



Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

November-December 2021

Westerly Historical Society Officers 2021-2022

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Vacant

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Ann L. Smith

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Eliza Griscom
Karen Griscom

Members At Large
Robert Boucher
Stephen Cersosimo

Cory Jacobson
Becky Jacoinski
John Leach

Brenda Linton
Russell Soder

Calendar of Events

Tuesday Evening
December 7, 2021 6:00- 8:00 PM
Book Launch and Signing
GREAT STORIES FROM
WESTERLY'S PAST

Meet author Zachary J. Garceau as he presents his first book, *Great Stories From Westerly's Past*. Enjoy wine and cheese, sparkling cider, and assorted refreshments while hearing a short excerpt from this work. Autographed copies will be available.

This event will be held in the Carriage House at the Babcock-Smith House Museum
124 Granite Street
Westerly, RI

Saturday, December 11, 2021
Babcock-Smith House Museum
Holiday Boutique

9:00 AM to 1:00 PM

A holiday marketplace of cookie platters, raffle of gift certificates, craft vendors, Joshua's Store, and tours of the decorated mansion house

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

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Editor's Notes

Ann L. Smith

My comments this month begin with a big “thank you” to all those who answered the call and volunteered to lend a hand with our events and projects from time to time. Although we did not call upon anyone this month to help fold and address this issue of *Westerly's Witness*, we are in need of volunteers for our December book launch and the January 23rd pot-luck event (see insert in next column). Arranging furniture and readying our meeting room with table cloths, coffee, tea, water, and other items always takes time. These are light tasks and many hands will make them even lighter! Please send an email to WHSPrograms@gmail.com if you are able to help with either of these events.

Another fun event is coming up in a mere two weeks, and that is the annual Babcock-Smith House annual bazaar (see Page 1 of this issue). The Westerly Historical Society hopes to have a presence at the event if space allows. If you were planning to attend, you may want to linger a bit and help WHS greet the public and assist with signing up new members. If you can donate thirty to sixty minutes of your time, we would love to hear from you! Please contact WHS President Tom Gulluscio at WHSPresident@gmail.com if you can help.

Folks may recall that we mentioned the metal-detecting hobbyist Matt Hayden a couple of months ago. (See the September 2021 issue of *Westerly's Witness*, “President's Notes.”) Matt recently showed me his collection of rare items that he has unearthed and explained the uniqueness and history behind some of them. The result was this month's feature article, “Digging Up the Past: A Visit With Matt Hayden,” which begins on the following page.

Late news arrived just before we went to print about WHS Archivist Zack Garceau's new book, *Great Stories From Westerly's Past*. The book has gone to the printer and will be arriving soon. What better way to celebrate than to have a wine-and-cheese book launch and signing! See our Calendar of Events on Page 1 for details.

Lastly, we are pleased to announce that our Executive Board continues to grow in number. We have included some brief background information on five of our newest members beginning on Page 5 of this month's issue.

JANUARY POT LUCK

Sunday, January 23, 2022, 2:00 PM

Westerly Historical Society

***Members Only Potluck Dinner and
Research Sharing Event***

We are once again planning a January potluck 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 our program director with your topic at whsprogram@gmail.com if planning to attend.



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. Memberships can be renewed electronically by logging on to our website at <https://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/membership/> 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.



Digging Up the Past: A Visit With Matt Hayden

By Ann L. Smith

Steven Allen graduated from Westerly High School in 1974. His classmates proudly wore their class rings to the graduation ceremony, but Steven didn't. Steve lost his custom-made ring on the beach in Weekapaug [in Westerly] just two days after he received it. Forty-five years later, a family from Woodbury, Connecticut literally stumbled upon the lost ring while hiking along the shore.

In 2019, Todd Holtman of Connecticut had taken his family on a long walk from the Westerly Town Beach to the Weekapaug breachway. As they turned back toward the town beach, Holtman's wife hit Allen's lost ring with her toe. After some sleuthing and personal research, the Holtmans were able to reunite the ring with its owner, Steven Allen. Area news outlets picked up the story and people were reminded that sometimes, a missing thing is not really gone forever.

Amateur treasure hunters can be seen from time to time using metal detectors along any beach. The internet offers dozens of kinds of metal detectors for children, all available for less than a hundred dollars. And while finding an occasional bit of loose change along the beach might offer some excitement for the younger set, more serious people like Matt Hayden of Charlestown, Rhode Island have been searching for treasure of an entirely different kind.

What started as an ordinary pastime has turned into a passion for Hayden, and made him an accidental historian in the process. His work as a police detective is sometimes stressful, and taking up metal detecting has been an excellent way to unwind from the pressures of his work. "It's my zen, my peace," Hayden said during a recent interview. Getting into the great outdoors and scanning the ground for lost and forgotten objects gives a person both immediate and delayed gratification. Matt Hayden related how an internet surfing session led him to some information on metal detecting quite by chance. After reading further, he decided that "digging," as it is sometimes called, might be a good hobby. So with a modest investment of about four hundred dollars, he started digging and hasn't stopped.

Having lived in Westerly most of his life, Matt was familiar with the places where some of the town's oldest farms once stood. A few of his favorite spots remain as undeveloped and pristine as they were two or three hundred years ago. His searches have led him to

open spaces along Bradford Road, some old homesteads in the Weekapaug area, and he has his sights set on exploring a few places in Watch Hill.

So what kinds of artifacts are out there in the soil, right beneath our feet? Matt was happy to talk about his collection of old coins, buttons, buckles, skeleton keys, arrowheads, and more, and showed an incredible knowledge of each thing in his display.

Not all of his items were found in Westerly, but many were dug up within the town's borders. A particularly desirable piece among diggers is any of the several types of George Washington inaugural buttons. Washington was wildly popular among the people of the new United States, and several versions of the Washington inaugural buttons were cast between 1789 and March 4, 1797. The March 4 buttons do not commemorate Washington's inaugural, rather, his last day as U.S. President. Still, they are loosely referred to as George Washington inaugural buttons.

Matt Hayden went digging with a friend in Connecticut, and together they found a button which appeared to bear the initials, "M.S." Upon closer inspection and turning the button 180 degrees, what has at first looked like "M.S." was actually the stylized imprint of the initials "G.W." All at once they knew they had found a genuine George Washington inaugural button.



SAMPLE IMAGE OF ONE OF THE MANY STYLES OF THE GEORGE WASHINGTON INAUGURAL BUTTONS

PHOTO: NEWMAN NUMISMATIC PORTAL AT WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS nnp.wustl.edu

A great deal of research goes along with being a "digger." Understanding the history and approximate date of what has been unearthed can take time. Matt Hayden has been particularly fortunate to have found a wide array of buckles. Many in his collection seem ordinary or similar to others, but careful research can
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Digging Up the Past

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help identify each type as to its use and approximate time of manufacture. Knee buckles (used on the knicker-style pants of the colonials), shoe-buckles, and many others are all part of Hayden's collection.



SPECTACLE BUCKLE FROM MATT HAYDEN'S COLLECTION
PHOTO: ANN L. SMITH

The oldest item in Hayden's possession is a kettle-point arrowhead from the 1600s. The name "kettle-point" is derived from the fact that Native people traded for brass kettles with the colonists, then fashioned the brass to make arrowheads. Several different types of kettle-point arrowheads are pictured below.



KETTLE-POINT ARROWHEADS
PHOTO: ANN L. SMITH

Beyond the buttons, buckles and arrowheads in Hayden's collection are numerous antique coins he has unearthed. While not trying to get rich digging up money, some of the coins Matt has found are indeed rare and very valuable. An unexpected find was a Chinese coin with a characteristic square hole in the center. Hayden admits that he is not aware of any Chinese people who may have lived in early Western, but one might guess that a sailor from the area may have acquired it while traveling in Asia. Lined up neatly and protected in plastic cases, Hayden's

collection of coins contains a variety of British and American coins from many different eras. Looking through the many coins on display, one can recognize a few familiar types such as the early twentieth-century Mercury dimes, the Standing Liberty quarters, and the Walking Liberty half-dollars. Others pieces represent coins from a much earlier time. A one-cent copper coin that looked to be about as large as a modern fifty-cent piece reminds us that a penny was once worth quite a bit more than it is today.



A PORTION OF MATT HAYDEN'S RARE ITEMS
FOUND WHILE METAL DETECTING
PHOTO: ANN L. SMITH

In his younger days Matt served in the United States Marine Corps and has been decorated with a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star. It is no wonder that his all-time favorite find is a pre-Civil War Marine Corps button from the early 1800s. The characteristic globe, anchor, and eagle made this piece valuable for Matt due to his personal connection with the Marines. It turns out that there are other military veterans who use metal detecting as a way to relax and perhaps find military items among the things they unearth. A group that calls itself the "Grunt Diggers" is made up solely of active duty and military veterans. Their motto is, "We once served; now we preserve."

A lot has changed since Matt started digging with his \$400 machine. He has upgraded his detector to an Equinox brand model that sells in the neighborhood of \$1,200. Add to that the identification catalogs, cleaning accessories, display equipment and the like, and one can imagine that there is almost no limit to how far a hobbyist can go. Matt's collection of found articles no doubt outweighs his investments, and no price can be placed on the historical knowledge he has gained by digging.

For folks who would like to see the Grunt Diggers' work, you can find them on Facebook. Matt Hayden can be reached at Mhayden761@gmail.com.

Westerly Historical Society Executive Board Announces the Addition of Five New Members

The Westerly Historical Society is pleased to introduce its newest members of the Executive Board. Their remarkable talents and notable backgrounds signal a new and exciting era for the society as a whole. We know you will share our enthusiasm as we welcome them.

Robert J. Boucher

Bob Boucher has had a lifelong passion with history. He graduated from Tulane University with a B.A. Degree in history. After college Bob served as an officer in the U.S. Army. Bob has been a Civil War reenactor since 1992. In addition to public events up and down the East Coast, he has worked with the National Park Service for events and battlefield restoration at Antietam, Spotsylvania, and Gettysburg National Battlefields. He currently serves as president of the 8th Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry, Company A, Inc.

Bob is the Vice President of Lending at Westerly Community Credit Union. Bob and his wife, Melissa, are the proud parents of two grown daughters and a very active rescue dog. As a relative newcomer to Westerly, Bob is excited to learn more of its history and to help preserve it for future generations.

Cory Jacobson

Cory's interests include local Westerly and Rhode Island state history, especially involving sports. He hopes to add to the board in all possible ways, specifically by helping to spread the word throughout the community about all the aspects of what the Westerly Historical Society stands for. He has worked at Electric Boat in Groton, Connecticut for the past ten years and is currently an auditor in the Radiation Protection Office. He previously had a decade-long career at YMCA's and Boys and Girls Clubs as an aquatics director. He is a 1994 graduate of Westerly High School and he holds a Bachelor's Degree in facilities management from Johnson and Wales University. He is a member of Alpha Tau Omega Fraternity and was a long-time member of Misquamicut Surf Rescue. Cory lives in Westerly with his wife, Justine, and his children, Andrew and Liam.

Becky Jacoinski

Becky Jacoinski was born and raised in Westerly and still resides here with her husband Larry and their two sons, Zach and Alex. Becky has been employed by Chelsea Groton Bank for 26 years serving as the Benefits and Wellness Specialist in the Human Resources Department. She recently joined the Westerly Historical Society to fulfill a lifelong passion for local history. She hopes her time here will allow her to help the society with its mission of preserving and sharing our town history with others including her own family.

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WESTERLY'S WITNESS PAPERLESS OPTION AVAILABLE

All members who have provided an email address receive notification emails as each new edition of *Westerly's Witness* is posted online. If you are currently receiving a paper copy of our newsletter via the U.S. mail in addition the online version, there will be no change to your regular paper mailings unless you request it. If you would like to go "paperless," simply contact the editor at whstreasurer@gmail.com.

Going paperless helps us keep costs down and is eco-friendly! If you would rather not be contacted by email notifying you when the newsletter is available on line, you must unsubscribe from all our email notifications by clicking "SafeUnsubscribe" shown at the bottom of the email. Whether you prefer electronic, paper, or both, the choice is always yours!



Five New Members Named to WHS Executive Board

(Continued from Page 5)

Eliza Griscom

Eliza's interests include architectural history, historic houses, and historic landscape design and plantings (as seen in our beautiful Wilcox Park designed by Warren Manning, 1898). Eliza was born and raised in Westerly, alongside her two brothers and her parents, Clement and Priscilla (Husted). Her maternal and paternal grandparents, and great grandparents, lived in the area seasonally, though she and her family have always lived here year-round.

Eliza's professional background includes over 20 years in computer science education, including teaching in Portland, Maine; Providence, RI; Boston, MA; and fully online. She now works remotely with her own consulting business, designbysupply, with clients on educational curriculum development, online instructional design, and web design maintenance. She holds a B.A. from Tufts and an M.S. in Education from the University of New Haven, where her mother, Priscilla, worked as a full-time Computer Science Professor. Her father, Clement, was an active local environmentalist, passionate about Napatree Point, author of a book on Fort Mansfield, and a Ph.D. Oceanographer. He was also one of the original group of all-volunteer founding members of the Westerly Land Trust. Eliza is also a new auxiliary member of the Architectural Review Board in Westerly and a volunteer with the American Friends of Georgia (the country, not the state!), which her first cousin, Marusya Chavchavadze, runs. Eliza lives in a historic home in Westerly with her spouse and their cat.

Karen Griscom

Karen Griscom's research interests include seventeenth and eighteenth-century women writers and translators, manuscript culture, archives, and book history. She is also interested in Rhode Island's role in the global slave trade and the underground railroad. Over the past ten years, Karen has trained in digital humanities technologies through the Rare Book School at UVa and the Digital Humanities Summer Institute at UVic. Additionally, she has participated in TEI/XML for humanists courses at Texas A & M University and the Beinecke Library at Yale University. She would be happy to collaborate in any work to help digitize the cultural record for the

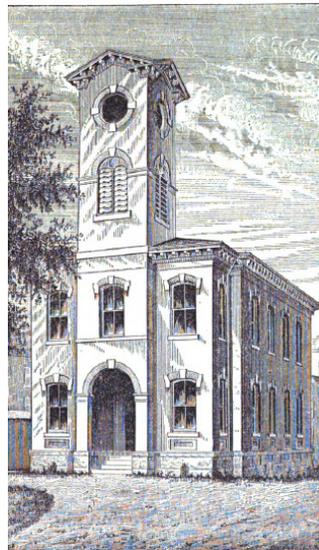
Westerly Historical Society. This summer, Karen participated with fellow RBS paleography workshop members to transcribe a seventeenth-century recipe book that is part of the Folger Shakespeare Library's Folgerpedia online collection. Karen is a professor in the department of English at the Community College of Rhode Island, where she has taught since 2006. She teaches courses on Shakespeare, British and world literature, and writing. She hopes to feature some Rhode Island writers in a course she is developing with colleagues called Women and Literature.

Karen is a fourth-year doctoral candidate in the English Literature and Criticism program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. She completed her M.A. in Literatures in English at Rutgers University, New Brunswick.

Karen lives in Westerly with her spouse and their cat. When she doesn't have her nose in a book, she loves walking in Wilcox Park, bird watching, and gardening.



DID YOU KNOW?

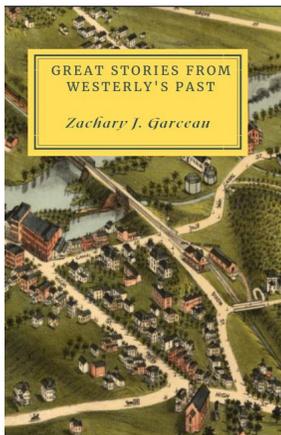


Westerly's first town hall, erected in 1874 on Union Street, took the place of the Union Meeting House. The basement housed the police headquarters; the first floor was dedicated for use by the town clerk and town council, and the second floor served as the town hall. Today the building is known as the Old Town Hall and is a historic landmark. A

clock (not shown) was added to the tower in 1882 and to this day keeps perfect time, thanks to the efforts of Rhode Island State Senator Dennis Algieri who restored and modernized it several years ago. The four-faced clock was made by E. Howard & Co., which made luxury watches from 1858 into the 1890s and produced wall and tower clocks.

Image: *Westerly and Its Witnesses*, Frederic Denison, (1878, p. 194).

Great Stories From Westerly's Past: Author Zachary J. Garceau Reflects on His Work



After nearly a year of writing, editing, designing, and editing again, it is finally happening. As I write this column, my first book, *Great Stories from Westerly's Past*, is being printed. After all the time and effort that I invested in making this book a reality, it was incredibly satisfying to place an order for 225 copies that will be released in just a

few short days.

Now comes the fun part: promoting and selling the book and sharing my research with anyone willing to listen. (In fairness, I also found the writing, editing, and designing fun too!) On Tuesday December 7, 2021, the Westerly Historical Society will be holding a book release event at the Babcock Smith House, and to say I am excited would be a huge understatement. After six years of college and two degrees in history, I can honestly say that I have done my fair share of historical writing. But nothing has been more personal and important to me as a writer than telling the stories of the town where I was born and raised.

Anytime I mentioned my work on this book to anyone who would listen, I was always surprised to hear that they were looking forward to seeing the finished product almost as much as I was. It is still hard for me to believe that there is so much interest in my research, but I truly and graciously appreciate the well wishes and kind words.

I am beyond excited for the people who mean the most to me to read this book. Although I have always been happy to share my writing with friends and family, I knew that asking them to read nearly 400 pages on the history of Westerly was a big request, so for many this will be the first time they will see it all in one place. I cannot wait to hear the feedback, both positive and constructive, once the book hits the shelves.

My parents have always been very supportive of my efforts and often asked me when I would *finally* be done with this book, mostly because they could not wait for this day to arrive. For that, I am truly grateful

because I know how proud they are (since they have not been shy about letting me know).

My wife, Anna, has also been very supportive of my efforts, even when working on writing and editing may have taken up time that could have been spent on other things. I am so glad to know that Anna has been supportive of me since the very first day we met. For those of you who don't know, Anna works at Savoy Bookshop and Café on Canal Street. She has begun talking up this book to customers and coworkers long before it ever even saw the first printing. Anna has always supported and promoted my endeavors and that means more to me than she will ever know. Although arrangements have not yet been made, we are working on scheduling an event at Savoy to promote the book's release and details of this event will be shared when they are finalized and scheduled.

As I am writing this, I am looking at a list of questions provided to me by our newsletter editor, Ann Smith, and one of her questions made me stop and think for quite a while. She asked "What sorts of things did you learn from this experience?" Then she asked, "Would you do it again?" First of all, I would absolutely do this all over again, and I certainly intend to in the future. As for what I learned from this, that is a bit tougher to answer. Of course, there is the obvious fact that I learned more about Westerly than I ever thought possible, but I also learned that there was so much more to our little town than I think most people ever realized. As I note in the introduction, there are more stories than I could reasonably include that were considered for this book.

In closing, I want to share what I hope readers will take away from *Great Stories from Westerly's Past*. My hope is, and has always been, that I could tell anyone willing to hear it how great the town of Westerly is and how many people, places, and events have shaped the community into the place that it is today. At the end of the day, if I can teach even one person something new about Westerly that they did not know before, then I will feel I succeeded. Thank you all so much for your time, your belief in my work has been an inspiration and I appreciate you very much.

---ZJG

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



***Bank Square Books presents a weekend book signing with Steven Slosberg
for the release of the new book***

Columnist: 45 Years of Having a Say



Westerly Historical Society member and popular newspaper columnist, Steven Slosberg, recently announced the release of his new book, *Columnist: 45 Years of Having a Say*. He will be appearing at Bank Square Books in Mystic next month to give an author talk

and book signing.

Steven Slosberg of Stonington, Connecticut worked as a reporter, editorial writer, copy editor, and columnist for *The Day* in New London for more than three decades and lately has been writing weekly stories for *The Westerly Sun*. During his career, he won the Horace Greeley Award for outstanding journalistic service from the New England Press Association, the Stephen A. Collins Award for public service reporting from the Connecticut Chapter, Society of Professional Journalists and first place

awards from the National Society of Newspaper Columnists, the American Association of Sunday and Features Editors and the New England AP News Executive Association. His current column, "Postscripts," deals with the local history of Stonington, Westerly, and the surrounding area.

Event date:

*Sunday
December 12, 2021
1:00pm to 3:00pm*

Event address:

*Bank Square Books
53 West Main Street
Mystic, CT 06355*

