



Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

Summer 2017

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Calendar of Events

The Babcock-Smith House Museum
Welcomes
***This Needlework of Mine: Historic
Samplers of Rhode Island***
Sunday, June 4, 2:00-3:30 pm
Presented by South County Sampler Initiative

Last fall people brought in samplers to be documented as part of the South County Sampler Initiative. This program will share the findings of that documentation and explore the history of schoolgirl samplers. Samplers from the Museum will be on display and audience members are invited to bring their own samplers. This program is offered as part of the South County Sampler Initiative funded by the RI Council for the Humanities.

At the Carriage House. Program is free to all.
<http://www.babcocksmithhouse.org/BabcockSmithHouse/events.htm>

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Our New Outdoor Sign—Coming Soon!

Upcoming Events sponsored by the Westerly Historical Society will be listed on our website:

<https://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org>

Please watch your email and visit our site throughout the summer for latest news and information.

Editor's Notes

Ann L. Smith

Our summer hiatus is upon us and so we bring you this shortened version of *Westerly's Witness* in order to tie up our loose ends as we go our separate ways. We had another lovely dinner at the Venice Restaurant as we took care of the business of our annual meeting. Dwight C. Brown, Jr. accepted the Westerly Historical Society's *Julia* award for his lifetime contributions to our local history and entertained us all with his colorful account of the wreck of the *Granville R. Bacon*.

We were joined by our two newest members, Zachary and Anna Garceau and are pleased to announce that Zachary Garceau has agreed to fill our archivist position. Zack has a bachelor's degree in history from URI and a Master's degree in public history from the University of Maryland. He is currently employed at the New England Historic Genealogical Society in Boston, but will still assist our collections committee at our Monday evening work sessions. Welcome Zachary!



DWIGHT C. BROWN, JR.

Pamela Scott, our program chairperson, is currently working on our upcoming program lineup. Details will follow as soon as dates and times can be firmed up with our speakers. Until then, we invite you to visit our website (<https://WesterlyHistoricalSociety.org/calendar>) and keep checking your email for updates.

If you missed our April speaker, a short recap appears on the following page.

Lastly, we are most grateful to our 2016-2017 benefactors, patrons, and sustaining members whose names appear at right. Your generous contributions enable us to continue our important mission of preserving memories of the past. Thank you all.

2016-2017 Contributors

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Program Review: RI Historical Preservation Commission

By Ann L. Smith

On April 2, Jane Elizabeth D. Warburton, Senior Architectural Historian, Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission spoke on the National Register of Historic Places and historic preservation in Westerly. Attendees learned the background of historical preservation in the U.S. and were informed as to what makes a property eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Congress established a preservation program for the United States in 1966 with the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act. This act established the National Register of Historic Places and is a division of the National Park Service. Each of the fifty states has a Historical Preservation Commission and our state's offices are located in Providence, RI. The fifteen-member staff is appointed by the governor and its mission is to identify and protect historic sites within the state. In fulfilling this mission the commission recognizes the historic value of notable properties and raises public awareness of them. Once made part of the National Register, selected properties are made eligible for grants, loans, and tax incentives.

Contrary to popular belief, making the list of historic places does not prevent a property from being altered, require it to be open to the public, or require that it be rehabilitated. If a property is destroyed or demolished, it is simply de-listed. Take for example the George Kent Performance Hall on High Street in Westerly. Formerly the site of Immaculate Conception Church, it is listed on the National Register as "Immaculate Conception Church." The site name is chosen based on the history of the property and does not change with changes in its use. And while the concert hall welcomes visitors during performances, it is not required to remain open for public tours.

Places of worship in general do not enjoy any particular advantage in the selection process, even though their members rightfully regard them as places to be revered and recognized. Whether or not a property is a place of worship, all nominations are considered based on four important criteria:

A. The property must represent a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history, such as those used in the mill industry.

- B. The property is associated with the lives of persons who were significant in our past.
- C. The architecture represents characteristics of a type, method or period, or the architecture represents the work of a master.
- D. The property has yielded or is likely to yield information important to our prehistory or history.

Westerly has fifteen sites on the National Register including the Flying Horse Carousel in Watch Hill, the Dr. Joshua Babcock House (the Babcock-Smith House Museum) and the Westerly's newest addition, the Perry Homestead Historic District on Margin and Beach Streets. To view the complete listing, visit

<http://www.preservation.ri.gov/register/riproperties.php>

Online Review of RI History Features Work of Thomas A. O'Connell

We are once again pleased to announce that the work of local author and Westerly Historical Society board member, Thomas A. O'Connell has been published by the *Online Review of Rhode Island History* (SmallStateBigHistory.com.) "Westerly Boys Compete for the Marbles Championships of 1931 and 1932," by Thomas A. O'Connell was published May 20, 2017 and can be viewed at <http://smallstatebighistory.com/westerly-boys-competite-marbles-championships-1931-1932/>

In the depths of the Great Depression, Westerly sent her most skilled champions to the state marbles finals for two years in a row. The competitors, whose family names are familiar to this day, made headlines in *The Westerly Sun* and elsewhere. Tom O'Connell takes us back in time to when an entire town followed their sons from the local meets on High Street to the state finals in Providence. Readers will find this a delightful story, suspensefully but patiently retold in the inimitable O'Connell style.

Christian McBurney, previous guest lecturer at the Westerly Historical Society, is the editor and publisher of *The Online Review of Rhode Island History*.

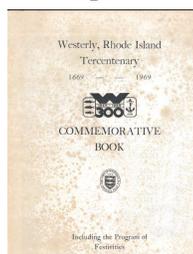
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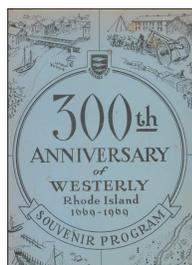
Sesquarcentennial or Semiseptcentennial? Either Way It's a Mouthful!

The Town of Westerly will celebrate its 350th anniversary in 2019 which is just over eighteen months away. Council members of the town have begun preparations and will be enlisting the help of local historians, librarians, interested parties and anyone who remembers the things we did the last time our town hit a milestone (that would have been 1969 for those who are counting!).

People debated the difference between the terms “tercentenary” and “tricentennial” back then, but deciding what to call a **350th** anniversary is an even knottier problem than before.



1969
SOUVENIR
BOOKLETS



According to Wikipedia, “sesquarcentennial” is a modern coined term for 350 years and is deduced from the “sestertius” definition for 250 years. To express 2½ in Latin it would be expressed as “half-three”. (The term relates to being halfway [from the second] to the third integer. In Latin this is “sestertius” which is a contraction of semis (halfway) tertius (third)—hence sestercentennial.) For 350 years it relates to being halfway from the third to the fourth integer; thus a contraction of semis (halfway) and quartus (fourth); hence sesquarcentennial.

According to Wikipedia, “semiseptcentennial” is probably a modern coined term: semi- (half) × sept(7) × cen(t)- (100) × centennial (350 years). It seems that other towns have opted for this second, preferred term as was the case in Block Island in 2011. Whatever we wind up calling it, Westerly will be in for one fantastic anniversary. Maybe we should start our celebration year with a contest as to what to call it. – ALS