

# Westbrook Historical Society

*A Society That Preserves The Past*

Newsletter, Fall 2006, Philip E. Curran, Editor

## Westbrook Historical Society Purpose and Principle

The purposes of this Society are to bring together those people interested in the history of Westbrook, Maine, and to discover, collect, and preserve any materials and objects that establish and illustrate the history of the area. The Society shall make all such materials and objects accessible for viewing or study on the premises. The Society shall arouse interest in the past by holding meetings open to the general public, by marking historic buildings, sites, etc. and by using other media to gain public interest in Westbrook history.

The membership meets regularly for business and entertainment at 1:30 o'clock on the first Wednesday of each month, with the exception of July and August.

### Officers

President, Donna Cousens Conley  
Vice President, Suzan Roberts Norton  
Secretary, Evelyn Libby Meserve  
Treasurer, Nancy Joy Curran

### Directors

Diane Turgeon Dyer – Ellie Conant Saunders  
Alwyn Waite – James Burrill  
Immediate Past President, Robert Smith

### Email address

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The doors of the Westbrook Historical Society are open to the general public every Saturday morning, 9:00 o'clock to noon. Capable volunteer staff is present at that time to help visitors with their interests and their needs.

The doors are invariably open again on Tuesday mornings while volunteer workers are doing their chores, at which time the general public is also free to visit.

## Friendship and sunshine cards

Anyone aware of the hospitalization, illness or grief of a member should call **Ellen Burrill** at **854-5897**. She will see that the person is comforted with a sunshine card.

## Bulletin board

○ **Jan Hodgkins Usher** and **Polly Hodgkins** have resigned from the Necrology Committee on which they both served so admirably for so many years. They are relieved by former president, **Vaun Dole Born**.

○ The Society will participate again this year in the "Festival of Trees" at Westbrook-Warren Congregational Church. Westbrook Historical Society's Day will be Dec. 8 when it will provide greeters in period costumes. The theme is "Gonna Buy Me a Paper Doll to Call My Own." Those wishing to join the fun should contact **Donna Conley**. Proceeds will be distributed to various worthwhile causes as usual.

○ There were 38 present at the regular October meeting, at which **Zip Zamarchi**, accompanied by his wife **Carol**, presented an exceedingly interesting program on the history of cycling, including a generous demonstration of early bicycles.

○ The Nov. 1 meeting featured national lecturer **David Mishkin** of *Just Black & White Photo*, of Portland, speaking about preservation and restoration of photographs.

○ The material has been purchased for the blue drapes for the new window installed over the stage with the recent rejuvenation of the building. **Donna Conley** and **Suzan Norton** proposed the design to the Board of Directors on Oct. 24 and will sew them. They will cover the window completely when they are closed. The Society had earlier paid for the transparent anti ultra-violet coating to the large window for the protection of the collection.

○ The membership stands (temporarily, we expect) at one hundred ten, including nine honorary members.

## Next meeting

The Dec. 6 meeting will feature **Al Hawkes**, popular Bluegrass band leader, who will speak about his music recording business.

## Louis “Pete” Blanchette

The Society is saddened by the passing of **Louis “Pete” Blanchette** who died Sept. 3, 2006 at the age of 80. Born in Westbrook, he will be remembered for his knowledge of the history of the area, as well as for his many years of energetic participation in Westbrook’s government and community affairs. He was an initiator and faithful member of the Westbrook Historical Society and a generous contributor to its collection.

## Westbrook’s 25 Revolutionary War Soldiers

As a service to Westbrook’s observance of the Bicentennial (30 years ago), **Kendall W. Woods** of 157 Central Street compiled a list of all the Westbrook-connected men he could find who fought in the Revolutionary War. He found 25---including one who is known only by his widow.

Woods’ list is taken from history books, newspaper clippings, family records, gravestones, and other sources. It required extra work because Westbrook was part of Falmouth in those days, as was the rest of the present-day metropolitan area, and Woods had to dig into each man’s statistics to establish his connection with modern Westbrook.

The list, and short biographies of many of them may be found in the July 9, 1975 edition of the American Journal in the archives of Westbrook Historical Society.



## Lest we forget

**I**n November 1919 President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed November 11 as “Armistice Day” commemorating the end of World War I, “...with solemn

pride in the heroism of those who died in the country’s service...” The original concept was for a day observed with parades and public meetings and a brief suspension of business beginning at 11 a.m.

Armistice Day was primarily a day set aside to honor veterans of World War I, but in 1954, after World War II had required the greatest mobilization of men and women in the nation’s history, and American forces had fought aggression in Korea, the name of the observance was changed by the U. S. Congress from “Armistice Day” to “Veterans Day” to honor American veterans of all wars.

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row...*

## World War I



Of the three hundred and ninety-eight men in World War I from Westbrook, those who died in service were: Eugene Adams, Elmer D. Anderson, Napoleon Buotte, Joseph Chamard, Herbert G. Cobb, Wyvern A. Coombs, Alphonse Dame, Stephen R. Dresser, Carroll Fuller, Erald Harmon, Tracy Jacques, Enoch Ladd, Stephen W. Manchester, Harvey M. Miller, William W. Poole, Jr., Dave A. Richards, Leon E. Richards, Walter A. Thompson and George H. Whitzell.

## American Legion



In October, 1919, forty-four men who had returned to Westbrook from service in the war started the **American Legion Post No. 62**. The first officers were: Commander, Percival A. Bachelder; Vice Commander, W. B. McGuire; Adjutant, Solomon A. Herman; Finance Officer, Lemuel G. Babb; War Risk Officer, Fred W. Small; Historian, Walter E. Frank; Employment Officer, Winfield R. Fernald; Chaplain, Dr. Frederick F. Wheet and Executive Committee members, Dr. Louis L. Hills, Horace H. Towle, Earle L. Mitchell, H. M. Fredrick, George Gilman. The Post was named for **Stephen W. Manchester**, the first Westbrook boy killed in the war. Assigned to the 26<sup>th</sup> Division in France, one of the first to have enlisted in the First Maine Heavy Artillery, Manchester was mortally wounded in the battle of Soissons-Rheims. Meetings of the new Post were held in the Armory, and later in Cloudman Relief Corps Hall and the Redman’s Hall until the American Legion building on Dunn Street was dedicated in 1929.

## American Legion Auxiliary

In 1922 the auxiliary to the Post was formed, the first officers of which were: President, Edith J. Towle; First Vice President, Rubie E. Naylor; Second Vice President, Isabel F. Anderson; Secretary, Josie M. Patridge; Treasurer, Beulah V. Miller; Sergeant-at-Arms, Blanche Esty; Historian, Hazel A. Patridge; Chaplain, Clyed R. Kirkpatrick. The work of the Auxiliary has been largely with veterans and their families in rehabilitation and child welfare. It disbanded in 1968 but was reorganized and revived in 1996, and continues its service.

### Westbrook Memorial Post 197 formed

After the close of Korean Conflict in 1954, some of the veterans of that struggle and World War II were granted a charter for another American Legion Post, **Westbrook Memorial Post 197**, and established its home in the building next to the old Realto Theater on lower Main Street. They later built a new Post Home on Conant Street, where it continues to be active.

### Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States

Another Westbrook organization formed by veterans of World War I was the Harmon Whitzell Buotte Post No. 2531, *Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States*. Its charter was presented in 1932. Eligibility requirements included service on foreign soil or hostile waters. The Westbrook Post was named for three privates who gave their lives in World War I: **Erald Harmon**, **George W. Whitzell**, and **Napoleon Buotte**. There were thirty charter members with **John O'Gara** named as first Post Commander. An Auxiliary to the Post was formed in 1948 which has performed noble service for the veterans.

### Canadian forces

At the time of World War I some Westbrook men did not wait for the United States to declare war but volunteered to serve with the Canadian forces. In October 1920, twenty-two of these men with **Dr. Frank Smith** for their commander, formed Post 101 of the *Canadian Legion*. Following World War II, fourteen veterans of that war joined the Post.

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## World War II



Thirteen hundred men from Westbrook were in the various services of the United States in World War II.

***We are the  
Dead. Short  
days ago  
We lived, felt  
dawn, saw  
sunset  
glow...***

Those who were killed or died in service are as follows: *Navy and Marine Corps*: Asa T. Bartlett, Joseph Dufour, Robert C. Lavangie, Christian Winther, Philip Arsenault; *Army*: Albert Arsenault, Joseph A. Auclair,

Harvey Chamberland, Francis H. Cloudman, Jr., Wesley Dearborn, Mederick Dyer, Leonard Emery, Gordon Fraser, Edward A. Gallant, Christian Hansen, Arthur E. Hawkers, Joseph Jones, Gordon Kelley, Malcolm Kenney, Ralph L. Littlefield, Harold R. McBride, Oden T. Naylor, Jr., George E. Nadeau, Conrad J. Pellitier, Alfred E. Poitras, Paul Robertson, Armand A. Roy, Lucien A. Roy, Charles A. Sinclair, Woodbury Spring, Charles Stickney, Joseph W. Therriault, Howard G. Waterhouse, Clarence E. Widber.

### New acquisition

Among recent acquisitions is a scrapbook donated by **Arthur O. Caron** in memory of his sister, **Irene F. Caron Babb**, containing a large collection of newspaper clippings of Westbrook people during the war years. Prominently featured are reports of the Carons' brother **Albert E. Caron**, who was captured by the Japanese Army at the fall of Corregidor in Manila Bay, Philippine Islands in 1942.

### Recorded Radio Code Tells Of Corregidor's Last Hours

*"We may have to give up by noon. We don't know yet. They are throwing men and shells at us and we may not be able to stand it. They have been shelling us faster than you can count..."*

### Corp. Albert E. Caron, Westbrook Is Prisoner In Philippines

**"Corp. Albert E. Caron** of this city, reported last May as "missing in action," is now a prisoner of the Japanese in the Philippine Islands... his parents are **Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Caron** of 336 Brown Street.

"Corporal Caron is the second Westbrook man to be captured by the Japanese. Second Lieut. **Harold R. McBride**, 34, son of **Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. McBride**

of 20 Stevens Avenue was reported to have been captured at Nichols Field in the Philippines.

“Corporal Caron sent his last cablegram to his parents Dec. 24, 1941, advising them, ‘please do not worry’ and wishing them a Merry Christmas. It is believed that he was stationed at Fort Mills, Corregidor, at the time of its surrender.

## **Maine Man Fled To Australia After Escaping Jap Prison Camp**

### **Albert E. Caron Captured May, 1942**

Allied prisoners from the Cabanatuan prison camp last week and continuing success of American arms on Luzon makes it possible to reveal that Cpl. Albert E. Caron, 23, USA, who was a prisoner there escaped in the summer of 1943 to Australia. He was taken prisoner by the Japanese when Corregidor fell in May, 1942. It was only last October that his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph A. Caron, of 336 Brown Street, learned their son had escaped more than a year before. He was safe in Brisbane then, the War Department told them, warning that the fact he had escaped must be treated with strict secrecy.

After inquiring about his parents and his 10 brothers and sisters in his first letter home after his escape, he wrote, “I am hoping that in the near future I will be able to write about 50 pages telling you about a few of my adventures since I escaped. I am sorry I cannot write about all that has happened since you last heard from me but I will try to give you a brief account. After the fall of Corregidor I was captured. You probably know what sort of life I had to lead in prison camp but somehow I managed to stay healthy. After about a year I finally managed to escape. Thanks to your prayers I succeeded.”

He said he never received any message or packages sent to him at the prison camp. He told in his second letter of being buried under several inches of dirt, twice, in the course of his escape when debris from hand grenades thrown by the Japs completely hid him from them.

Corporal Caron attended Westbrook High School three years and was employed by the M&P Star Theater prior to his enlistment. He had left for Corregidor on June 1, 1940, telling his parents he had a choice of Panama or Corregidor and chose the later post in the Ordinance Department.

## **Old house myths**

### **Tory chimneys**

*Myth:* Before the Revolution, colonists who were loyal to the crown (called Tories) signaled their political persuasion by painting their chimneys white with a black

band at the top. When visiting an old house or an old city, one can tell by the color of the chimneys which houses belonged to Tories.

*Reality:* Tories were unpopular during the Revolution and probably avoided calling attention to themselves. This myth also ignores the fact that any paint applied to a chimney more than 200 years ago has by now thoroughly weathered away. Many houses with white and black chimneys date from the Federal and Greek Revival periods, well after the Revolution..

The practice of painting chimneys black and white probably developed in the Colonial Revival period, more than 100 years after the Revolution.

### **Where “The Elms” now stands**



The painting of the house on the left by Mrs. William Longley is a rendition of



the house where George Million was born in 1822. It stood on the site that is now occupied by “The Elms,” built sixty years later for Mill Agent William Longley and his wife Mary, who was the niece of mill founder Samuel D. Warren. The painting was given to Westbrook Historical Society by Mrs. Clarence Spencer and Miss Barbara Davis.

## **Biography corner**

### **Oscar G. K. Robinson**

**O**scar G. K. Robinson had a varied career in Westbrook politics, serving as Alderman from Ward 2 and as President of the Council in 1908. He was obviously a popular citizen of the City because he was elected Mayor seven times. He defeated Harry F. G. Hay in 1911, and William B. Bragdon defeated him in the campaign for the 1919 term.

Mayor Robinson was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on March 13, 1870. He was a contractor and builder, with an office at 14 Fitch Street.

He was married to Margaret I. Campbell, who was born in 1869 at St. John, New Brunswick. They had two daughters and seven sons. The family lived at 28 Pennell Street. Their son, John G., and daughter, Clara, survive. Their son, George, was Postmaster in Westbrook in 1966 and 1967.

During Mr. Robinson’s administration an addition to the west side of the High School was under construction. The Superintendent of Schools reported that

the annex was completed in March 1914 and opened at the beginning of the spring term. At the same time a separate building for the Industrial Course and workshop was completed. **Miss Cornelia Warren**, daughter of **Samuel D. Warren**, took great interest in this improvement at the High School and made donations toward equipment for the building. Even earlier, the City received from her funds for the salary of the Director of the Industrial Course. Her Brother, **S. D. Warren, Jr.**, also shared in the Director's salary. They were both aware of the necessity of having a strong Industrial Course for the boys if they were to emerge from school into an Industrial city such as Westbrook.

The year 1914 was a landmark year for the City as Westbrook celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the separation of the Town of Westbrook from Old Falmouth. **Mr. William B. Bragdon**, who was to follow Mayor Robinson in office, was appointed Chairman of this event. Stores and homes were decorated with bunting; decorated floats were part of a City parade; and a 100-year time capsule was buried in Riverbank Park. During that Centennial week, Mayor Robinson accepted the monument with bronze figure of a soldier on the march, which was placed at the entrance of Riverbank Park. It was a gift to the City from **Mr. and Mrs. Woodbury K. Dana**, to honor those who had served in the Civil War. Mr. Dana himself had served in the Union Army during the Civil War and was an active member of the Grand Army of the Republic.



During Mayor Robinson's last two terms as Mayor, yet another war took Westbrook sons off to Europe to fight in France. The Armistice ending World War I was finally signed on November 11, 1918.

Besides being busy in his long political career, Mayor O. G. K. Robinson was active in Masonic orders, serving in positions of leadership. He died in 1953.

## One hundred years ago

### Westbrook was flourishing with industry

*from material gathered by The Westbrook American from the Westbrook Chronicle-Gazette dated Jan. 26, 1906*

**W**estbrook was the scene of bustling activity (100 years ago) with the city flourishing with industry, business and professional services from one end of Main Street to the other.

Principal activity then was S. D. Warren Company, site of the first farmland to be cultivated in

Westbrook by the white men. Another industry, still a going concern, was Knowlton Brothers, Machinists.

The city's transit system consisted of the Portland and Worcester Division of the Boston and Maine Railroad, with stations at the east and west ends.

Indeed, this was the case. With a population of 7,283 citizens we were served by five contracting and building firms, seven grocery stores, six clothing stores, three drug stores, and a candy shop.

In addition there were seven doctors, three dentists, three lawyers, one optician, two photographers, one funeral director, one jeweler, one insurance salesman, one millinery shop, lumber company, furniture store, fish market, carriage company, laundry, harness maker, granite and marble supplier, horse shoer and jobber, café, hotel, and a dealer in fine horses.

Citizens took care of their banking business at Westbrook Trust Company; its president was **Lemuel Lane**, treasurer and financial manager of Haskell Silk Mills, and a member of the city council.

**John Scates**, a prominent pharmacist, was vice president; he was a former member of the council, and builder of the Scates Block. The bank was founded in 1890 and its first president was **Leander Valentine**, first mayor of Westbrook.

Providing the citizens with electricity was the Westbrook Electric Light Company, owned by S. D. Warren Company, and managed by **William Bragdon** who served the paper plant for 15 years as its chief electrician.

The company was established in 1888, and its first manager was **Woodbury Dana**, manager and treasurer of Dana Warp.

Top industries of the time were the Warren company and the Dana mills.

The latter employed 400 persons and poured some \$11,000 monthly in wages into the city's economy. Assisting Dana in management affairs were **Philip Dana**, superintendent; **Luther Dana**, assistant superintendent, and **Lyman Cousens**, selling agent.

**John Warren** was agent and resident director of S. D. Warren Company which produced high grade bookpaper, and was the largest paper mill in America, "perhaps in the World.: Employees worked eight hours per day and the plant operated around the clock. There were 1,100 employed, and the payroll was \$2,000 a day.

Street railways served the citizens who wished to travel to Gorham, Windham and Portland.

**Rufus Jordan** was the mayor of the city; also operator of the foundry business at 907 Main Street. City Treasurer **George Raymond** was one of the principals involved in preparing data for this historical edition.



Serving the city from a news standpoint at that time was the *Westbrook Chronicle-Gazette*, operated with

seven presses and requiring three electric motors and an auxiliary 20-horsepower gasoline engine.

The paper was established by **Marcus Watson** of Biddeford in 1882. **Alexander Speirs** became principal owner in 1900. Speirs was an enterprising citizen who worked hard to establish the carrier system at Westbrook Post Office. He was termed “a pioneer” in introducing tin ware to five and ten cent stores, and was the inventor of the truss for hernia sufferers, and the spraying pump for gardeners.

The Westbrook Municipal Court had been established for 13 years. **Judge J. H. Tolman** occupied the bench at the time of the Jan 26, 1906 edition.

**Judge A. W. Shaw** served before him, and the first judge to serve was **Fabius Ray** who resigned to accept a term with the Maine senate.

The newspaper spoke glowingly of the Westbrook school system under the superintendency of **Fred Benson**. It spoke of “greatly improved school buildings” which keep abreast both at common and high school levels with the times.

The system credited **S. D. Warren** of Warren mills (son of the founder) with establishment of the Warren Sloyd School with instruction in carpentry and mechanics. And when the special edition hit the newsstands, **Harry W. Lowell**, a graduate of the school, was chief instructor of a Sloyd School in North

Tonawanda, New York.

The Westbrook Chronicle-Gazette commended the late **Joseph Walker** for his “splendid library gift.” Walker, a former citizen engaged in the lumbering business endowed the city with \$40,000 for this purpose.

Within the city were a great many first class stores where every article of legitimate merchandise can be bought at prices generally lower than in Portland.”

### **Police lockup first was at poor farm**

The charter granted in 1893 to the city provided for a City Marshal. At that time, and until about 1900 violators of the law were housed at the Poor Farm on Saco Street.

About that time, the Overseers of the Poor voiced their objections, and the Police Station was opened up over the Vallee Drug Store, then known as the Warren Block. It remained there until 1904 or 1905. A Mayor’s report, about 1903, told of the new station being built on Carpenter Street. The City Marshal’s annual reports are very interesting during the period 1893 to 1907.

Thus the Carpenter Street police station served the city 72 or 73 years. Originally one story, it was expanded in the early 1940’s, with an addition on the rear and with a second floor. The building was demolished in April, 1977.