

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM

HARBINGER

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY WWW.WPHISTORY.ORG
PO BOX N188, WESTPORT, MA 02790-1203, WESTPORTHISTORY@WESTPORTHISTORY.NET



Winter 2020

ANNUAL APPEAL

Dear Friends:

We would like to thank those of you who have already responded generously to our annual appeal.

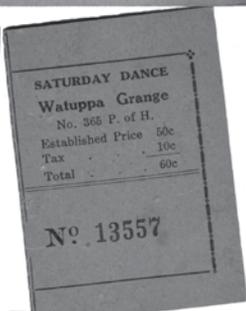
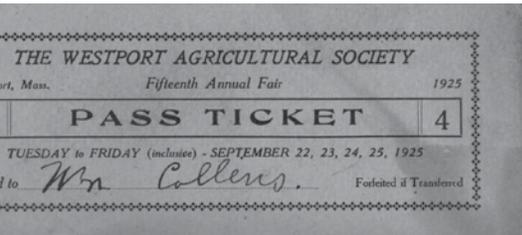
It is with great sadness and also great excitement that you are receiving this appeal. Our sadness is for the passing of Tony Connors, dear friend and remarkable President of the Westport Historical Society. Tony's quiet yet determined leadership during the past 12 years was a key ingredient in the growth and success of our Society. His true gift to us, however, was his love of Westport's history, and how he shared it with us through his writings, walking tours, and talks on a variety of subjects. Tony's legacy for us is his lasting contribution to our understanding of the town that we call home. He will be sorely missed.

Because of your past support that so many of you provide, we have been able to engage people of all ages with the rich and vibrant history of Westport. The coming year is no exception and is shaping up to be another exciting one on every front. Your donation will support the following activities:

- Publication of local history articles authored by past President Tony Connors.
- Our Winter History Forum, beginning in January, will explore a variety of topics including Westport's connections to Mayflower passengers, new insights into the life of Paul Cuffe and treasures from a collector of Westport postcards.
- A summer-long exhibition focusing on the history and associated memories, stories and objects connected to the old Westport Point bridge.
- Linking to the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower voyage, we plan a one-day tour of Westport's cemeteries, highlighting the stories of local Westport descendants of Mayflower passengers.
- A focused initiative to increase awareness of Westport's most significant historical figure, Paul Cuffe, within the school community.
- Regular activation of our newly trained gravestone cleaning volunteers.
- Restoration of the Bell School's belfry and replacement of the roof, as well as a cedar shingle roof at the Handy House (with funding from a Community Preservation Act grant).

And of course, our signature annual events—the House Tour, Artisan Fair and Halloween—will provide special Westport experiences.

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Don't forget to save your Lees Market receipts and bring them to the Westport Historical Society. Lees Market generously donates **1%** of the total receipt value. You can drop them off at the Bell School or bring them to a historical society program.



Gravestone Cleaning Initiative: Join Our Team!

BOARD MEMBERS

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MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Westport Historical Society is to engage the public in the exploration of the town's rich history and culture, to inspire a spirit of discovery through educational programs and encourage active participation in the preservation and interpretation of our past.

The Society collects and shares this history. Its goal is to foster the imaginative process of connecting to the past, making it relevant to our present and vital to the future of our community.

25 Drift Road, Westport, MA 02790
website www.wpthistory.org
phone 508-636-6011
email westporthistory@westporthistory.net

Find us on Facebook! 

THE WESTPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INVITES YOU TO JOIN OUR EFFORT TO PRESERVE WESTPORT'S CEMETERIES. IN 2020 WE WILL HOST A SERIES OF REGULAR GRAVESTONE CLEANING EVENTS. IT IS A REWARDING AND THERAPEUTIC ACTIVITY!

Todd Baptista admits his passion for cemeteries has been lifelong. A 52 year-old clinical pharmacist and town resident for 28 years, he remembers his mom bringing him for walks in a New Bedford cemetery early in life. The conservation and cleaning initiative of the Westport Historical Society is an ideal match for Todd's passion.

"I loved history, and was fascinated by the old stones. Each was unique and intriguing and many told stories. With the harsh New England winters, a lot of stones have broken, become weather-beaten, or even knocked over by lawn mowers. Some need significant maintenance, but a good number of them could simply use a good cleaning."

"For me, these old cemeteries are like a free trip to an American history museum. As I am cleaning, I find myself thinking of the individual buried there. The horse or ox drawn carts used to bring the coffins to the graves. The men who hand-dug these final resting spaces. The survivors and mourners and the carvers of these works of art that mark the graves. As the years of algae and mildew and dirt roll off and the names and dates are exposed clearly and vividly, all those folks seem to come alive again for me. It's a very rewarding feeling."

The Westport Historical Society plans to organize regular gravestone cleaning workshops in the spring and summer months. You can learn more about this project and other cemetery related initiatives including the plans for a tour of Westport cemeteries and volunteer opportunities on Saturday March 28. See the calendar of events for details.

CEMETERY TOUR OCTOBER 2020

The Westport Historical Society is sponsoring a tour of selected cemeteries on October 10, 2020, highlighting burial places of Mayflower passenger descendants in Westport to honor the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the Mayflower in Plymouth. We are looking for local descendants of Mayflower passengers who would like to share the stories of their ancestors or help with the tour.

Please contact Westport Historical Society for further information.



A NEW WALKING TRAIL AT HANDY HOUSE

A new walking trail at the Handy House has recently been completed by Eagle Scout Jay Raposa II. Jay is a member of Troop 100 which has a rich history of Eagle Scouts, and continues to encourage Scouts to pursue the rank of Eagle. Jay Raposa II has been involved in scouting since the age of six. "The journey for me was one I knew I wanted to complete after all the investment I've put in over the years," Jay said. "I couldn't have completed the project without the support of my father and the rest of my family, my friends, and the Westport Historical Society for allowing me to work with them."

Visitors can follow the wide trail to a grove of pines, crossing a bridge over wetlands. Along the way, Jay placed three granite benches to provide rest stops.

The Historical Society is extremely grateful to Jay and to everyone on his team for creating this trail which opens up new places for walkers as well as some interesting possibilities for the interpretation of the history our landscape. It provides a link to multiple themes of our local heritage from Wampanoags to the changing nature of our forests, and the impact of settlement on the land.

During the next few months, the Westport Historical Society will explore the possibilities for a rich outdoor interpretive experience for visitors. We invite you to explore the trail and to share your ideas with us.

Annual Appeal from page 1 continued

I would be remiss not to mention that your Board of Directors is in the process of methodically yet swiftly updating and modernizing our governance practices, particularly in the areas of developing our next generation of leaders and our collections policies. Both are essential ingredients for the historical society as we continue our growth, and our relevance to you, and our community.

Your gift to this year's Annual Appeal is necessary for us to strengthen our role within the community. If you are a previous donor—Thank You! Would you consider a move to a higher gift level? If you are a new donor, please understand that your participation is critical to our success. Whatever level you choose, you have our heartfelt thanks for the support and confidence you have placed in us.

Al Lees, President

Thank you!

DONATIONS IN MEMORY OF TONY CONNORS

- Robert and Phyllis Alison
- Breck Arnzen and Lani Peterson
- Buzzy and Dianne Baron
- Yvonne Barr
- Carol Bonnar
- Richard and Barbara Brewer
- Nils Bruzelius and Lynne Weil
- Normand and Theresa Caya
- BayCoast Bank
- Arlene Cloutier
- David Cole and Betty Slade
- Kevin and Nancy Connor
- Thomas Connors and Michelle Dolbec
- Michael and Carol Corbett
- Gerald and Vivian Coutinho
- Eric J. Dolin
- Kristine Donly
- Matthew and Christine Doyle
- Helga Faulenbach
- Kathleen Fielder Jenkins
- Colleen Stevens and James Francis
- Gay Gillespie
- Bruce and Elizabeth Golbus
- Andrew Goldberg
- Robert and Beatrice Gormley
- Emily Hoeffel
- Dawn Houliker
- Susan Hunt
- Janet Jones
- Debbie Klarfeld
- Robert and Naoko Kugler
- Albert and Cindy Lees
- Rev. Richard Loring
- Dwight and Doris Magovern
- Leo Marshall
- J. Terry and Judith McIntire
- Richard and Margaret McNally
- John and Carol Moriarty
- Susanne and Richard Peck
- John Rezendes
- Paul and Tina Schmid
- Tom and Kate Schmitt
- Garrett Stuck and Pamela Coravos
- Steven Syre and Laura Raposa
- University of Massachusetts
- Jeff and Elizabeth Wade
- Westport River Watershed Alliance Board of Directors
- Dale Weber
- Karen Winner
- Anne Connors Winner



WESTPORT HISTORY FORUM 2020

A WESTPORT POSTCARD COLLECTION PRESENTED BY PETER MEGGISON
Saturday, January 11, 2pm (snow date Saturday January 18)
Westport Public Library, 408 Old County Road

Discover the world of deltiology (the study and collection of postcards)! Deltiologist Peter Meggison will present a session on postcard collecting as a hobby. His presentation will include the history and development of postcards as a means of communication from the late 19th century, through the 20th century, and into our present century. He will share a wide array of postcard views from his vast collection including many views of Westport from the early 20th century. He will describe what deltiologists seek out for their collections. Peter Meggison is a Professor of Computer Technology at Massasoit Community College, Brockton, and has been collecting postcards for 60 years. He is a Westport resident and he has been a member of the Rhode Island Postcard Club since 1964. Suggested donation \$5.

WESTPORT'S MAYFLOWER CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN PRESENTED BY RICHARD GIFFORD

Saturday, February 8, 2pm (snow date Saturday Feb 15)
Westport Public Library, 408 Old County Road
2020 marks the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower voyage. Local historian and genealogist Richard Gifford discusses the many descendants of Mayflower passengers who settled in Old Dartmouth including the grandchildren of the Mayflower passengers George Soule, John Cooke, Francis Cooke, Richard Warren, William White, John Alden, William Mullins, Thomas Rogers and William Bradford.

While John Cooke was the only Mayflower passenger to live in Old Dartmouth (in the part that became Fairhaven), there were four children and dozens of grandchildren of Mayflower passengers who settled in Westport. Cooke's daughter Mary married Philip Taber, who built a grist and saw mill on the site that is now Gray's Grist Mill. His daughter Elizabeth married Daniel Wilcox, who spent much of his early life living among the local Wampanoags. Suggested donation \$5.

PAUL CUFFE: NEW INSIGHTS PRESENTED BY DAVID COLE

Saturday, March 14, 2pm (snow date Saturday March 21)
Westport Public Library, 408 Old County Road
David Cole will present new findings into the life and legacy of Paul Cuffe. As a researcher, author and super sleuth, David Cole has spent more than a decade setting the record straight

on over 200 years of material relating to Paul Cuffe, weeding out the myths and mistakes, and cleaning up the inconsistencies and unknowns. David Cole will summarize the various insights gained including new discoveries about Paul Cuffe's property ownership, identifying the home of his father, and most recently, writing about Cuffe's childhood on Cuttyhunk and his relationships with the Rotches and the Wainers. Suggested donation \$5.

WESTPORT CEMETERY PROJECTS 2020

Saturday, March 28, 10am
Westport Public Library, 408 Old County Road
Learn more about Westport's cemeteries including related upcoming events. Why and how are Westport's cemeteries (including smaller burial grounds) registered with the Massachusetts Historical Commission? Where can I find information about these cemeteries? What are some of the rules and regulations that affect cemeteries? Can I clean the gravestones and/or maintain a private cemetery? Can I be buried in an old private cemetery? Where do I report if I find a gravestone? Learn about the Historical Society's grave cleaning initiatives which will continue in the spring and summer. Get details about the Cemetery Tour of selected cemeteries on October 10, 2020 highlighting the stories of Mayflower passenger descendants. Learn about volunteering for these activities and be ready to contribute your own ideas! This is an informal discussion led by Betty Slade. Suggested donation \$5.

Coming in April (date and venue TBD)

MINING CLIMATE CLUES FROM OUR WHALING PAST PRESENTED

BY PROFESSOR TIM WALKER AND DR. CAROLINE UMMENHOFER
Climate scientist Caroline Ummenhofer and Professor Tim Walker discuss how whaling logbooks are providing weather data to document climate change and predict future changes. Captains and first mates of whaling ships kept a daily log of events including detailed records of wind speed and direction, sea conditions, and temperature. Moreover, whaling voyages covered vast areas of the ocean and provide data for remote locations. Ummenhofer and Walker have embarked upon a project to convert weather data into digital format, forming a team of oceanographers, climatologists, and historians to gain a better understanding of climate variability. Suggested donation \$5.

Schedule subject to change, please check our website for updates.



COLLECTIONS NEWS

WHS 2019.060 DONATED BY SUSAN COLLINS
An extensive collection of documents relating to the Lawton/Waite/Collins family.

WHS 2019.064 DONATED BY RED CUMMINGS
"Acoaxet Club, The Journey to 100" by Red Cummings.

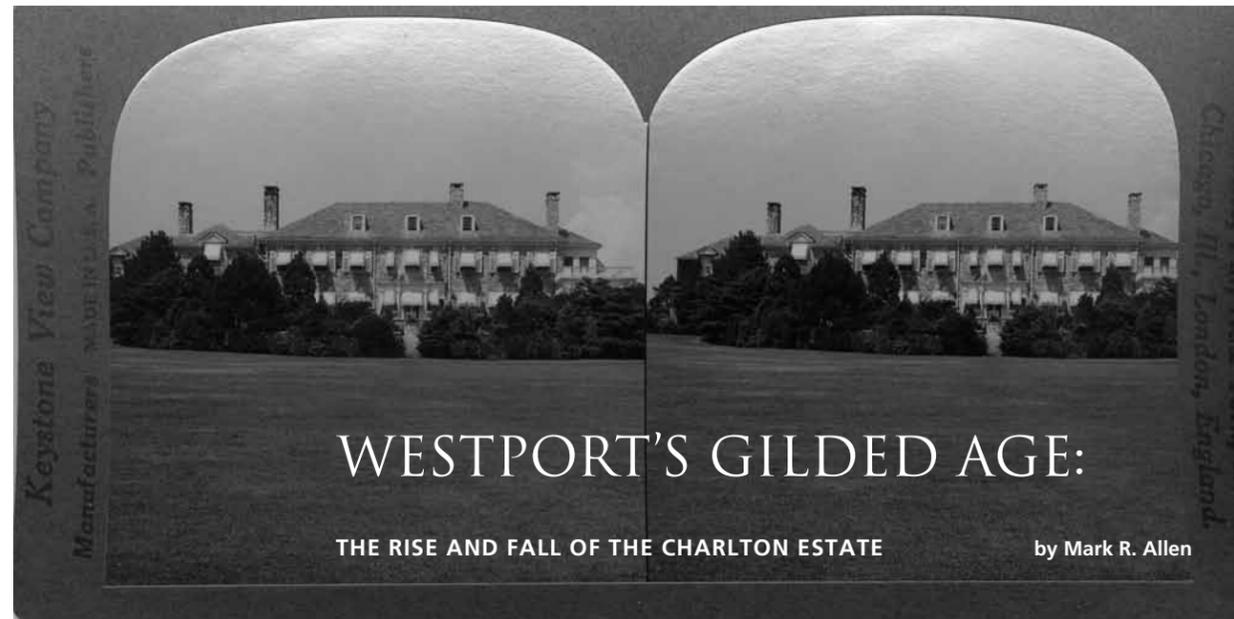
WHS 2019.058 DONATED BY MELISSA GELL
Nelson's Dairy collection including promotional milk bottle and dairy cookbook.

WHS 2019.063 DONATED BY ALBERT LEES III
Photographs of Westport, Head of Westport, and Westport Harbor, schoolbook, etching of Westport Point by Leonard Mersky, miscellaneous historical documents.

WHS 2019.065 DONATED BY PEGGY ROGERS
Scenes of Old Westport, postcards of Westport Harbor.

WHS 2019.066 DONATED BY VERONICA BUTLER
Materials relating to the military service of Graeme Butler, including slides of his service in Vietnam and Turkey, and a pair of goggles provided as protection during atomic testing in the Pacific.

WHS 2019. DONATED BY JILL GALUS IN MEMORY OF DANIEL AND PATIENCE SANFORD
Sanford Family collection.



WE ARE DELIGHTED TO PRESENT AN ARTICLE
 WRITTEN BY OUR HIGH SCHOOL INTERN,
 MARK ALLEN ABOUT A COLLECTION OF
 STEREOGRAPH CARDS DEPICTING THE
 CHARLTON ESTATE, ALSO KNOWN AS POND
 MEADOW. YOU CAN VIEW THE COLLECTION AT
 WPTHISTORY.ORG/CATEGORY/
 COLLECTION-SPOTLIGHT/

Pond Meadow, the Gatsby-esque mansion in Acoaxet next to the Nubble, is truly one of the most magnificent pieces of architecture Westport has to offer. Surviving hurricanes for the past 101 years, the estate has become a town landmark due to not only its extravagance but also the incredible view of the Atlantic from its grounds. While the outside of the manor is certainly splendid, it's the inside we now know more about. Going through a donation from 2008, it appears that we have a fairly complete photographic collection of the house during its prime in the form of 3D stereographic cards, in color no less.

Before discussing the mansion in any detail, we should first talk about the man who built it. Earle Perry Charlton was a self-made millionaire thanks to Five and Dime stores, which he started in Fall River and expanded throughout North America. Other locations included Los Angeles, Salt Lake City, and Ottawa. He would eventually merge into the Woolworth Company, taking an executive role as Vice President, and a check for \$6.5 million dollars in 1912. Charlton became a philanthropist, supporting various hospitals and other social causes, as was the standard set during the Gilded Age. However, just because a large portion went towards social causes does not mean he donated *everything*, as can be seen with his near iconic estate.

Construction of Pond Meadow finished in 1918. Charlton was incredibly liberal with his wealth—sadly not included in the collection of photos are pictures of his eight-car garage and bowling alley in the basement. The mansion had several libraries, offices, smoking rooms, and had a large conservatory and several outdoor gardens in the back. This is without mentioning the décor, which is simply beyond compare. A personal favorite has to be the wall mural on one of the staircases, so large it had to be printed on two separate stereographic cards. Many of the windows appear to have silk curtains, and there is one especially noteworthy pink room. Every frame, picture or mirror appears to be golden, and even the ashtrays have a shine to them. This is all without mentioning the astounding woodwork throughout the house, from the dressers to the tables to even the walls of the library. While each room has its own character, the house as a whole abides by a single phrase—luxury.

E. P. Charlton would die in 1930, leaving his estates (the others were in Maine, Pennsylvania, and Palm Beach) to his children, including his daughter, Mrs. James Charlton Masson. In the 1970's she was overwhelmed by not only maintaining the properties, but paying the taxes as well. Pond Meadow was assessed at \$253,800 in 1976, forcing her to pay some \$41,000 in taxes. That was



her final year with the property, as in June 1977 it would be sold to New Bedford Attorney Robert Xifaras for \$500,000 (over \$2,000,000 in today's money) in a fiercely fought battle with the likes of Liberace, the Grateful Dead, and apparently Elvis—who would die just two months later. Xifaras hoped to develop the land into a condominium block, with the New Bedford Standard Times reporting that he planned to build “no more than 10 to 12 homes and a tennis court on the available land.” However, while Xifaras did get the property, he didn't get anything inside.

The Pond Meadow auction broke the record for the largest auction in Westport history, and probably still holds it to this day. Lasting over two days, selling at an average of 90 items per hour, the auction blew right past the expectation of bringing in \$500,000. Anyone looking at the auction booklet both then and now gets a front-row seat into the, to quote the Fall River Herald, “eclectic” tastes of E.P. Charlton. Starting with a hair dryer, the auction included items such as German porcelain fruit plates, a camel backed sofa, a mounted sailfish, and, obviously the greatest prize of all, a Japanese bronze penguin. Thousands of local residents took free tours of the estate before the auction began, but few ended up paying the \$5 entry fee. Most of those who did also went home empty-

handed, outbid by the French and Italian collectors who crossed the Atlantic for this unique opportunity. The Metro newspaper opened their article in the middle of the auction, specifically as a Louis XV-style potty chair that started at \$50 was finally sold at \$150. Other notable items included a 417-piece set of Reed and Barton Francis I silverware which went for double its estimate, coming in at \$13,000, signed works of Charles Dickens, and the most expensive item was the Chinese coromandel screen, which was sold for \$16,000—today's \$67,791.16. However, in our story, the most important item was Lot 473: a Stereographic Library.

And thus, we come full circle, as this library must have been what we see in front of us today. These stereographic cards were printed sometime during the Roaring Twenties when the Keystone View Company became *the* premiere Viewfinder company after gaining a monopoly on WW1 cards. Although the cards are obviously from the Keystone View Company, the ones of Pond Meadow are missing many of their tell-tale signatures that can be found on commercial cards. Most importantly these cards do not have any indication of belonging to a particular series, and they lack any historic blurbs on the back.

Could it be that Charlton, in love with his

new estate, invited the Keystone View Company, at that point the most famous stereograph company, to make a collection of cards about his house? Again, judging by the other design choices made throughout the house, this isn't a great stretch. It seems likely that the cards were never sold commercially and remained in Charlton's private collection until the auction. While the origins of the cards are not known for sure, they certainly do give a grand look into one of Westport's greatest landmarks during its prime.

Although Xifaras' plan failed, the Pond Meadow site is today a condominium. While the many great gardens and even the whole conservatory are gone, the core essence of the property has stayed the same; this beautiful, historic mansion and monument to extravagance still overlooks the Atlantic and will continue to amaze for generations to come.

WESTPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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A gift for the
Westporter who has
everything!

From the Harvest Festival Collection:

Cow Over the Moon
by Betsy Macdonald

20-piece puzzle

Great stocking stuffer !

Available at Partners Store, all proceeds benefit
Westport Historical Society!