



Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

Summer 2019

Westerly Historical Society Officers 2018-2019

Annual Meeting Held, Awards Conferred

President
Thomas J. Gulluscio, Jr.

Membership Chair
Vacant

Vice President
Thomas A. O'Connell

Newsletter
Ann L. Smith

Secretary
Maria L. Bernier

Programs
Pamela J. Scott

Treasurer
Ann L. Smith

**Publications Committee
Chair**
Maria L. Bernier

Archivist
Zachary Garceau

Web Master
Maria L. Bernier

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

Members At Large
John Leach
Brenda Linton
Stephen Cersosimo

Celebrating its one hundred sixth year, the Westerly Historical Society gathered at the Venice Restaurant in Westerly on May 15th to conduct its annual meeting and hold its member reception. The featured speaker was Betty-Jo Cugini Greene. The second annual Local History Award was again shared this year by two tying nominees, Brandon Perrone and Zachary J. Garceau. The winner of this year's *Julia* award was Westerly's 350th Anniversary Committee. Town Council President and committee co-chair, Christopher Duhamel accepted the award with Diana Serra, committee co-chairperson, before fifty-five members and guests.

Last month the trustees of the Babcock-Smith House Museum in collaboration with the Westerly Historical Society met to review nominations for the co-sponsored Local History Award. Brandon Perrone, a Westerly student, tied for winner for his ongoing volunteerism at the Westerly Armory. Nominated for his dedication by Westerly Armory Restoration President, Roberta Mudge Humble, Brandon was happy to receive his share of the \$500 unrestricted cash prize as his parents looked on applauding his efforts.

Zachary J. Garceau shared this year's Local History Award for the hundreds of hours he has devoted to the maintaining the Westerly Historical Society archives and for rising above the call in assisting with this year's historical exhibit at the Westerly Library. Last year was particularly challenging for the archives department since we received over sixty cases of material from the estate of Dwight C. Brown Jr. following his death in the spring of 2018. Zachary was nominated for the award by Brenda Linton.

Next year the Westerly Historical Society will hold elections for board officers who serve two-year terms. For more details on this year's meeting, see our related story on the following page.

In this Issue

Annual Meeting Held.....Page 1
 Editor's Notes.....Page 2
 Annual Meeting Highlights.....Page 2
 Program Review: Point Jude.....Page 3
 Annual Meeting Photos..... Page 4



WADING IN THE SHALLOWS
PHOTO: RHODE ISLAND STATE ARCHIVES

Editor's Notes

Ann L. Smith

For quite some time now historians have been collecting oral histories of World War II veterans and others so as to preserve our history. Before the electronic age came into being, historians relied on the written word when researching primary sources of information. The *Colonial Record*, *Congressional Record*, and often personal diaries provided an insight and gave dimension to what life was like in the past.

My grandmother kept diaries for years. She managed her own farm resort with sixty head of Black Angus cattle, two hundred acres of farmland, and in later years, a campground on site. My grandfather worked in New York City until he retired and he commuted to "the farm" on weekends and other days off as time allowed. So "Granny" (as we called her) recorded the weather, number of hay bales brought in, which steers were sent off to slaughter, the number of guests in the house, and whatever other details of her personal life that were worth noting that day.

In this computer age, the video record has replaced the diary, so carefully penned in longhand late each night. One wonders just how much of our Internet blogs, Snap Chat, or Facebook content will be saved for future generations. For serious videographers, the stories worth retelling are being recognized and preserved. The awareness of the importance of preserving facts about people, places and things provides the inspiration for people like Markham Starr and Betty-Jo Cugini Greene. In April Mark Starr shared his documentary "Point Jude: Portraits From a Fishing Port" with us as part of our program series. Betty-Jo Cugini Greene, who spoke at our annual meeting about her documentaries, summed up her work with these words, "I tell stories."

We invite you to learn more about these two skilled storytellers by checking out our program reviews in this month's *Westerly's Witness*. Just as we are about to bury a new time capsule in Wilcox Park, these documentaries are part of what we create as historians so that future generations can see, hear and feel what we were all about when we were here.

Look for a full edition of *Westerly's Witness* in September when we will resume our full-length issues. We are planning another exciting season of programs and articles as we continue to fulfill our mission of "preserving memories of the past."

Annual Meeting Highlights Speaker Betty-Jo Cugini: "I Tell Stories."

By Ann L. Smith



No one knows if we have ever had an *Emmy* award-winner speak at one of our events before, but we can safely say that now we have. Our featured speaker at this year's annual meeting was Betty-Jo Cugini Greene, former news director for WJAR television and current associate professor of journalism at Emerson College in Boston. Betty-Jo is also Supervisor of New Media at University of Rhode Island. Her production company, Weathervane Communications, is another outlet for her creativity. It is through Weathervane that Betty-Jo fulfills her passion for telling stories.

As a member of the Babcock-Smith House Museum Board of Trustees and an active member of the Westerly Historical Society, Betty-Jo Cugini Greene takes pride in preserving our local history in the form of video documentaries. She has completed several historical productions already and has several more in progress. These "stories" reveal the history of the things around us that we, for the most part, take for granted. Most of us historians, to a greater or lesser degree, have some knowledge of local topics such as Watch Hill's history; facts regarding the Babcocks and the Smiths; or the granite industry that sprang up here in the nineteenth century. Books and papers on these subjects are many, but as Betty-Jo stated, "we live in a visual age."

What better moment is there than now to capture our stories in visual format so that they can be told and re-told in entertaining ways? Weathervane Communications has turned out several documentaries on Westerly's history so far and these are frequently televised on PBS. To date these programs have been well-received and the ones still in production promise to deliver the same appeal. We eagerly await Betty-Jo's newest titles such as, "Where the River Meets the Sea" and "Dr. Babcock and Dr. Franklin."

When not working on personal projects, Betty-Jo Cugini Greene also produces and consults for businesses and non-profits, doing custom content for training, sales, advertising and more. For more information on Weathervane Communications, we invite you to visit her website at

<http://weathervanecommunications.com/>

Program Review

Point Jude: Portraits From A Fishing Port

By Ann L. Smith

Scallop Mike Marchetti quit college to become a commercial fisherman. “I’m not going to spend the rest of my life looking out a window,” he said to himself as he sat in class one day. And so it was. Mochetti is one of eight people whose stories have been captured in Markham Starr’s documentary, “Point Jude: Portraits from a Fishing Port.” This film was shown last month as part of the Westerly Historical Society’s program series for the 2018-19 season. The film’s creator, Markham Starr, was on hand to introduce his work and he answered questions from attendees at its conclusion.

While not a Westerly story per se, “Portraits” takes place within a short distance of Westerly and provides a deep insight into the lives of the people who still fish commercially off of Point Judith, Rhode Island. “Still” is the operative word in this story because the local commercial fishing industry has shrunk from the size it was only thirty or forty years ago. Catch limits, species availability, the number of people choosing to enter the industry, and even regulations on the gauges of nets allowed have all affected the size of the local fleet.

Markham Starr’s film contains interviews with not only Point Judith’s fishermen, but people who serve in the support industries as well. Fish lumper Wayne Gaumond started unloading boats right out of high school and still works as an off-loader as he has for decades. Some days are long and his schedule can be erratic, but “lumping,” as it is called, is what Gaumond says he always wanted to do. At today’s rate of \$10 per 1,000 pounds of fish, lumpers need to be ready to take on the punishing work of quickly loading fish into buckets for hours at a time.

Harbor master Dan Costa, a third generation member of Point Judith’s fishing industry, recalls a time when lumping paid only a dollar per thousand pounds. As a boy he would help his father unload the family’s day-boat. Costa’s grandfather fished without radar and succeeded by relying on his own sense of hearing. Another local, Kodman Sykes, also descended from a long line of fishermen and lighthouse keepers, but not all workers around Point Judith claim such heritage. Unlike the well-known Champlins or Westcotts, transplants like Mark Sweitzer of Maryland worked summers in his college years, and somehow decided to stay for good.

A common theme of “Portraits from a Fishing Port” involves how people in the industry learned on the job

from relatives and neighbors or bosses. The film contains the childhood memories of people who tell how they learned to fish by simply “hanging around the docks” or “keeping out of trouble” in the bow of their father’s boat with a bottle of pop to pass the time. As these children grew, so did their abilities. Their life stories depict how they transformed into boat operators in their own right, whether running day-boats or long-haul operations.

Some of these children-turned-operators, like Jen Fish, did not shy away from the industry, even though it is dominated by men. She still likes to be regarded as a “fisherman” because she sees herself as one of them and works just as hard. The same can be said of Mary O’Rourke who, at Trawlworks, is part of a team that makes nets. Her story reveals a fishing sub-industry that requires technological skill and a strict adherence to regulation. New kinds of polypropylene now allow for thinner gauges compared with the older nylon nets, and the thinner lines have the effect of reducing drag. Less drag, in turn, conserves fuel and allows for increased range and easier hauling.

David Gallup of Rhode Island Engine took over his father’s engine repair and sales business, having been a part of it from the days when he swept the shop’s floor after school. Like the fishnet industry, engine building has become highly specialized and technical compared to the way it was decades ago. Adam Morse of Narragansett Bay Lobsters also “inherited” his land-based fish retailing business from his father. While initially the company dealt strictly in lobster, Morse noted that flexibility is the key to staying in business. Today his company sells a full line of shellfish and finfish, serving the restaurant and grocery trades.

While much has changed since the fishermen of today were children, all agree that the ocean, the wind, and the sun are still the same. For those who love the sea, working with nature will never lose its fascination.

Markham Starr’s film is part of a series whose purpose is to document the fishing industry and preserve it for future generations. His content will be catalogued at the United States Library of Congress. “Point Jude: Portraits from a Fishing Port” can be viewed at Vimeo.com or by following this link: <https://vimeo.com/302464103>

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



Awards Bestowed at Annual Meeting

PHOTOS BY STEPHEN CERSOSIMO



CHRIS DUHAMEL AND DIANA SERRA (RIGHT) ACCEPT THE *JULIA* AWARD FROM WESTERLY HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESIDENT, THOMAS J. GULLUSCIO, JR. (LEFT).



ELLEN MADISON PHD, PRESENTS THE BABCOCK-SMITH HOUSE AND WESTERLY HISTORICAL SOCIETY CO-SPONSORED HISTORY AWARD TO BRANDON PERRONE. ZACHARY J. GARCEAU (NOT PICTURED) SHARED THIS YEAR'S HISTORY AWARD DUE TO A TIE FOR FIRST PLACE.