

Westbrook History Quarterly

The Newsletter of the Westbrook Historical Society
Autumn 2010

President's Message

I'd like to take this time to thank you for electing me as the president of the Westbrook Historical Society and introduce myself to members of the Society.

I am a graduate of the University of Maine in Portland and a veteran of the U.S. Navy. In 2008, I retired from the Westbrook Police Department after forty years of service in both the police department and the fire department. I now work part-time in a local funeral home and volunteer at the Fireman's Museum in Portland, along with the duties as president at the Society.

History and photography are two of my great loves, so I hope my knowledge of Westbrook's history and my vast collection of Westbrook-related photographs will make me a great ambassador for this great organization.

- Mike Sanphy

Upcoming Events

Monthly Meeting
Wednesday, October 6, 2010
1:30p

Monthly Meeting
Wednesday, November 3, 2010
1:30p

Annual Meeting
Wednesday, December 1, 2010
1:30p

Historical Society Elects New Officers



Newly-elected president of the Westbrook Historical Society, Mike Sanphy

Members of the Westbrook Historical Society elected three new officers and re-elected its current treasurer at its annual meeting in June:

Mike Sanphy, an avid local historian who most recently served as a director of the Society, was unanimously elected as the new president of the Society.

Roberta Wyer Dutton Morrill, a longtime member of the Society, was elected as vice president.

Andrea Vasquez, the author of the newly-published book *Remembering Westbrook: The People of the Paper City*, was elected as the Society's secretary.

And Nancy Joy Curran was re-elected to her third term as the Society's treasurer.

- John C.L. Morgan

The Park Bench

The psychiatrist Dr. William Glasser observed that “we learn 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, 30% of what we see, 50% of what we see and hear, 70% of what we discuss, 80% of what we experience, and 95% of what we teach others.” Now, one can quibble with the convenient roundness of Dr. Glasser's statistics (remember: 79.4% of all statistics are made up), but the underlying premise of Glasser's quote—education should be as experiential and interactive as possible—should be a guiding principle of how the Westbrook Historical Society engages Westbrook's youth.

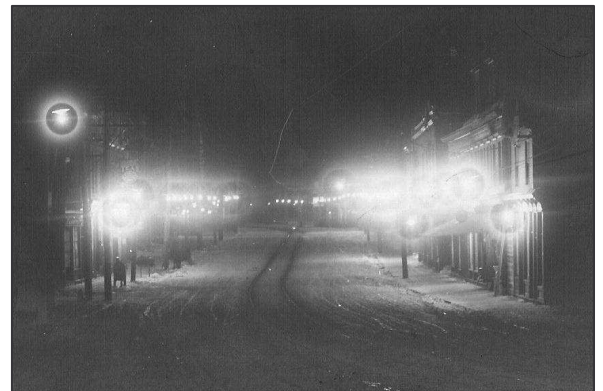
Close readers of this newsletter will recall last season's editions when I expressed some concern about the quiet crisis the Society faces if it fails to rejuvenate its membership rolls. The first recommendation I had to face this challenge was for the Society to reschedule all its meetings to weekends to make the Society more amenable to the non-retired set. So, with Dr. Glasser's quote in mind, I recommend the following as the second idea:

2. Engage students with active learning experiences

The Society does well opening its collection for student tours. It needs to do more than passive tours, though. It needs to get involved in developing extra-curricular groups in the city's schools, among other things.

Find of the Quarter:

This photo of Westbrook's first electric streetlights, circa 1880.



Purpose and Principle

The purposes of this Society are to bring together those people who are interested in the history of Westbrook, Maine, and to collect, discover, 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 opening its meetings to the general public, by marking historic buildings and sites, and by using other media to gain public interest in Westbrook history.

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

Officers

Mike Sanphy, President
 Roberta Wyer Dutton Morrill, Vice President
 Andrea Vasquez, Secretary
 Nancy Joy Curran, Treasurer

Directors

Beverly Marion, Alwyn Waite, Diane Turgeon Dyer, and Nancy Crump

Open Hours

The Westbrook Historical Society's doors are open to the general public every Saturday and Tuesday mornings, from 9a-12p. Capable volunteer staff is present at those times to help visitors with their interests and their needs.

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School Memories

A Personal History

(Editor's Note: Below is an excerpt from Gloria Boucher Cote's pamphlet, "Boucher Family Records.")

It was a long walk to St. Hyacinth's School, and I walked there in all kinds of weather. I carried a sandwich to school, and my mother gave me 5 cents for dessert. I'd stop at Hebert's Store on Bridge Street (later known as Dion's) and buy a big whoopie pie. They were wrapped in wax paper, and they were delicious. I'd take this to school and eat it at noontime. However, on my first day of school, I didn't know where the lunch room or my brothers were, so I walked home and told my mother that I was never going back. The next day I was back in school.

By this time (approximately 1934), attendance at St. Hyacinth's School was so high that there wasn't enough space for all the school's classes. The church had found a vacant hall on North Street and converted it into classrooms. This school was called Le Petit Canada (Little Canada). There were two second-grade and two third-grade classrooms in this building. My second-grade teacher was Sister Heloise. Sister Evelyn taught me in third grade and again in the fifth grade. My eighth-grade teacher was Sister Alfred. For half the day, our classes were in French and the other half of the day was in English.

The school uniform for girls was a black dress with a stiff, white removable collar. Boys wore dress pants, a white shirt, and a tie. My second-grade teacher, Sister Heloise, had some prizes to give away for those who wore their uniform all year. She drew my name, so I won a little blue rosary. I still have it today.

- John C.L. Morgan

Westbrook Streets

Stroudwater Street

The genesis of this street's name is disputed. Some believe it is named after a village in England, while others believe it comes from more of a descriptive origin. Olive Kittredge, author the 1985 book *This is Stroudwater: 1727-1860*, makes the latter argument:

Stroud, according to an early Oxford Dictionary, was not only "coarse red cloth used in bartering with Indians," but significantly a "marshy land covered with brushwood." Such a description would wholly fit the margins of the village. A record from 1688 used the word to describe the exact location. It reads, "over against the stroud water (sic) mills belonging to Sylvanus Davis." The quote would seem to confirm the base origin of the word Stroudwater, and other deeds supply clues to complete it.

- John C.L. Morgan

Byron Dyer (1931-2010)



It is with great sadness that we report the June 19 death of former Westbrook Historical Society vice president Byron Dyer.

Dyer, a 1951 graduate of Westbrook High School, served in the U.S. Navy and U.S. Navy Reserves for twenty years until he retired as a Chief Warrant Officer. Mr. Dyer also worked as a master electrician at S.D. Warren for thirty-six years before retiring in the mid-1990s.

Byron was an active member of the Society. Along with serving a two-year stint as the Society's vice president, he often volunteered on Saturday mornings and was always available to build a bookcase or construct a map stand. He is survived by his bride of fifty-four years, Society director Diane Turgeon Dyer.

- John C.L. Morgan



Walker Memorial Library, circa 1900

Society: Save Walker Memorial Library

Members of the Westbrook Historical Society voted at the Society's annual meeting in June to support the continued use of the Walker Memorial Library as a public library in the city of Westbrook.

Responding to media reports that city officials were exploring the feasibility of moving the current library's collection to the former Warren Memorial Library, members cited the building's legacy and its historical significance as the most pressing reasons to support the maintenance and renovation of the current building.

The Walker Memorial Library was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on November 10, 1980 and was registered as a Greater Portland Landmark in 1994. The library now houses a gathering room and a room devoted to the preservation of local history in the original part of the building. Supporters of the resolution in favor of preserving Walker Memorial argued that the beauty and planning of the original designers is still evident. And that the library has sat as a jewel in the downtown area of Westbrook for 116 years.

- John C.L. Morgan

Did You Know?

A collection of random facts from an old pamphlet compiled by Hal Cram in a June 1914 edition of the *Portland Telegram*:

- * The swath of land now known as Cumberland Mills was once a Native American planting ground called Ammon-Congin.
- * The 1881 budget for the city's 8 schoolhouses was \$4,296.
- * Westbrook's history through 1764 is identical to that of Portland.
- * The Babbs, Conants, Haskells, Pikes, and Willises were among the first families to settle in Westbrook.
- * Westbrook was the 205th town to incorporate in Maine, when the town became incorporated on February 14, 1814.
- * Twenty of the 100 Westbrook residents who fought in the U.S. Civil War died.
- * The estimated yearly discharge of the Presumpscot River is (as of 1914) 20,400,000,000 cubic feet.

- Donna Cousens Conley