

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM

Winter 2019

HARBINGER

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



ANNUAL APPEAL

Many of you have already responded generously to our annual appeal. Thank you!

We are excited to share some of the questions that drive our strategic plan for the next three years and we hope that you will consider a donation to the annual fund to support our efforts.

WHAT IS THE BEST USE OF THE BELL SCHOOLHOUSE? As our year-round headquarters, the Bell School is a conspicuous symbol of the WHS. Its location at the Head of Westport is advantageous and its interior spaces offer great potential for meeting the current needs of the Historical Society for office, exhibition and collections storage. We will review the existing use of space within the Bell School, re-imagine interpretative opportunities and prioritize structural repairs.

CAN WE EXPAND AND IMPROVE STORAGE SPACE DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF OUR COLLECTIONS? Fortunately, much of the collection is catalogued and accessible through an online database, and now priority must be given to the physical conditions in which the collection is stored. Our goal includes the creation of a long-term storage plan for the collection and addressing preservation needs of endangered and underutilized collections.

CAN WE ENSURE ONGOING RELEVANCE TO OUR COMMUNITY? We are known for our active, year-round schedule of lectures, exhibitions, tours, in-school programs and annual events such as the Artisan Fair. However, to ensure our ongoing relevance, the WHS must strive to broaden its audience, expand visibility and leverage the Handy House to its full extent. A new initiative, exploring the Wampanoag heritage of Westport, is already underway with programming to begin in 2019. This will be bolstered by diversification of interpretive techniques, community outreach and by developing a marketing strategy to attract visitors to the Handy House.

CAN WE STRENGTHEN THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY TO MEET FUTURE NEEDS? The people (board, staff, committees, and volunteers) who will implement this plan must be adequately supported. There is a need to involve a larger, more diverse group of individuals at all levels of the organization. We will put in place an organizational succession plan, strengthen committees, and, most importantly, provide additional support for the Executive Director by hiring a part-time administrative assistant.

Your gift to this year's Annual Appeal will continue to move us towards the future! We welcome your response to the strategic plan and encourage you to read the full version on our website. We remain deeply grateful for your on-going support of the WHS. If you are a new donor, please understand that your participation is critical to our success. Donations can be made securely at: www.wpthistory.org.

Thank you.



Read about Elvira Smith's legacy on p.3



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.



THE WESTPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



BOARD MEMBERS

President: Tony Connors

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Jenny O'Neill

MANAGER OF EDUCATION

Kathleen McAreavey

BOOKKEEPER

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.

25 Drift Road, Westport, MA 02790

website www.wpthistory.org

phone 508-636-6011

email westporthistory@westporthistory.net

Find us on Facebook!



Winter History Forum 2019

A WALK DOWN OLD HORSENECK BEACH PRESENTED BY DAVID JONES

Saturday, January 12, 2pm (Snow date Saturday, January 19, 2pm)

Westport Public Library, 408 Old County Road, Westport, MA

Postcard collector David Jones presents a visual walk down old Horseneck Beach, featuring a newly discovered collection of historic photographs by Clarence Williston, music teacher, photographer and East Beach summer resident. David Jones has conducted extensive research to reconstruct the pre-hurricane beach using old photos, postcards and maps. This program will provide an opportunity to view rarely seen images of East Beach and to rediscover the history of a community that was wiped out by the hurricane of 1938. Suggested donation \$5.

LAND SURVEYING, ELLIS BRIGHTMAN, AND STONE WALLS PRESENTED BY SEAN LEACH

Saturday, February 9, 2pm (Snow date Saturday, February 16, 2pm)

Westport Public Library, 408 Old County Road, Westport, MA

This program will highlight the importance of colonial land surveying and the historical significance of original stone walls, using the Ellis Brightman Farm, 533 Division Road, as a case study. Professional land surveyor Sean Leach will explore how land surveyors utilize the survey of original parcels of land and how they construct the deeds and ownership. This program will also explore the evolution of stone walls and highlight their important role as endangered historical land marks. Suggested donation \$5.

THE GIFFORDS OF WESTPORT PRESENTED BY RICHARD GIFFORD

Saturday, March 9, 2pm (Snow date Saturday, March, 16 2pm)

Westport Public Library, 408 Old County Road, Westport, MA

The Giffords were among the earliest settlers in Westport and, even today, the name "Gifford" remains a common surname among local residents. Local historian and genealogist Richard Gifford discusses the English origins of the Giffords, their early Quaker experiences in Sandwich and traces their first settlements and houses in Westport. We invite all local Giffords to share their own family histories too at this program. Suggested donation \$5.

Please visit our website for program updates www.wpthistory.org



THE ELVIRA SMITH BEQUEST

"HOME FOR ME WILL ALWAYS BE WESTPORT AND IS CLOSEST TO MY HEART!"

—ELVIRA SMITH (Above: Elvira Smith on the Horseneck Road farm)

Born just before the First World War, Elvira Smith's life spanned over a century of local history. She passed away at the age of 102, leaving a lasting legacy to the Westport Historical Society in the form of a bequest of \$195,000—a gift that was inspired by her love of Westport.

"This is the largest gift from an individual to the historical society during my time as director," noted Jenny O'Neill, Executive Director. "It came as a great surprise to all of us! The board is unanimous in its decision to designate this bequest as a reserve fund, not to be used for our operating budget, but will instead provide a safety net for the historical society for many generations to come."

Elvira's childhood was spent on a farm located on Horseneck Road, helping her father in the fields, driving cows to the spring brook, feeding the chickens and collecting their eggs.

When interviewed a few years ago, Elvira remarked: "Some of my fondest memories are working with my father on the farm. I believe all that hard work contributed to my physical strength and character lingering throughout my long life."

She recalled a frugal lifestyle: "We would use the cotton from the flour sacks to make our aprons. I remember that instead of throwing our old sweaters away, we would unravel the yarn, then wash and clean it to take out the wrinkles. My mother had the expression "Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without." We lived by that slogan then and I still do now."

Elvira also embraced modernity, becoming the first in her family to obtain a driving license and was the proud owner of a 1930 Chevy. She celebrated her graduation in 1932 by getting a "finger wave."

Elvira's bequest will provide a sustaining fund for the historical society's future. It is a transformative gift that will ensure the longevity of our organization and shape our future.

BECOME A LEGACY MAKER

Westport's unique character was forged in the stories of people who came here before us. The Westport Historical Society preserves these memories by maintaining the documents and artifacts that illuminate the narrative of our individual lives.

Your generous support of the Westport Historical Society's stewardship, preservation work, educational programs and events maintain Westport's fragile bridges to the past. Now you and the Westport Historical Society can work together to establish a new and special legacy gift program to secure the future of our town as well as recognize your own significant contribution to it.

Many non-profits like ours have secured their futures through planned giving and estate plans to meet the needs of donors. A bequest will establish your individual permanent legacy and help inspire young and old alike to explore the past, understand the present and even prepare for the future.

Becoming a legacy maker is easy. Through a bequest in your will or a provision in your living trust, you may name the Westport Historical Society as a beneficiary of a specific dollar amount or a percentage of your estate, or part or all of what remains of the estate after other bequests are carried out.

An example of some simple bequest language is:

"I hereby bequeath [the sum of _____dollars (\$) or _____percent (%) of the rest, residue, and remainder of my estate, to the Westport Historical Society, a Massachusetts non-profit corporation, for its general purposes."



Voices from the Past:

Preserving Westport's Oral History Collection

Voices, some of which have not been heard for many decades, will once again come to life! A project to preserve and provide access to interviews conducted in 1976 is moving forward with assistance from a Community Preservation Act grant.

During Westport's Bicentennial celebrations in 1976, oral histories were obtained from numerous residents. Many of the interviewees were in their nineties, and shared recollections of growing up in late 19th century Westport. For example, Alice Blossom, aged 93, recalled catching a train at North Westport to camp meetings at Beulah Grove. Everett Coggeshall, also in his nineties and considered at that time to be the oldest living plumber in the US recalls beginning his career in Acoaxet in 1897. Other interviewees discuss wartime activities, life during the Great Depression, the weather and town government. Hopes and fears for the future of Westport are frequently expressed.

Some of the stories may, perhaps, have been embellished, such as Everett Coggeshall's claim that he "saw a man walk from the end of Horseneck over to Cuttyhunk on the ice and back again. ...the ice was three or four foot thick."

However, taken as a whole, this collection provides a clear glimpse of the unwritten minutiae of everyday life. The spoken word adds new dimensions to our understanding of the past. The informality of these recordings imbues each interview with personality, candor and humor. In Everett Coggeshall's own words "Talking is the best thing I do."

Unfortunately, audio cassette tapes have a very limited life expectancy of about 30 years. As this collection reaches its 43rd anniversary, time is running out to capture the recordings and preserve them for posterity by transfer to a digital format. This project will create an audio master file (WAV file) and an audio access file (MP3). We hope to have the recordings available for listening by spring-time 2019!

Westport's oral history collection is currently available on audio cassette tapes and as a transcript at the Westport Public Library and at the Westport Historical Society. Transcripts can also be read on the historical society's website <http://wpthistory.org/oral-histories/>. A full list of all interviews is available on our website.

HERBERT HADFIELD

"Right now I'm starting a new venture in my life. I'm going to turn around 180 degrees and take a big step forward. I'm building a log cabin in the woods and I'm not going to have any electricity, no telephone. I'm going to try to do it myself, and if I succeed in some of these areas, I can say, 'Look what can be done.'" (Excerpt from Bicentennial interview, November 1976)

MABEL CROSBY

"Well, living off the road like that, it was too far for me to go out, and it was too far for children to come in, so I played with the animals mostly. I've had woodchucks, squirrels, and chipmunks. I had a baby weasel that liked to go around and hide things under everything. He was happy and contented in the house and didn't go out." (Excerpt from Bicentennial interview, October 1975)

ALBERT LEES JR.

"I had a hardware business, and when the mill outlets came into being, the hardware business took quite a decline, and I thought it over and thought, 'Why don't I stimulate some business and bring people in by putting in some groceries?' So we put in some groceries, mixed in with the hardware, made it more than a general store, and as time went along, the tail wagged the dog and we became a grocery store, and the hardware went into the background until now, we only have impulse items in the way of traditional hardware." (Excerpt from Bicentennial interview, August, 1975)



WESTPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL REPORT 2018

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Another busy year has flown by, and I'm happy to report that it was a very productive year for the Westport Historical Society. One major accomplishment—which small non-profit organizations like ours often put off—was strategic planning. We took time off with a very experienced planning consultant to figure out our strengths and weaknesses, prioritize what needed to be done, and plan for how to do it over the next three years. The entire Board, along with our Executive Director Jenny, participated, and it was a very rewarding experience. Our second annual house tour was a huge success—a sold-out event on a beautiful day. We also added a much-needed parking area at the Handy House and put it to good use at our popular Artisan Fair in September and Halloween event in October. All the while we kept up with our schools programs and adult presentations that are at the core of our mission. This successful year was made possible by a small core of employees and lots of talented volunteers, and your generous support, for which we are very grateful!

Tony Connors





HANDY HOUSE

New parking lots rarely generate much enthusiasm. At the Handy House however, we are thrilled to have completed our new parking facilities, which have increased visitor parking spaces from 5 to 40 plus. We have also increased handicapped accessible parking. Beautifully designed by landscape architect Emily Vogler, and expertly constructed by A.J. Potter, this parking area is a necessity for the ongoing success of our annual events such as the Artisan Fair and Halloween, providing plentiful, safe parking for our visitors. Our new “barn” offering restrooms and utility space was tested for the first year, receiving many positive compliments from visitors. It has blended into the historic landscape with ease. Taking into account our signature events such as the Artisan Fair and Halloween, the Handy House welcomed approximately 1500 visitors during the summer season.

Also key to the operation of the Handy House, is our team of docents, who enable the house to open each Saturday, July-October. For those visitors who prefer a guided tour, our docents are on hand, and for those who prefer a self-guided experience, they are available to answer questions.

We have sought to provide visitors to the Handy House with a grounding in the unique history of the house, but also to introduce aspects of our town’s history. This year, our temporary “galleries” showcased exhibitions on the Westport River, East Beach, and the newly installed exhibition “Infinite Details”, featuring archaeological discoveries at the Waite-Kirby-Potter site and from the Handy House property.



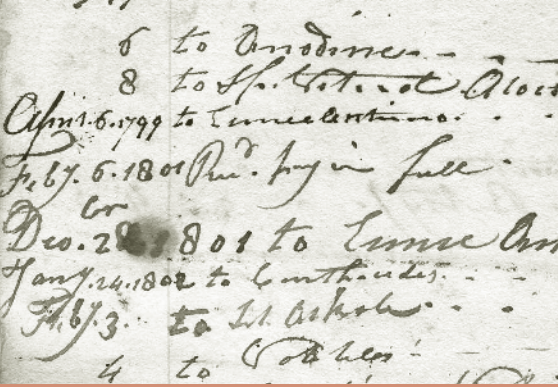
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Our mission places emphasis on community engagement. From the enormously popular winter history forum covering topics such as Native American families and Westport's founding families, to packed summer lectures, it is clear that the Historical Society continues to offer a "product" that our community appreciates. We were especially pleased to repeat Westport History 101. For those who are unable to attend our programs in person, we are able to provide access through videos posted on our website.

The Artisan Fair continued to evolve with the introduction of a community vintage market, attracting over 600 visitors. Younger visitors flocked to our Halloween activities at Handy House, offering creative, history focused and fun activities to 200 visitors.

Connecting to our theme of "archeology," a community day focused on local archaeological discoveries brought 100 visitors to the Handy House, many bringing their own discoveries for identification by archaeologists.





STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

October 1 2017 – Sep 30 2018

(Operating expenses only, excludes special projects at the Handy House)

REVENUE AND SUPPORT

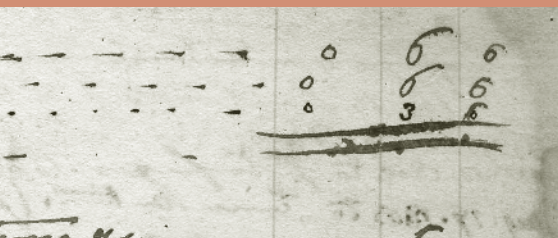
Direct Public Support	\$72,225
Grant Revenue	\$15,197
Special Events	\$38,140
Investment income	\$10,200
Sales of merchandise	\$3,231
In-kind goods and services	\$10,052
Other	\$603

TOTAL REVENUE AND SUPPORT \$149,648

EXPENSES

Fundraising	\$4,012
Contract Services	\$19,015
Facilities	\$1,266
Utilities	\$8,653
Operations	\$15,706
Program	\$6,512
Other	\$10,352
Payroll	\$64,009

TOTAL EXPENSES \$129,525



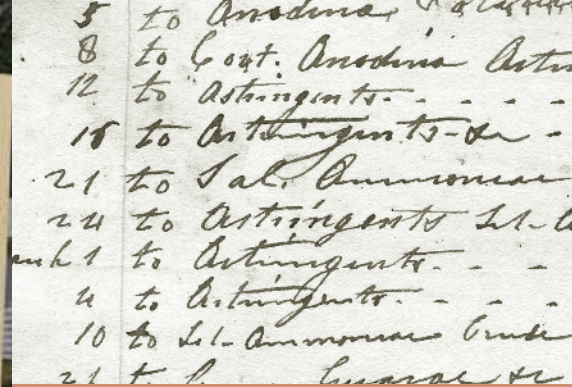
EDUCATION

During fiscal year 2018, the Children's Heritage Education Program interacted with grades K-3 and Grade 6 in the Westport Community Schools. We reached a total of 560 students through nineteen points of contact, and continued our long-term collaboration with the Westport Education Foundation and the Westport River Watershed Alliance. Our K-2 programming about the Macomber Turnip, Sarah Turner, and Paul Cuffe, respectively, was helped by volunteers Sarah Gifford, Alice Huff, and Buzzy Baron. Special thanks to Marilyn Packard Luther, Nancy Mailhot, Sarah Gifford, Ruth Bourns, and Jonathan Paull for all of their help and good humor during our marathon Tour of Westport Day in June for the 3rd grade. We look forward to further collaborations with the always supportive Westport Community Schools District on other K-12 initiatives. Early in 2018, an Education Committee was formalized to expand and deepen K-12 programming.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The WHS continues to grow steadily with record-breaking contributions from memberships, annual appeal, and the House Tour combining to fund our annual operating budget. This year we received grants from the Rathmann Family Foundation, the Westport Cultural Council, and Helen Ellis Trust.

The Westport Historical Society's second annual House Tour raised \$37,000. Over 400 participants visited 6 houses at Westport Point and South Westport with the assistance of 60 volunteers. The success of this event was generously boosted by the sponsorship of many local business, led by the Presenting Sponsor BayCoast Bank.



BALANCE SHEET

September 30, 2018

CURRENT ASSETS

Total Assets	\$666,733.51
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LIABILITIES

Total liabilities and assets	\$666,733.51
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With the successful completion of major projects at the Handy House, and having made progress towards financial sustainability through a combination of membership dues, annual appeal, grants and special events, the Board recognized a need to address some long-standing issues, to build on its strengths and to meet some new challenges. With the understanding that organizational priorities and needs can change quickly and in surprising ways, the Board elected to formulate an action plan for the next three years.

- Define the best use of the Bell School
- Improve collections storage and preservation
- Ensure ongoing relevance to our community
- Build organizational capacity

We welcome your feedback!





thank you!

DONATIONS RECEIVED BETWEEN OCT 1 2017 - SEPT 30 2018

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions by many individuals at all levels. Given space limitations we are unable to include all donors. This list includes contributors of \$100 plus.

\$100-\$249

Milton and Marilyn Adams
Nancy and David Andersen
Richard Anderson
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Steven and Dawn Tripp
Pamela Trippe
Henry and Janet Vaillant
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Catherine Williams
Kit Wise

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Martha Sears and Gary Baker
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Greg and Brenda Stone
Michael and Martha Sullivan

\$1000-\$4,999

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Buzzy and Dianne Baron
David Cole and Betty Slade
Tony and Sharon Connors
Peter and Alison Fenn
Charles and Linda Findlay
Steve Fletcher
Janet Hadley
Nancy Janelle
Albert and Cindy Lees, III
Dick and Eleanor Phillips
Tom and Barbara Slaughter
Steven Syre and Laura Raposa
Neil and Sylvia Van Sloun
Benjamin and Elizabeth White

\$5,000 AND ABOVE

Anonymous

FOUNDATIONS

The Charlene and David Howe
Foundation
Guild Family Foundation
Howard Bayne Fund
IBM International Foundation
Manton Foundation
Philip Snyder Foundation
Rathmann Family Foundation
Stearns Charitable Trust
Westport Cultural Council
Helen E. Ellis Charitable Trust

continued on p.12



BUSINESSES

\$100-\$249

Beauregard, Burke and Franco
Golf Car Solutions
Grays Gristmill
N.A.C. Security & Stereo
Southcoast Payroll and Bookkeeping
Slocum Design Studio
The Westporter
Westport Federal Credit Union

\$250-\$499

Acoaxet Veterinary Clinic
Blackstone Valley Hearing
Buzzards Bay Brewing
Coyne and Powers Insurance
Dennis Talbot Inc.
Douglas G. Vrona DMD TMJ
Orthopedics
Gray's Daily Grind
Kozy Nook Restaurant
Lapointe Insurance
Manchester Interiors
Partners Village Store
South Coastal Realty LLC
The Back Eddy
Zambezi Grace

\$500-\$999

Country Woolens
Dewing Schmid Kearns Architects
Jack's Landscape'n Inc.
On Point Realty Group, William Raveis

\$1000-\$4999

D2 Biological Solution
Lees Wine and Spirits
William Raveis

\$5000+

BayCoast Bank

A very special thank you to the following
businesses for donating professional
services:

Tim's Lawn Care
Geraldine Millham Design



Portrait of Ann Potter c.1830.

Signed: "Ann Potter's Profile drawn by Ruby Devol."

Watercolor, gouache and ink on paper. The inscription reads:

"Can love for me inspire your tender breast

Dare I to hope and with that hope be blest."

Ann Potter was born in Westport May 21, 1809 (daughter of Joshua and Elizabeth Potter). She married James Macomber on November 30, 1828. She died May 20, 1844.

RUBY DEVOL FINCH: WESTPORT'S FOLK ARTIST

Westport's Ruby Devol Finch (1804-1866) is considered to be "one of the most uniquely creative female American folk artists of her time" (Donald R. Walters, "Ruby Devol Finch, Recent Discoveries," *Antiques and Fine Art Magazine* 2012). However, with only 15 known works, it is not surprising that she remains somewhat obscure. Yet her art is highly prized and can be found in the collections of Colonial Williamsburg and the American Folk Art Museum, NY. Recently, with the help of a few generous donors, one of her works has found its way back home to Westport. Her profile portrait of Ann Potter c.1830 joins the "Little Gem" hand-tinted ferrotype of the artist in the Historical Society's collection.

Ruby Devol Finch came out of anonymity in 1978, with an extensive article by Donald Walters, the former curator at Colonial Williamsburg. In the 2012 issue of *Antiques and Fine Art Magazine* she received further attention as a result of new discoveries of her works. This article outlines her genealogy pieced together by local antiquarians Jim and Barbara Faria and also includes images of all 15 known works.

Her watercolor portraits satisfy all requirements of the folk art genre. Folk artists were generally self-taught, creating "naïve" or "primitive" style art far from the urban centers and reflecting the social setting of a rural community. Her portraits, almost always in profile, are characterized by a sharply defined, almost mathematical precision, with an overall flatness. She often included decorative flourishes such as the arched tablet border with columns and vines seen in the portrait of Ann Potter. Perspective, brushwork, and proportion are abandoned in favor of a

stylized illustrative depiction that nonetheless conveys the "truthfulness" and individual character of each subject. Most striking is the detail of clothing, furnishings, architecture and the use of color throughout. Her male subjects wear bright blue uniforms, patterned stockings, dotted waistcoats, and her female subjects are dressed in yellow, red and green. Peculiar artistic traits such as miniature shoes and "cauliflower ears" characterize her style.

It was rare that women practiced as professional artists in the early 19th century, however it seems that Ruby Devol Finch, who grew up on a farm on Sodom Road, was accepted as a community artist, creating portraits of friends and neighbors such as Elijah and Hannah Robinson, Abner and Betty Davis, Tillinghast Tripp, Susannah Tripp, and Sally Allen. Many of her works seem to commemorate life events such as marriage or death—moments in time that transcend the particular individual.

Her profile of Ann Potter may, at first glance, be a simple portrait of one individual, but it is also our link to the community of the 1830s and to an extraordinary artist—a rare example of a female folk artist whose world has been captured in 15 small works.

The Westport Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the donors who made this acquisition possible, with special thanks to Burney Gifford Fine Arts and Americana, Steven Fletcher, Charles and Linda Findlay, Bernard Taradash 2000 Trust, and an anonymous donor.



WHS Collection 2016.028.001 Hand tinted ferrotype inscribed on reverse "Ruby"

FURTHER READING:

Donald R. Walters, "Out of Anonymity," *Maine Antique Digest*, June 1978.

Donald R. Walters, "Ruby Devol Finch, Recent Discoveries," *Antiques and Fine Art Magazine*, 2012. <http://www.afanews.com/articles/item/1143-ruby-devol-finch-recent-discoveries>

WENT TO THE DEVIL: A YANKEE WHALER IN THE SLAVE TRADE

WESTPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESIDENT TONY CONNORS HAS WRITTEN A BOOK ENTITLED *WENT TO THE DEVIL: A YANKEE WHALER IN THE SLAVE TRADE*, TO BE PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS PRESS IN EARLY 2019. IT TELLS THE TRUE STORY OF WESTPORT NATIVE EDWARD DAVOLL WHO BEGAN WHALING IN HIS LATE TEENS IN WESTPORT, ROSE TO THE RANK OF CAPTAIN IN NEW BEDFORD, AND—DISILLUSIONED WITH THE DANGERS AND ISOLATION OF WHALING—TURNED TO THE ILLEGAL BUT LUCRATIVE TRADE IN AFRICAN SLAVES TO SOLVE HIS FINANCIAL PROBLEMS.

THE EXCERPT BELOW IS FROM THE INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK, AND SHOULD GIVE YOU AN IDEA OF ITS MAIN THEMES AND A SENSE OF THE STYLE OF THE NARRATIVE. WE WILL NOTIFY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERS OF THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE BOOK IN THE SPRING OF 2019.



The above daguerreotype was probably taken when Edward Davoll first took command of the brig *Cornelia* in 1848. Courtesy of the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

Whale stamp: Logbook whale stamps recorded whales captured or lost. Having harpooned but lost a large whale, Captain Davoll added the caption “Went to the Devil.” Log of the schooner *Palmyra*, courtesy of the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

In November 1861, Captain Edward Davoll prepared the whaling schooner *Palmyra* to winter over at Bermuda. He wrote to his wife that he would be home as soon as this task was completed, yet he lingered in Bermuda for six months. Winter storms were a danger and, in this opening year of the Civil War, he had been told of Confederate pirates in the vicinity. These excuses masked his real reason for delay. A year earlier he had outfitted the ship *Brutus* for a whaling cruise and guided it from New Bedford to the Azores. Then, with the captain remaining behind, the ship went on under the command of the first mate to the Congo River, where they purchased more than 500 slaves and transported them to Cuba for sale. Davoll had played a crucial part in the slaving voyage—fitting out the *Brutus* to look like a legitimate whaler to deceive the port authorities and the federal revenue cutter patrolling outside New Bedford harbor. His role completed, Davoll had returned home and quickly secured a legitimate whaling command on the *Palmyra*. The longer he stayed out, the better the chances that the rumors of illegal slaving that had swirled around New Bedford would die down. But as he cruised the whaling grounds between the Azores and Bermuda, he received news that the *Brutus*'s slaving operation had been

discovered—thanks to a crew member who told federal prosecutors of the sham whaling, the purchase of slaves, the suffocating Atlantic crossing and scores of deaths at sea, and the sale of the survivors to a Cuban sugar plantation. The owners of the false whaler had been arrested, and Davoll feared that he would face indictment and prison. Finally, though, after months of wavering in Bermuda, he decided to return to his wife and daughter in New Bedford. He could not have been surprised when a federal marshal knocked at his door.

Davoll was from the nearby town of Westport, where he had learned the whaling trade at seventeen, later moving to New Bedford for voyages with increasing responsibility. Whaling was a respectable career for a mariner along the south coast of Massachusetts. It could also be lucrative: the main road leading to the Westport wharves was lined with graceful Greek Revival homes of whaling captains, agents, and investors—an indication of their wealth and status in town. There was no reason why, if he applied himself, he couldn't have one of those homes as well. This smart and ambitious young man did apply himself, and by the age of twenty-five he had attained the rank of captain. He built a reputation as a respected—if not always



liked—whaling master in an industry that appeared to be thriving. But by the late 1850s his prospects had diminished, due to changes in the industry but also to his own bad luck, leading him to a series of fateful decisions that would ruin him and his family. In recounting Davoll's life we discover not only how he got to this juncture, but why a devoted family man, just 38 years old, with nine whaling voyages to his credit, would risk his career and his freedom to engage in the loathsome and illegal slave trade.

On one level this is an account of the rise and downfall of one individual, a man who had shown tremendous promise in a prosperous industry, but found himself trapped in a job that separated him from his family for increasingly longer periods of time and unable to escape the loneliness, drudgery, and dangers of his trade. This is also the story of the resurgence of the Atlantic slave trade in the decade before the Civil War, as Cuba produced an ever-greater percentage of the world's sugar, a commodity entirely reliant on plantation slavery. This revival of the slave trade coincided with the realization within the whaling community—particularly in its preeminent port, New Bedford—that its most profitable days were over, an awareness that drove some men to desperate measures. What developed was

a peculiar relationship between whaling and the slave trade, made possible by the dimming prospects for whaling and the crafty New York slaving agents and their worldwide network of financiers who were able to exploit whalers' economic uncertainty and moral indifference to their advantage.

This moral apathy does not match New Bedford's reputation as a bastion of anti-slavery sentiment. The Quaker-influenced city had provided sanctuary to the runaway slave Frederick Douglass and was an important stop on the Underground Railroad. Yet New Bedford was not immune to the expansion of New York-based slaving to coastal New England towns. How deep was New Bedford's commitment to abolitionism? Who knew about the whaling industry's complicity in slaving, and who did anything about it? Davoll's life, as he slid from respectable whaler to accomplice in slave trading voyages, provides a glimpse into social and economic issues that allowed a surprising number of people—captains, ordinary sailors, agents, outfitters, and government officials—to conspire in this appalling business.

While the story begins in the relatively sleepy whaling port of Westport and moves to the bustling wharves of New

Bedford, this isn't just a New England tale. It takes us to the Azores and the North Atlantic, to the Indian Ocean and Australia, and finally—tragically—to the slave trading coast of Africa and the sugar plantations of Cuba. It's a story of the often romantically depicted but ultimately brutal business of whaling, and of shipboard disease, fears of "native" attack, violent storms and shipwreck, the toll of long separation from family, cruel punishment of seamen, and the moral drift from legitimate work toward engagement in the slave trade. Edward Davoll's life conveys the rigors of a seafaring life at a critical time in the history of whaling, and shows how the lure of easy money could tempt a man of good reputation and seemingly high moral character to engage in the flourishing Africa-to-Cuba slave trade.

These events take place at a critical time in American history. The tumultuous 1850s brought increasingly radical antislavery activism, the financial panic of 1857, and escalating polarization over whether a nation half slave and half free could survive. As Captain Davoll's personal drama unfolds, the country is plunging toward civil war.

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