

Westbrook Historical Society

A Society That Preserves The Past

Newsletter, Late Summer 2005, Philip E. Curran, Editor, 17B Dunn Street, Westbrook, Maine 04092

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 Society shall work with other State historical societies and organizations in this field when called upon to do so.

The Society meets regularly at 1:30 o'clock on the first Wednesday of each month, with the exception of July and August.

Officers

President, Robert H. Smith
Vice President, Mike Sanphy
Secretary, Suzan Roberts Norton
Treasurer, Nancy Joy Curran

Directors

Diane Turgeon Dyer - Ellie Conant Saunders
Jane Gordon – Donna Conley
Immediate Past President – Betty Morabito

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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 **Jane Gordon** at **797-5536**. She will see that the person is comforted with a sunshine card.

First meeting of the season Sept. 7

Twenty-eight people turned out for the first meeting of the season. Donna Conley won a seat on the Board of Directors in an uncontested election that was overlooked at the Annual Meeting in June. The program committee remains unfilled. The board is temporarily performing that function from its ranks.

The speaker of the day was **Lyn McKenzie** from the Falmouth Historical Society. She is a former navy WAVE and is the author of the book, "Betsy," which is a story about the generation of the Great Depression and World War II eras. She spoke extensively to us on how to protect and restore museum collections, with remarkable ways to preserve and restore cloth, clothes, books, paper documents, and a slew of other items common to the care of a collection like ours.

Oct. 5 meeting

The speaker at the regular meeting on Oct. 5 will be **Kathy Gordon Gowen**, a Westbrook native who is prominent as a Civil War buff and historical re-enactor with her **husband, David**, with the Sons of Union Veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic. She will speak about historic period clothing.

New ceiling lights installed

Book shelves and research tables illuminated

Collin's Electric has completed the ceiling installation of three 500 watt flood lights to improve the bookshelf and reading area of the center of the museum, at a cost to the Society of about \$250. The extensive staging needed for such high-wire work was provided by American Legion Post 62.

From our collection

From the "Eastern Argus" Wednesday morning, Nov. 22, 1815 (Given to the Society by Harland P. Babb)

The friends of humanity are earnestly solicited to alleviate the anguish of a family by imparting any information they may be possessed of, concerning the person of the name of Samuel Stevens, by profession a carpenter, and who, in that capacity, served on board the Baltimore letter of marque* schr. "SIRO," which arrived in Portland about the first of May 1813. From Portland he went to Boston, from which time nothing has been heard of him, save a report that he there entered the army, and was thereafter seen in Charlestown.

The slightest information would meet a grateful reception by being transmitted to his wife...

* *Letter of Marque* – license or commission granted by a state to a private citizen to capture and confiscate the merchant ships of another nation; used extensively by the United States during the War of 1812 before the United States navy was fully developed.



The next president

Nov. 22, 1815 - The question is so frequently asked, "who is to be the next President?" that it is quite time this subject should be brought before the public for consideration. Men who think it of more importance to promote local and private views rather than the general good of the country, talk about a *Northern*, a *Western* or *Southern* President, according as their various interests are to be promoted – thank God the destinies of this country are not confined to such men. The man who has proved to us that he has no *foreign partialities* or attachments, who feels as an American – and as an American, is disposed to act on all occasions – who has rendered the most important services to the country, and who is the most capable of rendering all such as are required in the Presidential chair – whether he resides at the North or the South, let him be selected. – Such a man in the opinion of the writer of this article is, **James Monroe** – and although he resides in Virginia, *his arrangements for expelling the enemy from Massachusetts*,* when contrasted with those of Governor Strong's, are calculated to silence all opposition of a local nature.

* *This appears to be a reference to Monroe's conduct during the War of 1812, which had ended nearly a year earlier.*

School days

This visual arrangement of pictures of Westbrook schoolhouses and early students was assembled by Society



members **Ellie Saunders** and **Diane Dyer**, with an added chalkboard display drawn by **Suzan Norton**. It contains a taste of the Society's large collection of school and childhood memorabilia, and records

of first-hand recollections of education in early Westbrook. This display begins in time with the group picture of Rocky Hill School's class of 1911. It includes Class Marshals' batons that served to keep the graduating classes of 1942 and 1953 of Westbrook High School in step as they marched together to receive their diplomas.

Early lightening rod

(For drawing the electric fire from the clouds)

The brass lightning rod pictured here was given to the Society by **Robert Harmon, Jr.** The base for display was made by member **David Gordon**. The rod is said to have been made by **Benjamin Franklin**. It is one of three installed on a Westbrook house that was built on what is now East Bridge Street about 12 years after Franklin's theories about the conduct of electricity and lightning were confirmed as true. The rod was installed later, being of a design that was not manufactured by Franklin until after the Revolutionary War. Known as the *Proctor-Boody House* in earlier years, it was built in 1764 on land that was then part of the British Colony of Massachusetts. Following the American Revolution it became located in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, then later, in the State of Maine. It was located in the Town of Falmouth, then in Westbrook, all without changing location.



A condition of the gift is that Robert Harmon, Jr. be permitted to borrow the old lightning rod once a year to be used by the drama club of Windham High School in their annual presentation of Miller's play, "The Crucibles."

During the 1700's, when buildings were mainly made of wood, lightning was a major cause of loss by fire. The lightning rod attracts the lightning and sends the electrical charge into the ground.



Genealogy corner

John Proctor and his Wife being in Prison, the Sheriff came to his House and seized all the Goods, Provisions, and Cattle that he could come at and sold some of the Cattle at half price, and killed others, and put them to the West-Indies; threw out the Beer out of a Barrel, and carried away the Barrel; emptied a Pot of Broath, and took away the Pot, and left nothing in the House for the support of the Children: No part of the said Goods are known to be returned. Procter earnestly requested Mr. Noyes to pray with and for him, but it as wholly denied, because he would not own himself to be a Witch.

John Proctor was hanged as a witch Aug. 19, 1692, according to some sources. Others say his execution was by the crush of a millstone on his chest, which was a common method for getting people to confess to crimes during that period. His wife **Elizabeth** was spared execution only because she was pregnant. By the time she had given birth, the hysteria was over and she was not hung.

Proctor first came to Salem from Ipswich, Massachusetts in 1666. At the time of his execution for witchcraft in 1692 at sixty years of age, he was nearing the end of a successful career. He leased, when he first arrived, and later bought, a 700 acre farm, one of the largest in the area. He devoted himself to farming while his wife and daughter conducted a tavern business. He inherited a sizeable estate when his father died. His interests were greatly diversified and he attained a notable level of prosperity, stature and station in life at home in Salem, Ipswich and Boston.

A measure of the family's status is indicated when in 1711 the Massachusetts General Court paid compensation to the families of the condemned witches of 1692. The heirs of John Proctor were paid 150 British pounds, while the average for all the others was 21 pounds. Nevertheless, his son William, then 18, was torturously examined in prison, where they apparently hog-tied and left him in an attempt to get him to confess to his father being a witch.

The Proctors were given to sharp business practices

Some evidence exists that the Proctors were given to sharp business practices. In 1678, John Proctor was fined for selling liquor to the Indians.

John Proctor of this generation seems to have been an enormous man, very large framed, with great force and energy. Although an upright man (he was assigned a select seat in the "fourth row pew below" of the Salem meetinghouse), he seems to have been rash of speech, judgment and action. It was his unguarded tongue that would primarily lead to his execution. He was the first

male to be named a witch in Salem. In addition, all of his children were accused.

Over 250 years after John Proctors infamous execution, playwright Arthur Miller used him as a fictional character in a play that was to become a classic, "*The Crucible*"

John Proctor was married three times. Elizabeth Bassett Proctor, fellow victim of the witchcraft craze was the last, the mother of five of his children, and stepmother of at least five others. They were married in 1674 when she was 27 and he was 42. At least one of their grandchildren, Samuel, purchased and developed large parcels of land in Falmouth, Maine, including land adjoining James Winslow on the bank of the Presumpscott River, near where the Riverton Bridge now crosses between Westbrook and Portland.

This old house

Samuel Proctor, grandson of John Proctor of Salem witchcraft fame arrived in Falmouth, Maine in 1718. He was a man of unblemished character and a valuable citizen. He married **Sarah**, with whom he had nine children, daughter of **Anthony Brackett**. One of them was John, who later settled on his father's land-grant adjoining the property of James Winslow on the northerly side of the Presumpscott River. He built a sawmill on the Mill Brook, as well as a house between what is now known as East Bridge Street and Austin Street. The sawmill was in operation as early as 1753 and the Mill Brook at that time was called *Proctor's Mill Stream*.

In 1761 John bought an additional 10 acres from **Joseph Conant** that abutted the land he already owned at the river's edge. Three years later he built the house on this parcel of land that, much later, was to be occupied by the Harmon family at 684 East Bridge Street. He also built a bridge across the Presumpscott River, one-eighth of a mile above where the modern Riverton Bridge stands.

When this house was built in 1764 it had only one story. The second story was added at some later date. Inside, there was a secret passageway with stairs leading down by the central chimney to a hiding place beneath the stone arch supporting the huge chimney. This little room was built to provide protection to the women and children in case of an Indian attack. In later years alterations were made which closed the passageway, but the entrance closet by the chimney is still known as the *Indian closet*.



The graves of John Proctor, his wife Elizabeth, and other members of the family lie on a high knoll just

before the house, their stones shattered by vandalism, and scattered. However, John's stone is remembered from when it was still standing in Dr. Moore's time as owner of the house. It read, "Died Oct. 14, 1820 AE t 80, Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, yea saith the spirit for they rest from their labors and their works (?) do follow them" (From *Westbrook Cemeteries*, by Donna & Norm Conley)

The Proctor family occupied the house until 1838 when **Frederick Proctor** sold out. One of the Winslow girls, James Winslow's great granddaughter **Sarah Jane**, had married **Benjamin Boody** in 1830. They were the ones who bought the 100 acre farm from Frederick in 1838, which then became identified locally as the *Proctor-Boody House*. The graveyard did not go with the sale of the rest of the property, and remained in the Proctor family.

The house was owned for many years by Dr. Roland Moore, who restored and modernized it at great length. **Albert and Cecilia Harmon** bought it from Dr. Moore. They occupied it until the 1980's then sold it to Henry Gagnon. It was sold once again, and the rooms of this charming old house were converted to three rental apartments.

The condensed data from which the preceding three items were written in tandem came from: (1) various sources in the Society's collection, (2) recollections of Mr. Robert Harmon, Jr., (3) information found on the internet and, (4) "Salem Possessed," the treatise on the social origins of witchcraft written by Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum.

Church corner



Warren Congregational Church

The Warren Congregational Church at its corner location on Warren Avenue and Cumberland Streets, was dedicated July 8, 1869, a year after the organization of Warren parish. Warren Church was organized in September of the same year with a membership of 23, 19 of whom came by letter from the Saccarappa Congregational Church and the remainder from the Central Church of Portland.

Previous to 1865 no religious services were held in Cumberland Mills, the few families who were

interested in such services uniting in worship with and support of the churches in Saccarappa. In 1865 a prayer meeting was established in the village under **Rev. Joseph Danielson**, pastor of the Saccarappa Congregational Church and **Rev. J. H. Mordough**, who then resided here. These meetings were held from house to house and in rooms temporarily fitted for the services. They aroused a religious interest that was further developed by the revival which visited the Saccarappa Church in the spring of 1867. Meanwhile, the **Cumberland Mills Ladies Sewing Society** was organized March 1, 1866, with the avowed objective of "raising funds towards furnishing the first Protestant church edifice which may be erected in the village of Cumberland Mills."

The people then became aware of the need of a place of worship and steps were taken which led to the legal organization of Warren parish in July 1868. A year later **Rev. Elnathan Strong** of Waltham, Mass., preached the dedicatory sermon.

The people had already secured the services of Rev. Elijah Kellogg, who began his labors by preaching in the vestry of the unfinished church building on the last Sunday in May 1869. Mr. Kellogg supplied the church for a little more than a year. Because of his peculiar gifts in gathering a congregation, 13 members were added to the church during his pastorate.

The lot of land on which the building was erected was donated by **S. D. Warren, Esquire**, a member of Mt. Vernon Church of Boston, and owner of the paper mill in Westbrook. Mr. Warren also subscribed \$5,000 towards the building, which was expected to cover half the cost. Later, when it was found that the actual cost exceeded the estimate, Mr. Warren and his partners assisted in the payment of the debt and also substantially in proportion the expenses of the church. Additionally, he came up with a novel idea for raising money to help pay off the church's indebtedness; he arranged exhibits of a Swiss singing-bird, according to church records, with the proceeds going to the church. The first Sunday school class in Westbrook was begun in that same year, 1869.

In 1872 a clock had been purchased by a subscription by citizens and placed in the steeple of the church building. It was thereafter known as "the town clock." The organ was purchased largely through the efforts of the ladies in 1873, and in 1877 they purchased the chandelier.

In 1880 a parsonage was built by Mr. Warren, the use of which was granted the pastor, free of charge. In 1942, the Warren parsonage was purchased from the S. D. Warren Company. Up to that time, it had been furnished, rent free and heat free, for the ministers who served the church. Memorial chimes were installed in 1947, and a new pulpit, lectern and memorial organ were added in 1950.

As a note of interest, the church organist was paid \$52.00 for services performed during the year 1877, and the 'blow boy,' who operated the air pump.

When the church was enlarged in 1885 and a heavier and better toned bell was purchased with the help of Mr. Warren, the old bell was donated to the chapel at Sebago Lake Church.

By 1966 a lot of water had gone over the dam. Warren Church, then ninety-eight years old, was beginning to show signs of age. In June, in order to lighten the load on the wooden foundation beams, the steeple and bell tower were removed and disappeared forever from the Cumberland Mills skyline. In that year, 1966, the question of a merger of the Warren Church with the **Westbrook Congregational Church** on Main Street was first considered. Three years later the merger to be known as Westbrook-Warren Congregational Church was accomplished, and negotiations were completed for the sale of the Warren Church, the parish house and the parsonage.

The church was demolished and efficiently reduced to kindling wood during the week of April 24, 1978, one-hundred-nine years after its dedication. It had been the center of a vital force in the community during its entire life-span, a landmark, and a part of the lives of many people.

The parsonage was sold, moved about a mile down Cumberland Street, and reassembled as a private home. The more recently constructed **Parish House** became Westbrook's police station for the next quarter century and still stands on the former church property.

Samuel D. Warren dies in Boston

On Friday, May 11, 1888, Mr. Warren died at his home in Boston. The flag at the mill was lowered to half staff when the news reached Westbrook about four o'clock that afternoon, and a memorial service was held at the Warren Church on Monday, at the same time the funeral service was taking place in Boston.

An account of the memorial service tells us that "the church pulpit was heavily draped in black, and resting before it was a sheaf of wheat tied with a white ribbon, bearing the words, "At Rest." Eulogies were delivered "by employees and others, with broken voices and heart-felt sorrow."

Long before the appointed time," continues the account, "the people began to gather, and when the clock in the tower struck the hour of two, every seat was filled." The church remained "draped" for thirty days, in Mr. Warren's memory.

The beautiful Rose Window, which was in the wall above the entrance (and is now installed inside the

Westbrook-Warren Church), was a gift from Samuel D. Warren. It was purchased in Italy, and is said to be one of only five such windows in this county.

Stories of days gone by

Back in 1943 **Bill Clark** was 23 years old, the youngest man ever elected to the Westbrook City council. He was reelected continuously to the council until he was elected city clerk in 1955, and served in that position until shortly before his death. On the City Council with him, back in those years, was **Elmer Currier**, who became mayor in 1956.

Reminiscences by Bill Clarke

"We ran together," Bill said. "We got to be known as 'The Team.' In 1955, they came to us and asked if we'd run for mayor and clerk. Elmer said, 'Let's run'. But when it came to what we'd run for, he didn't care and neither did I. After a few days he said, 'I couldn't run for clerk, I wouldn't know what to do'. And I said I couldn't run for mayor, I wouldn't know what to do. Then he said, 'I don't know whether we're going to win or not, but we'll scare hell out of 'em!'" Currier became mayor, and Clarke became city clerk.

Both the mayor's and the clerk's job were part-time in 1955, and they'd arrive at the office about 3 o'clock, Clarke recalled. "Every afternoon we'd go to the courtroom and shut the door, and they'd think we were really doing something important. We were having cream puffs," he said.

The police chief's job was made permanent in 1957 and the fire chief in 1967. "Before that," Clarke recalled, "the mayor was elected and would appoint anybody he wished.* Sometimes I feel that worked better. They all knew they had to keep up, or when the election came they'd be out."

He recalled that Mayor Currier was at his house when they got word of the death of **Pierre Harnois**, Westbrook's first permanent police chief, who was shot by a man barricaded in his house in Limerick. That night, Clarke swore in **Eddie Caron** as chief when Caron got back from Limerick.

"When Westbrook started night police service, it was with one man in Cumberland Mills and one in Saccarappa," Bill said.

* *Billy Mitchell, for example, was Chief of Police in 1925-1927, and then again in 1933-1934*

That led to some reminiscences by John Hay

“I got through high school in 1928, and all my time in high school, **Tom and Eddie Hebert**, brothers, were the night policemen at this end (Saccarappa). They’d go out once or twice a night, and **Jim Fields** was at the other end.

“**The police station closed at 4 a.m.** There was no phone until 7 a.m., when **Bill Mitchell** came on. And if he was out taking care of traffic you couldn’t reach him. So they put in a phone at the foot of the stairs in one of the downtown buildings. But people would make long distance calls on it.

“**They had no vehicle.** I can remember a couple of times when they asked me to go home and get my father’s car and drive them over. I can see Bill, hailing a street car to go to Cumberland Mills for a fire,” Hay said.

“**They put a loud bell on the phone after a while,**” Clarke said. “When it rang, he’d have to leave off directing traffic and run in.”

These men of our own time contributed immensely to Westbrook’s history. They knew Westbrook as few others did.

Sixty years ago on the City Council

In 1945 all 13 seats on the City Council were filled by Republicans. They were Charles Ledoux, Irvin Finney, Everett Coffin, Arthur Knight, Elmer Currier, Thomas Stokes, Norman Swett, Charles Robie, Alfred Wilson, Alan Taylor, Donald Bodge and William Clarke. The mayor was H. Ordway Furbish, in his fourth one-year term. Elmer Currier and Alan Taylor were both elected mayor later.

Inside

Meeting Reports	1
Eastern Argus 1815	1
School Days	2
Early Lightning Rod	2
Genealogy Corner (Proctor)	3
This Old House	3
Warren Congregational Church	4
Tales of Times Gone By	5