



Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

November-December 2019

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Calendar of Events

Saturday, December 7, 2019

Babcock-Smith House Museum Holiday Boutique

9:00 AM to 1:00 PM

A holiday marketplace of cookie platters, custom decorated cookies and other baked goods, handmade decorative greens, artisan-crafted soaps, hearty soups to go and other food items ...and the ever-popular basket raffle!

<http://www.babcocksmithhouse.org/BabcockSmithHouse/events.htm> for latest information

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JANUARY POT LUCK

Sunday, January 12, 2020, 2:00 PM

Westerly Historical Society Members Only Potluck Dinner and Research Sharing Event

We are once again planning a January pot-luck for members and prospective members only.

Members provide appetizers, entrees, sides, and desserts. Beverages and bread /rolls will be provided. Interested parties may speak (5-10 minutes) on their current historical research or projects. Please contact Pamela Scott, Program Director, with your topic.

Email: whsprograms@gmail.com or phone

(401)-741-8705.

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Editor's Notes

Ann L. Smith

Apologies are in order for not bringing our readers up to date on the results of the town-wide trivia contest held September 20th. Organized by Donna Celico, Pat Grande, and Maria Bernier, "There's Nothing Trivial About Westerly" was one of many anniversary events that have been taking place throughout the town all year. The venue was filled with thirty one teams competing. Many thanks go out to team members Thomas J. Gulluscio, our president, Stephen Cersosimo, board member, Zack Garceau, our archivist, and his charming wife Anna. Yours truly rounded out the team of five. We were edged out by Betty Cugini's team who featured her daughter Betty-Jo and son-in-law Stephen Greene, and Ellen Madison's group that included Lido Mochetti, Bob Benson and Bob's son Brad. Still, a respectable third place for us with an incomplete roster earned us a few bragging rights. The event raised \$10,000 for the Westerly Library and Wilcox Park. Many thanks to all who purchased a table and to Westerly Historical Society secretary Maria Bernier who, although unable to join our team, cheered us on and stayed busy all night as part of the hospitality unit. Maria helped compile the questions and so was ineligible to complete. There were some easy questions but there were several "toughies" that helped to separate the wheat from the chaff. Congratulations WHS!

Due to scheduling issues, there will be no lecture program during the month of December. However, Pamela Scott, our program chairperson, reports that the spring lineup will include more of the engaging and informative content that we all have been enjoying in recent months. As a reminder, videos of our past lectures (with the exception of the November 2019) program are available on our website at

<https://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/events/>

Speaking of the November program, in the Carriage House it was "standing room only" as we welcomed The Vox Hunters for a wonderful program on the historical folk music of Rhode Island. See Page 4 for the program review. For those who missed the October lecture, a short recap appears on Page 3.

In the October issue of *Westerly's Witness* we brought you the first-hand account of Russell Soder's experience with vintage "base ball." We are

pleased to announce that Russell has been accepted to the Westerly Historical Society executive board as a member at large.

Our partners at the Babcock-Smith House Museum are gearing up for a wonderful holiday "boutique." The dates and time for this event are listed on Pages 1 and 7 of this issue. All proceeds benefit the Babcock-Smith House Museum, so we hope you will come out and join our friends for this seasonal event.

In January we are anticipating the fifth annual, members only, potluck dinner and research sharing event. The date is set for January 12th at 2:00 P.M. and is subject to change if inclement weather strikes, so we will schedule as necessary. Please know that **not everyone who attends is expected to present a topic**. We need listeners as well as speakers, so please consider joining us for a relaxing afternoon with friends as we share our most interesting topics and yummiest recipes. See Page 1 for details.

If you attended the Olde Tyme Faire in Wilcox Park in August, you may recall that the League of Women Voters held a mock election to raise awareness of civic responsibilities and to draw attention to the upcoming 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The 19th Amendment guarantees American women the right to vote. Nina P. Rossomando, president of the League of Women Voters South County and Westerly Historical Society member, presents an informational and inspiring piece on women's voting rights in this edition's feature article. We hope you enjoy "A Brief History of the Women's Suffrage in the U.S. and Rhode Island" beginning on Page 6.

Just a quick reminder, membership renewal letters were mailed during October. If you have not already done so, please renew your membership by December 31st. If you like, you can renew electronically by logging on to our website at <https://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/membership/> and renew using a credit card or PayPal.

As we move ever closer to the holiday season, we hope you will take time to reflect on the past, give thanks, and celebrate all that is good in your lives. Whatever your holiday and no matter your faith, the entire executive board wishes you our sincerest and warmest blessings now and for the coming new year.

Program Review: Stephen Cersosimo on Scanning and Digitization of Historic Photos

By Ann L. Smith

When the Westerly Historical Society partnered with the Babcock-Smith House to present “Our Story: 350 Years,” one of the first challenges to present itself was the scanning and reprinting of massive amounts of material. The “Our Story” exhibit at the Westerly Library contained a large volume of historic photos and documents from the archives of the two organizations. The items that were carefully hung in the Hoxie Gallery were actually reproductions, and so a marathon scanning event occupied a large part of the volunteers’ time in the weeks that preceded the event. Aside from needing to preserve the original materials from damage or loss, many of the photos and documents were enlarged for better visibility.

When Stephen Cersosimo joined us to share his technical expertise with us in October this year, we learned the basics of what is necessary when scanning and enlarging photos and historic documents. And while we are not planning another exhibit of the kind we presented earlier this year, folks attending Stephen’s informative presentation hopefully gained some skills for handling personal photos and documents.

The first lesson of the afternoon dealt with image resolution. Attendees learned about “dpi” (dots per inch), and file size. Stephen explained that the higher the resolution, the greater the capacity to enlarge an image. The tradeoff, however, is that the higher the resolution, the larger the file size.

Stephen also discussed the handling of 35mm slides and negatives. We learned that ordinary “all-in-one” type home printers are not built to handle transparent media properly. Serious collectors can invest in higher-end scanners or bring them to a shop that specializes in media scanning. Stephen explained the importance of knowing the difference between the “emulsion” side of a slide and the smooth (or “shiny”) side. When scanning this type of media the emulsion side is up and the shiny side is placed down so that it faces the light source in the scanner.

Once an item is scanned, it quite often needs to be rotated for easier viewing. Rotation is a simple command and is available in every media handling program. Whether one is using Adobe PhotoShop, Windows Photo Viewer or any other program, the

“rotate” command is readily available. Once an item is scanned and rotated, users have the option to crop it. Cropping is also a common command or “tool.” Then it is ready to be stored in one’s file directory. Naming and cataloguing media files can be tricky, especially when working with large collections. A well-organized system is essential for locating a file that, without the proper file name, would be difficult to find.

A common need in working with old photos and documents is the repairing of damaged images and the adjusting of colors. Once an image is scanned it can be repaired digitally using a software program such as PhotoShop. Improperly enlarged prints that exist with heavy pixilation can be corrected using programs that employ artificial intelligence to restore clarity. Fading and yellowing are common problems that can also be corrected after images are scanned. We learned that yellowing occurs due to the presence of sulfuric acid in paper. Newspaper is notorious for its yellowing property, so preservation of a newspaper item is best done when the original is new. The digital file can be stored indefinitely, and prints (if desired) are reproduced on acid-free paper that withstands yellowing over time.

Very large photographs nowadays are created by photographing a subject in sections and “stitching” the pieces together using specialized software. Sweeping panoramas that cover a broad area, for example, are made in this way. Reproduction of these items requires a wide-format printer that is not generally sold for home use.

Program attendees received one final piece of advice before Stephen Cersosimo ended his talk: despite the popularity and relatively high quality of cell-phone cameras, serious photographers still need to capture images on standard digital cameras. This is due to the fact that the sensors in regular cameras are several times larger than those in cell-phone cameras, even though they both may have the same number of megapixels.

Readers will recall that Stephen Cersosimo is the owner of Granite Photo where he offers a full range of scanning and photo restoration services. Stephen is looking forward to assisting with the digitization of our large collection of archived images.

Program Review: The Vox Hunters

By Ann L. Smith

Not far from Westerly, Rhode Island is the city of Fall River, Massachusetts where, in 1892, two members of the Borden family were murdered with an axe in their family home. Their daughter, Lizzie, was tried and acquitted and the murders were never solved. For years following the sensational event schoolchildren sang, “Lizzie Borden took an axe/ and gave her mother forty whacks./ When she saw what she had done/ She gave her father forty-one.” As children we ourselves remembered Christopher Columbus’s famous voyage by reciting, “In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue.”

The use of all kinds of rhyming verse is important from a historical perspective in that it serves two major functions. First, by recording an event in verse, events remain unchanged as a story is told and retold. Second, the events or storylines are easily shared in the absence of any written word. Consider that even where a population is largely illiterate, the retelling of history in verse is simple because rhyming lines are easiest to remember. The use of rhyming lines to tell a story has been with us since drama began in Ancient Greece and throughout history, continuing with Shakespeare’s classics and all the rest.

Sophocles wrote *The Persians* where he memorializes the Persians’ loss at the battle of Salamis. Shakespeare wrote many plays centering on historical figures such as King Henry VIII and Julius Caesar. According to Internet blogger Lee Jamieson, “In writing the history plays, Shakespeare was not attempting to render an accurate picture of the past. Rather, he was writing for the entertainment of his theater audience and therefore molded historical events to suit their interests.”

Leaving aside the classics for a moment, our purpose here is to explore how the use of popular verse helped to preserve our local history—by this we can say our *very* local history. We learned from our November 10, 2019 program that even the most quotidian events from our small neck of the woods were memorialized in verse and song. Lizzie Borden may have made the national news in her time, but it is a safe bet that few folks outside of Rhode Island would have cared about the conditions at the old Kingstown jail, for example.

What an unexpected treat, then, was ours to enjoy when Rhode Islanders Armand Aromin and Benedict

Gagliardi spent a delightful hour with us performing some of Rhode Island’s oldest folk songs. A brief history of how these songs came to be preserved preceded the performance. Perhaps the person most responsible for saving many of the songs from obscurity was Helen Hartness Flanders whose work in the 1940s proved to be invaluable. Aside from the Flanders collection, certain other collections have been uncovered through the diligent research of The Vox Hunters themselves. Their work has taken them to several hallowed halls of academia from Brown University, Harvard University, the Library of Congress and many others.



THE VOX HUNTERS
PHOTO: ANNA COLLITON
COURTESY THEVOXHUNTERS.COM

The musical portion of the program began with “O Bury Me Not in the Deep, Deep Sea,” whose chorus is

*It matters not, I have oft been told,
Where the body lies when the heart gets cold;
For the sake of the dear ones waiting for me,
Bury me not in the deep, deep sea.*

This sailor’s lament ends with the very thing the song forbids.

*And many wild prayers hallowed the waves,
And he sank beneath a sailor’s grave.*

This song does not refer to any seaman in particular, so there are no exact historical references contained in it. Its value lies in that it is a perfect example of Rhode Island folk music. “Bury Me Not in the Deep, Deep Sea” is a variation of another song, “The Sailor’s Grave” and was offered up by Carrie

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The Vox Hunters

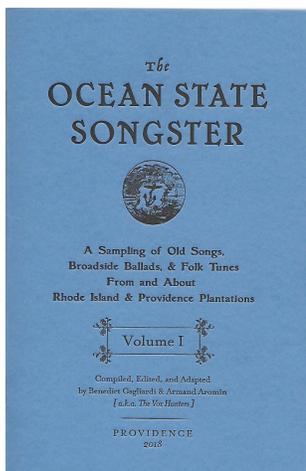
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Crandall of Westerly who sang it when the Flanders Collection was being compiled decades ago.

The next song of the afternoon was another mournful ballad. Supposedly written about the wreck of the *Metis* off Watch Hill in 1872 “Kiss Me Mama for I’m Going to Sleep” describes the deaths of two young sisters whose lifeless bodies were plucked from the surf and set upon the sand where all could see.

*Kiss me Mama, kiss your darling,
Pray to God my soul to keep.
Kiss me now, dear Mama kiss me,
Kiss me, for I’m going to sleep.*

The “Old Kingston Jail” was a brighter tune by far and mentions the jailer by name. “Wilcox” was indeed the name of not one but two sheriffs in charge of the Kingstown jail. The jail in the song is known today as the Old Washington County Jail. It no longer operates as a jail and is home to the South County History Center. According to The Vox Hunters’ *The Ocean State Songster*, shown below, both Charles Wilcox and his son John Reynolds Wilcox ran the jail from 1870-1878 and 1890-1903, respectively.



The rather infectious chorus of “The Old Kingston Jail” offers these hopeful thoughts.

*It’s Old Kingston Jail, we’re longing for the time
For Wilcox to unlock the doors and tell us all to climb.
We’ll jump into our hats and coats and travel off by rail
And bid farewell to the white-washed cell
We had in Kingston Jail.*

With this very specific reference to a historic place and the actual people who ran it, the value of these

old folk songs becomes apparent. It should be noted, however, that not all the old folk songs contain historical references. And, as in Shakespeare’s plays, we ought to be mindful that historical events can be “molded” for the sake of entertainment value.

The Vox Hunters’ *Songster* pamphlet categorizes the songs it contains into three lists: Old Songs of Local Relevance, Migrant Songs and Local Ballad Variants, and Broadside Ballads and Other Songs of Rhode Island Authorship. The melodies to which these songs are set are often “recycled” from one ballad to the next. The Vox Hunters are familiar with all the tunes and have set at least one poem to an existing melody due to the original music having been lost. An example of tune-sharing is observed when the well-known music from “Yankee Doodle” appears as the backdrop for “Narragansett Clams.”

*Yankee Doodle, dig ‘em up
Yankee Doodle dandy
Mind the edges when you shuck
And with your knife be handy.*

The Vox Hunters informative and entertaining program was not only an audible treat, but the unusual instruments they brought and played prompted a slew of questions from this author. Armand Aromin easily transitioned from fiddle to tin whistle, and Benedict Gagliardi was at ease whether he was strumming his four-string, tenor guitar or squeezing the concertina. His concertina, we were told, is a replica of an authentic instrument and was specially built for The Vox Hunters. Until recently Gagliardi had used a concertina that was more than a hundred years old but opted to retire it in order to preserve its condition.

For those who were unable to join us for this wonderful presentation, TheVoxHunters.com website offers photos and videos of some of their recent appearances. The *Songster* as well as their new album of recordings is also available to purchase. Their website contains The Vox Hunters’ full schedule of upcoming performances, so whether folks missed them on November 10th or just want to hear more of The Vox Hunters, many opportunities still exist to hear their music in person.

We are grateful to The Vox Hunters for spending their time with us. The presentation was as educational as it was entertaining. We would be open to scheduling an encore performance in the future if possible. For more information or to book a performance, use the “contact” tab on their website.

A Brief History of the Women's Suffrage in the U.S. and Rhode Island

By Nina P. Rossomando, President, League of Women Voters South County

The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."

The year 2020 is the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the amendment legalizing women's right to vote. Next year, the League of Women Voters and many other organizations nationwide will commemorate and celebrate the 72-year fight to win the right to vote which enfranchised 20 million women.

The Fight for the Vote Begins

In the mid-1800s, women began to question their lack of rights in this new country. Most notable were Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. These two women collaborated over many years to fight for women's right to vote. Stanton would write speeches and tend to her wifely and parenting duties, and Anthony was usually the fearless speaker traveling far and wide to deliver the message.

In 1848, Anthony and Stanton with Lucretia Mott and others organized the first women's convention at Seneca Falls, NY. Their ambitious goal, as expressed in the Declaration of Sentiments, was to redefine the status of women in society by winning: property rights, access to education and employment, and most importantly, the right to vote. At the convention, Stanton addressed the largely female crowd, "We are assembled...to declare our right to be as free as man is free, to be represented in the government which we are taxed to support."

The Movement Divides Over Race

The Seneca Falls Convention was quickly followed by women's conventions in other states. It is important to note that the women's suffrage leaders were also involved in the abolitionist and the temperance movements. The push for the 15th Amendment to give black men the vote resulted in a serious split among the suffragist women into two organizations – the American and National Woman Suffrage Association. The strong abolitionists supported the amendment, but others like Anthony and Stanton refused to support it, outraged that black men could win the vote before "all women, black and white." And there were black women, most notably

Sojourner Truth, a former slave, and Frances E.W. Harper, a poet, who spoke out for racial **and** gender equality.

Facing strong opposition in the U.S. Congress in the 1880s, the suffragists shifted to a state by state strategy with success in Colorado and Idaho. Wyoming and Utah, western territories, became equal suffrage states in the 1890s.

Progress in the 20th Century

The fight became more focused in the early 1900s led by younger women, especially, Carrie Chapman Catt and Alice Paul. Catt and her followers repeatedly petitioned the government; whereas, Paul believed in more aggressive tactics including marches and picketing of the White House with banners asking, "Mr. President, How Long Do We Have to Wait?" Many of the picketers were arrested, jailed, and some were force fed when they staged a hunger strike. After WWI President Wilson finally supported the women, and Congress passed the 19th Amendment in 1919.

By the spring of 1920, thirty-five states including Rhode Island, had ratified the 19th Amendment. Interestingly, eight states in the South voted against it. As thirty six states were required for ratification, the Tennessee House took up the question. The dramatic story of the Tennessee vote has been told and retold in books and movies. On August 18th, Harry Burns, the youngest legislator from a solidly anti-suffrage district, at the urging of his mother, voted "Aye," and Tennessee became the state credited with giving women the ballot. Eight days later, on August 26th the amendment became law.

Suffrage Efforts in RI: A Westerly Connection

For decades prior to the passage of the 19th Amendment, there was considerable activity in Rhode Island at the state and local level. In 1868, the Rhode Island Women's Suffrage Association, (RIWSA), was formed by Paulina Wright Davis, the first president of the New England Woman's Suffrage Association and editor of the *Una* newspaper, and by Elizabeth Buffum Chace (a bust of whom can be seen in the Rhode Island Capitol). On June 24, 1869, Westerly's (original) Armory Hall was the site of a Women's Suffrage Convention with Paulina Wright Davis,

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A Brief History of the Women's Suffrage

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president of RIWSA, presiding (*Rhode Island National Vote for Women Historic Trail*, compiled by Russell J. DeSimone, 2019). For more than forty years the RIWSA was the sole organizing force working for women's suffrage in Rhode Island. Soon after its formation, in 1882 the Association petitioned the legislature to submit an amendment to the Rhode Island Constitution to enfranchise women. According to Elizabeth Buffum Chace, Representative James W. Stillman, a young first term legislator from Westerly, "urged the adoption of a Constitutional amendment ...in a very logical and eloquent argument, occupying several hours.... By persistent effort, under a shower of ridicule and bitter sarcasm...he secured a thorough hearing for all the friends of the movement in the House." (*Elizabeth Buffum Chace and Lillie Chace Wyman*, by Elizabeth C. Stevens, 2003, p. 86).



OLD WESTERLY ARMORY ON MAIN STREET
PHOTO: WESTERLY HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES

Despite Representative Stillman's efforts, the amendment was voted down. Nevertheless, each year the organization lobbied for the legislation. Finally, in 1886-1887 the legislation passed and was sent to the voters. Not surprisingly the all male voters of Rhode Island voted "NO". Despite this setback, a bill guaranteeing women's suffrage by constitutional amendment was presented to Rhode Island legislature each year for the next thirty-eight years without success.

In the beginning of the 20th century, several suffrage groups coalesced into a single organization - The Rhode Island Equal Suffrage Association, and a
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**Babcock-Smith House
Holiday Boutique
Saturday, December 7, 2019
9 a.m. ~ 1 p.m.**

**Join us for a holiday marketplace of
cookie platters, custom decorated
cookies and other baked goods,
handmade decorative greens, artisan-
crafted soaps, hearty soups to go and
other food items ...
and much, much more!
(Including Joshua's Store and our
exceptional
Raffle Baskets)**

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A Brief History of the Women's Suffrage

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new generation of leaders – Sarah Algeo & Alva Vanderbilt Belmont took up the fight. In addition to women's suffrage, the Rhode Island organization supported many other social reforms. These concerns included lobbying for increased educational opportunities for women, improved child and female labor legislation, better immigration laws, and prohibition.

The League of Women Voters

A year before the passage of the 19th Amendment legalized the vote for women, President Catt of the National Women's Suffrage Association called for a "Living Memorial" to the leaders of the fight for women's suffrage. In February of 1920, the League of Women Voters was formally created as a national organization. The League of Women Voters of Rhode Island was organized on October 8, 1920. The League now exists in all 50 states with approximately 750 local chapters.

Can You Help?

The League of Women Voters South County is looking for any information about suffrage supporters and activities in Westerly and information about local descendants of Elizabeth Buffum Chace, Paulina Wright Davis, and James Stillman. Please send to: lwvscri@gmail.com.
