



Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

March 2020

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Calendar of Events

Sunday, March 15, 2020 2:00 P.M.
Russell Soder

“Vintage Base Ball in Westerly”

A chat about the Westerly Quarrymen, the game they play and how they play it. Discover our beloved pastime in its original form, circa 1864.

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Sunday, April 26, 2020 2:00 P.M.
Donna Brandelli of

Brandelli Genealogy Services **“Beginning Your Genealogy Research; More Than Genealogy 101”**

Looking for that elusive ancestor? Can't break through a brick wall? Come learn research strategies and tools to help concentrate your search. Learn about resources available online and how to evaluate your research. Learn how to document your work for future generations.

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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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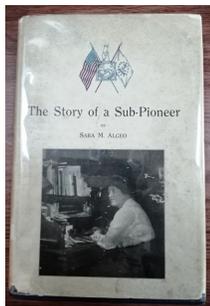


PHOTO OF THE 1925 BOOK *THE STORY OF A SUB-PIONEER* BY SARA M. ALGEO. THE AUTHOR TAUGHT AT CRANSTON HIGH SCHOOL AND WAS CHAIRPERSON OF THE RHODE ISLAND WOMAN SUFFRAGE ASSOCIATION. (PHOTO COURTESY OF ANN L. SMITH)

Editor's Notes

Ann L. Smith

Our season is in full swing and we find that there is so much happening that we hardly know where to begin. In this issue we continue our focus on Women's Suffrage with a recap of our recent program given by Russell J. DeSimone, "The History of Women's Suffrage in RI." We are looking forward to this Sunday's program, "Vintage Base Ball in Rhode Island," a talk and demonstration by Westerly Historical Society board member, Russell Soder. For a primer on vintage "base ball" see the October, 2019 edition of *Westerly's Witness*. We hope this current issue reaches you before the weekend!

In the opposite column on this page we have our final call for nominations for this year's history award. Please submit by the deadline to be considered.

In last month's issue we announced the date for the presentation of the Wilson Award at the Rhode Island Statehouse. Please note that this event has been moved to June 17, 2020. See Page 5 for further details.

May 13 has been set as the date for our annual dinner and business meeting. We are planning a wonderful evening in a new location and have "kicked it up a notch" with regard to the usual fare. This year attendees will enjoy a buffet featuring beef, chicken, and vegetarian selections. Because of the format there is no need to indicate your meal choice in advance. The cost has been set at \$35 per ticket and includes a \$7 per person subsidy which will be drawn from our treasury. Our featured speaker is still to be announced but please check the April issue of *Westerly's Witness* for updates. Also, the winner of the 2020 Julia Award will be announced at the dinner. Lastly, election of board officers will take place during this year's dinner. Ticket ordering information can be found on Page 6 of this issue and at our website at <http://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/annual-meeting>

In the midst of all that is going on, we are pleased to bring our readers an educational article entitled, "Captain John Smith in New England." This piece is about the same John Smith of the Jamestown, Virginia Colony and Pocahontas fame, but focuses on his travels along the New England coast and his short book, *The Description of New England*, published in 1616.

WESTERLY HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND BABCOCK-SMITH HOUSE MUSEUM 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 forms and more info are available online at:

<https://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/history-award/>

or at:

<http://babcocksmithhouse.org/>

Application or nomination must be submitted by April 1, 2020 to:

Westerly Historical Society

PO Box 91

Westerly, RI 02891

or by email to:

<mailto:whspresident@gmail.com>.

Experts on Captain John Smith almost always point out that the Smith was somewhat of a sensationalist in his writings. Some even say that the story of how Pocahontas saved him from having his head beaten in may be a myth. Smith, at best, was an ordinary sort of chronicler and so his writings ramble off topic and tend to repeat similar thoughts from one work to the next. Philip L. Barbour was probably the foremost authority on John Smith and spent a good portion of his later life researching, compiling and editing Smith's collected works. We hope you enjoy "Captain John Smith in New England" which begins on Page 4.

Program Review:

Russell J. DeSimone on the History of Women's Suffrage in RI

By Ann L. Smith

On February 23rd the Westerly Historical Society welcomed Russell J. DeSimone who spoke on the history of Women's Suffrage in Rhode Island. This talk was part of the 2020 year-long celebration of the ratification of the 19th Amendment which gave women the right to vote in the United States. Nina Rossomando, president of the League of Women Voters of South County (RI), was in attendance and offered interesting commentary and questions as well.

The story of Women's Suffrage in Rhode Island is long and multifaceted. The list of players contains a plethora of names; some noteworthy and some relatively unknown. It would be impossible to recap all the important facts concerning the Women's Suffrage movement in Rhode Island in the limited space provided here, however, there are a few important takeaways that deserve to be mentioned for those who were not able to attend DeSimone's talk.

Perhaps the most striking fact presented was that the Women's Suffrage movement was concerned with not just the voting rights of women, but of all people. Consider the fact that until the Dorr Rebellion of 1841-1842, only white landowners with \$134 or more in property could vote. As a result, the state legislature was dominated by rural interests. Urban businessmen, industrialists, and factory workers were disenfranchised and the need for improvements to the infrastructure was largely ignored. A new state constitution which took effect in May 1843 lifted the property requirement for all native-born males, regardless of race, excepting members of the Narragansett Indian Tribe. A \$1 poll tax was imposed on eligible voters which was used to fund public education within the state. Immigrants continued to be denied the right to vote, as were women.

Not only was the right to vote more than just a women's issue, voting itself was just one of many rights that Women's Suffragists fought for. Women in the nineteenth century were denied the right to hold public office (except for posts within local school committees), and could not own property in their own name or control their earnings, except under very specific circumstances.

A defining moment in the Women's Suffrage movement was the drafting of the Declaration of Sentiments and Grievances. This document was the

product of the Seneca Falls, NY convention of July 19-20, 1848, organized by Lecretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Along with demanding property rights for women, the "Declaration" put forth the rights for women to divorce and to serve as jurors. A detailed account of the fight for Women's Suffrage in the United States appears in the November-December 2019 issue of *Westerly's Witness*. This excellent article, written by Nina Rossomando, recaps much of what was presented by Russell DeSimone in his talk. (Westerly Historical Society members can access Nina Rossomando's article at <https://westerlyhistoricalsociety.files.wordpress.com/2019/11/whsnewsletter-2019-11.pdf>)

A couple of final thoughts are noteworthy after listening to Russ DeSimone's thorough presentation, however. The first two newspapers promoting Women's Suffrage came out of Rhode Island. *The Una*, which only ran for one year in 1853, was published in Providence by Paulina Wright Davis. A year earlier another Providence newspaper, the *Pioneer and Woman's Advocate*, published by Anna W. Spencer, had a short run ending in about March 1853. Its motto was "Liberty, Truth, Temperance, Equality."

The Women's Suffrage movement faced resistance from what was known as the "Anti's." These conservatives, seeking to preserve the status quo, had no logical or rational arguments for discrimination against women and so resorted to ridicule and mockery to thwart the movement. A favorite derisive nickname for the women's movement was "petticoat suffrage."

Russell DeSimone is currently involved with the National Women's History Trail which, according to their website, consists of two parts: "1) a database with digital map and 2) a program of historical markers for about 250 women's suffrage sites across the country, funded by the William G. Pomeroy Foundation and the federal Women's Suffrage Centennial Commission." Russ will be at the renaming of the Central Falls Post Office on March 15th, 2020 when it will be dedicated in honor of Elizabeth Buffum Chace who devoted her life to women's rights. Russ DeSimone has authored six books and several articles on Rhode Island's history with a focus on the Dorr Rebellion and women's rights. See his full biography at <http://smallstatebighistory.com/russel-j-desimone/>

Captain John Smith in New England

By Ann L. Smith

Imagine sailing up the New England coastline where the view consists of nothing but lush forests and rocky outcroppings with a few primitive villages dotting the hillsides. Cornfields grow alongside the placid Indian settlements while all kinds of creatures roam the shoreline. Undisturbed by human encroachment, otters, foxes, bears, moose, turkeys, geese, and ducks roam free and abound in great numbers. Fish and shellfish are plentiful as are all kinds of berries, fruit-trees and hardwoods, especially oak.

For Captain John Smith in 1614, such were the sights that befell him and his crew as they explored the pristine lands in what today is referred to as New England. From the 41st parallel to the 45th, this section of North America's eastern coastline became known as New England thanks to the efforts of John Smith. Captain Smith explored and recorded everything he could about New England during his trip to this region.

But Smith was not the first explorer to survey the New England coast. As early as 1602, well before the colonial settlement at Jamestown, Virginia, multiple expeditions began to take place to this part of North America by Captains Bartholomew Gosnold and Bartholomew Gilbert, Captain Martin Pring, Samuel de Champlain, Pierre Du Gua de Monts, Sir Thomas Arundell, and others. Arundell had a particular interest in finding a site to establish a Catholic colony, while certain French privateers came to profit from the fur trade. Du Gua de Monts founded the first permanent settlement in Canada at Port Royal, Nova Scotia in 1605.

While the adventures of Captain John Smith at Jamestown are well-known, many people are not familiar with Smith's accomplishments beyond what has been romanticized concerning Pocahontas in books and movies. Few people recognize that Captain John Smith spent more time surveying and mapping New England than the brief two years he spent in Virginia. Even though Smith had risen to the position of president of the Jamestown colony, his unpopularity among his people coupled with a severe injury to his hand forced him to return to England in 1609. In 1614 Smith returned to North America but farther to the north to what was then called "North Virginia."

In John Smith's important 1616 work, *The Description of New England*, Smith painstakingly lists each species of flora and fauna and gives careful descriptions of the types of rock and ores to be had in the new world. (Before its publication, Smith obtained permission from King James I of England to change the name of North Virginia to New England.) The text is a somewhat difficult read, but its value lies in the fact that John Smith had a keen interest in starting a colony somewhere between Penobscot Bay and Cape Cod as soon as possible. Here is an excerpt from *The Description of New England* (pp. 24-25)

And surely by reason of those sandy cliffs and cliffs of rocks, both of which we saw so planted with Gardens and Corne fields, and so well inhabited with a goodly, strong and well proportioned people, besides the greatnesse of the Timber growing on them, the greatnesse of the fish and the moderate temper of the ayre...who can but approve this is a most excellent place, both for health & fertility? And of all the four parts of the world that I have yet seen not inhabited, could I have but meanes to transport a Colonie, I would rather live here then any where...

And while Smith's work focuses on the territory between Cape Cod and Maine, he chose the 41st parallel as the southernmost boundary for New England. Not only does this line enclose Rhode Island, but all of modern-day Connecticut as well. There is scarce mention of anything to do with Connecticut or Rhode Island in *The Description of New England*, but mention is made of the Massasoits and the differences between them and the people of the Narragansett tribe. The Massasoits (or Massasoits) that Smith knew lived in what would today be Bristol, Rhode Island.

The irony of Captain Smith's life is that the Pilgrims reached Plymouth in 1620 without his help. While Smith was busy planning, selecting future colonists, and securing funding, the Pilgrim Separatists were forging ahead with their own plans for a new settlement. Smith knew of the Pilgrims' need for a leader and presented himself as the future captain of the Mayflower, but he was passed over in favor of Myles Standish.

(Continued on Page 5)

Captain John Smith

(Continued from Page 4)



DETAIL OF JOHN SMITH FROM AN ILLUSTRATION IN *THE GENERALL HISTORIE OF VIRGINIA, NEW ENGLAND, AND THE SUMMER ISLES; WITH THE NAMES OF THE ADVENTURERS, PLANTERS, AND GOVERNOURS FROM THEIR FIRST BEGINNING, ANO: 1584, TO THIS PRESENT 1624.*

ENGRAVER JOHN BARRA (UNCERTAIN).

[HTTP://ID.LIB.HARVARD.EDU/ALEPH/009637996/C](http://id.lib.harvard.edu/ALEPH/009637996/C)
ATALOG STC 22790 -

When reading *The Description of New England* the reader cannot help but note the internal moral debate that Smith carried on concerning the possible colonization of New England. On one hand Smith saw enormous potential in the natural resources of the American northeast. On the other hand, he struggled greatly with the idea of encroaching on the land that was already inhabited by Native people. Smith seems to weight his pro-colonization argument with the idea that spreading Christianity and converting the Indians to believers of a new faith would be a good thing. The “Spaniards,” after all, had been taking great “paines to bring them to their adulterated faith” for years. (This, of course, is a swipe at Catholicism.)

At the conclusion of *The Description of New England* Smith justifies the eventual colonization of New England with a long argument that stretches back to the creation of the world itself. “Adam and Eve did first beginne this innocent worke, To plant the earth to remaine to posteritie...” Smith further justifies colonization by citing the historical conquests of the Greeks, Romans, Goths, Hebrews, and others. “[W]hat was it they would not undertake to enlarge their Territories, enrich their subjects, resist their enemies? To those that were the founders of those great Monarchies & their vertues, were no silvered idle golden Pharises, but industrious, iron-steed Publicans...”

Captain John Smith returned to England in Late August 1614 having made a small profit from fishing and fur trading. His main competition in the fur trade

came from French fur traders who roamed up and down the New England coast and strived to keep peace between themselves and the Indians. Smith envisioned an English colony that might sustain itself through fishing and so hastened to publish *The Description of New England* as a means to pitch his plan. He was nearly successful at procuring funding for a settlement in the New World but even his best attempts failed in the end. Smith would never again return to America but he continued to publish several other works until his death in 1631. Of note are *New Englands [sic] Trials* (1622), *The True Travels, Adventures, and Observations of Captaine John Smith* (1630), and *Advertisements for the Unexperienced Planters of New England, or Any Where* (1631).

For those interested in further information on Captain John Smith, see *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith, 1580-16* (compiled by Philip L. Barbour), and *The Three Worlds of Captain John Smith* (1964) by Philip L. Barbour. Barbour also penned other books concerning the Jamestown colony and Pocahontas. Philip L. Barbour died in Connecticut in 1980 while still working on the *Complete Works*. This three-volume compilation of John Smith’s writings was eventually completed and published by the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia.

NEW DATE

June 17, 2020

13th Annual Wilson Award

The Wilson Award is a competitive award given to three Rhode Island teachers who incorporate civics in innovative ways into their teaching. Wednesday, June 17, Rhode Island State Capitol, Governor’s Reception Room, 3:00 – 5:00 P.M.



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: The Haversham Inn
336 Post Road, Westerly RI 02891

This year's dinner will consist of a **buffet** featuring beef sirloin tips, chicken francese, pasta marinara and seasonal vegetables. Assorted pastry, coffee, and tea are included.

Please send me _____ tickets for the Westerly Historical Society Annual Meeting and Reception on May 13, 2020 @ \$35.00 ea.

Enclosed please find my check for \$ _____
Name(s) _____
Address _____
City _____
State and Postal Code _____

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.