



# Westerly's Witness

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April 2010

## THE RHODE ISLAND - CONNECTICUT LEAGUE (1908): A BASE BALL STORY

### PART II: THE SEASON STARTS

By Thomas A. O'Connell

#### Opening Day

The much awaited opening day for the newly formed league arrived on Saturday, May 16, 1908. According to the league's Season Schedule, the games were allotted thus:

**Mystic at White Rock**  
**Westerly to Carolina**  
**Hope Valley in Stonington**

Saturday's "weather indications" as reported in the local paper described the early morning sky as partially blocked by broken clouds and a light southwest wind blowing. The previous several Saturdays had been rainy. The 5 a.m. temperature was 40 degrees, but game time a pleasant 68 degrees prevailed. In short, it was an excellent day to play base ball. [Back then, baseball was written in two words.]

Rhode Island- Connecticut League President Herbert W. Rathbun threw a well-aimed first pitch across home plate at the **White Rock** diamond. The home team's lineup included: Howard Bentley (cf), Bernard Christy (ss), Edward Crandall (1 b), Howard E. Bliven (2 b), Willard F. Staplins (rf), Philip Bryer (3 b), Howard D. Pember (lf), Frank Foley caught, and Charles D. Cornell pitched.

The **Mystic team's** batting order: Sherman (3 b), William McKone (ss), John H. Hoxie, Jr. (cf), Harry Manning (lf), Frank Larkin (rf), Mason Manning caught, Frank Wilcox pitched, Clyde Burrows (1 b), Noyes P. Farnell (2 b), and Amy also (2 b).

Charles Shakely of Stonington was the umpire. White Rock won 3-2. Edward Crandall scored two runs, and Frank Foley hit the other for White Rock. Both William McKone and Clyde Burrows scored for Mystic. A crowd of 300 watched the game.

A "fair-sized crowd" showed up at Carolina's grounds to watch the Westerly team take the opening day game from the home team 5-3.

**Carolina's team** roster included: Samuel Grimes (3 b), Alvah B. Burdick (1 b), Fred C. Kenyon (2 b), Benjamin Solomon the catcher, James Hirst (lf), Frank Brown (ss), T. Kenyon (rf), George E. Clark (cf), and Byron Cole pitched.

The **Westerly team** was led by its skillful pitcher, John "Doc"

Sawyers, with Herbert "Hub" Farnell at first base, Thomas "Skeet" Allen at second base, while Lloyd Noyes played third base. Byron Hartson held the shortstop position. The team captain, Prentice W. Chase, caught. Ranging in the outfield from left to right field were John Burke, John "Jack" Aiken, and William Lennihan.

"Skeeter" Allen knocked in two runs, Hartson, Lennihan, and Burke the other three runs. Carolina's Alvah Burdick contributed two runs, Benjamin Solomon the third run. Alfred Prince of Hope Valley was the umpire.



*SOME HOPE VALLEY TEAM members appear to be mixed in with another team in this 1908 era snapshot. The shot was taken at the Stanton Field in Stonington. (Photo: Westerly Historical Society Collection)*

The lads from **Hope Valley** journeyed to the Stanton Grounds (now Owen Field, corner of Trumbull Avenue and North Main Street) to play the Stonington nine. The reporter covering the game made the best of the visitors' defeat declaring "the lads from Hope Valley, though defeated owing to the superior work of the **Stonington** boys, have won a warm place in the estimation of the people. They played good ball and not a word of complaint was heard from the players... Their only run was made in the eighth inning... Stonington made three in the first, four in the fourth, two in the fifth, and one in the seventh." Plainly said, Stonington trounced Hope Valley 10-1.

Umpire Keyron Doyle of Westerly "called the game" at 3:35 p.m. Stonington Warden C.B. Crandall tossed the first pitch. This was very early on in the season, Stonington was to be the first league team to stack the deck against its opponent by selecting "good

men from New London and Westerly.”

Stonington men T. McGinley (ss), W.F. Wilcox (2 b), and pitcher D. Bowers scored two runs each. T. Laing (3 b), R. Jessup (cf), Birchall (lf), and W. Brown (1 b) put a run apiece on the scoreboard. D. Brown caught, and Wills was in right field.

The Hope Valley nine listed Everett Jacques (3 b), Main (cf). William H. Briggs (2 b), George Henry Perkins pitched, Arthur B. Wood (1 b), Edgar Spencer, Jr. (ss), Lester Smith (lf), James Harry (rf), and Charles Perkins caught. The one run was hit by Edgar Spencer. (*Westerly Daily Sun* May 17, 1908)

Time and space do not allow summaries of all the games played that season. Instead, emphasis will be placed on certain “features,” or important items or events as they were described back then.

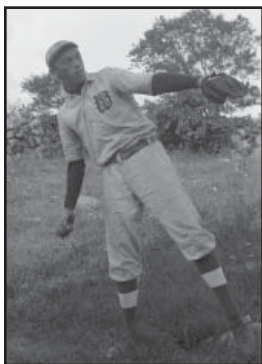
### An Early Protest

An early in the season (May 26) protest was made by the White Rock Manager, Tom Chapman, against the Mystic team. Mr. Chapman claimed that according to the by-laws [Article IX] of the league, no team had the right to play a new man outside of the roster without the sanction of the league.” Chapman later withdrew his protest perhaps because of a promise made by the executive board to clarify the matter of team rosters. The board on June 11, promulgated this new rule: *The line-up of all teams must be handed into the president no later than 72 hours from the time the game is to be played.*”

### Memorial Day Games

Memorial Day or Decoration Day, as it was then known, provided area fans a bonanza of league games. Each team played two games against the same rival: morning game at 10:30, and the afternoon game commenced at 3:30.

Stonington won both games against neighboring competitor Mystic, 4-0, 1-0.



Hope Valley also took two games from its neighbor Carolina at the Hope Valley grounds said to be Dr. Frederick Edwards’ Park located near the present Wyoming Shopping Center on RI Route #3. Hope Valley’s morning exertions won them a hard fought 8-6 victory. Carolina collapsed in the afternoon, losing 9-0.

(left) AN UNIDENTIFIED WESTERLY TWIRLER is about to pitch a fast ball across the plate.

A 1908 era photo. Perhaps a reader maybe able to identify this athlete. (Photo: Westerly Historical Society Collection)

Westerly and White Rock split their games. The morning game played at the White Rock diamond was taken by the home team, 10-4. In the afternoon, fans and players boarded the trolley cars for the trip to Westerly’s Oak Street grounds to watch Westerly

outplay White Rock, 6-3.

The league’s season began on May 16, 1908. Here is a glimpse of how the teams stood as reported on May 31 by the *Westerly Daily Sun*.

#### Rhode Island – Connecticut League Standings

	Won	Lost	Per Cent
Stonington	4	0	1.00
Westerly	3	1	.750
White Rock	3	1	.750
Hope Valley	2	2	.500
Carolina	0	4	.000
Mystic	0	4	.000

Not all was bliss in the new league. On June 2, Mystic protested their 1-0 Memorial Day loss to Stonington on the grounds that Umpire William J. Donohue of Westerly called the game off due to rain in the sixth inning without waiting. The rule required 30 minutes. Stonington won the game as a result of his decision. The protest would later be resolved in Stonington’s favor by the league’s executive committee.

### HOODOO ? What’s that ?

Hoodoo is another name for a losing streak. Both Carolina and Mystic were haunted by hoodoos. Carolina finally shook off its five-game hoodoo on Saturday, June 13, when it defeated Stonington, 4-1, at Stanton’s Park. Two runs were scored Alvah B. Burdick (1 b), and one each by catcher, Benjamin Solomon, and Nourse (ss) of the Carolina team. S. Foley entered Stonington’s sole sore to the record.

Mystic dropped the hoodoo man and finally captured a game. They beat Carolina, 6-0, on Saturday June 20. Mystic players had caught fire. Centerfielder, John H. Hoxie, Jr., scored a run, while Team Captain John McGrath (3 b) tallied 3 runs; Clyde Burrows (1 b) and pitcher L.J. Backus of Colgate hit the other two runs. The Mystic team was “strengthened” by three Norwich players: John McGrath, T. Sullivan, and John Fields. “The game was a pretty one to watch. Mystic excelled in all stages of the game and played for all they were worth.” Carolina, the reporter claimed “played a loose fielding game, making six errors. Second and third base were the weakest points, each making two errors.”

#### Rhode Island - Connecticut League Standings

(As of June 28, 1908)

	Won	Lost	Per Cent
Westerly	7	1	.875
Stonington	7	1	.875
White Rock	5	3	.625
Mystic	2	6	.250
Hope Valley	2	6	.250
Carolina	1	7	.142

### Fourth of July Games

Once again the holiday games will be played nearest to where the most team fans live. **Westerly** will play **White Rock** in the morning at their home field. In the afternoon, White Rock will host the

Westerly team.

The Westerly lineup: William Lennihan (rf), "Coach" Murphy (cf), Thomas "Skeet" Allen (2 b), Lloyd Noyes (3 b), Team Captain Prentice W. Chace (c), Byron Hartson (ss), John "Doc" Sawyers (p, morning), John "Jack" Payne (lf, afternoon pitcher), John Burke (1 b) and Herbert Farrell (sub).

White Rock listed the following players: Frank Foley (c), Charles D. Cornell (p, afternoon), Michael Sheehan (p, morning), Edward Crandall (1 b), Howard E. Bliven (2 b), John Savage (ss), Howard D. Pember (lf), Howard Bentley (cf), Philip Bryer (rf), Bradley of Norwich (rf), and McManus also from Norwich (1 b).

When the dust settled on their respective team fields, it was déjà vu all over again. White Rock took the morning game, 4-1, Westerly on its home ground won the afternoon combat, 4-2. However, Westerly's loss knocked the team down to second place behind Stonington. Alfred Prince of Hope Valley umpired both games. Attendance was set at 500 per game.

**Stonington** pushed **Mystic** back into the losing trough. In the morning contest Massachusetts import, Ed McCarthy (p), T. McGinley (ss), Wills (rf), D. Brown (c), and Birchall (lf) each drove in a run apiece for Stonington. For Mystic the runs of John Mallory (lf), Williams of Yale (ss), John Fields (c), and L.J. Backus (p) were insufficient to carry the day. Stonington won, 5-4. Keyron A. Doyle of Westerly officiated at both games. Fans numbering 525 attended that game.

In the afternoon, Mystic gave its best before a crowd of 1300, but lost again to neighboring Stonington, 7-5.

Meanwhile, **Hope Valley** and Carolina "split even in two cleanly contested games." In the morning game, Hope Valley pitcher, William D. Nelson, Chandler (2 b), and Everett Jacques (rf) produced runs for their team. Carolina catcher, Benjamin Solomon, and Sullivan (2 b) brought the team runs. Hope Valley was the victor, 3-2.

In the afternoon, Carolina won, 4-1 won over Hope Valley backed by runs hit from the willows of J. Shippee (ss), Riley (3 b), and Benjamin Solomon's two runs. D.E. Marra pitched both games for Carolina. W.D. Nelson did the same work for Hope Valley, Charles Shakely of Stonington was the official. Some 200 fans witnessed the games.

Rain caused the postponement of the scheduled league games on Saturday, July 25. So, as to please the crowd of 350 hardy fans gathered at the Hope Valley grounds, Hope Valley and Stonington played an "exhibition game." "The crowd [had] assembled in spite of the rain and dampness and the very bad weather conditions," the reporter sympathetically scribed. The Valley crowd was treated to a not-for-league-credit triumph against the potent Stoningtonites, 5-1.

Hope Valley's pitcher, Cabe, Chase (1 b), Hoxsie (lf), William D. Briggs (ss), and right fielder, Everett Jacques, scored. J. Christie, Stonington's short stop, made their sole score. T. Laing was the losing pitcher. A bright "feature" of the game was the music

performed by the new [Hope Valley?] Mechanics Band.

The league would still have to reschedule make-up games.

"Jack" Payne, one of only two pitchers for the Westerly team "was so badly injured by a ground ball in practice Thursday (July 30) afternoon that he will not be able to pitch for the Westerly's in the game with Mystic tomorrow." That meant John "Doc" Sawyers would have to work both Friday and Saturday's games.

### Rhode Island – Connecticut League Standings

(As of August 6, 1908)

	Won	Lost	P.C.
Westerly	11	3	.785
Stonington	10	3	.769
White Rock	8	6	.571
Mystic	6	8	.428
Hope Valley	4	9	.307
Carolina	2	12	.142

**In Early August** the Hope Valley team began to experience some financial problems due apparently to low crowd counts. So, "Manager Barber...tried a ten cent admission fee, as an experiment to see just how many would turn out. This week the admission fee shall be gentlemen 25 cents, ladies 15 cents, grandstand free to all. This is a good chance to see who the real fans are." (*Westerly Daily Sun* August 7, 1908)

**There was some mischief** afoot as well. The local paper reported..."It has come to light that Stonington brought a banner with them Saturday, but unfortunately the fans did not see it as some wicked person swiped it before they arrived at the field. The inscription read as follows:

### STONINGTON WANTS THIS GAME. 'NUFF SAID.

An Important League Meeting (August 16) *A meeting of the Rhode Island-Connecticut baseball league was held this morning in the office of H.W. Rathbun...In the president's absence, Secretary Thomas A. Chapman called the meeting to order.*

*The representatives present were John Hoxsie of Mystic, H.P. Clark of Westerly, A. B. Burdick of Carolina, T.A. Chapman of White Rock, George Grogan, Theodore Duherst, Gus Helmrick [of Stonington], Thomas Barber, A.J. Dawley and James King of Hope Valley.*

*The first business to come before the meeting was the appointment of a vice president to take the place of Harry Siegler, who has left Hope Valley. John Chamberlain of Stonington was elected to the office and James King of Hope Valley was elected on the executive board to take the place of Gus Helmrick who resigned that Hope Valley might be represented.*

H.P. Clark of was appointed a committee to confer with Keyron Doyle regarding the withdrawal of his resignation as umpire of the league. Clark and Dewherst [sic] were also appointed committee to see the president of the league about having the umpires more satisfactorily assigned.

The by-law under Article XI, Section 3 which reads “No umpire from a town represented in this league shall umpire in a game on the home ground.” was **annulled**.

Thomas L. Chapman resigned as the White Rock team’s manager, Patrick Lynch, “who played right field on the White Rock team last year,” replaced him. No reason was given for Chapman’s departure. (August 18, 1908)

**A Suggestion** was offered by *The New London Day* which its sports writer thought might help the Mystic team. “One thing the Mystic team has been rather shy on all season is the shouting... The shouting sometimes helps and Mystic has received but little support from the sidelines.” (August 19, 1908)

**A Hope Valley reporter** in speaking of game attendance in that community in comparison with Stonington’s game crowd of 1200 said, “We don’t know what the population of Stonington is, but we do know that the population of Hope Valley, Wyoming, and the immediate vicinity is about 1200 people, and of these, fully 300 attended the last game played at home, and they paid 25 cents to see the game, instead of the 15 cents charged by other towns. One noticeable thing at the games is the large number of **lady enthusiasts** who attend the games...If we only had a trolley line we could come down to play the Granite Cutters [the Westerly team] with a respectable size bunch of rooters...” It was estimated that Westerly would turn out about 1500.

Rain caused league games to be postponed Saturday, August 25th. Poor weather conditions also blocked the game between the Ocean House team and Westerly on the 26th.

**A Challenge was hurled** at the Westerly team of the Rhode Island – Connecticut League by the Wakefield team of the Rhode Island State League. A series of three games was proposed: the first in Westerly, the second in Wakefield, and, “if the third is necessary it shall be played on neutral ground.” The Westerly management is considering the challenge “very seriously.” The games would be played after the close of the local league’s season on September 12.

The **language reporters invented**. Now would be an opportune time to speak of those nameless, faceless men who made this story possible, the reporters. In the early years of sports reporting the verbiage used to describe athletic events was unexciting. The reader seemed to have missed almost nothing for his absence from the game. Reporters were quick to notice how insipid and banal was their game coverage. Gradually stories of base ball games become invested with more colorful, descriptive words, and active verbs. Their copy became more readable by inventing and using words or phrases to replace frequently used words. Take, pitcher, as an example. That player became spoken of as the team’s *twirler*, or *slab artist*, or *twirler of the sphere*. The twirler stepped *into the box*, not up onto the pitcher’s mound. The duo of catcher and pitcher became known as the *battery*. A skilful hurler would frequently *white wash* another team, 8-0, 13-0, etc.

Games would be played on a *diamond*, on the *grounds* (a large open field), or at a *park* (Fenway). The *sphere* had to be thrown at tremendous speed over the *rubber* (*home plate*), so that the um-

pire could determine its true value. Fans or *rooters* would be *right on end* when the batter drove in three runs. Fans would judge the slugger’s use of *the willow* to be some *fine stick work*, if he got a *bingle* (a single). Fielders *chased the horsehide* to end the inning. A *dub play* is a double play.

In describing the game the reporter might call it a *pretty game*, or say that was a *pretty double play*. Do we now have pretty close or pretty good in our vocabulary as a result ?

Speaking of team names, the Carolina team’s alternate title was the *Spindle Village*. The *Granite Cutters* became the Westerly team. The *Valley Boys* lived in Hope Valley. One spoke of a town team as *her*, as someone might call a ship her. Were a team *in the last hole*, or the league’s *tailender*, the reader knew that those lads were suffering from the worst *hoodoo* of all. A really super, great game was written of as a **crack-a-jack**.

**Yet another writer was a poet from Hope Valley who penned this doggerel**

**PLAY BALL –PLAY BALL\***

**We must play ball for a hot time  
will be here today.**

Have you heard that little story,

When the Mystics were undone,

How our team won the victory

By a score of two of two to one.

Of another game that followed

And our club was yet alive,

How with ease they won the laurel

From the White Rocks – score one and five

The same old nine will play again

With battery strong as ever,

The fielders you will find in place

And bases alert and clever.

With them a well known club will play,

From Wakefield they will come,

A Hope Valley boy will pitch for them:

Do you want to see the fun ?

If you want to see an exciting game,

Go up and see them play:

Take off your hat to the Hope Valley nine

For they’ll try to win to-day.

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**GAME CALLED AT 3.30 P.M**

**POPULAR PRICES**

(\*Poem lent by Ms Hope Greene Andrews, a renowned Hope Valley historian, from her collection of memorabilia)

Finally, on Saturday, August 30, the league was released from its rain confinement.

But first a few words about the Friday game between Hope Valley and Stonington, which “Hope Valley won by a handsome margin of 13-2.”

The red hot Valley boys who worked Stonington over were William H. Briggs (ss) 2 runs; Higginbottom (cf) 2 runs; John Hollander (lf) 3 runs; while Veno (c), Farrell (probably Noyes P.

Farnell traded from the Mystic team) at right field; Shea (rf, also), J. Murry (Murray) at 2 b, Chase of Providence (1 b), and Archambeault (3 b) each scored a run. Cabrol, the pitcher scored none.

Stonington's lineup that day included S. Foley (3 b), J. Christie (ss), D. Brown (c), Rhoades (Rhodes) at right field, Wills (cf), D. Bowers (2 b), W. Brown (1 b), Birchall (lf), and T. Laing pitched. Foley and Brown drove in the two runs.

**Rhode Island – Connecticut League Standings**

(As of September 3, 1908)

	Won	Lost	P.C.
Stonington	13	5	.722
Westerly	12	5	.705
White Rock	10	8	.666
Mystic	9	9	.500
Hope Valley	7	10	.421
Carolina	2	16	.111

*Nota Bene:* The league's season concludes on Saturday, September 12, 1908.

Well, September 1908, presented itself quickly enough on local diamonds. Those Virgo days only served to heighten the anxiety felt by the league's leading teams. Stonington which led the others by only one game was nervous about the upcoming game with Westerly. White Rock, "dubbed the league breakers," was poised to demolish (2-16) Carolina and perhaps improve its league stature. Mystic would be clashing with Hope Valley, in the valley. The games could go either way.

In the middle of this sea of nerves, there was a dispute which the league's executive committee would have to settle. "The Hope Valley management refused to play the [postponed] game in Westerly unless they receive \$25. The by-laws [Article VII, Section 1] state that visiting team shall receive \$10 and this is all the Westerly boys intend to pay them...After a lengthy[two hour] discussion the committee unanimously voted to have the game in Westerly.." (*Westerly Daily Sun* September 4 +8, 1908)

A game the local paper called "greatest baseball game in the Rhode Island – Connecticut League" was played Saturday [September 5] afternoon. The contest went fourteen innings ending in a final score, 0-0. For fourteen innings **Westerly** and **Stonington** fought its best and the victor [so it seemed to the reported] "was the fast approaching darkness..." The game was called on account of darkness at six o'clock having lasted 2 ½ hours. Both teams retained their pre-game league standing.

White Rock took its victory from Carolina, 8-5. They had to work hard for each run. White Rock began the game with a four run lead, but Carolina pulled ahead by one run in the sixth inning and "had White Rock at their mercy." The score was tied again in the seventh, but in the eighth White Rock scored three more runs to win. Charles Cornell pitched for White Rock and Claude "Chick" Burdick twirled for Carolina ("Chick" Burdick was the father of Alvah B. Burdick, also a Carolina hurler.) (Saturday, September 5, 1908)

On that same Saturday Mystic motored to Hope Valley. John

Mallory (lf) accounted for two of Mystics' runs and Kane (2 b) of Norwich scored the next run. Mystic won the game, 3-0 behind the perfect pitching of Frank Wilcox.

**Labor Day Games**

Baseball fans from Mystic, Westerly, and Stonington had choices among six games to watch that day. Time and distance posed the only barriers. This is what the score board showed that Monday evening:

Westerly 1	White Rock 0
White Rock 7	Westerly 4
Stonington 5	Hope Valley 1
Stonington 3	Carolina 2
Mystic 8	Carolina 2
Mystic 4	Hope Valley 5

**Rhode Island – Connecticut League Standings**

(As of September 11, 1908)

	Won	Lost	P.C.
Stonington	15	5	.750
Westerly	13	6	.684
White Rock	12	9	.571
Mystic	11	10	.523
Hope Valley	8	12	.400
Carolina	2	17	.107

The *Westerly Daily Sun* Sports Editor summarized season this way. *Tomorrow brings to a close the first season of the R.I.-Conn. League, provided there is no tie between Westerly and Stonington. In case there should be, an extra game would be necessary to decide the championship. Stonington's chances are good for first place, as the team now stands, but Westerly's games today and tomorrow make it possible for her to make a strong finish. Hope Valley, although handicapped financially, has had a first class nine and has won the admiration and respect of all baseball fans for her sportsmanlike manner in which she conducted herself both off and on the diamond. As Hope Valley plays here this afternoon it goes without saying that there will be a good crowd out to witness a contest between closely matched teams.[Charles] Shakely[of Stonington] will be the umpire.* (Friday, September 11, 1908)

Saturday's games provided the league with an additional problem, when Westerly defeated Stonington, 3-2, in ten innings. That tied both teams at 15 Won, 6 Lost P.C. .714



*THE WAKEFIELD TEAM is always ready to join the Rhode Island – Connecticut League. Is the suited at the right holding a contract in his brief case? A 1908 era photo. (Photo: Westerly Historical Society Collection)*

## No Pennant Winner

Following a most successful first season, the Rhode Island - Connecticut League ended its year. However, "there is no pennant winner. Westerly won two games, one from Hope Valley, and one from Stonington - this caused the year to end in a tie between Westerly and Stonington.

What will happen now? Sports fans asked themselves. By September 12, all league games must be played, that's the rule.

The reader, of course, knows intuitively such a matter of local pride and importance as this will not be left unsettled. Human nature deploras a vacuum. Just because the local sports editor intones, "No Pennant," the hurt feelings won't go away.

The Mystic team, for instance, started off the season handicapped by losing six straight games. Then the team lost money in its dealings with the Hope Valley team and when the Yale All-Stars missed the train, Mystic lost money again. But their sympathies were with the Westerly team; Stonington - never. Hope Valley was sore about losing its protest to Westerly earlier in the season. White Rock had some protests about the Labor Day games which hand't been resolved. (September 13, 1908)

### To Be Continued



## President's Corner by Maria Bernier

So far, our membership drive is off to a booming start. Between September 2009 and mid-March 2010, we've added 14 new members, which is almost a 10% surge and one of the biggest membership gains we've had in recent memory.

The board sent out additional invitation letters in March, and attendees at our monthly lectures have been picking up lots of membership applications, so we have hopes of continued growth. But there's always room for more! If you have a friend or neighbor who really ought to be a member, go ahead and talk with them about joining.

If you need a membership application, contact me at 596-7508 or print one from our web site at [www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org). (The application might not look very pretty on your computer screen, but it seems to print OK.) You can also obtain a membership application by contacting Membership Chair: Brenda Linton at [sadie14@cox.net](mailto:sadie14@cox.net). There's plenty of Westerly history to go around.

### *Wanted: History Enthusiast*

The Society is still seeking a Vice President to plan our monthly

lecture series. The work will take only a couple of hours per month from September through May. Please think about giving a part of your time to community service. Contact Maria Bernier, President, at 596-7508 for more information.

### *Upcoming Event Dates:*

Board Meeting, Wednesday, April 7, 6:30 p.m. at the Babcock-Smith House carriage house.

Outhouses program, April 18 - 2:00 p.m. at the Babcock-Smith House carriage house.

Virginia Williams will share her photographs and knowledge of outhouses. Co-sponsored with the Babcock-Smith House Museum.

Board Meeting, Wednesday, May 5, 6:30 p.m. at the Babcock-Smith House carriage house.

Neighbor Day, Sunday, May 23 - visit our table at Westerly Town Hall to say hello!

Annual meeting, Tuesday, May 25 - see registration form on back page.



## The Legal Potato Hole.

Near the beginning of the present century, a farmer, of broken fortunes, came into Westerly, and hired certain lands for cultivation, giving a proportion of the products for the use of the lands.

He planted potatoes, and secured an unusual crop. Not having storeroom of his own, he obtained consent of a land-holder, and deposited his share of the potatoes in what the farmers call a "potato hole"; that is, an excavation in the earth into which the potatoes were placed and covered with straw and earth in the form of a pyramid. On going out of the town into Connecticut, one of his creditors seized the opportunity, procured a writ, and attached the "potato hole." Whereupon another creditor, who was studying how to secure his dues, consulted with John Cross, Esq., and inquired as to what could be done. The shrewdness of the legal profession at once suggested an open door. Mr. Cross made the proposition, and proceeded to carry it into effect. A writ was issued by which an attachment was made, "not upon the 'potato hole,' but upon the 'potatoes' in the 'potato hole,'" specifying that the "potato hole" should be left upon the land where it was found. The plan was a success; and the first creditor came upon the stage only to find a few potatoes in his hill.

Denison, Rev. Frederic. *Westerly And Its Witnesses*, Providence: J.A. & R.A. Reid, 1878.

## *Early Motion Picture Entertainment in Westerly*

The genesis of motion picture entertainment in Westerly is a somewhat difficult thing to trace although of necessity it must have been somewhat after Edison patented his kinescope in 1893. Probably, it was about three years later although I have been able to find nothing in the files of the *Westerly Sun* or other contemporary records definitely indicating the exhibition of motion pictures in Westerly until 1899.

A ticket to Bliven's Opera House now in the William Purtil collection of theatrical memorabilia states that "This ticket and fifteen cents will admit any boy or girl to Opera House, Westerly Monday afternoon, October 23rd, 1899 at 4 pm to see the Great Dewey Celebration Taken on the Spot by the American Vitagraph." The Vitagraph Company was the first motion picture company organized in the United States. The company brought their own projection machine which was set in the center aisle of the theater where it operated by hand, light being furnished by portable gas tanks.

The *Westerly Sun* of October 22, 1899 carried an advertisement for this exhibition but I can find no comment in the news columns on the showing either before or after the event took place. It is therefore assumed the exhibition of motion pictures in town had taken place before in Westerly or that the *Sun* staff of the day was unimpressed by this new form of entertainment. However, it seems conclusive that the first place to show motion pictures in Westerly was Bliven's Opera House which was somewhat larger than many people recall with a seating capacity of 1200.

The second place opened for the showing of motion pictures in town was the Bijou, later called the Lyric, in the Barrows Block at the west end of the Pawcatuck River Bridge. This building was not built to include a theater but rather was constructed with a large hall intended for public gatherings such as dances, lodge meetings and political rallies. It was named Brunswick Hall.

Brunswick Hall was converted into the Bijou Theater by adding a stairway to the east end of the building which has since been converted into a newsstand. The first advertisement for the Bijou in the *Sun* in February 26, 1908 announced it had moving pictures, vaudeville and illustrated songs and was under the management of J. C. Davy. Admission was ten cents.

The Star Theater was opened on the south side of West Broad Street adjacent to the Pawcatuck River Bridge on Monday afternoon October 5, 1909 also under the management of the Cowan family. Here also were offered moving pictures, vaudeville and illustrated songs. The Star Theater was a converted textile mill building with the theater auditorium on the second floor with various enterprises such as a creamery, etc. on the ground floor. The conversion of this old building for theatrical use was made by constructing a lobby on the east side of the old building that was connected with the auditorium by two stairways. By today's standards, this was a veritable firetrap. Fortunately when it burned it was at a time when no audience was in the building.

The Star Theater had competition from moving picture exhibitions in A.O.H. Hall, now the Synagogue of the Congregation Sharah Zedek on Union Street. Here also were to be seen moving pictures accompanied by illustrated songs but apparently there was no regular program of vaudeville.

The Central Theater on West Broad Street and the present United Theater on Canal Street rounded out Westerly's theatrical construction, still in use these structures came after the hey-day of the illustrated songs that are our special interest this evening.



*View of the Central Theater, West Broad St., Pawcatuck, Conn.*

The illustrated song of the silent movies was developed in 1894, a year after Edison's first patent of the kinescope. What relation the development of one bore to the other is not clear for the projector used for "illustrated song" slides had been in use for "illustrated lectures" considerably prior to Edison's patent of a projector. It is probable the illustrated song slides were used for other gatherings prior to its introduction into the motion picture world.

One reason for the adoption of illustrated songs into the early motion picture theater was the fact that originally most theaters were equipped with only one projection machine which led to the best known slide of all - "one minute for change of reel". With the manual operation of the first projection machine and the arc-type illumination the operator frequently needed more than the "one minute" for adjustments or repairs and the illustrated song served to keep the audience amused during these longer periods.

The earliest moving picture advertisements in *The Sun* usually stated "moving pictures and illustrated songs" without mentioning what the subject of the pictures would be. Later advertisements giving the titles of the pictures indicate they were all "one reels".

For those too young to recall the illustrated song in local showings of the silent movie days let me say the process consisted of a singer, usually in a spotlight, coming out on one side of the stage where he or she sang accompanied by the inevitable pianist while the colored slides were projected on the screen. At first no effort was made toward audience participation in singing the chorus but later this was introduced with varying degrees of success.

Presented to the Westerly Historical Society by  
General Elliott Thorpe on November 5, 1952  
Excerpted from *Westerly Memories*



Westerly Historical Society  
 P.O. Box 91  
 Westerly, RI 02891

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## WESTERLY HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL DINNER

*Reservation Form*



When: Tuesday, May 25, 2010 Where: Masonic Lodge,  
 20 Elm Street, Westerly Cost: \$18.00 per person

*A Delicious Turkey Dinner with all the Trimmings*

Appetizers & Wine 5:30 p.m. Dinner Served 6:00 p.m.

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# \_\_\_\_\_ Tickets @ \$18.00 per person Total \_\_\_\_\_

We'll feature a short lecture by Dr. Glenn M. Grasso, Ph.D., on "Bathing Beaches and Bathhouses: Varieties of 19th Century Shoreside Recreation in Southern New England."

Please make checks payable to the "Westerly Historical Society"  
 Mail to Margie Sposato, 3 Lee Street, Westerly, RI 02891

Deadline for Reservations: Wednesday, May 19, 2010