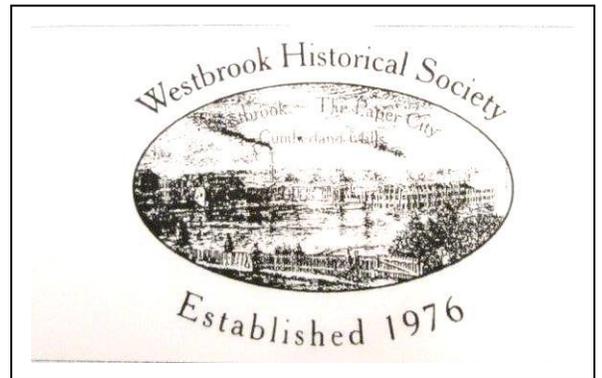


# Westbrook Historical Society

**"A Society That Preserves the Past"**

**Summer 2016 Newsletter**



## LANDSLIDES

Excerpts from article by Franklin Wright (Staff Feature Writer) Sept 1, 1947

The good people of Cumberland Mills had no way of knowing that the "surprise of their lives" was in store for them when they awoke on the morning of Nov 22, 1868. The day began in routine fashion but excitement travels rapidly. A sharp rap at the door, a startled shout, and men, women and children dropped affairs at hand to hurry to the village.

But of all surprised people in Cumberland Mills that morning, no one found it harder to believe his eyes than Benjamin Woodman. As was his custom he paused shortly after arising to enjoy a view from a window. For many, many years his eyes had rested on a substantial growth of timber. Imagine his emotions on that morning when he saw not the familiar trees but looked directly down on the village. The trees were gone! Vanished overnight! Not a leaf, limb or stump remained.

With his equally confounded wife, Woodman joined the throng rushing to the village. There he learned what had happened. A landslide during the night had moved land, trees and all a distance estimated by many at 200 yards. In the course of the event the channel of the Presumpscot River had been moved some 300 feet. No one witnessed the actual event but a watchman had spread the alarm when he found Warren Mills one-story deep in water.

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***A recent Geological Landslide Study contributed to the Society brought to mind the information in historic documents about actual landslides in Westbrook. Some of this study's information has been gathered here.***

### **Geological Landslide Survey Along Presumpscot River**

**Maine Geological Survey, Dept. of Conservation by Walter A. Anderson, State Geologist**

#### **Stability of Natural Slopes in the Presumpscot Formation (Excerpts)**

The Westbrook location studied in this report is on the Presumpscot River at the rear of the DiBiase development and Halidon Road.

Identification of landslide prone sites in Maine is imperative in order to maintain the safety of affected developed areas and future developments. Large landslides in Gorham, Maine in 1983 and Rockland, Maine in 1973, a number of smaller landslides, and evidence of historical and prehistorical landslides indicate that some areas of Maine, including developed areas will be susceptible to future landslides. Past landslides have occurred in deposits of the sensitive glaciomarine clay known as the Presumpscot Formation which covers the populated and rapidly developing eastern and southern Maine.

This paper examines two southern Maine sites – one at Brunswick and another at Westbrook – both of which have been subject to mass movements in the past and are suspected to be vulnerable to future mass movements. Past slides in the Westbrook area included major flowslides such as the one which occurred in November, 1868, affecting an area of thirty-four acres. The flow or spreading slides, such as have occurred in Westbrook, are potentially far more destructive.



This paper examines the geological characteristics and soil properties at the two sites with the purpose of identifying the causes of landslides, particularly flowslides or landslides that spread by retrogression. The site in Westbrook is located along the Presumpscot River in Westbrook in the vicinity of major historical landslides and is the site of a major housing development (more than 100 houses and a variety of underground utilities). This site is located on the north bank of the River one mile downstream from the S. D. Warren paper mill.

The susceptibility of the Westbrook area to landslides is well documented in the historical records. Several slides are known to have occurred both along the Stroudwater and Presumpscot Rivers since they were first settled in the early 1700s.

“About 1670, according to a legend or story told to the original settlers by the Indians, occurred a great slide of earth at the southwest and western side of Conant Street. One wonders what could have occasioned this for there is no stream of water there today to undermine the land; yet great rains have been known to bring about such movement of the terrain. Many years ago there must have been a “slide” toward the river in the Dunn St section for when excavating for a sewer years ago great trees were found on their sides, or so the story goes.”

Evidence also exists which suggests the occurrence of a massive prehistoric landslide in the Saccarappa area of present day Westbrook. This slide is thought to have encompassed two hundred acres and redirected the flow of the Presumpscot River northward away from an assumed course through the Fore River estuary.

“As to the evidences of the Saccarappa slide, they are of the most positive character. In the first place, the village rests on a level plain of clay, and bordering this on all sides is an embankment from ten to twenty feet in height. The upper portion of this depression has always been called by the inhabitants Warren’s Cellar, and indeed many have regarded this area as sunken land. In digging wells and sewers, trunks and branches of trees are met with at a depth of thirty feet from the surface.”

Two landslides occurred on the north bank of Presumpscot River in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The first slide occurred on the night of May 5, 1831 and encompassed an area “one hundred and twenty yards in diameter” while exposing clay banks thirty feet above the river. It is suggested that as many as 12 solid masses of clay (or sliding blocks) slid forward into the river, altering its course.

The second historical slide occurred on the night of November 22, 1868 immediately downstream of the S. D. Warren paper mill located at Cumberland Mills. The magnitude and impact of this slide was much more severe than the earlier slide of 1831, blocking the 200 foot wide river channel for a distance of half a mile, raising the upstream water level to 15 to 17 feet, and thus flooding the lower floors of the S. D. Warren Mill.

“Where formerly the River had meandered through a valley of interval bordered by steep banks rising about forty-five feet to a level sedimentary plane, a portion of this high land, fifteen hundred feet long and six hundred wide had slid into the valley leaving a chasm averaging about twenty-five feet deep. This immense volume of soil totaling something like eight hundred thousand yard had within an hour or two moved a quarter of a mile. The dam which it formed raised the water to a height which prevented operating the mill. Eventually the water cut a new channel, this time following the south bank thus transferring thirty acres of Jonas Raymond’s farm to the north side of the River. This is the land that we now use for the lower end of the woodyard and for piling bark.”

The frequency of major landslides in the Westbrook area clearly demonstrates the need to identify the sites susceptible to landsliding. This report examines one such site near to the 1868 flowslide. The location studied in this report is on the Presumpscot River at the rear of the DiBiase development and Halidon Road.

The complete report is on file at the Westbrook Historical Society.

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### Landslide on banks of Stroudwater River off Spring Street in 1974 Taken from Article in Portland Paper in 1974



**CONDITION WORSENS**—Recent drenching rains caused another large section of the backyard of the Thomas W. Clarke family on Westbrook’s outer Spring Street to break away and slide 30 to 40 feet down the steep north bank of the Stroudwater and into the small river. Clarke, who was plagued with similar slides during heavy rains last

July, said the Soil Conservation Service has been notified of the condition. Apparently high clay content in the soil has caused the problem and continued breaking away of the land, as can be seen in the middle of this photo, threatens to bring the landslides even closer to the Clarke’s back door. (Staff Photo by Gardner M. Roberts)

Engineers from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers came to inspect the major Stroudwater River embankment landslide close by the home of Thomas W Clarke off Spring Street.

The main slide struck the 35 foot high embankment early last July (1974) with much of the embankment face plunging downward and outward almost as one piece. Its downward force pushed upward soils that had been the river bottom, heaving them onto the opposite bank.

The slide filled what had been the river's course and backed up the stream until it over-flowed, then made a new course through the material.

Drenching rains the previous December triggered an expansion of the original slide and the Clarkes found half their back yard gone. Big new cracks opened and settling begun several feet back from the new embankment edge.

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### **Col. Westbrook's Grave** *from Articles from Portland Paper*

Forty years ago in July 1976 the grave of **Col. Thomas Westbrook**, the man for whom the City of Westbrook is named, was discovered on the farm of Roger D. Knight on County Road.

A group of history buffs and amateur archeologists located the grave after searching for several weeks. Its location had been a mystery since the Colonel died 232 years before its discovery.



Col. Westbrook had been a prosperous mast agent for King George III of England, an Indian fighter in the French and Indian Wars, a civic leader and businessman.

The reburial along with a capsule took place on July 28, 1976. The well preserved skeleton of Col. Westbrook was covered just as it was found and the site was restored to its former appearance with a marker placed there. The skeleton was complete, a man of about five-feet-six, in height, whose head had once apparently rested on a cushion, the teeth strong and shiny white, fragments of dark brown hair, apparently tied behind the head in a pigtail; two heavily rusted hinges, believed to be from a Bible buried with him; pieces of dark brown wood that conformed to the shape of the body which apparently were remains of the coffin as it collapsed around the Colonel in the grave, a circle of metal that may have been his belt buckle; some nails and a few other items. Fragments of metal still bright after all these years were pieced together and they made a rectangular plate, about 8X13 inches, with the four corners rounded out. The metal appears to be a "lead silver." There is a carefully printed inscription on the plate, done with ink or enamel – japanned. Easily readable are these letters: "...mas Wes...70 yrs."

"Tradition has it", wrote Ernest R. Rowe in Highlights of Westbrook History (1951), "that at that time there was an old English law, or perhaps we should say custom, whereby a dead body could be seized for debt. With this in mind, his friends buried the body secretly, and to this day there is no authentic record stating just where Colonel Westbrook was buried. The town, and now city, of Westbrook is the only monument left to perpetuate the name of this pioneer and gentleman."

It is said on the night of the day Col. Westbrook died, there was a heavy snowfall and the next morning the hoof prints of a team of horses were seen leading away from the house. The Knight family, which descends from the Colonel's sister, Mary Westbrook Knight, passes a story down from one generation to the next on the hidden grave. Mrs. Frances Marsh, Roger Knight's older sister, recalls "tagging along" as a child after her grandfather, Benjamin Knight, when he was plowing the field near the woods. "He pointed out the grave and said, "That's where the Colonel is buried."

Volunteer diggers from the newly-formed Westbrook Historical Society uncovered the skeleton. The dig was suggested by Roger Knight, a charter member of the Society, as the Bicentennial project for the Society. The "dig" started after exhumation papers were obtained and the ground thawed sufficiently for the small group of history buffs and amateur archeologists to go to work.

The Knights have kept the artifacts from the grave, and were planning to have them authenticated.

A time capsule prepared by Mrs. Marsh containing the known biography of Col. Westbrook and the story of the excavation, was placed in the Colonel's grave before a new coffin top was put over the moldering bones. Mrs. Nellie Spiller, 79, one the oldest members of the Westbrook Historical Society at the time and one of the most indefatigable of the diggers, put the first bit of earth back on the grave using her father's old English trowel.

## **Colonel Westbrook's Expedition Against Rasle Brought Fame**

*(Here's another look at our Colonel from Portland Paper)*

Colonel Westbrook achieved wide-spread fame in 1722 when he headed an expedition to capture the French Jesuit Missionary Father Rasle.

Father Rasle was a controversial figure. "The French writers place him among the Saints, while his English contemporaries give him a place the very opposite," writes William Willis in *The History of Portland from 1632 to 1864*.

Rasle lived among the Indians for 60 years, and achieved astounding results with them. At the time of Rasle's death, his "flock" worshipped in a chapel with its own bell and sacred vessels and Indian choir boys wearing crimson robes chanted the masses.

### **Extensive Influence**

Father Rasle's influence was "extensive and deserved". He was learned and talented, "a master of learned languages who wrote Latin with classical purity. He taught many converts to write, corresponded with them in their own language, and said he "knew all the languages in this vast desert".

Enmity between the English and Rasle started in August 1721 when Fathers Rasle and LaChassa accompanied 200 armed Indians flying French colors to Arrowisic where they held a "talk" with the fort commander. Willis writes that this ended without satisfaction to either party.

The Indians, being entirely under influence of the priests, were permitted to do nothing infringing upon French power or influence.

The embittered Indians left a letter to the Governor, accusing the English of unjustly invading their property, depriving them of the country which God had given them, and threatening to kill them, burn their houses and destroy their cattle if they did not remove from the land in three weeks.

### **Westbrook Enters**

The English tried, without success, to see the Indians alone. Colonel Westbrook entered the picture at this point. In 1721 the governor, irritated by the French, "determined to remove the apparent instigators". He ordered Westbrook to head an expedition of 300 men to Norridgewock to seize Rasle and bring him to Boston.

Westbrook, tramping through three feet of snow to the Kennebec River, arrived in Norridgewock without advance warning. Father Rasle wrote, "I had barely time to swallow the consecrated host, to pack the sacred vessels in a small chest and secrete myself in the woods." Rasle narrowly escaped. English troops came with "10 paces" of him as he hid behind a tree.

Col. Westbrook returned without Rasle, but returned with evidence. He took the "small chest". In a secret compartment of the chest Westbrook found letters from the Governor of Canada revealing French intent to "send upon our defenseless frontiers a barbarous foe". (The chest – Father Rasle's strongbox – may be seen at the Maine Historical Society).

In June, 60 Indians in canoes retaliated by capturing nine families in Merrymeeting Bay, then went on to completely destroy Brunswick and other settlements. Upon receiving the news, the Governor formally declared war and appointed Westbrook Chief of Command.

### **Destroy Settlement**

On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1724, the strife ended when Captains Brown, Bean Harmon and Moulton stormed Norridgewock. They surprised and entirely destroyed the settlement. Eighty of the enemy were killed and drowned, including Father Rasle “who was considered the principal cause of the cruel visits of his flock.”

The bloody massacre was contrary to orders of the commanding officer – men, women and

children were killed indiscriminately. Hearing the news, Boston rejoiced with restraint. Councilor Sewall wrote in his diary, “The sheerness comes up, Captain Harmon with his Norridgewock scalps at which there is a great shouting and triumph. The Lord help us to rejoice with trembling.”

Father Rasle died at 67. He left as a memorial a “Dictionary of the Abenaki Language”, which E. R. Rowe writes was part of the plunder and is preserved in the Houghton Library at Harvard University.

Today Father Rasle is considered a saint while “there is no name in our early annals that shines with a fairer luster than Westbrook’s according to local historian William B. Jordan, Jr.



## **The Memorial Library of Westbrook**

**An Institution that has Become an Indispensable part of the School System of the City and has Met the Requirements of the Reading Public**

Written for the Chamber of Commerce Journal by Lillian Quimby, Librarian (1917)

Nearly all the people of Westbrook are grateful for the Memorial Library. Knowingly or unknowingly, they are grateful to Joseph Walker, who came to Westbrook when he was twelve years old, lived at Pride’s Bridge and Saccarappa during the next forty-three years, and moved to Portland in 1855. From that time until his death in 1891, he never ceased to love this city. His monument to that love is the Memorial Library of Westbrook. At his death it was found that he had provided in his will for the expense of the library building, and for a fund in trust, now often referred to as the Walker Fund, which provides for a constant supply of new books and magazines.

It was by his own request the library was not called the "Walker Memorial Library", but merely the "Memorial Library", without mention of the giver's name.

A fine portrait of Joseph Walker hangs in the upper reading room of the library, almost facing the doors.

The library was opened to the public for the first time on May 26, 1894. On the afternoon of that day there was a "meeting of the Trustees of the library, the City Council, the clergymen of the city, and citizens, to receive the deed and keys of the library" from Frederick Fox, Esq., executor of Joseph Walker's will. Albert H. Cordwell was then mayor of the City of Westbrook.

Of the first trustees of the library only two are now living, Mr. Woodbury K. Dana and Mr. Edwin J. Haskell. Mr. Haskell has maintained his position as secretary of the Board of Trustees from the very first. The trustees and regents of the

library have been always some of the finest men of the city, and have been well fitted to look after the affairs of the library. The loss of John E. Warren, formerly agent of the S. D. Warren Co., and trustee of the library from January, 1895, until his death in August 1915, was a cause for deep sorrow.

At its beginning, the library contained only 4,469 books, which had been selected, however, with great wisdom. At the present time there are about 16,000 volumes. Much care has been taken always in buying the reference books; so that, by this time, the reference department is singularly fine for so small a library. The teachers and students of the public schools can testify to this fact; as can the members of the many literary clubs of this city. Lists of books for use in the schools are left at the library by the teachers to be called for by their pupils; and the fact that the library is situated almost exactly opposite the high school makes it easily serve the purpose of a private high school library.

Every attempt is made to meet the demands of the public in regard to fiction, and the reading tables are supplied with the leading periodicals. The largest annual circulation was 44,470 books.

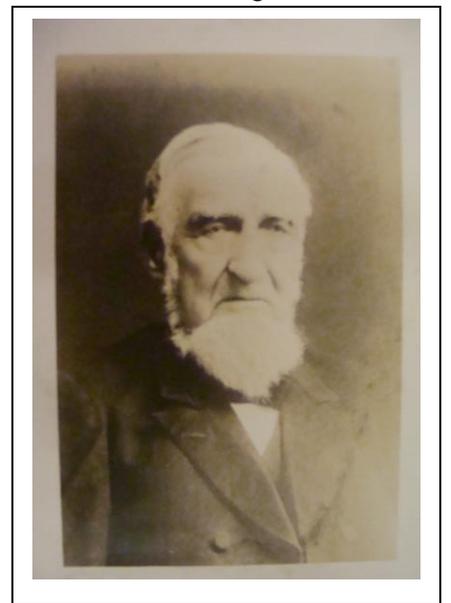
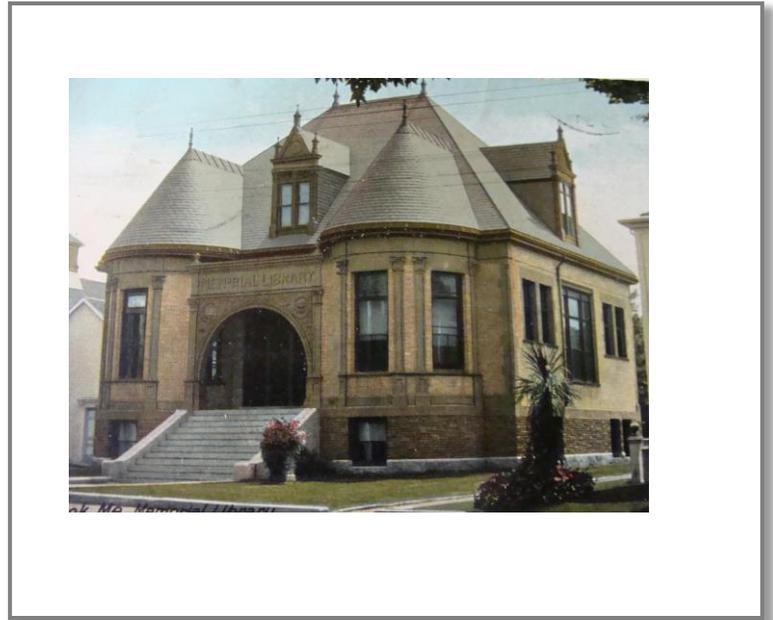
The Dewey Decimal-Cutter system of cataloging is in use, and so far as it is possible, printed cards have been obtained from the Library of Congress at Washington for filing in our card catalogues.

The library building itself is a very pleasant one, especially its interior. While the building is not at all imposing when it is viewed from the outside, one has only to open its wide doors to find oneself in the midst of light and cheer such as one seldom associates with institutions of this sort. The effect is due partly to the light-colored woodwork, and partly to the many windows which reach often to the ceiling and which flood with light the stack-room on the right, and the large reading-room at the left.

The trustees' room faces the entrance, and although small, it is very attractive. Upstairs there is to be a second stack-room, and downstairs there is a newspaper room, nearly always filled with readers.

The grounds belonging to the library are very beautiful, and so extensive that the building could be enlarged most indefinitely.

Truly the will of the giver was not in vain. May the praise for Joseph Walker never cease.



## *The President's Message*

I want to first recognize and congratulate Phil & Nancy Curran as our latest Honorary Members. Phil and Nancy were among the founding members of the Westbrook Historical Society in 1976 and over the years they have worked hard as members and officers of the Society. Thank you both for all that you have done for us and hopefully you will continue to be actively involved with us.

In the near future I will be looking to form a committee to work on celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our founding. The American Journal will do a feature article for us and hopefully we can have an open house among other things to recognize this event.

Summer is finally here and I hope it is enjoyable to everyone. Our monthly meetings and programs will start again in September and I will hopefully see you there.

*Michael Sanphy, President*

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Officers: President- Mike Sanphy , Vice President- Roberta Wyer Dutton Morrill , Secretary- Martha Brackett, Treasurer- Tom Clarke

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

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.

Our website: [www.westbrookhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.westbrookhistoricalsociety.org) – gives a fascinating outline of the Collections, Research Library and Exhibitions of the Society.

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