

Westbrook Historical Society

Newsletter

A Society That Preserves The Past

Summer 2008

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

As the lovely Maine summer rushes by, we realize how busy we've become, even though we are retired! We apologize for the lateness of this newsletter but we are again without an editor so I have decided to "wing it" for at least this issue. If you are familiar with a computer and the internet you may have heard the term "blog", a web diary. Well, that's what this newsletter will be, just some ramblings, stories and items of interest to Westbrook; no reasoning or theme to the stories intended. Hope you enjoy!

-A WESTBROOK CONNECTION-



When Norman Ostrowski of Dearborn Heights, Michigan was just eleven he heard Rudy Vallée on the radio for the first time and was "an immediate fan. I listened to his music constantly." He followed Rudy's career and as Norman got older, attended many of Rudy's performances "but I never dared to approach him".

In 1949 Norman, with wife Rose, went to see one of Rudy's shows. Afterwards they saw Rudy in the restaurant of the Casino having dinner with Eleanor, his bride of only five days. Norman got up his courage and approached Rudy's table. He told Rudy that he was a long-time fan and asked if he would autograph his program. Rudy agreed and Norm returned to his table "on cloud 9". Rose spied the club photographer and suggested they have her ask Rudy to have his picture taken with them. Norm's comment was, "Don't push it...I have the

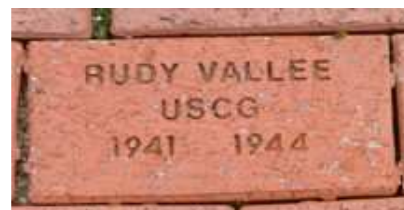
autograph." But Rose was persistent and went up to the photographer whose first comment was, "I don't know, he's very temperamental!" But she was persuaded to ask and Rudy agreed to the picture. After the photo was taken the couples talked for a while and thus began a long friendship between star and fans.

In the 1950s Norman and Rudy exchanged Christmas cards and letters and Norman and Rose would travel anywhere they could to see Rudy perform. In 1967 Norman wrote a letter to Rudy telling of his impending trip to California and Rudy invited him to stay at the Vallée home! Now, that is real star quality!

In 1982 Norm and Rose were invited to Rudy's 80th birthday party as seen in the accompanying picture [photo courtesy of Norman]. Rudy called Norman a few months before his death in 1986 to share his fear of upcoming surgery and Norman last talked to Rudy just four days before he died. Of course Norman attended the funeral in California.

Norman says he told himself when he first heard Rudy sing that he would be a fan of Rudy's for the rest of his life....and at the present age of 90, he thinks he's lived up to his prediction! Norman lost Rose, his wife of 67 years and fellow Rudy Vallée fan, this past January and The Westbrook Historical Society sends their condolences and wishes him well.

Continuing on the Rudy Vallée theme; opps, maybe there is a theme...to this page anyway! Look for the Rudy Vallée brick at the Veterans' Monument in Riverbank Park. The brick was placed there by the Historical Society in honor of Westbrook's famous native son.



**Keep watch for future items regarding the Rededication of Rudy Vallée Square, scheduled for July 2009

-A WESTBROOK RENEGADE?-



A *Portland Daily Press* from January 18, 1890 was recently given to the Historical Society. In it was an article “*How Montana was reduced to Law and Order*”. It tells of the renowned Henry Plummer gang...a gang of road agents and murderers. Plummer’s band was described as the “only well organized power of any sort in the community; it was organized for crime. It consisted of two dozen or more of the vilest scoundrels then unhung, with a full quota of spies, scouts, decoys, and outside correspondents in every part of the gold-producing region. These road agents wore moustaches and chin whiskers, and they knotted their neckties in a peculiar way.” They were a bunch of bullies and the respectable citizens lived in terror of them. The citizens were afraid to report any of their crimes since the so-called Sheriff was none other than Henry Plummer himself! It was said that he “could draw his pistol & empty its 5 chambers within three seconds, making every bullet tell.” The article goes on to tell how the Montana Vigilantes finally captured Henry for the murder of a German man in Stinkingwater Valley, Montana. When the Vigilantes prepared to hang Henry he “weakened...and the once formidable personage begged for his life, declaring with tears and sighs that he was too wicked to die.” “Give a man time to pray!” were his last words as he was hung on Jan 10, 1864.

All very interesting, especially when you learn that the newspaper was the original property of L.P. Warren of Westbrook [Longfellow Street]. Across the top of the page Mr. Warren had written: “Story of Henry Plummer who was born in Saccarappa on Bridge Street.” A renegade from Westbrook? An internet search found many articles about this infamous Sheriff-Outlaw; however, they all list him as being from Addison, Maine. Who is right...Mr. Warren who wrote the note 26 years after Henry’s death or Ruth E. Mather who wrote “Hanging the Sheriff; A Biography of Henry Plummer” in 1934? Visit the Historical Society to read the full article on Henry Plummer’s gang...and decide for yourself!

-Looking for help-

Can you file or use the computer or organize...or visit? We are looking for helpers at the Society on Tuesday and/or Saturday mornings. Could you donate 2 or 3 hours a week, a month? Would love to have a few new ‘working faces’!! Or just come in to peruse the collection.

-Summer Society Happenings-

There have been a few changes and additions to our webpage this summer; a map has been added to show directions to the Society, listings of Westbrook’s Revolutionary War and Civil War Veterans have been added and a link to Suzan Norton’s Blog which has many articles about people buried in Saccarappa Cemetery and about the Roberts family of Saco Street.

Need a gift for a Westbrook friend or family member? Check out the new note cards on sale at the Society. The cards contain this beautiful photo of Main Street, circa 1800s. (8 cards for \$5.00)



Wonderful new additions to our collection!!

One of the many items donated this summer to our Collection is a WW I military jacket originally belonging to Wilhem (William) Knudsen and a photograph of his unit, Battery D 60th Reg’t CAC, 1919. Mr. Knudsen was a local building contactor and prominent in local politics. He died in 1937. The items were donated by his grandson Richard Knudsen.

Also recently received is a beautiful Britannia (pewter) coffee pot, signed by Freeman Porter, Westbrook. In the 1800s Westbrook encompassed the area called Stevens Plains near Morrill’s Corner (now Portland). This area was known for its pewter makers and these items have recently seen a rise in popularity. Thank you C. Gardner Lane.



A medicine glass bearing the inscription: “Chas. A. Vallee, Rexall Druggist, Cor. **Elm** & Bridge St, Westbrook, Maine” is also a new accession. Interesting note...there has never been an Elm Street in Westbrook! And everyone knows that Vallee’s Drug was on the corner of Main and Bridge Streets!

-SMALL POX IN CUMBERLAND MILLS-

The State Board of Health was notified of the existence of small pox at Cumberland Mills on March 15, 1888. The 1st case occurred in a house owned by a Mr. Washburn. Some time in Dec 1887 the Washburns went out of town and left a family named Harriman in charge of the house. When they returned home Jan 24 they found Mrs. Harriman ill with what the doctor called chicken pox. Mrs. Harriman worked in the rag room of the Cumberland paper mills, and had left work on January 21 because of illness. Part of the room where she worked contained tables, upon which from Jan 2 – Feb 2 were rags only of the kind known as “English Whites”. Two weeks later Mr. Harriman became ill, followed by their child and later the Washburn child. All of the cases in this household were mild and all went by the name of chicken pox. Mr. & Mrs. Washburn had been vaccinated for small pox within the past two years and did not become ill.



On March 12 a woman who lived near the Washburn house and who had visited frequently during the sickness became ill. She had confluent small pox.

Millie Ricker, who worked in the rag room was attacked March 6th, died on the 10th, and was interred in Brownfield. The diagnosis in her case was malignant scarlet fever since none of the usual characteristic features of small pox were present. Mrs. Varney, who also worked in the rag room, was attacked with small pox on March 12th. She had a moderately severe form of the disease. Both of these women worked on the table where the “English Whites” were kept.

Ten days after the death of Millie Ricker, her sister Carrie became ill and died, as her sister had, after only four days of illness. She was also diagnosed with scarlet fever. But another case in Brownfield, that of the 14 year old brother of the Ricker sisters, settled the nature of the disease, without a doubt. He had a case of unmistakable small pox. Two other cases also occurred in Deering, among relatives of the Harriman's.

Everything was ready for a wide spread epidemic of small pox, but the prompt action of the local boards of health in the isolation of the sick and those who had been

exposed, free vaccinations and disinfection, restricted the outbreak to remarkably narrow limits.

Several important facts about outbreak:

1. Although a very slight exposure to the infection of small pox is often sufficient to produce the disease in some, in other persons even prolonged exposure does not cause illness.
2. The first cases in an outbreak, particularly when they are modified by previous vaccination, are very often mistaken for chicken pox.
3. The value of vaccination was strikingly shown in some instances.
4. There is a considerable danger of outbreaks of small pox originating from infected rags in paper mills, and outbreaks thus originating not only result in loss of life but are the cause of much annoyance, suffering, and expense to corporations, individuals and towns. This Cumberland Mills outbreak originated unquestionably from infected rags in the rag room.

The above report resulted in the following State law, “An Act to provide against the danger of the spread of Small Pox from Paper Mills”, approved Feb 23, 1889. This law required any paper mill, where domestic or foreign rags are used, to ensure that employees are successfully vaccinated or revaccinated every two years.

[For anyone wishing to read this entire report, it is filed in the Communities Notebook under Cumberland Mills.]

-A SMALL POX REMEDY-

John Roberts, the well-known and prosperous farmer on the Saco road gave the following recipe to the CHRONICLE. He states he has used it in his own family for scarlet fever and other kindred diseases.

Sulfate of zinc 1grain, fox-glove (digitalis) 1 grain, ½ tsp sugar; mix with 2 Tbsp water. When thoroughly mixed, add 4 oz. water and take a spoonful every hour. Either disease will disappear in 12 hours. For children, smaller dose according to age.

[A copy of the above Chronicle article, unknown date, was given by Polly Carmichael to Suzan Norton, both descendents of John Roberts (1837-1917). John was the father of Westbrook school teacher Eva Roberts.]

The Westbrook Chronicle - March 30, 1888

Saccarappa.

Small pox. The disease is being skillfully handled by the physicians in charge...All possible precautions are taken, persons exposed to the disease are ordered in doors to remain until all danger of contagion is over...Mrs. Kinney is recovering...A.J. Plummer is required to stay in his own house...