

Westbrook Historical Society

A Society That Preserves The Past

Newsletter, Summer 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

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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.

Donna Conley is elected president

At the annual meeting and election held on June 7, former WHS board member and Secretary **Donna Conley** was chosen president of Westbrook Historical Society for the next two years.

Donna was born in Portland and lived in the Riverside-Warren Avenue area until she was 11 when her family, consisting of parents Annie & Russell Cousens and sister Pat, moved to Westbrook. She graduated from Westbrook High School in 1958 and made a "great trek" to Baltimore, Maryland where she entered The Johns Hopkins Hospital School of Nursing, graduating in 1961. After driving across the country with a classmate and working in San Francisco for two years, Donna returned to Westbrook and began a thirty-six-year nursing career at the Maine Medical Center. Donna married Norm Conley of Portland in 1967. They have a daughter, Patricia and a son, Marc.

After their retirements in 2000, Donna started to fulfill some of her "retirement goals" by becoming active in the Westbrook Historical Society, the Buxton Historical Society (where her ancestors had lived) and the Maine Old Cemeteries Association. "I never cared for history in school," she said, "but working at the historical societies, doing my genealogy, and transcribing old cemetery stones, have given me a deeper appreciation and respect for the past."

Since Donna joined the Westbrook Historical Society she has seen a vast increase in the Society's acquisitions. She foresees these next two years in office as a time for organizing and computerizing the Society's collection so that there will be easy access to items.



Other newly elected officers are **Suzan Roberts Norton**, Vice President, and **Evelyn Libby Meserve**, Secretary. Newly elected members to the Board of Directors are **Alwyn Waite** and **James Burrill**.

President Conley announces Standing Committee assignments

Finance

**Bruce Allen – Phil Curran – Bette Morabito
Ex-officio - Nancy Curran**

Library & Museum

Ellie Saunders – Rowena Walton – Roberta Morrill

Publicity

Donna Conley

Program

Suzan Norton – Mike Sanphy – Evelyn Meserve

Membership

Nancy Curran

Hospitality

Diane Dyer – Margaret Lowell

Friendship

Ellen Burrill

Telephone

**Bob Barton – Shirley Lowell – Polly Hodgkins
Delores Swan – Ellie Saunders – Virginia Wentworth
Lucille Waite**

Necrology

Polly Hodgkins – Jan Usher

**The president is a member of all committees
by virtue of her office**

New acquisitions

The chamber pot



This chamber pot with cover, made of granite porcelain with a design of gold leaves on an ivory background, was donated to the archives by **Mary Carver Huntley** of Standish. It was part of the furnishings in the home of her grandparents, **F. Bernard Carver** and **Georgia Tracy Carver** at 53 Cottage Place, Westbrook.

The city whistle

This steam whistle is one of two in Westbrook that were known as “The City Whistle.” One was located atop the Dana Warp Mill and this one on the S. D. Warren Company. Its primary function was to alert firefighters by sounding the number of the call box that was pulled. It was also operated from the fire stations where they were sounded at various times of day, most notably at 9 P.M. Some will remember it sounding twice, four times, to notify of school cancellations due to heavy snowstorms. The steam whistles fell silent during the early nineteen-sixties, giving way to air horns located on the fire stations. The air horns were not generally appreciated by those living close by and they too were eventually replaced, this time with pagers. This interesting reminder of Westbrook days gone by was donated to the Westbrook Historical Society by **George Hansen**, who now lives in Harpswell.



The American eagle

Grounded after 77 years of vigil

This once proud cast-iron American eagle with a two-and-a-half-foot wing span was originally gilded, but is now rusted, pitted, and forlorn. It is one of four that were placed as sentinels on the four corners of the building at the time of the dedication of the Stephen W. Manchester Post in 1929. The eagle pictured here recently fell to the ground from its station on the roof, breaking off its base but otherwise remaining intact. It was given to the historical society collection by American Legion Post #62.



The Saccarappa Bible

By Norma Hagist

A dump, a Bible and a word

ON Rose Hill Road in Wakefield, Rhode Island, the South Kingstown dump (later called the Landfill and then the Transfer Station) has a little book shack affectionately known as the Rose Hill Library, where we leave our used books and pick up others. It was there years ago that **Warren Hagist** discovered a huge, battered old Bible, its leather back broken and pages wrinkled and torn, but filled with fascinating illustrations and maps. Even in its deplorable condition, it seemed much too important to be abandoned.

The title page, printed in several sizes and styles of bold-faced type, read as follows:

The HOLY BIBLE: Containing the OLD and NEW TESTAMENTS: Together with the APOCRYPHA. Translated out of the Original Tongues, and with the Former Translations Diligently Compared and Revised, by the Special Command of His Majesty King James I of England, with Marginal Notes and References. To Which are Added, an Index, an Alphabetical Table of the Names in the Old and New Testaments, with their Significations; and Tables of Scripture Weights, Measures, and Coins; John Brown's Concordance, &c. &c. Embellished with Twenty-Five Engravings. Philadelphia: Printed and Published by M. Carey, No. 121, Chestnut Street, 1814.

After keeping the Bible at home for a few years, we located a bookbinding firm, Markly & Asplund, Inc. of Foster, Rhode Island. We found the shop in an old rural grange hall, where the owners, Eric and Kendra Zimmerman, agreed to restore the Bible "if we weren't in any hurry". We left it in the summer of 1998 knowing it would be there for a year or more, as the Zimmermans, skilled artisans as they are, were swamped with work.

When at last the torn and wrinkled pages had been carefully washed, mended, pressed and rebound, and the ancient tooled leather cover repaired and restored, we brought our treasure home in the fall of 2005.

We could now make out the inscription written in faded brown old-fashioned handwriting on the flyleaf: "Presented by the ladies of Saccarappa for the use of the Pulpit. October 10, 1818."

Since the price fell into the category of just-take-it, Warren decided to do just that.

The name Saccarappa was a complete mystery to us. It took some computer searching to find that Saccarappa was the old Indian name of the waterfall in Maine, west of Portland, and of the mill village there which is now part of Westbrook. Further research and some roundabout telephoning eventually led us to the Westbrook Historical Society, who were understandably surprised by the story of the Bible's discovery in Rhode Island.

Westbrook records later revealed that a small Protestant community church had been built in the Village of Saccarappa in 1817. The building was destroyed by fire several decades later. Apparently this was the Pulpit for which the Bible had been presented by the Saccarappa ladies.

On April 8, 2006, Warren Hagist of Saunderstown, Rhode Island, delivered the great Bible to the delighted and grateful Westbrook Historical Society, thus returning this antique treasure as close as possible to its original and rightful home. How the Bible found its way to Rhode Island and came to be discarded in the Rose Hill dump remains a mystery.

Both Highlights of Westbrook History and Jan Usher's Westbrook United Methodist Church History recount the building of a meeting house in 1817. "...the pulpit was to be occupied each other Sunday by the Methodists and other Sundays by the Congregationalist" It was also used by the Universalists. The building stood on Saco Street for about thirty years. It became known as "The Old Iron Works Church," presumably because the site had been originally used as a nail factory by Major William Valentine. It was finally destroyed by fire in 1847, no doubt by vandals.

Upcoming programs

The Program Committee has announced the program of guest speakers for the regular meetings of the fall months through December.

Sept. 6: Westbrook's **Tony Shettleworth** will speak on the age old practice of dowsing for water.history of dowsing

Oct. 4: **Zip and Carol Zamarchi**, collectors of antique bicycles, will bring some of them with them. Members are invited to bring old photos of bicycles.

Nov. 1: **David Mishkin** of *Just Black & White Photo* will speak about preservation of photographs and exhibit examples of his work. He is a nationwide speaker at various genealogical conferences regarding the importance of preserving old photographs. His program

will last 1 hour, condensed from his usual 4 hour workshop.

Dec. 6: Al Hawkes, popular Bluegrass band leader from Westbrook will perform, and speak about his music recording business.

Frank Clifford Knight

The Society is saddened by the passing of fellow member Frank Clifford Knight who died Aug. 9 at the age of 82. He was a native of Westbrook, and a graduate of Westbrook High School in 1942. He was a devoted traveler with his wife Ruth, a combat veteran of World War II, and a lover of history.

Genealogy and research corner

Heritage Quest

Maine Historical Society members in good standing can now freely access a variety of valuable historical databases from the Maine Historical Society website on their home computers. Genealogical researchers will be especially pleased with the following online resources:

- *Heritage Quest Online*, is an extraordinary collection of historical and genealogical research databases, including access to over 25,000 family and local histories, an index and images of the entire U.S. Federal Census from 1790 to 1930, and Revolutionary War records.
- *ProQuest's Digital Sanborn Maps for Maine from 1867 to 1970* are valuable historical tools for anyone who wants to learn about the history, growth, and development of Maine cities, towns, and neighborhoods.

These and other computer programs are benefits of membership in the Maine Historical Society that are otherwise comparatively expensive.

Biography corner

William W. Cutter

Mayor of Westbrook 1895 – 1896

Born in Cape Elizabeth on January 11, 1852, to Ephraim and Ardelia Warren Cutter, William Cutter served Westbrook in many capacities. In addition to being Mayor, he served on the School Committee, as City Treasurer and as Alderman. In 1887 he was on a

committee to consider a city charter which was granted that year by the State but not accepted until 1891.

The Mayor's wife was Addie Cutter, born in 1854, and they lived at 38 Files Street. Their daughter was Mrs. Omer Porter. Their grandson, Richard Porter, is the father of the Cutters' great granddaughter, Susan Saunders of South Casco.

Mayor Cutter operated a dry goods store in the so-called Odd Fellows Block, and in 1896 with Arthur Benoit joined in building the Benoit Block which in 1991 is the Gowen Building at 840 Main Street. Ten years later his busy career took him into the insurance business which was later bought out by Willis Duran. Mr. Duran also became Mayor of the city in 1920.



His two terms in office seemed plagued by crises. Epidemics of Scarlet Fever threatened the school children, with 50 cases reported in 1895 and 25 in 1896. Beaver Pond between Spring and Brackett Streets was becoming smaller since the route of the old canal had been abandoned and then filled in, and the water was a possible "source of sickness".

The flood or "freshet" of 1896 caused great damage along the Presumpscot River, including destruction of the iron railroad bridge at Cumberland Mills. Fires at the Alonzo Libby property and the G. H. Waterhouse Store hastened the decision to install the Gamewell System of fire alarm and telegraph.

On the positive side, Mr. S. D. Warren, Jr., donated manual training equipment for a Manual Training course at the Warren School. Over 300 new volumes were added to the new Walker Memorial Library. Mason, Oak and Hawkes Streets were accepted as residential areas of the growing city. Company M of Cleaves Rifles was permitted a home in the new Forest Street School.

Mayor Cutter was active in the Odd Fellows, and he was serving as Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Maine, a Masonic order, at the time of his death in September 1915.

The Conants of Saccarappa

(In the dialect of the Abnakis, Sacaribeag)

It is thought that the first sawmills in Westbrook were erected soon after 1728 on the northerly shore of the "Island" where Dana's mill later stood, and put in operation as soon as possible. An industry of so much importance, in the midst of a virgin forest, could not fail to call in a considerable number of workmen who would naturally bring along their families and erect themselves dwellings in the immediate vicinity.

But to **Joseph Conant**, born in Beverly, Massachusetts on the 9th day of November, 1701, tradition ascribes the honor of having made the first permanent settlement in Saccarappa, and probably the first within our present corporate limits. Another settler, **Deacon John Bailey**, appears fleetingly on the scene as an early settler, but the earliest permanent settler in Westbrook was Joseph Conant, who is said to have paddled up the Presumpscot River with his family and his few worldly goods in a canoe. In 1728 two lots of land were assigned to him, which he appears to have been obliged to give up, probably because they were claimed by old proprietors, and was thereafter engaged in several land transactions and title disputes.

but the earliest permanent settler in Westbrook was Joseph Conant

Joseph Conant and his brother **Samuel Conant**, 16 years his junior had trekked here from Beverly, Massachusetts. They were great grandsons of Roger Conant, the first settler and governor of what is now Salem, who was knighted for educating the colonists and helping them to build homes. In Boxford on the 9th day of December, 1725, Joseph married **Sarah Jewett**, daughter of Thomas and Hannah Jewett. Their first child, **Hannah**, was born in Ipswich on December, 27, 1726. On November 7, 1728 a son, **Lot**, was born in Falmouth. On Oct. 3, 1733 Hannah gave birth to twins **Elizabeth and Sarah**; then came **Bartholamew, Joseph Jr.**, and **Daniel**.

Conant's pioneer path was beset with unusual struggles. On his arrival in Maine, Conant tried mightily to buy a mill sight but was thwarted for some time because Deacon Bailey and his associates owned all the land surrounding Saccarappa Falls and had all the water power rights, besides. Eventually Conant bought land for his mill with the help of **Reverend Thomas Smith**, but then could not acquire a homestead site. He finally leased land on the northeasterly side of the river, and bridged the Presumpscot to reach it. In May of 1739 Conant finished his mill and began building a home in December 1739, with the help of friends who later were to prove a trial to him. For among those four pioneers, who, with gusto and speed to be admired today, helped Conant complete his house within five days, were the Haskell brothers. Because of one of them, **Thomas Haskell**, Conant's enjoyment of his new home was short-lived.

Conant's enjoyment of his new home was short-lived

Uninvited guests

Soon after moving in, Conant rushed to Gorham to help bury those supposed massacred in an Indian raid. Happily Conant found no dead, but unhappily upon returning he found his home was no longer his "castle." For in his absence, Thomas Haskell's wife had moved in

and refused to leave when the Conants returned home." To amend for her boldness she vowed she could "dress his victuals" as well as anyone.

Apparently this did not soften her boldness. Mrs. Haskell ran a ferry boat at Stroudwater, a job not conducive to femininity one surmises. "Soon" Conant states, "she made my life miserable." This matter was settled by Joseph, he selling the property to the Haskells. He himself moved into an abandoned logger's camp. In 1744 Indians destroyed all mills in this vicinity including Westbrook's dam and paper mill at the lower falls of the Presumpscot. Apparently Conant's mill survived or was quickly rebuilt for in Parson Smith's journal we find, "Feb. 27, 1748. Went to Saccarabig. Mr. Conant tells me he has ground 1000 bu. of corn this winter, there being no other mills than his between Yarmouth and Saco."

In 1739 Joseph Sr. had built a mill and a bridge over the river and later sold part of his mill holdings to Enoch Freeman. His brother Samuel owned part of this mill. On Jan. 2, 1765, he passed on to his reward and was buried in the Conant Cemetery on Conant Street. No stone marks his resting place. In 1756 Samuel deeded one half of a grist mill to Joseph Noyes of Falmouth, this being on the west side of the river, the other half owned by his brother Joseph Sr. In 1760 Samuel received a license to keep a tavern in Saccarappa.

In November 1764, Joseph Conant conveyed lands near the Duck Pond to his sons, Joseph, Jr., and Bartholomew. This conveyance was probably made in anticipation of a surgical operation, from which he did not recover, as will appear from the following extract from the Journal of the Reverend Thomas Smith:

"27 (November 1764) I rode with **Mr. Deane** to Conant's and Proctor's; I prayed with the former, who had his leg amputated by **Nathaniel Coffin**, and Mr. Deane with the latter who had his arm broken in two places."

At a time when the only known anesthetics were spirituous liquors, it is not strange that a man of Mr. Conant's years should not withstand the shock attending so severe an operation, as the removal of a leg. From the Journal of Dr. Deane we make the following extract which concludes the life drama of this enterprising pioneer. "2 (January 1765) Attended the funeral of Mr. Conant."

Joseph Conant's descendants lived for many years in the Highland Lake area. Today none of that branch remains. Descendants of his brother Samuel live in Westbrook to this very day. Westbrook's Conant Street bears tribute to the family.

The above story of Joseph Conant is an abridged composite of part of Chapter III of "History of Westbrook" carried in the Narragansett Sun May 30, 1895, of which all 30 chapters are on disc in the collection of Westbrook Historical Society, and other newspaper reports in the archives.

Narragansett Sun
January 3, 1895

Westbrook – The employees of the Westbrook division of the electric road Monday night presented **Superintendent F. F. Spring** with a gold watch chain. Conductor Waterhouse made the presentation speech.

Frank O. Bolton of Gorham was before Judge Tolman Wednesday for cruelty to animals. From the testimony **Charles Hanson**, the owner of the horse, testified that Bolton drove the animal to South Bridgton, a distance of 26 miles, and when he came into the stable the horse was covered with ridges. Bolton denied the charges. **Carroll W. Morrell** of Portland appeared for Bolton and **E. N. Perry**, agent for the SPCA, Portland, represented the society. Bolton was fined \$15 and costs.

Joseph Babb while driving on Bridge street Friday way thrown from the sleight and dragged quite a distance by his horse. Mr. Babb was only slightly injured. The sleigh was badly damaged.

James Cobb's horse ran away Monday upsetting the sleigh and throwing Mr. Cobb out. Neither owner nor horse were injured.

The storm of Thursday brought out the snowplow on the electric and a force of men to clear the tracks. Main street was never in such good condition after a storm as it is now. Apply the ordinance relating to clearing

sidewalks as vigorously to property owners and we shall have nothing to complain of.

Feb. 8 1894

Cumberland Mills – Following a custom of the last three years the S. D. Warren & Co. paid the annual dividend to their workmen last Friday. The amount was four per cent of the earnings of the employees of the company for the year 1893, and came as a nice little present to them during these hard times. This was much better than cutting down wages as some other companies have done.

Mayor (Albert) Cordwell is very much improved in health.

**Westbrook Historical Society
will reinstate its web site**

Watch for the Society's new web page being developed by **Dr. Albert Parker**, with the direction and input of Donna Conley, Suzan Norton, and Phil Curran. Dr. Parker, cousin of Conley's mother, has had extensive experience designing web sites for the use of non-profit organizations since his retirement from medical practice in New York City. He graciously offered to redesign our site and train our managers in its maintenance.