



# Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

March 2021

## Westerly Historical Society Executive Board 2020-2021

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## Calendar of Events

### Our Events Have Gone Virtual!

Programs from the Westerly Historical Society are free and currently available online. Our topic for February 2021 was "New England Wireless and Steam Museum Steam Up Event." In case you missed it, the video can be accessed via the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCGIOLMXf50&feature=youtu.be>

From the museum staff: "See huge reciprocating steam engines run. Hear about the beginnings of wireless communication, and learn about the genius behind it all. The New England Wireless and Steam Museum in East Greenwich RI presents this video, made by our volunteers, in lieu of our 56th annual Steam Up event. There is no comparison to seeing these incredible pieces of technology in person, but we hope this video brings you close to it all."

Our virtual program for March 2021 is, "**Beginning your Genealogy-Find Your Roots**" presented by Crista Cowen, the Barefoot Genealogist. To view March's program go to our events page at <https://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/events/> Then under "March 2021" simply click on the words [Link to March program](#).

Please check the events page on our website each month to access another new program. To view videos of previous programs please visit our events archive page at <https://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/events-archive/>

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## Editor's Notes

Ann L. Smith

If you've ever driven by Grey Sail Brewing on Canal Street in Westerly, you may have noticed that the brewery bears the name of Westerly Macaroni Manufacturing Co. etched in stone above the door. Anyone trying to find out the history of the old macaroni company will be summarily disappointed to find that almost nothing exists on the internet about the macaroni company or the family who ran it. The Grey Sail Tap Room and Beer Garden occupies the space in and around the imposing yellow building next to the Grey Sail brewery. This former residence of the John Cataldo family was built around the year 1930 and was part of a master plan to create a family compound where business and pleasure could coexist. John Cataldo wanted to live near his work, and so he built his beautiful home at about the same time he erected his store and macaroni manufacturing plant on the land next door.

Luckily for this writer, the owners of Grey Sail Jen and Alan Brinton, had already collected some bits of Cataldo family lore and copies of photos from Cataldo's great-granddaughter, Danielle. Sadly, none of John Cataldo's four daughters are still living, and the grandchildren and great-grandchildren are scattered across several states. The search for information required several deep dives into Ancestry.com's databases, emails with the research librarians at the Westerly Library, and searches of town records in both Westerly and Stonington. The result was a story not so much about groceries and macaroni, but how a family lived and loved and made their way through every good time and bad. Special thanks to the Father Giacomo Capoverdi's staff at Immaculate Conception Church in Westerly, who I sent on a wild goose chase, but who were gracious and kind through the whole process. We hope you enjoy "Macaroni: The Best Medicine --A Cataldo Family History," which begins on Page 3.

On Page 5 we bring you up to date on all that is happening at Charter Oak Scanning. Located in historic Stonington, Charter Oak Scanning is a document scanning and management shop whose founding was inspired during the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy in 2012 where memories of family and friends were washed away and important medical and financial documents damaged.

Charter Oak Scanning President and CEO Robert Webb was a program presenter at the Westerly

Historical Society several years ago and continues to support our efforts through his donations of door prizes at our annual dinners.



ADAM SMITH  
PHOTO: CHARTER OAK  
SCANNING

By way of full-disclosure, my son Adam Smith is production lead at the company. Family connections notwithstanding, the reason we decided to bring you the latest happenings at his company is that we have found out that many new (and fascinating) developments have taken place since we last heard from owner Robert Webb. The

company has diversified from handling still photos to the processing of video, home movies, and every kind of audio recording, expanding into microfiche and archival imaging of historic documents from the civil war era.

Many of us are familiar with the old-style Edison wax cylinders or the ever-fragile 78 RPM records of yesteryear. But digitizing a magnetic wire-type recording, for example, raises the bar for expertise in this line of work. Having state-of-the-art computers and hi-fidelity digitizing equipment is one thing, but a company like Charter Oak Scanning continuously needs to acquire rare playback equipment in order to unlock clients' often decades-old content. Once acquired, team members go through a training process on how to use and maintain these antique machines.

Recently Charter Oak Scanning was asked to assist in the authentication of a Rembrandt-era charcoal drawing. Using a light-table and the layering of several image exposures, a centuries-old watermark conforming to those of the 1600s was raised from the paper. It goes without saying that, with the recounting of daily happenings such as this, dinnertime at the Smith household is frequently an adventure.

To update our readers on what it's like to work at a place such as Charter Oak Scanning, we bring you the piece entitled, "Preserving the Past—An Interview with Charter Oak Scanning" which begins on Page 6.

Also this month Zachary Garceau, our archivist checks in with his latest news on Page 5.

One last note: our annual dinner is scheduled for May 26th at the Haversham Inn in Westerly. Please see details and ticket ordering information on Page 8.

# Macaroni: The Best Medicine—A Cataldo Family History

By Ann L. Smith

When Giovanni Cataldo filled out his application for U. S. citizenship, more than a decade had elapsed since he had passed through Ellis Island and set foot on American soil. He arrived from Alcamo, Italy at the age of 29. In his first three years here he had married his sweetheart Maria Annina (“Marianna”), settled into a place on First Avenue in Manhattan, and welcomed his new baby daughter, Mary. By 1905 Giovanni had Americanized his name and so the New York State census-taker that year recorded the Cataldo head-of-household as “John.” His occupation was listed as “piano maker” and Marianna was by then a housewife.

In a 1968 *Westerly Sun* article, Marianna recalled how she worked in New York with her brothers as a new immigrant. She talked about turning out fine embroidered silks and linens in the shop where the family worked. Marianna (nee DiBlase) was but a teenager when her civil marriage to John Cataldo was recorded in Stonington Connecticut on March 23, 1903. The blushing bride had turned eighteen barely a month before. The *Westerly Daily Sun* (as it was known in those days) ran a small item under the heading “Wedding Bells” the following day. The article reported that the couple was planning a religious ceremony in New York once they returned there. And so, although married in Stonington, Connecticut, they settled down in the Little Italy section of Manhattan to follow their dreams.

After much searching, we are not sure why the Cataldos decided to settle in New York as newlyweds. The wedding announcement referred to Marianna as a Pawcatuck, Connecticut resident. She obviously had moved from Manhattan since her days in the fabric shop. But one thing does seem sure: John Cataldo was a man of purpose and means.

The youngest of fourteen children, Giovanni Cataldo carried \$180 with him when he disembarked from the S.S. Lahn at Ellis Island in 1902. The carefully penned entry on the Lahn’s manifest shows that Cataldo declared more money than any other passenger listed on the same page. In today’s dollars, Cataldo was carrying an amount equivalent to nearly \$5,500. Knowing the things that he accomplished later in life, it seems as though John always had a vision to set up a store and become his own boss.

But New York City in the early 1900s was a tough place for Italian immigrants. A 2017 non-fiction

work by Stephan Talty entitled *The Black Hand*, describes the struggles of early Italian Manhattanites this way.

Italians were moving into neighborhoods that had long belonged to the Irish for at least two generations. The new arrivals...were outnumbered and bitterly despised. When an Italian family moved into a tenement, the Irish often moved out. At one flashpoint, policemen lined the streets every day as the last bell rang at the local school. When the Italian kids emerged from the front door, a howl rose up from the nearby tenements...as one Irish mother after another pulled up the sashes on their windows, leaned out, and shouted at their sons below to “*kill the d-gos!*” The fair-skinned boys heard them, picked up rocks and sent them spinning at the heads of the Italian boys and girls, who fled the school in packs (pp. 3-4).

On top of the onerous bigotry, members of the Black Hand of which Talty writes were extorting innocent Italians and kidnapping their children with impunity. Untrusting of and with little faith in the mostly Irish police, Italian-Americans often paid the enormous sums demanded by the Black Hand. Reports of bombings became a daily occurrence in the New York newspapers. Bank tellers “on the inside” would divulge to gang members their next likely targets. No matter how hard the Cataldos may have tried to make things work in New York, moving out must have eventually become the obvious choice.

Marianna Cataldo’s ties to the Westerly-Pawcatuck area presented a good option for the small family. As things turned out, John, Marianna, and daughter Mary settled in nearby Peace Dale, Rhode Island, where he ran a grocery for several years. John Cataldo applied for U.S. citizenship in 1914. He registered for the draft in September, 1918, shortly before the end of the First World War. It was around this time that John and Marianna, now the parents of three daughters, moved from Peace Dale and settled in Westerly. They welcomed their daughter Barbara in 1911 and daughter Virginia (“Ginny”) entered the world in 1916.

The Cataldos’ first Westerly address was 69 Pleasant Street, just around the corner from their

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## Cataldo Family History

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eventual home on Canal Street. It was on Pleasant Street where John and his family ran a grocery store and macaroni manufacturing business out of the ground floor of the family home. Their fourth child, a daughter named Ida, was born in 1921 during the family's time on Pleasant Street.

The business must have been a success, because by 1928 John had acquired a parcel of land in the mill section along Canal Street in Westerly. A building used for making cotton webbing for rubber tires (owned by Fisk Rubber Company) stood on the site. Fisk abandoned the Westerly webbing mill once they had consolidated some of their operations and relocated them nearer to the Massachusetts headquarters.

In November of 1928, announcement was made in a trade publication, *The Macaroni Journal*, that John Cataldo was building a modern macaroni manufacturing plant on Canal Street in Westerly.

The building is brick and steel construction and will soon be ready for occupancy. The property on which the factory is being constructed has a 400 foot frontage. A large store will occupy the front part of the building and the manufacturing will be done in the rear.

In February, 1929, the *Macaroni Journal* ran another announcement entitled, "Westerly Plant in Operation."

The new plant of the Westerly Macaroni Mfg. Co., 157 Canal St., Westerly, R. I., was officially opened Jan, 4, 1929. The plant is a modern brick building, 100 feet long, 50 feet wide and one story, built so as to carry additional stories as business necessitates.

The plant equipment is not extensive but most modern. A mixer, kneader, and 2 presses compose the production department. The drying is done in a compartment that combines artificial with natural drying methods.

John Cataldo is the proprietor of the concern and has for over 10 years operated a macaroni factory at 69 Pleasant St. Under his management the business has grown so that it requires the more commodious quarters now occupied.

In the search for more details about the macaroni plant, this author turned up virtually nothing. We would have liked to know what products were most in demand, what the store was like, and who the people were that worked there. What we found instead was a story about a family. A family whose most important memories were not of their father's work, but how much he loved them.

After not even ten months in business, the stock market crash of 1929 occurred and the Great Depression began. John Cataldo, however, continued what he had started. Providing foodstuffs would prove to be a business that could survive even during the worst economic conditions. No matter how depressed prices were, people still needed to eat.

And so it was that a second structure, the Cataldos' stately family home was erected next door to their business. The Cataldo house is now owned by the Grey Sail Brewing Company and serves as its "Tap Room," but owners Alan and Jennifer Brinton allowed this author to tour the building as part of the research for our story. While certain changes have been made, the original custom murals and arched doorways still remain. A Cataldo descendant told the Brintons that a painter was brought from Italy to make the murals and that he lived with the family for more than a year until his work was complete.

Marianna Cataldo installed exotic botanical rarities throughout the yard, and while most of the plantings are gone, her ornate fountain is still in operation outside the Grey Sail Tap Room. Her Chinese peonies, lilies, tulips, a Japanese cherry tree, and rare fruit and nut trees were the subject of her 1968 *Westerly Sun* feature article mentioned above.

John Cataldo's business did so well that he also sent all four daughters to college. They each became registered pharmacists. Three of his four daughters married and were given homes of their own on their wedding days. Daughters Ida and Ginny each married doctors, one a dentist and the other a physician. These were Pasquale "Pat" Celestino, M.D., Ginny's husband, and Frank Celestino, D.D.S., who married Ida. The Celestinos were brothers and so the two families were connected by marriage twice over.

John Cataldo died on March 23, 1946. The announcement of his passing appeared on the front page of the *Westerly Sun*. He was referred to as a "prominent businessman" and it was reported that he

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## 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 5 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.

For convenience, an application form can be found on the following page of this newsletter.

Additional 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, 2021 to:

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

### *Cataldo Family History*

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was one of the largest distributors of macaroni products in the state. Marianna died in 1973, and by 2010 all of their daughters had passed away.

The National Register of Historic Places mentions that the macaroni factory continued operating until the United States Postal Service leased the building in 1954, but no one seems to know exactly when the grocery store and factory went out of business. Later NAPA Auto Parts occupied the space, and Grey Sail Brewery acquired the property after NAPA relocated.

John Cataldo's descendants today are scattered throughout several states. Among his grandchildren at least one more pharmacist and one more physician appear on the family tree. But no matter the extent of this family's accomplishments, it might be said that macaroni, in the way it provided for them, was the best medicine of all.

## *From the Archives*

*By Zachary J. Garceau*

In late 2020, the Westerly Historical Society received a fascinating new addition to our collection from our very own Tom O'Connell. The hardbound ledger book simply reads "Records" on the spine, but it is the contents of this ledger book that are most interesting. This volume contains, as noted on the very first page: "Records of Police Doings, Westerly, R.I." from August 1, 1879 through September 30, 1890.

Nearly every entry in this book provides accounts of police activity which range from brief ("Officer Coon stopt [*sic*] one case of fast driving on Main Street") to very detailed. In addition to being of interest to the casual observer, these records can also be helpful from a genealogical standpoint, as there are a multitude of entries for times when the police would provide lodging for immigrants overnight, at which time they would record the person's name, age, and place of birth.

Summaries appear at the end of each month, such as this one from November, 1884:

- Five disturbances suppressed
- Twenty intoxicated men sent off the street
- Twelve arrested
- Fifty persons furnished with lodgings

Of the twelve arrests, eleven were for "drunkenness" and one was for assault. During the same month, the police collected \$36.70 in fines while spending \$6.37 on "committing Michael Frinnesy to Providence County Jail" (\$6.07) and two lantern globes (\$0.30). The remaining balance of \$30.33 was paid to the town treasurer.

The notable absence of any police work between March 9<sup>th</sup> and March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1888 coincides with the Great Blizzard of 1888 which struck between March 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>. The lack of any record may have been due either to an absence of notable crime or that the police were too busy to record their actions during that span.

The records in this book provide a unique look into law and order in Westerly during the late nineteenth century. As an example, on August 13, 1885, George Smith was arrested for drunkenness on Canal Street. The following morning, he pled guilty to the charge. Smith then promised to leave town and was discharged by Judge A. B. Burdick. Smith's name remained absent from the records for at least a year following the merciful sentence he received.

# Preserving the Past—An Interview With Charter Oak Scanning

By Ann L. Smith

*Charter Oak Scanning is a media digitization service located in Stonington, Connecticut. While “scanning” is part of the company name, the company’s primary focus is preserving photos and video of family moments. President and CEO Robert Webb recently granted us an interview to talk about his business and how he and his team enjoy working with historic mixed media.*

**Q: Your website talks about your having wanted to fill the need for personal digitization services following Hurricane Sandy. What other major factors and or challenges were involved in going from concept to reality in setting up your business?**

Initially, the business focused on commercial document scanning. However, when trying to obtain sales, we realized that there was very little business for documents themselves, but customers did want their photos scanned. So the company shifted from a commercial focus and more towards personal media for families within the community.

**Q: Is there a particular medium or time period that relates to your favorite kind of project?**

Film projects produce some of the most exciting results! Customers come in daily with film footage made in Stonington during the 1930s. Comparing the footage then versus the modern-day makes for an interesting comparison.

**Q: Your business is located in a historic site, the Velvet Mill. Can you tell us about how you and other nearby businesses owners enjoy being a part of a business community that operates in and around historic places?**

The community within the Velvet Mill and the surrounding area is lovely to work in as everyone works together. We often call on other businesses within the mill for advice and, they in turn reach out to us for their digitization needs. Not only is the community helpful, but working in a historic building resonates with the memorable media that we work on. We digitize the memories of families and the town, and the Velvet Mill is an integral part of the community and Stonington’s history.

**Q: What has been your most unusual or memorable order so far?**

One order that stands out is when a customer brought in a small dictating machine tape. The customer’s son had a school project that involved interviewing an elder. The boy went across the street and interviewed his neighbor, who was a war veteran. Six months later, the interviewee passed away, and the customer went to the funeral. She told the interviewee’s children how much they appreciated the interview and how kind the man was to take time to speak to her son. The children were stunned because although they knew he was a veteran, their father had never discussed his war experience. Bringing people’s memories back to life makes me love what I do, and the moving moments make it all worthwhile.



**Q: What would you like our readers to know about the importance of historic preservation of old media?**

The preservation of media is essential for both personal and communal reasons. Each piece of memorabilia holds a part of the story, one that could be ultimately lost if not passed on to future generations. So to preserve the narrative, we must maintain the associated media.

**Q: How has Charter Oak Scanning changed since it started?**

Our business turned dramatically for the better when we hired Adam Smith, a rising star in the technologic community. The company was in the Stone Age of technology before him, whereas now we have advanced technology and have drastically expanded our business. We also recently acquired more space before the pandemic, which has helped with equipment storage, creating more workstations, and overall efficiency.

## Charter Oak Scanning

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**Q: If folks are interested in the scanning or restoration services that Charter Oak Scanning offers, what can they expect when they visit your shop?**

When a customer comes in, they can expect high-quality customer service at the lowest rates. We can capture many analog media types and convert them into several formats to fit the customer's preferences. Customers can go onto our website, call our store, or visit our Velvet Mill office.

**Q: Is transfer, scanning, or restoration expensive?**

Usually our customers are pleasantly surprised at how little it costs to bring back their beloved memorabilia. Memories are priceless to families, so we always try to take that into account with every order.

**Q: What do you envision regarding the future of your business and the demand for digitization services in general?**

More and more people will want to curate their family memories that are already in an electronic format. Due to this, our business would likely add on services and procedures that incorporate how to handle personal digital collections. In the more immediate sense, we have purchased specialized scanning equipment that captures microfiche and microfilm, which is prevalent in libraries, newspapers, and historical societies. So the current objective is to salvage both family memories and the historical documentation within the community.



**CHARTER OAK**  
Scanning & Digitization

Charter Oak Scanning is located in the historic Velvet Mill, 22 Bayview Avenue, in Stonington, Connecticut. For more information, visit their website at [charteroakdigital.com](http://charteroakdigital.com) or look for them on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

## In Memoriam Dr. Bruce Gray



It is with great sadness that we mourn the passing of Dr. Bruce Gray of Westerly. Dr. Gray was a long-time member of the Westerly Historical Society and, according to his wife Sally, enjoyed reading

about our local history in *Westerly's Witness*.

Moreover, Dr. Gray is remembered for his outstanding contributions to the medical community and academia in particular. He had just retired from Simmons University as a Professor of Neurobiology and Biology after 25 years of service to the college as Professor, Department Head, Colleague and advisor to hundreds of students who all have described him as a brilliant neuroscientist, researcher, mentor, and kind friend. He was given awards for his advising. So many students felt that he believed in them when they didn't believe in themselves. He challenged them, took them to Society for Neuroscience scientific conferences around the world where they presented Alzheimer's research work they did in his lab, and many have said they wanted to follow in his footsteps, and that he opened their minds and helped many of them get into medical school. He was so honored that a grandparent of one of his former students made a donation to the University in his honor. A new dean at the University stated that even though she had only been at the University for a short time, she was made aware of the incredible legacy and very large impact he had made on student and faculty.

He never asked for praise, but was a man of great strength and character. Recently retired, Dr. Gray was looking forward to spending time with his wife and extended family at his home on Winnapaug Pond. Dr. Gray's family asked that we accept his recent membership renewal payment as a donation for the benefit of the Westerly Historical Society and we are grateful for their generosity. Dr. Gray was a rare, magnificent person and will be incredibly missed.

**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 26, 2021 @ \$25\* each.

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 19th** 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.

*\*Ticket price has been subsidized in part this year following a decision by the WHS Executive Board.*