

# Westbrook Historical Society

"A Society That Preserves the Past"

Fall 2019

## Purpose:

The Westbrook Historical Society meets regularly in its rooms at the Community Center at 426 Bridge Street, Westbrook at 1:30 pm on the first Wednesday of each month.

The purpose of the Society is to bring together those people interested in the history of Westbrook, and to discover, collect, and preserve any materials and objects which establish and illustrate the history of the area.

## SEAL OF THE CITY OF WESTBROOK



Seal of the City of Westbrook was adopted on June 4, 1891 by vote of the City government. In the center of the seal is a facsimile of the vessel in which Col. Thomas Westbrook, for whom the City was named, came to Falmouth bearing the King's Commission to select masts for the Royal Navy. Surmounting this is the crest of the Westbrook Family, a mailed foot and knee. Around the seal are the words, "City of Westbrook" and the dates 1814 (date of incorporation of the town) and 1891 (date of incorporation of the city).

## FIRST MEMBER OF WESTBROOK POLICE FORCE, ONE OF SEVEN SURVIVORS OF THE CIVIL WAR

October 16, 1927 By H. J. R. Tewksbury

When Westbrook became a city in 1891 and Leander Valentine was elected Chief Executive, one of his first official acts was to appoint Stephen M. Dresser a member of the police force. The other appointees were Harry Cousins and Wesley Whitham. Messrs. Cousins and Whitham are dead, but Mr. Dresser is still alive, the sole survivor of Westbrook's first police force. In addition, Mr. Dresser is one of the few remaining members of the little army of Civil War veterans. Ten years ago there were 30 men wearing the little brass button signifying they had taken part in the terrible struggle between the North and South: today there are only seven – a mere handful. Those still left are Franklin F. Andrews, William H. Kelley, John e. Thompson, James W. Morris, George Bixby, John Van Buskirk (known as John Van), and Mr. Dresser. Mr. Dresser, now in his 80<sup>th</sup> year, is content to remain at home and let the world roll by.

### On Police Force 16 years

Mr. Dresser served on the police force for 16 consecutive years, serving under nine mayors – Leander Valentine, Malhlon H. Webb, A. A. Cordwell, W. W. Cutter, Francis A. Cloudman, King S. Raymond, Jacob L. Horr, Joseph A. Warren, and Rufus K. Jordan. With the election of Mr. Jordan, he was replaced by a Democrat.

"I should have been replaced before," said Mr. Dresser in speaking of his connection with the department. "The last year I was on the force, I had trouble getting around and the job really called for a younger man. After leaving the force, I served several terms as sealer of weights and measures but I really retired from public life when I quit the force."

### A Native of Standish

Mr. Dresser informed me that he was born in Standish, Feb. 16, 1839, the son of Edmond and Miriam Bradbury Dresser. He received the usual country schooling and when he was 22, went to Newton, Mass. and secured a job on the Boston & Worcester Railroad as a fireman.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, he enlisted in Company B of the 44<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Regiment and was sent to North Carolina where he took part in a number of important engagements.

Knowing that Mr. Dresser was rather modest concerning his war record and was not telling me all that he should, I inquired, "Were you wounded, Mr. Dresser?"

Mr. Dresser paused, looked at me intently a moment and then said, "Yes, I was wounded in the stomach, if you "I don't suppose the roads were in as good condition then as they are today," I inquired.

"I should say not!" he exclaimed. "Sometimes the mud would be up to the hub. It was good old Saccarappa mud and there's no worse mud in the world."

"Did you leave the trucking job to accept a job on the police force?"

"No," he replied slapping his knee and laughing heartily, "the trucking job left me. The company virtually went out of business, selling to Mr. Dana (the late Woodbury K. Dana) and I was out of a job. I applied for an officer's job and was accepted."

#### **Resembles "Buffalo Bill"**

Mr. Dresser is in good health but sticks close to the fireside. Although he is a veteran of the Civil War he never affiliated with the G. A. R. post. He a gentleman of the old school – courteous and kind – and hold the confidence and respect of his neighbors and fellow citizens. A distinguished looking gentleman, he bears a marked resemblance to Col. William Frederick Cody (Buffalo Bill) that well know government scout and Indian fighter.

know what I mean." I was forced to confess that I did not know what he meant. "Well," he said, "we went a good many days without anything to eat. Sometimes we would have only one piece of hardtack a day and that would be the regular program for eight or ten days at a stretch. But that was nothing for us in those days. We managed to live and were able to fight and that was what we were there for."

#### **Married Shortly After War**

"On receiving my discharge," he said, "I returned to Cambridge, Mass. and took on railroading again. I worked short time, earned enough money to get married and went to Bayonne, N.J. to work for the New Jersey Central Railroad. I came to Westbrook in 1892 and went into the trucking business, forming a partnership with my brother-in-law, Joseph Hazelton. We did business under the firm name of Hazelton and Dresser. We did all the trucking for the old Westbrook Manufacturing Company hauling the finished product to Portland and returning with cotton or coal. We had one four-horse team and one two-horse team and they kept us on the jump."

#### **Recalls Saccarappa Mud**

"I don't suppose the roads were in as good condition then as they are today," I inquired.

"I should say not!" he exclaimed. "Sometimes the mud would be up to the hub. It was good old Saccarappa mud and there's no worse mud in the world."

"Did you leave the trucking job to accept a job on the police force?"

"No," he replied slapping his knee and laughing heartily, "the trucking job left me. The company virtually went out of business, selling to Mr. Dana (the late Woodbury K. Dana) and I was out of a job. I applied for an officer's job and was accepted."

Stephen M. Dresser, 89, One of the First Policemen in City, Dead – December 14, 1923

∞ ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞

Articles from The Westbrook Telephone newspaper dated Tuesday, November 16, 1880  
Price 3 cents

#### **A Few of our Early Settlers**

Town histories are made up from family histories. Hence the facts pertaining to the first settler and his family lie at the foundation of the self-imposed task of the town historian. Unfortunately it is now no longer possible to ascertain who broke ground and erected the first-civilized habitation in our village. There is a tradition, however, that the ancestor of the Conant family, coming up the river in a canoe, made a landing near the upper falls, and erected the first house and saw mill. Here the tradition comes to an untimely end: and going to the records of deeds we find two Conants, contemporaries and

perhaps brothers, viz: Samuel and Joseph, Sr. The former who married Mary Peabody, was the ancestor of the Saccarappa Conants. Joseph Conant, Sr., also lived at Saccarappa but his descendants, who appear to have become long since extinct in the male line, lived near the Duck Pond, and were closely connected with the Prides and Joneses.

By marriage Samuel Conant was connected with the Webbs of this town and Windham. Samuel Webb, a blacksmith by trade, taught the first school in Windham, and was an early settler of that town.

He had a numerous family and one of his sons, David, married Dorothy (more commonly called Dolly) Peabody, the sister of Mrs. Mary Conant. Jonathan Webb, long the leading lumber merchant of Saccarappa, was the son of David and Dorothy Webb, and was born in Gorham in 1755, as we learn from the head-stone in the old Conant burying ground. He was twice married, and had a numerous family. His first wife was Mary Coverley and his second Susanna Smith, who survived him and subsequently married respectively Capt. Nathaniel Partridge and the Rev. Caleb Bradley.

Joshua Webb, one of the sons of Jonathan and Mary (Coverley) Webb, was also largely engaged in lumbering in this town, and when in the full tide of prosperity erected for his private residence the large brick mansion house now owned by the Westbrook Manufacturing Company and used for a boarding house.

In the records of conveyances in the last century we find the name of John Webb, "Taylor", who lived near Pride's Bridge.

One of the sons of Samuel Webb of Windham was named John. Was he the same person with our "Taylor" John Webb? Again in the early part of the present century William and "Kiah" Webb lived on the Saco road near the present residence of

Hon. Leander Valentine. Can any old inhabitant tell Windham), under the ministry of John Wight.us who these Webbs were, and with what families they were connected?

One of the very early settlers in Saccarappa was Thomas Haskell, born in Gloucester Mass. in 1089. June 10<sup>th</sup> 1740 he bought of Joseph Conant "his house on the north east side of the river at Saccarappa". This was probably near the Windham road, and on land now owned by Elias S. Dodge, and sometimes called the Pike field.

He died the 10<sup>th</sup> day of February 1785 in the 97<sup>th</sup> year of his age. He had ten children and at the time of his death, and seventy-nine great grand children, one of his granddaughters, now upwards of ninety-five years of age is still living in Pownal. He probably lies buried in the Pike field, where still may be read the inscriptions on the headstones to Dr. Benj. Haskell and Lydia his wife and Mrs. Hunnewell. Dr. Benj. Haskell was his son and Mrs. Hunnewell was probably his daughter. Before coming to Saccarappa he had lived on the "Neck" now Portland, where he had been a member of the first parish church. This connection he severed on coming here to unite with the church which was then being formed in New Marblehead, (now

### **The Dead Pearl Diver – Sculpture by Paul Akers**



**BENJAMIN PAUL AKERS – born 1825. Died 1861.**

Paul Akers, famous sculptor, was born in Saccarappa. (now Westbrook) in 1825. Paul had but few opportunities to acquire an education, however young Akers read extensively, books borrowed from the well stacked library of the family physician. He read Plato, Aristotle and Dante and also German and French literature. He made some early efforts with both pen and brush yet neither seemed to be his true vocation.

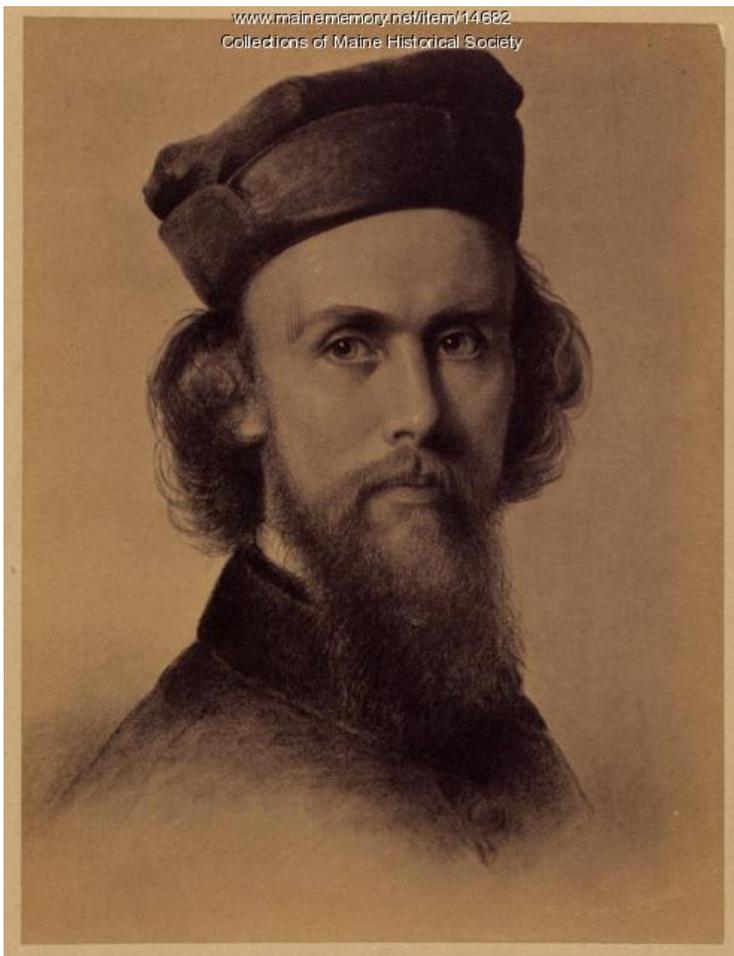
A desire for travel possessed Paul and he determined to earn sufficient funds to enable him to do this and as a means toward this end, he went to Portland and got a position in a printing office. Following this employment he went to Boston and studied plaster casting with Carew and later made several busts among them being that of the poet Longfellow.

He also produced a number of ideal works, among them a head of Charlotte Corday and a bas-relief of Evening. His work gained him reputations and the means of going abroad which he was able to do in the fall of 1852.

He studied for a year in Florence making several busts and a few marble pieces. He returned to Portland in 1853 and the next year went to Washington. He modeled busts of noted men, among them Edward Everett and Sam Houston.

He again visited Europe passing a number of years in travel and crossing the Alps on foot. In these few years he produced his best known works, which gave the young artist renowned fame. While in Rome he became acquainted with Nathaniel Hawthorne which resulted in lasting friendship.

At this time the sculptor was at work upon a number of statues turning into marble some of his previous models among them the head of Milton, now at Colby College and the Lost Pearl Diver which was considered his masterpiece and which was brought from Italy by money subscribed by Portland citizens and placed in the reference room of the public library; later taken to the Sweet Memorial Art Museum.



Paul Akers died in Philadelphia in May, 1861. It was thought that constant work upon damp clay contributed largely in bringing about his early death.

He is buried in Evergreen Cemetery in Portland.

Above from an Article from old newspaper at the Westbrook Historical Society.

It is called "Lost" in early article but "Dead" in later ones. Below is further information from the "Find a Grave" site with more detailed information

## Benjamin "Paul" Akers

Sculptor, born in Saccarappa, now part of Westbrook, Maine, the eldest of a large and indigent family of rural Maine. He received the "Commemorative Silver Medal" at the 1854 Exhibition and Fair of the Maine Charitable Mechanic Association. The award was for his bas relief of "Peace" (Maine Historical Society). "He is known for his portrait busts and medallions and most specifically for one sculpture, the Dead Pearl Diver, about an ideal youth drowned at sea. With elaborate carving of the fish net drapery, it brought Akers fame and success" (The Artist Bluebook). His playmates called him Paul, referring to the Apostle, "due to the serious cast of his mind," and this name he preferred. As a young man he worked in his father's wood-turning mill, inventing fancy patterns and turning beautiful toys. He wrote on art for the Atlantic Monthly and contributed to The Crayon, a short-lived art magazine of the mid-nineteenth century. He spent the winter of 1849 in Boston learning the processes of plaster casting from the sculptor Joseph Carew. When in Portland he got his clay from the pottery of Jeremiah Dodge and Son near Deering's Oaks, this was the pottery celebrated in Longfellow's poem, "Keramos." A weathervane in the form of a rooster was his first work in sculpture. Some of his early works include: a relief entitled Charlotte Corday, later renamed Lady Jane Grey; the Head of the Savior mentioned by Neal; portrait medallions of his brother, mother, father, and one entitled The Village Doctor, a portrait of Dr. Jonathan Swett who had befriended him and loaned him books to read and a place to work in Hollis. On June 12, 1851, he arrived at the home of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in Cambridge to sculpt a bust of Longfellow. On June 12, 1851, from the poet's Journal: "Mr. Akers of Portland arrived. He is to pass a week or so with me and make my bust; a young man of superior talent and high ideas of his art." Subsequent entries in the Journal indicate the

progress of the bust. Monday, June 23, 1851: "Mr. Akers gets on well with the bust. It promises to be a very good one, though I have hardly given him an hour. He is the easiest artist in the world, hardly asking a regular sitting." And, Wednesday, June 25, 1851: "The bust is finished in the clay and is pronounced excellent. He received a second commission from Mrs. Longfellow's uncle, the wealthy Bostonian, Samuel Appleton. Again from Longfellow's. Journal, Thursday, July 22, 1851: "Went to Boston to see Uncle Sam's bust by Paul Akers. Quite grand and striking, and finely done. Very few people look so at eighty-five.." Mr. Appleton further commissioned Akers, to make replicas in relief of two figures by Michelangelo, Morning and Evening from the Medici Tombs in Florence, this was the first of his three trips to Europe. During 1853 he devoted himself to an ideal piece, Benjamin in Egypt, the figure illustrated an episode from Genesis 44: 12. The statue was exhibited at the Exposition in the Crystal Palace in New York, the statue was destroyed later in a fire at the Customs House in Portland. On a trip to Washington, DC, Akers took the likeness of President Pierce; did a bust of Linn Boyd from Kentucky, Speaker of the House at the time; the bust of John McLean, Justice of the Supreme Court, which was moved from the Capitol to the Supreme Court Building in 1935; and, a bust of Edward Everett, now belongs to the Maine Historical Society. When he returned to Maine in the Summer of 1858, he met Mrs. Elizabeth Anne Chase Taylor, a young mother, journalist, and poet. In August 1860 they were married in Hollis. Their only child, Gertrude, died in infancy. In 1859, his sculpture of the Dead Pearl Diver (1858) first went on display at the Portland Museum of Art in Portland, Maine. He died while in Philadelphia, of tuberculosis.

### The Storm of 1936 By Edna Gowan

The recent heavy April storm reminded us of the more disastrous rain of March 12 and 13, 1936. At the time of that storm snow covered the ground. Two days of torrential rain together with warmer air softened the snow causing rivers and streams to over flow their banks with frightening speed. The force of the flood loosened great chunks of ice adding another element of destruction. In the central and southern parts of the state bridges toppled like dominoes into the flooding waters. Governor Brann estimated the flood lode at ten million dollars (It would be nearer ten billion now!).

The Highland Lake community did not escape. The mill dam which held the lake water back for a hundred years or more was wrenched from its foundation. With the loss of the dam a wall of water from the lake came

pouring through, taking out the bridge over the Mill Brook on Duck Pond Road. The influx of water turned the brook into a river which went surging on its way toward the next bridge.

Mill Brook, as all the trout fishermen well know, crosses Route 302 near the Lyman Woodbury home. The bridge there was presumably built about 1836, the date when construction of the new road from Highland Lake Corner to Prides Corner was begun. Both supporting ends of the bridge were of granite masonry and the road bed is said to be of granite, too. The masonry was strong but the culvert was weak. The wall of water approached the bridge laden with debris and uprooted trees. The entire ravine was filled with water. No one had any doubt the bridge would go.

Leon Babbidge, a special Police officer, was sent to guard the approaches. The last person to cross the old bridge must have been Augustus Brown, who was the proprietor of the grocery store where the Hawkes Television Shop is now. He waded across to get his bundle of papers - the bridge went out with a roar leaving him on the other side talking with Office Babbidge.

A couple of notes in closing are from the Portland Press Herald of March 18; "Paper City employees under direction of Elmer Randall started replace the bridge over Mill Brook on Duck Pond Road, one of the first bridges in Cumberland County to have been washed out. And Harwood Stewart of Prides Corner was injured while working rebuilding the bridge on Roosevelt Trail (Route 302). A cave in caused the staging to fall on him. He was taken to the Westbrook Hospital on Main Street for X-rays."



### **WESTBROOK WOMEN'S CLUB – 100 YEARS OLD**

The GFWC ( General Federation of Women's Clubs) Maine, Westbrook Woman's Club was organized on October 15,1919, when a small group of local women met at the home of Mrs. Oscar Fick by invitation only to consider the feasibility of forming and organizing a woman's club. It was voted to establish the Westbrook Woman's Club with the purpose of encouraging hospitality between the club women of both sections of the city (east and west); to stimulate the intellectual life of the members; and to promote the practice of charity in the community. On March 23, 1920, the club became federated, so became a part of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, which is considered to be one of the world's largest and oldest women's service organizations. Civic and Community Improvement projects have always been a major component of our community involvement. In 1920, we initiated having lunches for high school

students. In 1921, we supplied milk for the public school children, being supervised by the school nurses. In 2003, historic plaques were placed at various spots in Westbrook such as The Cumberland and Oxford Canal, the James Winslow House at 473 Bridge Street, the North School at the corner of Cumberland and Bridge Streets, and at Saccarappa Falls. We have supported our local charities such as My Teen Place, the Animal Refuge League, the Locker Project, and the Westbrook Historical Society. We provide scholarships for our high school seniors, recognize and reward our Westbrook High School artists at our Annual Art Show and started the Annual Westbrook Together Days. Our object of the Club is still to stimulate the intellectual lives of our members; to promote the practice of charity; to maintain and extend the spirit of hospitality; and to participate actively in community improvement.

**On October 20, 2019, we will have a very special event to celebrate our 100th Anniversary.**

∞ ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞

### **Welch-Welsh-Walsh: Grape juice, language or family name?**

All of the above answers are correct, but you have already guessed we want to say more about the Welch-Welsh-Walsh families and more precisely about those who immigrated to Westbrook mainly in the late eighteen hundreds.

Nowadays, Welch-Welsh-Walsh descendants living in Maine are named : Bryan, Ellis, Foley, Gillis, Graham, Mitchell, Mooney, Plummer, Rinaldi, Stilphen, Sullivan, Tapley, Welch, ... The latest are the descendants of John Welsh and Elizabeth Dunn, an Irish couple who emigrated to Canada from Ireland around 1825. We don't know much about their life before they came to Canada, except they were married and had two or three children already. We believe they would originally be from the Irish province of Leinster.

Some of their children, like Patrick, Mary and William, and also some grand-children, moved to Westbrook during the industrial era to work at S. D. Warren paper mill (Cumberland Mills at the time). Since they were bilingual and had some experience working at the paper mill in Portneuf, Quebec, Canada, many of them happened to be valuable candidates for S. D. Warren Co.

Some of the famous descendants of John Welsh and Elizabeth Dunn in the Westbrook area were Welch and Welch attorneys at law, Welch's Drug Store owner as well as Paine drugstore owner, Portland renown restaurant Chef, ... and those who made S.D. Warren Forty or Fifty-Year Clubs as well as those who served their country at war. Nevertheless, many of the Welch-Welsh-Walsh descendants are people like you and me doing their best in life.

Lastly, why mentioning three family names? Well, it appears that the Welsh moving from Canada to Maine got their name changed from Welsh to Welch. Why is that? We don't know yet, no more than we are sure about the last name Welsh, which could also have been Walsh. As a matter of fact, Welsh and Walsh have the same roots. The surname means foreigner and today Walsh is being ranked 4th most numerous last name in Ireland.

We are planning our first family reunion in June 2020 near Quebec City and are hoping many American cousins will join us! So would you know a descendant, please pass along this article and would you be a descendant yourself, you and your family are invited to this special event.

Written by **Linda Bedard**. Mrs Bedard is the daughter of Maggie Welsh who lived on the ancestral farm in Portneuf; they both now live in Quebec, Canada. Mrs Bedard is an amateur genealogist and can be reached at [welshfamily83@gmail.com](mailto:welshfamily83@gmail.com) about this article or at [facebook.com/johnwelshreunion](https://www.facebook.com/johnwelshreunion) about the family reunion in 2020.

### *President's Message*

Just a few reminders – Fall is here, time to reorganize and get to those chores we have been putting off while enjoying summer pastimes.

Annual dues of \$10 are due. We hope you still remain members of the Westbrook Historical Society. Remember our monthly programs which are now starting up again. Mark Swett has presented his second session of "Who Killed Alice Hawkes?" to an interested crowd. Our October program is this coming Wednesday, October 2<sup>nd</sup> when Mary Morton Cowan, a Westbrook native, presents her book on the Transatlantic Cable, on Nov 6th Diane Dyer will present a program on Famous Artists from Westbrook and on December 4<sup>th</sup> Paul St. Cyr, another Westbrook native talks on the Southern Perspective on the Civil War. Hope to see you all there.

*Mike Sanphy, President*

Contact Information: [info@westbrookhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@westbrookhistoricalsociety.org) Telephone 207-854-5588  
Officers: President- Mike Sanphy , Vice President- Roberta Wyer Dutton Morrill , Secretary- Ellen Burrill,  
Treasurer- Nancy Joy Curran **Open Saturday and Tuesday mornings from 9 am to noon.**  
Our website: [www.westbrookhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.westbrookhistoricalsociety.org) – gives a fascinating outline of the Collections, Research  
Library and Exhibitions of the Society.

∞∞∞∞

**Open Saturday and Tuesday mornings from 9 am to noon.**

+++++

Westbrook Historical Society  
426 Bridge Street  
Westbrook, ME 04092  
Tel: 854-5588