



# Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

March 2023

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## Program Notes

The Westerly Historical Society would like to extend our warmest thanks to Lawrence B. "Larry" Hunter who gave a wonderful talk on Westerly's cemeteries last month. For a complete program review, please see Page 6 of this issue of *Westerly's Witness*.

Our March event will be held in collaboration with the Charlestown Historical Society, Richmond Historical Society, Quonochontaug Historical Society, and Friends of the Quonochontaug Grange. Paul St. Amand of the Scituate Preservation Society will present a program on George E. Matteson entitled, "The Man and His Maps." This event will be held at the Quonochontaug Grange Hall, 5662 Post Road in Charlestown on **Saturday, March 18<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 PM**. For complete information, please consult the flyer which appears on Page 5 of this issue.

**Save the date:** on April 12, Zachary J. Garceau, Westerly Historical Society Vice President and Archivist, and author of *Great Stories from Westerly's Past*, will present a program on the History of Bradford Dyeing Association. The April program will be held at the Carriage House of the Babcock-Smith House from 6:30 to 7:30 PM.

**Wednesday Programs Are Held  
at the Carriage House  
of the Babcock-Smith House Museum  
124 Granite Street, Westerly, RI  
Free Admission ~Complimentary  
Refreshments**

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# WESTERLY'S WITNESS

Published by the Westerly Historical Society  
P. O. Box 91, Westerly, RI 02891, seven times per  
year in January, March, April, June, September,  
October and November

The mission of the Westerly Historical Society is to  
research, study, and preserve the local history in  
our community. We are a dedicated, all-volunteer,  
non-profit organization that owns numerous  
historical artifacts and an extensive photographic  
collection.

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Find us on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/WesterlyHistoricalSociety/>

## President's Corner

*Thomas J. Gulluscio, Jr.*

Dear WHS Friends,

I am thrilled to report that your society has  
partnered with some new friends representing the  
Richmond, Charlestown and Quonnie historical  
societies to host our first co-sponsored program on  
George E. Matteson map maker. It looks to be an  
interesting program; see Page 5 for details. Special  
thanks go out to Larry Hunter for filling the Carriage  
House room with his program on local cemeteries, see  
Page 6 for the recap.

As we prepare for our annual dinner scheduled for  
May 24th at the Haversham Restaurant, I am  
overjoyed to report that the executive board has made  
our unanimous decision for this year's recipient for the  
distinct Julia Award. Our very own beloved Ann  
Smith is the perfect choice. Ann has served in several  
key positions for the Society over her tenure but none  
more noteworthy than as editor of *Westerly's Witness*.  
Ann made each edition entertaining and educational  
with her selective topics and laborious research. Ann,  
after 10 years as editor, is retiring from that position  
and from the board as well. We hope receiving this  
award will show her how much we have appreciated  
all the effort she has put into making *Westerly's  
Witness* such a pleasure to read! Please get your tickets  
early for our dinner meeting and help us say thank you  
and good luck to Ann!

Tom

## EDITOR'S NOTES

*Ann L. Smith*

Well, it's here. The first ten-page *Westerly's  
Witness* in over a decade, if we had one ever. The  
fact is, we are so involved in so many things, that we  
just couldn't cut anything out. Tom O'Connell, our  
immediate past newsletter editor, came up with a  
short piece on the resting place of Osceola H. Kile,  
Westerly High School's first principal. (A  
comprehensive account of Principal Kile's career at  
Westerly High School appears in O'Connell's 2003  
work, *Westerly's Gold...Her People*.)

At the same time, Part 2 of the history of Bradford  
Elementary School was on the drawing board, and  
it's time once again for the announcement of this  
year's annual meeting and dinner.

Following our Regional History Fair in September  
of 2022, we forged a few bonds with this area's other  
historical societies. As a result of these new  
friendships, the Westerly Historical Society will  
co-present an offsite program on Saturday, March 18  
at the Quonochontaug Grange titled, "George E.  
Matteson: The Man and His Maps." See Page 5 for  
details.

Lastly, there is still time to apply for the co-  
sponsored History Award, given each year by the  
Babcock-Smith House in collaboration with the  
Westerly Historical Society. Information and an  
application form can be found in this issue. We hope  
you enjoy it all!

## *Bradford Elementary Remembered (Part 2 of 2)*

*By Ann L. Smith*

Last month in this space we documented the beginnings of what was the Bradford Elementary School in Bradford, a village within Westerly, Rhode Island. Since the publication of that piece, the Westerly Historical Society has received input and commentary from many people connected with the school.

To begin, we received evidence that the first graduation was held in the spring of 1924. Mark Doescher, a Bradford resident and alumnus of the school, has a collection of materials relating to Bradford Elementary that date back to the school's inception. Doescher had been a vocal advocate for the preservation of Bradford Elementary until its demolition in 2022. Mark Doescher also sent us architectural drawings of the school showing its footprint both before and after an addition was built in 1987-88. These drawings, when studied next to the plans for the earlier constructed recreation area, show that the new wing somehow overlapped part of the federally funded (and protected) recreational space.

Readers may recall that the recreation area built behind and adjacent to the school only a few years prior to the addition was funded by a grant from the U.S. Land and Water Conservation Fund. These federal funds came with the restriction that the recreation area would be preserved as open space in perpetuity. When the school was expanded and rebuilt, repairing the 1986 fire damage and doubling the building's footprint, a part of the recreation area inadvertently was sacrificed, but to this day it is not clear how the issue was handled at the time.

Jeffrey Emidy, Director of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission discussed the history of the Bradford Elementary School in a recent phone conversation with the Westerly Historical Society. Relying on anecdotal accounts, he commented that there are different versions of how or if the encroachment problem was resolved. Emidy noted that in situations such as the one at Bradford Elementary, solutions can be reached by substituting, or "swapping" one recreational space for another. The alternative would have been to remove the part of the building that overlapped the protected space. Emidy said that according to one source, the Town of Westerly and the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) had worked out the issue to the satisfaction of all parties involved. Decades later, the issue of the open

space at the Bradford School would prove to be a problem once more. But first, a bit more of the history needs to be told.

After the expansion, life went on at Bradford School. September of 1989 marked a new beginning for the village's children. Parents raised money to buy books for the new but nearly empty library. Mark Doescher remembers how he and his friends rode their bikes to the school to see their class lists on the windows in August of 1990 and every year after that. He wrote us in an email

We had lots of great memories; sock hops and parties in the gym, carnivals out in the field. The Flag Day ceremonies were really good memories for sure. Standing on risers in the gym, belting out patriotic songs for those gathered, students and parents.

In 1996 the Bradford Village Historic District was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. This new historic district encompassed the most significant areas of Bradford Village. It included Bowling Lane, Bradford Road, Dorr Street, and several others, including Church Street on which Bradford Elementary School stood at #15. The historic places registration form is lengthy (sixty-five pages), and the school is described in brief, but it gained its certification as part of a historic place on April 9, 1996.

Again a period of normalcy followed at Bradford Elementary School. The number of grades served and the size of the classes varied over the years. In 2005 Westerly opened its new Middle School on Sandy Lane and the elementary schools in town served students from kindergarten through just the fourth grade.

After 2005, Bradford Elementary School had been on the chopping block at least four times. Town administrators and elected officials struggled continuously to find the best solution for the configuration of its public schools. Many plans were defeated and officials came and went, thereby exacerbating the frustrations in getting to a viable solution. To make matters worse, residents voted down a \$38.5 million renovation bond in November 2016 that would have benefitted all of Westerly's public schools.

*(Continued on Page 8)*

# WESTERLY HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND BABCOCK-SMITH HOUSE MUSEUM HISTORY AWARD



An annual 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.

Application or nomination must be submitted by **April 1, 2023** by mail to

Westerly Historical Society  
PO Box 91  
Westerly, RI 02891

or by email to [whspresident@gmail.com](mailto:whspresident@gmail.com).

**Note: Additional supporting material or information may be submitted with an application, but will not be returned**

The application form can be found on the Babcock- Smith House Museum website and on the Westerly Historical Society website.  
<https://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/history-award/>

or at:

<http://babcocksmithhouse.org/>

A copy of the application form appears on Page 7 of this newsletter.

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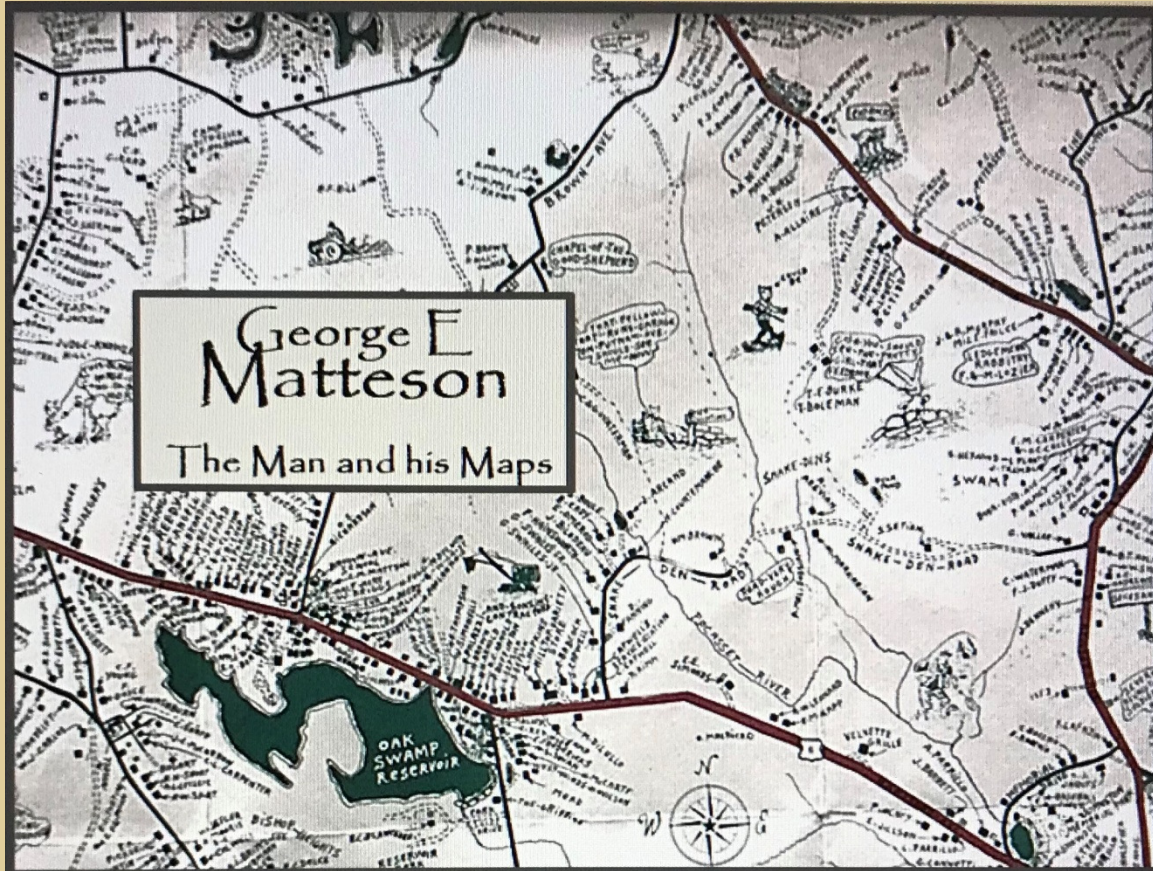
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CHARLESTOWN Historical Society, RICHMOND Historical Society,  
QUONOCHTAUG Historical Society, FRIENDS of the QUONOCHTAUG  
GRANGE, and WESTERLY Historical Society  
Present  
GEORGE E. MATTESON: THE MAN and HIS MAPS



We treasure his wonderful maps, beautifully illustrated with local landmarks, legends, and folklore. His maps hang in pictorial map collections locally and abroad, bringing us all twinges of nostalgia. George Matteson was from Scituate and Coventry. He was a forest ranger for over 40 years and served as a search and rescue specialist taking part in thousands of rescues of lost hunters and hikers, 100 plane crash rescue missions and myriad forest fire patrols. He would fly over forest fires, drawing quick maps of the terrain, landmarks, trails and roads, which were dropped by parachute to ground crews to aid them in reaching the heart of a fire. Did you know his father drove a hitch of a dozen or more horses for the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus? In collaborations with George Matteson's grandson, Paul St. Amand, conscientious custodian of his grandfather's extraordinary collection, the **SCITUATE PRESERVATION SOCIETY** will present a program to reveal more about this mapmaker who spent a lifetime surveying backwoods, digging into local legends, and preserving our rich history. Join us for a great program, and view Matteson's myriad maps—some rarely displayed.

**Saturday, March 18<sup>th</sup> @ 2:00 pm**

For further information email [rihiso@gmail.com](mailto:rihiso@gmail.com)

Location: Quonochontaug Grange Hall  
5662 Post Rd., Charlestown, RI 02813

Admission is free; Donations gratefully accepted

## ***Program Review: Larry Hunter on The Historic Cemeteries of Westerly***

The Westerly Historical Society welcomed Larry Hunter on February 8<sup>th</sup> to talk about his work with the Rhode Island Advisory Commission on Historic Cemeteries. As a commissioner assigned Washington County (and to the Westerly area in particular) Larry has no shortage of work when it comes to helping the community preserve its historic cemeteries.

Speaking before an audience of some thirty-seven attendees, Larry described the process to become a commissioner of the RIACHC and the many responsibilities the volunteer position entails. The group also learned a bit of history regarding New England burial customs, and heard a few anecdotes about the various searches and restorations in which he has been involved. Larry, in his role as a Westerly Land Trust steward, has been instrumental in improving the Trust-owned cemeteries, and helped out at Westerly Historic Cemetery Number 1 last year which the Westerly Historical Society owns.

Although Larry Hunter's main responsibility could be described as being a resource for the community—that is, to answer questions and teach others how to care for historic cemeteries—after sharing photographic slides of recent work done in the area, it was plain that Larry is a hands-on participant in this process. The fact is, caring for historic grave markers is a delicate process, and untrained but well-meaning people sometimes have done more harm than good in attempting to restore graves. In addition to the often taxing physical labor, Larry assists with the research and documentation of gravesites, often sharing the information to the FindaGrave.com web site.

Folks learned that Rhode Island is unique when it comes to cemeteries because, rather than making use of large centrally-located burial places, settlers customarily maintained small family cemeteries, or burial grounds near local meeting houses. The practice of burying people in places not affiliated with churches or other houses of worship traces back to our roots as a colony founded on religious freedom. As a result, Rhode Island has over 3,200 registered historical cemeteries and 95 of them are located within Westerly alone.

As part of his ongoing effort to raise awareness of our historic cemeteries, Larry Hunter is planning two cemetery tours in our area this May. The first is planned for Tuesday, May 16<sup>th</sup>, and the second will be

held on Saturday, May 20<sup>th</sup>. For exact locations and meeting times, interested parties are welcome to check out Larry Hunter's Facebook page, Cemeteries R Us, or email him at [Lphunter53@Yahoo.com](mailto:Lphunter53@Yahoo.com)



LARRY B. HUNTER – PHOTO COURTESY OF FACEBOOK

The following will help cemetery seekers be good stewards when searching for graves or if cleaning up burial places.

- DO seek permission from property owners to pass through their land. Ask where to park. Respect their land and their wishes. Leave no refuse. Leave everything as you find it or better.
- DO NOT move gravestones
- Record names and dates if stones have not previously been documented. Call a Commissioner with this information. Photograph if possible.
- DO NOT cut large living trees
- DO NOT drag fallen trees across gravestones. Lift carefully.
- DO take away any debris.
- DO wear gloves, safety glasses. Watch for poison ivy, oak and sumac. Use rubbing alcohol as soon as possible on you and your equipment.
- Finally, gravestone rubbing is NOT recommended except under expert supervision.



**WESTERLY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
AND BABCOCK-SMITH HOUSE  
MUSEUM HISTORY AWARD**



**APPLICATION AND/OR NOMINATION FORM**

An annual 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.

Applications are available online at [babcocksmithhouse.org](http://babcocksmithhouse.org) or [westerlyhistoricalsociety.org](http://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org).

Application or nomination must be submitted by April 1 by direct mail to Westerly Historical Society, PO Box 91, Westerly, RI 02891 or by email to [whspresident@gmail.com](mailto:whspresident@gmail.com).

Name of candidate:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

If this is a nomination, please list your name and contact information:

Please describe the candidate's contribution to local history research, study, or preservation. Additional supporting information may also be submitted, **but will not be returned.**

## Bradford Elementary Remembered

*(Continued from Page 3)*

During the school year 2016-2017, the State of Rhode Island performed a Facility Condition Assessment at the Bradford Elementary School. Administrators were given the opportunity to provide feedback before the state's report was made final, but it seemed that providing the amount of money needed to save the school of some 80 pupils just would not be feasible. The report cited deficiencies which included repairs that would be needed in the foreseeable future (five years) as well as deficiencies that already existed. In short, the total "five-year need" was estimated by the state to be \$4,345,226.

In a move that almost no one saw coming, the Westerly School Committee voted in January 2017 to close Bradford School at the end of the 2017 school year. *The Westerly Sun* broke the news with a story that was sub-headed, "Bradford Elementary, a small school that has become the heart and soul of its community, will close at the end of the school year." In June of 2017 the newspaper ran a piece that highlighted just how important the school was to those who worked and learned there. Filled with vignettes of people packing boxes and children singing songs at their last assemblies, the article truly showed what the school meant to all those who knew it.

In March of 2019 the school committee voted to turn control of Bradford Elementary School to the Town of Westerly. Workers of the town's recreation department occupied offices there, and various groups used the premises for recreational and community outreach activities. Administrators from Saint Pius X Catholic School looked at the property briefly. Still, it seemed as if the building rents might not really meet the costs of maintaining the site.

In March of 2022, the Westerly Town Council voted to have Town Manager Shawn Lacey "pursue marketing the property" and report back to the council. Area residents opposed the move, stating that the school has served an important unifying role for the village. One of these residents, Bill Aiello, had once been a member of town council and would again take up his seat at the end of 2022. Another Bradford resident, Dan King, was too an advocate for preserving Bradford School.

Later in 2022 the town signed a contract to sell the property Trendsetter Properties, a construction firm that planned to erect apartments on the site. But the sticky problem of the Land and Water Conservation grant came to the forefront. Taking the grant meant

that the recreational space was protected from development in perpetuity, regardless of who held the deed. And so the deal to sell Bradford School was ended. The Town Council voted to raze Bradford School which once and for all would protect and restore the recreational space funded by the grant. Bradford School was torn down in December, 2022.

As for the school's inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, The Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission looked for answers regarding the property's demolition, stating that the Town of Westerly was obligated to put forth a "mitigation" plan prior to the destruction of the school building. ("Mitigation" refers to the creation of a resource that preserves the memory of a place that no longer exists.) Town officials eventually came to the table to discuss the mitigation plan, but only after the demolition had begun. As of this writing the mitigation plan remains in progress.

What happens next at the site of the old Bradford School is yet to be seen. Residents are hoping to see a place where the community can once again enjoy recreational activities, and the mitigation plan is expected to be completed in the near future. Turning the page after 100 years has proved to be bittersweet for many, but a new chapter for the property at 15 Church Street in Bradford is about to begin.

***Many Thanks***  
***to***  
***Another of Our***  
***Generous Sponsors***  
***John "Jack" Spratt***



# Osceola Holcomb Kile After 150 Years

By Thomas A. O'Connell

Some years past Westerly residents were re-introduced\* to Westerly High School's first principal, Osceola Holcomb Kile. This very popular teacher of botany, Latin, geometry and physiology began his tenure here in the fall of 1870 when the first WHS (later the Elm Street School and subsequently Saint Pius X School) opened its doors on Elm Street. Though he was originally from Lewis, New York, he arrived in town following a successful stint (1865-1870) as the head teacher at the Vergennes (Vermont) Graded School.

Kile was careful to stress to the townspeople that they "should be interested in *their* schools." Scoffers at the notion of spending \$50,000.00 on a new school building were pleased to discover the funds were well invested because Principal Kile invited them into the building to hear students profess their newly acquired knowledge when given publicly witnessed oral exams. "Kile regarded teaching as the highest of callings."

Early in January, 1873 his past caught up with him. The years spent in barely heated classrooms in upstate New York caused damage to his lungs. Westerly students became aware of his frequent coughing bouts. He was suffering from consumption (tuberculosis). He died at home on the morning of Thursday, January 16. There was a largely attended wake held in the lower Westerly High School hall. He was interred in River Bend Cemetery.



PHOTO: GREG HOWARD



PHOTO: ANN L. SMITH

IMAGES OF OSCEOLA H. KYLE'S MONUMENT BEFORE AND AFTER BEING CLEANED BY RAY WILKINSON

\* "A Biography - Osceola Holcomb Kile: First Principal of Westerly High School," in *Westerly's Gold...Her People* (2003).

These words appear on his monument:

**In Memory of  
OSCEOLA H. KILE  
First Principal of the  
Westerly High School  
Born Jan. 10, 1839.  
Died Jan. 16, 1873.**

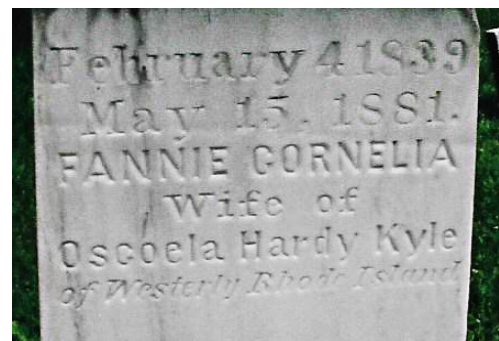
**Erected by the grateful  
citizens of Westerly.**

Well over a century of seasons and storms have assailed his Willow Street, urn-draped, white marble monument. This year, 2023, found his burial marker encrusted with all that time could hurl at it. A member of the Westerly Historical Society decided that 150 years' wear required proper attention. After consulting with River Bend Cemetery Superintendent, Greg Howard, he gave permission allowing Ray Wilkinson to restore the stone to its former glory. There was no charge for this service. (See the before and after pictures.)

Fannie Cornelia (Kellogg) Kile, Osceola's wife (who taught French and geometry at Westerly High School), too, was a victim of consumption. She passed away May 15, 1881 and is buried in the Kellogg family ground in the Essex Junction (Vermont) Cemetery. These words appear on her monument:

**February 4, 1839  
May 5, 1881  
FANNIE CORNELIA  
Wife of  
Osceola Hardy Kyle  
of Westerly Rhode Island**

Eternal typographical errors manifested. (See photo)



LOWER PORTION OF FANNIE CORNELIA KILE'S MONUMENT LOCATED IN THE KELLOGG FAMILY GROUND IN THE ESSEX JUNCTION (VERMONT) CEMETERY.

PHOTO: TOM O'CONNELL

**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 24, 2023 @ 40\* each.

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

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

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 17th** to:

**Westerly Historical Society**  
**P.O. 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.

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