



Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

October 2019

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Calendar of Events

October 27, 2019 2:00 P.M.

Stephen Cersosimo

*Scanning and Digitization of Historic Photos
and Other Media*

Stephen Cersosimo, owner of Granite Photo in Westerly, will give a talk on the scanning and preservation of photos and other media. The second half of this event will focus on the technologies used for scanning. We invite the audience to bring old photos, negatives, and slides of Westerly and Westerly life for scanning.

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November 10, 2019 2:00 P.M.

The Vox Hunters

Rhode Islanders Armand Aromin and Benedict Gagliardi are seekers and singers of old songs, cultivators of local music, and chronic multi-instrumentalists. With a pair of oft-harmonizing voices tastefully garnished with fiddle, free-reeds, and tenor guitar, The Vox Hunters will offer an all-natural connection to the living tradition of folk music.

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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
&
Westerly 350th Anniversary Committee**

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THE WESTERLY QUARRYMEN
PHOTO: RUSSELL SODER

Editor's Notes

Ann L. Smith

As most of our readers are aware, many of our members devote time to both the Westerly Historical Society and The Babcock-Smith House. In fact, the level of energy among some of our people is astounding. Consider that many also volunteer with the Chamber of Commerce's 350th Anniversary Committee or are involved with the Friends of the Library. With so many irons in the fire, it seems even more amazing that our local historians occasionally take on personal projects in addition to the time they spend everywhere else.

Around the year 2000, Dwight and Anna Brown (both now deceased) took the initiative to catalog every grave in River Bend Cemetery. This valuable reference work is available for viewing at the Westerly Library in the Special Collections Department (a.k.a "Local History Room"). The long hours the Browns undoubtedly spent on this project astonishes and we are grateful for this and other written works that now form part of their legacy.

The list of "heavy-hitters" of recent memory is long. If I dare to continue in this vein the reader would no doubt hear mention of the books, videos, and research by the notables among us such as Tom O'Connell, Ellen Madison, John Coduri and many, many more.

Board member Brenda Linton and her husband John have spent the last decade traveling the United States authenticating monument orders from the Smith Granite Company's records. Using their photographs, they shared their technique, along with specific locations and personal stories about the folks who bought Smith granite stones at the recent Babcock-Smith House program, "Monument Hunters: A Little Travel, a Little History, a Little Mystery." This talk was the culmination of their ten-year project and is a valuable contribution to our deposit of local history. Kudos to the Lintons for a job well done!

Membership renewal letters were mailed recently. If any member has not received a renewal notice, it is either because you joined recently and aren't up for renewal or we have an outdated address. Email us at whsmembership@gmail.com if you would like to inquire about the status of your membership.

In this issue of *Westerly's Witness* we are pleased to present a review of our last program, "125 Years of Football at Westerly High School: A History of the Bulldogs, 1893-2018" presented by our archivist, Zachary J. Garceau. The attendees consisted of former players and coaches and one or two future football hall-of-famers. A recap of Zack's talk appears on the following page.

In conjunction with major league baseball's post-season and eventual World Series later this month, we bring you Russell Soder's piece on the vintage baseball league operating in our area. With much of the focus on modern-day baseball, whether it be school competitions or major league games, we thought our readers would enjoy knowing about an entire network of enthusiasts who play the game according to historical rules and rock the old-time uniforms for added effect. Just a note for our grammar police: "baseball" was known as "base ball" back in the day. We learn something new every day.

On Page 5 readers will find the latest archive news from Zachary Garceau. Zack has been on site throughout the summer maintaining our holdings and processing new acquisitions. Please see his "From the Archives" report for details.

Our fall programs are scheduled for October 27 and November 10. See Page 1 for details. In addition, the Babcock Smith House will present two programs between now and their December holiday bazaar. See <http://www.babcocksmithhouse.org/BabcockSmithHouse/events.htm> for a description of the November 3 talk entitled, "The DAR and Westerly, Rhode Island" and the December 1 showing of Betty-Jo Cugini's documentary on Benjamin Franklin and the Babcocks of Westerly. This video was produced in collaboration with Jim Karpeichik, who along with Betty-Jo, enjoyed a successful career at NBC News. Jim is now producing independent projects for public television and the corporate world at large. You can find Jim Karpeichik on line at [Linkedin.com](https://www.linkedin.com/in/jimkarpeichik/) or visit his website at <https://www.oceanstatevideo.com>

The next issue of *Westerly's Witness* will be our November-December edition and are hoping to have it available near the end of November. In the meantime we welcome your questions, comments and suggestions. Please feel free to contact us via any of the email addresses on our website, <https://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/>

Program Review

125 Years of Football at Westerly High School: A History of the Bulldogs, 1893-2018

By Ann L. Smith

What happens when you take a sports enthusiast with a passion for local history and turn him loose in a vault full of Bulldogs' ephemera? Anyone who has already seen Zachary Garceau in action (see "History of Basketball at Westerly High School;" *Westerly's Witness*, March 2019) knows the answer. Last month our program attendees were treated to a second sports history lesson about Westerly's finest athletes when we heard Zack's talk entitled, "125 Years of Football at Westerly High School: A History of the Bulldogs, 1893-2018."

Competing for attendees with televised pro football in the same time slot and a beautiful day weather-wise, Zachary Garceau still managed to draw a respectable number of people to his audience. Retired coaches and players as well as some possible future players always pay attention whenever Zack takes the podium and the topic is sports. It certainly helps when the subject's history is worth talking about. Consider how uninteresting this talk would have been if Westerly's football history had nothing notable in it. Luckily, there have been plenty of (sixteen) state championships, winning seasons, and interesting events concerning our football Bulldogs, and so the audience came away satisfied in the end.

In its humble beginnings, the football program at Westerly High School suffered its fits and starts. Evidence exists of a high school football team in Westerly as of 1886, but official records seem to document regular play from 1893 on. The early uniforms included leather helmets and non-matching jerseys. The stylized "W" appearing on the uniforms has gone through several iterations over the years. Even the location of the early games was inconsistent. The Bulldogs played everywhere from Moss Street in Pawcatuck, Beach Street, Elm Street, and Craig Field before settling into their permanent home at the Westerly High School in 1951. It is noteworthy that the High School opened in its current location in 1938, but adequate space for football games did not exist until at least a dozen years later in 1951.

Five coaches each stayed on the job in excess of ten years. Famous notables include the likes of Robert Mudge, who incidentally, was considered one of Rhode Island's all-time greatest athletes. His touchdown for Rhode Island State College (now URI)

won them the first-ever game against Brown University in 1935. Other legendary football coaches in Westerly's football annals are James Murano, a Hall of Fame coach who led Westerly to two RIIL state titles, and Sal Augeri for whom the school's athletic field is named.

The long-standing football rivalry between Westerly and Stonington, Connecticut is said to be one of the oldest, if not the oldest, continuously held matchup between two high school football teams in the country. Experts argue over technicalities concerning this claim, such as the fact that no contest took place in 1920, but the Bulldogs vs. Bears tradition is certainly an institution in this neck of the woods. Stonington, incidentally, has a slight edge currently over Westerly for the most wins in the two-town game history.

One of the most notable players in Westerly's football history was John "Goose" Gentile. Said to be "poetry in motion," he was an all-state selection at halfback in 1944, missed the 1945 season due to military service, and returned in 1946 when he was again named to the all-state team.

The history of football at Westerly High is long and varied. There have been winning years and even winning decades. Consider that in 1930 Westerly gave up only six points in nine games, and those six points were all scored by one opponent in a single game. In contrast, our most abysmal losses finished with triple-digit scores as when the Bulldogs fell to Norwich Academy 100-0 in 1903. In 1917 our most able-bodied players went off to fight in World War I, and so our loss to Stonington was entered into the record books that year with a score of 122-0.

The current outlook for Westerly football seems positive. We recently witnessed the stellar performance of Tristan Turano, who, during the period 2017-2018 claimed the best statistical career in Westerly High School football history. For the current season the Bulldogs are 3-1 as of this writing. We look forward to continued successes and hope to finish with a big win against the Stonington Bears next month. Our readers can check out the latest game results and schedule for the remaining games at [https://www.maxpreps.com/high-schools/westerly-bulldogs-\(westerly,ri\)/football/schedule.htm](https://www.maxpreps.com/high-schools/westerly-bulldogs-(westerly,ri)/football/schedule.htm)

Vintage Base Ball: Westerly's Quarrymen Rock the Game

By Russell Soder

On a breezy day in April 2013, I fell in love with my favorite sport all over again. After driving from New York for over an hour to play vintage base ball at a vineyard in rural Connecticut, I had the usual “new team” butterflies. Referred by dear college friend who played on another vintage team, I would not know anyone at this “match” and I hoped to do well enough to be offered a coveted 1860's period woolen uniform. I was nervous, but immediately put at ease by the kind demeanor of the “ballists” of Newtown Sandy Hook.

This was not the baseball I knew. We were not playing in a familiar diamond shaped infield. There was no dirt or gravel in which to indicate position. We were situated on an all grass “pitch,” a gorgeous field of green, stirred only by two chalk lines extending ninety degrees from home plate into the horizon, three sand-filled canvas bags and two round plates for a pitcher and a striker to stand near, respectively. All seemed serene, other than the fact that I was playing first base without a glove, as was the rest of the team--no such equipment in 1864!



AN AUTHENTIC REPRODUCTION OF A VINTAGE BASE BALL
PHOTO: VBBA.ORG

My first time batting was interesting, to say the least. I was handed a 40 inch long, thick handled piece of lumber and heard, “Striker to the plate!” from a gravelly voiced umpire wearing a bow tie, tails and a handlebar moustache. I then entered into a friendly battle of wits with the pitcher (at times called a hurler) and realized that he was obligated to throw strikes. He pitched a hard underhand and sometimes a high, softball-like changeup. If he didn't throw a strike he got a “Warning pitcher!” call from the umpire. If I passed up a hittable ball in the space of my chest to my shins, I heard, “Warning striker!”

Upon hearing the glorious crack of the wooden bat to the handmade leather ball, it yielded a hard line drive to left field. I ran the usual ninety feet to first, made my turn and slowly walked back to the bag. The first baseman informed me that I was caught out and announced to his infield, “One hand here!” I learned quickly that you are out on a bounce and an out is referred to as a “hand.” These are just a few of the many differences between our wonderful pastime at birth, and the late-day game we continue to celebrate.

This past spring, Chariho baseball coach Josh Silva and I decided it was time for Westerly have its place in the VBBA, or Vintage Base Ball Association. The Westerly Quarrymen Base Ball Club is now one of over 200 teams nationwide, with around 40 in our region. We play teams from Maine down to New York City, such as the famed Providence Grays and the Brooklyn Atlantics. Our current home field fluctuates, but we intend to have a dedicated pitch by spring 2020.

Vintage base ball is a gentleman's sport. There is no room for negativity or brawling. There is a camaraderie among the players and fans that I feel is sometimes lacking in the modern game. An historical, at times theatrical interpretation is evident and we strive to uphold and share that with our community. I see this game as both competitive and educational. We have players fresh out of college and players who are coming back after years away from playing ball. Ladies are welcome to take the field. We all have one common passion--our beloved pastime.



A RECENT MATCH-UP.
PHOTO: VBBA.ORG

If you or someone you know is interested in playing vintage base ball, drop us a line at westerlyquarrymen@gmail.com or find us on [Facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/westerlyquarrymen).

From the Archives

By Zachary J. Garceau

The last several months have been quite a busy time for us at the Westerly Historical Society archives. Over the summer, we received several notable additions to our collections, including several multi-item donations. A comprehensive review of the items we received since our annual dinner in May will be forthcoming, however, this month, I'd like to briefly mention a few significant contributions.

In August, I had the privilege to sit down with Mr. Ed Liguori at his home and talk at length about local sports history. Mr. Liguori provided the archives with several newspapers from the 1970's through the 1990's including multiple inserts from the *Westerly Sun* showcasing Westerly High School football and the Summer Pops. He also provided us with a copy of the program from a Westerly High School basketball championship banquet from the 1950's. We also recently acquired a collection of 35mm slides showing parade scenes in Westerly in the late 1960's as well as aerial photos of Westerly taken during an air show in the 1970's. **If you have any items you'd like to donate, especially those regarding local high school sports or items from the mid to late 20th century, please contact me at whsarchivist@gmail.com.**

Over the summer, I had the pleasure of working with an intern, Kyra McCormick, who was local for the summer before departing for graduate school, where she is studying Public History. Kyra helped me to catalog a number of our previously unsorted boxes of photos which lacked a formal index. Kyra meticulously indexed and numbered the photos in these boxes and compiled a spreadsheet that we can now use to search the collections, making these photos accessible and useful to researchers. We hope to have Kyra back whenever she is in town and we are incredibly grateful for her help.

We also made several necessary purchases over the summer including folders, document boxes, letter boxes, newspaper boxes, and clothing storage. The letter boxes in particular were very helpful when cataloging the Bertha M. Brown and Mildred H. Bray Collections, part of the Dwight C. Brown Jr. Collection. These series contain dozens of letters written to Bertha M. Brown and Mildred H. Bray during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These letters provide a fantastic view into life at the turn of the century.

The Brown collection also contains several school

reports and report cards from Westerly High School which are fascinating for their insight into the public education system in the early 20th century. Also intriguing is the Bray Collection which includes documents from Mildred's visit to England for the coronation of King George VI and her time at Wheaton College.

In regards to the aforementioned Dwight C. Brown Jr. Collection, I have been continuing to work over the summer on sorting and indexing the collection. As a result, I have been able to consolidate the collection from approximately 60 to 70 boxes to approximately 30 to 35 boxes by rehousing items and creating a more detailed organizational system. There are some boxes which still require sorting and indexing, but overall, great progress has been made.

In addition to the efforts made on the Brown Collection as well as the work involved in adding new items to the archives, I have also begun several smaller side projects. The first project is the creation of a genealogical file folder. Over the last two and a half years serving as the Society's archivist, I have found that there are three main types of inquiries that we receive: photo requests of certain scenes, events, or people; information about homes once owned by ancestors; and most often, genealogical questions. As a genealogical researcher by trade, I have come to understand the importance of strong record keeping for individuals mentioned in the items in our collection. Because of the prevalence of this last type of request, I have composed a genealogical file sheet, which contains space for all of the most pertinent information about a person's life and family history including their place and date of birth, marriage, and death, as well as information about children, occupations, activities, and military service. Whenever I come across information of note about an individual, I have begun recording this information on a genealogical file sheet for future use. Lastly, I would like to take the time to mention that, going forward, I will be greatly assisted in my archival work by our newest board member, Stephen Cersosimo. Mr. Cersosimo, the owner of Granite Photo, brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in the art of document and photo preservation and restoration. He has also begun working on scanning the thousands of 35mm slides donated as part of the Dwight C. Brown Collection, making them much more beneficial to the Society. I very much look forward to working with Stephen and am incredibly happy to welcome him to the archival team.

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



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Westerly Historical Society Membership Renewal Form

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining | \$50.00 | | |

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