

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM

HARBINGER

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



Winter 2015, vol.48, no.1

Letter from the Director

Thank you for your support in 2014! Please help us to celebrate the past in 2015! We may live more than 200 miles from Wall Street, but let's talk about a return on your investment in the Westport Historical Society. While dividend checks aren't forthcoming (sadly!), your support of local historic preservation this year has reaped a bounty of rewards.

The public opening in July of the Handy House—our most treasured asset—not only sparked great interest in the historic Hix Bridge Road property, it proved itself as a unique resource to tell the story of Westport. Also, there is a new appreciation for the house and grounds as a community-gathering place that appeals to people of all ages.

More than 1,000 visitors explored the Handy House between July and October. Some took advantage of the "open house" on alternate Saturdays while others attended a pair of wildly successful events during the autumn season.

Over 400 people attended our first-annual "Artisan Fair" that featured local traditional artisans. And 200 little ghosts, goblins and princesses took part in "Dr. Handy's Spooky Skeleton Hunt" the weekend before Halloween. The success of both events is proof-positive that the Handy House is well on its way to become a significant addition to our community.

Besides the festivities at the Handy House, Society programs that explored our town's mills, neighborhoods, stone walls and historic cartways also drew scores of history buffs. Some informal adult educational opportunities, such as "Westport History 101," drew standing room only crowds (fear not, a command performance is slated for March), as well as "Colonial Conversations."

As we examine our long-term forecast, there are many challenges to be met:

- The launch of "Exploring History Through Artifacts," a new educational initiative for schools centered at the Handy House
- Phase II of Handy House preservation project
- The start of significant Bell School preservation work both for the building as well as for the vast collection it holds
- And, of course, to continue to offer a diverse array of programs!

But we cannot move forward without your help. We are deeply grateful for your on-going support of the Society. *Now, we ask you to join our Annual Giving Campaign with an overall goal of \$30,000.* If you are a previous donor, please consider a move to a new gift level. If you are a new donor, please understand that your participation is critical to our success. Would you consider a scheduled monthly gift? Donations can be made securely online via our newly-revamped website www.wpthistory.org.

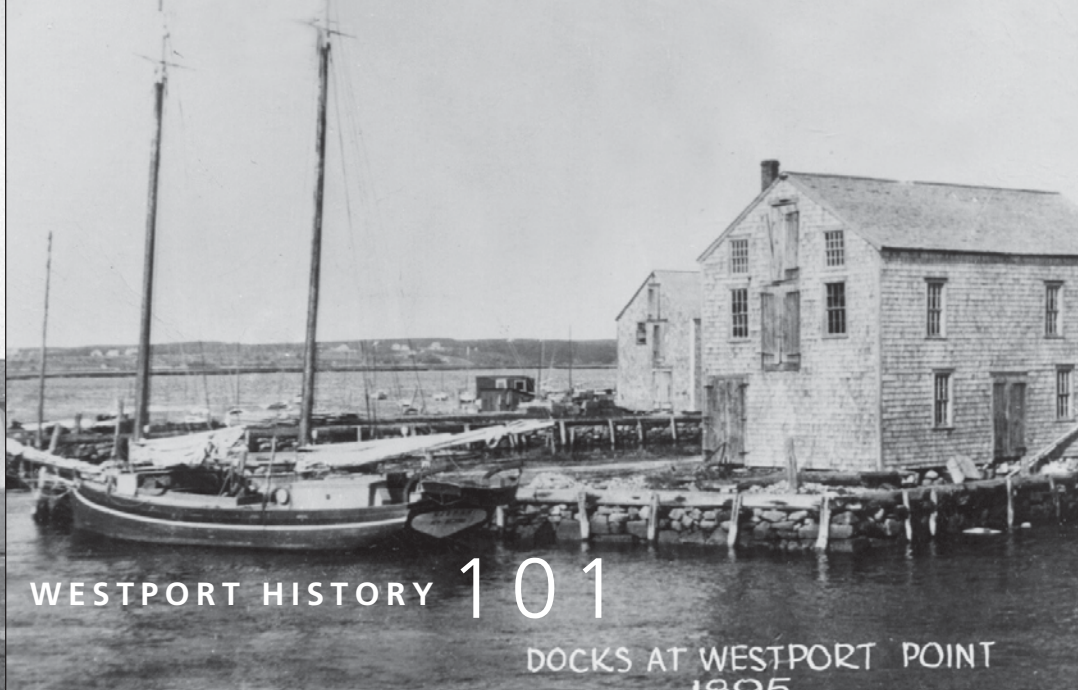
We are bullish on our ability to continue to offer you, supporters of Westport's historic preservation, the programs, events and tools to expand your knowledge or pique your interest in our local story. We thank you for your support.

Jenny O'Neill, Executive Director

This October Dr. Handy's
Spooky Skeleton Hunt
attracted some strange apparitions!



THE WESTPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



WESTPORT HISTORY 101

DOCKS AT WESTPORT POINT
1895

BOARD MEMBERS

President: Tony Connors

First Vice President: Yvonne Barr

Second Vice President: Laura Raposa

Treasurer: Al Lees

Clerk: Emily Sutton

Charley Appleton

Sean Leach

Howard Gifford

Ed Howe

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Jenny O'Neill

MANAGER OF EDUCATION

Kathleen McAreavey

BOOK KEEPER

Nancy Andersen

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.

The *Harbinger* is published by the Westport Historical Society, a 501(c)(3) non profit organization.

25 Drift Road, Westport, MA 02790

website www.wpthistory.org

phone 508-636-6011

email westporthistory@westporthistory.net

Find us on Facebook!



Besides Westport's incorporation in 1787, how much do you really know about our sleepy little town? Lexington, Concord and even New Bedford may have grabbed all the historic headlines, but Westport has a rich past of whaling and fishing, farming, manufacturing, immigration and even tourism that has contributed to the fabric of the SouthCoast region. Beginning March 14 on three consecutive Saturday afternoons, Westport Historical Society President Tony Connors will lead us on a fascinating journey through Westport's history. He'll begin with the glaciers that influenced the town's development then travel through time until the decline of the town's manufacturing base in the early 20th century.

SAVE THE DATE - SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 21, 28, 2PM-4PM

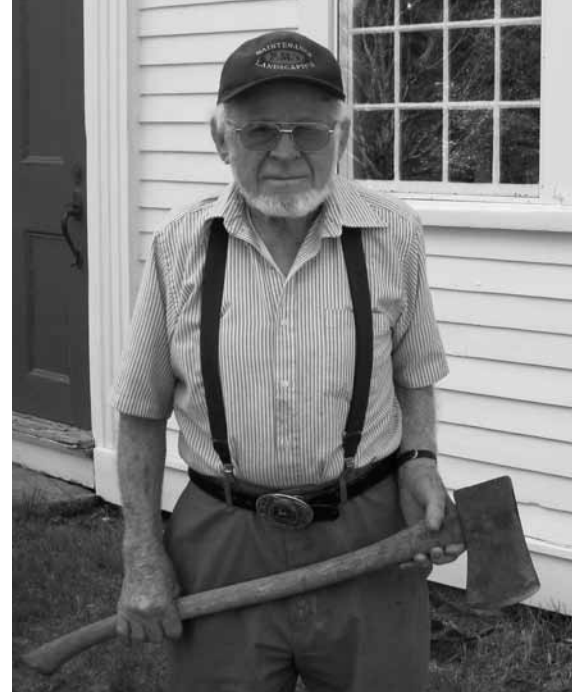
AT THE PAQUACHUCK INN, 2056 MAIN ROAD, WESTPORT POINT

Suggested donation per session \$5. Please PRE-REGISTER for Westport History 101 by contacting the Westport Historical Society at 508-636-6011 or by email at westporthistory@westporthistory.net. You can sign up for one session or all three sessions.



DO YOU REMEMBER THIS FOURTH OF JULY PARADE? VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO FIND OUT MORE!

Our new website features all kinds of images, artifacts, and stories. It presents a comprehensive history of Westport, provides updated information about events, and fascinating and fun highlights from our collection. You will find information about local archaeology, local history resources, oral history interviews, and in-depth Handy House research, such as the life and times of Elizabeth Cadman White. It is a work in progress, so look out for new content which is posted regularly! www.wpthistory.org



VOLUNTEER opportunities



CHILDREN'S HERITAGE EDUCATION PROGRAM

We are recruiting volunteers for the WHS Children's Heritage Education Program. We presently work with Westport third-graders, but, eventually the program will be open to a wider range of grades and farther reaching school districts. If you enjoy interacting with children, love history, buildings, farms, factories, the sea and all the wonderful stories related to them, then this is the program for you!

HANDY HOUSE DOCENTS

Anyone interested in local history and meeting new people should consider becoming a docent for the Handy House. Docent training takes place in late April/early May. We offer a flexible schedule but as a general rule of thumb volunteers must be able to commit to volunteering on one Saturday per month June through October.

POP UP MUSEUM PROJECT

A Pop Up Museum is a temporary exhibition that "pops up" in non-traditional venues, often centered around a theme or idea. A Pop Up Museum usually lasts a few hours on one day and focus on bringing people together in conversation through stories, art, and objects. They can happen anytime, anywhere, and with any community. It encourages visitor participation and also helps the historical society to provide connections to local heritage beyond the walls of our museum buildings. We seek creative thinkers to plan and implement and facilitate this project in 2015.

HANDY HOUSE GARDEN VOLUNTEERS

Attention garden lovers! Can you spare a few hours to help maintain the Handy House gardens and grounds? We need volunteers to weed, prune and water the gardens so the house will look in tip-top shape for our visitors.



RECENT ACQUISITIONS

The following are some highlights of recent acquisitions. We are very grateful to all who have entrusted us with these gifts:

2014.001 AND 002 ROBERT AND SANDRA TRUMP

Tilt top tea table, chest of drawers

2014.004 MIKE AND AMY CLARKE

Two seater school desk

2014.008 NORMA JUDSON

Materials relating to Paul Cuffe

2014.009 JIM AND BARBARA FARIA

Collection of newspapers 1798-1838

2014.012 CARLTON AND ALICE MACOMBER

Collection of photographs and newspaper clippings.

Axe used by Augustine Cabral to cut bushes in Westport as part of the WPA project.

2014.014 SHIRLEY DAVENPORT

Photos of Spindrift Restaurant

2014.015 LEE TRIPP

Rugs made by Mabel Ball

2014.016 LARRY AND SALLY BROWNELL

Collection of 18th century textiles

2014.019 ROBERT BARBOZA

Patriots of Old Dartmouth

WESTPORT IN THE

GREAT DEPRESSION



Cukie Macomber, Dawn Tripp and Tony Connors

Most of us know about the Great Depression of the 1930s either because we lived through it, listened to stories from parents or older relatives, or heard all the references to it when we went through the recent “Great Recession” of 2008, which had some of the same causes and unfortunate effects.

The Historical Society recently held a panel discussion on the Depression to learn from Westport residents who remembered—either first hand or from stories—how people survived the low point in our nation’s history. This program was moderated by local novelist Dawn Tripp, and featured the observations of Cukie Macomber, Arnold Tripp, and Dick Wordell, with additional comments from the audience.



Dawn Tripp and Arnold Tripp

On the national level, the Great Depression was one of the cyclical downturns the American economy has endured, only much more prolonged and devastating than previous ones. It was marked by very high unemployment and a famous stock market crash. The 1929 crash did not cause the Depression, but intensified problems that had existed throughout the Roaring Twenties—a decade of energy, expansion, and excess. The economy was already heading for a recession in the late



Herald News caption reads: SCENES AT WESTPORT MUNICIPAL BUILDING DEDICATION: Impressive exercises marked the dedication of Westport’s new Municipal Building Saturday. (1) Architect Israel T. Almy presenting gold key to Chairman George W. Russell of the Board of Selectmen. (2) General view, showing James Morris Post Drum and Bugle Corps standing at attention. (3) Frederick J. Dreyer, PWA representative, addressing the gathering. (4) Town Clerk Edward L. Macomber (right) showing citizens his new office. Others in picture, left to right, Mrs. Luther J. Shepley, Dr. Shepley, Samuel A. Boan and Charles R. Wood. (5) Chairman Arthur E. Seagrave speaking from steps of main entrance.



1920s; the crash of the financial markets turned it into a severe depression.

While the Twenties was a boom decade for some, farmers suffered, and the income inequality between the wealthy and the poor deepened. A frenzy of speculation seemed to overtake the nation. Economist John Kenneth Galbraith noted “the lunacy which has always seized people with the notion that they can become very rich.” People risked not only their own savings, but borrowed to play the market. President Herbert Hoover—hardly a radical—recognized the same behavior: “The problem with capitalism is capitalists; they’re too damn greedy.”

With so many people speculating in stocks, the market overheated and crashed in late October 1929. Since people had no money to buy products, industrial production contracted, which caused unemployment to increase, deepening the spiral of economic disorder.

Just before the crash, national unemployment stood at 1.8 million. By 1931 it was 8.7 million, and in 1933, the worst year, it reached 13.8 million, about 25 percent of the workforce. Such widespread unemployment brought homelessness, as families were left with no money to pay their mortgage or rent, and no safety net to support them. A pervasive hopelessness spread across the country as core beliefs—in democracy, capitalism, and self-reliance—were severely tested.

The election of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in November 1932 brought a dramatic change in government policy, with the key goals of Relief, Recovery, and Reform. New government programs would provide relief to the unemployed, sick, and elderly; recovery from the eco-

nomie downturn; and reform the banking system and the stock market to prevent a similar disaster from happening again.

Roosevelt’s New Deal introduced an extensive array of new programs, most notably:

THE CIVIL CONSERVATION CORPS (CCC)

- Employed 3 million young men in camps doing natural resources work
- Provided shelter, clothing, and \$30 per month (\$25 was sent back to the family)

CIVIL WORKS ADMINISTRATION (LATER WPA)

- Large-scale public works projects, such as buildings and bridges

FEDERAL HOUSING ADMINISTRATION (FHA)

- Regulate mortgages

FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION (FSA)

- Alleviate rural poverty

SOCIAL SECURITY ACT

- Retirement income, unemployment insurance

SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION (SEC)

FEDERAL DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORP. (FDIC)

Overall, the New Deal provided a great deal of relief, and some banking reform, but was less successful at solving the underlying economic malaise. It was only the unprecedented buildup of industrial production in World War II that truly brought the Great Depression to an end. That is both an indication of the depth of the economic and social catastrophe and a sad commentary that it took a devastating global conflict to end it.

How did the Depression affect Westport? In the 1920s, Westport was a quiet rural town. The big issue at town meeting in 1929 was whether to install “an automatic Stop & Go electric traffic signal” at Rt. 6 and Sanford Road. When asked whether the town should allow participation or viewing of sporting events on Sunday,

the citizens voted No—an indication of the staunchly conservative local politics. It was a growing town, with a population increase of 41 percent during the 1920s. The Depression dampened expansion, however, with a 6 percent drop in population during the ‘30s.

Politically, the town was Republican. Even when Massachusetts went Democratic in 1930, the people of Westport voted for the Republican gubernatorial candidate by a 2-1 margin. In the presidential election of 1932, the overall vote in the state favored Roosevelt over Hoover 51 percent to 47 percent, while Westport voted 62 percent for Hoover.

During the 1930s, politics had become scary, as Nazi leader Adolph Hitler rose to power in Germany, and more and more frustrated Americans listened to demagogues such as Father Charles Coughlin a.k.a. “The Radio Priest,” and the fiery populist Huey “The Kingfish” Long of Louisiana. It was believed that the two firebrands would join forces in a third party to challenge FDR in 1936, but Long’s assassination ended that threat.

Back in Westport, the first indications of economic distress came in 1930, when the town reduced payments for streetlights, town hall maintenance, and insurance. Between 1930 and 1933, salaries for most town offices were trimmed: Selectmen by 15 percent, Assessor 20 percent and Town Clerk 30 percent. When bridge tender Harry Shurtleff saw his salary cut by 60 percent he wrote, “I don’t see how I can fulfill my duties . . . as drawtender of the Westport Point Bridge under the present appropriation of \$75 for one year,” and resigned (which created an opportunity for a new bridge tender by the name of Albert Lees).

continued on page 7

HISTORICAL SOCIETY sundries

THE FIRST ANNUAL ARTISAN FAIR

at the Handy House last September was an incredible success and attracted hundreds of visitors. The historic house on Hix Bridge Road proved to be the perfect setting to showcase some of our local and regional traditional craftspeople.

Plans are underway for our second annual Artisan Fair on September 26, 2015. We would love to hear from any local artists who would appreciate a venue to demonstrate a traditional craft technique. Artisans are welcome to sell their wares, too!



A BIG THANK YOU TO SOME SPECIAL VOLUNTEERS...

Our summer intern Westport High School student Arianna Trahan, along with volunteer archivist Lenora Robinson, catalogued many of the photographs in the collection of Westport Fire Department. Their time and skills will ensure that this collection is both preserved and accessible to future generations.

We are also indebted to Arianna for her technical wizardry. She posted many of the oral history interviews from the 1970s on our website www.wpthistory.org. Do check them out!

And finally, we welcome aboard our new intern, Westport High School senior Elizabeth Broadbent. She is hard at work on a project to photograph many of our three-dimensional artifacts. Elizabeth has been generous with her time, photography skills and her invaluable Adobe Photoshop know-how. We hope to share some of her photographs on our website in early 2015.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU to the following local businesses for their donation of time and skills:

Jack Wilkinson of Jack's Landscap'n for rebuilding a stone wall at the Handy House.

Marie Savetierre and Elizabeth McFadden (Drift Workroom, custom sewing for interiors) for making linen curtains for the Handy House.

Tim Palmer of Tim's Lawn Care for ongoing care of the grounds at the Handy House.

Denise Bolduc for making a canopy for Handy House four poster bed.



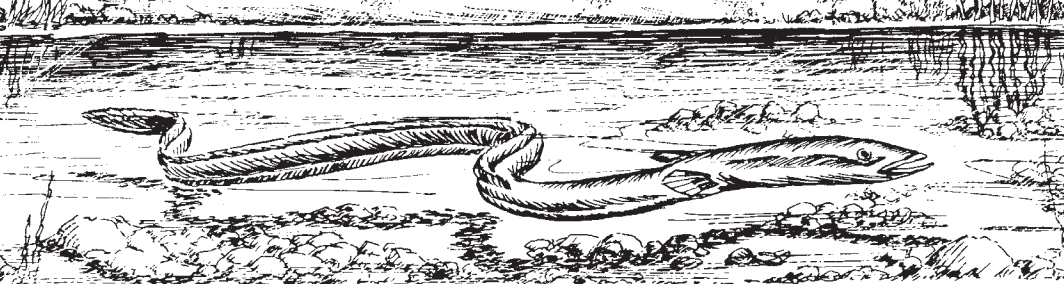
DR. HANDY'S SPOOKY SKELETON HUNT

Did you happen to see our Handy House witch flying brazenly outside the house around Halloween? Did the silhouettes of Dr. Handy and his patient who appeared in the windows at night startle you?

We welcomed hundreds of local kiddies, dressed as skeletons, princesses, cowboys and even surgeons during Dr. Handy's Spooky Skeleton Hunt back in October.

The Historical Society is looking for volunteers for next year's Halloween event. It's a great opportunity for our creative members to help decorate the Handy House for Halloween.





continued from page 5

In addition to wages being cut, many people lost their jobs. The Westport Manufacturing Co., with cotton factories on Rt. 6 and Forge Road, had been in business since 1855 and was the largest employer in town. The textile business was already in trouble before the crash, and the extended Depression forced the company to declare bankruptcy in 1938. (That same year Westport endured a devastating hurricane, adding to her residents' economic and emotional woes.)

New Deal programs brought some relief to Westport. The Civil Works Administration (later known as the WPA), a short-term program to get people working, employed 171 local men, mostly in roadwork, drainage, and river dredging projects. Seventeen Westport boys joined the Civil Conservation Corps and helped support their families. The federal government, through the Public Works Administration, also contributed \$32,850 (45 percent) toward a new town hall. At the dedication in November 1939, it was noted that much of Westport's contribution came back to the town in labor, materials, and machinery hire. Westporters put in 12,801 hours of labor on the new building—a much needed boost to the local economy.

The Great Depression persisted until the United States greatly increased industrial production for World War II. Of the 524 men and women from Westport who served in the military, 11 were killed and many more wounded. The ordeal of the Depression was over, but now Americans would have to face four long years of a different sort of hardship.

As we listened to people who remembered the Depression in Westport, it became clear that many families were able to survive by making use of the town's natural resources. Farms produced abundant

vegetables, meat, eggs, and milk. There was hunting and trapping in the woods. The rivers and ocean teemed with fish. It was a barter economy, with little cash. Some families "lived off the river," catching eels and trading them for flour, sugar and other needs. Times were hard, they said, but we were resourceful and we managed. Certainly in places like America's "Dust Bowl" or in cities, there were few resources to exploit, but in resource-rich Westport, most people got by.

Still, federal, state, and local programs helped. What is now the fish market in Central Village was a clothing distribution center for the poor, run by Sam Boan. People remembered bread lines and soup kitchens, mostly operated by churches. The Poor Farm, which had been active for 100 years, continued to take in the homeless. Al Lees III remembered how his grandfather had a government contract to cut wood on his family's woodlots and deliver free firewood to needy residents from Sherman Hill to the Point. Taking advantage of the town's natural resources, and through generosity and a bit of help from the New Deal, the people of Westport survived the Great Depression.

—Tony Connors

Please visit our website to read more about the Great Depression in Westport.

We would love to hear your stories about life in Westport during the Great Depression. We would be interested in photos, letters, diaries or written reminiscences about this era.

Above illustration by Carlos Perez from *Pa & I: Memoirs of a Country Boy at Westport Point* by Carlton T. Manchester, Sr.

Support LOCAL HISTORY!

The Westport Historical Society is supported by donations from individuals, foundations and businesses who care about preserving the special heritage of Westport. In addition to joining the Historical Society as a member, please consider these other ways you can support our mission:

CONTRIBUTIONS IN HONOR OR MEMORIAL GIFTS

Honor a friend or relative, commemorate a special anniversary or mark the passing of a loved one with a contribution.

BEQUESTS

Leave a lasting legacy for the future by naming the Historical Society as a beneficiary in your will.

CORPORATE MATCHING GIFTS

Please check with your employer to see if they offer a matching gift program.

BUSINESS SPONSORSHIPS

The Historical Society offers local businesses many different levels of sponsorship and recognition.

Thank you

TO OUR BUSINESSES MEMBERS FOR THEIR SUPPORT:

Tim's Lawn Care
Country Woolens
Comfort of Touch
Sisters of Solace
Bradshaw Insurance
Lees Market
Jack's Landscaping and Lawn Service
Even Keel Realty
Gray's Daily Grind and Gray's Gristmill
Geraldine Millham Design
Partners Village Store
Bartlett Tree Service
Baycoast Bank
Village Plumbing
T.F. Morra Tree Care
Drift Workroom Custom Sewing for Interiors

WESTPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
25 DRIFT ROAD, PO BOX N188, WESTPORT, MA 02790

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage
PAID
Fall River MA
Permit No.323

join us!
MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

- ☐ INDIVIDUAL \$20
- ☐ FAMILY \$35
- ☐ CONTRIBUTING \$70
- ☐ SUSTAINING \$200
- ☐ SPECIAL GIFT \$ _____

Please make check payable to and mail to:
WESTPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
25 DRIFT ROAD, PO BOX N188
WESTPORT, MA 02790

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____

EMAIL _____



HANDY HOUSE ... OPENING DOORWAYS **DONATION FORM**

Donation \$ _____

Please use my/our gift where it is most needed ☐, or for the following project:

CONTACT INFORMATION

DONOR NAME _____ EMAIL _____

CONTACT PERSON (IF DONOR IS AN ORGANIZATION) _____ EMAIL _____

STREET/PO BOX _____ PHONE _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

CHECK ENCLOSED ☐ (please make checks payable to Westport Historical Society)
OR CHARGE MY ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ Amex

CARD NUMBER _____

EXPIRATION DATE _____

PRINT NAME OF CARD HOLDER _____

SIGNATURE _____

To donate securities or stocks or to make a pledge, please contact Jenny O'Neill
at the Westport Historical Society at 508-636-6011.

Please list donation in publications as a gift from:

MAIL TO: Westport Historical Society, PO Box N188, Westport MA 02790

thank you!