

# Westbrook Historical Society

*A Society That Preserves The Past*

Newsletter, Summer 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 – Beverly Marion  
Alwyn Waite – James Burrill  
Immediate Past President, Robert Smith

### Email address

[wsbkhistsoc@awi.net](mailto:wsbkhistsoc@awi.net)

Tel: 854-5588

### Web site address

[www.westbrookhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.westbrookhistoricalsociety.org)

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.

## Society's first evening program a distinctive success

**Suzan Roberts Norton** and **Gene Berg** are shown here after the special evening program on May 30 at which each of them traced the fascinating history of their ancestors as immigrants to Westbrook. Also contributing slide pictures and stories of the homes and lives of their immigrant families were **Diane Turgeon Dyer**, **Phil LaViolet** and **Astrid Jensen Meggison**.



The concept of an evening of entertainment in this form, which in this case featured families of French, Irish, Danish and German descent, was acclaimed as being hugely successful by all of those who attended.

## Next meeting, Sept. 5

### First meeting of the new season will feature biographer of Rudy Vallee

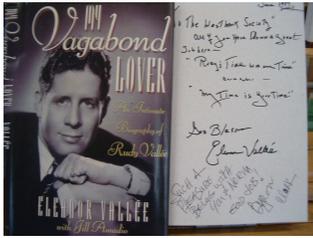
The guest speaker at the first meeting of the new season will be **Mark Chag**. Chag will be recognized by some of our members as a frequent visitor to our archives. He has researched a wealth of information about Westbrook's **Rudy Vallee**, and has become an authority on his life and times. He has written about Vallee in a series of feature articles in "The Advertiser Democrat" of Norway, Maine, and is presently engaged in writing a book about him.

## Recent acquisitions

In the process of changing the use of some of its floor space from the usual library activities to rental space, the **Warren Memorial Library** has thoughtfully contributed many Westbrook photos, articles and books,

and two display cases to Westbrook Historical Society. Among the gifts are an early real estate deed to **Colonel Thomas Westbrook**, a pipe that belonged to **Samuel D. Warren**, as well as one that belonged to Westbrook's first mayor, **Leander Valentine**, and a sword that had been presented to **Capt. J.F. Quinby** by the citizens of Westbrook, Jan. 21, 1862.

**Eleanor Vallee, widow of Rudy Vallee**, who is recuperating from a fall in New York City, sent a copy of the intimate biography she has written about her late husband Rudy Vallee, entitled, "The Vagabond Lover," with warm inscriptions from she and her present husband, Byron Clark, who had accompanied her on her recent visit to Westbrook and Westbrook Historical Society.



## School days



**Shirley M. Leighton, Jr.** was the son of paper mill worker Shirley Leighton and Julia Swift Leighton. He first saw the light of day in the village of Cumberland Mills, May 2, 1898. His education, begun in the new Forest Street School, led later to graduation from Westbrook High School in 1916, and eventually graduation from Floyd Training School of Boston and New York University School of Education.



Mr. Leighton died in 1974 following a successful and rewarding teaching career in the New York State education system. Parts of his papers were later donated by his family to the Westbrook High School library, which recently contributed them to the archives of the Westbrook Historical Society. The papers contain the manuscript relating fond memories and engaging stories of Leighton's boyhood during which he attended Westbrook schools. They were written for newspaper publication from his vantage point of more than three-score-and-ten. The following is condensed from portions of the original essay and published version which describe his move from the modern village school on Forest Street to the country school a mile away, and his distinction as school janitor.

## Look up to the lights of Temple Lodge

In the early days of Westbrook Historical Society, when the late **Howard Stevens** was president, the Society acquired several articles from an earlier time in the history of Temple Lodge, Ancient Free & Accepted Masons of Westbrook, which had been displaced by Urban Renewal from its quarters on Main Street. Among the items were two sets of lights that had illuminated the lodge hall for many years. One set is pictured here in our present quarters. They had been installed and displayed in working order in the old Junior High School by the authority of Superintendent of Schools and Society member **Harold Hickey**. They shone brightly at our meetings at that location until they became in disrepair.



After the Society's move to the Dunn Street quarters, the lights were kept in storage, apparently thought by everyone that they couldn't be fixed. Nevertheless, member **Byron Dyer**, a retired S. D. Warren Company electrician, took it upon himself to restore the lights to working order, display one over the office area, and the other over the refreshment area where they may be seen today.

## A pen picture of a rural school in Maine

**Cumberland Mills** was a progressive village. It had long since outgrown the one-room school. Thus it came about that I spent my first two school years in what passed those days as a modern, eight-room grammar school, equipped with running water and electricity, but lacking a cafeteria and gymnasium as did most schools at that time. The first and second grades shared one classroom and one teacher, but, for the rest of the grades, each had its own room and its own teacher. Following the second grade in this "modern" grammar school, my parents moved to a small rural neighborhood a mile or so away, known as Rocky Hill. I was promptly enrolled in the rural school which was but a two-minute walk up the road from our house.

I expected to be placed in the third grade at Rocky Hill, but it happened that there were no other third-graders that year. The teacher apparently did not relish the idea of

**Know Someone who may want to join?  
Pass this newsletter along to them**

developing a program of study for a class of one, so she decided that my training in the larger school surely had prepared me to cope with fourth-grade work. Thus, I skipped the third grade and never knew the difference.

Some rural schools had but one large room. Ours had two. One was a good-sized classroom; the other, a fair-sized recess and cloak room. The latter was heated by a long, low, wood-burning stove which took long pieces of wood. These would burn for quite some time, keeping the room comfortably warm. Under this stove, there was room for wet rubbers, overshoes, and mittens to be placed to dry; and there were hooks on the wall for hanging coats and hats. One side of this room was given over to a bench upon which stood the pail of drinking water. Nearby, hung a long-handled tin dipper. Along the other walls were settees for use during recess time and for the children to sit on while eating their lunches on cold, winter days. On mild days, everyone spent the lunch hour and recess time out of doors. Only the few of us who lived nearby could go home for lunch.

The classroom had seats for about twenty pupils.



The first-graders sat in a row at the front and moved back a seat each year; so, by the time they reached ninth grade, they were in the back row. In one of the front corners, an old table held a dictionary and a few books.

This was our library. Miss Naughton's desk was perched on a low platform so she was in a position to oversee everything that went on.

Off to the side, at the rear of the school property, stood a sizable shed in one end of which was stored the year's supply of coal and wood. At the other end were the "rest rooms", the same type of crude privies that all were accustomed to at home. There was a pile of dry sand in the shed; and, at the end of each day, the janitor lifted the seat covers and spread a layer of sand. At the end of the school year, a couple of men pulled in with a horse-drawn dump cart, removed the outside boards, and did a clean-up job. The privy was not the sweetest smelling place, but it was never regarded as a health hazard.

When I had reached the end of seventh grade, the boy who held the important job of janitor finished his ninth grade. Like many boys in those days, his school days were over and he was going to work in the mill. Since a new janitor would be needed, he suggested that I take over his job. This idea appealed to the teacher who considered me reliable and to me who regarded it as somewhat of an honor. My parents had no objections to any kind of honorable work; so I was given the job which I held my last two years at Rocky Hill School. I cannot recall what my pay amounted to; not much, I'm sure; but a little pocket money went a long way then; and holding this distinguishing job did a lot for my ego. I became a privileged character.

As Janitor, my biggest job was the care of the two stoves as long as heat was needed; this was most of the school year. The fire in the classroom stove was never supposed to go out; so I would leave the fire checked at the end of the school day and go home and do my chores there and eat my supper. At nine o'clock, I would take our kerosene lantern from its hook in the shed and return to the schoolhouse and get the stove ready for the night. First, I would open the damper and the ash door and wait until the fire built up. As soon as I had a really hot fire, I would shake it down until bright ashes began falling into the ash pan. I had learned all this at home, and by observing my friend's care of this stove.



I next filled the stove with coal; then, there was a long wait while the fire built up and the coal gas burned off. It would sometimes take more than a half-hour before the dampers and the draft in the ash door could be closed.

While waiting for the fire to build up, I would sit at my desk and, by lantern light, do my homework and reading. Usually the process from shaking down the ashes to the time of closing dampers and draft took more than an hour. Finally, hoping the fire would hold, I would pick up my lantern, lock up the school, and go home and to bed.

By seven in the morning, I would be back to get the stoves going so the classroom would be warm for Miss Naughton's arrival. Each day, I had to start a wood fire in the recess-room stove and bring in a supply of coal and wood for the day. Then, I dusted the desks with a feather duster, emptied waste baskets, and pounded the dust out of blackboard erasers. At all times, there had to be a pail of fresh water on the bench in the recess-room; therefore, both morning and noon, I would take the pail down the hill to the well which was on my grandfather's property and fill it by hooking the pail onto the end of a long pole. This was no great chore except in winter when the flat stone that topped the well was coated with ice. The square hole which long ago had been cut through this flat stone was large enough for a grown man to fall through. However, by using good judgment, I never fell in.

**I often tried to evaluate the education which I received in the rural school.**

I was, from the start, troubled about the method used for dispensing drinking water at the school. Much as I liked a drink of water from a tin dipper, I never drank from the common dipper at school. As janitor, I often took the dipper home for my mother to wash and scald.

Many jobs fell to the janitor in the rural school. Blackboards had to be washed, floors swept. And the old wall clock had to be wound. Paths had to be shoveled in winter. Looking back, I realize that the janitorial job

placed a lot of responsibility on a young boy; but I enjoyed it and never felt overworked. It never occurred to me that it was a big assignment.

Throughout my career as a teacher, I often tried to evaluate the education which I received in the rural school. Besides learning good sportsmanship, the basic rules of good citizenship, and the three R's in good measure, I was inspired there with the desire for higher learning. In a school whose library consisted of a few worn volumes, I discovered the joy of reading. And, aside from the class sessions when we had to prove that we knew our history, geography, arithmetic, and English, we had ample time to read and study while other classes were reciting. I liked to listen to these recitations and I see the value of this. I could listen to what the grade below was doing and get a free review of anything I had forgotten; likewise, when a class ahead of me was in session, I got a preview of what was to come.

*The original one story Rocky Hill School was built in 1875. In 1916, after 41 years of service, it was torn down and replaced by a large four room wooden building located a short distance south of the earlier school site. The second school was closed in 1974. it was subsequently converted to a private residence, apartments and a day-care center.*

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## Look-a-likes

Westbrook natives all their lives, **Roger Knight** (L) and **Byron Dyer** (R) pose for a look-a-like photo at the Westbrook Historical Society's annual meeting. Knight is one of the organizers and earliest members of the Society. Dyer is a faithful member and volunteer.



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## Club corner

### Temple Lodge Ancient Free & Accepted Masons

In 1990, **John W. Hay**, a long-time Westbrook funeral director, was honored on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his term as master of Temple Lodge. Hay got a plaque and gave a speech, reviewing the history of the lodge. Honored with him were four men who joined in the year he was master and remained members 50 years later. They were **Dana Babb**, **Ronald Wiggan**, **Glenn McMillin** and **Edward Jess**.

"Masonry has not attained its high standing without problems," Hay said. "In the 1820's members of the order were looked upon with suspicion and aversion, as a result of which no lodges were chartered in Maine between 1824 and 1848 and several lodges were forced to surrender their charters.

"Much of this feeling was sparked by the 'Morgan Incident'. Morgan, a western New York person of questionable character who had been denied the degrees of Masonry, mysteriously disappeared after having made outbursts against the Craft. Charges that he had been 'liquidated' were made by anti-Masons. Nothing was ever proven, but the issue was pursued with such hysterical fervor that political candidates were judged on the basis of pro and anti-Masonic sympathies.

"Not long after this wave of bigotry passed," Hay continued, "19 Westbrook citizens who were members of Harmony Lodge, Gorham, undertook to form a lodge in Westbrook. The town of Westbrook was at this time a large, sprawling area sparsely inhabited," Hay said. "It extended from the Gorham line to a point on what is now Forest Avenue, Portland, where the old power house stood at the corner of Marginal Way.

"The paper mills to be known as the S.D. Warren Company were not started until 1854, The Dana Warp Mills were not put into operation until 1866, when Woodbury K. Dana was mustered out of the Army of the Potomac.

"Historical notes of the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century speak of the 'low moral' tone of the village, but at mid-century the village was awakening to the need of institutions of good influence. It was ripe for the type of society that Free Masonry provides. The charter was finally issued on May 6, 1856. The new lodge, called Temple, shared quarters with Saccarappa Lodge of Odd Fellows. **George Warren** became the first master. In 1883, 54 members left to form Warren Phillips Lodge at Cumberland Mills.

"The year 1903 was an important one for Temple Lodge. **John Clarke Scates**, pharmacist, was building a brick business block on the site of the old Presumpscot House across from Bridge Street and offered to lay out the third floor to accommodate the Masonic bodies. Arrangements were immediately undertaken.

"A huge fair was planned to raise funds for furniture. It was fabulously well attended. Special trolleys were run from Portland. A great quantity of prizes were given – the major award being a piano.

"A panic was narrowly averted when the crowd on the top floor became so great that the walls on the lower floors buckled perilously and doors could not be

**John Clarke  
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budget. The success of this project is attested by the \$3,509.16 netted.

“Throughout its long history Masonry has been a most powerful force for the unification of mankind in charitable works and the performance of deeds of mercy and benevolence. It is our belief that Temple Lodge over its long history has measured up to this evaluation; it is our fervent hope that it may continue to do so with increased dedication in the years that lie ahead.”

### The Westbrook Decemvir Club

*Decimvir: (1) a member of a permanent board or a special commission of ten members in ancient Rome, esp. the commission that drew up Rome's first code of law or, (2) a member of any council or ruling body of ten.*

**T**he Westbrook Decemvir Club, which is composed of 10 representative business and professional men, was organized at the White House, Jan. 13, 1921. A dinner was served by **Landlord Boone** and the speakers of the evening were Prof. Bertram E. Packard, Assistant Superintendent of Schools of the State and Dr. John A. Hayward of Portland, both of which were former members of the Camden Club.

**The charter members were Rev. Jonas Taylor of Warren Church; Stephen E. Cordwell of the Warren Mills; Luther Dana of the Dana Warp Mills; Ralph W. Haskell of the Haskell Silk Mills; Harry W. Saunders of the Saunders Dowel Mill; Richard J. Libby, Superintendent of Schools; Paul Huss Smith, Merchants; H.J.R. Tewkesbury, Press; Horace H. Towle, Laws, and Josiah D. Winship, Real Estate. At the death of Rev. Jonas Taylor, Oscar A. Fick of the Presumpscot Electric Co. was elected to fill the vacancy.**

The club meets at the homes of its members on the second Wednesday of each month, with the exception of July and August with a dinner at 7 p.m. when a paper is read by one of the members, which is followed by an informal discussion. At the January meeting Judge Reuel W. Robinson of the Camden Club was the guest of the evening and read a fine paper on *The Romance of General Know*.

The idea of the Decemvir Club, is similar to that of the Rotary and Kiwanis in that it is composed of men of the various professions, is both social and educational, and is a splendid organization for the smaller towns.

#### Message from the editor

No one could have enjoyed producing the Society's newsletter more than I have. Nevertheless, the tenth anniversary of my editorship, with my recent completion of four-score very active years, offer excellent landmarks

for a graceful withdrawal in favor of fresh perspective and the ideas of someone else. The Westbrook Historical Society has long been one of my favorite organizations. I expect that it always will be. The value of its work is immeasurable. I wish my successor as editor to be as pleased with the assignment as I have been.

*Philip E. Curran*

### History of the Scates Block

By Nellie D. Spiller

**T**he impressive Scates Building, dedicated in 1903, was built by a prominent Westbrook citizen and businessman, John Clarke Scates. Standing on the site of the Old Presumpscot Hotel, looking down Bridge Street, it towered above the other structures in Westbrook's main business district. Indeed, it was the center of activity for nearly half a century.

**The old Presumpscot Hotel** was moved to Fitch Street and survived until Jan. 8, 1978. That day it was partly burned in the fire that gutted the old building which for many years housed the Men's Shop. Both these ancient buildings were scheduled to be torn down the following day as part of the urban renewal.

**Mildred Stevens Whitney**, born in 1885, widow of **Dr. Ralph Whitney** whose dental offices looked upon the Scates Block, remembers her father taking her to the dedication of the Scates Block in 1903. Such a crowd had assembled in the second story hall that the floor began to cave in. It has never since been level.

**The architect was S.W. Cunningham** of Portland, and the contractors were Gray (George) and Huston, builders, of Westbrook. Mildred Stevens Whitney's father, **Fred Stevens**, was an architect with the S.W. Cunningham Company for the Scates Block.

**Before moving next door in the Scates Block**, the Westbrook Post Office was in a small wooden building, left of the Scates Block. In the right side of the first story was Scates Drug Store, which about 1914 was sold to Raymond and Marr. Next it was Raymond's alone, then it became the B and B Drug Store and lastly, Tommy Lachance's Drug Store. This store then had a variety of uses, such as vacuum cleaner sales, a beauty parlor, and lastly Phil's Pizza.

**The left half of the first story** of the Scates Building was occupied by the Westbrook Post Office until 1936, when it was moved to the new Government Post Office building on Brackett Street. Postmasters who served at the Scates Building office were, **Benjamin J. Woodman**, appointed Oct. 9, 1901; **Clinton S. Eastman**, appointed May 20, 1914; **Carroll Richardson**, appointed

April 12, 1922, and May 29, 1930; **Eugene I. Cummings**, appointed Jan. 7, 1935; and **George C. Robinson**, appointed Jan. 9, 1936.

**The space in the Scates Block vacated by the post office** was then used for many years as an office for the Central Maine Power Company. Next it was used for offices of the City Clerk and Treasurer, until all the city officers were moved to the modern building (purchased by the city) located between the Walker Library and Spring Street. The Hub Furniture Company was the last tenant of the Scates Block first floor left.

**The second story of the Scates Building** was reserved for Westbrook City Offices with the Municipal Court Room in the rear. During the years that court was held here (until about 1965), the Westbrook lawyers serving as judges were **Tolman, Fabius M. Ray, William Lyons, Frank Pride, Wade Brigham, Armand LeBlanc** and **Francis Rocheleau**.

**The top story of the Scates Block** was occupied by the Masonic Order. Here the various affiliated groups conducted their meetings and other activities. The lodge room was almost majestic, with its Ionic-column decorations, arched windows and domed ceiling having a mural painted by **Ansel Sterling**, for many years art director of Westbrook schools. Marvelous views of the city may be seen from the windows of the top story. About 1920, a Masonic Corporation purchased the Scates Block from its builder, John Clarke Scates.

*The preceding article was written for the April 5, 1978 edition of the "American Journal" by the late Nellie Spiller. It was part of a passionate campaign to prevent demolition of the Scates Building by the trustees of the Westbrook Urban Renewal Authority. In spite of the effort however, amid resounding controversy, the building was torn down in late December, 1979. There had been an effort to put a housing project for the elderly, with first-floor stores, on the site, but Westbrook's Zoning Appeals Board turned down the plan on grounds that it would be a poor place to put the elderly. It eventually became the location of CVS Pharmacy, which now occupies the site.*

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## Ten years ago

**Officers of Westbrook Historical Society** when this newsletter was first adopted and published in September 1997 were:

President	Nancy Curran
Vice President	Betty Morabito
Secretary	Kay Sullivan
Treasurer	Jan Usher

Directors: Polly Hodgkins, Lillian Dyhrberg and David Gordon.