

Westbrook Historical Society

"A Society That Preserves the Past"

Spring 2015

Purpose:

The Westbrook Historical Society meets regularly in its rooms at the Community Center at 426 Bridge Street, Westbrook at 1:30 pm on the first Wednesday of each month.

The purpose of the Society is to bring together those people interested in the history of Westbrook, and to discover, collect, and preserve any materials and objects which establish and illustrate the history of the area.



HISTORIC COLLECTION OF SCRAPBOOKS DONATED TO SOCIETY

Just a small bit of the collection shown above.

Ellie Conant Saunders, a descendant of the early Westbrook Conant family, recently died at 94 years old, leaving 211 scrapbooks created over her long life, all filled with Westbrook history.

She was closely involved in the Historical Society and was an original organizer of the founding of the society in 1976. Her organizational skills extended to the vast collection of scrapbooks all labeled with tags and years. A separate box containing an index of note cards cataloging the contents of the scrapbook collections with titles and matching numbers accompanies the gift. This is truly a living history of the City and its citizens.

Topics include the Presumpscot River, City Hall (Ellie was the wife of former Westbrook Mayor Donald Saunders), city celebrations, people, the community hospital, the bicentennial, recreation, parks and cemeteries, yearbooks, education, politics, arts, police, buildings and five scrapbooks containing obituaries only. These will provide a valuable resource to people interested in genealogy.

Excerpt from Saunders obituary:

WESTBROOK -- Eleanor Conant Saunders, 94, passed away Nov. 22, 2014 at her home in Westbrook. She was born at home, the middle daughter to Percy and Eva Laidlaw Conant on March 24, 1920. She was a direct descendent of brothers Samuel and Joseph Conant, who were the first permanent settlers of Saccarappa, later Westbrook. She attended Westbrook Schools. Ellie was active in the old Westbrook Congregational Church. Her ancestors were founders and builders of that church. She served as deaconess, teacher, on the ladies' guild and on many committees, and as the first church historian. She and her sisters sang in the church choir. She served on the boards of the Westbrook Nursing Association, Westbrook Community Hospital, Eunice Frye Home, and Westbrook Historical Society. She was a founder and a director of that society. Ellie was asked to form a business and professional women's group. The first organizational meeting was held in her home. She served on the city's 100th Anniversary Celebration Committee. She was church liaison for Westbrook Congregational Church during the formation of a Senior Citizen's group. Though too young to join, she served as secretary until the election of officers. She, with the help of Wesley McKague and John Marcellino, created the Whitney Rose Garden which she has sponsored for many years. She served as the chair of the Maine Sesquicentennial Celebration for Westbrook. She received a plaque and recognition dinner for her involvement in the bicentennial celebration of Westbrook. Ellie created a large collection of Westbrook memorabilia. She enjoyed opera and gardening. Ellie and her sisters worked as dental assistants. She married Donald K. Saunders in 1958. He was the light of her life. He passed away in 1994. She was proud to be honored as the Grand Marshal of the Westbrook Together Days Parade in 2007.

A FEW NOTES FROM THE NINE OBITUARY SCRAPBOOKS:

The Historical Society has an extensive collection of obituaries already filed for easy access, but many more will be added from Ellie's meticulously filed collection of nine more scrapbooks with only obituaries filled by date.

GEORGE CHARLAND – (10/6/1906) One of the saddest reports that has reached the ears of the young people of this city for many a day came yesterday in the announcement of the death of George Charland, who succumbed to an attack of quick consumption after a very brief illness. But a few weeks ago the young man was about the streets conversing pleasantly with his many friends, who little dreamed that in a very short time he would become a victim of the terrible "white plague". He was employed at the Boston Branch clothing store. At that time he was obliged to give up his position owing to a wracking cough brought about by a cold acquired last winter. His physicians feared the worst and advised a trip to Canada believing the change of air would benefit him. He took the trip, returning about a month. Hardly a week had passed after his arrival at home when he was obliged to take his bed. The young man was 21 years old and of excellent habits. He was a member of St John the Baptist society and also the Modern Woodmen of America.

MARGUERITE ROSALIE – (1907) Wife of Syfrois LaFond died Saturday evening at her home on King Street at the age of 57 years, after an illness of five years. Mr. and Mrs. LaFond came to the city in 1882 and for 25 years. Mr. LaFond has been a prominent business man.

SAMUEL DENNIS WARREN – (2/24/1910) Sunday at his summer home, Karlstein, at Dedham, Mass. Samuel Dennis Warren, the noted millionaire per Company at Yarmouth and the board of trustees of the Boston Art Museum, and senior partner of the S. D. Warren & Company at 161 Devonshire Street, Boston, which firm controls the large paper and pulp mills at Cumberland Mills, the Forest Paper Company Mills, the Forest Paper Company at Yarmouth and the Copsecok Mills at Gardiner, died very suddenly from apoplexy.

12 Year Old Tries in Vain to Rescue Brother in River

EMERY CHAMPAIGN, JR- (7/5/1912)

Emery Champaign, Jr, 10, son of Emery Champaign was drowned in the Presumpscot River at Westbrook today, shortly after 7, when a small boat in which he was playing was overturned. His brother, Xavier, 12, nearly lost his own life in a brave effort to rescue him. Xavier was taken out of the river by people who heard their cries for help. He was unconscious but was revived and will recover from his experience.

EDWIN WYER JONES – (1907) The death of Edwin Wye Jones, an old and much respected citizen of Westbrook, was the one sad feature of Thanksgiving day in this city. Mr. Jones of Westbrook was born 72 years ago in that part of Westbrook which is now known as the Deering district of Portland, and he was the son of Daniel S. and Jane Jones. Early in life Mr. Jones learned the business of cabinet making and followed that trade before and after the Civil War. In 1861 he enlisted in Co. I, of which Hebron Mayhew of this city was captain – the 1st and 10th Maine regiment.



14 new bookcases are being built by Scott Martel, an instructor at the Westbrook High School Vocational School. Donations toward the purchase of materials were given by Saco & Biddeford Savings and others.

Many of these bookcases will be used to house the scrapbook collection. The Society plans to have a full inventory catalog of the scrapbooks to aid research.

A SAMPLE ITEM FROM ANOTHER SCRAPBOOK

WESTBROOK CHURCH-GOERS THREATENED BY BIG MOOSE (6/17/1935)

An 800 pound bull moose charged a 10-year-old boy, threatened Warren P. McLaughlin of Falmouth Street in front of St. Hyacinthe Church, Westbrook, then swam across the Presumpscot River and swept by a group of children who scurried to the steps of the Dr. Frederic E. Wheet home on Main Street, Westbrook at early-mass-time Sunday.

The boy, whose identity is unknown, pluckily diverted the course of the 800-pound animal by hitting it with a stone as it charged toward him in front of the rectory of Father Philip E Desjardins, adjacent to the Brown Street Catholic Church.

McLaughlin was in the path of the animal as he came out of the church at 7:30 o'clock. It swerved past him, and he, Napoleon LaChance and several others coming out of the church drove the moose to the river where it made a straight course to the Wheet home near the Wheet home near the opposite bank. McLaughlin and LaChance, who feared for the safety of about 40 children from ages of 6 to 9 who were to receive first communion at St. Mary's Church on the opposite bank at 8 o'clock, gave out a warning in time for a group of children dashed onto Main Street. The two men pursued the animal at 35 miles an hour for several hundred feet down Main Street until the moose was finally driven up Stroudwater Street towards a rural section.

SOME OF THE LOYAL WORKERS AT THE WESTBROOK HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Rowena Walton and Denise Dyer



Donna Conley and Tom Clarke



Mike Sanphy and Susan Norton



Rowena Walton and Mike Sanphy

**From resources available at the Society:
Those D*!* Dams**

Colonel Westbrook's Dam

While other factors were involved, still it was primarily the sea salmon which came up the Presumpscot River to Sebago Lake that caused a bloody war of six long years. These fish were a great food of the Indians who speared them not alone for fresh food, but also they were cured by a smoking process.

The early settlers along our river eked out their food through a hard and long winter by this custom learned from the Red Man; they also salted them down.

The trouble began in 1739 when Colonel Thomas Westbrook, for whom our city was named, and who had large lumbering interest in this and adjoining sections, built the first dam on the Presumpscot River. This dam was on the upper Saccarappa Falls and was never wholly completed. About this time a block-house for defense was erected on Pork Hill, as our present Park Hill was called for many years. Tradition has it that the origin was as follows: the garrison in the town who sent their meat supplies very quickly disposed of the pork, but the beef lasted longer, therefore, they were admonished to go lightly on the pork; hence to pork eaters, be that as it may, it was Pork Hill, and still is to the older inhabitants.

This dam was an obstruction to the salmon ascending the stream to Sebago Lake, their spawning ground.

Chief Polin soon discovered this. He was the leader of the Rockamecooks, a band of the Sokokis, who frequented the Saco River. The same year that the dam was built Polin walked to Boston, where he had an interview with Governor Shirley and demanded that Westbrook's dam be removed. When Governor Shirley told him that a fish way would be built, which was promptly done, he was pacified for a time. But as the white settlers increased, the supply of salmon for the Indian lessened.

Again Chief Polin went to Boston and interviewed the Governor. He was at all modest in his demands as he claimed all the land on both sides of Presumpscot River from Sebago Lake to tide water, Portland, where the river empties into the Atlantic Ocean.

Receiving no satisfaction, he swore vengeance on the white settlers along the stream. The first attack fell on Gorham April 19, 1746. In the meantime two forts for defense had been erected, one on Fort Hill at Gorham, the other at Windham on what is known as the River Road in the Anderson neighborhood; in fact, it was situated in what is now the garden of the house owned and occupied as a summer home by the Goodells of Cumberland Mills, descendants of the Anderson family. These forts were occupied from necessity during this six years' war provoked by Col. Westbrook's dam.

May 14, 1756 an attack was made by Polin and his band of warriors on the Windham settlers, who had ventured forth from the fort to plant some corn.

The Indians had assembled at White's Bridge, Sebago Lake and came down the Presumpscot at a point near the blockhouse. Hearing the report of the guns of the savages, members of the fort occupants hastened to the relief of those attacked. Among this party were Abraham Anderson and Stephen Manchester. Polin in ambush fired at Anderson and missed. While eagerly reloading, in his haste he came out of hiding. Manchester, quick to take advantage, raised his gun and fired, with the result that this dreaded chieftain fell, to rise no more.

The woods resounded with the yells of the red skins. The Indians, as was their custom when suffering a defeat, became panic stricken, and quickly carrying the dead leader, they made their escape in their canoes up the river to Sebago Lake, where they proceeded to uproot a beech tree and place the body of Polin in the cavity thus made. Released, the tree quickly sprang back into place, deftly covering all trace of the burial.

Excerpt from Fabius M. Ray's Story of Westbrook as transcribed by Karen Sherman Ketover

Request- We are sending as many Newsletters as possible by Email to save on postage. If you received one in the mail, please send your Email address to westhistorical@myfairpoint.net Thanks!

President's Message

Spring is finally here and with it comes exciting times at the Westbrook Historical Society.

We recently acquired 211 Scrapbooks along with several totes of High School yearbooks, maps, booklets and pamphlets from the Estate of the late Eleanor Conant Saunders. This is a fantastic addition to our collection. Westbrook Superintendent of Schools Dr. Marc Gousse offered to have the Students in the Carpentry Program build shelves to accommodate this Collection if we provide the materials. The cost of materials is \$ 2,600.00 and I have started reaching out to local businesses for contributions. Saco & Biddeford Savings Institute has given us \$ 1,300.00 and I am still working on getting the rest.

Our Annual History Contest is moving along towards it's May 1st deadline for entries.

We have also acquired the uniform jacket of Vice Admiral John Carrier who retired as Deputy Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard. John is the highest ranking Military Officer from Westbrook.

Come in and see our new acquisitions, I'm looking forward to seeing you.

Mike Sanphy, President

Contact Information: info@westbrookhistoricalsociety.org Telephone 207-854-5588
Officers: President- Mike Sanphy , Vice President- Roberta Wyer Dutton Morrill , Secretary- Ellen Burrill, Treasurer- Tom Clarke **Open Saturday and Tuesday mornings from 9 am to noon.**
Our website: www.westbrookhistoricalsociety.org – gives a fascinating outline of the Collections, Research Library and Exhibitions of the Society.

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