



Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

April 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. In case you missed it, our topic for March, 2021 was **"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-archive/> Then under "March 2021" simply click on the words [Link to the March program](#).

Our virtual program for April, 2021 is a virtual visit to the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum in Reading, PA.

This museum covers all air travel and flight. What fun! And there is a P-61 restoration project that is worth the trip. It has just re-opened to visitors, but has a fascinating virtual tour, just for you to tour from home. Enter [here](http://www.maam.org/tourstr.html) or navigate to <http://www.maam.org/tourstr.html>. Scroll to the bottom of each page to follow the tour. Enjoy!

More links:

The P-61 Restoration Project
<http://www.maam.org/p61.html>

**Shop at the museum's online store including
a terrific book selection!**

(Categories on the left column):

<http://www.maam.org/php/xcart/home.php>

Our program schedule for the 2020-2021 season is now complete. Please watch this space for information on our fall programs beginning with the September 2021 issue of *Westerly's Witness*.

In this Issue

Editor's Notes.....	Page 2
Ask Any Scout: Life is Good in the Woods! by Ann L. Smith.....	Page 3
From the Archives by Zachary J. Garceau.....	Page 5
In Memoriam.....	Page 5
Annual Dinner Ticket Order Form.....	Page 6



(SEE INFO ON THE
MID-ATLANTIC AIR MUSEUM AT RIGHT)

Editor's Notes

Ann L. Smith

Back in the days when the Masonic Hall was the site of the Westerly Historical Society annual dinner, I once joined Barbara La France who just happened to have the room's last empty seat waiting for me at her left. After the exchange of a few pleasantries, she asked if I was related to the Smiths who used to live at 17 Spring Street. "Funny you should ask," I said. "My husband was Herbie Smith, the third of seven children born to Margaret and Arthur Smith."

"Well you know, I grew up with them and still live on Spring Street. It's been a long time" she said.

Without giving away anyone's age, I will just say that my husband graduated from LaSalle Academy in '55. Accidental historian though he was, he was cut from that old cloth were folks just naturally cultivated a respect for the local history. I have sometimes thought it was due in part to the fact that folks didn't seem to move in or out of town at the rate they do in other places. Or maybe it was because we don't tend to take down our old buildings as fast as other towns seem to do. And when we do lose an architectural landmark, folks will give driving directions as if the place were still there. It's an old joke: "You know you're really from Rhode Island when..." So we say things like "Turn right at Benny's," or worse yet, "You go left at Happy Holliday's."

I no longer have my husband around when I need to know something about the "old" Westerly, but Barbara LaFrance continues to keep in touch by dropping us a line every now and then. It is thanks to Barbara that the Westerly Historical Society continues to acquire all manner of ephemera, from antique postcards and correspondence to old-time household cleaning hints and more. So here's a shout-out to you Barbara. We hope you are well.

Speaking of old friends, it is with great sadness that we mourn the loss of two dedicated women who contributed much to the preservation of our local history. Westerly native Jane Maxson died on March 9, 2021 at the age of 94. She co-presented a program on the diaries of J. Irving Maxson and offered frequent e-mail feedback on the articles appearing in *Westerly's Witness*. I enjoyed her vignettes about old Watch Hill and she will be missed by the many who knew her.

We also lost WHS member Frances Kelly a few days ahead of Jane Maxson's passing. She lived to be 100 years old and contributed much to the

Babcock-Smith House by way of her volunteer efforts. Obituaries for Jane Maxson and Frances Kelly appear on Page 5 of this month's newsletter.

Also in this issue, our archivist Zachary J. Garceau weighs in with a short piece about the Babcock Collection and how genealogical research was done before the existence of the internet. To read Zack's piece, please see "From the Archives," on Page 5.

Pamela Scott, our program chairperson, continues to provide us with new virtual programs each month. Our program for April, 2021 is a virtual visit to the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum in Reading, PA. See Page 1 for details and a link.

Our executive board has openings for new members. We welcome anyone with an interest in local history, whether or not they are current members of the Westerly Historical Society. We are seeking both officer and non-officer candidates, so if you would like to become actively involved in our planning and decision-making processes, please contact Westerly Historical Society president, Thomas J. Gulluscio, Jr. at WHSPresident@gmail.com.



PAWCATUCK RIVER

PHOTO: TROOP 1, WESTERLY

Our feature article this month is entitled, "Ask Any Scout: Life is Good in the Woods!" This short piece is a very cursory history of the two scout camps right here in the Westerly-Pawcatuck area, Camp Quequatuck and Camp Kitchtau. With the warm weather approaching, perhaps some of us will be inspired to volunteer or get our kids and grandchildren involved in scouting and into the great outdoors. (In my younger days I was both a den mother and a troop committee chairperson. "Herbie" too, was scoutmaster for our local troop. Looking back, I can safely say that I wouldn't trade scouting with my family for anything else in the world.)

One last note: our annual dinner is scheduled for May 26th at the Haversham Inn in Westerly. **We are offering custom requests for seating**, so please be sure to indicate your preference when ordering. Our venue has kindly offered to set up tables for **parties of two or more**. Please see details and ticket ordering information on Page 8.

Ask Any Scout: Life is Good in the Woods!

By Ann L. Smith

*In a cool solitude of tree
Where leaves and birds a music spin,
Mind that was weary is at ease
New rhythms in the soul begin.*

---William Kean Seymour (1877-1975)

Camping and scouting have always been a natural fit. Even though scouts cultivate within themselves a curiosity about all kinds of things, at the top of the list for most is learning about and enjoying our natural world. Camping has been a part of what scouts have been doing for over a hundred years. And while the Westerly, RI area is home to troops run by both the Girl Scouts of America and the Boy Scouts of America (the latter is now known as Scouts BSA), only the Boy Scouts can lay claim to the two camps right in or adjacent to our own town.

Our story might be better understood if we go back to the beginning, when boy scout troops sprang up independent of what we have mostly referred to as Boy Scouts of America. The Boy Scout movement was founded in Great Britain in 1908 by a cavalry officer, Lieutenant General Robert S.S. (later “Lord”) Baden-Powell, who had written a book called *Scouting for Boys*. In 1910 the American journalist William D. Boyce is said to have encountered a Boy Scout in England. Popular lore says that the scout guided Boyce through a dense fog and that this gesture inspired a meeting with Baden-Powell. As a result, William Boyce incorporated the Boy Scouts of America on February 8, 1910.

Meanwhile scouting was becoming popular across the United States and troops unaffiliated with the Boy Scouts of America were being organized all across the country. Some have attributed the rise of scouting to the passage of stricter child labor laws in the early part of the 20th century. Children suddenly had more free time on their hands, and organizing them into formalized volunteer groups was seen as a good thing for both the children and their communities. And so in Westerly, on March 13, 1913 at a gathering at the high school, the Westerly Boy Scouts were officially organized as part of the Rhode Island Boy Scouts. The official census of “Westerly’s First Troop,” dated 3-19-1913 has been preserved on 3 x 5 cards by the Westerly Library. Each record lists the member’s name, age, address, occupation and whether or not they are a church member.

The Rhode Island Boy Scouts merged with the Boy

Scouts of America in 1917 and all service was carried over and recognized. According to J. Harold Williams, author of *Scout Trail* (a history of the Boy Scouts in Rhode Island through 1962), “It was agreed that the RIBS would retain its corporate identity as a trustee group to hold property and funds.” To this day the RIBS owns many of the properties operated by Narragansett Council.

Here in Westerly, RI, a separate organization was formed on April 12, 1926 for the purpose of “promoting the work of the Boy Scouts of America in Westerly and vicinity, and to do all acts and things connected therewith and incidental thereto.” The incorporators were Dwight Harold Rogers, William C. Clark, Samuel H. Davis, Willard H. Bacon and W. Russell Dower. The first officers were George B. Utter, president, Wilfred B. Utter, secretary, and Dwight Harold Rogers, treasurer.

Within two months of its founding in April 1926, Westerly RI Troops acquired a one-acre riverfront parcel on the land once known as Norman Farm. The property was deeded to the Westerly RI Troops by John H. Austin of Stonington, Connecticut. The Austin land, however, was essentially a gift from the Westerly Lions Club who raised the funds to make the purchase. The Lions’ presentation of the Austin deed was commemorated in a ceremony on the property and it was then that the name Camp Quequatuck was officially given. “Quequataug” was a place name used by the Native people for centuries and it means “upland.” In several historical deeds dating from 1660, Native people referred to this place, being roughly twenty miles upriver from the ocean, as “Quecatuck” or “Quequtahanick.” By 1762 the first mill was built at Meeting House Bridge by Peter Crandall (where Route 3 crosses the Pawcatuck River today), and the Natives began to refer to the area as Quequatuck. In 1930 Oliver and Hattie Crandall conveyed ownership of an additional 4.5 acres to the Westerly, RI Troops. Over the years the camp’s footprint has undergone several minor changes, as reflected the land evidence records, but Camp Quequatuck is still roughly 4.5 acres in size.

The number of Westerly area Boy Scout troops continued to grow and they were organized into what was known as the Quequatuck District. Some of the most prominent community leaders stepped up to

(Continued on Page 4)

Ask Any Scout

(Continued from Page 3)

assume leadership roles, whether as scoutmasters, committee chairmen, or as board members in the trustee organization for Camp Quequatuck, the Westerly RI Troops. One very successful area businessman was Otto Seidner. Famous for his mayonnaise and delicatessens in Mystic and Westerly, Otto Seidner was a well-known philanthropist.

In Thomas A. O’Connell’s *Fair Westerly*, he writes, “In the spring of 1938, a group of civic-minded men from the Westerly-Pawcatuck area formed a committee ‘to do something worthwhile for the Quequatuck [Scout] District.’” Otto Seidner was head of that committee and in just six months raised enough money to purchase an eighteen-acre parcel of land in lower Pawcatuck and build a suitable cabin for the scouts to use. The new camp, acquired from Herbert and Beatrice Vars, was named Kitchtau after the Pequot divinity regarded as the author of good. According to *The Westerly Sun*, “The cabin was constructed by the carpenters’ union under the direction of Pierce Morrison.” O’Connell’s account mentions George Williamson as also taking leadership role for the carpenters and states that the builders all worked for free. Camp Kitchtau was dedicated on September 17, 1938, just days before the great hurricane of that year. The master of ceremonies for the dedication ceremony was Otto Seidner, and the keynote speaker was J. Harold Williams, Narragansett Council Executive and author of the aforementioned book, *Scout Trail*.

On March 16, 1950, *The Westerly Sun* announced that an additional eight acres had been acquired for Camp Kitchtau through the efforts of Ross R. Aiello, chairman of the Quequatuck District, Boy Scouts of America. Thomas Pucci of the district committee “carried on the work of securing donations for the camp fund.” Leading the list of benefactors was the name Otto Seidner, which reflects the continuity of his support for our area’s scouts.

In December 1998, the cabin at Camp Kitchtau was destroyed by fire. No one was at the property at the time of the blaze, but experts believe that an ember from the stove pipe on the wood stove may have landed on a bunk and started the fire. Once again, in true philanthropic fashion, volunteers stepped up to rebuild the camp’s cabin. Donations in the form of

money, materials, and free skilled labor came from all over the area. By the fall of 2005, the Westerly RI Troops celebrated the completion of “The New Otto Seidner Cabin,” but the camp was still in need of bunks and other equipment. *The Westerly Sun* ran a feature article in December that year with the aim of raising awareness of the need for additional donations.

Today Camp Kitchtau is a fully functioning camp with an open-air activities pavilion next to the cabin and has room for 200 outdoor campers. The pristine grounds contain an open field between the Seidner cabin and the large flagpole where ceremonies and events are often held. Quiet trails that crisscross marked campsites provide for ideal hiking, but be forewarned: this little piece of heaven is not open to the public, and only authorized visitors are allowed.

Our story would not be complete without a brief mention of the now-defunct scout camping area at the end of White Rock Road in Westerly. A 165-acre parcel known then as “Bumpin Hill” was offered to the Quequatuck Scouts to use, free of charge, by its owner, F. Samuel Nardone in 1949. The scout officers planned to develop a long-term program for the use and conservation of this land, but their plans never came to fruition. Aside from soliciting suggestions for a camp name, the history of the Bumpin Hill campground is a short one. A coldwater spring on the property was said to provide water pure enough for drinking, and tall oaks rising 164 feet above sea level had survived the 1938 hurricane. Nardone passed away in 1968 and the property has changed hands many times over the last fifty years. Signs of some quarrying operations can be seen on the property, but it is evident that the scouts moved on years ago.

It may be hard for many of us to get used to the name “Scouts BSA,” but the fact is that the old Boy Scouts of America is now a co-ed organization, hence the change in name. Things are always changing, but the mission of the Scouts BSA is as relevant today as when it was first written: “[T]o prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law.” For folks interested in finding out more about scouting in their area, visit <https://beascout.scouting.org/> on the web and search local groups by entering a ZIP code.

Many thanks to Thomas J. Gulluscio, Jr. who provided background material for this article.

From the Archives

By Zachary J. Garceau

The Babcock Collection

(Accession Nos. 50607-50620, 50624-50655)

Over the past several years, professional genealogists and amateur researchers alike have become accustomed to having family history records directly at their fingertips with the rise of websites such as Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org. The items from the Westerly Historical Society's archives being discussed this month show that the practice of genealogy before the internet was quite unlike what we are familiar with today.

Prior to the advent of the internet, most published family genealogies relied on information supplied by relatives both known and unknown to the author. It was not uncommon for an author compiling a history of their family to send letters to all individuals with a particular surname in a city directory or phone book soliciting any knowledge of their family's history and relying on the recipient to provide as much as they were able. This is one of the most common reasons that all published genealogical works which do not cite specific primary source material are viewed with at least mild skepticism by professionals.

The Babcock Collection is an amalgamation of memoranda, miscellaneous papers and letters containing genealogical data largely related to the Babcock and associated families. As described above, these records were seemingly obtained by contacting distant relatives. Some of the records, however, are more formal documents, such as No. 50608 which is a record of the family of John Jr. and Mary (Hoxsie) Cross and their children printed on an oversized sheet containing highly detailed accountings of the lives of John, Mary, and their twelve children.

Conversely, record No. 50636 is a letter dated 6 June 1879 from a Thomas B. Stillman of Plainfield, New Jersey to Asher M. Babcock of Westerly inquiring about any information Mr. Babcock possessed about the Stillman family, serving as a perfect example of one genealogical research technique utilized in the past. It appears Mr. Babcock complied with the request, as the letter contains scribbled notes in pencil laying out the information that was sought by Mr. Stillman.

In Memoriam



E. Jane (Hoxie) Maxson

E. Jane (Hoxie) Maxson died March 9, 2021. She was born in Westerly, RI on January 27, 1927, the only child of Isabella (Shaw) and W. Porter Hoxie.

Jane received her undergraduate degree from the University of Connecticut. In 1949, she married Jonathan I. Maxson, Jr., her high school classmate. The couple lived in Stamford until 1959 when they moved to Ridgefield, CT where they raised their children and lived for thirty two years. Jane received her master's degree and teaching certification from Western Connecticut State University and taught fourth grade at Ridgebury Elementary School for twenty five years. Jane and Jon moved to Green Hill, RI in 1991.

Jane volunteered at the Westerly Library Local History room, transcribing many of the library's collection of early town papers. Jane published the Diaries of J. Irving Maxson 1898-1923, transcribing and annotating them from her husband's grandfather's day books. She was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Jane is survived by her three children, Jonathan Maxson III, Judith Sharnik, and David Maxson along with their spouses. She leaves four grandchildren, and one great grandchild. Jane was predeceased by her parents and her beloved husband Jonathan I. Maxson, Jr.



Frances (Westman) Kelly

Frances (Westman) Kelly of Winnapaug Road, Westerly, passed away on March 3, 2021 at the age of 100. She was the wife the late William R. Kelly who predeceased her in 1999. Frances

was born in Boston, the daughter of the late Walter and Catherine Westman. Frances was a bookkeeper for local firms during her working years. Her retirement years gave her the opportunity to enjoy volunteering at the Babcock-Smith House, serving as Treasurer of the Docents as well as Treasurer of the Board of Trustees of the Babcock-Smith House Museum. She was also a Friend of the Westerly Public Library and enjoyed working at the annual Book Fair. She leaves her two daughters, Linda K. (Ken) Parrilla of Watch Hill, Carolyn K. (John) Watts of Titusville, FL, five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

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_____

Seating preference if any (see Page 2):

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.*