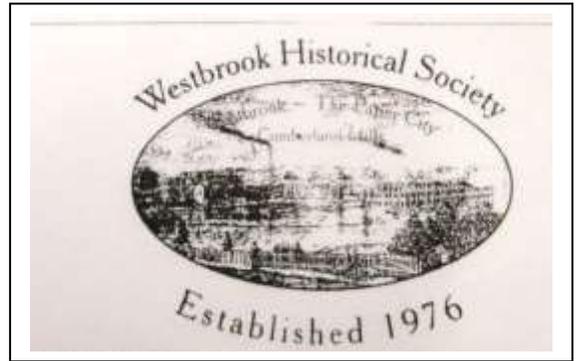


Westbrook Historical Society

"A Society That Preserves the Past"

Fall 2020 Newsletter



The Presumpscot River - 1939 Press Herald letter

I wonder at times whether the inhabitants of the towns of Windham and Gorham fully realize the importance and value as a great natural resource of the Presumpscot River, which forms the boundary lie between the two towns. (Also a major asset to Westbrook)

The source of this most valuable river is at Basin Pond, backed up by the following lake and ponds which drain into Sebago Lake: Long Pond, Brandy Pond, and Basin Pod. Long Pond is 11 miles long and two miles wide and discharges its waters into Brandy Pond. Brandy Pond, four miles long and two wide discharges into Lake Sebago. Lake Sebago which is 25 miles long and eight wide discharges into Basin Pond. Basin Pond is two miles long and one-half mile wide discharges into the Presumpscot River.

This will explain the reason why there is always an ample supply of water, discharged by the river. Even in seasons of severe drought, there is never shortage of water. This constant and ample supply of water at all seasons of the year make it the best river in the State for industry. There are no floods or freshets and there is no record of any mill being lost or damaged by these causes on the river. The river is only about 25 miles long, but has an abundant fall over this short distance.

At one time there were 18 falls on the river available for mills, namely as follows: Wescott's, Eelwier, Hubble, Steep, Harding's, Great Falls, Whitney's Island, two at Westbrook, one at Congin, two at Presumpscot Falls. These sites have from time to time been purchased by the power companies, and they now own or control the entire Presumpscot River.

Some few years ago at Great Falls there was located a factory engaged in the manufacture of pails. Built around this factory was the thriving village of North Gorham. The factory provided employment for scores of people who owned their own homes. Then along came the power companies and acquired the power site, the factory was replaced by the power station, employing two or three men. Residents were forced to sell their homes and move away. Large two-family dwellings were sold for anywhere from \$15 up to \$50.

Now let us see what is taking place at Little Falls and Mallison Falls on the Presumpscot. Up until a few years ago, when the power companies acquired the power sites at these locations, we had two thriving industries at these two places. The Androscoggin Pulp Co. operated a mill engaged in the manufacture of wood, pulp board and the Rindge Woolen Co. operated a textile mill. At Mallison Falls, the weekly payroll at these two mills was around \$15,000. Since the power companies gained control here at South Windham, both mills have closed down. Stores have closed and gone out of business and what was once one of the most prosperous villages in this section of the State is fast going to decay.

No better location exists for the manufacture of pulp board or paper than at the South Windham mill on the Presumpscot. The water is clean and pure, ample power and excellent shipping facilities. The same can be said of the idle textile plant at Mallison Falls which plant is well suited for manufacture of cotton or woolen goods. This is an up to date plant, new boiler house, and new dye house. \$200,000 was expended here just before the mill closed down .
Carl A. Magnuson, South Windham

Removal of the Dams on the Presumpscot by Dana Warp Mills



As Sappi Fine Paper works on dam removal, the city plans other upgrades to make the downtown a recreational hub. By Leslie Bridgers - December 2014

By 2017, if all goes according to plan, alewives, shad and herring will swim up Saccarappa Falls for the first time in more than a century, while paddlers will get unfettered access to the 29-foot vertical drop.

The Bridge Street bridge where cars now pass over the Presumpscot River will become a walkway where restaurants can set up outdoor seating and pedestrians can watch the activity in the water below.

“All of these pieces really fit very nicely together and give people from the Greater Westbrook region and southern Maine a reason to come here,” said Bill Baker, the city’s director of business and community relations.

The linchpin of the plan is the removal of a hydroelectric dam that’s long provided power to the Sappi Fine Paper mill – once the pillar of the city.

By opening up the falls to boaters, as well as fish, the city hopes to create a recreational hub in the middle of its downtown and make a new name for the former mill town.

Sappi initially planned to build a fish ladder over its Saccarappa Falls dam to meet a requirement by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which ordered the company over time to create access for migratory fish through several of its dams on the Presumpscot. The ruling followed a years-long battle between the paper company and environmental groups.

As the 2015 deadline for the Saccarappa Dam fishway approached, the city and environmental

groups asked the company to consider removing it to create a natural passageway instead.

When Sappi crunched the numbers, it turned out shutting down the dam would be in its best interests, too.

After agreeing to surrender its federal license to generate power at Saccarappa Falls, Sappi was given a two-year extension to create the passageway.

With input from the city, environmental groups and the public, the paper company is working on a design for the falls that will allow fish to go up, kayakers to come down and Westbrook to become a place people want to visit.

Growing public interest in the project was evident last month at a packed meeting at Westbrook High School that Sappi held to give an update on and get input for the design. About 50 people attended from as far away as New Hampshire, identifying themselves as paddlers, fishermen, environmentalists and parents.

Caeli Shadis, a Portland resident who used to live near the Damariscotta Mills fishway, said an educational program about migratory fish has drawn busloads of students to that area. She asked Sappi and the city to consider adding a similar component to the Westbrook site.

Barry Stemm, project manager for Sappi, said the company plans to have a final design by the summer in order to meet its completion deadline of spring 2017.

At same time those plans are in the works, other upgrades to the city's downtown are moving forward.

Bids are due Wednesday for a Department of Transportation project to build a new bridge on Bridge Street and turn the existing one into a pedestrian bridge that would overlook the falls.

At the same time, the city is looking into extending its Riverwalk, which now runs along the southern bank of the Presumpscot, to the other side of the river.

Then there are the amenities that are already in place.

Ramps with floating docks were installed on the river in the spring of 2013 and quickly put to use by fishermen.

Ron Kriesman, attorney for the Friends of the Presumpscot River, said if the passageway allows fish to successfully repopulate the river, it should become an increasingly popular spot for fishing – the “surest way” to bring economic development to the downtown, he said.

Soon after the docks were installed, the city started renting out kayaks and paddleboards, a program taken over by Portland Paddle last spring.

Zack Anchors, co-owner of Portland Paddle, said the season was a success and provided a “real nice, peaceful place for people to paddle,” especially families.

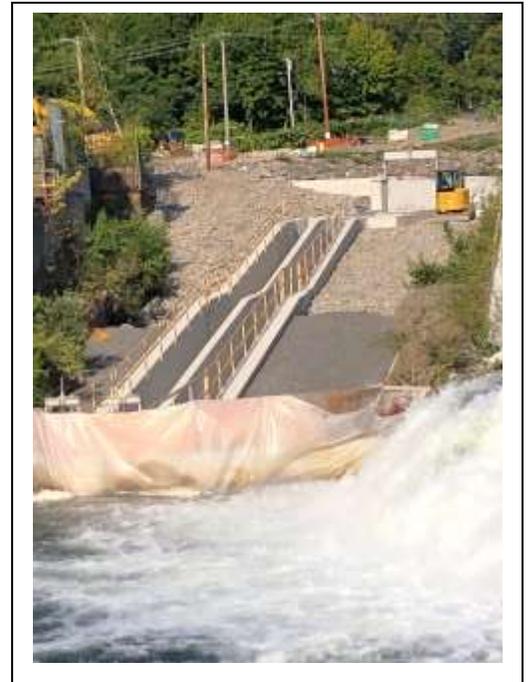
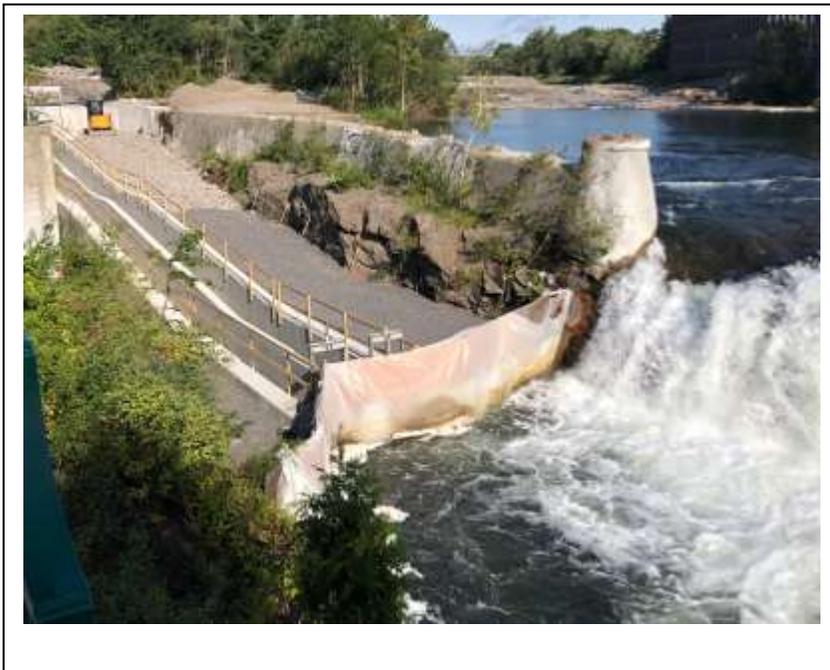
He imagines that adding whitewater features to the river would be a huge attraction.

“There’s not a lot of whitewater kayaking destinations within a short driving distance of Portland,” he said. “I think it would draw a lot of people to Westbrook from all over New England.”

Baker said there are more ideas out there about recreational features in the downtown. Snowmobilers want to be able to ride from trails to restaurants and gas stations, something that the new pedestrian bridge might make possible, he said. There’s even been talk about a zipline that would dump into the river.

“I think the possibilities are endless,” he said.

Photos of Fish Ladder Construction September 2020



THE PRETTY PRESUMPCOT

Down from the silvery Sebago,
Singing her way to the sea.
Hurried the pretty Presumpscot,
Flowing unharnessed and free.

Then came the first of the white man.
Those who were true pioneers-
Building their cozy log cabins –
Opening up new frontiers.

Clean and sweet were her waters;
Fragrant and clean were her shores
Here lived the mink and the otter;
Nested the wildfowl by scores.

Swarming with fish in the summer,
Alewives and salmon and trout –
Leaving their spawn in her gravel,
Safe from the flood and the drought.

Here where the great spruce and pine tree
Towered aloft at her brink.
Deep were the trails in the leaf mold –
Worn where the game came to drink.

Here came the red man in season,
Paddling his handmade canoe.
Feasting upon her rich bounty,
Taking it all as he due.

Planting their maize and their gourds,
Squaws made their camps in her meadows.
Drying and smoking the salmon
Speared from her migrating hordes.

Cattle soon grazed in the meadow.
Clearings appeared on the slopes:
Then came a sawmill and gristmill,
Man had accomplished his hopes.

Time brought an influx of people
Pollution from man and machine
Dooming the lower Presumpscot –
Making her worse than unclean.

Reeking and brown are her waters-
Offensive to nose and to eye;
Nothing now lives below Westbrook.
Nothing is likely to try.

Quickly man must prove his genius,
Changing the terrible trend –
Saving the pretty Presumpscot –
Bringing her shame to an end.

Then in her brightening waters,
Life may appear once again;
Thus, may we save in the future.
All of our waters of Maine.

EXCERPS FROM INDIGENOUS STUDIES PAPER BY BROOKS AND BROOKS

This paper tracks the story of a Wabanaki sagamore (Chief Polin) who travelled from the Presumpscot River in Maine to Boston in 1739 to protest the damming of the river that he “belongs to”, and on which his people depended for sustenance. Information is taken from the account of the first documented dam protest in New England.

Polin traveled to the colonial center of Boston to meet with a neighboring leader, Jonathan Belcher, the Governor of Massachusetts Bay colony. He said that he had something to say concerning the river which I belong to. “It is barred over in sundry places; the fish is thereby barred up, which is our food.” Laying down an otter skin, he said he desired “only that a place may be left open in the dams so that the fish may come up in the proper seasons of the year”.

This little known conflict between indigenous fisheries and colonial dams eventually led to outright war between English settlers and Wabanaki families. The people who “belonged” to

the Presumpscot watershed were part of an extensive network of rivers and relations in Wabanaki. As family bands, they were identified with the rivers and places to which they belonged. Polin’s band moved with the seasonal cycles of a dynamic watershed from the mouth at Casco bay to the White Mountains. Their main villages were at the fisheries of the Windham, Saccarappa and Cumberland Falls. As many visiting Europeans observed, in the spring, the rivers of Wabanaki were “swarming” with fish. While the Basque, English, and French fishermen who fished off the coast tended to view this abundance as an “endless supply” and sought to “take” as much fish as they could hold in their seagoing vessels, Wabanaki people were keenly aware that the spring runs were only part of a cycle of scarcity and abundance. Polin and his band were concerned with maintaining their upriver fisheries, and sustaining their relationship with the fish that migrated upstream every year. They relied on the free passage of fish for their survival.

Every spring, the Presumpscot flooded, enhancing the fertility of the soils around it. When the floods receded, families descended from mountain hunting camps to plant on the riverbanks, just as the spawning salmon arrived at the falls, providing essential sustenance after a long, hard winter. During annual gatherings on the banks, families gave ceremonial thanksgivings for the return of this precious relation. While the people on the Presumpscot had the benefit of agricultural stores, they relied on hunting to get them through the winter, and if the winter was a rainy one, or game was scarce, the spring fish runs represented the promise of endurance. The people and the salmon had adapted over thousands of years to the particular cycle of the Presumpscot. The annual planting of corn, beans, and squash stabilized the riverbanks, added nutrients to the soil, and when abandoned for a new field, cultivated medicinal and edible plants in the marshes and meadows, while men cultivated the forests through controlled burns and firewood harvests, ensuring a healthy game population. During summer, the people also relied on the "abundance" of shellfish on the coast, as well as fish in the inland ponds such as Sebago.

This interaction between the environment and people was disrupted by the arrival of newcomers from Europe who did not understand the order of things. Entering into the Wabanaki lands entailed entering a longstanding network of relationships and responsibilities. When Skitterygusset signed an agreement allowing settler Francis Small to inhabit the southeast bank of the Presumpscot River, Small promised to pay a gallon of liquor and a trading coat every year. Similarly, when Skitterygusset, his mother, and his sister Warrabitta made an agreement to live, plant, and gather there, an pledged an annual bushel of corn to them as "acknowledgement". This bushel of corn, recurrently pledged on deeds and treaties, was similar to the contribution an indigenous family was obliged to make to its village. Rather than acquiring outright purchase, settlers engaged in an agreement by which they, too, could "belong" to this place, through their annual "acknowledgement" to local family leaders, enacting a formalized relationship to the land and its longstanding community.

However, settlers later claimed that these agreements constituted exclusive title, particularly as they sought to push upwards on coastal rivers. By the mid-1630s, English entrepreneurs had

developed the settlement of "Falmouth" at the mouth of the Presumpscot with the primary industries being fishing and logging abundant resources of the region, amassing as much fish and wood as possible to ship overseas to transatlantic markets. Conflicts arose when European traders and settlers failed to participate in the local system of distribution, conservation, and "ritualized reciprocal exchange". Wabanaki people were not interested in capital formation for its own sake. Rather, they recognized economic success in terms of the security it achieved for the community as a whole. But this economic value system came into direct conflict with a European system that emphasized accumulation of goods, protection of property and wealth, and the rights of the sovereign, corporation, or individual to amass as much resources as possible for their own use and for distribution overseas.

Open warfare followed in the late seventeenth century, including the first "Abenaki-English War" (the northern front of King Philip's war, 1675-1678) and the second War (King William's War 1688-97). During this time, the Wabanaki sagamore Atechuando led raids on settlements in his home territory on the Presumpscot, Saco and Casco Bay, and in alliance with other leaders, eventually forced English settlers into a tributary relationship which peace was short-lived. Settlers planted themselves where they pleased, without concern that their farms and lumbering operations disrupted the Indians' seasonal use of sea and river shores. Indians repeated complained of the settlers placing nets across the Saco River, blocking migrating fish, and the damage to corn fields by the English cattle.

While many Wabanaki people from coastal rivers sought refuge in the mountains, inland marshes, and French mission villages during the war, following the signing of another Treaty at Casco Bay in 1727, small family bands returned to their "common lands" on the rivers to resume their seasonal cycles, including Polin's on the Presumpscot.

The commander-in-chief of the Eastern forces during this conflict known as Dummer's War was Thomas Westbrook. He was charged with scouting Wabanaki territory in the east, including patrols between the Presumpscot and Saco Rivers. His commission, as given to him by Lieutenant Governor Dummer, was: "You are to take, intercept, kill & destroy the Indian Enemy in all

Places where they may be found". Westbrook developed a keen sense of Wabanaki seasonal cycles, instructing his militia "to intercept their fishing and fowlin' in the spring, to raid their villages at planting time, to track them while they were hunting in the fall, and to "range" the "islands" on the coast during "these moonlight nights" of spring and summer, "it being the time for the Indians gathering eggs and catching sea ducks". He related that his "winter scouts discovered sundry of their fishing places on Saco, Presumpscot, and Amuscoggin Rivers where they made large quantities last summer" and sought to find them on these "great rivers" in the spring, "this being the time to fish for salmon & other fish'. Thus, the Colonel acquired a kind of local ecological knowledge as well. During the war, Westbrook complained to Governor Dummer in particular of the cyclical spring floods,:" there is no marching far into the County, the swamps & Rivers being so full of water" Because of this acquired knowledge of the local environment, after the war Westbrook was appointed as the King's Mast Agent, and he moved the colony's central logging operation from his hometown of Portsmouth, New Hampshire to Falmouth, in Casco Bay. This town had been cleared and resettled numerous times over the course of the wars, and colonists began to rebuild Falmouth once again following the 1727 Treaty, relying on revenue from the harvesting of local "capital", including the great white pine, which could grow to three hundred feet, an ideal size for the ship masts of the Royal Navy. Pines that grew along the river were branded with the King's mast mark and it was Westbrook's mission to manage the harvest and protection of these trees for the King, as he supervised a rising colonial industry.

The settlers of Falmouth rapidly transformed the Presumpscot River into a waterway for the transportation of lumber. Westbrook and his partner, Samuel Waldo, who had vast real estate interest in Wabanaki country, acquired colonial title to all of the falls on the Presumpscot, the very places where Polin's people had their fisheries and central villages. Westbrook and Waldo sought to transform the fisheries into sawmills, harnessing the power of water to prepare and transport masts, as well for commercial sale. In addition, as settlers moved up river to take advantage of the developing industry, they acquired additional sawmill rights to cut and process those trees not claimed by the King. Westbrook and his fellow settlers "swamped out" a road beside the river, so that oxen could haul

the trees to the falls. Then the logs were floated down the Sebago watershed to feed the increasing number of sawmills. Finally, the lumber was sent further downriver to be used in local manufacture and to be shipped, like the fish, to markets in Boston, the West Indies and Europe, where they could be traded for sugar, rum, corn, and other goods. The lumber industry kept settlers so busy that many of them did not have time to plant, and instead had their food shipped in from Virginia and England. At times they suffered a dire shortage of corn, a staple that indigenous women had been growing on the banks of the Presumpscot for century

Unsatisfied with this small fiefdom, Westbrook sought to expand his lumber operation to new heights. In 1733, he began building a **huge dam** – "an enterprise on a larger scale than anything before attempted. The site selected for the dam was Presumpscot Falls. With the dam, Westbrook would be able to control the water, the pines, the fish, and the native people. The power of the river would be directed to the mill, which processed the logs, while the dam would make their flow manageable. The dam would also solve the problem of the river's openness", which had obstructed Westbrook's scouting expeditions during the last war. Finally the dam would hinder, perhaps even halt, the salmon's spring run, and Westbrook knew that the people of the Presumpscot were dependent on these fish for their survival.

The damming and logging worked to destroy the diversity of the river on which the salmon were so dependent. As the riverbank was shorn of stabilizing trees, soil poured into the rivers. High water levels caused by the dams led to shore bank erosion, increasing the sediment. Pools gradually disappeared, and the result was a stagnant river. The sediment smothered and killed the salmon eggs.

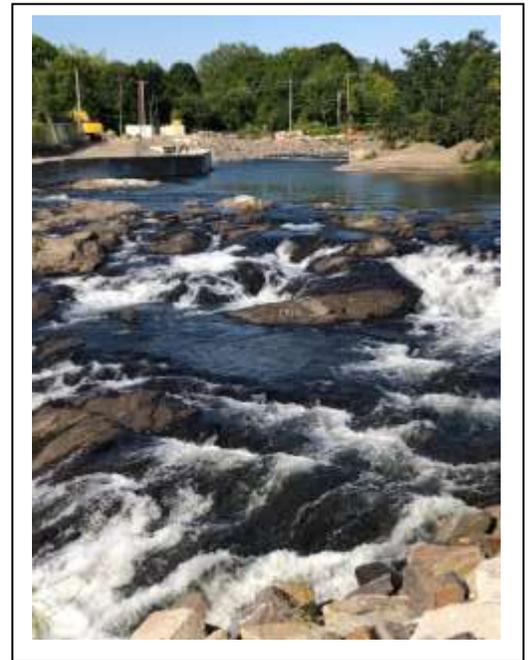
Westbrook built his dam with blockhouses on each end and three new upriver mill settlements had been built with Indian defense in mind. While New Marblehead (Windham) and Saccarappa (Westbrook) were constructed on prime fisheries, Gorham was built directly on the path from the Presumpscot to the White Mountains, hindering Wabanaki travel north. These new settlements not only disrupted the Presumpscot band's seasonal subsistence, but also blocked their access to relations on the Saco River and to the mountains

that provided winter hunting grounds and wartime protection.

Once again, Polin met with the governor and to avoid another Indian War, the Governor wrote a formal letter to Westbrook and insisted that he "leave open a sufficient passage for fish" in the proper season. However, Westbrook failed to follow through, and both the fish and the people continued to suffer the effects of the mills and dams. When the "Five Years Indian War" erupted in 1744, the people of the Presumpscot had their motivations for raiding the English settlements along their river. While other factors were involved, still it was primarily the salmon which came up the Presumpscot River to Sebago Lake that caused a blood was of six long years. During the war, the Wabanaki men destroyed many of the dams and

sawmills to let loose the flow of the river. Westbrook died penniless on the eve of the war. His great dam at Presumpscot Falls was never completed and was carried away by a freshet in 1751.

One early morning in May, 1756, Polin came down from the White Mountains with his relatives to find armed settlers trying to plant on the riverbank outside the fort that had held them captive. Polin traveled from their encampment on Sebago, down the Presumpscot to the New Marblehead settlement, and ambushed the local militia patrol. During the skirmish that followed, at Inkhorn Brook, Polin was shot and killed.



Update on Community Center Opening:

We at the Historical Society have missed seeing our members and hope that this shut down will soon be a thing of the past! Unfortunately we have been unable to have our Annual Meeting and have missed our monthly programs. When the building is opened for larger groups to convene, we will let you know. In the meantime, please check on our website for historical information as Donna Coney maintains the site and adds information and photos.

Paul St. Cyr has recorded his program on Johnny Cumberland, the baseball player which he was going to present in September and when we find out how you may watch it, we will let you know. In the meantime, all the monthly programs will have to be delayed.

Mike Sanphy and Mark Swett are busy working on copying old pictures and negatives to computer images for easier access. Many of these amazing old photos will be used in the 2021 calendars.

Mike has been collecting negatives and pictures for years from professional Westbrook photographers (Marshall Studio and Del Cargill), the American Journal and other sources. He probably has several thousand.

Financially the Society is carrying on. However, dues were to be paid this summer and now that we are into fall they can be mailed to Westbrook Historical Society at 426 Bridge Street, Westbrook, ME 04092. Tom Clarke, Treasurer, has maintained a monthly report through the trying shut down times. We will try to keep you informed via email and mail on any important events.

President's Message

Hi everybody! Sadly summer is rapidly coming to an end and the Society has been mostly dormant although we continue to have a work crew on Tuesdays and Saturdays from nine to noon. Appointments can be made to join us – just wear a mask. We are looking forward to the time when the Community Center will be open to the public. I am busy working on pictures for the new calendar which will feature 'Then and Now' photos. One of the pictures features Duck Pond Corner with the old James Gowen store at the turn of the century. Also, several pictures of the late Charlie Kilbride who was for years the Westbrook Santa. Looking forward to seeing you all again.

Mike Sanphy, President

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Officers: President- Mike Sanphy , Vice President- Roberta Wyer Dutton Morrill , Secretary- Martha Brackett, Treasurer- Tom Clarke **Open Saturday and Tuesday mornings from 9 am to noon.**
Our website: www.westbrookhistoricalsociety.org

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