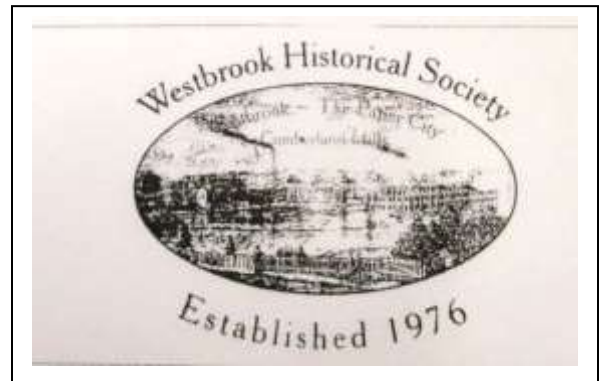


Westbrook Historical Society

"A Society That Preserves the Past"

Spring 2020 Newsletter



HAPPY 200th BIRTHDAY STATE OF MAINE

Founded on March 15, 1820



Governor Brooks announcement:
But the time of separation is at hand. Conformable to the memorable act of June 19, 1819, the sixteenth day of March next will terminate forever the political unity of Massachusetts proper and the District of Maine: and that District, which is bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, will assume her rank as an independent State in the American confederacy.

The first governor of Maine was William King. One of the first acts of the Legislature was the adoption of a State Seal. The moose, the noblest animal in our forests, and the majestic pine tree, the most valuable of our timber, became the central figures. An anchor and a scythe, as the emblems of commerce and agriculture, were placed upon either side. Above, the north star shines, signifying the position which Maine occupies in the constellation of the States. Two figures, representing a sailor and a farmer, are conspicuous. Over all is the Latin word "Dirigo" (I lead).

Before the Revolution there was not a four-wheeled passenger carriage in the State. Two-wheeled chaises were not introduced into Portland until 1760. It was about the year 1800 when the first four-wheeled carriage was seen in the streets of Augusta. Men and women generally journeyed on horseback. Even today some travel by Ford Mustangs.

A stage coach line was established between Portland and Portsmouth then extended to Augusta in 1806. In 1823, Capt. Seward Porter commenced running a steamboat, "The Patent", from Portland to Boston. Later that year, queer looking little steamboats with stern wheels, began to run up the Kennebec River. Later Sebago Pond was connected by a canal to Casco Bay.



In 1834 the seat of government was moved from Portland to Augusta. The State House, built of the finest granite at a cost of about \$125,000. Maine has continued to grow and prosper for the last 200 years and hopefully will continue for another 200!

Westbrook, a Famous Manufacturing City

From Chamber of Commerce Journal of Maine

Far Famed as an Industrial Center. Has Splendid Water-Powers Available for Manufacturing. A Community of Modern Business Blocks and Homes. Has Many Industrial Plants, - a Wide-Awake Board of Trade, - Strong, Enterprising and Up-to-date Mercantile Establishments.

Westbrook's industrial importance is due to but one factor, namely, the admirable water-power furnished by the Presumpscot River. This has given it a commanding position among towns in the State possessing such advantages. Its nearness to Portland has been rather beneficial than detrimental to its industrial development, as it has insured better and cheaper freight rates, causing industries to locate here and homes to be built, which all has helped to make it a manufacturing center of no small importance. In directing attention to the great inducements offered by the paper city to those seeking profitable investments, or to those in quest of desirable homes, special stress can be laid on the great accessibility of the place, through its complete railway connections.

Westbrook is reached by the Boston & Maine and by the Maine Central Railways, the local service rendered by both of these railways being excellent and frequent. In addition to this service the

Portland Electric Railway run large and commodious cars between this city and Portland, over one of the best equipped and best managed electric roads in the country, every fifteen minutes during the day. These frequent trips made into Portland are a great convenience to those residents who may attend lectures, theatres, and other forms of entertainment, while enabling them at their close to return in good season to their homes. Its distance from the Forest City, only six miles, is just far enough away to afford a certain degree of seclusion without being debarred from any of the city privileges. The fire department is strictly up-to-date in every particular, both in equipment and efficiency, and has made an enviable record in fires that have occurred here. The S. D. Warren Company paper plant have a complete fire department of their own, which may be regarded as supplementary to the municipal system now in use.



The police department is thoroughly organized, with an alert marshal at its head. The police records compare very favorably with any other city in the State, as regards efficiency and point of service. The public schools in

number, size and equipment, are second to none in point of excellence. Supplementary in the line of instruction is to be classed the Noble Public Memorial Library, the gift to the city of the late Joseph Walker. Another valuable library is that of the S. D. Warren Company, which is kept well stocked with books for the entertainment and instruction of their employees. A large thoroughly appointed gymnasium has been fitted up, and a competent instructor is in charge. Miss Cornelia Warren is the generous and far-seeing patron of this necessary adjunct for physical culture. The religious element is not found wanting. All of the leading denominations are here represented. Their pulpits are filled with well-known clergymen. The social spirit of citizens is reflected in the numerous fraternal organizations, which are all prosperous and rapidly increasing in membership.



Walker Library
Cumberland



Riverbank Park System

Westbrook's park was the result of an idea advanced by the late Hon. John E. Warren, who secured land on the southerly bank of the Presumpscot River for the purpose of constructing a boulevard extending from Cumberland Street to Ash Street, a distance of about seven-eighths of a mile.

In connection with Mr. Warren's plan, the Westbrook Board of Trade began agitation some years ago for a public park at intervening points along the proposed boulevard, consequently several tracts of land for this purpose either have been purchased by the city or donated by private owners for public use.

1st. About twelve acres, containing swimming pool, play grounds, tennis court, etc. donated for public use by Miss Cornelia Warren, Trustee, of Waltham, Mass.

2nd. About seven acres, containing the Warren League baseball grounds, with a covered grandstand and high fence enclosure. Donor, Miss Cornelia Warren, Trustee, of Waltham, Mass.

3rd. About nine acres, purchased by the city in three installments, containing the new Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument: another triangular plot upon which is placed a large boulder, shrubbery, etc. the gift of the late Hon. John E. Warren, at the time of the park dedication, on June 9, 1914, at Westbrook's 200th anniversary of incorporation. Again in reference to the first named nine acres – the main entrance to the park is elaborately laid out and is lighted by six double powerful gas lamps.

In 1915, about two hundred shade trees were set out under the supervision of E. J. Laverty, chairman of Trustees of Public Grounds.

4th. Additional land in plots aggregating about eight acres can be made available at any time for park purposes, situated between Dunn and Ash Streets. When this is accomplished the dream of those interested in a public park extending along the proposed boulevard will become a reality; then for beauty of location, extent of territory, and for public utility, few cities in our union of the size and population of Westbrook, can offer more, and no greater city of more population without added expense of living. These facts give a slight idea of the desirability of the city in fields of industry and pleasure. Westbrook has made itself what it is today by the loyalty and pull-together spirit of its citizenship. They have a fair city, and one with boundless opportunities. Westbrook is destined to grow and prosper by the indomitable confidence her people have in her future.

(Trustees Report Jan 26, 1916 – Mayor Robinson ordered the trustees to lay out and build a street on the park. The street, with sidewalk on both sides has been built and graded in accordance with the engineer's plan, beginning at the rear of the site of the soldiers' monument and following the proposed High street to the river and from High to Dunn, in all a distance of 750 feet, and both the walks and driveway given a coat of ashes, the whole cost of street work being about \$100.00.)

S. S. WESTBROOK VICTORY

Launched in Baltimore, Maryland

On April 17 1945 the wartime ship S. S. Westbrook Victory was launched in Baltimore, Maryland, and named in honor of the City of Westbrook for being the community most typical of the State of Maine.

With Mrs. H. Ordway Furbish, wife of the mayor of Westbrook as sponsor, and with her daughters, Elizabeth and Barbara Furbish in attendance, the s. S. Westbrook Victory, first cargo carrier named in honor of a Maine City, slid down the ways for her maiden dip at Baltimore. Also present was navy Storekeeper Second Class Colin A. Roma of Westbrook, stationed in Baltimore.

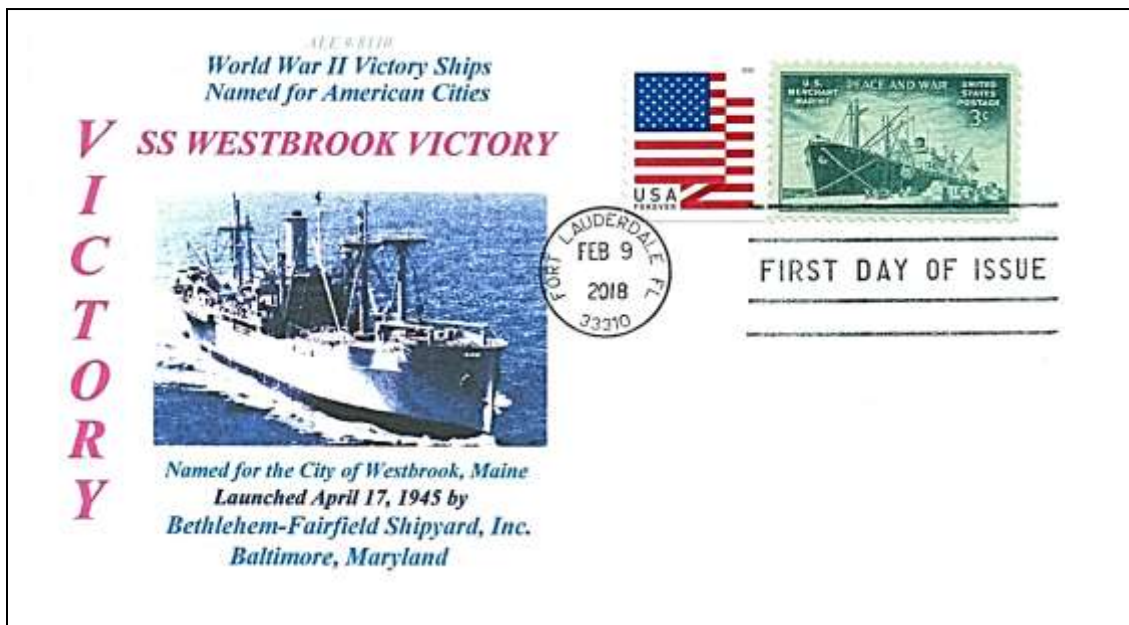
A solid silver plaque on a mahogany base with a brief history of Westbrook was presented by the city. A library, games and baseball equipment, gifts of various organizations and churches in Westbrook were given for use by the crew.

The ship was soon busy bringing troops back to the United States after the war was won.

Maritime Commission Hull # 649 – Type VC2-A{2 – Keel laid February 23, 1945 – Launched April 17, 1945 –
Delivered May 12, 1945. Built at Bethlehem – Fairfield, Baltimore, MD

Among those attending the christening of the s. S. Westbrook Victory, in addition to Westbrook Mayor and Mrs. Ordway Furbish and their daughters and nave Storekeeper Colin Roma, were Mrs. Emile Francoer and daughters, the Misses Beverly and Joyce Canning; army Private John Mullen; Mrs. Pauline Burnham Forrestall (Burke) and Ethelyn Smith (Chase), both of whom worked in wartime Washington, D. C. They were all former residents of Westbrook, Maine. They all attended a luncheon held in the Belverdere Hotel in Baltimore preceding the launching, and were treated in grand style.

(The postcard below recently appeared on eBay. The information above was in the 1906 and 1997 Newsletters)



MEMORIAL TO WW II LIBERTY SHIPS AT ACTUAL FORMER SHIPYARD

The Liberty Ship Memorial is located on a scenic point of land named Bug Light Park overlooking Portland Harbor and Casco Bay. The park was a sprawling World War II shipyard that covered 140 acres of land and included over 60 buildings. It had the capacity to build up to 13 ships at one time. Between 1941 and 1945, South Portland Shipyards built 236 Liberty Ships that contributed greatly to the Allied victory in World War II.

The need for Liberty Ships and the shipyards ended with the war. In 1945, the Maine Legislature formed the Greater Portland Public Development Commission (GPPDC). That body acquired, leased, and managed the shipyard.

In 1996, a group of South Portland residents organized an effort to purchase and preserve a portion of the former Shipyard property for use as a public park. On December 30, 1996, Bug Light Park became a reality.

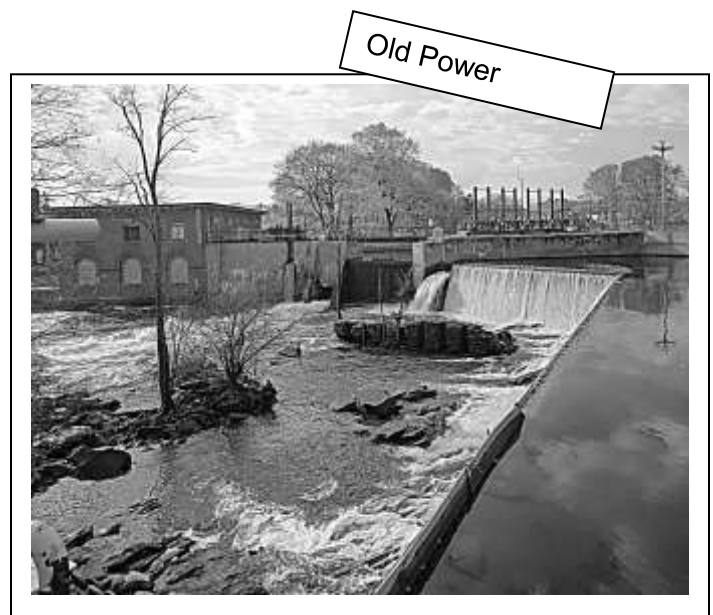
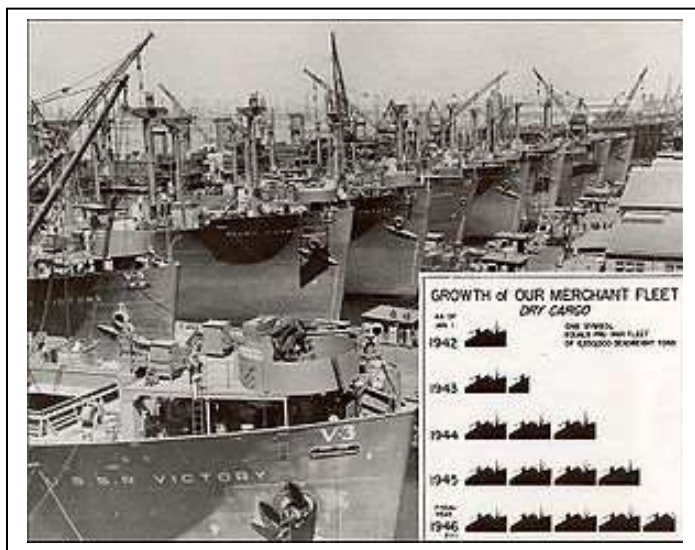
Meanwhile, The Bug Light Park Enhancement group began planning a memorial to South Portland's rich shipbuilding heritage. The result was this Liberty Ship Memorial. It was designed by Renner and Woodworth. It is a magnificent tribute. The main part is a scaled-back skeletal sculpture of a Liberty Ship. It's about 35 feet tall and 65 feet long. The exposed frames and partial exterior plating illustrate the utilization of pre-assembled parts that allowed Liberty Ships to be constructed very quickly. The Liberty Ships specifications were:

Length Overall: 441 feet 6 inches, Beam: 56 feet 10 3/4 inches, and Depth to upper deck: 37 feet 4 inches.

Since the ships were launched from the shipbuilding basins with their bows out, the memorial is oriented facing outward into Casco Bay.

Inside the structure are info boards as follows:

- 1) SOUTH PORTLAND AND ITS LIBERTY SHIPS - tells of the transition from wooden shipbuilding to steamers.
- 2) THE YARD - tells how New England Shipbuilding Corp. became the fifth largest emergency shipyard in the nation.
- 3) VOYAGES TO VICTORY - tells how these ships endured adverse weather and how the US produced the Liberty Ships faster than the German U-Boats could sink them. Of the 2,700 Liberty ships built, 200 were lost.
- 4) WW II: ON THE HOME FRONT - tells of victory gardens, woman working in defense plants (Rosie the Riveter), war bonds, shortages and rationing
- 5) THE WORK FORCE - Over 30,000 men and women worked here. Many women worked as welders (Wendy the Welder), but they were also machinists, burners, crane operators, and pipe coverers.
- 6) THE UGLY DUCKLINGS - When President Roosevelt saw the plans for the ships, he dubbed them The Ugly Ducklings.



Our Dad's WW II Army Trunk

Our Dad passed away in 2011. He was 87 years old. It wasn't until this past summer (2019) that we got around to sorting through the rest of his memorabilia stored in the attic. We decided to donate his WW II Army trunk to the Westbrook Historical Society because it contained a complete set of Army-issued clothing with dress uniforms, pants, shirts, ties, underwear, brass button polishing cloth, shaving bag, etc. It appears that he or our Mom had everything dry cleaned and put back into the trunk after he returned home, which helped to keep everything in very good condition for the past 74 years.

Clifton S. Clarke was born in Westbrook on November 6, 1923, the son of Lee E. and Millie (Scribner) Clarke. He had one brother, William L. Clarke, who was the City Clerk of Westbrook for many years, and one sister, Leonice C. Winship of South Windham. Dad grew up on the Blue Spruce Farm at 333 Spring Street, attended Westbrook grammar and middle schools, before graduating from Westbrook High School in the class of 1942. Following graduation, he attended one year of college at the University of Maine in Orono before being drafted into the United States Army during WWII.

Dad entered the service on June 26, 1944. He worked and trained at Fort Devens, Massachusetts and then Camp Croft near Spartanburg, SC. In April of 1945, he was sent over to the European Theater where he served as a Pfc. Infantryman in France, Belgium and Germany. He and hundreds of other troops left stateside by ship bound for Le Havre, France. The seas were rough. He and others suffered from severe seasickness. He was assigned to the Timberwolves Division, Company G, 415th Infantry Regiment. One of the few things we remember him telling us as kids occurred when fighting in Germany. He and several other Infantrymen were in a foxhole waiting for their next orders, when all of a sudden a German Panzer tank drove over their foxhole. They saw the underbelly of that tank pass overhead, but fortunately, they weren't spotted! After the war ended in

Europe, Dad received orders to join the fighting in the Pacific Theater. However, before his ship left California, two atomic bombs were dropped on Japan and World War II officially ended.

He received an American Service Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Service Medal and a World War II Victory Good Conduct Medal. He was honorably discharged on December 14, 1945 from Camp San Luis Obispo, California. He told us that he rode a train from California back home to Maine sitting on his trunk in the aisle of the train. They had one memorable stop along the way

in a large plum orchard. Everyone got off to stretch their legs and pick a few plums.

Dad never talked much to us about what he did in France, Belgium and Germany other than the tank incident and a few other funny incidents, but we were aware of his WWII Army trunk in the attic, knew that he had served honorably and that was good enough for us.

He returned to UMO in 1946 and graduated in 1949 with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration. Dad married Nellie M. Lenfest of Milford in 1946. They had three children: Lee A. Clarke of Buxton, Carolyn C. Simpson of Norman, Oklahoma, and Mark W. Clarke of Augusta.



This complete story and fully packed trunk of **Clifton Clark** was donated to the Historical Society by his son, Lee Clarke. It gives the man's military and life story, much of it centered in Westbrook.

We appreciate the Clarke family sharing this with the Westbrook Historical Society

Snippets from Letters from France – A Collection of letters from Eugene Currier during WWI

Donated by William Currier to the Westbrook Historical Society

April 20, 1918 – France, We have a nice YMCA here and can buy anything we need. They sell cookies, candy, nuts and tobacco. My pay is \$36 a month and I'm sending you \$20 and my insurance is \$3. I have \$13 a month for spending.

Sept 1917 – The YMCA is packed with soldiers writing to their old folks at home. They have sent all our horses away and it makes it much easier for us we don't have to feed anymore.

July 14, 1918 – Oscar Rocheleau and all the Westbrook boys are well and happy. The weather here is good, we had a little rain today. Today is a field day it is a holiday something like the 4th of July. We are going to have all kinds of games, run races jumping and so forth.

March 29, 1918 – Young Richelieu met some of the boys from Westbrook the other day, he meet Nat Bishop, George Sampson, Young Pomerloe, and a few others. The French people are planting their gardens. The women do as much work as the men here. We are in a small town behind the lines. We are billeted in French houses which they left.

August 10, 1918 France – Just now I am in a small town near where we are camped and it's a nice little place. I and a couple of other fellow had dinner with some French people. They are very nice and treat us like a mother would. For a while I felt as if I was at home. I have seen a lot of France, but have not been to Paris yet.

February 19, 1919 – The transportation conditions in this country are pretty bad now. That is all that is holding us up from going home sooner, I think. ...The time seems long to me now that this war is over. Our division was supposed to be one of the first to go home, and instead we have been sidetracked and the other troops that never saw the front are going home ahead of us. I saw a piece in a Boston paper, that said, "Is this the reward that our New England boys get after sacrificing their lives on the front and going through all the hardships of the war, and then to be the last to return. There will be trouble if this division isn't home soon.

February 23, 1919 – We had a big review last Wednesday by General Pershing.

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/westbrookhistoricalsociety>

All past programs are available to watch on this site.

President's Message

Coming into Spring we are well into a new project scanning old original photographs and glass plate negatives. Many of these which will be used for a new "Then and Now" Westbrook Memories book. Glass plates enable us to make much sharper, more interesting pictures of the past. New old scenes of Westbrook are being discovered as progress is made. Publication date is scheduled for this fall.

Another project underway is a new Westbrook Maine Historical Society Facebook page. This will feature some of these old pictures scanned at high resolution, something that we did not have the technical capability to do before.

We were pleased at the record high turn-out at our last program in March with over 60 people attending. The pictures and information on the old McLellan building and the Star Theater led to an eager audience sharing memories of the squeaky floors at the store and the smell of hot popcorn at the theater.

Although we are adding to our collection of old Westbrook pictures, we are always pleased to receive donations.

Mike Sanphy, President



Open Saturday and Tuesday mornings from 9 am to noon.

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