

Westbrook Historical Society

A Society That Preserves The Past

Newsletter, Winter 2007, Philip E. Curran, Editor

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 membership meets regularly for business and entertainment at 1:30 o'clock on the first Wednesday of each month, with the exception of July and August.

Officers

President, Donna Cousens Conley
Vice President, Suzan Roberts Norton
Secretary, Evelyn Libby Meserve
Treasurer, Nancy Joy Curran

Directors

Diane Turgeon Dyer – Ellie Conant Saunders
Alwyn Waite – James Burrill
Immediate Past President, Robert Smith

Email address

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Tel: 854-5588

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 **Ellen Burrill** at **854-5897**. She will see that the person is comforted with a sunshine card.

Web site address

www.westbrookhistoricalsociety.org

January meeting

The program at the January meeting was in-house "Show and Tell" by several of our members, who presented some of their privately owned objects and related stories most interestingly.

February meeting

Christi Mitchell, architectural historian for the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, presented a very interesting slide show and commentary about buildings throughout the State of Maine and in Westbrook which are on the National Register of Historic Sites.

Finance committee appointment

Jim Burrill, left, has been appointed to the finance committee to fill the position opened by the resignation of committee member **Betty Morabito**. Here Jim is being greeted by committee member and scribe, **Bruce Allen**. Burrill is also a member of the board of directors.



New Members

Penelope Loura – Darlene Holston
Keith Nelson – Rev. Wayne Carter

Students Study Westbrook

Interview Historical Society members

The Society quarters were visited recently on a Saturday morning by a team of six under-graduate and graduate students from the **Salt Institute for Documentary Studies** in Portland. Their class assignment was to research and produce a documentary recognizing the earlier influences and present forces at work to produce direction and vitality to Westbrook's changing development. This picture is of our members, **Byron Dyer, Nancy Curran** and **Ellie Saunders**, being interviewed and recorded by students Sandra and Andrea. Others interviewed were **Phil Curran, Diane Dyer** and **Mike Sanphy**.



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Bulletin board

Coming Programs

March 7

Portland Trails is coming to Westbrook

Nan Cumming, Executive Director of Portland Trails will talk about the mission of Portland Trails and explain about their current plans for trails in Westbrook.

April 4

The Irish are coming

Eileen Eagan, Associate Professor of History at University of Southern Maine will speak about Irish groups' arrivals in Maine.

May 2

Northeast Historic Films

Members of the general public are invited to attend the Society's programs without charge, and members of the Society are encouraged to bring guests.

All historical information in this publication is derived from the archives of The Westbrook Historical Society, unless otherwise noted

Westbrook Historical Society web site is reinstated

Newly designed and expanded



Westbrook Historical Society web site has been redesigned, expanded, and in general use since Nov. 30. In addition to our own pages which can be reached by far-flung computer users, it is now linked to the web sites of the City of Westbrook, our local libraries, and the extensive online resources and programs of all the important library and museum networks in Maine.

The new design was graciously done by Dr. Albert Parker, a physician now retired from a notable obstetrics and gynecology practice in Port Chester, New York. He is a cousin of our president, Donna Conley. Dr. Parker, now living in New Jersey, has freely given of his retirement time and skills to develop this excellent site for us, for which we are very proud and deeply grateful.

Presidents' Day or Washington's Birthday?

No one did more to put the United States on the path to success than George Washington. No one did more to assure a government with sufficient power to function but sufficient limits to allow freedom to flourish. No one walked away from power with more dignity or did more to assure the prosperous society we enjoy today. This is why Washington, and Washington alone, is the father of this country.

Celebrated as early as 1778, Washington's Birthday was by the early 18th century second only to the Fourth of July as a patriotic holiday. It was officially recognized by Congress as a national holiday in 1870. The Monday Holiday Law in 1968 moved it from Feb. 22 to the third Monday in February. Contrary to popular opinion, though, no act of Congress or order by any president has changed Washington's Birthday to "Presidents Day."

The above is an excerpt from an article in the American Legion Magazine entitled, "The Man Who Would Not Be King".

The kitchen cronies

From *When Antiques Were Young* (1786)

It is said that in the poorest house there were sure to be found a gridiron, a warming-pan, a pudding bag and a dripping-pan. The warming-pan presupposed a bed to be warmed, the gridiron some game to broil, the pudding bag a dole of corn meal, and the dripping-pan a roast of meat turning on a hempen string whose juices must be gathered without the loss of a single drop.



Club corner

Westbrook Kiwanis Club given beautiful silk flag

Westbrook Kiwanis Club received its charter in February 1926. The following is a report of the event in the Portland newspaper of the time.

Charter night of the newly formed Westbrook Kiwanis Club was observed last evening when over 200 Kiwanians and their ladies gathered at the Falmouth Hotel. There were representatives from all sections of the State present as well as those of District organizations. The dining hall was attractively decorated with American, State of Maine and Kiwanis flags and gay colored caps and streamers added to the gaiety of the evening.

Prior to the dinner, District Governor **Major Edward E. Philbrook** explained the duties of the officers and the responsibilities of the members as Kiwanians and the charter was formally presented to **President Edward L. Pickard** of the Westbrook club by **Dr. J. Edward Libby** of Saco, Lieutenant governor of the New England District. President Pickard, in accepting the charter, pledged the allegiance of the officers and members of the new organization to Kiwanis principles.



Mayor John Lawrensen of Westbrook welcomed the Kiwanis Club as filling an important need of the city and greetings of the Westbrook Rotary Club were expressed by **President Harry F. G. Hay** of that body.

Paul S. Harmon, vice president of the Portland Kiwanis Club, acting in absence of President **Edward S. Anthoine**, presented the Westbrook Club with a beautiful silk Flag, the same being received by **C. Omer Porter** of the Westbrook organization.

Thomas E. Babb of Worcester, Mass., International trustee for the New England District, was the principal speaker. He urged the Kiwanians to take a firm stand against reckless disregard to human life by speeding automobiles. He stated that legislation requiring pay in money for lives taken can never solve the problem but that the spirit of friendliness and service of Kiwanis can aid in changing conditions.

Music was provided by the Saco-Biddeford Club orchestra during the dinner. Perry's Orchestra played for the dancing which followed the dinner and speaking program.

Charter members of the new Westbrook club are: Austin A. Alden, Harry D. Brooks, William H. Cape, Andrew C. Cloudman, F. Harold Cloudman, Harry C. Crowell, Fred M. Eugley, Dr. F. Leslie Ferren, Oscar A. Flick, John R. Fortin, Stanley E. Goff, Walter F. Haskell, Dr. Louis L. Hills, Leonard T. Hoard, Dr. Ralph H. Hutchinson, John W. Knight, Eugene Lamontague, Benjamin T. Larrabee, Orrin L. Miller, Leigh B. Motherwell, Edward L. Pickard, Ernest O. Porrell, C. Omar Porter, Merritt G. Pride, Dr. Harold K. Rice, Arthur L. Saunders, Harry W. Saunders, Killey E. Terry, H.J.R. Tewksbury, Horace H. Towle, George H. Twombly, Hormidas Vincent, Leon E. Waterhouse, H. Leroy Welch, Dr. Ralph M. Whitney and Dr. John B. Winslow

History of the Pride's Corner Community Club

The Pride's Corner Community Club had a life span of less than 40 years. Nevertheless, during that time it played an outstanding role in promoting and maintaining the cohesiveness and social stability of the neighborhood, especially before, during, and after the years of World War II. The following, from the Society's archives, is a brief report of the earliest years of the club. Every Pride's Corner inhabitant was entitled to free membership in the club, and a flat \$1.00 admission fee to all suppers, dances and other activities presented by the club. The club had served its purposes well until it ceased activities in 1976 and distributed its remaining assets equally among Pride's Corner Congregational Church, St. Edmund's Catholic Church, and the City of Westbrook for the purchase of a fire-rescue unit for the Pride's Corner Fire Station.



Early in September, 1937, one of our local young men, now the **Rev. Kenneth Clark Hawkes**, who was acting as pastor of the Prides Corner Union Church, realized the need of some kind of a club in our community to promote good fellowship and sociability, and also to create a greater interest in the

church and its work. He talked the matter over with several people, and they decided to have a get-together to learn the minds of the people as to what kind of a club should be formed. An oyster supper was served in the Pride's Corner Hose House, at which time a committee was appointed to decide upon a date to call a meeting. Wednesday, Oct. 13, 1937 was set aside for a meeting of all those interested, same to be held in the Church. On her way to attend this meeting, one of our oldest and most beloved neighbors, **Wilhelmina Scholl**, was struck by an automobile and instantly killed a few hundred feet from the Church. This necessitated postponement of the meeting until a later date.

A second meeting was called on Nov. 10th, at which thirty-seven people were present. **Mr. Reuel MacKenzie** was appointed as Moderator, and officers were elected as follows: President, **Frank Weeks**; Vice President, **Arthur Russell**; Secretary, **Ruth Wheeler**; and Treasurer, **Ruth Weeks**.

It was voted to name the newly formed organization "The Pride's Corner Community Club"

It was voted to name the newly formed organization, "The Pride's Corner Community Club," and its chief objective was to aid the Church financially and otherwise. **Charles Thompson** was chosen as Chairman of the council of seven which was to meet every third Wednesday of the month to discuss matters pertaining to the welfare of the club. Throughout the winters of 1937 and 1938, meetings were held regularly in (**Leon Eldridge's** garage. As there were no heating facilities and no chimney in the garage, a parlor-type oil burner was temporarily installed by removing a light of glass from one of the windows, and replacing it with a zinc pane, manufactured by Frank Weeks, which gave vent for the funnel. This worked fairly well in some types of weather, but on windy days it smoked and it flickered causing such an offensive odor that it became necessary for the group to retire to the living room of the Eldridge home. Furthermore, the fire had to be started around noon in order to get a near normal temperature by evening. A collection was taken at each meeting to defray expense of oil and lights.

A box supper, a public supper, several birthday parties and even a dance with victrola music were among the activities held in these quarters. On March 2, 1938, at a regular meeting the need of a community building was suggested, and a committee of two was appointed to obtain figures and specifications. **Frank Foster** offered to give a lot of land, the same to adjoin the church property. This offer was accepted and plans were started for the building. In order to obtain a legal deed it was necessary for the Club to be incorporated by the state, and through the kindness of **Judge Wilford G. Chapman**, the necessary documents were executed.

The following five directors were appointed: **Charles Thompson, Harry Heald, Arthur Russell, Almon Wheeler, and Frank Weeks**. A building committee was later chosen consisting of **Charles Thompson, Harold Robertson and Fred Cole**.

At a special ceremony on Sept. 7, 1938, Frank Foster officially presented to the Directors a deed of the lot, this deed having provision that the building constructed thereon be used only by the Community Club for the benefit of its members and the neighborhood in the vicinity of Pride's Corner.

It was suggested by **Walter Webber** that money for the proposed building be raised by selling books of twelve coupons each, payable monthly, which would net twelve dollars each. Approximately thirty-five books were sold. Money as later borrowed from Nelson **Hawkins** and **Isaiah Hawkes**.

On Feb. 15, 1939 the club voted to sponsor the newly formed Boy Scout Troup #86 of which **Elmer Riggs** was to be Scoutmaster.

A piano was donated for use in the hall by **Mrs. William Cousins** of Portland. An American flag was given by Harry Heald. A kitchen stove was donated by Frank Foster. The **An-A-Sun-Ta Club** donated cooking dishes and decorations for the kitchen, and the Ladies Aid bought dishes and silver for the dining room. Charles Thompson volunteered to paint the kitchen, but inasmuch as he was unable to do the work himself, he hired it done and paid for the labor. The digging of the cellar, and later the interior decorating of the hall were done by club members.



Through the cooperation of the people in the entire community, a great interest has been created, and today, June 5, 1939 we have a most prosperous club consisting of 123 members.

This brings us up to the dedication of our building on the above date, which was a gala occasion with music furnished by the **Stephen W. Manchester Post American Legion Band of Westbrook**. There were several out-of-town ministers present as well as City and Civic officials, all of whom extended greeting to our Club. On the next day, June 6th a supper was served and a dance was enjoyed with music donated by **Frank and Bernice Bateman**.

Having spent all our funds for building purposes, the Club was unable to hire a janitor, and in 1939 Leon Eldridge volunteered to give his services. For nearly three years he did his work faithfully, tending coal fires and cleaning the hall. Later when we felt a little more flush with money, **Mr. George Cole** was hired as Janitor at \$10.00 per month.

Five hundred people attended the dedication of the Pride's Corner Community Hall on June 5, 1939, including speakers led by Westbrook Mayor Roscoe Libby and a large roster of other public figures and organizational representatives. Greetings were brought from Maine's Governor Lewis O. Barrows by Attorney General Franz Burkee.

written by former Westbrook High School teacher **Marian Vaeiletta Chick**. After her long teaching career was ended, she was a librarian at Westbrook High School for several years. She died in 1996 at the age of 92.

School Days



When Westbrook became a city in 1891, it shared a superintendent with Deering, **Mr. Frederick Robins** who had been the first principal of Westbrook High School in 1893. Westbrook thus at its very beginning as a city was one of the few communities which had a trained man over the schools. In 1899 96% of the superintendents engaged in other occupations; 65% of them were not graduates of *any* school. The superintendents could not be paid less than \$2.00 a day of service. Westbrook in 1899 paid \$650 for supervision.

Beginning in 1907 Westbrook and Gorham joined in hiring a superintendent. The first superintendents were their own clerks and stenographers. **Miss Mary Small**, head of the high school commercial department is listed as assistant superintendent in 1923. In 1924 **Mr. Guy Sinclair** was named as supervising principal in Bridge, Forest and Rocky Hill schools, and the superintendent had for the first time a full time assistant which later which is interpreted to mean a secretary. With Mr., Sinclair's promotion to superintendent in 1931, the position of supervising principal seems to have disappeared and since that time each elementary school has had a teaching principal.

Not until 1954 was the high school principal relieved of all classroom duties. In the fall of 1955 both the junior and senior high school principals were to become wholly supervisory.

In the early days of the city the school committee seems to have taken their duties as supervisors more seriously than today. There are frequent references in the high school calendars (in the "Blue and White") to visits of the school board.

Human nature being human, one realizes that superintendents and school committees have not always agreed, but no one would suspect it from most of the reports. However, **Mr. Keyes** in 1917 could not restrain himself from pointing out that the freeze-up during Christmas vacation had cost over \$100.00, considerably more than was saved in fuel by letting the fires die down.

The article above is a portion of the history of Westbrook's school system in the Society's archives,

School Committee would introduce drawing into all the grades

(Town Report of 1894-1895)

I hope (reported School Committee chairman **F. E. C. Robbins**) that in the near future it will be found to be expedient to introduce drawing into all the grades. At present it is taught as a regular study only in the High School, and to only a part of the pupils there. It seems to me that it would be possible to introduce, without great expense, some system of drawing that even teachers who have had no special training in that direction might carry on successfully, with a general oversight on the part of the teacher of penmanship.

I know that there is sometimes a feeling that these special branches, like music, manual training and drawing, may encroach too much on the so-called "regular studies." It is no doubt true that there is danger of attempting too many things and consequently doing nothing well. On the other hand we should remember that education, in the best sense, means not merely the acquiring of a mass of facts, many of which are sure to be forgotten, but the developing of intelligence and of power. And it is the fact, now generally admitted, that these special studies contribute so much toward this end that justifies the giving of some time to them, even if a part of that time be taken from arithmetic.

History of Westbrook previous to 1657

from *Narragansett Sun*
May 9, 1895

Squitterrygusset, was spared (from execution for murderous crimes to settlers) so that he could give to the white land speculator the first deeds of lands within our city. This sachem with the long name is supposed by the late Hon. William Willis, to have ruled over a tribe or clan of Abnakis, known as the Aucocisos, from which is abbreviated our familiar name of Casco. This is thought to have been the same tribe which fished and hunted along the Presumpscot river, and whose squaws planted, in springtime, at old Ammoncongan, and over which, in subsequent years, reigned the **half-breed, Polin** who was shot by Manchester at New Marblehead, now Windham, in 1756.

As localities in and about Saccarappa still preserve, in their local nomenclature, the traditions of the beaver, and as this animal furnished the most valuable peltry which the white trader acquired by barter from the Indian, it is probable that during the three years that **Walter Bagnal** pursued his calling on Richmond's Island, the Indian trapper and hunter was engaged in the extermination of this most interesting animal within our present city limits. I have often inquired, but with no satisfactory results, how and why the well-known Beaver Pond in Saccarappa was given its name. I assume, however, as perfectly reasonable, that some time in the past the beaver built his dam upon the little rill that emptied into the pond near the present dwelling house of **Mr. William C. Phinney**; and that the "Beaver-Dam brook" so called, on Longfellow street, within the limits of Gorham, was in their possession when the white settlers came, of the animals whose presence and peculiar industry suggested its name.



Other fur bearing animals, too, had their habitat within our present corporate limits, in those early times. In fact I have heard from the lips of a gentleman who has passed away within the last few year, that up to the beginning of the present century (1800's) the bears were so numerous in the vicinity of Saccarappa that they made

great havoc in the farmers' cornfields; and that a familiar mode of destroying them was by the use of a rude log trap, know as a "figure four." I remember particularly of being told that this method of capturing bruin was exercised by the **Johnson brothers**, whose farm was where the late Rufus Johnson lived and died, on Saco Street.

Besides the red deer, the moose and caribou, (which latter is said to be a first cousin of the rein deer), roamed through the virgin forests which were found by our ancestors, or grazed upon the open plains where the great fires had destroyed the trees and underbrush. All these animals were useful to the Indian; their flesh as an article of food and their hides for clothing, for strings for his bow, for thongs for his snow shoes in winter, and for covering for his canoes at all seasons.

But now the white man comes upon the scene, and this paradise of the Indian, which he had never appreciated as such until it was too late, - but with what keen appreciation would it have hailed in its primeval state by the modern sportsman who puts in his summers at Moosehead or the Rangeleys! - must give way before his devastating hand. Lands and the stately forest trees, that count so little in the economy of savage life, what visions of wealth and self-aggrandizement did they raise to the imagination of the European adventurer!