

Westbrook Historical Society

"A Society That Preserves the Past"

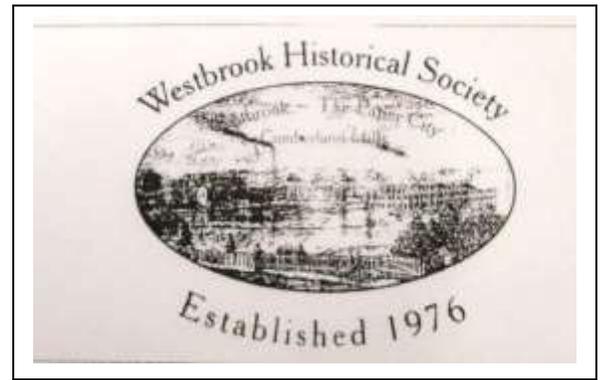
Winter 2020 Newsletter

Historical Sketch by Isabel T. Ray

It is not known with any degree of accuracy on what date the first white man settled within the limits of what is now known as the City of Westbrook. The first recorded deed of Real Estate bears the date of 1657, and describes a tract of land from Capisic, formerly in Deering and now included in the city of Portland, to the "Ammoncongan River". The Indian sagamore, Sqitterygusset, gave it to **Francis Small**, fisherman. The consideration mentioned in the deed was "one trading coat a year for Capisic, and one gallon of liquor a rear for Ammoncongan."

Nearly ten years afterwards, to be exact June 4, 1666, two Indian sagamores sold to **George Munjoy** a tract of land which began "on the other side of Ammoncongan river at the great falls, the upper part of them called Saccaribegg, and so down the river side unto the lowermost planting ground, the lowermost part thereof, and so from each aforesaid bounds to go directly into the woods so far as said Munjoy will, not exceeding one mile, with all the woods and privileges there on belonging."

An ancient deposition makes known the fact that "**George and Mary Munjoy** - his wife - had a house and some improvements on the southwest side of Ammoncongan, in the great river Presumpscot, where said Munjoy and his servants used to go in planting and reaping time and often at other times, where they usually tarried about a week." Munjoy probably died about 1685, as that year an inventory of his estate was returned in which his



Ammoncongan land is valued at 20 pounds or about 100 dollars.

If settlers came before this time they did not remain, for all the settlers were said to have left Falmouth when the first Indian was waged so furiously in 1690, that being the year old Fort Loyal at Falmouth was captured.

Probably the earliest settler here of whom we have any record was **Joseph Conant**, who with his younger brother, **Samuel**; came from Beverly, Mass. He was a great grandson of **Roger Conant**, first settler and Governor of Naumkeag, now Salem.

Tradition has it that Conant brought his family and all his worldly wealth up the Presumpscot in a canoe. It is known that the Conant's has several grain mills as well as saw mills and were farmers also. In 1740 **Joseph Conant** sold his house in Saccarappa to **Thomas Haskell**. Some of the descendants of Joseph Conrad afterwards lived in that part of Westbrook now known as Highland Lake, but all of them who bore the family name have long since died or removed to other places. Descendants of **Samuel Conant** are still living in this city and it was for them that the street called Conant was named.





On the second day of December 1729 Saccarappa Falls were granted by the Falmouth Proprietors to **Benjamin Ingersoll, Joshua Bayley, Benjamin Larrabee Jr.** and Co., for a saw mill. This was the beginning of the lumber industry in Saccarappa which was carried on for a century and a half without interruption, and for many years was highly profitable to the owners. Among those who were engaged in the lumber business in the eighteenth century were **E. H. Freeman Jr, Daniel Godfrey, John Gordon, the Conants, Jonathan Webb, Andrew P. Titcomb. Daniel Godfrey**, who was by trade a shipwright, swamped out the first road for the passage of log and lumber teams. It undoubtedly was a part of our present Main Street. Considering the "Saccarappa blacking" of more recent days even, what must a road of over a hundred years ago have been when traversed by heavy ox teams in the early spring months! Godfrey had a double saw mill that spanned the river. Lumbering was carried on well into the nineteenth century and some of the lumber kings of that day were **John and Nathaniel Warren, Daniel T. Pierce, Archelaus Lewis, Joseph Walker, Dana Brigham, George and Lewis P. Warren and Samuel Clements.**

And not only were there saw mills but grist mills as well. Long after the first settlement in Gorham in 1736 the only grist mill available to the inhabitants of that was at Presumpscot lower falls to and from which they transported their grists by boat, carrying boat and cargo around the falls at Saccarappa and Ammoncongan. The Conants early took

advantage of this, and that a grist mill was in operation at Saccarappa by the middle of the 18th century is shown by the following entry in Parson Smith's journal: "Feb. 27, 1748. Went to Saccarabig. Mr. Conant tells me he ground 1000 bu. Of corn this winter, there being no other mills than his between Yarmouth and Saco.

Besides the many mills at Saccarappa and Ammoncongan there were saw mills erected in the 18th century at Stroudwater Falls, so called, on the present Spring Street, and also at the outlet of Duck Pond, now called highland Lake, and upon Mill Brook by the residence of the late **Nathan W. Boody**. Saccarappa must have been a busy place with 19 saw mills all in operation at one time, night and day. It was no uncommon sight to see a team of twenty-six oxen in line drawing the immense loads of lumber.

Saccarappa, which was the name of the largest village in the town of Westbrook, has been immortalized by **Richard Henry Dana** in his book "Two Years Before the Mast", and sailors have been heard oftentimes to sing this doggerel:

*"Old horse, old horse what brought you here?
From Saccarap to Portland Pier
I've carted boards this many a year,
Till killed by blows and sore abuse
They salted me down for sailor's use.
The sailors they do me despise,
They throw me over and damn my eyes,
Cut off my meat and scarp my bones,
And throw me over to Davy Jones."*

But the saw and grist mills have given way to other and more desirable industries.

Col. Westbrook's grave site



The name Westbrook was given to the town in 1814 in honor of **Colonel Westbrook**, a man of much prominence in his time in civil, business and military affairs. Probably a native of Portsmouth, N. H. where he was a member of the Provincial Council. In 1727 he took up his permanent abode in Falmouth and lived at Stroudwater where he died in 1744.

The old town of Falmouth originally had within its corporate limits, besides numerous islands in Casco Bay, the territory comprising today the cities of Westbrook and Portland and the towns of Cape Elizabeth, and Falmouth. Cape Elizabeth became a town in 1765, and Portland in 1786. In 1814 Falmouth was still further divided by the General court of Massachusetts when the town of Stroudwater was incorporated. This name was not satisfactory to the inhabitants and another being sought, Westbrook was selected and adopted the same year.

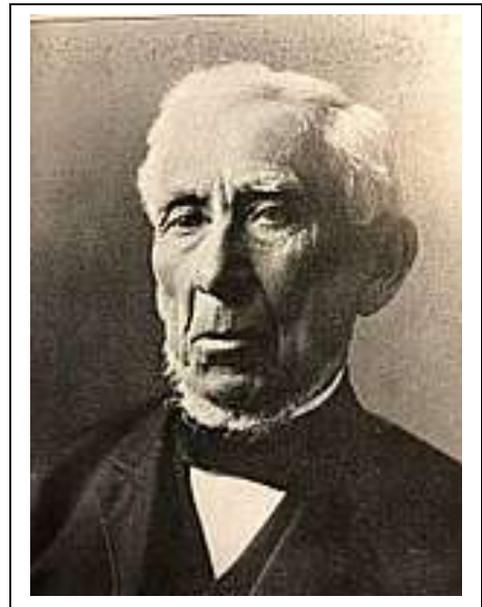
In 1871 Westbrook had so increased in population and was so large, as it extended from the Gorham line to near where the present electric power house is now located on Forest Ave., Portland, that it was deemed unwieldy for the management of municipal affairs and so after a somewhat heated contest a new town was taken from it which was known as Deering and extended from, and including, the sand pit on Brighton Ave. to the Portland line.

Westbrook, much reduced in territory, had now a population of less than 2000. But thanks to its magnificent water power and two lines of railroads its growth has been steady until now it numbers nearly 10,000 souls.

In the winter of 1887 there seemed to be a general conviction that the old town government was no longer suited to its increasing needs. After several meetings of the leading citizens and business men a committee was chosen to draft a city charter to present to the state legislature, which was promptly enacted. This charter was adopted at a special town meeting in February, 1891.

At the first election, held in March, 1891, Hon. **Leander Valentine** was elected mayor. Mr. Valentine was born in Saccarappa in 1814 while the new town which had just been taken

from Falmouth was still called Stroudwater, and he was fond of telling how he had lived in two cities, Westbrook and Portland and three towns, Stroudwater, Cape Elizabeth and Falmouth, and always occupied the same house. Mr. Valentine was identified with the affairs of the town from his youth to old age. He served in both branches of the Legislature and one term in the Executive Council. He was, also, for many years, United States appraiser for the collection district of Portland and Falmouth, an office which he filled most acceptably, and from which he voluntarily resigned.



While the various industries of our city afford employment to an ever increasing population, a period has been reached when persons of wealth and leisure need look no further for pleasant and attractive homes. In our churches the leading Christian denominations are represented. Our schools and school buildings are of the very best. We also have within easy reach the Gorham Normal School on one side and the well-known school, Westbrook Seminary, on the other. We have a public library, the gift of the late **Joseph Walker**, who was a former resident, which is second to no city of its size in the state. Our District Nursing Association and also the Health Center are not to be excelled in the state, in fact Westbrook was the first place in the State of Maine to establish the latter. Much

is being done for our young people in the way of Scout work, welfare work and community recreation. The clubs and secret societies furnish literary and social activities. In short, Westbrook has much to offer those who wish to locate a business here, with her

unsurpassed water power and her splendid railroad facilities, as well as those who desire to make this city their abiding place. Westbrook feels that it can point with pride to the past as a guarantee for the future.

Romero, Pickford, Vallee



LETTER FROM FRANK SINATRA TO RUDY VALLEE

July 18, 1977

Dear Hubert:

I received your letter and my translators are working on it for me.

I am sorry to hear you are in trouble in Las Vegas, but having been in trouble in Las Vegas, New York, Chicago, Hollywood, and more recently Australia and Berlin, I must tell you, you are an amateur at getting into trouble.

As for my helping to secure a booking for you at the Del Webb hotel in Vegas, don't believe everything you read in the papers. Mickey, it's true, has picked up some Del Webb stock, but I hasten to caution you that is purely on an investment basis at the present time. So we neither have nor seek any control of the holdings of the Del Webb Corporation. On the other hand, if you want me to I will have Mickey take my proxy to the next stockholders meeting and I will write on the back of it "Save the Vagabond Lover".

Quite to the contrary, I have never been "alienated by rumors that you preferred Como and Crosby to me...singingwise!!!" I have been very fair about that. I have played Bing's records, I have played Perry's records, and I have played my own records, and there is no question you have made a good decision.

But seriously, folk, if the Del Webb situation ever changes, I will get back to you.

Regards, *Francis Albert*

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ANSEL B. STERLING, DIRECTOR OF ART AND PENMANSHIP

Has background based on a Course at the Chicago Art Institute and the American Art Institute in Boston – Has also taught in schools in Dexter and Rockland.

Excerpts from article in the Evening News - Friday, May 25, 1928

It has been said of Art, that it required the combined workings of heart, head and hand. This being the case, the entire being of Ansel B. Sterling, who directs the youth of Westbrook along the path of art of and penmanship, is in the work he has so ably performed. With his heart in the duty of art director, he has been able to make some splendid advancement both in art and in penmanship, in which he also majors, during the five years he has been instructor in Westbrook.

Mr. Sterling was born at Peaks Island and is the son of Mr. and Mrs. W. Scott Sterling. Apart from the time spent in his education at Boston and Chicago; he has always lived in this State. Nearly all of his teaching experience has been in Maine. His married life has been a distinct help to his calling as he wed a teacher, Miss Gladys Willey of Saco, who was a University of Maine graduate and who is devoted to art as is her husband. Mr. and Mrs. Sterling spend their summers at the old home of Mr. Sterling's grandmother at Peaks Island. It is there that much of the best work done by Mr. Sterling has been accomplished.

The Sterling Honor Roll – To have ones name placed on an honor roll is an ambition which has been felt by many a pupil, and the Penmanship Honor Roll means that a record is kept of position, legibility, and improvement of the individual scholar from his first pen and ink writing lesson until he graduates from the high School, or until he leaves school. In connection with this honor roll, a file of the family names to which the pupil belongs is kept; this enables the instructor to show the parents at any time the progress which their children are making in their writing. This system was inaugurated by Mr. Sterling and is one of the advanced ideas which he has in mind and which are always for the betterment of his classes.

I wonder what happened to these records.

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HOW THE PRESUMPCOT BLEW UP THIS MORNING, CAUSING DEATH AND DESTRUCTION APRIL 5, 1899

The Engine Presumpscot blew up near Saccarappa on the Portland and Rochester Railroad this morning. The engineer J. A. Bickford received injuries from which he died on his way to the hospital. Fireman John f. Eldridge was instantly killed. Fire from the engine's fire pot was blown into two homes setting fire in them. Three boys playing beside the railroad track was (were) badly scalded by steam and water. The front of the engine was blown through the dormer window of a near-by home. No passengers were injured seriously.

One of the worst railroad accidents that this state has known for a long time, took place at a few minutes before eight o'clock this morning on train number two which left this city over the Portland & Rochester line at 7:30. Two of the most valued employees of the road lost their lives.

Train number two had left the depot of the Rochester depot at the foot of Preble street on the regular scheduled time. It consisted of the locomotive Presumpscot, a combination car and two passenger cars. The train was in charge of Conductor Frank H. Cleves. Everything preceded as usual, the stations at Woodfords and Westbrook Junctions being reached on regular time. Engineer Bickford, as was his wont, slightly slackened up in the speed of the train as he neared the crossing at Church street almost up to the station which was formerly known as Saccarappa but which is now known as Westbrook. Just what happened at this time will never be exactly known.

The engineer and firemen were attending to their usual duties when the boiler burst. There was a sharp report which could be plainly heard for a mile. The steam escaped in volumes and the pieces of the locomotive flew through the air in all directions.



The only man who seems to have been an eye witness to the affair, was C. T. Ames of Westbrook who had come down Church street as far as the railroad crossing and was waiting at that point for the train to pass by.

Mr. Ames says that the entire front piece of the locomotive was thrown up into the air like a rocket. It came down and landed plumb on the dormer window of the two story and one-half wooden dwelling house owned by W. W. Poole of the Haskell silk mills but occupied by Mrs. C. M. Palmer and Mrs. John S. Grant.

The 250 pounds completely smashed the window and the shock that was caused by its striking broke nearly all of the windows in that side of the house. The front piece rolled down from the roof and struck in the ground.

As it was flying through the air it tore limbs from several trees, broke two of the crossbars on the upper part of a telegraph pole and broke the telegraph wires. The train ran along for a couple hundred feet before it came to a stop a short distance beyond Brackett street.

The explosion had given a fearful shock, there was a great consternation among the passengers who rushed out of the cars to learn what had happened. The small crowd of highly excited people saw that something fearful had taken place. The big locomotive with the whole frontpiece gone, presented a wrecked appearance. The wheels had left the track.

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A LITTLE FLU HISTORY... The 1918-19 "Spanish Flu" Pandemic

Known at the time as the "Spanish Flu," this flu pandemic was the most severe pandemic in recorded history. It was caused by an H1N1 virus. According to the CDC, an estimated 500 million people — or 1/3rd of the world's population — caught the virus during the pandemic and between 50 million and 100 million people were killed. 675,000 died in the United States alone. Some victims died within mere hours or days of developing symptoms.



Victims of the Spanish flu lie in beds at a barracks hospital on the campus of Colorado Agricultural College, Fort Collins, Colorado, 1918.

The pandemic was so far reaching in part because of World War I troop movement. There were also no vaccines stop the spread of the virus at the time, no antiviral medications to help treat it, and no antibiotics to treat secondary bacterial infections that can come with the flu. All that people could do to contain the spread of the disease was wash their hands, avoid public gatherings and quarantine the sick.

2021 Calendars are available for pick up!

Calendars are selling fast but can be picked up on Tuesday or Saturday mornings between 9 and noon at the Society Room in the Community Center. The calendar is featuring a "Then and Now" theme with pictures and written information. The amount of information included makes it a mini history of parts of Westbrook. Well worth the purchase price of \$10.00.

President's Message

Hi everybody! This has been an unusual year and we miss all of you, hopefully 2021 will be a much better year. I am very grateful for our workshop staff that has faithfully showed up to work on Tuesdays and Saturdays. We have been unable to have in house programs, so we have resorted to recording them. So far we have a program on Johnny Cumberland, Westbrook and major league baseball player as well as a program on Halidon which was a Westbrook single tax colony. We are thankful to Paul St. Cyr for both of these. We will present them at a future date and are looking forward to g them on the Westbrook channel. We have additional programs planned. We are thankful for Barry Dodd and the City of Westbrook for producing these programs for us. *Happy Thanksgiving* and hopefully 2021 will be a much better year.

Mike Sanphy, President

Westbrook Historical Society
426 Bridge Street Westbrook, ME
04092 Tel: 854-5588