



A History of Wahaneeta Preserve



WAHANEETA PRESERVE

Introduction



The Westerly Land Trust's (WLT) Wahaneeta Preserve is located just off the east side of Dunns Corners / Bradford Road, about 1.5 miles from Route 1. To access the Preserve, take Moorhouse Road off Dunns Corners / Bradford Road. There is a small parking area just off this road. The property is adjacent to the Trombino Sports Complex, and the 800-acre Woody Hill Management Area of the RI Department of Environmental Management.

Covering approximately 85 acres, Wahaneeta Preserve was acquired by the WLT through two separate transactions. The first and largest of these transactions was the purchase of approximately 74 acres from the Girl Scouts of Rhode Island in 2012. The site had been an active Girl Scout Camp for approximately 50 years, from the 1940s until the mid 1990s. In 2018, the second property was acquired by the WLT through the generous donation of Peter and Andrea Verbos: approximately 11 acres of woodland located just to the east of Wahaneeta off South Woody Hill Road. Because of its proximity, WLT includes this property as part of Wahaneeta Preserve.

Entering the Preserve visitors will find the main Girl Scout camp area with its original cabin and pavilion dating back to the 1940s. Beyond the camp area, with its proximity to the nearby 800-acre preserved forest, and its own unusually rich soils, hilly topography and glacial geology, the Preserve offers a natural habitat with an abundance of wildlife. Several well-maintained trails provide visitors with various paths to explore and enjoy this peaceful, natural landscape. Signs along the trails offer a look back at Girl Scout camping activities and highlight historic sites dating as far back as 300 years.

Notably, at the time of its purchase, this beautiful property marked a major milestone for the Westerly Land Trust. In a letter to the Girl Scouts of Rhode Island, then WLT President Harvey Perry wrote that the property was “an essential parcel for the Land Trust’s landscape-scale project to create a conservation area from Route 78 east to the Charlestown town line, north to the 800-acre Woody Hill Management Area, and north through the State-owned Newton Marsh to the Pawcatuck River.”

The closure of the Girl Scout Camp in the mid 1990s is but one example of the effect of a decline in scouting across the country; a decline that continues to threaten the loss of many camps and open spaces to development. In Westerly, like the Girl Scout Camp, this trend led to the closure of the local Boy Scout Camp Quequatuck. Working with the Boy Scout organization, in 2025 WLT completed the acquisition of this camp, a four-acre parcel adjacent to WLT’s Riverwood Preserve at the end of Boy Scout Drive.

With the purchase of both the Girl Scout and Boy Scout Camps, the Westerly Land Trust has ensured the preservation of these two open spaces to be enjoyed by all future generations of the community.

HISTORY OF THE LAND AND PEOPLE

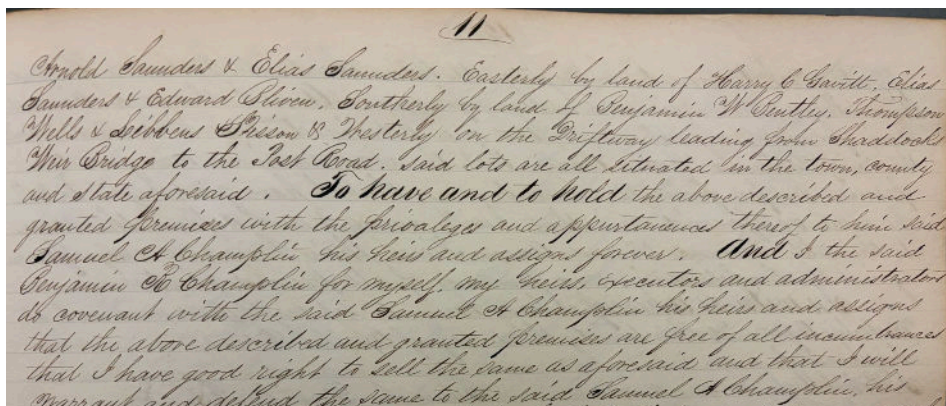
The First Inhabitants

A historical perspective of the people who called this land home begins with Native Americans, specifically the Narragansett Tribe. Various sources cite anthropological and archeological findings indicating that the Narragansetts have lived in this area for 10,000 years. As recounted in their oral history by their Sachem Canonicus, the grandson of the Great Sachem Tashtasick, the people have existed “since time out of mind.” Their homeland covered most of what is now Rhode Island, including Block Island, and at its peak, their population was estimated to range from 30,000 individuals to as high as 40,000.

Their history tells of living near the shore areas in the warmer months, taking full advantage of the abundant ocean resources. While living near the ocean, families lived in *wetus*, small, rounded temporary homes with woven grass mat covering. In winter months they moved inland, also living in *wetus*, but these were built with more solid bark covering and made more air-tight to withstand the cold. At these winter sites they also built *gunnekamuck*, much larger, permanent long houses. These structures might be up to 200 feet long, providing a communal living space for as many twenty families living together, as well as often serving as communal gathering places.

Without written records or archeological evidence, it is not possible to know with any certainty whether the people may have moved from the coastal areas of Westerly to the area of the Wahaneeta Preserve in the colder months or lived in this area year-round. However, a look back through old area maps and recorded history suggests this may have been likely.

Most specifically, records of this area dating back to the 1700s refer to a “driftway” leading from the Weekapaug area northward over what are now Langworthy and Dunns Corners / Bradford Road. Continuing north along this route brings you to the Pawcatuck River crossing in Bradford. Early history records this crossing as “Shattuck’s Weir.” Local accounts say Shattuck, a Native American, most likely Narragansett, lived and fished by the river falls here. To catch fish, he would spread a weir, or fish trap, across the river. At the time the river offered an abundance of fish including salmon, trout, pickerel, and shad, the biggest catch of the year in the spring when shad came upriver to spawn.



1850 Champlin Family deed identifies “driftway from Shaddocks Weir Bridge to the Post Road”

Following this route connecting the shoreline with inland areas, passing the area of the Preserve with its abundance of wildlife and freshwater brook, it is easy to imagine the Narragansetts living on the land that today is Wahaneeta Preserve.

Ownership History

A search of Westerly land evidence records traces ownership of the present-day Preserve property from the Girl Scouts’ purchase in the 1940s back to the mid 1850s. However, research into the family histories of these owners suggests a possible chain of ownership dating back to the mid 1600s and one of Westerly’s first families.

The property purchased by the Westerly Land Trust from The Girl Scouts of Rhode Island was acquired by the Scouts through two transactions with the family of Stuart Cruickshank Sr.

The first of these took place in March 1941, when Stuart Cruickshank Sr. sold approximately 22 acres to the Westerly Council of the Girl Scouts of America.

Records show the second parcel sold by Stuart Cruickshank Jr. in March, 1948. However, a report in *The Westerly Sun* reveals the property was gifted to the Girl Scouts by the Westerly Lions Club, an effort spearheaded by local businessman Angelo Gencarelli. According to the article, as well as numerous other reports, Gencarelli had been a long-time supporter of the Girl Scouts and had been instrumental in the construction of the camp house.

Interestingly, the record of this second transaction lists the parcel as approximately 81 acres. However, a survey done in support of the sale to the WLT found the actual size to be about 50 acres. The survey found that two transactions involving this parcel had occurred after its sale in 1948, selling off two pieces totaling about 32 acres, leaving the parcel purchased by the WLT at approximately 50 acres.

Stuart Cruickshank Sr. and his wife Helen had purchased these two parcels as one 102-acre property in 1924 from Frank Woodmansee, a resident of Wakefield, Rhode Island. Woodmansee purchased the property in 1923 from Albert Langworthy of Westerly. Langworthy had owned the property for about 30 years, having purchased it from Charles Chapman in 1892.

Town land records show the property being sold by Samuel Champlin to Case Chapman Jr. on May 23, 1855. Chapman family history indicates that Case Chapman Jr. had died in 1877 and had two children: a daughter, Harriet, and a son, Charles. It is likely that Case conveyed the property to his son Charles, who then sold it to Albert Langworthy.

A definitive record of Samuel Champlin's purchase of the land could not be found. However, Champlin family history in the Local History Room of the Westerly Public Library indicates that Samuel A. Champlin and his brother Benjamin were sons of Benjamin R. Champlin.

According to *New England Families* by William Richard Cutter, Benjamin R. Champlin was born in Exeter, Rhode Island on May 18, 1786, and died May 18, 1847. He is buried in Hopkinton, RI. Cutter reports, "In the spring of 1830 he bought a farm in the eastern part of the town of Westerly which, with land subsequently purchased around it amounted to three hundred acres. It was afterward known as the 'Benjamin Champlin Estate.'"

The exact location of these 300 acres could not be determined, but town records suggest the Wahaneeta Preserve property may have been part of this estate. Specifically, a land evidence record dated April 22, 1850, shows the sale by one Champlin brother, Benjamin, of his one-fifth share in the estate of his late father Benjamin R. Champlain, to his brother, Samuel A Champlin. While this one-fifth share of the 300-acre estate does not appear to involve the Preserve property, the names of adjacent owners clearly place it in the general area of the Preserve. The boundaries and description of this share do suggest the one-fifth share parcel included land that is now the nearby WLT's Barlow Nature Preserve.

While the record search involving this property ends with the above transactions, research of known owners and their families uncovered evidence of a possible ownership trail back to the mid 1600s and one of Westerly's first settlers, Elder John Crandall.

In 1660, a group of businessmen from Newport, Rhode Island, purchased from Narragansett Sachem Soso a "tract of land called Misquamicut." This land formed the town of Westerly until 1738, but by 1757 it would be divided into the towns of Westerly, Charlestown, Richmond and Hopkinton. Historical records, and those of the Crandall family, show that one of the original settlers and landowners involved in this purchase was Elder John Crandall. According to Crandall Family Association history, in 1661 this land was "distributed into 18 shares; John Crandall received a half share."

Family history holds that the exact location of Elder John's land has never been verified, but with six sons in Westerly, Elder John's descendants bought and sold much land in the area. Ownership of the family "Homestead" on Pound Road, a short distance from the Preserve, can be traced to one of Elder John's grandsons beginning in the mid 1700s. That branch of the family became buyers and sellers of farms culminating in Elder John's great-great-great-grandsons owning more than 1,000 acres in the Pound Road / Dunns Corner area. Those parcels included the 553-acre parcel that is now the Land Trust's Crandall Family Preserve, Timber Creek RV Park, and Narragansett Indian parcels on Pound Road and adjacent to the Wahaneeta Preserve.

Additional evidence leading back to Elder John Crandall also emerged through research on the historical Rathbun family cemetery located in Wahaneeta Preserve. This effort identified a connection between the Rathbun and Crandall families, creating a chain that - while admittedly speculative - could also link ownership of this property to Elder John Crandall. Details of this research are included later in this history, as well as additional information on the cemetery.

WAHANEETA

The Story Behind the Name

Local history holds that a young scout, Evelyn Reese, was the winner of a Girl Scout contest to select a name for their new camp. Her winning submittal told the story of a young Indian girl, Wahaneeta, looking out over the ocean on the bluff in Watch Hill, awaiting the return of her lover. No doubt a compelling story. But what might have been this young author's inspiration for her story?

The answer may be found in a book of poems published in 1895 titled *Autumn Leaves* by Mary Bassett Clarke. The first poem in this book, *Legend of Watch Hill*, is an impressive 373 lines in length and tells the story of a young "maiden, Wahaneeta," the daughter of "Sassacus, the Pequot Chief." It tells of Wahaneeta sitting on a bluff in Watch Hill looking out over the ocean, waiting for the return of her lover, "a young Manisses Chieftain" from his home, presumably Block Island. Sadly, Wahaneeta does not know that her father disapproved of the young chieftain and had him killed. And so she waits, through the summer months and on into winter, where she is found one morning "silent, cold and dead."

Mary Bassett Clarke was originally from Independence, New York, a small town in the northwestern part of the state. In 1859, at the age of 27, she married William Lewis Clarke and moved to Ashaway, Rhode Island, where she lived until her death in 1908. Clarke's years in the Westerly area are reflected in the fact that, in addition to the *Legend of Watch Hill*, a number of poems in her book are of nautical themes.

Interestingly, a search for the story behind Wahaneeta led to a February 6, 1891 edition of *The Round Table*, a periodical published since 1853 by the students of Beloit College in Beloit, Wisconsin. This edition included the story of *Wahanita - A Supposed Indian Legend*. The story closely parallels *Legend of Watch Hill*: a young Native American girl, Wahanita, daughter of Ogalala, a name familiar to the Midwest Lakota Sioux, waiting for the return of her lover who, as in the story of Wahaneeta, unfortunately never comes. In this story the young Indian warrior, Keneu-Kola, in an effort to avoid conflict between tribes, travels from his home in "the plains" to the east where "lived the Iroquois." In this legend the young warrior is killed by the Iroquois. Sadly, upon learning of his death, Wahanita also dies, succumbing to a fever.

Perhaps Mary Bassett Clarke found the inspiration for *Wahaneeta* through the story of *Wahanita*. But what about the inspiration behind *Wahanita*? An inquiry to *The Round Table* at Beloit College brought no response. A broad search through Native American history revealed many legends, however there was no evidence of the legend of *Wahanita*.

VISITING THE PRESERVE

The Girl Scout Camp



Camp House Located on "Camp Wahanceta" Affords the Necessary Facilities for Over-Night or Longer Camping

Image sourced from The Westerly Sun

Entering Wahanceta Preserve, visitors will find a camp house and pavilion built for the Girl Scouts. The opening of the new camp, including the camp house, was covered in *The Westerly Sun* on November 25, 1942. The article highlighted the broad support of volunteers involved in clearing the land and building the cabin and also emphasized that all funding for the construction of the cabin was being raised through public donations.

The camp house was "patterned after the most modern type of camp approved by Girl Scout Headquarters." According to a life-long Westerly resident and former scout who attended the camp, the cabin was modeled after the cabin at Camp Hoffman in South Kingstown. A 1940 *Westerly Sun* article described the cabin:

The building will be a one-story structure, 24 feet by 36 feet in size, will be of cabin design and will be finished inside with stained knotty pine. The floors will be of double oak, and the outer walls will be ship lapped. In the camp will be a large camp room with a fireplace, a bedroom with sleeping facilities for two camp leaders, a kitchen, and two store rooms. Over the end rooms will be sleeping cots for a full troop of 23 girls.

Today, visitors will find this rustic cabin in its original form, artfully restored and maintained by Westerly Land Trust volunteers. Nearby the camp house is a large, open-air pavilion with picnic tables and a new metal roof installed by WLT volunteers. Volunteers have also restored the camp's well and its outhouse.

A chronology of the many activities undertaken to complete the camp, prepared by the Westerly Land Trust, highlights the considerable work of many local volunteers, as well as the scouts themselves, involved in the construction of the camp. This chronology also brings to light the occurrence of some of the major events of the time.

Starting in December 1940 and on into 1941, initial efforts to clear the land for the camp began; and a well was dug. However, it was noted that before any work could start the area had to be cleared of debris from the historic 1938 hurricane.

In the spring of 1941, 15,000 pine seedlings were donated and planted throughout the camp by volunteers as well as the Girl Scouts. And in July 1941, the foundation and floor of the camp house were put in place.

Most notably, in the fall of 1942, the chronology brings to mind World War II and the extreme difficulties volunteers faced trying to secure resources to complete the camp. The history recognizes the tremendous efforts of the volunteers and specifically notes the efforts of local residents Mrs. Thomas Moore, Sr. and Mr. Angelo Gencarelli. Their efforts were key to completing the camp and having it ready for use in the fall of 1942.

And lastly, in the spring of 1945, the chronology notes that the “old mill pond at Woody Hill was returned to a wading pool and presented to the Girl Scouts to be to be used for both wading and skating.”

Relive the Preserve’s Unique History



A short walk from the camp’s meadow on the Orange trail connects with the Yellow trail where visitors will find an old and somewhat unusual chimney. On one side of the chimney is a fireplace, most likely used to heat the house; a pipe that ran out the backside might have been used to heat a workshop.

This chimney is believed to be the remains of what was at one time the home of the Cruickshank family. Their family history shows that Stuart Cruickshank, his wife Helen, and their five children emigrated to the United States from Kemnay,

Aberdeenshire, Scotland, sometime prior to 1920; and they lived in and around Westerly and Bradford.

According to the 1920 Census, Stuart Cruickshank Sr. and his son Stuart Jr. were employed as dye operators, undoubtedly at the Bradford Dyeing Association. However, the Babcock-Smith House Museum in Westerly and the book *Built from Stone* includes both men in its list of “nearly 2600 names of men and women who were part of Westerly’s granite industry.” Evidence of this can be found in a note from the archives of Dwight Brown, a widely known Westerly historian. In his note, Brown recalls that as a young teenage boy, Stuart Jr. would drive a horse and buggy from his home, presumably the site of the chimney at the Preserve, to his work as a mason at the Smith Quarry. This quarry was located near the intersection of Tower and Granite Streets, demanding a daily round-trip buggy ride of roughly 10 miles!



A short walk from the meadow along the white trail is a small pond. A sign at the site alerts visitors to the unique history of this pond, a history dating back 300 years to the early 1700s when the pond was created to support the operation of a sawmill.

According to a Forest Management Plan prepared for the Land Trust in 2014, the pond was first created by damming the stream that runs through the Preserve and then forming the pond by constructing two soil/masonry embankments to contain the water. This same study also provides evidence of a sawmill, noting the existence of an old logging road that runs from the Woody Hill management area southerly across the property and passing near the pond.

Further evidence of a sawmill, as well as the likely period of the operation of the mill, can be found in two local history books. One book is *In and About Westerly* by local historian Tom O’Connell. In a section of the book titled *Crandall Farm*, he notes that lumber in part of the Frank Crandall house is “over 200 years old” and “was moved from its former location.” He adds that the “lumber in this part of the house came from a mill by the old earth and stone dam which can still be seen near the Girl Scout Camp Wahaneeta.”

In the book *A New England Childhood* by Dorothy Crandall Bliss, the author includes a picture of her family home in Westerly. With the picture, Bliss includes a description of the house, stating “the main house was built in 1845, and the ell, moved from across the road, was built in the early 1700’s.” Photos of the house included in each book show the same house, clearly supporting the timing and operation of a sawmill at the pond site. In fact, this home still stands today; it’s on the west side of Dunns Corners / Bradford Road just to the south of Moorhouse Road and the entrance to Wahaneeta.

Over the years, the pond filled in considerably through the buildup of natural sedimentation. The original pond went up to the ridge along the blue trail and a good distance upstream. Its original outflow was where the sawmill was located; the current outflow resulted from a portion of the dam being possibly blown out by a storm or intentionally removed. Following the purchase of the property, the Land Trust completed an engineered restoration of a small portion of the pond, helping to reestablish its function as an integral part of the natural ecology. Today the pond serves as a nesting area for wood ducks, and it has also become an important cold water-refuge for native brook trout that inhabit the stream running through the Preserve.

Located in the southeast corner of the Wahaneeta Preserve is Rhode Island Historical Cemetery No. 53, Thomas Rathbun Ground. Rev. Frederic Denison writes in *Westerly and Its Witnesses 1626 - 1876*, “Here are about thirty graves with unlettered stones. This ground contains the graves of Anna, Paul, Mercy and Thomas Rathbun and others of the Rathbun family.”

Efforts to determine those identified as buried in the cemetery included research and analysis of several online genealogical sites, Rathbun family records in the Local History room of the Westerly Public Library, and Westerly and Charlestown Land Evidence Records. While it cannot be stated with complete certainty, considerable evidence was found that indicates the four names of those said to be buried in the cemetery are the son of Ebenezer Rathbun Sr., his son’s wife, and their son and his wife.



Ebenezer Rathbun Sr. was born April 28, 1696, on Block Island and genealogical records show that he had “at least two sons and five daughters.” He died in Westerly, the date unknown but reportedly prior to 1775; where he is buried is also unknown.

Genealogical records show that a son of Ebenezer, Thomas, was born in Westerly in 1721 and died in Westerly in 1798. Further, a search of Westerly land evidence records to determine when the Rathbun's purchased this land found a deed from January 8, 1752. This deed documents the conveyance of the property that includes the site of the cemetery from Ebenezer Rathbun Sr. to “Thomas Rathbun my son.”

In addition to Thomas, it is believed that the grave of Anna is that of Thomas Rathbun's wife. Records show that Thomas married Ann Wilbur in 1745. More current and general online genealogical records list her name as Ann. However, an 1898 Rathbone Genealogy, compiled by John C. Cooley, states Thomas Rathbun "married Anna —; she was born in Westerly, R.I." It's also noted here that where more current family records typically spell the name as Rathbun, older records spell the name as either Rathbun or Rathbone.

RATHBONE GENEALOGY.		741
1. Elizabeth, b. July 27, 1728.		
2. John, b. Aug. 7, 1730.		
3. Simon, b. June 27, 1732.		
4. Marion, b. May 10, 1736.		
5. Phyllis, b. Jan. 22, 1742.		
EBENEZER ³ RATHBONE (William ⁴ , John ⁵ , John ⁶ , Richard ⁷), born on Block Island, R. I., June 28, 1696; married Mrs. Sarah Berry of Westerly, R. I., July 23, 1721. Willed him by his father, pottage pot. &c. Was admitted a freeman of Westerly, R. I. Children:		
1. Thomas, b. Nov. 23, 1722; m. Anna —.		
2. Famsin (dau.), b. Oct. 8, 1724.		
3. Sarah, b. Mar. 27, 1728; m. Abner Wilbur, Feb. 8, 1853.		
4. Elenor, b. Sept. 10, 1732.		
5. Mary, b. Jan. 16, 1737; m. (probably) Christopher Kenyon, Dec. 27, 1739.		
6. Ebenezer, b. Jan. 29, 1740; m. Mary Crandall.		
THOMAS ⁴ RATHBONE (Ebenezer ³ , William ⁴ , John ⁵ , John ⁶ , Richard ⁷), born in Westerly, R. I., Nov. 23, 1722; married Anna —; she was born in Westerly, R. I. His will, dated June 20, 1795. Children:		
1. Stephen, b. Nov. 17, 1750; m. Elizabeth Taylor, dau. of David, both of Westerly, Mar. 25, 1779; they had three children: (i.) Anna, b. Sept. 14, 1781; (ii.) Job Wilbur, b. June 20, 1784; (iii.) David Taylor, b. Mar. 6, 1795.		
2. Priscilla, b. Nov. 12, 1752.		
3. James, b. May 6, 1754; m. Susannah Clark, dau. of Joseph, Sept. 27, 1798; she died June 18, 1868.		
4. Paul Wilcox, b. Dec. 29, 1756.		
5. Mary, b. April 29, 1758.		
6. Thomas, b. Mar. 8, 1768.		
JAMES ⁵ RATHBONE (Thomas ⁴ , Ebenezer ³ , William ⁴ , John ⁵ , John ⁶ , Richard ⁷), born in Westerly, R. I., May 6, 1754; married Susanna Clark, —, 1777; she died Jan. 18, 1818. In or about 1797, he removed to the town of Hartwick, Otsego Co., N. Y., after there a year he removed to the town of Lawrence same county, where he died, Dec. 17, 1843; he was buried in the private burial ground on the farm of Jonathan Fuller in the northwestern part of said town. He was a soldier in the war of the Revolution. He was a farmer. She was buried in the Quaker burial ground near		

Ninigret. Records show that George had assumed control of the tribal government in 1735. Information found in the Rathbone Genealogy states that the cemetery sits on "land that was bought of the Indian Chief Minigret (sic) by John Hill and Christopher Champlin in Charlestown and Westerly, R.I. Deed dated Jan. 14, 1745. It is on this lot where the burial lot in which the graves of that family are buried. viz. Anna, Paul, Mercy and Thomas Rathbone and other members of the family. It is situated one-fourth mile east of the cross road from the Post road to Dowville on the old Champlin farm, now owned by Mr. Case Champlin."

Dowville is presumably Dorrville, the mid 1800s name for Bradford; and as later ownership records show, the property was owned by Case Chapman, not Case Champlin. Unless the property was sold by Hill and Champlin prior to its purchase by Ebenezer Rathbun, it is reasonable to conclude that Ebenezer purchased this property between 1745 and 1752, from Hill and / or Champlin.

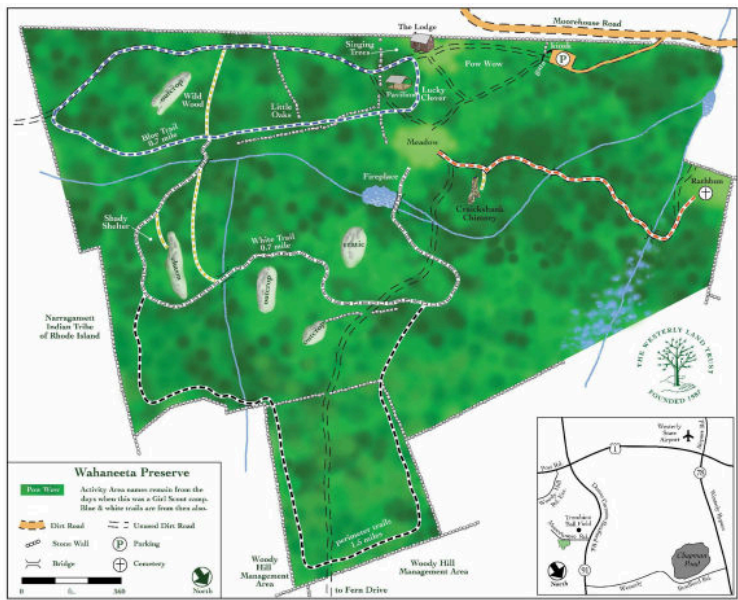
And lastly, the graves of Paul and Mercy are believed to be the son and daughter-in-law of Thomas and Anna Rathbone. Records show that Thomas and Anna Rathbone had six children, four sons and two daughters. Paul Wilcox Rathbone was one son. He was born in Westerly in 1756 and died in Westerly about 1820. In 1778, Paul married Mercy Rathbone. She was born in 1758; records show she is buried in Westerly, however, the date of her death is unknown.

A record of the purchase of this property by Ebenezer Rathbun could not be found. However, the search for information regarding family members buried in the cemetery revealed a most notable sale of the property in 1745 by George Ninigret, a direct descendent of the Niantic Sachem

Regarding a possible link to the family of Elder John Crandall, genealogical research revealed that Ebenezer Sr.'s other son, Ebenezer Jr., is buried along with his wife Mary Crandall, at the nearby RI Historical Cemetery Number 55, Thier Crandall Ground. Crandall family records show that Mary Crandall was the aunt of Thier Crandall. Historical cemetery records note its location on land known as the Thier Crandall Farm. In fact, the *RI Historical Cemeteries* database provides a graves list for the cemetery revealing the oldest grave in this cemetery to be that of James Crandall who died in 1792. Crandall family history lists this James Crandall as the father of Mary Crandall and the grandfather of Thier Crandall, suggesting that James had been the prior owner of the farm, with ownership eventually passing to his grandson. Most notably, family history also shows James Crandall to be the great grandson of Elder John Crandall.

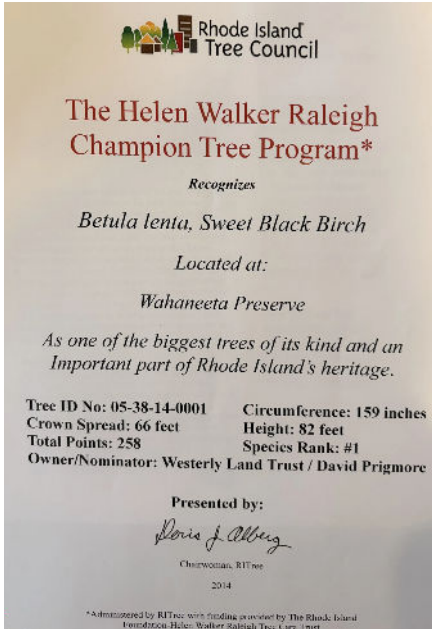
Exploring the Land

A carefully maintained trail system, including bridges and boardwalks, covers approximately 2.4 miles, providing visitors with easy access to explore the natural landscape of the Wahaneeta Preserve. While some of these trails have been built by Westerly Land Trust volunteers, returning scouts may remember the Blue and White trails as original trails from their camping days.



Signs along the trails recall sites and activities from the Girl Scout's camping days. A number of the signs, Lucky Clover, Little Oaks, Wild Wood and Shady Shelter, mark the locations of individual campsites. Other signs, PowWow, Singing Tree, and Mosquito Manor Bug Bog, mark sites for larger group gatherings and activities.

For all visitors, and most certainly those interested in geology, the Wahaneeta Trail Map highlights areas of unique geological formations left behind as the area's last glaciers receded 10,000 to 12,000 years ago. These formations include outcroppings of bedrock, a deep, glacial chasm, and erratic, deposits of rocks and boulders left behind as the ice melted.



Along the trails visitors will note small signs identifying the many species of trees found throughout the Preserve. Most notably, along the Black Dot trail near the Preserve's northern boundary with the Woody Hill management area, visitors will find a spectacular black birch tree. In 2014, the *Rhode Island Tree Council* and the *Helen Walker Raleigh Champion Tree Program* formally recognized this tree “as one of the biggest trees of its kind and an important part of Rhode Island’s Heritage.” At that time, the tree measured 82 feet high with a girth of over 13 feet! This champion tree was originally identified by two long-standing Land Trust stewards, Tom Moore, Jr. and Dave Prigmore. Interestingly, Tom Moore Jr’s mother, mentioned earlier, was one of the many volunteers that built the camp and one of the original camp counselors.

Wahaneeta Preserve has also been a rich resource for scientists. In 2017-2018, Dr. Charles Clarkson, Director of Avian Research for the Audubon Society, led the research for the RI Bird Atlas, the most extensive catalog of birds in the region. Dr. Clarkson accessed several Westerly Land Trust properties to track spring and fall migration, as well as year-round counts of native species. At Wahaneeta, more than 70 species of birds were observed - the richest species density not only within WLT preserves, but in the region.

Connecting with Nature

The Westerly Land Trust’s goal at Wahaneeta Preserve, as well as at all WLT properties, is to encourage a life-long love and connection between people and nature. To this end, the WLT offers a variety of programs and activities with a goal to encourage an appreciation of nature, spark imagination, expand knowledge and create memories.

Youth Programs: Children of all ages engage directly with the natural world through a variety of programs, including afterschool enrichment experiences, homeschool groups, early childhood programs, family programs, and field trips. The pond, an important ecological feature, was once used by Girl Scouts to wade in and simply enjoy the water and is now a hands-on site where students study aquatic life using dip nets and waders. During youth programs, the former Girl Scout cabin transforms into a classroom—a welcoming space where students can gather and stay warm during colder months. Students also explore the trails—some of which date back to the days of the former Girl Scouts—learning about trees, rocks, habitats, and biodiversity of Wahaneeta Preserve.



Right: Former Girl Scout Ellen Madison inspires young conservationists in the Wahaneeta Cabin.

Hikes & Exploration: Wahaneeta Preserve is open to the public, and WLT offers guided hikes through our Thursday Hikes group as well as themed hikes and special events. Each program naturally weaves in the history of the site, and visitors can also learn from historical education signs placed throughout the Preserve, providing context and stories as they explore.



The Westerly Land Trust invites visitors of all ages to connect with nature and history. Whether hiking the trails, discovering nature, reliving its history, or joining a program, Wahaneeta Preserve offers a hands-on connection to both nature and the heritage of the Preserve. Explore, learn, and be inspired by this special place that has welcomed generations of visitors.



Sweet Black Birch at Wahaneeta Preserve



The accreditation seal is awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence.

When visiting Wahaneeta Preserve, please note that hunting is permitted. RI state law requires that all visitors must wear 200 square inches of solid daylight fluorescent orange from the second Saturday in September to the last day of February and from the third Saturday in April to the last day in May.

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