

# Westbrook Historical Society

"A Society That Preserves the Past"

Winter 2012

## 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.

## SEAL OF THE CITY OF WESTBROOK



Seal of the City of Westbrook was adopted on June 4, 1891 by vote of the City government. In the center of the seal is a facsimile of the vessel in which Col. Thomas Westbrook, for whom the City was named, came to Falmouth bearing the King's Commission to select masts for the Royal Navy. Surmounting this is the crest of the Westbrook Family, a mailed foot and knee. Around the seal are the words, "City of Westbrook" and the dates 1814 (date of incorporation of the town) and 1891 (date of incorporation of the city).

## Who Owned What in the Early Days of Westbrook

*Feb 26, 1947. From Westbrook Advertiser in Tales of Old Sacarappa column by Charles W. Munson*

On Dec 2, 1729 Sacarappa Falls was granted to Joshua Bailey, Benjamin Larrabee, Jr., and Benjamin Ingersoll, for lumbering purposes. By the year 1733 there was a dam at this site. One Daniel Godfrey was among the earliest settlers in this area for on Dec 4, 1730 he received a grant of 30 acres 10 rods above the Falls, on Sept 26, 1732, 70 more acres, and Nov 26, 1738, an acre for a house lot and later an additional three acres. It is easy to see that land was very cheap in those days. John Tyng, whose wife was a sister to the Rev. Thomas Smith of the old First Parish Church in old Falmouth, received on March 31, 1732, 100 acres on the South side of the Presumpscot River, running parallel to the river for 126 rods. This would be, of course, on the right hand side of our present Main Street.

Colonel Samuel Waldo later gained control of this land but eventually it fell into the hands of Solomon and Mark Haskell. The buyers of the best lots on Main Street were obligated to purchase them from the Haskells. Solomon built a bridge across the river to connect his holdings and later sold it to the town for fifty pounds. He died in 1816 at the age of 92 and, with his brother Mark, was the first to be buried in Sacarappa Cemetery. The small house next to the Chute home on Main Street was the Haskell home and is one of the oldest in the city.

Pike's or Scotch Hill and Conant Cemeteries preceded the Sacarappa Cemetery but the bodies on Scotch Hill were removed by John E. Warren to the Sacarappa lot. This fine gesture did not always happen for new owners often destroyed such places, especially on farming estates, even though this was in opposition to the existing State law.

It is quite certain that the old lot containing the body of Captain Joseph Pride of the Revolutionary War period was destroyed. Capt. Pride was an ancestor of the Prides residing here at the present time. The Godfrey tract mentioned above was later owned by Enoch Freeman and later by George Warren and several others.

This Warren was of the old Watten family that settled on Stroudwater Street, a mile or more from our Main Street. They resided here at the time of the Revolutionary War.

In 1738 Moses Pearson received a grant of 50 acres located next to the property owned by one James Simpson, being located east of the John Tyng grant of 100 acres. Later Simpson apparently sold his holdings to Pearson and after this one Luther Fitch secured this land to help build up his estate. This Fitch was for a term of years, Judge of the Municipal Court of Portland. It is probable that Fitch Street was named for him. In later years Isaac Quimby owned this territory.

Many of these names are still familiar in Westbrook.

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## **BRIDGES OF WESTBROOK**



Because Westbrook is bisected by the Presumpscot River, bridges have an important role to play in tying the City together in the past and the present as seen in this aerial view showing downtown. The bridge on the right is the old iron bridge on Bridge Street that was replaced in 1957. Bridge on the left is the bridge leading onto Dana's Island a.k.a Yudy's Island. The white building on the island is the old woolen mill that later became one of Woodbury Dana's Mills and then served as a warehouse for the Dana Warp Mill on Bridge Street. When the Dana Warp Mill closed, this building was rented to Yudy's Tire Company as a Tire Warehouse. The building was demolished in the early 1980s as it was deemed a fire hazard. The bridge is still there, but is closed as it is unsafe.

*Many thanks to Mike Sanphy for his help with pictures and information on bridges in Westbrook.*

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In the 'Old Days' a covered bridge crossed the Presumpscot River on Cumberland Street near the mill. This picture is taken from the south side of the river in 1865. The bridge was torn down and replaced in the 1870s. The wooden structure at the end of the covered bridge is the old rag storage building with the date 1858 painted on it. This building was on the island. Just beyond is the second bridge running from the island to the north bank.

The building just across the river and to the left is an old tin factory where cans were made to supply Baxter Corn Shop which was located across the river. The Baxter partner of this corn canning shop was the father of ex-Governor Baxter. The tin shop is located on what is now the lawn of the Elms. The Elms was built in 1882.

At the extreme right, there is a flagpole which was the property of a farm just downstream. When the company needed to expand and went to buy out this farm, the deal went through only after they agreed to keep the flag flying.

The house in the upper right corner, the residence at one time of Joseph A. Warren and later Rudolph Greep, has gone through extensive alterations since the picture was taken.

The building at extreme left is the old boarding house on Brown Street, operated at one time by the Boone family who later started the well-known Boone's Restaurant in Portland.

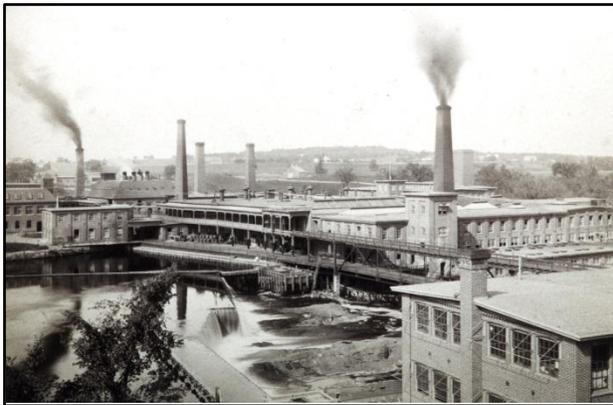
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The left photo shows the old iron bridge on Bridge Street around 1901. Building on the right is the old Haskell Silk Mill as it was being demolished. Large building in upper center of photo is the old Warren Block that later became the Valle Block. Church steeple is part of the Westbrook Congregational Church.

The right photo is the old steel bridge on Cumberland Street, later replaced by a two lane steel and concrete bridge that is presently being replaced. Warren Congregational Church and parsonage is in the background.

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Left: S. D. Warren Mill showing external bridges. Right: The bridge running from the warehouse on Dana's Island (Yudy's) to the Dana Warp Mill was often used by children as a shortcut to Bridge Street School.

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The next print gives an overview of Westbrook and its many waterways including the Cumberland Oxford Canal. At one time there were bridges on New Gorham Road, Longfellow Street, Saco Street and Spring Street that crossed over the Canal. Other bridges are on route 302 crossing the Mill Brook on Route 302 and Duck Pond Road.



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### FLOODS TAKE OUT BRIDGES

In 1843 a great freshet of water carried away the Sacarappa Bridge and damaged the bridge at Congin in March 1869. There was a foot of snow on the ground and this melting caused the Presumpscot River to rise very rapidly. The ice in the river began to go out, and in an hours' time the water had risen 10 feet. The bridge at W. K. (Illegible) went, and then followed a railroad bridge. The wheelhouse of the Westbrook electric light station was carried away, leaving Westbrook without any means of lighting. By this time the debris brought down by the raging waters had accumulated into a mass of threatening proportions. It lodged against the big iron railroad bridge of the Maine Central Railroad. The water, which had backed up against the bridge, rose fully 30 feet, and when released spread over the adjacent territory for a distance of 100 yards back from the natural banks of the river. Below the bridge were the mills of S. D. Warren, the largest paper mills in the world. The gate house, which recently cost \$40,000, was destroyed, and this will throw 2500 people out of employment. Pride Bridge, which has stood the floods of 40 years, together with a power station of S. D. Warren, which furnishes light for the mills and the City of Deering, were both carried away. The Stroud brook, which in summer time, almost runs dry, began a torrent and swept away Spring Street Bridge.

Most bridges have been washed out from time to time. Spring Street and Saco Street bridges not very long ago. Remember the flooding that closed Route 302 by the Riverton Bridge?

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### From the Pastor's Study @ 1960 Cabin Fever

SNOWBOUND! Within the memory of many that word had meaning. Long days hemmed in by a sea of white. Cold nights when wood piles dwindled as comforters were wrapped against penetrating icy fingers. Roads lay unbroken on the undulating landscape, awaiting snorting, steamy-nostriled horses and cursing men urging the great roller to beat a track for horse and sleigh. Around the farmstead narrow channels were dug to the barn, well and hen house. Dogs romped and frolicked burrowing into the white sea, and then emerging shaking their shaggy coats in defiance. Coy cats wisely lay curled by the stove rising only to satisfy life's basic urges. Being snowbound used to be a part of life. The woodshed was attached to the kitchen, assuring a steady supply of fuel. Young boys had only to pass into its frosty dankness to fetch in armloads of seasoned maple, oak, beech, and birch, these to sanctify the insatiable appetites of Atlantic Clarion, Glenwood, and Home Comfort. Twice daily mackinaws were donned for the ritual of milking and tending to the other animals. When water froze, clean snow was gathered for melting. Other chores such as repairing harnesses or fixing

equipment for the next season's planting filled time. This was an act of faith for the surrounding landscape gave no hint of fertility.

Womenfolk had things to fill their time. Meals went on as usual. Clothes needed washing and mending. Rags were turned into quilts and there were always fires to tend.

Those long, cold, solitary days gave rise to a common complaint: cabin fever. It set in sometime in January of early February, depending on the onset of isolation. The old Mainer, when asked what people did through those long winter days, said, "Oh, we set an' talk, but mostly we jest set."

Cabin fever is a common winter ailment today, though it is hard to imagine the feeling of being cut off as I sit looking out on a bare parking lot. Perhaps it isn't just isolation but a longing for warmth that gives us cabin fever.

In simpler times the sight of the road roller, a visit with neighbors, mail from afar, or a sleigh ride to the village was sufficient to break the isolation. Today we yearn for distant places, balmy breezes, white sands, and warm, clear water. As the preparation for planting even in the dead of winter was assurance that spring would come, trips to tropical climes assure us that somewhere in the world it is warm, that warmth will return to cold New England.

Oh, ye of little faith. Do you not think spring will follow winter? Is your faith so shallow that you must punish yourself traveling south? Of course not. You know spring will come, I know it, too. But in the midst of February – I, too, long to sample the delights of warm air, barefoot walks on soft sand, and tropical seas.

*(Not much really changes throughout the years, does it?)*



*Main Street at Mechanic Street – old photos from Mike Sanphy's collection.*

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### COLLECTION OF POLL TAX CARDS

The Poll Tax in Maine was repealed in 1978, but some interesting information is available in the collection of Poll Tax cards in the Westbrook Historical Society.

The Society's collection of Poll Tax cards list information filed under the male person's name that paid poll tax in Westbrook. These cards record information by year from about the 1918s to the 1950s. Each card has columns to check off: ownership of dogs –either male or female, pianos, horses, cows, radios, stocks in trade, furniture, total value and the tax paid. Some cards list the State Militia year and some have the occupation as well as present residence address.

It is interesting to note that radios began to appear in the 1930s while pianos show up earlier. They were the usual items listed. Occasional farmers appeared with livestock listed and businesses list their stock value and furniture. This is an interesting source to check when researching an ancestor or a business in Westbrook.

## RECENT PROGRAMS

**September 5, 2012** At our program Portland Fire Department Historian Michael Daicy presented a program on the Great Portland Maine Fire of 1866. Mr. Daicy told of the rapid progress of the fire and the difficulty firefighters had in fighting it as the wind was brisk and water was in short supply. Firefighters had to tap into wells that often went dry after a short period of time which meant disconnecting and moving onto another well. Over 1800 buildings were destroyed and several people died in the conflagration. Mr. Daicy and fellow Fire Department Historian Don Whitney co-authored a book on this fire. The book is for sale at several area book dealers and at the Portland Fire Department Museum at 157 Spring Street in Portland.

**October 3, 2012** - Westbrook's own Pat Charette Gallant tells of the challenges and the rewards of her record setting goal to complete what is known as the **Oceans Seven Challenge**. It took her three attempts before she completed the English Channel swim but this 60-year-old swimmer persevered until she'd accomplished her goal. In the past two years she has also swum across the Strait of Gibraltar, the Catalina Channel and most recently, the Tsugaru Strait in Japan. Her goal is to also swim across the Cook Strait in New Zealand, the Irish Channel and the Molokai Channel in Hawaii.

**November 7, 2012** - **Civil War Medicine** was vastly different from medicine as we know it. Penny Loura discussed the treatment of wounded and sick soldiers in the 1860s.

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

As 2012 comes to a close, I want to thank the Officers, Board of Directors and volunteers that have helped me during the year. This year was especially busy with our move from the Dunn Street Legion building to the Community Center and I am especially grateful to the members that were there day after day to pack, help move, unpack and set up our collection. The Community Center is a great location and the number of visitors to the Historical Society has increased greatly. I also want to thank the Director and Staff of the Community Center as they continue to be attentive to our needs. In closing I want to wish everyone a Happy Holiday Season and look forward to another great year in 2013.

**Mike Sanphy**  
President

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**December 5, 2012 - The Barn Book** by Don Perkins, will explore the history of barns and the trials and tribulations of getting a book into print. His newly published book on barns, with some 31 featured barns and 109 photos has been a labor of love which has taken him throughout Maine and New England's countryside. Books will be available for purchase.

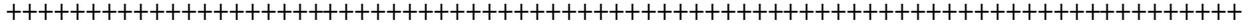
**January 3, 2013 - The Cumberland Oxford Canal** will be the subject of David Tanguay's program. There are few places in Westbrook where traces of the canal can be seen today but the history of the canal remains a subject of fascination.

**February 6, 2013 - The Quaker Artist:** Julia M. Hawkes was born before the Civil War and died in 1934 at age 80. She lived on the family farm in Westbrook and is buried in Highland Lake Cemetery. She was a dedicated painter, working mostly in oils but also in watercolors. She painted landscapes, flowers and barn scenes in and around Westbrook, using colorful but subdued colors. Due to her religious upbringing in the Quaker faith she painted in secrecy and her paintings were never been shown publicly. Her great-nephew Al Hawkes will talk about her life.



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Officers: President- Mike Sanphy , Vice President- Roberta Wyr Dutton Morrill , Secretary- Andrea Pacillo Vasquez, Treasurer- Nancy Joy Curran.  
Directors: Nancy Crump - Diane Turgeon Dyer - Suzan Norton - Rowena Walton

**Open Saturday and Tuesday mornings from 9 am to noon.**  
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