

History Came Alive at the Ferry Landing Gala

July's History Alive! Gala at Ferry Landing was unique in many ways. It celebrated the opening of our new improved History Center. It showcased the two new exhibits there on the ferry and our Revolutionary War soldiers. Best of all, the history of the ferry was told by those who rode it back in the 1940s. Captivating stories were shared by Eben Greenleaf, Trudy Mentzer, Connie Ostis, George and Marcia Richardson and Jack Swanton. It was a day that history truly came alive!

Recognized Statewide

The Maine Archives & Museums (MAM) association featured the opening of our new History Center with a unique History Alive! gala in their summer newsletter. See the reprint on page 3. They said:

"What a fantastic effort you've undertaken in Westport!"

- Lucy Hannington
Executive Director
Maine Archives & Museums

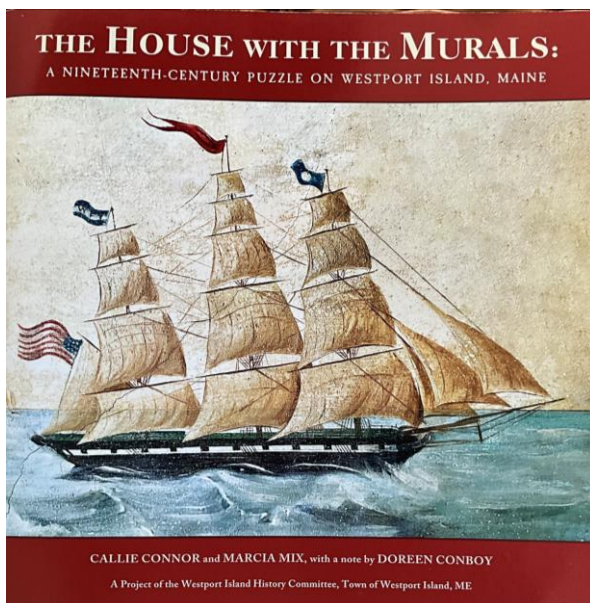


New Westport History Book

Friends trustee Callie Conner and member Marcia Mix have written a new Westport Island history book, *"The House with the Murals, A 19th-century Puzzle on Westport Island."* Beautiful hand painted murals cover the walls of Callie's house, built by Cornelius Tarbox

Jr, in the mid 19th century. Their origin has always been a mystery —until now!

This beautifully illustrated color book is **available now** at the History Center or on our website for \$16. All proceeds benefit the Friends.



Site Chosen for 2027 History Alive! Gala

One of Westport's most historic homes and beautiful waterfront sites has been chosen for the summer 2027 History Alive! Gala. Bunker Hill veteran Josiah Parsons built this house in 1792. He had a thriving mill, the island's only store, was the largest landowner and a town leader. It's one of only two Westport homes on the National Registry of Historic Places.



2026 Town Hall History Talks Are Now Viewable on Our Website

If you missed any of this summer's series of History Talks at the old Town Hall, you can now view them online. These were filmed by Westport's Patrick Bonsant, who also then edited images and video into the stories.

To view them, go to the Past Events page of our website: <https://fowih.org/about-us/past-events/> where recorded lectures are noted and their links are in aqua text. Or just click on the above link to take you there.



Westport Island and the American Revolution

Westport's Ken Swanton describes the daring exploits of the island's soldiers. Learn how the island militia played a winning role in a key local skirmish, but then participated in the biggest American naval disaster before Pearl Harbor.



The Quebec Expedition, Revolutionary War Trek

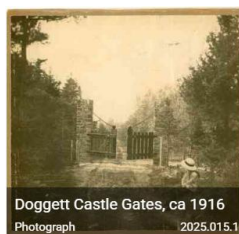
Rob Stevens describes how Benedict Arnold led a thousand soldiers on a grueling march through the Maine forest to attack Quebec. He is a member of the Arnold Expedition Historical Society and recently retraced the historic trek.



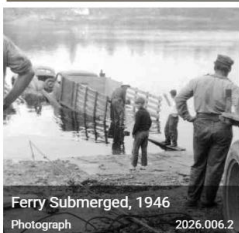
Restoring a Working Landmark - The Old Town Hall

Westport's Chris Malliet and others describe the challenges and progress restoring Westport Island's historic town hall, which dates from 1794 and has had many lives over the years.

Our Online History Collection Grows



Doggett Castle Gates, ca 1916
Photograph 2025.015.1



Ferry Submerged, 1946
Photograph 2026.006.2



Herb Cromwell Sr. Ferry Memo...
Oral History 2026.006.6

Our collection of historic Westport Island photos, images and audio continues to grow. So far this year 126 items have been added or updated, bringing our collection to 1488 items. Brewster Doggett's photos were added including Doggett Castle on the cliffs above the Sheepscot River.

Many new ferry items were added, from recently uncovered photos to an audio recording of Herb Cromwell Sr. describing the ferry.

View our growing collection at the History Center. As a member of the Friends, you can also go to Catalogit.app/login. Then enter the email address fowihfriend@gmail.com and the password Westport1820\$ Click Login and peruse our history.

New Exhibits at the History Center

In July two new exhibits were unveiled at the History Center. If you haven't seen them yet, stop by any Sunday afternoon from 12 to 2.

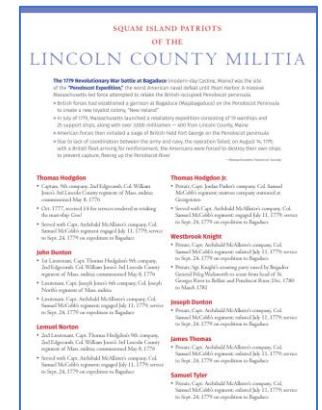
The Ferry

Relive the Westport ferry through the eyes and memories of those who rode it. See ferry artifacts.



The Revolution

Learn the saga of Westport's many soldiers in the American Revolution. See artifacts.



History Alive! Gala Launches New Westport Island History Center

By: Ken Swanton

On July 19, one hundred and fifty people gathered to celebrate Westport Island's new waterfront History Center and learn the story of its historic ferry landing site. This was Westport's sixth annual History Alive! gala, which each year brings to life the story of a special historic site on the island.

Westport's history has always been tied to the sea. In 1850, cod fishing propelled it into one of the wealthiest towns in the state. But when that industry moved to Massachusetts, the island fell on hard times and could no longer afford to maintain a bridge to the mainland. In 1899, it began using a cable ferry that connected it to Wiscasset. For the next 51 years, that was the island's lifeline.



Twenty years ago, the old ferry landing site was turned into the town's boat launch and wharf. The site had a house that the town's two history groups eventually moved into, bringing artifacts previously stored in a Town Hall closet. One group is the History Committee, a town board that preserves the artifacts. The other is a non-profit, The Friends of Westport Island History (The Friends), who raise funds and handle public outreach. The two groups are intertwined, with overlapping leadership and monthly meetings.

Last year, Westport's Town Meeting overwhelmingly approved a 99-year lease of the History Center to the Friends. Since then, the Friends has invested over \$50,000 to revamp the waterfront house into new museum and community spaces. The latter is now a popular spot for island groups to meet, introducing many more people to the history exhibits on its walls.

The Friends' big annual event is the History Alive! gala, which is held each summer at a different historic site on the island. After hors d'oeuvres and libations, presentations tell the site's history. A related exhibit then showcases it in the History Center year-round.

The July gala brought history alive as six octogenarians, who had been passengers on the ferry in the 1940s, enthralled the crowd for an hour with their colorful and amusing remembrances. They told how Luther the ferryman propelled the ferry across the river with a bat, how they would shine a light on Luther's bedroom window to wake him up after hours to get across, how the ferry went underwater when its cable broke, and how the ferry eventually wound up miles away at the bottom of the sea.



Exhibits on the ferry and on the island's Revolutionary War soldiers can be seen on Sunday afternoons from noon to 2 p.m. at the Westport Island History Center, 38 Ferry Road, Westport Island, 04578.

Images: Top: New Westport Island History Center at the old ferry landing, Bottom: Attendees listening intently to local octogenarians sharing ferry memories



2026 Friends Annual Meeting

On August 23, twenty-nine Friends members gathered for the 2026 Annual Meeting of the Friends of Westport Island History. The brief meeting reviewed the accomplishments of the last year, the goals of the next, and then elected trustees and officers. That was followed by our annual awards.

Last Year's Accomplishments

- Completed the History Center Phase 1 renovation with its new museum room and community room
- A wonderful Ferry Landing History Alive! gala where octogenarians who once rode the ferry told its story
- Record membership and fundraising, so the entire \$55k Phase 1 History Center renovation is now all paid for
- Three Town Hall History talks, three newsletters, and the scanning of many historic documents
- Received a grant for renovations of the old Town Hall

Next Year's Goals

- Expand History Center programming and community use
- Host another great History Alive! gala
- More talks, newsletters, membership growth and scanning
- Find a new Treasurer (This position only takes a few hours a month using a spreadsheet and our membership tracker. If you are interested in it, please let us know!)
- Recruit more volunteers, including History Center greeters
- Kick off Phase 2 of the History Center renovations
- Start planning for Westport's 200th anniversary in 2028

Election of Trustees

We thanked the four Trustees who are stepping down, and who each played a big role: Dennis Dunbar, Elizabeth Graff and Anne and Dewey Harris. We then elected two new Trustees, David Bradford and Bobbie Newberg, and re-elected continuing trustee Anne Cole-Fairfield. Our resulting Board of Trustees is shown below.

Friends of Westport Island History Trustees

Ken Swanton, <i>Chair</i>	Louana Frois
Gaye Wagner, <i>Secretary</i>	Mara Giuliani
Jeff Tarbox, <i>Treasurer</i>	Dedee Greenleaf-Hodgdon
David Bradford	Bobbie Newberg
Anne Cole-Fairfield	Jack Swanton
Carolyn Connor	Jean Wilhelmsen-Exter

Volunteer of the Year Award

- Dennis Dunbar

The 2026 Volunteer of the Year award went to Dennis Dunbar, an unparalleled Westport Island history researcher and story teller who has brought much new history to light.

He's shared it over the years in countless "On the History Trail" articles in the Community Association newsletter, in other publications and in his colorful presentations.

His leadership created the Westport Island History Trail with interpretive signs at historic properties, which have helped make land and historic preservation synonymous.

Dennis has served as a Friends Trustee since our founding. While now stepping down as a trustee, he will continue as an active member.



Special Recognition Award

- Ted Loran

Ted Loran was recognized for his untiring work in contributing regular history columns to the Westport Island Facebook page. His interesting stories and photos have attracted attention and appreciation. His family roots go back to Westport's early settlers. Ted researches and writes all his stories despite significant physical challenges. Thank you Ted!



Ted Loran

 All-star contributor