



## Westbrooke Historical Society & Museum

May 2023 Newsletter to Members

### A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT:

*Dear Members:*

*Our Historical Society is (happily) juggling a lot of projects this year, all aimed at preserving our wonderful town's history. In this newsletter, you will see what we are working on in the museum and in the community. I think we're on the right track and hope you agree.*

*There are many events coming up. I would like to bring special attention to our June 10 launch of Westbrooke's first history book for children, *I Live in Westbrooke, Connecticut*, written by Fran Russell, and illustrated by Bud Loomis, both longtime Westbrooke residents who know their Westbrooke history well! See our [Upcoming Events](#) to learn more.*

*Thank you, members, for your support. First, for your financial support and your votes for us in the Essex Savings Bank grant program, from which we received \$442.00. Secondly and equally, thank you for your compliments. I try to read all compliments we receive to our group of volunteers, who devote hours to our success. I can tell you that your words of support make a big difference.*

*Sincerely,*

*Marcy Fuller, President, Westbrooke Historical Society*

### AT OUR MUSEUM:

- Our museum is open every Wednesday from 9 to noon. You will find us welcoming visitors, offering tours, helping people find information, and (always interesting!) listening to visitors' connections to Westbrooke history.
- Projects to accession new items and update records with 2023 technology for our research center are led by our archivist Sandy Forest, with help from scanning volunteers Suzanne LePage and Karen Conkey. Sandy is also capturing articles from the *New Era*, a newspaper that covered Westbrooke in years past.
- Genealogy just got easier for us. Our society has purchased and added a new program to our laptop for easier genealogical research for our volunteers and for our members. It

helps, too, that our President Marcy Fuller is a professional genealogist, who volunteers her expertise free to the public at the Westbrook Public Library on the fourth Tuesday of each month from 6-8pm.

- Remember when photos had negatives? In March, Historical Society member Kevin Palm donated a box of old negatives of Westbrook to our Society. They are filled with memories of our town and will be officially added to our collection.
  - This summer our museum and our mannequins will be decked out to remember Westbrook's Grand Illuminations - celebrations of summer from 1884 to 1938, when shoreline cottages were lit up with Chinese lanterns after dark and families partied day and night. Secretary Gail Colby is our "set director" and Roberta DeLeo, our Textile and Clothing Curator, is "costume designer."

### **IN OUR RESEARCH CENTER AT OUR MUSEUM:**

- We continue to help visitors find information about people or places from Westbrook's past. Often our seasoned volunteers (ahem, Nile Barrett) know the answer from their heads! If not, we work on finding the answers in our research center. We have had questions about the old trolley station, Toby of Toby Hill, Westbrook's Stannard family, Salt Island, cranberry bogs, and many more.
- Different volunteers champion topics for research. For instance, Gail Colby is researching Salt Island, and Sandy Forest is working on documenting Westbrook's enslaved population. Topics like these end up as documents in the research center.
- President Marcy Fuller has organized all the books authored by people of Westbrook, surprising herself and others with a collection of over fifty books, now shelved and ready for researchers or readers.

### **IN OUR COMMUNITY:**

- **A NEW HISTORICAL NOVEL BOOK CLUB** has been formed through an initial organizing meeting in April. The group will meet on June 5 at 4:00 in the museum to discuss our first read, "The Four Winds," by Kristin Hannah. If you wish to join the new book club, please come on June 5, or contact our society by email.
- **NEW PROTECTION OF A UNIQUE WESTBROOK GRAVE.** In our museum, you will see a gravestone rubbing of Westbrook resident Peter Stannard, who died of smallpox, which is engraved on the stone. Peter Stannard's actual gravestone is now protected by a new strong and locked iron fence, funded by the Westbrook Foundation. Sandy Forest, our cemetery expert, has been working with the town officials, Cathy Doane, and John Lee to appropriately preserve and honor this unique piece of Westbrook's history.
- **OUR LONG-TERM MAJOR PROJECT:** President Marcy Fuller continues to work with town officials and community groups, like the Westbrook Garden Club, on the ideas for the use, furnishings, and landscaping of the **Bushnell House** at 121 South Main St. This historic property was donated to the town by Leighton Lee III in 2022 with the

agreement that the building would be used for historic purposes. The town is in the process of cleaning, repairing, and protecting the building.

- **1,000 FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS! We just (on May 16!) hit 1000 followers on our Westbrook Historical Society FACEBOOK page.** FACEBOOK continues to be an effective way for our society to communicate with our members and community. We hope people will post Westbrook historical photos and comments to our site. ARE YOU ONE OF OUR FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS? We hope so.
- **EVENTS:** We continue to hold monthly free and open-to-the-public presentations on historical topics in the Community Room of the Public Library. Many are made possible with the support of a grant from CT Humanities. See our UPCOMING EVENTS on the last page of this newsletter.

### **WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP US CONTINUE TO BE SUCCESSFUL?**

- **Attend and bring friends** to our museum and our events.
- Buy the new Westbrook children's history book, *I Live in Westbrook, Connecticut*, by Fran Russell, and read it with a child.
- Do you have an idea on how to involve more children and young people with our museum and Westbrook history? We'd love to hear it.
- Check Westbrook Historical Society **Facebook** page. Share some of your old Westbrook photos on our Facebook page. People love them.

**The Westbrook Historical Society Museum, located at 1196 Boston Post Road on the Westbrook Town Green, is open to the public Wednesdays 9-12 and by appointment.**

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**FACEBOOK: Westbrook Historical Society**

## UPCOMING EVENTS OF WESTBROOK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**MAY 29:** Following the 10:00 parade, on the town green, in front of the Veterans Memorial, President Marcy Fuller will give a short talk to remember and honor Donald Calderari of Westbrook.

**JUNE 5,** 4:00 pm at the museum: The new Historical Novel Book Club discusses *The Four Winds* by Kristin Hannah.

### **JUNE 10:**

- 10 am – 3 pm The museum will be open for **THE LAUNCH OF WESTBROOK'S FIRST HISTORY BOOK FOR CHILDREN, "I Live in Westbrook, Connecticut."** (Adults will like it too!) Author Fran Russell and Illustrator Bud Loomis, both Westbrook residents, will be in the Westbrook Historical Society museum on the town green from 10 to 3 with **first editions of the new book**, available for purchase and signing. The **original artwork** that captures our town's early history in story-telling illustrations and maps will be **on display** with illustrator Bud Loomis on hand to point out some clever features in the artwork you'll enjoy hearing about.
- This book launch is part of two other events on June 10: Westbrook's Family Day (by Westbrook Park and Rec) on the town green (12-2), and **CT OPEN HOUSE DAY**, a day when historical societies, art galleries, museums and more throughout the state offer free admission with special offers and events for visitors. On this day, you can also buy our popular *Westbrook History Happenings and Hearsay* book at half price.
- [A TIP TO HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERS: Thinking of parking, we are opening at 10 am, two hours before Family Day begins, and staying open until 3 pm, an hour after Family Day ends.]

**JUNE 22:** 6:30 – 7:30 pm at the Westbrook Public Library Community Room, a presentation by Richard Franklin Donohue on "Remembering Connecticut's Doughboys: The World War One Memorials of Connecticut." (Free and open to the public, made possible with a grant from CT Humanities.)

**JULY 13:** 6:30 – 7:30 pm at the Westbrook Public Library Community Room, a presentation on "Life at West Beach 1880-1920" by Westbrook author Claire Smith, drawing from her book *Georgiana, Like So Many*. Free and open to the public.

**AUGUST 19:** 1:00 – 2:00 pm, followed by reception: Architectural Walking Tour of Westbrook, led by Architectural Historian and Westbrook resident, Sebastian Liseo. The tour will start and end at the Congregational Church, where an after-tour reception will be held.