



# Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

March 2019

## Westerly Historical Society Officers 2018-2019

**President**  
Thomas J. Gulluscio, Jr.

**Vice President**  
Thomas A. O'Connell

**Secretary**  
Maria L. Bernier

**Treasurer**  
Ann L. Smith

**Archivist**  
Zachary J. Garceau

**Babcock-Smith House  
Museum Liaison**  
Edward A. Fazio

**Membership Chair**  
Vacant

**Newsletter**  
Ann L. Smith

**Programs**  
Pamela J. Scott

**Web Master**  
Maria L. Bernier

**Members At Large**  
John Leach  
Brenda Linton

## Calendar of Events

**Sunday, March 24, 2019 2:00 PM**  
***“Smith Widows: Women With the  
Strength of Stone”***

***Presented by Linda Smith Chaffee  
and the Babcock-Smith House Museum***

Learn how the three “Orlando Widows”  
met the challenges of raising a family,  
operating a business, and managing a  
home.

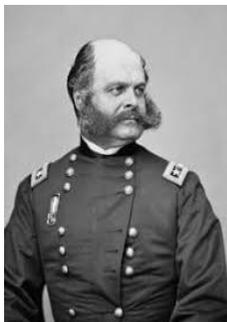


## In this Issue

Editor's Notes.....Page 2

Review: History of Basketball at  
Westerly High School.....Page 3

Ambrose Burnside's Confederate Spy:  
The Moon Who Wouldn't be a Star...Page 4



**Sunday, March 31, 2019 2:00 PM**  
***125 Years of  
“Westerly Library and Wilcox Park”***  
***Presented by Book Authors  
Maria L. Bernier,  
Brigitte Hopkins, Alan Peck and  
Bob Benson***

Programs will be Held at the Carriage House  
of the Babcock-Smith House Museum  
124 Granite Street, Westerly, RI  
Free Admission to all Programs  
Thanks to the Support of the  
**Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce  
and the  
Westerly 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee**

## Editor's Notes

*Ann L. Smith*

New Englanders are known for giving wry answers to what (we assume) are dumb questions. The old saw, "You can't get there from he'e-ya," is well known. My favorite is, "Q: Have you lived here all your life? -- A: I don't know. I'm not dead yet!" Which brings me to a thought I have pondered lately: when does all the old stuff we keep begin to qualify as historical artifacts?

There is a time capsule in Wilcox Park, buried there during the town's 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. The folks who put it there knew that their commonplace items of the day would someday be valued as historical artifacts. And while a great number of us are still around since then, what we may not realize is that, the moment our generation passes away, our "stuff" becomes instantly more valuable. It's the same when an artist dies. Their works immediately appreciate in value.

While we may not think of our old clothing or letters as valuable now, they will be a reflection of who we were in our time. Just think of all that we gleaned from the reading of the Hempstead diary (see *Westerly's Witness*, September 2018). Woven through the paragraphs we found revelations about what people ate, wore, how they traveled, and how they worshipped; all very quotidian to the diary's writer, but valuable to us now as historians.

Last month we enjoyed Zachary J. Garceau's presentation on the history of basketball at Westerly High School. A fantastic outcome of the day was that one of our attendees and society members, Marianne Holly, who played for Westerly High in the 1950's donated her gym uniform and class ring to our archives. (A review of Zack's presentation appears on Page 3 of this month's issue.) This wonderful contribution along with a perusal of our artifacts on display at the Westerly Library this month brings us to the realization that we need to ramp up our efforts to acquire more twentieth century artifacts.

Although Zachary Garceau, our archivist, works tirelessly at maintaining our collection, we are in search of more items from the last sixty to eighty years. There are many items arriving as a result of the library exhibit, but we want to invite our members and friends to consider donating any items that may

## WESTERLY HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND BABCOCK-SMITH HOUSE HISTORY AWARD



Once again an award of 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, 2019 to:

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

or by email to [whspresident@gmail.com](mailto:whspresident@gmail.com).

Application form and more info available online at <https://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/history-award/>

be of historical value. Zack's column, "From the Archives," will return next month with a full update on our recent acquisitions.

Meanwhile, the library exhibit, "Our Story: 350 Years" will be dismantled and removed over the two-day period of March 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>. If you would like to volunteer to help pack and move the displayed items, contact either Zachary Garceau at [whsarchivist@gmail.com](mailto:whsarchivist@gmail.com) or Ellen Madison at [ellenmadison1945@gmail.com](mailto:ellenmadison1945@gmail.com).

The exhibit opening was an incredible success with over two hundred visitors on opening night. Volunteers are in the process of creating a video record of the exhibit and a portfolio of still shots has already been posted on our Facebook page. We hope you will take a look.

Our annual meeting and dinner reception is scheduled for Wednesday, May 15<sup>th</sup> at the Venice Restaurant in Westerly. See Page 6 for details and tickets. Betty-Jo Cugini will talk about the production of her historical documentaries with a focus on "Dr. Babcock and Dr. Franklin." Please join us!

# Program Review

## Blue and White: Basketball at Westerly High School

By Ann L. Smith

What do you get when you combine a collection of high school yearbooks with a person who has a passion for history and sports? The answer is a superb program on the history of our high school's basketball program over the last 118 years.

On Sunday, February 24<sup>th</sup>, Zachary J. Garceau, Westerly Historical Society's archivist, drew a packed house for his presentation, "Blue and White: Basketball at Westerly High School." Among the attendees were some former players and coaches who shared their wonderful anecdotes during the Q and A. Especially noteworthy was the revelation that two women members of the Westerly Historical Society in attendance (one a board member) played basketball while students at Westerly High.

Marianne Holly, who now resides in Mystic, regaled us with the story of her last-minute game-saving basket against the Army-Navy team. Her coach at the time took a verbal beating for leaving Marianne on the bench throughout the game, only to have her save it in the final seconds. Had she been put in sooner the game sure would not have been as close, folks said.

Board member Brenda Linton played for Westerly in the 1960's just before Title IX brought better opportunities to girls' school sports in general. Even with limited interscholastic play, the girls' teams enjoyed an active intramural schedule and basketball was a worthwhile endeavor for all who played.

The slide presentation was packed with statistics, and the plethora of information would be impossible to summarize here for those who did not attend. Certain facts, however, did stand out as noteworthy. Westerly High School boasts seven Division II titles which puts it in a first place tie for most in Division II. Westerly claims a history of winning records for both total wins and number of points scored. As of 2015 there were fourteen boys and four girls who scored in excess of 1,000 points during their careers at Westerly.

In its earliest days, games were held around the area due to the limited space at the former high schools in town. The Pawcatuck Armory, the Ancient Order of Hibernians on Union Street (now the Congregation of Sharah Zedek Temple), and the Main Street Hall were all used to accommodate game

play prior to 1931. With the construction of Babcock Junior High School (now part of the High School's campus) basketball players were able to play more games in one place.

A brief look at the uniforms used through the years showed that what goes around comes around. Consider how uniform shorts started out as nearly knee-length, then rose to a closer fitting, short brief, and later returned to the loose-fitting, longer style we are familiar with today. The Bulldogs logo has seen several iterations before becoming the one we now have.

Due credit was given to our great coaches that have led our youths to many victories over the years: Gerry Gleason, Leo Smith, James Federico (for whom the modern high school gymnasium is named) and Coach John Stellitano who, now in his nineties, was in attendance for this presentation. Stellitano took over for Federico in 1954, but Federico returned for one final year in 1967.

In the current era the girls' teams have done very well. Between 2000 and 2010 they never finished less than third place. The girls' team finished the 2016-17 season in first place but lost in overtime in the Division II playoffs. The strongest players among the boys in recent memory include the names Ulles, Nigrelli, Stenhouse, and Serra. Today under Coach Mike Gleason the basketball talent is the best our town has ever seen. The challenges remain great, however due to rising talents of able players among the opposing teams.

The program was well-received by all in attendance. Arguably the best part of the afternoon was hearing stories from former players and coaches. Listeners debated the point at which girls' teams went from half court to full court. Folks recalled how at some point the girls' teams went from six to five players. All agreed that when one considers the date that basketball was invented (1891), it is remarkable that organized teams were in place at Westerly High School by 1900.

Zachary Garceau shared a wonderful piece of history with us, and, while doing what he loves (talking about sports), drew in a large crowd of folks with connections to Bulldogs basketball. We look forward to more of Zack's sports talks in the future.

# Ambrose Burnside's Confederate Spy: The Moon Who Wouldn't Be a Star

By Ann L. Smith

Just one look at Ambrose Burnside's portrait gives us a clue as to the origin of the word "sideburns." For the uninformed among us, you guessed it: "sideburns" originated from old Ambrose himself. His distinctive facial hair was first referred to as "burnsides" and described a facial hairstyle that, according to Wikipedia, "connected thick sideburns by way of a moustache, but left the chin clean-shaven."

Born in Liberty, Indiana, Ambrose Burnside was admitted to West Point through his father's political influence and graduated in 1847. He saw limited action in the Mexican-American War and fought with the Cavalry against the Native Apaches in the West. After being shot by an arrow in the neck, he invented a breech-loading carbine (the Burnside carbine) that could be used by cavalymen in place of sabers, their only type of weapon at that time. Burnside would later become the first president of the NRA.

In 1850 Burnside was granted a long furlough and returned to his home in Liberty, Indiana. There he took a fancy to a young lady by the name of Charlotte ("Lottie") Moon. Ambrose would call for Lottie at her family's home and would often be greeted by Lottie's little sister, Virginia. "Ginny," who was a child of four or five, would occasionally sit on Ambrose's lap during his visits, and she nicknamed her big sister's beau, "Buttons." This, no doubt, due to imposing array of brass buttons on his Army uniform.

Burnside proposed to Charlotte Moon, and she accepted. On the day of their wedding (during the winter of 1850-51) when the minister asked if Charlotte would take Ambrose as her wedded husband, she replied, "No siree Bob, I won't!" and walked out.

His broken heart somewhat mended, and having fully recovered from his neck injury, Burnside ended his furlough and returned to active duty. In 1852 he was assigned to Fort Adams in Newport, Rhode Island. He met and married Mary Richmond Bishop of Providence on April 27, 1852. In October 1853, Burnside resigned his commission in the United States Army, and was appointed commander of the Rhode Island State Militia with the rank of major general. He held this position for two years.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Burnside was a colonel in the Rhode Island Militia. He fought in the first battle of Bull Run, commanded troops in North Carolina, and fought at Antietam. The campaigns in which he fought were not always successful and in January 1863, his infamous failure at Fredricksburg (later known as the "Mud March") caused him to quit his command of the Army of the Potomac. He offered to resign his commission altogether, but President Lincoln sent him to command the Department of the Ohio, which encompassed Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, and Illinois. This was a quiet area with little activity, and the President reasoned that Burnside could not get himself into too much trouble there.

Meanwhile, Burnside's old flame, Lottie Moon and her sister Ginny had by now built up quite a reputation as Confederate sympathizers. Ginny is said to have been engaged to sixteen Union soldiers at the same time, and her sister, Lottie, (the plainer of the two) was betrothed to twelve from the Union Army. Historians presume that this was part of an intelligence-gathering plot. Lottie finally married a lawyer from Ohio, James Clark, who later became a judge. Mr. Clark, aware of some of Lottie's history, and informed directly by one other of her fiancés of their betrothal, threatened Lottie on the morning of their wedding at gunpoint saying, "There is going to be a wedding today or a funeral tomorrow!" The wedding took place. The pair settled in Ohio taking Lottie's younger sister Ginny with them.

By this time the Moon sisters' father had passed away, and their mother had resettled in Memphis, Tennessee. Ginny was enrolled at the Oxford Female College in Ohio. Unhappily surrounded by pro-Union classmates and teachers, Ginny one day begged to be sent back to her mother in Tennessee. The principal felt that such a trip for a seventeen-year old girl travelling alone would be ill-advised. In protest Ginny withdrew a pearl-handled pistol from her skirts and shot out all the stars one by one from the American flag. This resulted in Ginny's immediate expulsion, bestowing on her the freedom she so dearly longed for.

In their younger years, the Moon sisters participated in local theater and some community variety shows.

*(Continued on Page 5)*

## Ambrose Burnside

(Continued from Page 4)

Lottie, it is reported, had a knack for ventriloquism and could dislocate her jaw at will producing a loud crack whenever she did. The acting skills of the Moon sisters would soon be put to good use in their roles as Confederate spies.

One day in 1862 Lottie and Judge Clark were called on by Walker Taylor, a relative of Zachary Taylor, who had travelled from over the line in Kentucky under an assumed name. He was carrying messages from Confederate General Sterling Price which needed to be taken to General Edmund Kirby-Smith in Kentucky. He needed someone to make the trip in his place since he knew he was becoming more recognizable as an operative for the South. Lottie volunteered to go to Kentucky with the messages and thus began her career in earnest as a Confederate spy.

Within a few hours Lottie left her home in Ohio disguised as an elderly woman. Bent at the waist, she wore an old bonnet that concealed much of her face, and tossed a ragged shawl around her shoulders. She crossed the Ohio River by ferry and found a transport bound for Lexington. There she turned "Irish" and begged for a seat aboard so that she could see her "poor dying husband" in the hospital. Even with her act, she was denied passage. Undaunted, she sought out a few "fellow Irishmen" among the crew, who giving in to their own sentimentality and swayed by Lottie's tears, smuggled her aboard. Once in Lexington, with the help of Colonel Thomas Scott, her mission was accomplished.

Lottie boarded a train for Covington, Kentucky that night. She heard that authorities were searching for a female spy who might be on board. Pretending to be worried that she might be falsely accused, she appealed to General Leslie Coombs, former Kentucky Governor, to protect her, crying all the while. He saw her safely to Covington and helped her off the train. From there she crossed the river into Ohio and made her way through the woods to her home by morning.

Lottie Moon Clark carried out many missions for the Confederacy. Her travels took her to Canada and to places throughout the South. Ginny made several trips of her own when she was not in Memphis helping her mother roll bandages and gather medicine for the Confederate cause.

Ambrose Burnside, meanwhile, had started

prosecuting civilian friends of the Confederacy in Ohio. Judge Clark and his family were suspected sympathizers, and an envoy was sent to their home to gather intelligence on their activities. Ginny and her mother had come north on a spying expedition, and rather than returning to Memphis immediately, they were at the Clark home in Oxford Ohio. Lottie was away in Canada, but her sister and mother welcomed the envoy and waited on him for several days as they found him "most agreeable." The young envoy noted that the women did "nothing but quilt" from morning till dusk. What he did not know was that the women were sewing supplies such as morphine, opium, quinine and camphor into their garments in order to transport them to the Confederate troops undetected.

Ginny and her mother were soon apprehended aboard the *Alice Dean* where they were searched and placed under house arrest at a hotel in Cincinnati. The evidence seized included forty bottles of morphine, seven pounds of opium, and a quantity of camphor. Ginny met with and plied her wiles on her old friend "Buttons" who, as a favor, agreed to conduct the trial for her and her mother himself. After several weeks with no progress towards their freedom, Ginny's sister Lottie appeared before (now) General Burnside posing as a British subject and asked for a pass to Arkansas. Burnside called Lottie's bluff, although she continued to deny knowing him until she finally dropped the ruse. Lottie was placed under arrest with her sister and mother. The three were eventually released to the Clark home in Oxford, but were technically still under house arrest. Historians speculate that Burnside kept them in suspense in hopes that they would abandon their confederate activities, but there is no record of any action ever being taken against them.

Ambrose Burnside resigned his commission on April 15, 1865, after Lee's surrender at Appomattox. He served as governor of Rhode Island from May 29, 1866, to May 25, 1869. In 1874 Burnside was elected by the Rhode Island Senate as a U.S. Senator from Rhode Island; was re-elected in 1880, and served until his death in 1881. An equestrian monument of Ambrose Burnside made of Westerly granite stands in Burnside Park in Providence.

Ginny Moon went on to a career in silent films. She had small parts in *Robin Hood* and *The Spanish Dancer*. Her sister Lottie became a novelist and a pioneer woman newspaper correspondent covering European capitals during the Franco-Prussian war. Of the two, Lottie was the Moon who would never be a star.

**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 15, 2019 @ \$29.00 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 (Cash Bar)**  
**Dinner will be served at 6:00 PM**

Send this form with your check or money  
order before May 8th 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.