



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

Summer 2021

Don't forget to renew your membership!

We are most appreciative of the many individuals who have already renewed their membership. **One quarter of our operating income is generated by membership renewals so your continued support has a great impact!** You can renew on our website www.wpthistory.org.

We invite you to renew your membership and encourage you to join us for some special experiences that will inspire, rejuvenate and strengthen your connection to our incredible community of Westport.

Here are some highlights of upcoming and ongoing activities:

- The Handy House re-opens on Saturday July 31.
- Join us on September 18 for the annual Handy House Artisan Fair and Vintage Market.
- Consider participating in our gravestone cleaning initiative -- a pandemic-safe activity that is also therapeutic and healing to the spirit. Sign up for a Saturday gravestone cleaning session via our website.
- Download the Westport History Tours app to access two smartphone tours:
 - Archaeology Tour along the Handy House Heritage trail with archaeologist Holly Herbster.
 - Head of Westport walking tour “where the past meets the present.”

Later this summer, visitors to the trail will encounter new interpretive content relating to Westport's Native American heritage, introducing themes of travel via land and water and of wild harvested plants of the woods used in Native cuisine.

Join us for lively and fun local history discussions exploring the history of Gooseberry and recalling The Lamplighter nightclub (now White's). On a more serious note, we plan to leave a digital time capsule for future generations documenting our experiences and lessons learned from this pandemic.

We remain profoundly grateful to you, our members, who provide the bedrock of support for our day-to-day operations. You can renew your membership on our website www.wpthistory.org.

Thank you!



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.



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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.

Don't forget to save your Lees Market receipts and bring or mail 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.

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Tracing the history, local lore and controversies of Westport's highways, ancient ways, streets and corners

What are the origins of the names of our roads? How did Sodom Road get its name? How have roads developed and changed over time?

The 1831 map of Westport reveals a familiar network of roads, one that we recognize today, shaped by waterways, maritime and agricultural activities yet constrained by the two river crossings on the East Branch of the Westport River. In some cases, they follow established Native American trails, forming ancient links to modern cities of Newport, New Bedford, and beyond to the Cape. By the early 1700s, the outline of NS, EW routes was in place. The 1905 census records 31 streets, roads, and avenues. By 1948, the census records more than 90 roads and by 2002, Westport has more than 400 roads. The most significant disturbance to the established network of roads occurred in the mid-20th century with the construction of Route 88 and Route 195.

Today, as we drive along these roads, we follow the same routes taken by 18th century settlers and travelers. The speed at which we travel deprives us of so much intimate knowledge of our landscape. We speed by houses that were once taverns or stagecoach stops, passing wide spots in the road that were watering places for horses, scarcely noticing boundary markers that were once reached at a slower pace by horse and wagon or by foot. Even with the coming of the automobile, travel remained comparatively slow. In 1910, the town set a maximum speed limit of 8 mph through the village and 15 mph in rural areas.

This research project is a collaborative effort. I am most grateful to the members of the Westport Historical Society's Research Committee for their assistance, with special thanks to Richard Gifford, Kathryn Lamontagne, Sean Leach, Claude Ledoux, Maury May, and Robin Winters. Westport's "old timers" provided many references for this project. Their memories and stories are preserved in videos of the Westport History Study Group (available via our website). Like many local history research projects, this is a work in-progress. Moreover, as much of the information has been derived from informal conversations, it is presented here with the understanding that there may be some errors in my interpretation.

We invite you to share your own stories about your street and welcome your comments and corrections.

Jenny O'Neill, Executive Director



Drift Road at the Head of Westport



PROJECT SCOPE

We have delved into the stories behind the naming of roads:

- Those named for landmarks that no longer exist, for example Hotel Hill or Bridge Street.
- Roads named for industries or businesses, such as Mouse Mill Road or Forge Road.
- Those named for prominent early English settlers such as Sanford, Cornell, Blossom, Howland, and Gifford families or for specific individuals such as Charlotte White or J. Douglas Borden. Some street names represent more recent Portuguese or French Canadian immigrants.
- Some roads derive their names from Native American place names such as Pine Hill Road and Horseneck Road.
- In more recent years, developers and their families selected street names, for example Christopher Circle.
- In some cases, the police and emergency 911 services required unique street names. Residents were asked to suggest street names.

You will find the following road related topics on our website at www.wpthistory.org/blog/:

- A to Z of Roads: Adamsville Road to Zulmiro Drive
- Corners of Westport
- Special features on Gifford Road, Howland Road, Sodom Road.

SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON WESTPORT ROADS

By Richard Gifford

Many Westport roads are mentioned in the Dartmouth highways collection, with a good number being laid out in 1717/18. Roads tended to be of two varieties: “open ways” were laid out so as to be freely traveled, while “drift ways” were interrupted by “convenient gates for carts and horses” as they passed through the land of one owner to the next. There was no standard width for roads, but the most common widths were 4 rods (66 feet), 40 feet and 2 rods (33 feet). Some roads (Drift Road, for example) had different widths at different points.

Roads were all “laid out” (surveyed) and constructed by the town government, the Dartmouth Proprietors had no role in determining the course or width of the roads. However, the Proprietors did make an “allowance for a way” (i.e. an adjustment to the acreage calculation) when a highway traversed a parcel it distributed, sometimes even when the highway was no yet laid out but anticipated in the future.

The selectmen seemed to have acted as highway surveyors for the earliest roads, usually visiting the route in person. Not infrequently, after a road was constructed there were



Research committee members





Bald Hill Road



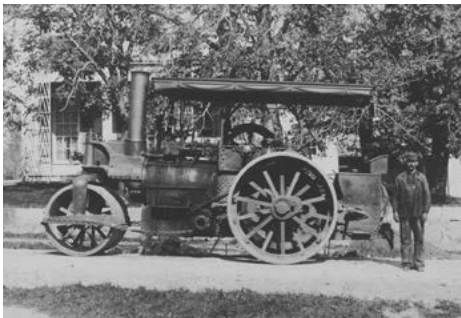
complaints about a road's course, having proved inconvenient either to travelers or the abutting landowners, and the selectmen were generally receptive to such complaints, and would again visit the site and make adjustments to the courses of the roads.

In the early Dartmouth records, no roads are identified by any name we would recognize. Probably the earliest road name commonly appearing in deeds is "the Country Road," which is Old County Road plus the western stretch of Rt 177. Even here, the early Dartmouth records do not use this name, but call it the highway from Stony Brook to Nokechuck bridge, the latter point being at the Head of Westport where the bridge crosses the river.

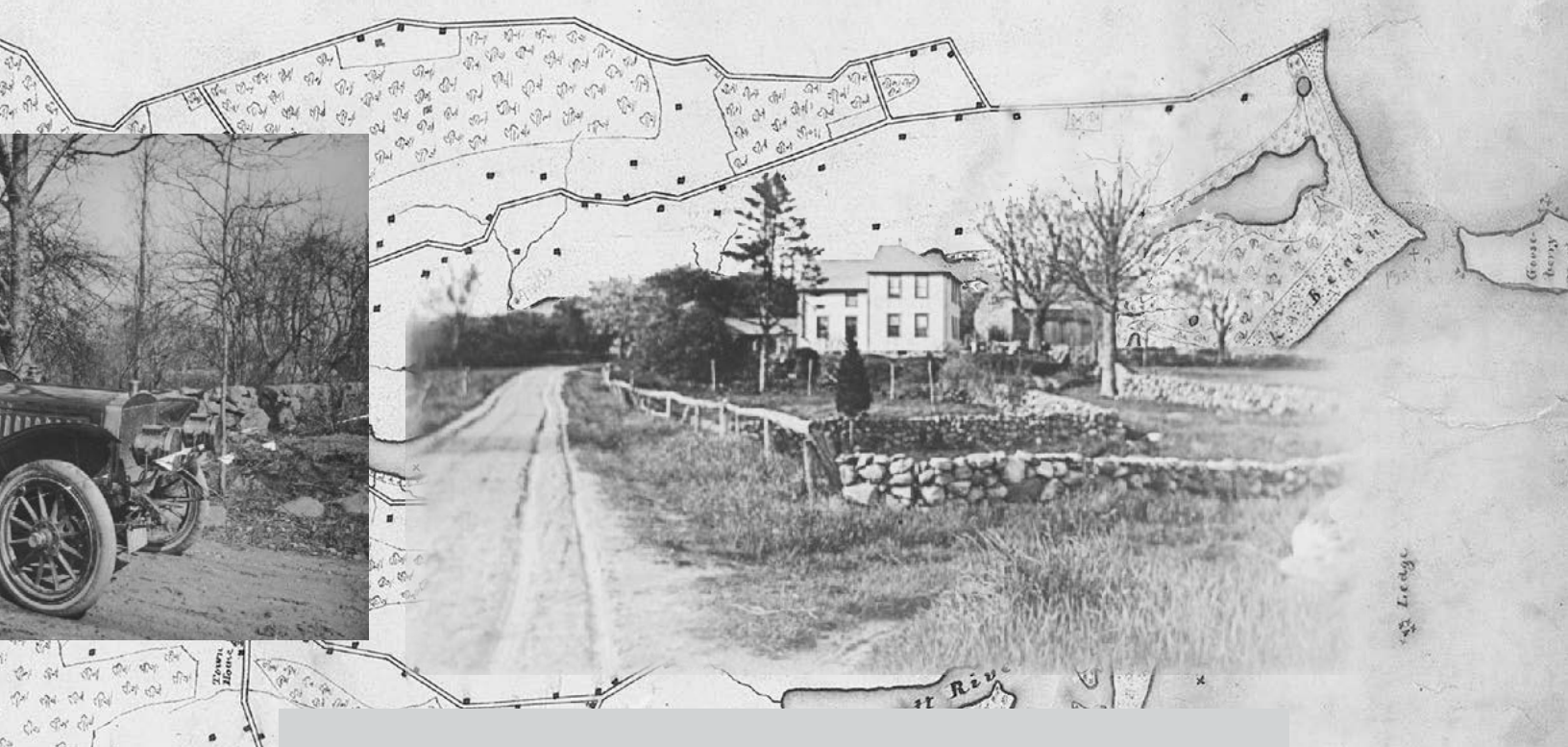
Where roads are referred to in deeds from the 1700s, the typical formulation is "the highway from Point A to Point B," with the reference points being either a person's house or homestead or some other landmark. This way of designating roads is problematic, as over time the owners of those homesteads changed, and there can be multiple persons with the same name. A brief example of this is the homestead of William Wood, which could refer to three different points named for three different people:

- 1) the intersection of Drift and Main Roads,
- 2) the intersection of Sodom and Adamsville Roads, and
- 3) the intersection of Charlotte White and Sodom Roads. (The last of these was the grandson of #2).

Even in the same time period, a road could be called by different names, because different lengths would be referred to or different labels applied to the same point. An example of this is Main Road in the early to mid-1700s. The south end is fairly simple, it would either be Peckechuck Point or some derivative, or Christopher Gifford's (who owned all of Westport Point at the time). But I have seen references to the "to" point as various as ---
 "To Noquechuck Bridge" (thus including all of Main Road plus Old County Rd from Gifford's Corner to the Head of Westport)
 "To Benjamin Tripp's" (i.e. the intersection of Main and Charlotte White Roads)
 "To the Meeting House" (i.e. the Friends Meeting House at Central Village)
 [after 1762] "To the Center Meeting House" [i.e. to Gifford's Corner, as the "Center" Meeting House was located north of the high school]
 "To Widow Howland's" (i.e. Gifford' Corner, as the Philip Howland house was, and is, on the NE corner of the intersection).



Steve Chase standing next to the steam roller on Drift Road. "When I first knew it, the Main Road was a dirt road. When it was first macadamized, they had a steamroller going back and forth, and I used to ride on the steamroller. They'd harden it down by sprinkling it and then rolling it." Mary Sowle



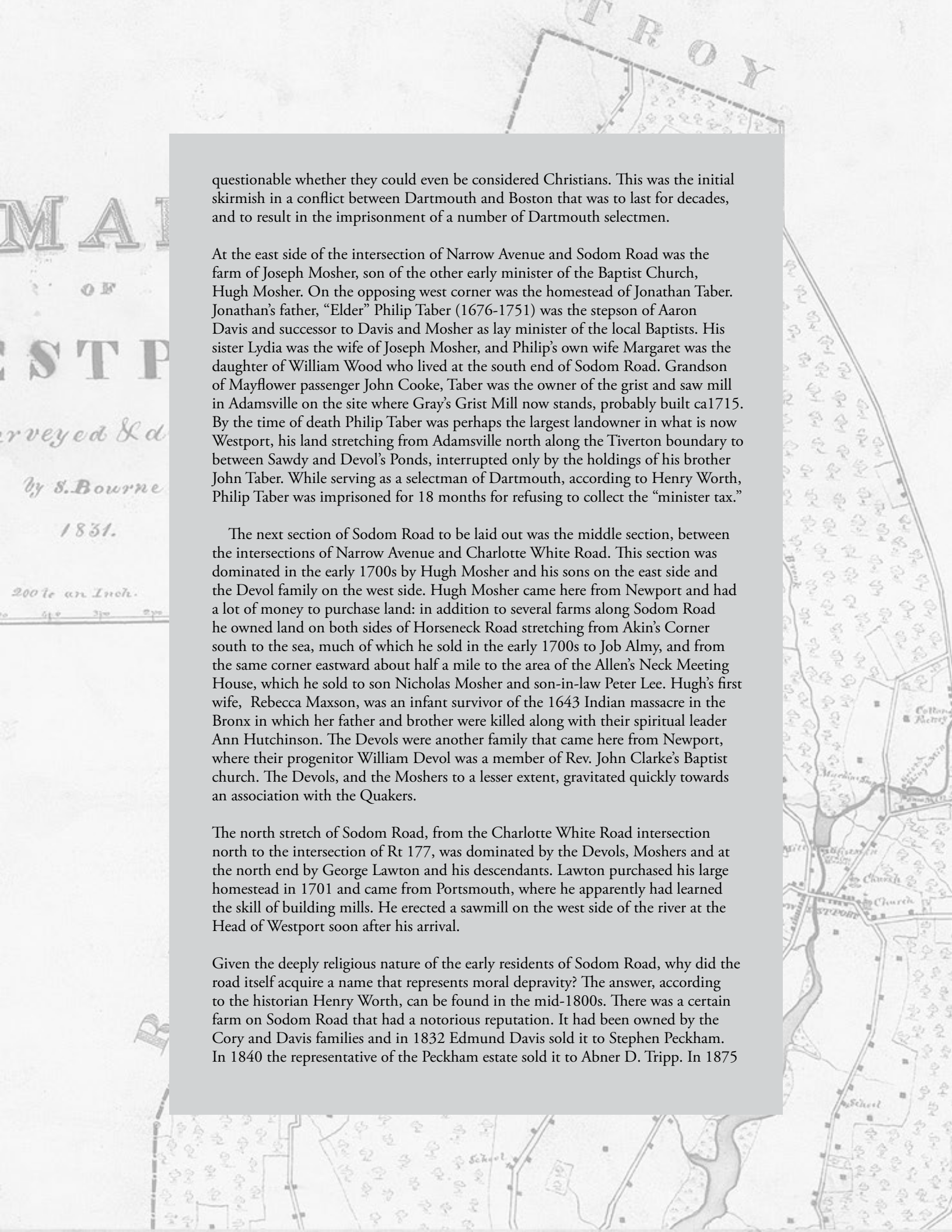
SODOM ROAD HISTORY

By Richard Gifford

In its early days, Sodom Road was populated with some of the most significant religious figures in the history of Old Dartmouth. By the end of the 1800s its modern name --- with its connotation of moral depravity --- had become firmly attached to it. What event or people were behind the naming of Sodom Road?

Old Dartmouth highway records show that Sodom Road was laid out by 1718. The earliest section to be surveyed was its southern stretch between its intersections with Adamsville Road and Narrow Avenue. In the early 1700s, the dominant landowners on the west side of the southerly part of this stretch were George Wood and his son William, the east side was owned by various Potters. From the 90 degree turn in the road in the area of Weatherlow Farm northward to the Narrow Avenue intersection, the Davis family owned most of the land on the east side of the road and the Cory, Soule and Taber families on the west side. Aaron Davis (d.1713), whose 1690 homestead was at the corner, was one of two early ministers of what we now know as the Old Stone Baptist Church in Adamsville.

In 1698 the Town of Dartmouth was indicted by the Boston authorities for failing to hire and maintain a Puritan/Congregational minister, as the law required. The Dartmouth selectmen --- George Cadman and Jonathan Delano --- responded that there was no violation, Dartmouth already had two ministers, namely Aaron Davis and Hugh Mosher. The court was not amused by the selectmen's response. These two Baptists were not only not proper ministers, in the eyes of the court, it was

A historical map of Westport, Maine, serves as the background for the text. The map shows a network of roads, including Sodom Road, and various landmarks such as churches, a school, and a cotton factory. The title 'MAINE' is visible at the top left, and 'Westport' is written vertically on the right side. A scale bar at the bottom left indicates '200 feet an Inch'.

questionable whether they could even be considered Christians. This was the initial skirmish in a conflict between Dartmouth and Boston that was to last for decades, and to result in the imprisonment of a number of Dartmouth selectmen.

At the east side of the intersection of Narrow Avenue and Sodom Road was the farm of Joseph Mosher, son of the other early minister of the Baptist Church, Hugh Mosher. On the opposing west corner was the homestead of Jonathan Taber. Jonathan's father, "Elder" Philip Taber (1676-1751) was the stepson of Aaron Davis and successor to Davis and Mosher as lay minister of the local Baptists. His sister Lydia was the wife of Joseph Mosher, and Philip's own wife Margaret was the daughter of William Wood who lived at the south end of Sodom Road. Grandson of Mayflower passenger John Cooke, Taber was the owner of the grist and saw mill in Adamsville on the site where Gray's Grist Mill now stands, probably built ca1715. By the time of death Philip Taber was perhaps the largest landowner in what is now Westport, his land stretching from Adamsville north along the Tiverton boundary to between Sawdy and Devol's Ponds, interrupted only by the holdings of his brother John Taber. While serving as a selectman of Dartmouth, according to Henry Worth, Philip Taber was imprisoned for 18 months for refusing to collect the "minister tax."

The next section of Sodom Road to be laid out was the middle section, between the intersections of Narrow Avenue and Charlotte White Road. This section was dominated in the early 1700s by Hugh Mosher and his sons on the east side and the Devol family on the west side. Hugh Mosher came here from Newport and had a lot of money to purchase land: in addition to several farms along Sodom Road he owned land on both sides of Horseneck Road stretching from Akin's Corner south to the sea, much of which he sold in the early 1700s to Job Almy, and from the same corner eastward about half a mile to the area of the Allen's Neck Meeting House, which he sold to son Nicholas Mosher and son-in-law Peter Lee. Hugh's first wife, Rebecca Maxson, was an infant survivor of the 1643 Indian massacre in the Bronx in which her father and brother were killed along with their spiritual leader Ann Hutchinson. The Devols were another family that came here from Newport, where their progenitor William Devol was a member of Rev. John Clarke's Baptist church. The Devols, and the Moshers to a lesser extent, gravitated quickly towards an association with the Quakers.

The north stretch of Sodom Road, from the Charlotte White Road intersection north to the intersection of Rt 177, was dominated by the Devols, Moshers and at the north end by George Lawton and his descendants. Lawton purchased his large homestead in 1701 and came from Portsmouth, where he apparently had learned the skill of building mills. He erected a sawmill on the west side of the river at the Head of Westport soon after his arrival.

Given the deeply religious nature of the early residents of Sodom Road, why did the road itself acquire a name that represents moral depravity? The answer, according to the historian Henry Worth, can be found in the mid-1800s. There was a certain farm on Sodom Road that had a notorious reputation. It had been owned by the Cory and Davis families and in 1832 Edmund Davis sold it to Stephen Peckham. In 1840 the representative of the Peckham estate sold it to Abner D. Tripp. In 1875

John G. Tripp conveyed it to Nathaniel Kirby. During the ownership of Peckham and A. D. Tripp the occupants of this place kept a resort of such character that it was called the Sodom Place. From this circumstance the road had since been known as the Sodom Road.

Exactly what vices were indulged in at the Sodom Place Worth leaves to our imagination. Stephen Peckham, the first owner of the Sodom Place, spent most of his later life in New Bedford, where in several directories he is listed as a gardener. The second owner of the Sodom Place, Abner D. Tripp (1807-1895) also leaves no clue to the nature of the notorious activities in the census or vital records. From all appearances in those sources he was an ordinary farmer, in 1860 farming 18 acres while owning 37 acres of unimproved land, owning one horse, two cows, four "other cattle," three sheep and one pig.

Abner did leave behind a surviving house built ca1850 at 790 Sodom Road, but from Worth's description and the deed evidence this small house lot was not the location of the Sodom Place, which would have been a 30 acre farm on the west side of Sodom Road a short distance north of the house. There does not appear to be any surviving buildings from that era at the location of the Sodom Place. Abner married Almira (Devol) Davis, widow of Abraham Davis and a sister of Westport folk artist Ruby Devol Finch. Almira, together with her daughter and granddaughter, are buried in the "Tripp-Taber" cemetery south of the surviving house at 790 Sodom. The proximity of this dilapidated and overgrown cemetery to the site where Aaron Davis would have built his house ca1690 leads me to think that it may be the site of the Davis family cemetery, which is shown occupying a fairly large area on the 1895 map of Westport. Certainly the property was owned by Davises or their descendants for over two centuries, lastly in the late 1800s by Gilbert Macomber Jr., whose mother was a Davis sister of Almira's first husband Abraham (Gilbert Jr was the great-great grandfather of "Cukie" Macomber).

Discover the stories of Westport's roads! An A to Z of Roads: Adamsville Road to Zulmiro Drive www.wpthistory.org/blog



An important part of highway maintenance was the crushing of the stone. Stone crushers were set up as near as possible to the work sites to minimize the cost of material transportation which was done by horse teams.



HANDY HOUSE UPDATES FOR 2021



We look forward to welcoming you at the Handy House which will re-open on Saturday July 31. The house and property will be open every Saturday 10 AM – 4 PM. FREE. All plans are tentative! Please check our website for updates.

Handy House Artisan Fair and Vintage Market is on for 2021!

202 Hix Bridge Road, Westport MA

10 AM -3 PM Saturday September 18, 2021 (Rain date Sep 19) FREE

The Handy House Artisan Fair, organized by the Westport Historical Society, showcases many local craftspeople who specialize in skills and traditional crafts commonly practiced in the 18th and 19th century. This year's fair also features a vintage wares yard sale – an opportunity to pick up unusual antiques, postcards, jewelry and textiles. The Artisan Fair offers a rare opportunity to meet local craftspeople and learn about their skills through hands-on demonstrations.

Further information on the Vintage Market, September 18

Do you have an attic full of treasures that need a new home? Why not consider participating in our Community Vintage Market! This opportunity is open to anyone in the community. It is a yard sale with a “vintage” focus. We ask for a donation of \$60 (WHS Members) or \$80 (non-members) to cover the cost of the tent/tables/chairs. We require at least 10 individuals to participate in order for this event to take place.

The Handy House Artisan Fair attracts 400 + discerning visitors with an interest in history and traditional crafts. The community vintage wares market is a juried event accepting vendors based on variety and quality of goods sold. We provide a large communal tent and tables. Each vendor will be provided with a 6 ft table and chairs. Space is limited.

We seek vendors of the following types of the items:

- Vintage household wares
- Vintage kitchen wares
- Vintage toys
- Agricultural and gardening wares
- Antique tools
- Mid-century modern
- Antiques/ephemera/curios (in original condition)
- Artisan tools and equipment

NO items made after circa 1960, books or magazines, items that have been restyled, up-cycled, or repurposed.

Vendors are responsible for their own sales and must be present at their table for the duration of the event. Vendors must remove all unsold items at the end of the event.





ALONG THE HANDY HOUSE HERITAGE TRAIL

Talking trees? In Westport? Only at the Handy House Heritage Trail! As part of a continued effort to interpret the history of Westport's forests and landscape, the Westport Historical Society, with the help of two voice-over artists, has given voice to some special trees along the Handy House Heritage Trail, located at 202 Hix Bridge Road in Westport.

A new audio experience "Tree Talk" enables visitors to the trail to listen as each tree tells its own story about how they were put to use by early settlers and by Native Americans. Visitors will meet the magnificent white oak, the tough black gum, the majestic white pine, the medicinal sassafras, the lustrous birch, and the hardy black gum. Their stories interconnect with themes of shipbuilding, medicine and food, heating, and tools for daily life.

"Westport's landscape is a museum of infinite proportions, and our forests and trees are living collections that can be used to interpret our heritage," noted Jenny O'Neill, Executive Director of the Westport Historical Society. "Tree Talk is a simple and fun way for visitors to experience our forests. The technology is quite straightforward, anyone with a smartphone can access the recordings by scanning a QR code."

The Westport Historical Society recruited two experienced voiceover artists and musicians, Greg Morton and Dori Rubbicco. Their challenge was to embody the personality of each tree as well as to articulate their individual stories. Greg Morton is known locally as the deep and commanding voice of the Zeiterion and for his work with the Whaling Museum's "Spectacle in Motion" presentation. His career has also encompassed bass player and singer for "Duke and the Drivers" as well as many years as owner of the Bridge Street Café, Padanaram and Morton's Fork Catering.

Singer-songwriter and recording artist Dori Rubbicco is a well-known Southcoast jazz musician. Her training as a soulful interpreter of song seeps into her vocal stylings, no matter what genre she might be dipping into when she performs at concerts, clubs and private engagements throughout the region.

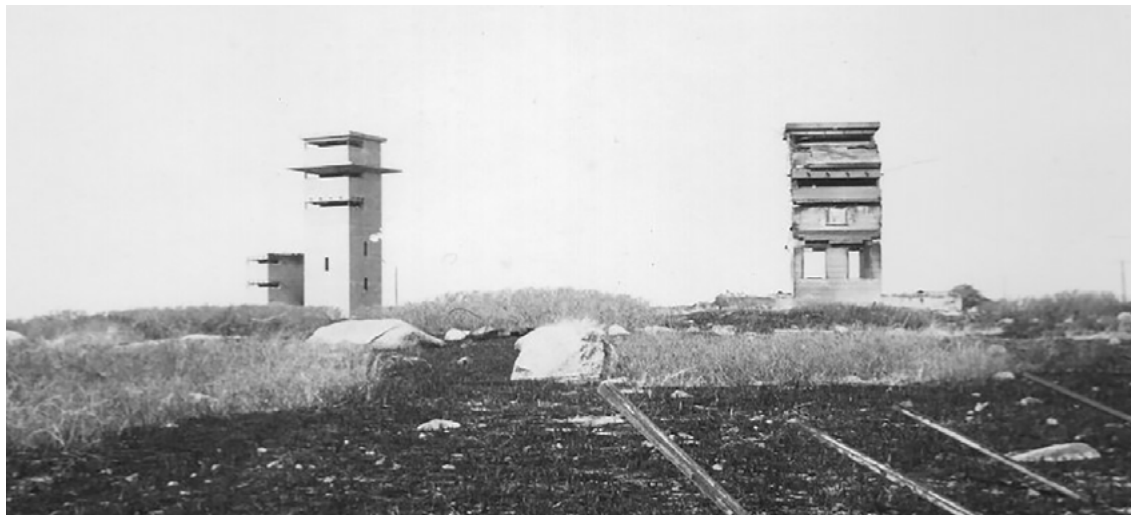
The trail can be accessed from the Handy House main visitor parking lot, 202 Hix Bridge Road. It is open dawn to dusk year round. For further information visit Westport Historical Society's website at www.wpthistory.org.



Greg Morton and Dori Rubbicco in the recording studio



Greg Morton and Dori Rubbicco on the trail



UPCOMING EVENTS (Please check our website for updated event information)

Gooseberry Island - From Wild to Wild

5 PM Thursday July 29

Presented via Zoom, visit our website to register to attend.

From the time retreating glaciers dumped some large “erratics” there until the early 20th century, Gooseberry was wild. It attracted occasional visitors for work and pleasure, then in the 1920s some folks got serious, wanting to turn it into a wall-to-wall summer community.

Greg Stone will explore the key changes on Gooseberry during the 20th century and how we ended up, again, with a wild Gooseberry - a haven for birds, animals, and fishermen, and a delight for anyone who loves to explore the natural world.

Greg Stone has been walking and photographing Gooseberry for more than half a century and has taken a special interest in its history. He founded the “Westport’s Gooseberry Island” Facebook group.

This program will be presented via Zoom, visit our website to register to attend. FREE.

COLLECTIONS NEWS

The following are some highlights of recent acquisitions.

We are very grateful to all who have entrusted us with these gifts:

2020.013 Donated by Janet Lane - Boy Scout memorabilia belonging to George Stike, member of Camp Noquochoke.

2021.003 Donated by Richard Donnelly - Broadside advertising Frederick Tripp farm auction

2021.007 Donated by Albert Lees - Face mask with Westport MA logo.

2021.018 Donated by Andrew Macomber - Family photographs, includes a photograph of the meeting of the North Westport First Christian Church at 111 Blossom Road.

2021.028 Donated by Richard Dey - Westport Point Poems

2021.029 Donated by Richard Donnelly - Bill of sale of the whaleship Harbinger, 1848.

2021.030 Donated by Caroline Wordell - Arthur Restcome Cornell certificate of membership to Free Masons.



The Head of Westport...
Where the past meets the present.

Westport Gravestone Cleaning Group

The Westport Historical Society invites you to join our effort to preserve Westport's cemeteries. It is a rewarding and therapeutic activity! We will host a series of regular gravestone cleaning events on Saturday mornings. Sign up for a session via our website, www.wpthistory.org

Head of Westport Walking Tour

Our new mobile app offers a walking tour of the Head of Westport "where the past meets the present!"

Explore the early beginnings of this historic village – water power, shipbuilding, commerce!

Discover the special architecture of the houses!

Compare "then and now" photos of the Head as you walk!

The tour features narration by Greg Morton and a fascinating array of historic photos from the collection of the Westport Historical Society. Visit our website to download the app. FREE.

The Handy House, 202 Hix Bridge Road, Westport

Open EVERY Saturday 10 AM – 4 PM

July 31 – October 23

Free and open to the public

Ongoing activities at the Handy House:

Guided tours of the Handy House every Saturday at 11 AM.

Family Reunion: Pick up a backpack when you visit the Handy House and inside you will find puzzles, clues and tools that will take you on a playful adventure through this historic home.

Handy House Heritage Trail

Open year round dawn to dusk.

The trail provides a link to multiple themes of local heritage from the presence of Wampanoags to the changing nature of the forest, and the impact of settlement on the land.

Handy House Artisan Fair and Vintage Market 2021

10 AM -3 PM Saturday September 18

(Rain date September 19)

Our annual Handy House Artisan Fair showcases local craftspeople who specialize in skills and traditional crafts commonly practiced in the 18th and 19th century.

Traditional craftsmanship, from blacksmithing to green woodworking, is still very much alive in Westport. Come to the Artisan Fair and speak with these extraordinary craftspeople, learn about their skilled hand work and human powered technologies through hands-on demonstrations. The vintage market is a juried event accepting vendors based on variety and quality of goods sold.



Meeting of the North
Westport First Christian
Church at 111 Blossom
Road

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Preserving the memories and knowledge of Westport's old timers

A collection of more than 150 videos has been preserved and made accessible on our website with funding from a Community Preservation Act grant. This effort was spearheaded by Betty Slade. Rick Tabit processed the videos. The collection includes meetings of the Westport History Study Group, organized by Norma Judson, preserving the stories, memories and knowledge of a generation of Westport's old timers such as Ab and Shirley Palmer, Dick Kugler, Dana Reed, Cukie Macomber, Glenda Broadbent, Dorothy Curtis, Bob Brayton, Russ Hart, Tom Hancock, Carolyn Cody, and Charlie Costa. Their informal discussion group covered a wide array of topics, which included farming and fishing, rum running, lives of important Westporters, little known fascinating facts, among others. Many local historians joined in including Tony Connors, Bill Wyatt, Geraldine Millham, Pete Baker, and Bob Harding. Videos can be viewed at <https://wpthistory.org/video/>

