to announce that our previous lecture presentations will soon be available on YouTube as we are in the process of setting up our own YouTube channel. Details to follow soon in this space and at <https://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org>

Our annual meeting and dinner is rapidly approaching and we hope you will join us on Wednesday, May 17 for this exciting night out. As you will have already noted, our own Dwight C. Brown, Jr. is the recipient of this year's "Julia" award and he will also be our featured speaker. Dwight's short presentation will be on the wreck of the *Granville R. Bacon*. See page six for ticket info.

In this issue we have a short recap of our March 2017 lecture on historic sewing patterns given by URI Professor Emerita Joy Spanabel Emery. (See page 3.)

Our feature article is on the Battle of Lake Erie and it is based on the writings of Mary Agnes Best in *The Town That Saved a State: Westerly*. Even though the accounts of this particular battle are many and the details are well-known, the role played by Oliver Hazard Perry is unique. His staunch and valiant efforts not only won the battle, but this singular victory is said to have won the entire War of 1812 for the Americans. The war would not officially end until more than a year after Erie was over, but Perry's unlikely win for the United States no doubt turned the tide in our favor. The story begins on page 5.

### ARCHIVIST WANTED

The Archivist manages the Historical Society's collection, which consists primarily of hundreds of glass plates negatives and related digital images, photographs, publications and other ephemera.

The Archivist responds to inquiries from both Society members and the public, often requiring searches of the digital archives for requested images as well as some knowledge of local history, and maintains the appropriate records. Working with the Collections Committee, the archivist accepts additions to the collection which meet established criteria, organizes items in the vault as necessary and performs recordkeeping using PastPerfect, the Society's collection management software.

Interested parties may contact [whspresident@gmail.com](mailto:whspresident@gmail.com) for more information.

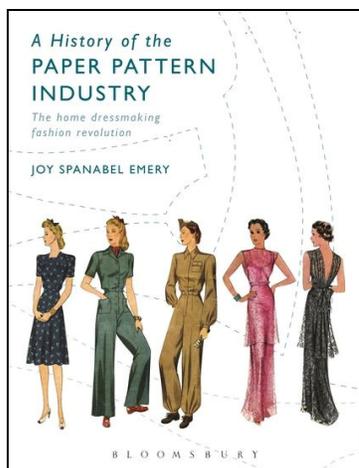
**Correction:** In the March 2017 issue of *Westerly's Witness*, page 3, the Chancellor of Germany was referred to as "Andrea Merkel." Ms. Merkel is known as "Angela Merkel." We regret this error.

# Program Review: Professor Joy Spanabel Emery on Historic Sewing Patterns

By Ann L. Smith

If you've ever sewn a garment from scratch, it may be hard to imagine how clothes could ever have been made without patterns. The fact is mass-produced sewing patterns as we know them are a twentieth-century novelty. Before that, what folks relied on for patterns bears little resemblance to the Simplicity or Butterick patterns so widely available today.

The Westerly Historical Society was pleased to welcome Professor Emerita Joy Spanabel Emery on March 5, 2017 as our guest lecturer of the month. Professor Emery, curator of the Commercial Pattern Archive at URI, has published a book, *A History of the Paper Pattern Industry* (Bloomsbury Press). Prof. Emery took us on a journey through time beginning with the first known clothing patterns dating back to 1589.



None of the first patterns nor those in the following two to three hundred years was printed to scale, however. Large sheets of paper were not widely available so only the smallest clothing (infants') could be printed true-to-size. There were no standard sizes in the early days nor were sketches of the finished products made available in most cases.

By the late 1800s, clothing sizes started to appear on patterns. Children's sizes went according to age (much as they do today) and adult sizes were assigned according to bust size for women or chest size for men. Waist sizes were relatively small but the designers presumed that the user would be corseted according to the custom of the time.

The Demorest Pattern Emporium of New York City was the first company to put patterns into envelopes or "bags." The mass-production

techniques introduced by Demorest were so efficient that they endured for nearly a century, even though the company ceased operation in 1887. At that time Ebenezer Butterick had developed his own system for the mass-production of paper patterns and was awarded patents for his methods. The competition from Butterick rapidly forced the closing of Demorest Patterns.

The Vogue company began in 1899 but its first pattern did not appear until 1931. The first copyrights for printed patterns were secured by McCall's in 1923. Like Vogue, Simplicity started selling printed patterns in 1931 and these are still regarded as the simplest patterns to use. It was Simplicity that introduced the concept of multiple views. That is, a basic design can be customized with the options provided so as to create differing styles.

Through time there have been many pattern companies, some of which are no longer in business. Conde Nast, for example, introduced its "Hollywood" line in 1932. DuBarry, a division of Simplicity made the scene in 1931. The "Advance" pattern line began in 1933 and was available for a time through J. C. Penney.

During the Great Depression and throughout the World War II era, certain novelty patterns appeared such as the "feed-bag" dress and the "Victory" apron. At one time a pattern appeared with instructions for fashioning a lady's outfit out of a man's used suit.

The Commercial Pattern Archive begun by Prof. Emery at URI contains over 61,000 designs and includes over 40,000 images in its database. One of the earliest designs in the collection dates back to 1847 and is for a French lady's jacket. The collection serves as a valuable resource for entertainment wardrobe professionals. Costuming historical characters in the correct outfits for the period being portrayed is essential in maintaining accuracy.

The archive is open to researchers by appointment and is located in Special Collections in the University of Rhode Island Library. To schedule an appointment, parties may contact Joy Emery by e-mail at [jemery@uri.edu](mailto:jemery@uri.edu) or by telephone at (401) 874-2713.

# *Oliver Hazard Perry and The Battle of Lake Erie*

*By Ann L. Smith*

If asked to state where Oliver Hazard Perry was from, many people might say Newport. While he was educated in Newport, Oliver H. Perry was born in South Kingstown. He also lived near relatives on Main Street in Westerly for a time with his father, United States Navy Captain Christopher Raymond Perry. The younger Perry was assigned to oversee the construction of gunboats here at the age of 23 but had by that time already served ten years in the United States Navy.

At twelve years of age, Perry sailed with his father to the West Indies aboard the USS *General Nathaniel Greene*. Within one year he was appointed a midshipman in the United States Navy at the age of thirteen. During his early career he served on several ships including the USS *Adams*, USS *Nautilus*, USS *Essex*, and the USS *Constitution*. Beginning in April 1809, he commanded the sloop USS *Revenge*, engaging in patrol duties to enforce the Embargo Act, as well as a successful raid to regain an American ship held in Spanish territory in Florida. On January 9, 1811, *Revenge* ran aground at Watch Hill on its way from Newport to New London and was lost.

Following the wreck of the *Revenge*, Perry was found not guilty at court-marshal and given a leave of absence. He married Elizabeth Champlin Mason of Newport with whom he would eventually have five children. By the time the War of 1812 broke out, Perry was eager to see action but two factors stifled his dreams. The U.S. government was concentrating all its efforts on the army, and, after the loss of the *Revenge*, Oliver Hazard Perry was not as well favored in the eyes of the Naval command as he had been before.

Not one to sulk, Perry carried out his duties commanding a flotilla to guard the coast. He started a recruiting station at New London and went about drilling his men.

A certain Daniel Dobbins had escaped British capture at Detroit and brought information to Paul Hamilton, Secretary of the Navy. Dobbins saw the need for more ships on the Great Lakes and was dispatched to build four gunboats there. Perry heard of Dobbins' assurances that this war would be decided on Lake Erie, and, aided by the lobbying efforts of the Rhode Island senator Jeremiah B. Howell, Master Commandant Oliver Hazard Perry took command of the Lake Erie squadron.

Making the journey northward was arduous and long. The January snows of 1813 covered the trails and, hacking through underbrush, Perry would barely advance three miles in a day at times, going on foot or on horseback as the situation demanded.

Upon arriving at Lake Erie Perry found Dobbins already at work. Working without nails they fashioned wooden pegs from the unseasoned lumber and proceeded to build their ships out of seemingly nothing. There was no iron, no copper, no sailcloth and no ammunition. The food supplies were so meager that the workers rebelled. Supplies began to arrive from great distances but at great expense. It would cost a thousand dollars to bring in a cannon, and pack horses died from the strain.

Finally and against all odds, the fleet was floated just two hundred days from the time Perry left home. There was just one problem: they had no men to sail the boats. Perry wrote to Washington and General Harrison finally sent him some men, many of whom had never seen a ship. Perry wrote again in exasperation, "For God's sake and yours and mine, send me men." Perry was sick with "lake fever" (malaria) as were half the men, as he neared a state of desperation. Finally some officers and seamen arrived and the time had arrived to plan a course of action.

Perry's predecessor at Lake Erie, Captain Jesse Elliot, had been sent to serve on board the flagship USS *Madison*, and took part in the Battle of York and the Battle of Fort George. He was promoted to master commandant in July of 1813 and reassigned to the Lake Erie squadron, to serve as Commodore Perry's second-in-command.

By August of 1813, both the British and the Americans knew that a battle on the Great Lakes was imminent. The British Commander Barclay, a veteran who had served with Nelson, regarded his men as seasoned marines, whereas Perry's band of "bastards and outlaws" sailing a few fir-built frigates, did not stand a chance in Barclay's eyes. But what the British commander lacked in humility, Perry matched in prudence.

Perry was to command the *Lawrence* with Elliot

*(continued on next page)*

## *The Battle of Lake Erie*

(continued from page 4)

sailing the *Niagra*. Perry named the *Lawrence* for James Lawrence, a fellow naval officer and dear friend who died earlier that year aboard the frigate *Chesapeake* fighting the British near Boston. Captain Lawrence's famous last words to his men were, "Don't give up the ship!" as he was carried below decks and died shortly thereafter from his wounds. The *Niagra*, like the *Lawrence*, was a 118 foot, two-masted ship built with thick oak, with 18 32-pound carronades, which were short, smooth short-range cannons, and two long-range 12-pound long guns.

Master Commandant Perry ordered a flag to be sewn with Lawrence's famous last words. It is said to have been a large blue banner with white lettering and missing the apostrophe. Nevertheless, he carried it into battle aboard the *Lawrence* as an inspiration of morale for himself and his crew.

Mary Agnes Best writing of the account 125 years or so later offered this breathtaking account.

Captain [sic] Elliot commanding the *Niagra*, the best ship of the fleet, was to support the flagship [*Lawrence*] and attack the *Queen Charlotte*, the leading enemy vessel. To the amazement of all Elliot kept out of the conflict until the American fleet had been battered, Perry's flagship shot to pieces and most of her valiant officers and men killed or disabled. Then the untouched *Niagra* sauntered slowly up, still out of enemy range. Puzzled, Perry leaped into a small boat and amid a shower of shot was rowed to the *Niagra*. William Sweet Peckham of Westerly who stood by his side was killed. With "unspeakable pain" the Commander saw the American flag lowered on his dismantled flagship, but the British failed to take possession, and as Perry raised his flag on the *Niagra* had the pleasure of seeing the Stars and Stripes go up again on the disabled *Lawrence*, named for the gallant officer whose dying words were: "Don't give up the ship." Perry quickly fought his way through the enemy fleet, crippled it, destroyed the flagship, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing the white flag wave.

The British commander, meanwhile, had gone below decks assuming that he had already won the battle. The "bastards and outlaws" however, had fought with exceptional bravery and Perry through

extraordinary prudence and planning, wrested victory from defeat. A further quote from Mary Agnes Best sums up the result of Lake Erie this way.

On that day the cherished scheme of the British, the conquest of the great west for annexation to Canada went aglimmering. The west as well as the war was won on Lake Erie, by the bulldog tenacity of Dobbins, Perry and his unskilled men.

Perry notified his friend and sympathizer, General Harrison, that the battle had been won and sent the famous message, "We have met the enemy and they are ours."



THE BRIG NIAGRA

COURTESY OF THE PENNSYLVANIA CENTER FOR THE BOOK

King George IV explained to Parliament that the battle was lost due to the British fleet having "arrived too late along the St. Lawrence."

Master Commandant Elliot won distinction for his actions and official praise from Perry, and was given command of the Lake Erie squadron the next month. There was nevertheless controversy over his actions during the battle. Some (including Perry) suspected that he had deliberately held *Niagara* out of the battle in the beginning, and they would feud over this point to the end of their lives.

On January 6, 1814, Perry was honored with a Congressional Gold Medal, the thanks of Congress, and a promotion to the rank of Captain. Oliver Hazard Perry served the U.S. Navy on several other missions until his death from yellow fever in 1819. He was 34 years old. His grave is located in Newport's Island Cemetery.

**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 17, 2017 @ \$26.00 ea.

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 May 10th to:

**Westerly Historical Society**  
**PO Box 91**  
**Westerly, RI 02891**

**Internet orders may be placed on our  
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or click on the words “**Annual Meeting**” from  
our home page.