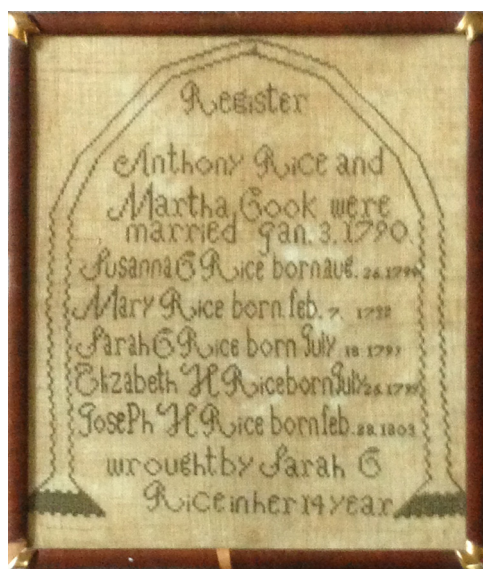


Three Samplers from Westcott, Rhode Island

In the first decades of the 19th Century, three talented young ladies in Westcott, Rhode Island demonstrated their literacy, dexterity and faith by cross-stitching three remarkable samplers. While the males in the village of Westcott along the Pawtuxet River achieved fame as generals, entrepreneurs and politicians, the quiet work of cousins Sarah Cook (below left) and Sarah Rice and their niece Martha Westcott endures with these embroideries in the Westcott collection at the Warwick (Rhode Island) Historical Society.



A Young Woman's Education

A sampler is a piece of cross-stitching or embroidery produced as a demonstration or a test of skill in needlework. It often includes the alphabet, figures, motifs, decorative borders and sometimes the name of the person who embroidered it and the date.

The earliest known American sampler was made by Loara Standish of the Plymouth Colony about 1645. By the 1700s, samplers depicting alphabets and numerals were worked by young women to learn the basic needlework skills needed to operate the family household.

By the late 1700s and early 1800s, schools or academies for well-to-do young women flourished, and more elaborate pieces with decorative motifs such as verses, flowers, houses, religious, pastoral, and/or mourning scenes were being stitched. The parents of these young women proudly displayed their embroideries as showpieces of their work, talent, and status.

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/object-groups/american-samplers>

<http://www.rihs.org/connect/online-exhibits/samplers/>



Sarah Cook's Alphabet and Numbers, 1808

In 1808, twelve-year-old Sarah Crawford Cook demonstrated mastery of her letters and numbers by crafting a 12-inch by 13-inch needlework with three bands. The first band consists of rows of upper-case letters (including alternate characters for A, M and N), an ampersand, numbers 1 through 12, lower-case letters, a period and then numbers 13 to 20. The faded center band reads:

**Sarah C. Cook was born
January 30, 1796 and made
this May 6, 1808 in Providence.**

The band at the bottom of the piece consists of three rows of upper-case letters with a more elaborate script, followed by a simple sawtooth design to fill space at the end of the row. The presentation is contained within a single-line border.

Sarah was the daughter of sea captain Joseph Bernon Cook (June 6, 1765 to October 11, 1850) and Abigail Allen (about 1769 to October 1828).

In his will Joseph Bernon Cook appoints Sarah's cousin, Elizabeth Holden (Rice) Westcott, to be his daughter's guardian. The federal and state censuses in the second half of the century list Sarah as a boarder in the home of cousin Elizabeth Westcott and her nieces and records Sarah as "insane."

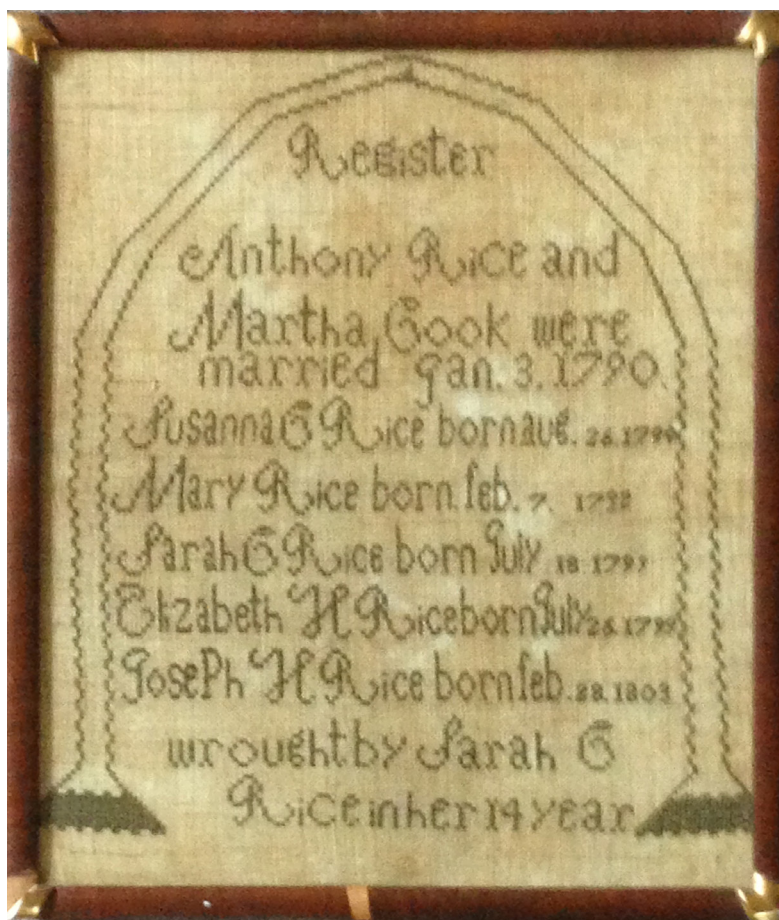
The story of Sarah Cook is told in "The Old Homestead," a 1928 manuscript by Jennie Westcott about the Westcott Rice House in Warwick:

"Grandmother's [Elizabeth Westcott] uncle Joseph Cook was a sea captain and probably brought home the china and perhaps some of the furniture that was in the house. His

daughter Sally {sic} was one of the characters of the old place. She came here when she was 25 years old, was insane, but harmless, and lived there the rest of her life. She lived to be over 80. I have heard my aunts tell about how she would go after huckleberries when she was young and string them and hang them to dry. She was very well educated and I have some beautiful

needlework that she did while at Miss Balch's private school in Providence."

Another family story is that Sarah lived in isolation on the second floor of the Westcott house for most of the 70 years after being "scorned by a lover." Sarah died on October 5, 1882.



Sarah Rice Stitches a Family Register

In her 14th year Sarah Crawford Rice, Sarah Cook's cousin, wrought an 11-inch by 13-inch sampler titled "Register" documenting her parents' marriage and the birth of their five children:

Register

Anthony Rice and
Martha Cook were
married Jan. 3, 1790

Susanna C Rice was born Aug. 26, 1790

Mary Rice was born Feb. 7, 1792

Sarah C Rice was born July 18, 1795

Elizabeth H Rice was born July 26, 1799

Joseph H Rice was born Feb. 28, 1803

wrought by Sarah C

Rice in her 14 year

The marriage and the five births all took place in Warwick, R.I. The text is bordered by a simple arch.

Martha Cook was the sister of Joseph Bernon Cook, father of Sarah Cook.

Anthony Rice (1761-1817) was a Revolutionary War soldier and the three-times great-grandson of Randall Holden, one of the original settlers of

Warwick. Anthony farmed the western portion of Wecochoaconet Farm Number 5, 400 acres south of the Pawtuxet River that was laid out for Randall Holden.

In 1789, Rice built a center-chimney Cape style house with five rooms on the first floor and two on the second. When the New London Turnpike was opened in 1817, a toll house was placed across the road from the Rice house, and a family member “turned the pike,” that is, opened the toll gate, after collecting the authorized fee.



Undated photograph of the south side of the Westcott-Rice home in Warwick

Sarah married Major John Westcott on January 23, 1814. John Westcott (August 25, 1792 to December 5, 1844) was the son of General Thomas and Marcy Westcott and the three-times great grandson of Stukely Westcott (John⁶, Thomas⁵, Nathan⁴, Josiah³, Jeremiah², Stukely Westcott¹). He was a member of the Kentish Guard and a harness maker and shoe maker.

Their marriage and the births of their four children – Mary Louisa Westcott (1815-1864), Amanda Fitzallen (Westcott) Holden (1816-1878), Thomas Alonzo Westcott (1818-1850) Jane Westcott (1821-1864) – are recorded in John Westcott’s bible.

Sarah died on April 18, 1822 and was buried in a plot on a rise to the west of the Rice home, a lot that would become known as the General Thomas Westcott Lot. Her stone has an 8-line poem:

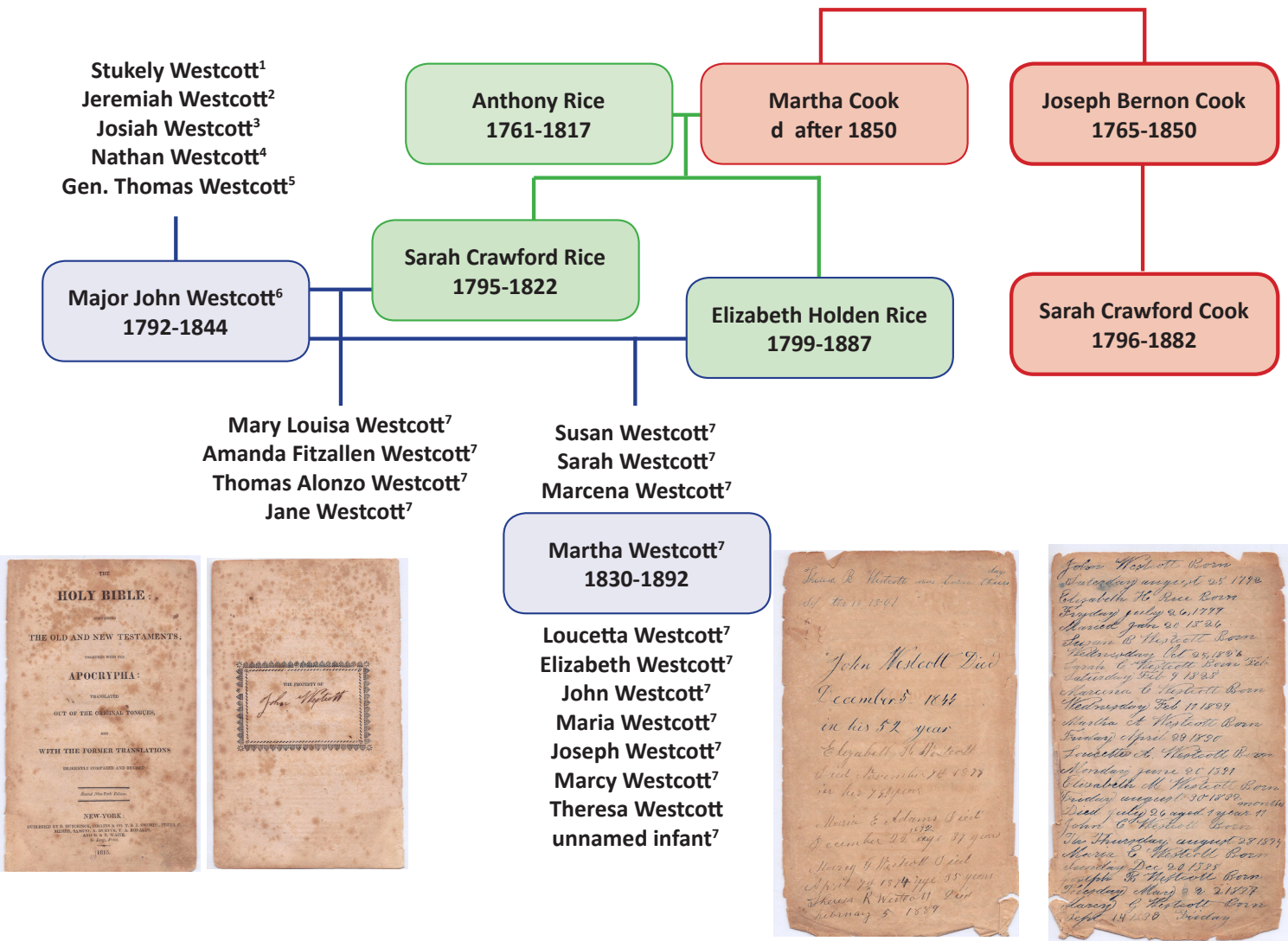
Great God I own the sentence just
 And Nature must decay
 I yield my body to the dust
 To dwell with fellow clay
 Yet faith can triumph over the grave
 And trample on the tomb
 My Jesus, my redeemer lives
 My God my Saviour come.



On January 20, 1825, John married Sarah's younger sister Elizabeth Holden Rice (July 26, 1799 to November 7, 1887). John and his four children moved in with Elizabeth in the Rice family home and the Major set up his harness shop in a room in the toll house. The Rice home would soon become known as the Westcott House.

John and Elizabeth had 12 children, the fourth of which was Martha Westcott, maker of the third sampler in the Westcott collection.

Westcott * Rice * Cook





“No eye hath seen nor ear hath heard”

Martha Westcott was 11 years old when she stitched a three-band sampler with alphabet and numerals, a four-stanza hymn based on First Corinthians and floral decorations surrounding her signature: “Wrought by Martha Westcott Oct 8 1841.” Martha’s is the most colorful, the largest (18 in. by 19 in.) and most the complex of the three.

Fading in the first and fourth stanza obscures some of the words; tentative transcriptions are underlined.

High on a throne of amazing hegt {sic}
 God sat exalted high
 And great the Lord at his right hand
 With all his majesty
 No eye hath seen nor ear hath heard
 The Glory of the Place
 But myriads with their glorious train
 Can bow before thy face
 Shall I appear among that train

To worship God above
 And shall I see my god & Christ
 Whom angels now do love

God grant his power to fit my soul
 To be amongst them here
 To see my savior and my God
 And in his blessing share

The sampler has pulled-thread border.

Martha Westcott was the eighth child of Major John Westcott and the fourth child of Elizabeth Holden Rice. John and Elizabeth would have eight more children before John died on December 4, 1844.

In the 1850 federal census, Elizabeth is listed as the head of household along with 10 of her children and step-children. Twenty-year-old Martha’s occupation is, not surprisingly, “dressmaker.”

In the 1875 Rhode Island Census, Elizabeth is living with her mother, eight siblings and her aunt, Sarah Crawford Cook.



Portrait of Martha Westcott (date unknown) in an album in the Westcott Collection at the Warwick Historical Society, the Westcott-Rice house (also date unknown) and Martha's headstone in the General Thomas Westcott Lot

In the 1880 U.S. Census, older sister Susan is the head of household consisting of six Westcott sisters. Martha died on January 17, 1892 and was buried in the General Thomas Westcott Lot.

Where's Westcott?

Westcott is a village in current day Warwick and West Warwick, R.I. at the juncture of the New London Avenue, Toll Gate Road and Providence Street. At the beginning of the 19th century it was the farm land surrounding the Rice family home where Major John Westcott would later join his second wife Elizabeth Holden Rice in 1825.

General Thomas Westcott Lot

The makers of the three samplers are buried in the General Thomas Westcott Lot (Warwick Historical Cemetery 125) on the rise to the south and west of the Westcott house. General Westcott (July 16, 1758 to September 22, 1838) was the father of Major John Westcott and the grandfather of Martha Westcott.

Thomas lived in the Nausauket section of Warwick. It was there that he began his military career in the defense of Warwick after the July 10, 1777 capture of General Richard Prescott, the commander of British forces in Newport,

caused concern of retaliation in Warwick. General Westcott and wife Marcy Arnold (died May 5, 1810) were buried in the Marble Lot (WK39) in Nausauket, but were later moved to the lot named after him behind the Westcott home.

New London Turnpike

In the second decade of the 19th century, Rhode Island was well into the Industrial Revolution with mills and mill villages being built throughout the Pawtuxet River Valley, except around the Westcott Rice House. Instead the house would become the site of the Toll Gate on the New London Turnpike that connected the mills to ports and markets along the Eastern Seaboard. Built by a chartered private corporation, the road surface was hard enough to turn a pike (or gate) open after a Westcott family member collected the authorized toll.

From *Historic and Architectural Resources of Warwick Rhode Island*, R.I. Historical Preservation Commission, 1991:

"Improvements to the [Rhode Island's] road system were encouraged by the construction of factories, many of which were located in what had been remote river valleys. Better means

of transporting raw materials and finished goods were needed, which led to the formation of turnpike companies authorized to build, maintain, and operate toll roads connecting the manufacturing villages of Rhode Island to Providence and to towns in other states.

“One such road was the New London Turnpike, which ran through western Warwick, linking the former backwoods outposts of Natick and Centerville to Providence. This highway, opened in 1821, was built by the Providence and Pawcatuck Turnpike Company, a corporation of Rhode Island businessmen and professionals that included Christopher and William Rhodes, owners of the Natick Mill, and Obadah Brown, a shareholder in the Warwick Manufacturing Company which owned the mills at Centerville. In addition to improving freight transport between Providence and the Pawtuxet Valley mill villages, the New London Turnpike was designed to facilitate long-distance travel. At the time of its construction, people traveling from Boston to New York generally rode by stage via Providence and Norwich, Connecticut, to New London, where they transferred to steamboats, thus avoiding a long, inconvenient overland trip through Connecticut. The New London

Turnpike, which ran straight across southern Rhode Island from Centerville to Westerly, was shorter than the Norwich route and was meant to provide a quicker, more direct connection from Providence to New London. The supposed advantages of the turnpike prompted one early nineteenth century writer to characterize the road as ‘the greatest improvement that ever was made in this state.’ However, the road soon proved to be a financial failure, for the tolls made hauling freight too expensive and the steep grades along the route, among them the section of present day New London Avenue that branches off Providence Street to climb over the crest of Natick Hill, made travel difficult. With the completion of the Stonington Railroad in the 1830s and improvements to public roads, the turnpike quickly became obsolete.”

Display Notes by David Wescott Smith
Historian, Society of Stukely Westcott
Descendants of America

June 23, 2018

Revised May 25, 2019