

GLIMPSES INTO THE PAST

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FEATURE: FIRE OF 1876

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DO YOU KNOW? Other Westport Business District fires

Main Street Before 1876



Notice the church steeple in this picture!

Before the great fire of 1876, Westport's main street harbored several businesses. On the west side of the street, on the southeast corner of what is now the Library lawn, was the Persons Hotel, owned and operated by Harry and Maria Persons. Their son, Edwin, was a clerk at the hotel until his death in 1865. On the east side of the street was a harness shop owned by John C. Osborne, C H Eddy's store, the Post Office, Town Clerk's Office, Dr. Pollard's office, and other businesses owned by J Hutchinson, A Prescott and E B Low. On the corner where the Inn on the Library Lawn now stands were homes of D L Hooper, R Ingalls and V C Spencer. Just south of these homes stood the Baptist Church. On August 16, 1876 all of these buildings were destroyed by a fire which started in the stable of Persons Hotel.

Main Street early 1900's



No church steeple visible here!

The buildings that burned were soon rebuilt except for the Hotel. In 1887, the Hotel property was deeded to the newly organized Westport Library Association, and has become the "park" for the town residents enjoyment.

A newspaper notice of the fire which appeared in the Watertown Daily Times dated Wednesday, August 16, 1876 reports:

FIRE AT WESTPORT

"A fire at Westport, N.Y., last night, destroyed all the business portion of the town. The fire originated in a barn owned by F.H. Pike [sic] and extended south to the Baptist church on Main street, and then across from C. H. Eddy's store to Richards' drug-store. The hotel was also burned. The loss is \$75,000."

GENEALOGY OF THE OSBORNE FAMILY

Generation 1

1. John C. Osborne was born in 1827 in England, and died at the age of 62 on 20 Mar 1889 in Westport. He was a harness maker, and owned a shop on Main Street which was destroyed in the fire of 1876. He built the house at 6420 Main Street just north of the Armory, now owned by Alan Kennedy. John C. Osborne married Mary Real. Mary died at the age of 59 on 19 Mar 1890. Both are buried in Hillside Cemetery.
2. Edward Osborne, brother of John C., came to Westport after 1865. He was born about 1840, and died in Westport in 1908. He married Stella Barney b. about 1848, in VT. She died in 1905. Both are buried in Hillside Cemetery

Generation 2

Children of John C. and Mary R. Osborne:

1. George b. 1855 in Westport, married Martha Elizabeth Carlin. She was born about 1861 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa and died in Westport on 13 April 1895.
2. Maria married John Gregory
3. John Eugene b. 19 June 1858 in Westport, married Selina Smith on 03 Nov 1907. He died 24 April 1943 in Rawlins, Wyoming.
4. Eliza born 1851, d. 04 Jan 1870 in San Mateo, CA.
5. Susan M. born 1849.

Children of Edward and Stella Osborne

1. Linnie m. Lewis Lester
2. Wallace, b. abt 1865, d. 11 Nov 1881.
3. Fred S. b. 1868 d. 15 Nov 1904. (Hillside Cemetery)
4. Cora S. b. 1875.
5. Clarence William b. 05 Mar 1885, d. 1959, married Edith Strong. They are buried in Hillside Cemetery.
6. Arthur M b. 1888.

Generation 3

Children of George and Martha Osborne:

1. Robert L, b. 1883, in Westport
2. Blanche Gladys , b. 22 Sept. 1892 in Westport, m. Walter Fisher Walker, d.1974. Both are buried in Hillside Cemetery.

Child of John Eugene and Selina Osborne:

Jean C. b. 1908

Children of Clarence and Edith Osborne:

1. Ruth b. 1907, m. Stephen Keefer
2. Stella b. abt 1912 m. John Morris
3. Harriet b. Sept 13, 1914, m. Raymond Clark. Both buried in St. Philip Neri Catholic Cemetery

Generation 4

Children of Blanche Osborne and Walter Walker

1. Charlotte Elizabeth Walker, b. 10 July 1912, m. Benjamin Fletcher.
2. Osborne Fisher Walker, b. 02 Aug, 1913
3. Carlin Osborne Walker, b.11 Jan 1916; m. Ruth Manville, d. 21 Nov 1998. Carlin is buried in Hillside Cemetery. Ruth is still living in Westport.

Children of Stella Osborne and John Morris

1. Michael Morris m. Carol Lee Borden
2. Judy m. George Shepard, Jr.
3. Priscilla m. John Chestnut
4. Candace m. Jay Kohen

Children of Harriet Osborne and Raymond Clark:

1. Sandra m. an Arrington
2. Susan m. a Hooper

SOURCES

The information for the above entries has been obtained from: "Bessboro: A History of Westport, Essex County, NY", 1902, by Caroline Halstead Royce; various U S Census records, tombstones in Hillside and St. Philip Neri Cemeteries in Westport NY, WWI draft registrations and various newspaper articles. (This is not intended to include ALL descendants of the Osborne family.)

OBITUARY

JOHN E. OSBORNE

"Dr. Osborne, Native of Westport, is Dead"

"Dr. John E. Osborne, early-day Wyoming governor who once had a pair of shoes made from a desperado's skin, died April 24, at Rawlins Wyo., according to a press report. He was 89.

In the 1880's, after Dr. Osborne went west from Vermont, "Big Nose" George Parrott was lynched by a Wyoming posse. Dr. Osborne, then a young physician removed a square of skin from the body and had it tanned and fashioned into a pair of shoes which are now on display at a Rawlins bank.

Dr. Osborne was governor of Wyoming from 1893-1895, United States representative from 1896 to 1898 and first assistant secretary of state in President Wilson's administration.

He was born in Westport, went to Burlington, Vt., at the age of 16, and began working in a local drug store. He attended the University of Vermont and received his M.D. degree at the age of 20.

He became an assistant surgeon for the Union Pacific railroad headquarters in Rawlins, Wyo., and in addition opened a drug store which expanded into a wholesale establishment. Dr. Osborne later began raising sheep on the side and before long was regarded as the largest individual sheep owner in the state.

He was elected mayor of Rawlins and in 1893 was chosen the state's governor by a plurality of 1800 votes. After one term as governor, he declined the renomination and was elected to Congress, serving one term. In 1900 he was chosen as the Wyoming member of the Democratic National committee. Dr. Osborne was appointed assistant secretary of state in 1913, resigning 3 years later."

[Essex Co. Republican May 7, 1943]

BOOKS

GRAY'S ATLAS (1876)

An interesting resource book for all Essex County NY researchers is the New Topographical Atlas of Essex County New York with General Maps and Descriptions of the World. It was surveyed, drawn, engraved and published under the direction of O.W.Gray and Son of Philadelphia in 1876. Its contents include the Population of Essex County Towns of that time, Agricultural products from the Census of 1870, Manufactures statistics of items such as starch, carriages and wagons and woolen goods. Included also is a "Classified Business Directory" of each of the towns in the County. The drawings included are renditions of the Lee House and the Witherbee residence in Port Henry, the Leland House and the Ondawa House in Schroon Lake, the Hammond residences and the Spaulding house in Crown Point, Christ Church and Rectory in Port Henry, and the St. Peters and Paul Church in Mineville. But, by far, the most informative feature is the map of each township, which shows the plots of landowners of the mid 1870's. A copy of this book can be found at the Essex County Clerk's Office.

SPOTLIGHT PERSONS HOTEL

Lake House (as it stood in Library Park previous to fire of 1876)



The Persons Hotel was also called The Lake House. It is said that it was built by Aaron Felt, who was one of the earliest settlers of Wadhams Mills.

The Lake House stood on the southeast corner of what is now the Library Lawn.

Harry J. Persons, hotel keeper, was born in Vermont on February 14, 1805. His wife, Maria was born in 1810. Their son, Edwin was born in 1828. He worked as a clerk at the Lake House. They also had daughters, Lousia and Katherine (Kitty).

Harry J Persons died Dec 29, 1877, only a year after the disastrous fire that took his livelihood. His wife died May 27, 1882.

Edwin died at the young age of 37, on Jan 5, 1865.

Harry, Maria and Edwin Persons are buried in Hillside Cemetery

DO YOU KNOW...

Other fires have wreaked havoc on our main street too. In 1919, Charles A Pattison's store was gutted, leaving only the brick walls standing. And again in 1936, a main street fire took three buildings: an ice cream shop owned by Wallace Fuller, a soda fountain and gift shop owned by Sara Richards and an apartment building which stood next to the bank.

Two families were rescued from the apartments: Elmer Rice and his children, Kenneth age 18, Dorothy age 9 and Estelle age 20 had occupied one apartment. The other, by Carey (Cooch) and Kate Merrow. No one was injured, although both families lost everything.

The second fire on Main Street in Westport 1936



Featured Website

There is much more to learn about John E. Osborne and his adventures in Wyoming. Read about his election to office and the train robber Big Nose George.

<http://www.wyomingtalesandtrails.com/rawlinsa.html>

<http://www.wyomingbnb-ranchrec.com/City.Rawlins.htm>