

Westbrook Historical Society

A Society That Preserves The Past

Newsletter, Spring 2006, Philip E. Curran, Editor, 17B Dunn Street, Westbrook, Maine 04092

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 Society shall work with other State historical societies and organizations in this field when called upon to do so.

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

Officers

President, Robert H. Smith
Vice President, Mike Sanphy
Secretary, Suzan Roberts Norton
Treasurer, Nancy Joy Curran

Immediate Past President – Betty Morabito

Directors

Diane Turgeon Dyer – Ellie Conant Saunders
Jane Gordon – Donna Conley

Email address

Email: wsbkhistsoc@ghi.net

Tel: 854-5588

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 **Jane Gordon** at **797-5536**. She will see that the person is comforted with a sunshine card.

Arthur C. Gordon, Jr.

The Society grieves the passing of **Arthur C. Gordon, Jr.**, who died Jan. 28 at 81 years. He was an enthusiastic student of the history of his neighborhood area at Highland Lake and Duck Pond Corner, and was a faithful and helpful member of Westbrook Historical Society for many years.

Ella W. Chipman

The Society mourns the death of Honorary Member **Ella Waterhouse Chipman**, who passed away March 24, 2006 at the age of 98. She was an early member of Westbrook Historical Society and a treasured part of the community.

March 8 meeting

The program for this meeting was conducted by **Vice President Mike Sanphy**, who showed slides and narrated a show of scenes of Westbrook as it used to be.

April 6 meeting

Nominating committee elected

Betty Morabito, Roberta Morrill and **Ellie Saunders** were elected to the Nominating Committee.

Westbrook Historical Society voices opinion

By a resounding (40-1) vote of those present at the April meeting it was decided that the Society should publicly express its view that the statue of the **little bronze boy in the park** should remain at its present location where it is so fittingly placed.

The program for the April meeting was a video presentation featuring Society member **Phil LaViolet's** tour of the museum collection of St. Hyacinth Parish.

May 3 meeting



The Speaker for the May meeting will be author **Rhea Cote Robbins**. She is the founder and executive director of L'Institut des femmes franco-américaines (The Franco-American Women's Institute), located in Brewer, Maine. The Institute is an organization of women who gather together as a force for the specific purpose of promoting Franco-American, ethnic women's voices. Society members are urged to bring guests.

Nominations and Elections

Article IV. Section 4 of the By-laws of Westbrook Historical Society: "At a meeting in April of the even years, a Nominating Committee of three members shall be elected. In the even numbered years, the committee shall nominate candidates for the officers and one director. In the odd numbered years, the committee shall nominate candidates for one director. Additional nominations from the floor shall be permitted at the May and June meetings. The officers and director shall be elected at the annual meeting in June."

How Highland Lake got its name

By Arthur Gordon

Editor's note: All of us in this neighborhood knew Arthur Gordon as a born history buff, forever chasing down the stories of earlier times. Six days before his death he called me on the telephone to tell me the story below. I made notes as he spoke. A couple of days later, with the consent of his wife, Barbara, I visited him in his sick-room at home on Duck Pond Road, taking the notes with me that I had written, to ask him if it was all put down properly, the way he had told the story to me. He reached for his glasses, looked it all over, and thought he "might revise it a bit," but didn't say in what way. He would get it back to me when he could. He passed away two or three days later without meeting those intentions. This story is exactly as he first told it to me.

Arthur Gordon remembers tales of Duncan McIntosh's struggle up the Duck Pond Stream in

the Maine forest with his wife Jane in the 1700's. Duncan and Jane were both born in the Highlands of Scotland in 1737. They had found it wise to relocate to America under threat of religious bullying and bodily harm at home. They became among the earliest settlers in the area, clearing and settling 100 acres on the shore of the teardrop of water known today as "Highland Lake," building a house, and raising a family.

Gordon thinks Duncan McIntosh may have unwittingly played a role in renaming the Duck Pond to Highland Lake, many years after his death.

By 1890 the southern end of the lake at Duck Pond Corner had become a significantly settled area by the standards of that day, with several industries, including at one time or another several mills and a fertilizer factory. It was known locally as Duck Pond Village, and by the U.S. Postal Service as Duck Pond Village Post Office, housed in Woodbury's store on the corner of Route 302 and Duck Pond Road. In 1900 the schoolhouse next door to the post office was known in the School Department's records as Duck Pond School.

The area was then known among the locals as "Little Scotland," presumably because of Duncan McIntosh's earlier influence as an early settler and the subsequent proliferation of his own kind and, especially, because of his beginnings in the "Highlands of Scotland," from whence he came to the Province of Maine.

In 1903 the burying ground in the churchyard across Duck Pond Road from the post office appeared for the first time on maps and in city records as "Highland Lake Cemetery." Soon after this period the name of the post office was changed from Duck Pond Village Post Office to Highland Lake Post Office. Similarly Duck Pond dropped out of most references and Highland Lake eased into the language. The school became known as "Highland Lake School." Duck Pond Stream took on the name, "Mill Brook."

Arthur Gordon thinks he has pieced together the several factors that led to such a quietly unsanctioned change of geographic identity. In the early 1900's when the changes occurred it was the practice of the postal service to send inspectors to local post offices from time-to-time to monitor services and coordinate compliance with the postal regulations. It is Gordon's contention, echoed by the late Fred Gowen of Duck Pond Road, that on one or several of the inspector's visits to the post mistress and storekeeper, Sadie Woodbury, she infused him with the grand idea that Duck Pond Village Post Office was not a worthy name for such a prosperous area and, in honor of Duncan McIntosh's ancestry and legacy,

the name of the village and post office should better reflect the "Highlands of Scotland" from which the dominant group in the area originated. Soon Highland Lake Post Office began to appear on documents, maps and stage schedules. Never mind that there seems to be no official documentation in the files of either the postal service or the National Geodetic Service, or anywhere else, to sanction the changes.



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.

This above article first appeared in the November 1997 issue of Westbrook Historical Society's newsletter. The next issue (Winter 1998) added the following:

Among those attending the christening of the *S. S. Westbrook Victory*, in addition to Westbrook Mayor and Mrs. Ordway Furbish and their daughters and navy 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 Belvedere Hotel in Baltimore preceding the launching, and were treated in grand style.

S. S. Westbrook Victory

Champagne box

It is an ageless custom when a new ship is launched and given over to the sea, for the sponsor of the ship to smash a bottle of champagne against the ship's prow as it is publicly named and given life. In the case of *S. S. Westbrook Victory*, Mrs. H. Ordway Furbish, wife of then Westbrook's mayor was the designated sponsor who performed this impressive ritual. Over sixty years later, the daughter of Mayor and Mrs. Furbish, **Barbara Furbish Bridgham** who now lives in Georgetown, Maine, added to our collection the album of the 1945 launching, and the wooden chest with plaque pictured here, inside of which the bottle of champagne resided awaiting its important duty at the hands of Mrs. Furbish.



Personality corner



Colin A. Roma

Among those in attendance at the wartime launching of *S. S. Westbrook Victory* in Baltimore was United States Navy Storekeeper **Colin Roma**, United States Naval Reserve, who was then attached to a Baltimore Naval Hospital. Roma had been a notable Westbrook athlete before the war, and a prominent participant in local affairs all his years after he returned home.

Roma graduated from Westbrook High School in 1929 and was a member of its championship basketball team in 1927. He played four years of basketball and three years of baseball at Westbrook High School, and was Football Manager. He was also an All-Telegram League first baseman. He participated in local semi-professional sports for many years and became well known throughout the state as a member of the Westbrook Community Association Basketball Team. He was also player-coach of the Stephen W. Manchester American Legion Post Senior Baseball Team. He was an amateur hockey team coach, a semi-professional baseball umpire and a city league softball player.

An employee of S. D. Warren Company for more than 40 years, he was active in the local political scene and was chairman of the Westbrook Board of Assessors, a

member of the Board of the Overseers of the Poor, the Westbrook School Board, and chairman of the Westbrook Board of Registration.

Biography corner

H. Ordway Furbish
Mayor 1942 – 1945

Mayor H. Ordway Furbish was in office during the long and trying years of World War II. In February 1945 he reported that there were 1,486 men and women in the service from Westbrook. At that time eighteen had died; nine were reported missing; seven, prisoners of war; and twenty-nine had been wounded. There were forty-two families in town who had from three to seven children in the service. During World War I the Mayor himself had served in France.

Mr. Furbish was born in Berlin, New Hampshire, on June 29, 1897, the son of Willard H. and Elizabeth A. Furbish. He attended Amherst College in Massachusetts, and in 1920 he was married to Helen P. Thompson of Augusta. They had two daughters, Elizabeth (Michel) and Barbara (Bridgham). His daughter Barbara's father-in-law was Wade Bridgham, a schoolmate of Mayor Furbish in Farmington, Maine, who also settled in Westbrook and became the City's Municipal Judge.



In 1917 young Furbish served in the American Field Service to aid the French in the war, receiving the French Commemorative Medal (Medaille Commemorative de La Grande Guerre). He joined the American Expeditionary Force over there and served with Ambulance Co. #26.

Politically Mayor Furbish was considered very successful in his campaigns because he was re-elected three times by a large majority, carrying all wards. This has been recalled by older citizens.

During his administration the Street Department found that road and street repair problems were compounded because of scarcity of materials and manpower. The Mayor appointed Roscoe F. Libby, who had preceded Furbish as Mayor, to be Street Commissioner in 1942 to meet the challenges of those years.

Mayor Furbish's daughter recalls that many agenda items shared by the City Council during the war years had to do with scrap metal drives, blood drives, rationing, civilian Defense efforts and farewell parties for men and women leaving for the service. Service persons were told that they had the Mayor's permission to wire him collect if they found it hard to get along on \$21.00 a month! The Mayor lived at 142 Mason Street.

A memorable occasion during Mayor Furbish's last term was the launching of the *S. S. Westbrook Victory* at the Bethlehem-Fairfield Shipyard in Baltimore, Maryland, on April 17, 1945. This honor was bestowed on Westbrook by the U. S. Maritime Commission after "intensive research on its history, customs, and its record in the present war had proved that the town was one of the most typical of the State of Maine."

The Mayor and his family went to Baltimore, and there they were joined by Westbrook citizens who were working or in the service in that area. They were regaled at a banquet and given limousine service to the shipyard, where Mrs. Furbish christened the *S. S. Westbrook Victory*, the first cargo carrier to be named for a Maine City.

Mr. Furbish was employed for 26 years at the S. D. Warren Co., where he was Superintendent of the Finishing Department. The Furbishes moved to Bangor in 1946. Mr. Furbish was a salesman for Toledo Scales and a dispatcher for the Maine State Police in Augusta. He died in Augusta in 1953.

From "100 Years of Westbrook Mayors," by Westbrook Historical Society, 1991, Vaun E. Born, Editor

Little bronze boy in the park

Tribute to John E. Warren

In a tranquil setting in its natural state by the side of the Presumpscot River, behind the Warren Memorial Library and baseball fields, is the **Cornelia Warren Greenway**. It features a winding walking path along the edge of the river to Riverbank Park. Its gravel surface meets the bicycle route and connects to extend the eastern end of the City of Westbrook's new wooden River Walk to the back gate of S. D. Warren Company's parking lot, now owned by Sappi.

On a bend of the path only a few feet from the river bank is a memorial fountain and statue of a youthful swimmer and his dog. In prominent relief circumscribing the bronze base of the statue are the words, "**In Memory Of John E. Warren A Loyal Member Of The Community Who Planned The Path By The River.**"

The graceful sculpture by noted Boston artist **Bashka Paeff** was commissioned by Miss Cornelia Warren, who would be dead within a week of the dedication, in honor of her cousin, John. Much of the



charm and distinction of the statue rests with its special location in such an accommodating place.

John E. Warren had served the Westbrook community long and well. In addition to his mill duties and numerous other activities, he became treasurer when the governments of Westbrook and Deering were divided, proactive in the application for a Westbrook City Charter, a member of the first City Council, and variously a member of both the Maine Senate and Maine House of Representatives. He passed away while a member of the State Senate.

According to a newspaper report following the dedication on May 28, 1921, "Both troops of Boy Scouts and Troop Two Girl Scouts were present in uniform and assisted in the unveiling of the fountain. The fountain itself is a work of art. Designed of bronze, the mill stone at its base was once recovered from the old river bed by the late Mr. Warren, and kept as a reminder of the original industry to utilize its power. The head and figure of the boy, who, from the mound above leans over to enjoy the bubbling stream, are modeled after young **Mortimer Warren, Jr.**, a grandson of John E. Warren. The water spilling at the base fills a pool for the comfort of our four-footed friends, whose appreciation is typified by the dog lying with his nose at the edge."

The head and figure of the boy...are modeled after young Mortimer Warren, Jr., a grandson of John E. Warren

Riverbank Park is located midway between the east and west ends of the city.

According to Highlights of Westbrook History, "Its name was suggested by the late Honorable John E. Warren. Mr. Warren had a pathway built from the old swimming pool along the bank of the Presumpscot River to the grounds of Riverbank Park. In order that no building enterprise could destroy the plans he had made he bought, and held for many years, the land which eventually became the park, paying the taxes and finally selling it to the city for the original purchase price."

Portland Sunday Telegram
May 29, 1921

The Cumberland Mills playground was the scene of a large gathering of Westbrook citizens yesterday afternoon at the unveiling of the John E. Warren memorial fountain. His Honor **Governor Percival Baxter** was the first speaker...

"**It is fitting** that a memorial to him should be erected in the community he loved so well..."

"**I knew Mr. Warren for many years** and was intimately associated with him during the last few years of

his life. We were in frequent consultation throughout two political campaigns. There was never a man more unselfish, more conscientious or more courageous in his public service than Mr. Warren. His sole desire was to contribute to the full extent of his ability to the highest welfare of the State of Maine. His motives were unassailable, his ideals high, and his life is both an example and an inspiration to those of us who knew him.

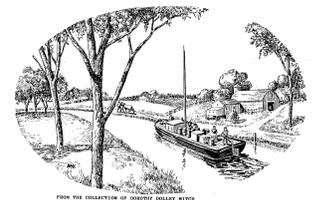
"**Mr. Warren and I lived together in Augusta** during a Legislative session and our seats in the State Senate were side by side. I remember our many discussions of men and measures, our close cooperation in certain important matters, for I looked to him for guidance as I looked to my own father, whom I lost but two weeks ago.

Mr. Warren never criticized harshly and never imputed unworthy motives to others. He was big and tolerant, kindly and open-hearted, sympathetic and helpful. Helpfulness was one of his dominant qualities. He helped young men like myself, men in his mill and in his community. All looked to him when in doubt or trouble and he never failed them...He left an indelible impress upon this community and as long as I live I shall never come to Westbrook or pass through its streets without thinking of him. His life was so filled with good deeds that his influence for good will long be felt..."

John E. Warren was one of several nephews and nephews-in-law who were employed in auspicious positions by Samuel D. Warren. John stands out most prominently among them. He began working for his uncle about 1867 as a carpenter after he had served in the Civil War. He had been a prisoner at the Andersonville Prison and survived to tell the story. He became Mill Agent and Resident Director in 1884, four years before his uncle's death, entrusted with the management of the largest paper mill in the entire world and the enormous financial interests involved with it, prominent in local affairs and a "power for good." He lived in Westbrook in the home next to the mill that was later relocated to Cottage Place. He died in 1915.

Cumberland and Oxford Canal

The route of a canal boat from Portland to Harrison was via 20 miles of hand dug canal to Sebago Lake behind a tow path horse, much of it through Westbrook, 12 miles under sail up Sebago to the Songo River, 4 miles of poling up this winding waterway (2 miles as a crow would take as a short cut), 2



miles through Brandy Pond to Naples followed by a last 12 miles under sail up Long Lake to Harrison. A fully loaded boat drew 3 ½ feet of water and as the canal was designed for 3 ½ foot depth with a 5 foot flowage right there were frequent groundings with traffic stoppage. The digging began in 1827 as hand work by Irish immigrants. The canal opened on



Tuesday, June 1, 1830. This provided a means of inexpensive and safe transportation 50 miles inland from the ocean that was sorely needed. The excavated portion of the route, from Portland to Sebago Lake, had 27 locks and one aqueduct. It was a 265 foot drop to sea level. The first boat through the canal was the “George Washington.” She was “finely furnished and equipped with a bar,” and decorated lavishly with the gilt and colored designs that characterized the passenger boats of the larger Erie Canal in New York State.

On Wednesday evening, the day after the opening of the canal, the first two loaded cargo boats arrived at the outlet. One was the “Columbus,” Captain Thayer, with 20,000 feet of timber from inland; the other was the “Berrien,” Captain Thurston, loaded with wood.

Beaver Pond – Westbrook

Beaver Pond is located on high land above the flood plain of Presumpscot River, and as the land falls away in all directions there is no watershed feeding it to cause serious changes in water level. At the time the canal was dug, and was used as a waterway, it was on the outskirts of the town (of Saccarappa) and there was no conflict between it and the urban area. While the canal could not use any part of the Presumpscot due to uncertain seasonal water conditions, this did not apply to Beaver Pond and a quarter mile of digging was avoided.

The towpath horses used the north bank of the pond and then crossed to the south bank by means of a horse bridge.

In the original act of incorporation the canal proprietors were allowed to take the necessary land and nearby materials for construction and maintenance, for which the property owners were compensated mostly in canal stock which eventually became worthless.

Dues expire June 30. Members may renew their membership at any meeting or mail (\$10.00) to Nancy Curran, 222 Duck Pond Road, Westbrook, Maine 04092