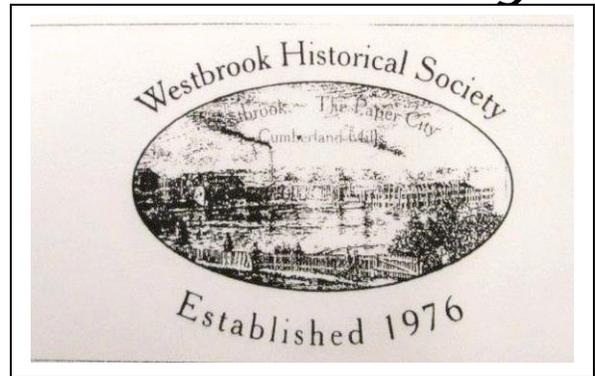


# Westbrook Historical Society

"A Society That Preserves the Past"

Summer 2021 Newsletter



It's time for me to thank all the helpers at the Westbrook Historical Society and on the quarterly Newsletter. Most of the photographs we use on our web site and in our newsletter are generously loaned from our President **Mike Sanphy's** extensive collection. He has been collecting Westbrook memorabilia for years. **Donna Conley** is still maintaining the Society's web page posting new information frequently. **Diane Dyer** graciously greets visitors and helps them find items and shows off the collections. She also keeps the window displays up to date. **Mark Swett** handles the Facebook site and contributes articles for the newsletters. **Tom Clarke** keeps the obituaries up to date and handles the Treasurer position. **Roberta Morrill, Deb Shangraw** and **Julie Peterson** faithfully attend the Board Meetings and lend a hand where needed. **Wayne Chick** is also on the Board and is in charge of sweeping the floors on occasion. The Society depends on these volunteers to keep things organized and running. The regulars have the bonus of enjoying working together.

This Newsletter features articles written by some of these loyal supporters.

You are all much appreciated, **Martha Brackett**, Secretary & Newsletter Editor

## *Setting the theme...* **MEMORIES** by Wayne Chick

This may seem somewhat unusual for a Newsletter, but the way I see it is that memories are personal histories of one's self. We all have good and happy memories and we all have some not so happy memories. These memories start as far back as we can remember and continue our entire lives.

I was brought up in Westbrook and have lived most of my life in this city. I was raised on a large farm with lots of land to grow up on. I remember walking through green pastures and woods, swimming in the cold waters of a nearby river and sledding in the winter when the snow was deep.

We had much more snow than in these times. I remember playing ball with uncles and cousins and my Dad. I remember climbing lots of trees, one in particular, and falling out of a few. I remember learning to drive on a five-speed truck that was my uncle's.

I remember my school days and my class mates and friends and the good times of after school activities. Oh, yes, I remember the school dances and the music of the era. I still like that music after all these years.

I remember friends I made along the way and friends I lost during the Vietnam War and as the years pass by.

I could go on and on, but I will stop here. Maybe reading this will bring some good memories of your past to the surface. I hope your happy memories outweigh the bad ones.

## **MY FIRST GLIMPSE OF TV by Diane Turgeon Dyer**

In 1953 I saw my first TV at my best friend, Rita Caron's house. She lived on Brown Street and I lived across the street from St. Hyacinth's Church. On my way to meet Rita at her house to go to Tom's Restaurant, which all the kids went to after school, she told me to come into the house.

I went in and the living room was all dark and about 20 or 25 people were sitting in the dark and in the corner of the room was a TV set. The horizontal control was not working so the picture was rolling.

No one knew how to fix it. When I left with Rita I told her I didn't think I wanted to have a TV as I didn't want to watch it while it was rolling like that.

I remember celebrating when Westbrook High School won the basketball championship and everyone was singing, cheering and dancing at Tom's. George Doucette got up on the round table in the corner and danced, unfortunately broke the table which his father later fixed.

The following article was written by Dianne LeConte about **Tom's Restaurant**.

A Bit of Nostalgia – There was a time when Tom never minded if all you ordered was a pine tree float...

I haven't thought so fondly of "Tom's" in a long time until tonight; when, in answer to my questions as to her destination, my daughter's reply was "downtown to meet the kids". She really doesn't know what that means

Those of us who lived our teen-age years in the forties and early fifties know that "downtown to meet the kids" was down to Tom's; Well, Tom's is no more. Oh, the building is there; the three cement steps up to the door are still the same; the two picture windows on each side of the entrance are still intact, but Tom's is not there. It is now a paint store. Not that paint stores aren't necessary, but if you walk the town from end to end you will not find another Tom's; not even an imitation.

What made Tom's so special??? Because it was "our place". Sure, it was a public restaurant and adults could order meals there; but we never saw them. They just melted into the woodwork when we were there. It belonged to us. It was our meeting place, our club-house and even our study hall.

Why Tom put up with us I'll never know! Maybe he just loved kids. he never uttered a word when the cheerleaders led us in Rah, Rah's from the top of the counters and tables, after a big victory. He soothed his waitresses when they made a mess trying to remove the upside-down full glasses of water from the tables, often to no avail (the old hands slid them off onto trays). We could sit all evening and order nothing more than a pine tree float (toothpick and water). We could leave anybody a message and Tom took them all like an answering service. We always knew that our message would be delivered, because everybody in town went in at sometime between six and midnight.

Coffee was cheap (10 cents), but even if you didn't have a dime, Tom would see that you had a cup before you went home if he felt it was necessary. If studying at home was impossible, you could take a back booth and cram as long as you liked and the great thing about that was that someone was sure to come in who could help if necessary.

All love affairs in town blossomed at Tom's and like wise that's where all the hearts were broken. Tom's was the place where the girls practiced their smoking and the boys talked about practicing their drinking. We muddled up the place in the summer and soaked it in the winter. We hardly spent a cent. The extent of our eating habits was fries and cokes. Total cost, thirty cents. Yet he put up with us night after night, week after week.

We were our own guidance counselors, psychiatrists, social workers and employment office. We helped each



other make the major decisions of our lives, such as what we should do when we graduated, how to get along with our parents, how to get this guy or girl or get rid of that one. We found jobs for those kids who needed them, cried with those who were sad, and laughed, and laughed, and laughed. We were happy – we were lucky.

Who puts up with our children now? Let them try ordering a pine tree float and sitting around the local ice cream parlor all evening. If you decide to stand around outside, a 'no loitering' sign greets you. "Hanging around" is now "loitering", and that seems to be bad. The donut shop and the milk store have the same attitude. Don't hang around here, you might give my store a bad name.

Granted, there are trouble-makers around; maybe more than in the fifties. But, there do not seem to be any adults around at all. Or maybe they just walk away when there is trouble so as not to get involved. If there was a serious ruckus at Tom's, the adults got up and threw "trouble" out. Usually all Tom had to do was speak...but who speaks now?? No one!!! It's not anyone's problem anymore. That's why there is no more Tom's. Is there no one left on earth who will put up with the trouble that being a nice guy creates?

The Society's calendars for 2021 theme for presenting history to the community with a side benefit of making a bit of money was very successful. The "Then and Now" theme showing downtown sites in the past and in the present with a description of the changes was very well received. A total of 250 calendars were ordered with 50 generously contributed by Full Court Press who worked with the Society to develop a stunning product. Of these, 231 were sold. We look forward to work with them for the 2022 calendar.

## BLUE SPRUCE MEMORIES by Tom Clarke

The Town of Stroudwater was renamed Westbrook in 1814 after Col. Thomas Westbrook and became a city in 1891. The Presumpscot River ran through the heart of the city, and many mills were on its banks. Westbrook Manufacturing, Haskell Silk Mill, Dana Warp and S.D. Warren were sources of income for Westbrook residents. Westbrook also had a heritage of dairy farming. It was all farm land on the outskirts of the city. Richard Libby once told me that at one time Westbrook had as many as 50 licensed milk dealers. He was one of those dealers and operated El Maple Farm and also sold ice cream at a stand on Saco St.

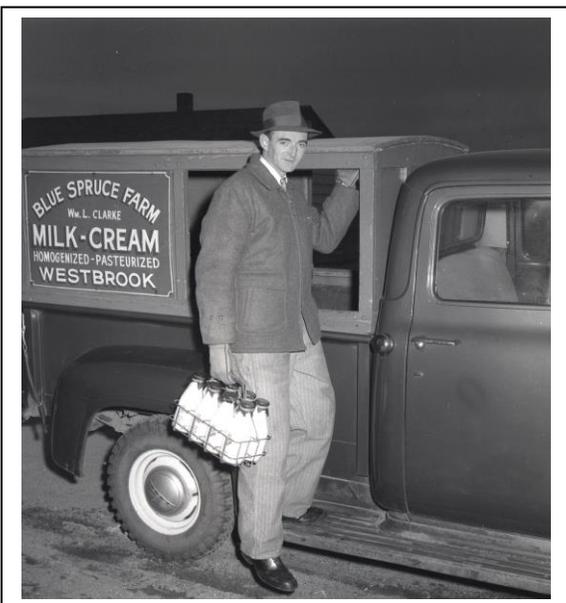
I grew up on Blue Spruce Farm in the 1950's and 60's. It was owned and operated by my dad, Bill Clarke and was located on 333 Spring St. The house and barn were purchased in 1920 by my grandparents, Lee and Millie Clarke, when my dad was 6 months old. The house was built by William Bragdon in 1910. He was a former mayor of Westbrook, and my grandmother told the story of people walking up from downtown to hear

him give his mayoral speech from the front porch of the house.

Dad eventually bought more land for pasture and haying, making the farm the size I remember it. In 1953, the Westbrook American had an article featuring Dad when he purchased a new homogenizer. He invited people to visit the farm on "outer" Spring St. This was before the Maine Mall was built, and Westbrook was still a small city. No one had need to travel Spring St. except to go to the dump or travel to neighboring towns. Dad used to cut the hay on the old Twin Falls Farm, which later became a golf course. It was then used for pasture and I remember driving the cows across the road for the day, something that would be impossible with today's traffic.

Dad delivered milk door to door in the 1940's and 50's. In later years, with the expansion of the big grocery stores, it was no longer feasible to deliver milk and many of the family dairies started to disappear. In 1960, Dad sold his milk route, and continued to produce milk that he sold to Oakhurst Dairy.

Across the street, Louis and Anna Turgeon owned Springbrook Apple Orchard. In the late 40's they sold the



orchard to Alton Hurd. Because of a barn fire, and the loss of their orchard equipment, a new larger barn was built. Alton went into the dairy business and started Springbrook Dairy.

In my high school years, Alton's cows were long gone, and the barn was vacant; big enough for a basketball court in the loft. Alton's son Steven and I were good friends at the time. We put up a couple of baskets, and for the next few years we played many games of basketball whenever we could. Richard Mayberry, Richard Harris, Rob and Don Douglas, Ralph Maxwell and Ron Russell were some of the neighborhood kids that played regularly.

The summers were always busy. Not only with daily chores and milking, but also the added work of haying. I learned how to mow, rake, and bale hay at a young age. Driving tractors gave me lots of experience and it was useful when it was time to get my drivers license. Whenever I drove on the road, it seemed I was going very fast. But in reality, the top speed of the tractor was 18 mph. One of my fondest memories is of my mother bringing out some lemonade and a platter of sandwiches after we were done unloading the hay. We had a choice of peanut butter and jelly, or sandwich spread. Then there was Mom's homemade chocolate cake! Another memory that never leaves me is the smell of fresh cut hay that was laying flat in the field a day after it was cut.

Dad got into Westbrook politics at a young age and was on the council for a few years. He was nicknamed "the boy alderman." In 1956, he was elected City Clerk. The story goes, that he and Elmer Currier couldn't decide which office to run for, so they flipped a coin and Dad choose City Clerk, which he held for 38 years. He and Elmer were life long friends, and in later years would meet for cream rolls on Elmer's birthday. I have many memories of people coming to the farm to get hunting or fishing licenses because they were ready to go on their trip and had forgotten to get their license. Dad also performed many marriages in the front parlor of our home. There were times when a couple would come alone and I would be called on to be a witness.

As time went by and the City of Westbrook grew, the farm land started to be developed for schools, industrial parks, housing and recreation. Two of the farms became golf courses but were eventually sold for housing projects. Slowly all the farms disappeared. Unless you grew up during that time, you wouldn't know where any of the farms were. Now there are just two working farms in Westbrook, Randall Beef farm and Smiling Hill Farm. Although technology has made life easier, I still miss the good old days when I had the privacy to pee in my back yard!

(Tom wanted me to cut this line but I was laughing so hard, I couldn't. Thought you would enjoy it too.) MB



### **WYER'S GREENHOUSE by Roberta Wyer Dutton Morrill**

My Mom, Eleanor Louise Joy, and Dad, Otis William Wyer, were married in my Mom's home, The Warren Homestead at 108 Longfellow Street in Westbrook on September 8th, 1917. My Mom was a homemaker and Dad worked in the fur department in Palmer's Department Store on Congress Street in Portland. I don't really remember how they decided to become florists, but I have an idea my Dad might have been influenced by George Meloon, who was a Shriner friend of

Dad's, and was also a florist in Portland. George gave my Mom and Dad many valuable and useful suggestions and tips, that I do recall hearing about. It was in the early 1920's that Wyer's Greenhouse became an established business.

The Warren Homestead had been a working farm for many generations and owned land to the William Clarke Highway and up to the Gorham line. Mom was the fourth generation to live in the pre-revolutionary home and at that time, the farm

was no longer in existence. Four garages connected our home to the greenhouse office and workroom area. There were two very large greenhouses attached to the office area. The one closest to the office was used to grow snapdragons, sweet peas and babies' breath and there was a propagating bench where carnation cuttings were started. Potted geraniums, vinca and German ivy as well as flats of dusty miller, petunias, marigolds, ageratum, and coleus were also housed there. At Memorial time, four or five extra employees were hired to fill rustic or birch baskets with the above mentioned potted plants and the flowers in flats. Usually five or six extra women sat at a long, drop down, work table in one of the garages to make cut flower arrangements to be placed at head stones in the cemeteries. These bouquets were kept in water filled vases on shelves in the closed in "run-way" connecting the garages to the work area.

A small connecting greenhouse led to the second huge greenhouse where there were approximately seven or eight benches filled with different shades of carnations. Dad crossed a couple of carnations and produced a light salmon variety, which he named "Roberta". Each variety of carnation with a particular color was given a name. For instance a yellow variety was named "Maine Sunshine" and a white one was named "Mamie Eisenhower".

They hired someone to work as a book keeper to

type bills and sometimes answer the phone. The phone number for the greenhouse and our home was 116. My Mom usually answered the phone to take orders, and sometimes I did, and many times the customer thought my voice sounded like my Mom's. Dad handled the growing of the flowers, with the help of one or two others. Two or three women worked full time and usually a high school boy was hired to do the delivering. In the summer, four or five high school boys worked in the carnation house. Dad had a rotation system every summer for three or four benches that needed to have the carnation plants thrown out and the soil removed. The benches were then sometimes repaired, but always sterilized, as well as the soil which had been fertilized and put back into the prepared bench. Then new cuttings from the propagating bench were added. Sometimes it was so hot inside the greenhouse that the boys were sent home for the rest of the day.

My older brother, Bill, and I worked there as kids and adults, so it was definitely a family business. Bill helped Dad and also delivered not only in the Westbrook area, but to Cornish, Bridgton and out of town areas. I learned to design floral arrangements, which I loved creating, and filled in as book keeper and typed the bills when needed. The business was in operation for over fifty very successful years. In the early seventies, someone broke into the office and set it on fire and the business closed shortly afterward.

Rudy



## URBAN CREST FARM By Wayne Chick

The property at 649 Saco Street, Westbrook which was owned by Frank and Sarah Chick looked as shown in the picture from the 1940s. What many do not know is that this all started as a small cape around 1755. Sometime around 1800, additions to the structure were made which included a second story. A third story was added in 1868, which included three rooms and an open attic area. A small skylight room was also part of the third floor addition. An ell was added at the same time. The ell connected the main house to a small “barn”. The ell contained the kitchen.

When Frank Chick bought the property in 1911, the house (including the ell) had fifteen rooms. A barn had also been built. The property was purchased with the intent of going into farming and building a dairy business. Two silos and a “milk house” were added to the barn along with a lean-to for machinery storage and a “blacksmith” shop. Frank Chick was a blacksmith by trade. He learned his skills while working for a carriage builder in Limington. Cattle and equipment were purchased and dairy business was underway. Before a customer base was established, milk was sold in bulk to local proprietors. To establish a home delivery milk business, money had to be spent on various size glass bottles, bottle caps and other equipment that was needed. As the dairy business grew, an addition was started on the barn which extended from the barn towards Saco Street. This was intended to house bulls, pregnant cows and cows with small calves. This addition was never finished. Other small buildings were added over the course of time such as chicken houses and a corn storage shed. An apple orchard was planted, a grape arbor was constructed with various varieties of grapes and an asparagus bed established.

Thirteen children, three were born there, and many grandchildren were raised on this property.

The reason for the name Urban Crest Farm was that the property was the highest point in that area of Westbrook.

As time went on, the dairy business grew, but eventually closed for a variety of reasons.

One room in the building, which was one of the original rooms, was painted with murals. This was known as the “painted room”. The murals were painted by Jonathan Poor around 1835 and are now housed in the Huntington Museum in California. They are the only such walls west of the Mississippi River.

The property and buildings were sold out of the Chick family in 1960 and the property is now the site of the Hamlet.



## *It was time to get together!!*

Our Annual Meeting was held on Wednesday, June 2<sup>nd</sup>.  
We renewed old friendships and heard the updates on the Society.  
Many paid their dues for the following year.



Attendees at Annual Meeting: Front row: Julie Peterson, Lorraine Glidden, Jim Born, Janice St. Cyr, Christine Johnson.  
Back row: Denise Dyer, Mark Swett, Wayne Chick, Tom Clarke, Roberta Morrill, Paul St. Cyr, Mike Sanphy.

### *President's Message*

*Hí, everybody!*

Things are finally getting to the point when we can start having regular meetings and programs again in the fall and I am looking forward to it.

It's hard to believe that we have been in the Community Center for 10 years, seems like just the other day we were moving! During these years our collection has increased greatly and I am grateful to our faithful volunteers for coming every week to help out.

We did a photo project for the new Bangor Savings Bank and were surprised that they made a \$250 donation to the Society.

Ongoing projects are: Donna Conley is looking into Historic House signs for Westbrook and to get these buildings on the National Register. The Women's Club did a similar project several years ago

which Roberta Morrill is updating the Society on. Also, the Society is looking into a Preservation Ordinance for the City of Westbrook.

Deb Shangraw is renovating the McLellan's sign which was located on the sidewalk just as one entered the store.

The Society voted to fund a marker commemorating the Underground Railroad which once had a stop at the Brackett Building. It will be located on the House of Pizza building which is where the Brackett building was once located and is next to soon to be renovated Blue Note Park.

A copy of one of the only portraits of Cornelia Warren is now at the Full Court Press waiting to be finished. This will be hung at the Society.

*Mike Sanphy, President*

Contact Information: [info@westbrookhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@westbrookhistoricalsociety.org) Telephone 207-854-5588

Officers: President- Mike Sanphy , Vice President- Roberta Wyr Dutton Morrill , Secretary- Martha Brackett, Treasurer- Tom Clarke, Newsletter Editor – Martha Brackett

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

**Our website** [www.westbrookhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.westbrookhistoricalsociety.org)