



# Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

April 2024

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## Program Notes

### **THANK YOU**

The Westerly Historical Society would like to extend our appreciation to Christian McBurney for his informative presentation last month on his new book titled "Machine Guns In Narragansett Bay; The Coast Guard's War On Rum Runners".

Christian presented a summary of his new book followed by a focus on a fascinating incident that occurred off Watch Hill near Napatree Point between local rumrunners and the Coast Guard.

Thirty-one guests attended his presentation!

Please see page 5 for two related photos from our archives of a suspected rumrunner that apparently ran aground and was damaged beyond repair near Weekapaug Point.

### **SAVE THE DATE**

We are finalizing another joint summer program co-sponsored by the Watch Hill Conservancy. The program topic will be on Fort Mansfield and will be presented by Jack Spratt. The date remains to be determined but will be in late June.

### **SEEKING SPEAKERS**

We are still seeking speakers to present programs for the society. If you know anyone who is familiar with a particular local history topic and enjoys talking about their passion, please let us know.

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*Wednesday Programs Are Held at the  
 Carriage House of the Babcock-Smith House  
 Museum at 124 Granite Street in Westerly, RI  
 Free Admission ~Free Refreshments*  
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# WESTERLY'S WITNESS

Published by the Westerly Historical Society  
P. O. Box 91, Westerly, RI 02891, nine times per  
year in January, February, March, April, May, 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 with numerous historical  
artifacts and an extensive photographic collection.

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## President's Corner

*Thomas J. Gulluscio, Jr.*

Hello Society Friends,

I hope you are well and looking forward to some kinder weather! Your Westerly Historical Society marches on and continues to prepare a wide variety of events and programs to entertain and educate our members.

As of this moment, we are diligently reviewing all of the nominations for our history award co-sponsored by our friends at the Babcock-Smith House Museum. Please join us at the annual dinner meeting to see who was selected!

Speaking of our upcoming dinner meeting, we have set the ticket price as the same as last year, \$40 per person. This is possible by your society board voting once again to subsidize a portion of the cost with the hope that you will continue to join us and enjoy a wonderful evening with friends and show your support and appreciation to everyone involved.

I have the distinct pleasure of working with your society board members regularly and I witness their untiring efforts to be the best we can for you, our members!

So please look for the Annual Dinner Meeting ticket information in this newsletter and please be sure to join us on May 22nd. We will all be happy to see you in attendance.

We have begun our new project of video recording the oral histories of Westerly's homegrown locals. You can find a link to our first interview on our website. We are offering a history of Fort Mansfield program by society member and friend Jack Spratt on July 10th at the livery in Watch Hill as a fundraiser for our new oral history project. So please mark your calendars as it is not to be missed!

Stay well and I'll see you soon, Tom

## EDITOR'S NOTES

*By Robert Peacock*

*Thank you to Thomas O'Connell for allowing us to print excerpts of another chapter from one of his books this month.*

*We always welcome newsletter submissions by our members and we encourage you to consider writing an article for inclusion.*

***Remember, this is your newsletter!***

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*We encourage our readers to support these fine Westerly businesses who generously contribute to the community and who support us in our efforts to bring you this newsletter. We sincerely appreciate their support!!!*

# RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL RECORDS ADVISORY BOARD

*By Zachary Garceau*

On Monday, March 25<sup>th</sup>, a group of volunteers from the Westerly Historical Society and the Babcock Smith House Museum worked for several hours with representatives of the Rhode Island Historical Records Advisory Board.

Ashley Selima, the Rhode Island State Archivist and Lori Urso from the Old Slater Mill Association came to review the collections of the Westerly Historical Society and the Babcock Smith House during one of the Rhode Island Historical Records Advisory Board's Annual Service Days.

During their visit, Ashley and Lori offered valuable advice on how to best store and preserve some of the oldest and most precious records and artifacts of the Society and the Museum.

Ashley also provided detailed recommendations for maximizing storage capabilities and reviewed our Disaster Plans while Lori offered her expansive knowledge of textile preservation to advise Zack on how to properly store many of the cloth samples and other items in the Dwight C. Brown Jr. Collection.

We appreciate the time and efforts of Ashley and Lori as well as the dedication of Society members Zachary Garceau, Thomas Gulluscio, and Gregory Pettys for assisting in the review process.

The Rhode Island Historical Records Advisory Board is active in preserving history by offering Rhode Island non-profit organizations and other archival repositories valuable and vital assistance in reviewing and processing collections through Service Days.

The selected organizations are awarded \$1,000 in archival housing materials and receive valuable on-site assistance from members of the RIHRAB as well as archival community volunteers. These volunteers include archivists, students, and other information professionals in Rhode Island who are seeking to expand and enhance their professional development experience by volunteering during these Service Days.

The program is offered with funding and related support from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

As part of the grant funded program, the Westerly Historical Society received one thousand dollars of archival materials including one box of archival quality plastic clips, ten boxes of reinforced full tab archival quality expanding file folders, and thirty-six archival quality storage boxes.

The Rhode Island Historical Records Advisory Board members are appointed by the governor and the Board serves as a central advisory body for historical records planning and project development projects funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. In addition, the Board encourages and supports communication and coordination among the historical records community.

The Mission Statement of the Board is “The Rhode Island Historical Records Advisory Board serves as the central advisory body for historical records planning and for projects developed and carried out under the Rhode Island state program by fostering and supporting the training, identification, preservation, access to, and protection of historical records.”

The Vision Statement of the Board is “To serve all people of Rhode Island by defending and providing responsible, universal access to knowledge about their heritage through the historical record.”

The Board was established by Executive Order No. 31 in 1976 by Governor Philip W. Noel. It was created with the knowledge that “there exists in Rhode Island the need to collect, preserve, and when deemed desirable, edit and publish important documents”.

The members work diligently to support, coordinate, and encourage the preservation of and access to historical records in Rhode Island and are dedicated to developing and collaborating to provide educational programs and support to the archival and historical community within the State of Rhode Island.

**The Service Day event was a beneficial and positive collaboration and we all sincerely appreciate their guidance and their support!**

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**Announcements**

**Westerly Historical Society  
Annual Meeting and Dinner  
Ticket Order Form  
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 22, 2024 @ \$40 each.**

Enclosed please find my check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State and Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

*\*The ticket price has been partially subsidized this year following a vote by the WHS Executive Board.*

Cocktails at 5:30 PM (Cash Bar)  
Dinner will be served at 6:00 PM

Please send this form with your check or money order before **May 8th** to:

**Westerly Historical Society  
P.O. Box 91  
Westerly, RI 02891**

**Internet orders may be placed on our  
website at**

[westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/annual-meeting](http://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/annual-meeting)

Or click on the words "Annual Meeting" from our home page.

Major credit cards and PayPal® accepted.

## New Additions to Our Archives

The following historical artifacts have been donated to further expand the historical collections of the Westerly Historical Society.

As always, we sincerely appreciated any and all Westerly related donations!

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Prohibition was enacted in 1919 and repealed in 1933. In our archives, we found two photos in a scrapbook with the notations,

**Toro – Beached  
Sept 14 1922  
near Edgemere**

**Toro,  
Suspected  
Rumrunner**



The upper photo, labeled “**Toro – Suspected Rumrunner**”, is very clear and crisp. It shows the boat beached and in an apparent process of being salvaged and dismantled. The masts, windows, and upper deck have been removed and the middle section is split. Note the well-dressed men and horse drawn wagon in front of the boat. The bottom photo, labeled “**Toro – Beached Sept 14 1922 Near Edgemere**” is blurry and appears to have been taken earlier before the waves pushed it further ashore.

If you are interested in obtaining additional information or arranging for a donation of a locally related item to our collection, please email our President, Thomas Gulluscio, at [whspresident@gmail.com](mailto:whspresident@gmail.com) or our Archivist, Zachary Garceau, at [whsarchivist@gmail.com](mailto:whsarchivist@gmail.com)

# Discovering Westerly's Cemeteries

## Westerly Cemetery # 022 - The Sumner Chapman Lot

There were reportedly 20 ancient burials in this cemetery with many marked by rough fieldstones and only one marked by a carved headstone. The most recent known burial was in 1812 and the oldest burial is not known.

Included here are the remains of Sumner Chapman, who was born in 1724 and passed on December 13<sup>th</sup> of 1812. Sumner was the son of John Chapman and the husband of Betsey Herrick. John and Betsey are also believed to be buried here in unmarked graves.

Sumner Chapman was a veteran of the Revolutionary War and served as a private in the Alarm Company under Captain Edward Oliver.

While his remains appear to have been buried here, both he and his wife are listed on the shared family monument located in the newer family cemetery located approximately one mile down the road (Westerly Cemetery # 13).

Sumner is listed on the shared family monument located in Cemetery #13 with a very common inscription underneath his name which reads "Remember friends as you pass by as you are now so once was as I am now so you must be prepared for death and follow me". Although it appears a bit cryptic, this epitaph was one of the most common epitaphs seen on headstones and monuments during the 1800's.

According to the 1878 book by Frederic Denison, "Westerly and Its Witnesses", the cemetery was recorded in 1860's as being "On the north border of Burdens Pond (or Chapmans Pond) a little west of the residence of Charles P. Chapman, between the railroad and the new highway, on a sandy knoll from which the road makers have largely drawn, are many ancient graves, without enclosure or care. While many have only rough headstones, one has an inscription, reading as follows: Mr. Sumner Chapman, died Dec 13, 1812, age 88." (Note – Denison recorded it as Sumner but the grave appears to read Sumnor)

The cemetery is located across from pole number 150 on the opposite side of the Westerly Bradford Road approximately fifty feet in from the road along the railroad tracks. The cemetery sign marks the general location and part of the cemetery is on the back side of the hill partially enclosed by a concrete wall built by the railroad during the refurbishment and electrifying of the tracks. A few of the large fieldstone grave markers are evident outside of the enclosure and the carved and inscribed headstone and footstone of Sumner Chapman are located within the concrete enclosure. The surrounding area includes a steep hill, large trees, and a portion of two old stone walls.

A single headstone, in poor condition, made of sandstone, with a fancy top, and a carving of an urn and a willow, approximately 36 inches above ground and 20 inches wide, is visible along with a similar footstone.

Access is possible but very difficult by travelling through the dense brush and then up and over the steep hill. Alternatively, slightly easier access is possible by using a small path approximately 500 feet towards Bradford where the guardrail opens which winds through the woods and onto the side of the railroad track area. Unfortunately, the larger crushed stone that make up the area beside the track makes walking difficult. Use extreme caution while walking by the tracks because the high speed trains pass on a regular basis. Do not walk on or close to the tracks!

For those using GPS, the cemetery is located at 41 Degrees, 23 minutes, and 5.1 seconds North by 71 degrees, 47 minutes, and 40.3 seconds West.

*In addition to a personal visit to the cemetery, information for this article was obtained from and sincere appreciation is extended to the research of Reverend Denison in the 1860's, the files of the Rhode Island Historical Cemeteries Commission, and the personal knowledge of Cemeteries Commissioner Larry Hunter.*



*The cemetery is located within the area across from pole number 150 on the opposite side of the Westerly Bradford Road approximately fifty feet from the road along the railroad tracks. The cemetery is located on the back side of the hill where the cemetery sign is located.*



*The cemetery is on the back side of the hill along the tracks partially enclosed by a concrete wall built by the railroad during the refurbishment and electrifying of the tracks. A few fieldstones are evident outside of the enclosure on the left side and the carved headstone and footstone are located within the enclosure.*



*A single inscribed headstone, in very poor condition, made of sandstone, with a fancy top, and a carving of an urn and a willow, approximately 36 inches above ground and 20 inches wide, is visible as well as a smaller matching footstone inside the enclosure. A few other fieldstone grave markers are also visible just outside of the enclosure.*





*These three photos above were taken several years ago and were provided by Larry Hunter, the Washington County Commissioner of the Rhode Island Historical Cemeteries Commission.*

## OF MARBLES AND THE DREAM TEAM BY THOMAS O'CONNELL

*The following is an excerpt from a story originally published by Thomas O'Connell in 2004.*

It will be different this time, they thought. This year the state championship was theirs. The Westerly boys had practiced and practiced. Their sore knuckles, some worn raw and bleeding, open wounds that could become dirt infected, would be worth the pain. Not alone did their discomfort result from lacerated finger joints, bruised knees, and aching necks, borne also was the loss of fun enjoyed playing other games with friends and neighbors. The whirring sound of a string-pulled top gyrating menacingly close to, colliding and disabling an opponent's top somewhere on a smooth sidewalk or wooden porch floor; the satisfaction of seeing the piggy\* become airborne to shoulder height, whacked so true and mightily that it sailed down the street as if winged; and, the speedy stealth and adrenalin pumping anticipation of discovery in a session of hide-and-seek – all these favored diversions dimmed in importance to the task ahead.

The preceding year had been the first in which the Westerly youngsters were offered the opportunity to engage in the several levels of competition for the Southern New England Marble Shooters Championship. The event's sponsor, again this year, was the Palestine Temple, Mystic Shrine of Rhode Island. The Shriners were seeking contestants, boys and girls, under the age of fifteen. So when the announcement of this year's local matches was made in the Westerly *Sun* (Friday, April 29, 1932), Westerly's candidates were ready. There were prizes to be awarded at the preliminaries on Saturday, May 7. The next level of competition would be held at the Shriner's Circus at Rhodes-on-the-Pawtuxet. Only four from Westerly would make that important trip. The winner of the Rhodes contest would be sent to the National Matches in Ocean City, New Jersey, "later in the summer."

The marble champion of Westerly for 1932 was Louis Cappuccio, 14, of 88 ½ High Street. The *Sun* reported that Cappuccio "was outstanding in the preliminaries last week [and] was equally good yesterday...he won every match he played." (May 8) His successes automatically qualified him to represent the town on the squad selected that day. Also securing a place on the team representing the town was the youngest boy who entered the tournament, Henry Nardone, 9, of 8 Pierce Street. Rated as the number two man on the team, he was an exceptional performer who "lost only one match of the many he played." Nardone, the paper explained, even played with a painfully sore finger on the 7<sup>th</sup>. Called a "Dark Horse" by the local sportswriter, Adam Celestino, 12, of 19 Pearl Street, became the third member of the team "winning his way to the finals in a brilliant streak of shooting." The fourth member of the team, the tournament veteran, was Pasquale Iacoi, 14, of 6 Marriott Avenue, "who displayed some of the accurate 'flipping' that carried him so far last year." Thus, was Westerly's dream team formed.

Not all the glory was showered on the first four victors. The first four runners up received bronze medals. These boys would presumably fill a spot on the first team, if the need arose. They were Joseph Celestino, 14, Adam's brother; Frank Turco, 12, of 16 Dayton Street; Frank Parilla, 14, of 11 West Street; and, Edward Siller, 14, of 10 Spring Street.

The results of that first day's round of Rhodes competition were splashed across the lower part of page one of the *Sun* for Thursday, May 18: LOCAL MARBLE PLAYERS WIN EARLY MATCHES OF STATE MEET. The glory boys were Louis Cappuccio who quashed John Kenney of Newport 11-2, 7-6. It only took him two games in the set of three to eliminate his opponent. Adam Celestino easily quelled Thomas Warburton of North Attleboro 11-2, 7-6. "Showing good form and ability".

Pasquale Iacoi extinguished Chester Budjinski's of North Attleboro hopes 8-5, 9-4. Westerly's youngest team member did not fare as well. Henry Nardone fell before the strength of Thomas Williams of Pawtucket 13-0, 7-6. It was expected that despite the loss of Nardone's able flipping, the three remaining team members would excel in the next round of play.

**Continued On Next Page**

## OF MARBLES AND THE DREAM TEAM BY THOMAS O'CONNELL

Thursday's games produced mixed results. Louis Cappuccio, Westerly's number one seed, fell before the onslaught of Edmund LaRue of Bristol, last year's State Champion. Cappuccio made LaRue labor strenuously for the victory. "With one game apiece Cappuccio having taken the first, 9-4, and LaRue the second, 7-6, the former champion knuckled down and with smooth shooting form captured the third game, 9-4." Celestino and Iacoi fared better. Adam Celestino convincingly beat Albert Blais of Woonsocket 7-6, 9-4. Pasquale Iacoi bested Chepe Pena of Newport 7-6, 9-4. Their victories moved the boys into the Friday semi-finals. The winners of Friday's contests will have a final go at the State Championship on Saturday.

The *Sun* didn't publish on Saturdays back then, so most of the townsfolk had to wait for the Sunday, May 22 edition to find out what happened to its finalists on those two final days. It wasn't good news. On Friday afternoon both Adam and Pasquale were defeated and eliminated from the tournament.

"Defeated but not disgraced" the sportswriter proclaimed. Both youths battled mightily. Celestino who claimed victory in the quarterfinals by defeating Joseph Dill of Woodlawn 3-10, 8-5, 7-6 was eliminated in the semi-finals. The article failed to report how this befell Celestino. Interest instead fell on the odd conclusion to Iacoi's career. He had jostled his way into the quarterfinals by overthrowing Edward Skrizmiarz of Pawtucket 9-4, 11-2. The unusual circumstances of his defeat occurred in the semi-finals when Iacoi was matched with William Kenney, presumably of Newport. That information was not given. In their set of three games, Kenney won the first 10-3, "but Iacoi came back to tie the count with a 7 to 6 victory."

In the last game both boys were down to six marbles each. Then it happened. "Kenney shot at the last one and the agate smashed to bits." The judges were nonplussed. This agate smashing, though always possible when using glass marbles, had not happened before. "Finally they decided to put another marble in the ring and the boys lagged for the first shot." Cappuccio went first. He saw how much rode on this flip. Perhaps he was really nervous. Whatever the reason, he missed his shot. Kenney knelt down at the ring's edge, took careful aim, fired his shot, and knocked the marble out of the ring. His single shot at that moment earned him a slot in the semi-finals. It must have been a long, quiet ride home to Westerly that fateful Friday night.

Could this great team from Westerly have won? Maybe, but a fatalist would say it just wasn't to be. The young men gave their all, did their very best. Luck favored the upstaters. The previous year Westerly had placed five contestants in the Rhodes games. Maybe if they had been allotted the same number in 1932, they might have captured the title. We will never know. By the way, the *Sun* didn't list the name of the new State Champion in the final article. We will never know. On the other hand, the final marbles story was reported on the sports page. The sport had gained some respect.

### Notes

*A "piggy" was often times created from a discarded broom handle. Boys cut a 5"-6" piece of wood from the handle. The ends of the cut piece were sanded to cause it to resemble a pickle. Thanks for this bit of playground lore to Rev. Joshua A. McClure, Pastor, Pleasant Street Baptist Church.*

*Thanks also to Attorney Louis B. Cappuccio, Sr. for his first hand knowledge of the facts. Mr. Cappuccio survived this ordeal, in fact, he claimed that it helped prepare him for a life in state and town politics. Mr. Joseph Celestino, who would later become Coach Leo Smith's "Iron Man" of the 1934 Westerly High School football team, is owed thanks for his valuable insights.*

***Our sincere thanks and appreciation are extended to Westerly Historical Society member Thomas O'Connell for allowing us to republish these excerpts from his original article which was originally published in this newsletter in 2004.***

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