



Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

September 2015

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Babcock-Smith House Museum Liaison Edward A. Fazio	

Calendar of Events-Continued

October 18, 2015

Steamboats of the Pawcatuck River



Ann L. Smith, Westerly Historical Society newsletter editor and treasurer, will give a talk entitled, "Steamboats of the Pawcatuck River" on Sunday, October 18, 2015 at 2:00 P.M. Ms. Smith has done extensive research on this subject as preparation for the museum exhibit by the same name which ran at the Babcock-Smith House Museum during the summer of this year. In addition, Ann Smith contributed two feature articles about the Pawcatuck River steamboats to the Westerly Historical Society's newsletter last season.

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

**Sundays at 2:00 PM
Free Admission**

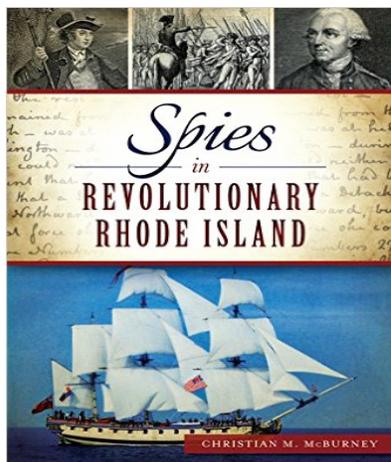
to Westerly Historical Society Members and
Members of the Babcock-Smith House Museum
Admission for Non-Members: \$5.00
Memberships Available at:

<http://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/membership/>

Calendar of Events

September 13, 2015

Spies in Revolutionary Rhode Island



Christian McBurney, historian, author, publisher, and editor-in-chief of *The Online Review of Rhode Island History* will discuss his book *Spies in Revolutionary Rhode Island* on Sunday, September 13 at 2:00 PM. Mr. McBurney, for the first time, unravels the world of spies and covert operations in Rhode Island during the Revolutionary War.

Editor's Notes

Ann L. Smith

We wrapped up last season with a wonderful dinner at the Venice Restaurant as we attended to the business of our 2015 annual meeting. Our featured speaker, Fran Muller from Mystic Seaport, gave an informative talk about the Mystic Seaport Museum and its programs. Through the use of photographs taken in and around the museum, our guests were treated to an inside look at what it takes to rebuild and restore the many historic sailing vessels in the collection such as the *Morgan* and the *Pilgrim*.

Tom O'Connell received the 2015 Julia Award for his years of dedication to the Westerly Historical Society. His many books on Westerly's history as well as his decade-long commitment to our newsletter has put Tom into a class by himself. No other writer of our time has written as much on, nor dedicated more hours to, the preservation of our local history. Pictured below is Tom O'Connell as he delivered his acceptance speech for the Julia Award.



Our publications committee came to the stark realization shortly thereafter that one of Tom O'Connell's earlier works, *Westerly's Gold: Her People*, has been sold out. This volume, published in 2003, is now being prepared for its second printing and is planned for distribution in early 2016. This important work continues to be a sought-after resource for local historians and for all the people who are descendants of its many colorful characters.

We would be remiss if we did not mention another of our dedicated authors whose work is also soon to appear in its second printing. Dwight C. Brown, Jr., archivist emeritus of the Westerly

Historical Society and author of several books and numerous articles on Westerly history compiled *Leaves of My Journal* from a series of articles published in the *Narragansett Weekly* in 1861. The articles, written by the anonymous "A. Whaler," recount a two-year whaling voyage in the 1840s. With reference to his journal from the times, the author provides a first-hand account of a greenhorn's experiences on a whale ship sailing from New Bedford Massachusetts, around Cape Horn to the Hawaiian Islands, Sea of Japan, Sea of Okhotsk, New Zealand, and back to his home port.

Dwight Brown spent hours researching, compiling, and transcribing these writings for the sake of preserving them for future generations. The volume is dedicated to his late wife Anna. (See related piece "In Memoriam" on page six of this newsletter.)

Then for our first newsletter of the 2015-2016 season we thought it more than appropriate to bring you an excerpt from *Leaves of My Journal* in order that we might whet your appetites for this latest publication of the Westerly Historical Society.

We have also included a short recap of the April 2015 program given by Anne Snowden Johnson on the history of the Watch Hill Lighthouse. Every seat was taken as Ms. Johnson related the history of the Watch Hill Light from its earliest days to the present. The best "take-away" was learning that Westerly has a third museum in addition to our armory and the Babcock-Smith House Museum. The Watch Hill Lighthouse Keepers Association continues to face new challenges as projects take place for the maintenance and improvement of this important landmark.

Lastly, words cannot express the deep loss we have all felt at the passing of one of Westerly's most beloved citizens, Isaac (Ike) Gallup Smith. Ike left our midst on August 9 at the age of 93 after a long and debilitating illness which he heroically endured. (See insert "In Memoriam" on page 6.) Ike and his widow Gertrude have supported the Babcock-Smith House Museum and the Westerly Historical Society with their many gifts of time, talent and treasures over the last several decades. We wish to publicly express our condolences to Gert, Ike's daughter Linda Smith Chaffee, and all the members of the Smith family at this deeply sorrowful time.

Excerpt from *Leaves of My Journal* by A. Whaler

Compiled by Dwight C. Brown, Jr.

[Editor's note: see previous page for background information on the upcoming publication of *Leaves of My Journal* by A. Whaler. *Lahaina* is situated on the island of Maui, Hawaii.]

"LAHAINA"

Feb. 6th. Let go our anchor in the roadstead at Lahaina. This was the first time our ship had swung to her moorings since leaving New Bedford, and it seemed as though she unconsciously felt a kind of satisfaction in thus finding herself at rest after six months constant labor, and some of it severe and exceedingly trying to her timbers and fastenings. It was peculiarly refreshing to us to inhale the land breeze as it came to us laden with the perfumes of tropical vegetation. The little towns built along the water's edge seemed nestled snugly among the coconut trees, and the few white framed buildings, scattered here and there, were in pleasant contrast to the rows of grass huts, the abodes of the natives.

The land gradually rises from the coast until it is lost among the clouds that always hang over it. A blue mist spreads over the intervening landscape, through which the alternate light and shadow can be seen, like blushes over the face of a veiled maiden. Upon the side of this elevation stands the missionary school of Lahaina Luna. It secures one of the pleasantest sites on the island, and is some two miles from the harbor. Deep gulches, caused by the descending floods during the rainy season, lead down the side of the mountain through which the detritus is carried to the level land below. Of course the soil is washed off and made to enrich the gardens at the base.

The island itself is of volcanic origin, having been heaved up during some sudden convulsion of nature in remote ages. Extinct craters are visible, showing where the pent up fires spend their fury, and masses of lava indicate the violence of their eruptions. Coral insects have erected their structures along the shore, forming a foundation for the reception of mountain sands, and gradually they have been filling up, until how the palm and the olive the orange and the breadfruit wave their branches over the humble abode of men, erected above the coral formations, and who till the very soil that the clouds of heaven have deposited upon their marine habitations. The great leveling process is continually going on, and although the "lapse of ages" might not suffice to bring down all this huge mass, yet the final consummation is as sure as that the earth exists. But who can count the cycles

that must "run their weary round," or number the generations that must pass from earth, ere its diminution is perceptible to humane eyes?

The street of Lahaina are filthy, with but few attractions. The fort which commands the landing is a square concern, with walls about ten feet high. This serves the double purpose of defense and lock up for the punishment of criminals. In fact, the latter is the only use it can be applied to, for it would be almost useless as a protection from invasion by an armed fleet. A few stores kept mostly by Chinamen, were scattered along the streets, while grog-holes with their streams of living death, yawned in hideous obscurity in the lanes and bye-paths of the town. They were not tolerated openly, but any body could get liquor that wanted it.

There were but few ships in the harbor, one being the *George Washington*, of Wareham, whose crew had refused duty, and were taken care of by the authorities ashore. It seems the reason they gave was that the captain having died, and the command having devolved upon the mate, they considered themselves absolved from all connection with the ship. But the American consul had appointed the mate as master, as he decided that she must pursue her voyage. So the men had no other alternative but to submit, which they concluded to do after receiving a dozen lashes each.

Our crew went on board of her to assist them in clearing her anchors, which were foul. The ship went the voyage and filled up in one season, so the crew made a profitable job of being coerced into duty. We only stayed here about a week, during which time we painted the ship outside, filled all our empty water casks, took on board potatoes, onions, pumpkins, and other recruits that we were in need of.

We had a couple of days run ashore, which one or two availed themselves of to run away. They were subsequently caught and brought back. A boatsteerer, and two men were shipped in place of the two that were discharged sick. Altogether our visit to this port was a pleasant one, and as it was my first, the sight of the half clad inhabitants, and their mode of living, made a profound impression upon my mind. Subsequent visits, however, made me better acquainted with them, and I could better understand the great changes that had taken place in the social and political condition of these gems of the Pacific.

(continued on page 4)

Leaves of My Journal by A. Whaler

Compiled by Dwight C. Brown, Jr.

(continued from page 3)

Feb 15th. Weighed anchor and started for the north. We who had never been north, of course, knew nothing about what was in store for us, so we could not look upon our departure with so much regret as those who have experienced the inclemencies of an early season on the north-west. Our destination was the Japan Sea, where ships had been the year before, and were very successful, particularly in the early part of the season. Soon everything were snug again, and the ship making rapid progress before the strong trade winds that were blowing.

“ENTRANCE INTO THE JAPAN SEA”

The first part of our passage from the Sandwich Islands was pleasant, but when we had left the trade winds, we began to experience very rough, stormy weather. Gales followed gales in rapid succession, and we would scarcely get all sail set before being compelled to take them in again. On the morning of March 23d, we made the island of Nippon, one of the Japanese group. Our intention was to pass through the straits of Sangar between that island and Jesso. We came up to the straits the next day, but the wind blowing so strong, and dead ahead, too, that we could not get through. It was not until the first of April that we could get a favorable wind that would enable us to stem the strong current that set out of the Japan Sea, through the strait, into the ocean.

In the meantime we were several times in the mouth of the straits, and had a full view of the shores of Japan. We could see the smoke curl upward from numerous cities, villages and hamlets, could trace the cultivated fields, although but just emerging from the rigors of winter, and detect unmistakable signs of thrift and industry from a crowded population.

Their vessels were cruising in every direction, but none could be approached on account of the exclusiveness of their customs and laws. Did a boat happen to be near where we were to pass, they would make all possible haste to get as far as they could from us.

Their junks are curiously and loosely constructed, hence are poorly adapted to stand the inclemency of northern navigation. The timbers are put together, particularly those that run fore and aft, with a tenon and mortice, the former projecting out through the

timbers, and pinned with a wooden tree-nail on the outside. The rudder is framed in the same manner, and worked by a tiller extending from the rudder head to the mast, occupying at least two-thirds of the length of the deck. There is usually but one mast, and that is pretty well forward. Only one sail, ordinarily, and that is suspended on a yard and hoisted up by a rope around its center. A large number of ropes are made fast to the leeches of the sail, and used to guy it forward and keep it steady. Under these circumstances, it is almost impossible to sail "on the wind," but before it they make tolerable progress.

...

We were now in the midst of whales. Our boats were down from morning until night, sometimes rowing with all our might, and at other times paddling as if for dear life. A large whale would come up but a few boats' length from us, and we would strain every nerve to get along side of him. We grow nearer and nearer, the mate more and more earnest, encouragements after encouragements are held out, the boat fairly whizzes through the water. The monster, right ahead, is quietly moving along, apparently unconscious of any danger, throwing out the water, and ringing his spout holes at every inhalation as the air rushes to his lungs. His rough, barnacled head, and his shining black skin that conceals the oily mass beneath, rising above the surface of the water, as if to dare us to the attack, awakens in us a feverish desire to come in contact with his majesty. another boat's length, and he is ours. See that peculiar twist of his tail, not unlike that of the little "shiner" that nibbles at the bait upon the barbed hook when he suspects the piercing agony of the worm upon its point. His ponderous head is raised above the water, and down he goes, lifting high his tail as he disappears beneath the surface, as much as to say, "Kiss my foot, gentlemen." The next time he makes his appearance he is some two miles to windward, and going as though he was a passenger over the underground railroad, with the hounds in full pursuit.

Such was our experience day after day in the Japan Sea, and a dozen times a day.

Copies of Leaves of My Journal will be available soon at

<http://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/gift-shop>

History of the Watch Hill Lighthouse

by Ann L. Smith

[Editor's note: On April 19th members and guests of the Westerly Historical Society were treated to an informative presentation by Ann Snowden Johnson of the Watch Hill Lighthouse Keepers Association. This brief article on her talk is by no means meant to be a complete history of the Watch Hill Light. For that our readers will need to consult the local library. Our April program was so loaded with information, that only a few of the more interesting points can be mentioned here. Nevertheless, we hope this short recap of Ann Snowden Johnson's talk will foster greater interest in our beautiful and historic lighthouse, and prompt some of our readers to pay a visit there.]

In 1806 The United States Congress authorized the construction of the Watch Hill Lighthouse, provided that a suitable parcel of land could be obtained on which to build it. In May of that same year the townspeople voted to deed Watch Hill Point to the State of Rhode Island. Rhode Island then turned control over the land to the United States government. Four more acres were then sold to the lighthouse by private citizens,

Jonathan Nash was the first keeper of the Watch Hill Light and he kept its ten lamps lit by whale oil. Nash was paid about \$300 per year and he added to his income by taking in paying guests. The U.S. government removed Nash some 27 years later in part because they did not like the idea that Nash was engaging in a side business on government property.

There were 45 wrecks occurring during Nash's tenure. One of the more notable accidents happened in January 1811 when the *Revenge* commanded by Oliver Hazard Perry struck ground on Watch Hill Reef.

The current lighthouse was erected between 1855 and 1856 and was built from Westerly Granite. The structure is unusual for a lighthouse because the tower is square rather than round. Watch Hill Point was reinforced shortly thereafter with granite from Smith Granite Company. The large pieces of stone were transported from the quarries in town on the scow "Jason" to a special wharf constructed just for this purpose.

A rather famous shipwreck was that of the *Metis* on August 30, 1872. The *Metis* sailed out of New York City and was headed for the mills in Providence with a load of cotton. In addition to her

cargo, the *Metis* carried approximately 146 passengers and forty crewmembers. At around 3:45 A.M. the *Metis* was broadsided by the schooner *Nettie Cushing* about five miles south of Watch Hill Point. The *Nettie Cushing* was damaged but returned to her home port without any loss of life. The *Metis*, however, broke apart and sank. Life preservers and four lifeboats were put into service but some fifty men, women, and children lost their lives that day despite the brave efforts of the volunteers from the Life Saving Service.

More than one hundred ships have wrecked off the shores of Watch Hill Point and the U.S. Life Saving Service served a key role in rescuing many survivors of these disasters. Originally called the "Humane Society," the name was changed by an act of Congress where life-saving stations were then commissioned by the government. This 1878 law gave us nine life-savings stations in Rhode Island alone. The Watch Hill Life Saving Service operated for 45 years at the Watch Hill Light from 1879 until 1934.

During the years that the Life Saving Service was in operation, the volunteers would hold weekly drills. Their use of the breeches-buoy rescue apparatus and self-righting lifeboats was a spectacle for the local tourists. Spectators from the Larkin House would entertain themselves by watching the drills from the steamboat dock as they waited for the next boat to arrive.

The lifesaving station was rebuilt in 1907 and the old building remained as an auxiliary structure. After the Life Saving Service left Watch Hill, its buildings were decommissioned and given to the Watch Hill Lightkeepers Association. The Watch Hill Lighthouse is now run by the Lightkeepers Association under a lease from the federal government.

The Watch Hill Lighthouse continues to undergo changes as the years go by. The classic Fourth Order Fresnel lens which had a range of fourteen to sixteen nautical miles has been replaced by the VRB-25 rotating beacon and the seawall is currently being rebuilt following the devastation of Hurricane Sandy.

For more information visit
www.rhodeislandlighthousehistory.info

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



~ In Memoriam ~

**Anna Irene (Riley)
Brown**

Anna Brown, loving wife of Westerly Historical Society board member Dwight C. Brown, Jr. died peacefully on April 30th. Anna was a beloved member of her community having served many years in the Girl Scouts and as a volunteer at Our Lady of Victory Church in Ashaway. Anna was a recipient of the St. Anne's Award given to her by her parish. A skilled genealogist, Anna lent her assistance to the Westerly Public Library and enjoyed researching the genealogy of people from all over the country. She also liked to instill the passion of learning about family history in others and gave a workshop for those interested in discovering their own genealogy.

She also supported her husband Dwight in his research of our local history throughout their 64 years of marriage. In addition to her husband Dwight, Anna leaves three sons, two daughters, eleven grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.



Isaac Gallup Smith, Jr.

Isaac "Ike" Smith died Aug 9th at the Westerly Hospital. A veteran of WWII, he was a stone cutter for the Smith Granite Company, the Joseph Coduri Granite Company, and the

Bonner Monument Company. Isaac also worked at Electric Boat for 24 years before retiring in 1983.

Ike was PTA president of Elm Street School, foreman of the Alert Hook and Ladder Co., and a charter member of the Central Baptist Church where he served as chairman of the Board of Trustees. Ike was a dedicated volunteer for the Westerly Library, Wilcox Park, the Babcock-Smith House Museum and the Westerly Historical Society.

He will be dearly missed by Gertrude, his wife of nearly 72 years, his daughter and son-in-law, Linda and Kenneth Chaffee and his nephew, Anthony Gallup Smith. Isaac's extended family includes five grandchildren, thirteen great-grandchildren, and four great-great grandchildren.