



Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

October 2018

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Calendar of Events

October 28, 2018 2:00 PM
Ann Johnson and colleagues
present
**“Recent Happenings at the
Watch Hill Lighthouse
Museum.”**

Ann Johnson will lead a discussion about the Watch Hill Lighthouse Museum, its first major fundraiser, upgrades to the museum itself, how they work with their volunteers and the U.S.

Coast Guard; their recent activities and their plans for the future, both as a museum and as a national landmark.



WATCH HILL LIGHTHOUSE

PHOTO COURTESY OF WWW.WATCHHILLLIGHTHOUSEKEEPERS.ORG

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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**

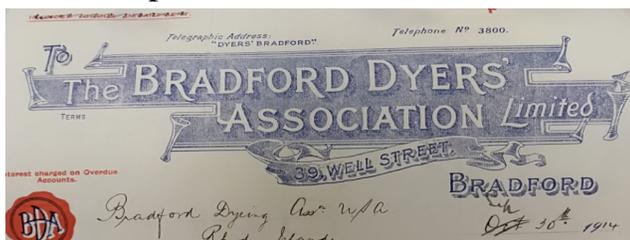
to Westerly Historical Society Members and
Members of the Babcock-Smith House Museum
Admission for Non-Members: \$5.00

Memberships Available at:

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

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SAMPLE DOCUMENT FROM THE DWIGHT C. BROWN JR. COLLECTION

Editor's Notes

Ann L. Smith

Historians are people who like to read other people's mail. –Miki Pfeffer

On October 5 the executive board of the Westerly Historical Society was treated to a surprise visit from New Orleans historian and author, Miki Pfeffer, PhD. The reason for Dr. Pfeffer's visit had to do with her current research on Grace King, a fiction writer and historian of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Dr. Pfeffer, on her way to Elmira, New York, stopped in Westerly to locate a particular residence mentioned in Grace King's letters around 1896.

After consulting some older maps, our archivist, Zachary J. Garceau, identified the Watch Hill cottage of Elizabeth Burnap. It is there that Grace King relaxed amid the sound of the ever-crashing surf and the salty, sometimes drizzly, ocean air. Grace King's letters leave out few details in describing her leisurely stay with her hosts, Elizabeth Burnap and Burnap's companion, Elizabeth Adams.

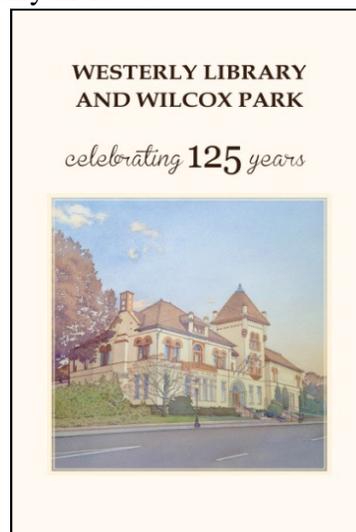
How the author King wound up in Watch Hill was not immediately clear, but it is known that Grace King had been in Hartford, Connecticut with Mark Twain around the time of her Watch Hill letters of 1896. It would seem logical that, being within a hundred miles of the seashore, Grace King took advantage of the opportunity to spend time at the idyllic summer retreat known as Watch Hill.

The culmination of Dr. Pfeffer's research will likely result in a new book on the letters and life of Grace King. Research has been underway for over a year already and there is still a fair amount of work to be done. When we left Dr. Pfeffer, she was planning to meet with Westerly Historical Society president, Tom Gulluscio, for a private tour of Watch Hill, including the Burnap house, on the next day.

When the Grace King letters and memoirs are published, the volume will be the second book by Miki Pfeffer, PhD. The first, *Southern Ladies and Suffragists: Julia Ward Howe and Women's rights at the 1884 New Orleans World's Fair* (2014) was also the subject of Dr. Pfeffer's PhD thesis and won the Eudora Welty Prize which recognizes excellence among contemporary Southern writers. Find Miki Pfeffer, PhD on Facebook or contact her at mpfeffer03@gmail.com.

Book Launch Celebrates Westerly Library's History

The Westerly Historical Society is proud to co-sponsor the launch of the Westerly Library's new book, *Westerly Library and Wilcox Park: Celebrating 125 Years*, that tells the full history of both the library and park. By permission of the Westerly Historical Society, the book includes a faithful reprint of Sallie Coy's paper about the library's early years, "Westerly's Living Memorial," which was read before the Westerly Historical Society on April 18, 1963, and published by The Utter Company in 1976.



Please join us at the launch party on **Tuesday, November 20**, at 6:30 PM, in the Hoxie Gallery at Westerly Library. Copies of the book will be available for \$15 each.

Corrections

In last month's issue of *Westerly's Witness*, we neglected to mention that the Babcock-Smith House co-sponsored the memorial gift of a new table given by WHS to the Westerly Library Special Collections Department, Local History Room in memory of Dwight C. Brown Jr. and Anna Brown.

The September issue of *Westerly's Witness* also contained several typographical errors which made certain passages difficult to understand. A corrected copy of the September issue of *Westerly's Witness* has been posted to our website and may be found at <https://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/169-2/>. Please note that the newsletters for the current season require a user password. Members can email the editor at whstreasurer@gmail.com for login information. We regret these errors.

The Westerly Historical Society Acquires the Dwight C. Brown Jr. Collection

By Zachary J. Garceau

In the September issue of *Westerly's Witness*, we presented a brief overview of the Dwight C. Brown Jr. collection, which was acquired by the Westerly Historical Society this summer. In this issue, we will present a more comprehensive look at this monumentally important collection.

COLLECTION HIGHLIGHTS

While the entirety of the collection is noteworthy, there are several items which deserve to be highlighted on their own. These items include:

Comprehensive newspaper indexes for the *Stonington Mirror*, *Narragansett Weekly*, and *Westerly Sun*

These indexes are crucial to local history research, as they will significantly aid our ability to locate information about individuals, families, and events.

Research Materials

Over the span of many decades, Dwight collected an immeasurable amount of information on a wide range of local history topics. These research materials are of great importance to the Society as they represent a lifetime of historical research and contain correspondence, cited source materials, and personal notes written by the most prolific local historian Westerly has ever seen. Not only are they of great value from a historical perspective, but also from a personal perspective, as they provide insight into Dwight's research methods.

Bradford Dyeing Association Collection

This collection alone would be considered the largest donation the Society has ever received, and yet it only represents a portion of Dwight's work. For many decades, Dwight worked for the Bradford Dyeing Association, and throughout the course of his time at the company, he managed to obtain as much historically significant material as possible. While the breadth of the BDA collection cannot truly be quantified, our assessment of the donated items found, among other items is:

- Blueprints
- Cloth samples
- World War II employee buttons (over one thousand in total)
- Paperwork and correspondence
- Engineering sketches
- Work log (1954-1986)
- Company newsletters
- Machine parts

- Photographs
- Licenses and other official documentation
- Textile manufacturing books and publications
- Record book (1910-1920)

Many of the items mentioned above are one-of-a-kind and remain the only known copies in existence.

Taken as a whole, the Bradford Dyeing Association collection, as a subset of the Dwight C. Brown Jr. collection, creates the most complete history available of a company which employed hundreds of Westerly workers and played a vital role in the lives of many local people.

Westerly High School Yearbooks

Dwight's collection also contained yearbooks from Westerly High School between 1923 and 1953, allowing us to add to our collection and fill in many missing years, giving us a more complete set.

35 Millimeter Slides

In addition to being a respected source of historical knowledge, Dwight was also an excellent artist and photographer. His paintings brought joy to many who knew him and his skills as a photographer were highly touted. Throughout his lifetime, he amassed an enormous number of photographs which were preserved on 35 millimeter slides. Altogether, the Dwight C. Brown Jr. collection contains roughly 11,800 slides, which cover an array of subjects including:

- Watch Hill and beaches
- Weekapaug
- Steamboats
- BDA
- Granite
- Sailing vessels
- Potter Hill
- Trolleys
- Maps
- Cemeteries
- Chariho
- Marine documents
- Battlefields



STEAMBOAT TICKET FROM JULY, 1867

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Dwight C. Brown Jr. Collection

(continued from Page 3)

Other items of note in the Dwight C. Brown Jr. collection include:

- Photographic glass plates (3x4 and 4x5)
- Magazines
- Newspapers
- Proof copies of published books
- Maps
- Scrapbooks
- Cemetery indexes
- Local history books

The Unique and Fascinating

A detailed discussion of the contents of the Dwight C. Brown Jr. collection could easily span several newsletters. However, there are some items which simply stand out above all others due to their distinctiveness and the intrigue they will likely generate. Some of the collection's most captivating objects include:

Ship Documents and Logs

Dwight's interest in shipbuilding and the wrecks that sometimes followed is apparent to anyone who has the opportunity to view this collection. In the course of his research, he accumulated numerous original ship logs, documents related to the shipping industry, and information about the men who built these vessels. This information is of great importance to local historians wishing to learn more about Westerly's long history with seafaring craft.



ONE OF SEVERAL PHARMACY BOOKS IN THE BROWN COLLECTION

Scrapbooks

Scrapbooks are one of the more frequently donated items to the Westerly Historical Society, and each one provides a unique view into the creator's life. When examining a scrapbook, questions arise such as "Why did they think this was important?" or "How did they find this piece?" While the contents of these books are almost always of great value from a larger historical perspective, they are also helpful to historians studying the lives of everyday men and women.

Pharmacy Books

In the days before HIPAA and various privacy laws and legislations, pharmacists often recorded the prescription orders of clients in large bound books to aid in the keeping of accounts and credits. Although the exact source of these books is not known, Dwight was able to obtain several of these massive volumes kept by local pharmacies in the 1880s and 1890s. These books are valuable in offering historians and researchers an understanding of everyday life in Westerly during this time period, particularly in regard to the costs of various items and the health concerns of many residents.

Business Logs

As with pharmacies, prior to the advent of personal computers, many businesses kept detailed logs of transactions they were involved in and could refer back to these in order to settle accounts and reclaim debts. Dwight collected logs from several local businesses including:

- Howe and Company
- George H. Bray Company
- Howe and Carr

Also included are business cards from a plethora of local and national businesses.

Postcards

Among the many folders comprising the Dwight C. Brown Jr. collection are two large manila folders containing hundreds of postcards. While a majority of these postcards are unused, a small portion of them contain inscriptions. Some might argue that these inscriptions lower a postcard's value, however, the correspondence that was recorded offers a unique look into the lives of ordinary men, women, and children in the early 20th century. These used postcards are invaluable for understanding how people communicated, traveled, and interacted with one another.

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Dwight C. Brown Jr. Collection

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Personal Letters and items regarding Bertha Brown

Although research has not revealed the exact nature of the relationship between Bertha Brown and Dwight C. Brown Jr., it is apparent that they were related in some way. Over time, Dwight collected many letters which were written to Bertha from various other citizens of Westerly in the late 19th century. Another interesting piece relating to Bertha Brown are her report cards from Westerly High School, where she was a part of the Class of 1897.

Apparently, a penchant for history ran in the family, as Bertha often received A's in the subject throughout her high school career!

Process Involved in Cataloging

The highlights of the Dwight C. Brown Jr. collection presented above represent only a fraction of the entire donation, and as a result, we will have quite a bit of work to do as we move forward. Upon transporting the collection from Dwight's home to our secured vault, we determined that there were roughly seventy boxes of materials. The first step in our cataloging process has been to explore and consolidate the contents of each box and to develop a concise list of the items within each box. We then will create a more detailed inventory of each box's contents, including the item's type, description, and any important information that will aid us in later searches.

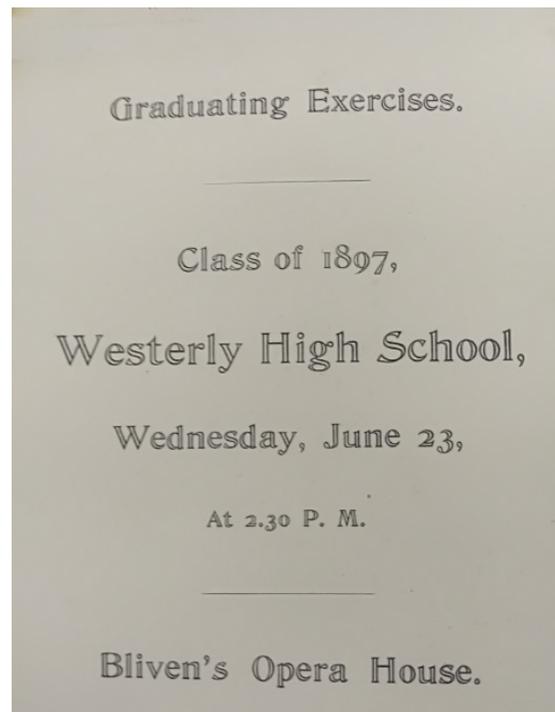
While conducting our inventory, we are also applying preservation techniques to ensure that further damage to the items can be prevented. After developing this thorough catalog of the collection, our next concern will be storage. Using the highest quality archival materials, we will store the most delicate items in our vault while the items requiring little preservation and maintenance will likely be stored securely in our additional shelving.

What I Learned

Working with the Dwight C. Brown Jr. collection has taught me a great deal, not only about local history, but also about the man behind the collection. I became involved with the Society in May 2017. My introduction to the Society came at the 2017 Annual Dinner, where Dwight, the guest speaker, presented his research on the wreck of the *Granville R. Bacon*, a subject he studied for many years. It was obvious to me from the very beginning that he was extremely

well informed about local history and that he was respected by all who knew him for his many years of work and dedicated service to the Westerly Historical Society. Despite this revelation, I truly had no idea how expansive his research was.

With Dwight's passing, we lost not only a great friend, but also a great historian. On more than one occasion, I heard members of the Society say "There will never be another Dwight." The Westerly Historical Society is extremely fortunate, as Dwight meticulously organized all of his research, photographs, and documents, making it accessible to anyone who could ever need it.



SAMPLE DOCUMENT FROM THE DWIGHT C. BROWN JR. COLLECTION

I've long known about the importance of preserving history on every level, whether it be local, regional, national, or global. However, archiving and inventorying the Dwight C. Brown Jr. collection has reaffirmed my conviction that conserving historical artifacts and research is incredibly important and necessary for both maintaining knowledge and fostering an interest in history in future generations.

The Dwight C. Brown Jr. collection's importance to local historical knowledge cannot be understated. The information and artifacts that Dwight collected throughout his life will be used by local historians for generations to come and should we be so lucky, may inspire these future generations to preserve and conserve their own pieces of local history.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

The Westerly Historical Society

P.O. Box 91

Westerly, RI 02891



It's Time to Renew!

Westerly Historical Society Membership Renewal Form

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual | \$20.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Patron | \$100.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family | \$30.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor | \$250.00+ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining | \$50.00 | | |

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____ E-mail _____

- Newsletter in online version only (opt-out of printed copy via USPS)

Renew online at <https://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/membership/>

Or if paying by mail, please make check payable to:

Westerly Historical Society and mail to:

P.O. Box 91, Westerly RI 02891