



Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

March 2018

Westerly Historical Society Officers 2017-2018

President Thomas J. Gulluscio, Jr.	Membership Chair Joanne Pendola
Vice President Vacant	Newsletter Ann L. Smith
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Archivist Zachary Garceau	Members At Large Dwight C. Brown, Jr. John Leach Brenda Linton Thomas A. O'Connell
Babcock-Smith House Museum Liaison Edward A. Fazio	

Calendar of Events

March 25 , 2018 2:00 PM

Edward Fazio

and Tony Smith

***"Little Known History of the
Babcock-Smith House"***

This program will begin in the Carriage House as usual with some photos depicting seldom-seen features of the Museum House, from the cellar to the attic.

A tour of the Museum House will follow for all interested parties.

~ ~ ~

April 15, 2018 2:00 PM

Rebecca Nolan

***"Westerly, Pawcatuck & the River
that Changed the Landscape"***

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Lecture programs are held in the
Carriage House
of the

Babcock-Smith House Museum
124 Granite Street, Westerly, RI
Free Admission at all Programs

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/>

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SAVE THE DATE!

Westerly Historical Society
Annual Meeting and Dinner

Wednesday, May 9, 2018

Cocktails 5:30 PM

Dinner 6:00 PM

Annual Recap of Activities

Financial Report

Guest Speaker

See page 6 For Ticket Order Form

Editor's Notes

Ann L. Smith

Sometimes we get pulled in so many directions at once that it becomes a bit difficult to focus. Not to worry however, because our news is all good! Here at the Westerly Historical Society we have been busy with our programs, archive activities, and preparing for our annual meeting and dinner reception. (See Page Six for information and tickets.)

In addition to all our regular activities, our newest endeavor is the joint effort with the Babcock-Smith House museum to present an award to a local historian who has made a significant contribution to preserving our history. This award will be presented at our annual meeting and is in addition to the *Julia Award*, which is continuing on an annual basis. The new co-branded history award, unlike the *Julia Award*, was designed to include students, and will focus more on one-time projects as compared with lifetime achievements recognized by the *Julia Award*. Applicants can submit a description of their work by completing the application form as described in the insert on this page. In addition, candidates may be nominated by third parties.



Last month we were pleased to welcome our program director Pamela Scott to our lecture podium. Her presentation on the Clark Thread Mill and the history of the New England milling industry was well-attended. A recap of this talk can be found on Page 3.

We were saddened to hear about the recent illness of board member Dwight C. Brown, Jr. A non-elective surgery landed him in the hospital

on his 90th birthday, but his wonderful party still proceeded in his absence. The evening was filled with testimonials and photo remembrances of our great friend who is a historical living legend. We are happy to report that Dwight is feeling much better since last month and is due back home shortly. Dwight lectured at our annual dinner in 2017 and was last year's *Julia Award* recipient.

We received an informative piece from Alexandra LaForce, Commissioner of the Rhode Island Advisory Commission on Historic Cemeteries. Alexandra wrote to remind us of Historic Cemetery Restoration/Awareness Day which will take place on Saturday, April 14, 2017. Preservationists are invited to engage in the cleanup and restoration of our local historic cemeteries that day. Full details on Page 5. Late word from Alexandra informed us of the following:

In January of 2017, Westerly passed an ordinance providing a tax abatement of \$100 to owners of historic cemeteries who preserve and maintain their cemeteries. Applications for this abatement can be obtained from the Tax Assessor's Office and must be filed by April 15th in order for the abatement to be applied to the coming year's taxes.

Please consider volunteering in your area.



Announcing the new WESTERLY HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND BABCOCK-SMITH HOUSE MUSEUM HISTORY AWARD

An annual award up to \$500.00 will be given to a person or persons, Grade Five through adulthood, who furthers the mission of researching, studying, and/or preserving local history in our community. Secondary consideration will be given to someone who exhibits a passion for history unrelated to the local community.

Application or nomination must be submitted by April 1, 2018 to:

Westerly Historical Society
PO Box 91
Westerly, RI 02891

or by email to whspresident@gmail.com.

Application forms available online at
<https://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/history-award/>

Program Review: The William Clark Company Thread Mill

By Ann L. Smith

Pamela Scott, program director for the Westerly Historical Society, took over the podium at our February 18th lecture to personally present the story of the William Clark Thread Mill. The event was well attended and was informative both for the history of milling in New England and for the updates on how some of our old mill buildings are being repurposed.

During the nineteenth century and through the first half of the twentieth, milling in New England was an important industry. British, Scottish and Irish interests came to the U.S. to set up milling operations as a way to avoid paying heavy import taxes. In 1789 William Slater set up shop in Pawtucket, Rhode Island in what today is known as “Slater’s Mill.” The mill compound is on the National Register of Historic Places and Slater is regarded by many historians today as the “Father of the American Industrial Revolution.”

Another important mill was the Bourne Mill, part of the Tiverton-Fall River community of mills. It began operating in 1883 and is today used as a residential apartment house. In Lowell, Massachusetts, another industrial hub, people were enticed to emigrate from Europe with the promise of steady work and decent pay. The classic “mill villages” in Lowell were representative of those found throughout New England. Companies often financed the construction of entire blocks of homes in close proximity to their mills, to provide local housing for their workers.

From the early 1800’s to the Great Depression of the 1930’s, much of the South’s cotton was sold to Rhode Island, where textile mills dominated the urban landscape. While agriculture was the priority of the early Rhode Island settlers and continued to play an important role in the economy, textile production was the industry that shaped the young state and its communities. When technology advances enabled the United States to compete with the established textile manufacturers of Europe, it wasn’t long before the South’s cotton production had ready customers in New England.

Rhode Island and Massachusetts in particular had conditions ideal for the textile industry’s development – a growing society looking to diversify and find new investments, and a good supply of the water courses needed in those early days to power the mills.

Slater’s Mill was a great success, and by 1815

Rhode Island had 167 textile mills producing goods from cotton. While these early mills were generally small, they became the center of their communities, with self-sufficient villages forming and growing around them.

By 1890 Westerly, Rhode Island had a population of 9,000 and was rapidly increasing. While its quarries were the major source of wealth, the mill industry also was an important source of monetary gain for the town’s inhabitants. Cotton, wool and flannel goods were the primary products of the mills here. The largest mills were the Stillman Mill, the White Rock mill, and further down the Pawcatuck River, the William Clark Thread Mill.

The Pawcatuck River location was chosen for its swift-running waters and the Clark Thread Mill was one of the earliest examples of a mill powered by coal-fired steam engines. Steam powered engines are regarded as having changed the face of the Industrial Revolution entirely.

In 1895 the Clark Thread Mill was expanded to include two additional buildings which housed a dyeing room and a drying room. For a time a ferry ran between Margin Street in Westerly to the Clark Thread Mill in Pawcatuck to enable its workers to commute easily across the river.

American Thread bought the Clark Thread Mill in 1901 along with fourteen other mills across New England. American Thread was sued in 1915 for violating anti-trust laws and was forced to break up its monopoly. In 1938 the mill suffered major damage during the Great Hurricane, and the top floors were blown away from buildings #1 and #2. By that time William Clark had been deceased for over ten years, and his heirs sold the mill rather than invest in repairing it.

Today the main building of the property has been completely restored and, like the Bourne Mill, is home to apartment dwellers who enjoy modern conveniences, oversized windows, and spectacular water views of the river and its surroundings.

Much more information was shared than space permits, but an important reference noted at Pam’s talk can provide further reading at: “The Textile Mills of Rhode Island: World History”

<https://worldhistory.us/american-history/the-textile-mills-of-rhode-island.php>

From the Archives

By Zachary Garceau

Each month, we will highlight one item or collection from the archives of the Westerly Historical Society. This month, our featured items are:

Records of the People's Mission (1892-1948)

The People's Mission was a non-denominational civic organization founded in 1892 by citizens in Westerly and supported by local churches and businesses. According to their 1911 constitution, the corporation "is constituted for the purpose of engaging in religious services of receiving, collecting, and distributing funds, clothing, food, fuel, and other necessities and supplies among the needy families and individuals of the community." Furthermore, "the religious work of the society shall be along evangelistic and undenominational lines."

The headquarters of the People's Mission was stationed on West Broad Street in Pawcatuck, where Bess Eaton currently stands, although the building was razed decades ago. The Mission had a significant and positive impact on the community during their existence, as they frequently initiated charitable endeavors which included holding a Christmas toy drive in which they collected and repaired used toys for needy families, working with local Girl Scout troops to distributed Thanksgiving baskets, and making house calls to the families in need.

Most remarkable about the work of the Mission is that records show a significant increase in aid provided at the start of the Great Depression in 1929. Given that the Mission's work depended largely on contributions from the public, this increase shows a desire of the community to provide aid when it was most needed. In 1928, the Mission gave out 58 Thanksgiving baskets, however, in 1930, this number nearly doubled to 108. The People's Mission continued to provide aid until 1948, when social agencies were established in the United States and took over much of the work the Mission had been performing.

In the collections held by the Westerly Historical Society's People's Mission Collection, there are:

- A scrapbook containing newspaper clippings regarding the Mission from 1907 to 1909
- A diary and cash book, c. 1908
- Meeting minutes and annual reports 1918-1929.
- Two cash books dated 1944-1946
- A scrapbook containing newspaper clippings about the Mission and obituaries of members, c. 1920's-1930's
- A copy of the 1911 Incorporation Constitution
- A photograph of Mrs. Dagmar Smith, former Superintendent of the Mission

- Postcard from former Superintendent and husband of Mrs. Smith, Alexander Smith, c. 1909.
- People's Mission Letterheads
- A poem titled "To Our Mrs. Smith" dated 3 June 1930.

Acquisitions

This month, the Westerly Historical Society received the following items:

- "Tidal Current Charts, Long Island Sound and Block Island Sound"
- Westerly Tax Book, 1873
- *New York, Providence and Boston Railroad. Report to the General Manager Upon the Construction of the Thames River Bridge and Approaches, at New London, Conn.*, by Alfred P. Boller (1890)
- *1928 Handy Railroad Atlas of the United States*
- "Souvenir of Westerly, R.I., Miniature Post Cards in Colors"
- Newspaper clippings from the Hurricane of 1954

New to the WHS Library

The following items have been added to the Westerly Historical Society Library and can be searched by the archivist upon request:

- 📖 *Westerly Hoops: The Glory Years of 1940-1950* By John L. Stevens
- 📖 *Westerly Hoops: The Glory Years of 1940-1962* by John L. Stevens
- 📖 *1932 Westerly High School Yearbook* signed by Lillian Stevens
- 📖 *Claire's Hands: Claire Bliven Winship: Her Life and Art* by Deborah Davis Stewart (2017)
- 📖 *Painted Rooms of Rhode Island: Colonial and Federal* by Ann Eckert Brown (2012)
- 📖 *Carrier War* by Lt. Oliver Jensen (1945)
- 📖 *History of Pawcatuck River Steamboats* by Everett Barns (1932)

Historic Cemetery Restoration/Awareness Day

By Alexandra LaForce,
Commissioner

R.I. Advisory Commission on Historic Cemeteries

As you drive around Rhode Island, or even go hiking in the woods, have you ever noticed rectangular white signs on poles and ever wondered what they are? They are likely markers for some of the 3500+ cemeteries here in the smallest state in the country. This state is unique in that, from its founding, the deceased were usually buried on their own property, not in churchyards. Now many of those properties, once farmland, have been developed or returned to their original state of forestland; hence, cemeteries in the middle of the woods.

Within the nine towns in Washington County there are almost 1,500 cemeteries. In 1867 Reverend Frederick Denison identified at least 96 cemeteries within Westerly's borders. In the 1990s John Sterling searched for these same cemeteries and was able to find 77. Of the 77, there are only ten remaining which have not yet been located, and it is believed that at least two of these were destroyed or moved. The members of the R.I. Advisory Commission on Historic Cemeteries, who are all volunteers, have worked over the years to identify these cemeteries and mark them using GPS, erect signs, and clean them, but since there are so many, and there are only three Commissioners for Washington County, most gravesites are not maintained.

Rhode Island's State Legislature has proclaimed April 14th, 2018 "**Historic Cemetery Restoration/Awareness Day**" in the State of Rhode Island. Several cemeteries in each town are maintained by Cemetery Commissions, or by the towns themselves. The Westerly Historical Society owns cemetery #WY001 (a previous issue of *Westerly's Witness* contained a great article about this cemetery) and it was recently cleaned and looks manicured. Historic Cemetery Restoration/Awareness Day is a great time to clean your cemetery or one in your neighborhood. The following hints, from the R.I. Historical Cemetery Commission website <http://www.rihistoriccemeteries.org/>, provide information that would be helpful when planning a cleanup:

- DO seek permission from property owners to pass through their land. Ask where to park. Respect their land and their wishes. Leave no refuse. Leave everything as you find it or better.
- DO NOT move gravestones
- Record names and dates if stones have not previously been documented. Call a Commissioner with this information. Photograph if possible.
- DO NOT cut large living trees
- DO NOT drag fallen trees across gravestones. Lift carefully.
- DO take away any debris.
- DO wear gloves, safety glasses. Watch for poison ivy, oak and sumac. Use rubbing alcohol as soon as possible on you and your equipment.
- GRAVESTONE RUBBING is not recommended except under expert supervision.
- PHOTOGRAPHY is welcome. Take before and after photos. Record date, cemetery location and direction photo was taken. If you have undocumented grave stones, please let us know so we can update the Historical Cemetery Database.

Please join us in recognizing the importance of history in this state and celebrate this day by cleaning a cemetery! I will be cleaning WY051 – the Samuel Chapman Ground #3 - located to the west of Pound Road, accessed from Route 91 on April 14th.

Directions: Go almost to the end of Pound Road and park in the Land Trust lot on the left. Across from the parking lot is a trail; cross the chain blocking the trail and walk about 600 feet. WY051 will be at the top of the slope on the right. Bring a chainsaw – the plot has been overrun with Russian olive trees. The fun starts at 9 a.m.

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 9, 2018 @ \$28.00 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 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.