

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 2023

Renew your membership!

From a small group of historically-minded Westporters, the Westport Historical Society has grown and prospered for a half century, sustained through the combined generosity of our long-haul members (some of whom have renewed their dues on an annual basis since the inception of the Historical Society in 1965!) and our more recent members. We are truly grateful for your unwavering support which forms the bedrock for our day-to-day operations. By renewing your membership, you will remain connected to our history and well informed of all new activities. This year we will offer a meaningful experience for all members to enjoy.

The Handy House opens its doors for the season on Wednesday June 21 (with regular open hours 10 AM – 1 PM every Wednesday/Saturday). Our summer exhibition Bonnets, Bustles, and Bloomers presents the changing shapes, silhouettes and many-layered fashions worn by Westport women in the 19th century. Families will enjoy creative crafts during our Kids Make History events (Wednesdays July/August). We will highlight Westporters with French Canadian roots at a “get-together” on August 5 and we ask for your help documenting the history of the Westport Grange on August 10.

Behind the scenes, we continue to make steady progress on plans to regenerate the Bell School, with a goal of creating a more relevant, accessible and welcoming Westport History Center. More details about the project goals are available at www.wpthistory.org.

With your help we are able to maximize our impact on the community and fulfill our mission of preservation and engagement. You can donate securely in memory of/in honor of an individual and set up recurring monthly donations using a credit card via our website. We look forward to seeing you at the Handy House, on the Handy House Heritage Trail, and at our events this summer!

Thank you for your support!



Stone marker located at Old County Road and Beeden Road



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. Please mail receipts to our office.

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WESTPORT GRANGE HISTORIC PAINTED STAGE CURTAIN

Nearing its 100th birthday, Westport's largest work of art, the historic painted stage curtain at Westport Grange # 181, has received some much needed TLC.

With funding from the Westport Cultural Council and an anonymous donor, paper conservators Chris Hadsel and MJ Davis of Curtains Without Borders have carefully cleaned and repaired the 8 ft. x 16 ft. historic painted curtain at Westport's grange, keeping the patina appropriate to its age. Their goal, according to Hadsel, is to make the curtain "whole and readable, removing stains where possible, but not to make it look brand new." Compared to stage curtains of a similar age which are often damaged by water, faded, or torn, the Westport grange curtain is in fairly good shape.

"The Westport Grange 181 is proud to display our restored curtain as documentation and preservation of this important part of Westport Grange and New England history," Barbara Smith, President of the Grange noted: The curtain now hangs at the back of the stage in the grange.

Paper conservators Chris Hadsel and MJ Davis travel throughout New England to repair historic painted theater curtains that hang in town halls, granges and opera houses. Chris has identified more than 400 curtains but, she notes "no two curtains are the same." According to her, "these curtains were the primary artistic features in the cultural life of almost every village and town in northern New England. They also have interest as early examples of business support for the arts."

Made of sailcloth, the Westport Grange curtain is known as a "grand drape" as the design includes painted stage drapery around the border. Hadsel notes that it is one of the smallest "fly curtains" (the mechanism used to raise the curtain) that she has found.

The curtain is not easily categorized, perhaps best regarded as a hybrid piece of art, somewhere between folk art, theatrical scenery, and advertising medium -- a symbol of the significance of the grange and Westport's agricultural heritage. The curtain played a role during Grange rituals which often required a "big reveal" as part of their ceremony. Furthermore, the grange and its stage, was once a popular center for dances and other entertainment in an era when there was little else to do.

Dating from the 1930's, the curtain displays ads from businesses in Westport, Fall River, and New Bedford. Its creator, Robert H. Chapelle (1890-1969), lived in Fall River where he worked as a sign maker and as a scenic painter in theaters. (Thanks to Robin Winters, Westport Public Library for this research). The ads represent businesses possibly owned by Grangers. The cost of the curtain and its installation, approximately \$175 – 200, was covered by money raised by each ad space.



FAR LEFT: Chris Hadsel, paper conservator, with curtain displayed at Westport Grange.

NEAR LEFT: MJ Davis, paper conservator at work on the stage curtain

In 1951, Westport resident Samuel Hadfield (1909-1978) updated the ads, overpainting several of them. Sam and his wife Marie lived for many years at Westport Point. Several other paintings by Samuel Hadfield still survive.

Several of the businesses advertised on the curtain are still in operation today, although the five digit ME (Mercury) telephone number will no longer reach them.

The Westport ads include:

- Potter Funeral Service
- Lees Oil Service
- Albert E. Lees Inc.
- Frank Slocum Auctioneer
- Carlton Macomber General Auto Repairs

The central scene on the curtain depicts the customs house at the small port of Torbole on Lake Garda. "Casa del Dazio" is one of the most picturesque corners of Garda Trentino and one of the most photographed and painted by artists from all over the world. The building has been restored and is open to the public on special occasions. (<https://www.tonellihotels.com/en/casa-del-dazio>) Such a scene may seem an unusual choice for Westport but romantic, fanciful European scenes, most commonly of Venice, were typical subjects for grange curtains.

This was not the only painted stage curtain in Westport. The Bell School also had a curtain, installed in 1909 when the building was known as Alumni Hall, functioning as a community hall. According to the Fall River Herald, the curtain was a "fine piece of scene painting representing The Head of Westport in 1950." The futuristic view included the river, a train shed, masts of ships, a steel bridge over the river, electric lights, and hydrants.

In 1910 the Fall River Herald noted the arrival of a curtain at the Westport town hall, "painted especially for the hall and will be used principally by the Central Village Improvement Society." Sadly, unlike the grange's curtain, these curtains have not survived.

"This project has highlighted how little we know about the history of the Westport Grange #181 and the Watuppa Grange #365," said Westport Historical Society Executive Director Jenny O'Neill. "We would love to hear from members of the local community with information, photos or memorabilia that might help document the history of this organization."

For further information about historic painted theater curtains, visit:
<https://www.curtainswithoutborders.org/>

The Westport Grange and the Westport Historical Society seek further information about the history of the Westport Grange #181 and the Watuppa Grange #365. Members of the public are invited to share information, photos and memorabilia at a Grange History Day on Thursday August 10. Please contact Westport Historical Society to learn more about our effort to document this community organization.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

SUMMER 2023



Please check our website for updates!

Ongoing throughout the summer:

Handy House, 202 Hix Bridge Road, Westport MA

Open 10 AM – 1 PM Wednesdays and Saturdays

June 21 – September 16, 2023

SUMMER EXHIBITION

Bonnets, Bustles, and Bloomers: 19th-Century Fashions from Underwear to Outerwear

Explore the changing silhouettes of fashion and the statements they made through a display of accessories and outfits worn by Westporters in the 19th century. Visitors can try out some 19th century hairstyles and hats!

Undressed at the Handy House

10 AM Tuesday June 27, Tuesday July 25, Tuesday August 29

at the Handy House, 202 Hix Bridge Road, Westport

How many layers of clothing did the average woman have to wear in the 19th century? Join guest curator Blair Walker to learn more about the form and function of corsets, bustles, bloomers, petticoats, hats, gloves and other accessories as she undresses a mannequin from outwear to underwear.



SUMMER ACTIVITIES FOR FAMILIES!

Kids Make History

10 AM – 1 PM Wednesdays July 12 – August 9

Drop in for some creative family-friendly crafts! Make a corn husk doll, make a hat/bonnet, enjoy a scavenger hunt and explore the Storywalk along the Handy House Heritage Trail. FREE.

Summer StoryWalk on the Handy House Heritage Trail

Take a walk, read a book, have an adventure!

July/August, open every day dawn to dusk.

Enter at Handy House parking lot off Hix Bridge Road.

Our StoryWalk features children's book "Homespun Sarah" by Verla Kay. Experience the hardships and daily chores of life in early 1700's colonial America. Written in Verla Kay's own special style of cryptic rhyme, Homespun Sarah brings this early period of colonial history alive for children in a fun and exciting way.

"The swordfish are in when the dandelions bloom"

(Date and venue TBA)

Join us to enjoy some stories and memories as recounted by Westport's swordfish boat captains. "The swordfish are in when the dandelions bloom" is an age-old Westport saying recalled by former swordfish boat captain Russ Hart. In the 1950s, swordfish were plentiful in supply, providing extra revenue for lobster boats which often came across swordfish just a few miles offshore. Weighing-in of the swordfish was a daily event that always attracted quite a crowd at the Point.

☆ Kids make History ☆

This iconic photograph captures the excitement of the crowd gathered on Lees Wharf to witness the weighing-in of the swordfish. Albert Lees Sr. bends over the scales, watched by a young Carl Lees (on his left), Art Denault (to his right), Norma Judson, (wearing a scarf), and Liz Blossom Rulon (wearing overalls). Also amongst the crowd is Richie Earle as a young boy with his parents. “By Cracky” owned by Arthur Denault, a well-known Westport sword-fisherman, is moored at the dock. The “Last Fling” owned by Ted and Bob Hebden is moored close by.

French Canadian Families of Westport and Dartmouth Get-Together

10 AM Saturday August 5, 2023

Handy House, 202 Hix Bridge Road, Westport MA

Westport Historical Society and Dartmouth Historical and Arts Society invite those with French Canadian roots to gather for an informal discussion and sharing of historical and genealogical information. Please bring photos and other historical documents to share at this event.

Grange History Day

2PM – 5 PM August 10

The Westport Grange and the Westport Historical Society seek further information about the history of the Westport Grange #181 and the Watuppa Grange #365. Members of the public are invited to share information, photos and memorabilia at a Grange History Day on Thursday August 10. Please contact Westport Historical Society to learn more about our effort to document this community organization.



Paul Cuffe: In Search of a New Land

6:30 PM Thursday August 17, 2023

Round the Bend Farm, 92 Allens Neck Road, Dartmouth

A performance of an original play by Samuel Harps based on the remarkable life of Captain Paul Cuffe (1759-1817). Purchase tickets in advance at www.wpthistory.org.

Handy House Artisan Fair and Vintage Market

10 AM – 3 PM Saturday September 16, 2023 (rain date September 17)

Showcasing 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 market – an opportunity to pick up unusual antiques, jewelry and textiles.

Handy House Halloween

Saturday October 28

Little ghouls, ghosts and goblins are invited to converge at the Handy House to enjoy some spookiness inside and outside the house.

ONGOING

Westport History Tours

Explore the Head of Westport and the Handy House Heritage Trail with our mobile app. Visit our website to download the app.



Download your tour at:
www.wpthistory.org/westport-history-tours/



Head of Westport Walking Tour

“Past meets present” at the Head of Westport, Massachusetts.

Enjoy a walking tour of this historic village narrated by Greg Morton

Explore the early beginnings of this historic village - water power, ship building , commerce!

Discover the special architecture of the houses!

Compare ‘then and now’ photos

Start Tour



GOOD FENCES: WESTPORT'S BORDERS, BOUNDARIES AND STONE MARKERS

By Mark Allen



Stone marker located at Division Road

Ever since I was a child, my family played a game while heading down the American Legion Highway. Surely you're familiar with it, and if not, it's a fun tradition to start. Without fail, every time we drive through the few dozen feet between Westport and Tiverton, we hold our breath through Fall River. Even if you don't play along, you've at least asked yourself, "why, oh, why does this ridiculous stretch exist." If your first guess was that it was some relic of the Colonial Days, you're more right than you had any idea.

One of New England's great geographical cliches is the stone walls. They have dotted and divided our countryside for 300 years and serve an understandable purpose. Our forefathers cemented their control over the land they themselves pacified by erecting such near immovable boundaries. Maps were rare and comedically inaccurate, so a line of stones (also known as witness monuments or witness marks) demarking the distinction between two plots was far more reliable than a line of ink. However, this was not always practical due to the landscape or sheer size of a property, so instead, one could create boundaries with landmarks. Streams and prominent trees proved to be common markers in the unfettered frontier, though these options had repercussions. The stream could dry up, or the tree could fall, and the following confusion and disputes prove Robert Frost's parable that good fences make good neighbors. Therefore, when possible, landowners would instead commission stone markers that could stand the test of time. While not as effective nor iconic as an entire wall, stone boundary markers dot the New England landscape; their Stonehenge-like character provides an undeniable mystique to those who do not know their story.

Such is the case with Westport's own collection of stone markers. At first glance, these short obelisks located throughout the borders of our town look seemingly haphazard. Though weathered by the years, these two-foot granite stumps still have perfectly legible letters, most commonly a "W" on one side and an "NB," "FR," "D," or "RI" on the other. As you may guess, these are not anyone's initials.

Instead, towns, counties, and even states use the same tools to demarcate boundaries for private individuals for the same reasons. Inaccuracies on a map or a misworded document can lead to unnecessary disputes, and there have been more than plenty in our region. For example, disagreements on the Massachusetts/Rhode Island border date back to the 1600s, when it was decided that the border would be at a "Narragansett River" that never existed. Thus began a two-hundred-year legal battle that had to be resolved by the Supreme Court. Therefore, the traditional methods were utilized by governments while drawing boundaries to ensure they made sense. See the Dartmouth/New Bedford Border, which after being redrawn in 1831, used one particular maple tree as the sole reference point for a mile-long imaginary line. Much like fence viewers would inspect the boundaries between citizens' property to ensure they were well-drawn and maintained, both townships would have sent representatives down to this particular maple tree and have them walk the borders to check if the legal boundaries needed revision.



Stone marker located at Horseneck Road and Division Road

As was the situation in 1894, when the state commissioned an investigation to “... locate and define the boundary lines between the city of Fall River and the town of Westport.” The Massachusetts Topographical Survey Commission combed through archives dating back to the region’s first colonization to determine where Fall River was legally supposed to end. The city’s awkward growth involved buying and trading vast amounts of land from Rhode Island, complicating matters.

To give you an idea, in 1746-7 our county capital of Bristol was essentially traded for lands that would become southern Fall River. Tracking down the true border became vital as Rhode Island wished to completely redraw its eastern flank in five years, finalizing it with geographical coordinates and the most accurate tools at hand. If Massachusetts could not resolve its internal boundary predicament in the region, they were sure to lose territory.

The Commission’s final verdict was certainly interesting. They tracked down the markers of old in the name of fairness and drew straight lines between each one. Bodies of water were cut in half, and while the geographic coordinates of the boundaries’ various intricacies were recorded, their final locations remained the same. However, “appropriate monuments” were erected at all the various nooks and corners along the border, replacing the anointed maple trees of old. These granite slabs are the ones we see today, and although they are barely 130 years old, they still look positively ancient at first glance. This was the exact point: heavy and immobile, one cannot move the borders easily and should not do so needlessly.

While one can scoff at a scenario such as this – a room of legal scholars and map enthusiasts moving lines half a millimeter at a time – the real-life implications of a poorly drawn map cannot be ignored. Commissions like this are why we can hold our breath through Fall River. The old marker indicating the southern extreme of Fall River was at the southern end of Sawdy Pond, and therefore, the Commission decided to draw the line exactly north from it, cleaving the pond in half between the two towns. This decision had some bizarre consequences, as Fall River gained jurisdiction over several small neighborhoods that are entirely unconnected from the city proper. Most notably, the 200-odd feet of the American Legion Highway from the Pond’s halfway point to the Rhode Island border. A ridiculous patch, you can quite literally see the “Entering Tiverton, Rhode Island” sign from “Entering Fall River.” In this way, their “Stonehenge-like quality” comes into full effect, and these mysterious totems reveal their true power. While maple trees or concrete slabs on their own may be no more than momentary curiosities, for 400 years, they have been ordained with extraordinary powers, dictating lives – or at least land – ever since.

Learn more at www.wpthistory.org/2022/12/good-fences-westports-borders-boundaries-and-stone-markers/

CEMETERY TOUR



Our first ever Cemetery Tour was held on June 10, 2023 and proved to be both a successful fundraiser as well as an exceptional Westport experience for our tour-goers. With the help of 40 enthusiastic volunteers, the tour included 9 cemeteries and countless stories about the individuals buried at these sites.

You can read about the cemeteries and the stories they represent at:
<https://wpthistory.org/2023/06/stories-in-stone-cemetery-tour-2023/>

Special thanks to:

Norm Anderson and Laurie Marinone
Todd Baptista
Richard Gifford
Jenny O'Neill
Laura Raposa
Troy Rebello
Ray Shaw
Betty Slade
Robin Winters
All members of the Westport Gravestone
Cleaning and Restoration Group

Thanks to our sponsors!

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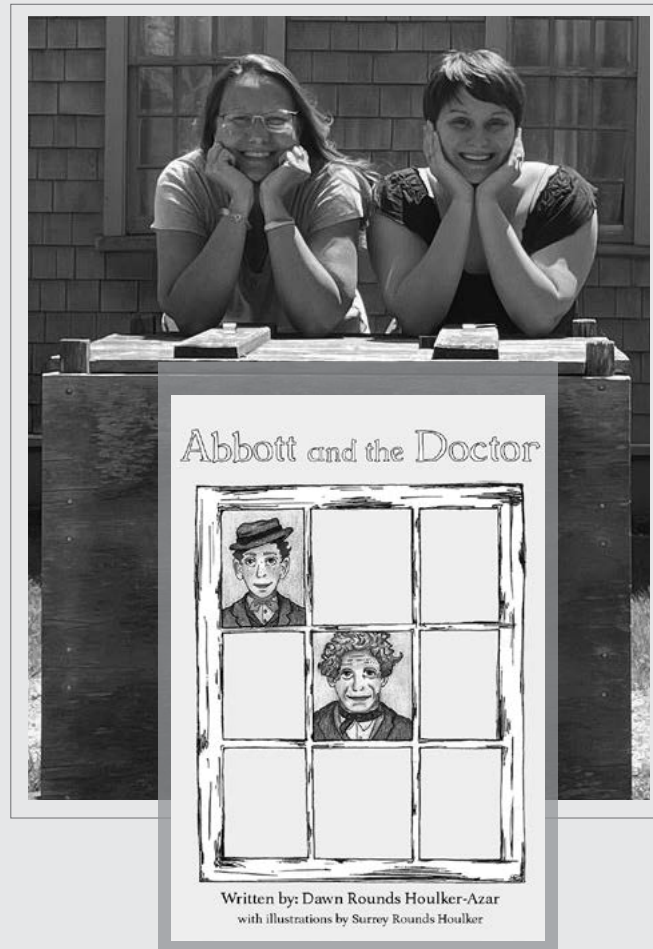
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A NEW BOOK INTRODUCING THE HANDY HOUSE TO A YOUNGER AUDIENCE:

Abbott and the Doctor

by Dawn Rounds Houlker-Azar with illustrations by Surrey Rounds Houlker



Dawn Houlker-Azar (author)
and Surrey Houlker (illustrator)

Dawn Houlker, a volunteer docent at the Handy House, describes her inspiration for writing this children's book:

Each summer, I enjoy volunteering as a docent at the Handy House. I was first introduced to this historical house by my mother who was a caregiver to Eleanor Tripp, the last Handy House owner. My mother was very fond of Eleanor and would marvel at how she cooked her own food from scratch. She knew that Eleanor was also quite proud of her historical residence. When I first met Eleanor, I experienced how delighted she was to show me her home and to share the history of the Handy House.

*I was inspired to write **Abbott and the Doctor** when I met a young visitor to the Handy House. She and her grandmother were looking for a memento to take home and we did not have specific children's books available for purchase. I have many fond memories of reading picture books with my own children, and I thought it would be fantastic for a young person to read a story about the fascinating people that lived in the Handy House. It is a special home, in a special town, with many stories to tell.*

Abbott and the Doctor (\$10) is available for purchase at the Handy House.

This project is supported in part by a grant from the Westport Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency.



COLLECTION NEWS

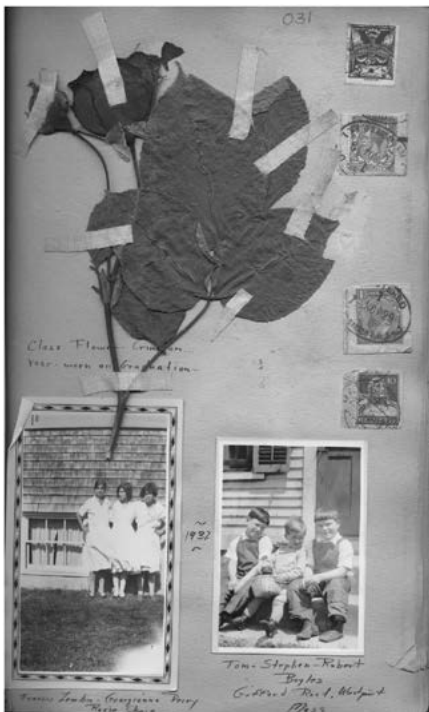
GLEANINGS FROM THE PAST

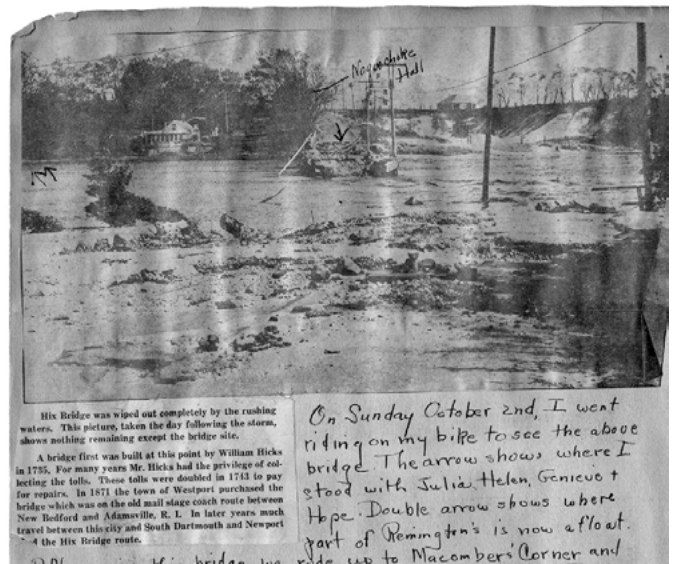
Fragments of Westport's History Preserved in Scrapbooks

The Westport Historical Society's scrapbook collection includes more than 30 volumes, amounting to more than 1000 pages. Many of the scrapbooks have been digitized for easy access via our online collections database. The collection provides a valuable miscellany of local news, spanning a timeframe from the late 1800's to the mid-1900s and documenting local events, from the important to the obscure and even scandalous, and capturing the personal interests of its creator. Topics include school, hurricanes, the details of births, deaths and marriages, world wars, local tragedies and celebrations. Much has been written about the history of scrapbooking as a way to organize and manage what was considered to be an overwhelming amount of ephemeral media — an explosion of newspapers and magazines in the 19th century. To preserve the important and meaningful for later access, scrapbookers (most often women) “scissorized” a newspaper and the clippings were known as “gleanings.”

Historians compare scrapbooking to today's “pinning, posting, and tweeting” on social media. For archivists, scrapbooks present special conservation challenges – the glue fails and clippings crumble – but, if properly cared for and handled, I suspect scrapbooks may outlive their fleeting digital counterparts. In some cases, in the true Yankee tradition of frugality, scrapbookers reused printed books, pasting newspaper clippings over printed pages. Whaling logbooks and other account books were occasionally recycled and used for scrapbooks. In such cases, it is possible, under supervision of a paper conservator, to remove the clippings from the pages if the value of the original book is considered to be more significant.

Should you come across a scrapbook, please understand that whoever the creator, it is a significant cultural artifact, worthy of preservation – not to be thrown in the trash! You can explore our scrapbook collection at the following link: <http://westhist.pastperfectonline.com/> . Search by using the keyword “scrapbook.”





Highlights from the collection include:

Josephine Zembo Scrapbook Collection (WHS 2008.091) The historical society is fortunate to have a set of scrapbooks by a most prolific scrapbooker, Josephine Zembo, who documented her school days and the class of 1932. In addition to newspaper clippings, she saved programs, tickets, photos, and even ration cards. Her scrapbooks are filled with news of classmates, sports, dances, plays, graduations, and travel. The pages are embellished with her handwritten notes, identifying people and providing additional commentary.

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READ INSTRUCTIONS ON REVERSE SIDE OF THIS CARD								
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Scrapbooks documenting the hurricane of 1938 Several scrapbooks document the disastrous and damaging hurricane of 1938. One volume focuses on Westport Harbor, WHS 2008.046, donated by Charles Test. This scrapbook includes clippings about Horseneck Beach, South Westport, and Hix Bridge during and after the hurricane of 1938. (WHS 2008.015)

Arlene Gifford Collection WHS 2008.036 This scrapbook was used to save fashion ideas by clipping illustrations from Godey's Ladies Book 1881 pages.

Learn more about our scrapbook collection at www.wpthistory.org/2022/12/gleanings-from-the-past/

Opportunities for you! Contact Jenny O'Neill, Westport Historical Society for further information.

BECOME A HANDY HOUSE DOCENT

Docents assist with managing visitors to the Handy House, providing some interpretation, assisting with special events and merchandise sales. We offer a flexible schedule but as a general rule of thumb volunteers must be able to commit to volunteering for 3 hours on one Saturday or Wednesday per month June through October.

JOIN THE WESTPORT GRAVESTONE CLEANING AND RESTORATION GROUP

Learn more about the activities of this dedicated group of volunteers at www.wpthistory.org/gravestone-cleaning-project/

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

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WHAT'S NEW ON OUR WEBSITE?

- The Southard Collection, the Southard Family of Westport Point and their estate "The Junipers."
- Looking back at Covid-19 – Eight Perspectives from April 2020.
- Westport's Little League Baseball team 1964.
- Do you remember Butler's Donuts?
- The Practice of Medicine in Westport from 1811 to 1843.
- The Westport Harvest Festival Painting Collection.
- Some Native American and African American Connections of the Wainer Family.
- Saving the Tripp family cemetery.

Join Blair Walker, guest curator, 10 AM on Tuesdays
June 27, July 25, and August 29 for
"Undressed at the Handy House"
(see program schedule for details).