



The Babcock-Smith House Museum Newsletter

Volume 8 Number 1

March 2012

Ike Smith Retires

Forty years ago, the courts were looking for “a younger man” to add to the group of trustees established for the Babcock-Smith House after Aunt Alice, the sole trustee, died. They found Isaac G. Smith, Jr., now almost 90. Ike recently resigned after 40 years of being not only a literal preservationist of the museum house, but also a visionary with big dreams.

Ike is presently working on two sets of drawings: one capturing the past and the other preparing for the future. The first set shows how the house evolved from 1734 to the present with additions and subtractions, Victorian gentrification and colonial restoration. Ike remembers how everything, including the floor, was covered with newspapers when the Trust inherited the building in 1972. The mildew was so bad that he had to take his clothes off before his wife, Gertrude, would let him into the house. Using the maintenance skills honed from 23 years at Electric Boat, he oversaw the restoration of the house, removing an eight inch sag from the roof, discovering rosettes and scroll work near the front door which were buried under a quarter inch of paint, and “wooding” the house. Then he moved on to the grounds, moving and transforming the corner into Joshua’s Store, and designing and overseeing the building of the Carriage House.

His contributions are boundless. As he got ready to retire, he turned over the maps he had drawn of all the underground utilities. As present trustees were familiarizing themselves with the contents of boxes of records, they discovered that copies of thank you notes for every gift

to the house had been saved. In most cases, valuable antiques had been appraised for the donor. Monthly records of the cost of a project were laid out in a neat grid. Even applications from and letters of rejection to potential caretakers had been saved. Gertrude, his wife of 68 years, was certainly his partner in all of these accomplishments and he could not have done this without her.



Our knowledge of the granite industry would not exist without Ike. His years of painstakingly computerizing the information in 21 books of the Smith Granite Company laid the foundation for the book *Built from Stone: The Westerly Granite Story*. His willingness to be involved in all aspects of preserving the granite heritage is remarkable.

Even now, as the red granite urn from the YMCA was being moved to the museum in February, Ike was the one who decided where it should be placed and oversaw the hole being dug for the foundation. Ike always responded to inquiries from anyone searching for information. One of the trustees was visiting the Lizzie Borden Museum a few weeks ago and had taken a book with her to share the documentation regarding the stone for Lizzie’s parents. The manager said, “Oh, yes, I talked with an older gentleman there once.” “Ike Smith.” “Yes, that was his name. He knew everything.” That experience happens frequently.

When asked what his biggest dream for the museum is now, there was no hesitation. “The west wing addition to the Carriage House.” Of course, he has the plans all drawn. This addition will provide space for a permanent granite museum and two classrooms, triple the vault space and provide additional meeting space for programs and events. He pushes constantly for a building campaign, eager to see this project underway so that he can begin thinking about the next one.

We might be expected to say that we will miss Ike, but we can’t say that, for the only change is that he has given himself permission to miss a few meetings. He lives just a few steps away from the Museum and his contributions continue just as they always did. We are grateful.



Ike (on the right) has always been a hands-on leader, involved in all facets of the museum. Above he supervises the placement of the granite sign donated by Gail Bonner.

Library Supports Granite Effort

The Westerly Public Library has agreed to a long-term loan of its granite artifacts. With the reconfiguration of the library interior, there was no room to display the granite artifacts. At the same time, the Babcock Smith House Museum was developing its role as a granite research center. These two circumstances led to a win-win situation. Not all artifacts will be on display at all times, but they will be fully catalogued and available to anyone on request. Several of the most beautiful items will be on permanent display. The collection includes nearly 100 mounted photographs, scores of tools that would have been used by stonecutters or blacksmiths, and samples of granite both uncut and highly finished. Our thanks to the Westerly Public Library for its cooperation in developing a comprehensive granite research center at the Babcock-Smith House Museum.



Near the parking area a Victorian cap (left) introduces visitors to Westerly granite. At the entrance to the back door, a blue Westerly granite capital rests on a red West-erly granite rock-faced pedestal (right).

The GAR pedestal (left) is a particularly important item because many of the Westerly granite Civil War monuments were funded by various chapters of the GAR, a Civil War veterans organization. We have little back-ground on the blue polished pedestal with a skinwork sabre design (right). If you have any information, please share it with us.

YMCA Urn Finds New Home



When the YMCA discovered that the red polished granite urn needed to be moved to accommodate new construction, it was aware of the museum's interest in Westerly granite. Negotiations led to the museum acquiring the urn.

Originally located across from the Y in front of the Tetlow house, the urn had been placed in front of the YMCA to honor Helen Green, founder of the Y Garden Club. Coincidentally, Helen was also a charter docent of the museum.

Alan Peck prepared the site, and Comolli Granite Com-pany moved the urn to its new location on the museum lawn.

A Sense of Style:

Popular Fashions from Turn of the Century Rhode Island



Go back to a time when women's fashions were romantic and genteel. The Babcock-Smith House will display its collection of clothes and accessories from the Victorian era and beyond. Come see the evolution of styles and learn how the reign of Queen Victoria and the Industrial Revolution influ-enced garment design, affordability, and accessibility.

The exhibit will open in June with a Victorian tea and will remain on display until the end of July. For more informa-tion about the exhibit and for tickets to the tea, please see our website or contact Jennifer Davis at jdavis751@g.rwu.edu.

Handicapped Access Improved

A grant from The Champlin Foundations has provided funds to reset the stone handicapped access ramp at the Carriage House and to provide handrails for greater safety. Below, workers from the O'Brien Company begin the process of installing the handrails. Docent Bruce Brawley is resetting the stones to steady the existing sidewalk and Comolli Granite Company is supplying two additional stones for steps.



Two Hundred Years Ago...

The War of 1812 was in the head-lines; a young country was strug-gling for survival. The Isaac Smith Room will feature an exhibit of items, including this commemora-tive pitcher, that tie our museum and our town to this war.



From the Chair:

A major highlight of last year certainly was the response to the publication of *Built From Stone, The Westerly Granite Story*. The 800 copies in the first printing were completely sold out before Christmas. The second printing arrived late in January and is now available at the museum store and The Other Tiger Bookstore, our sole distributor.

Our initiatives for this year include the replacement of the copper roof of the North wing kitchen, the re-setting of the Carriage House ramp, and the installation of an accompa-nying railing. These projects, made possible by a generous grant from The Champlin Foundations, will be completed by May 1. Additionally, a variety of educational programs (no charge for members) will be offered to the general public; a Granite History Curriculum Guide (grant from the Westerly Education Endowment Fund – WEEF) will be published for use by all 4th-5th-6th grade students in West-erly starting in September; and a Carriage House expansion feasibility study will be undertaken.

We are very fortunate to have a dedicated group of docents who are working on an exhibit of vintage fashions, the an-nual doll tea, and the fifth grade fieldtrips. There would not be a Babcock-Smith House Museum without the tireless efforts of these community-minded volunteers.

Members of the Board of Trustees have been involved in preparations for moving the granite urn from the YMCA, developing suitable storage for the granite artifacts on loan from the Westerly Public Library, developing the website, and creating programs to enhance the value of membership in the museum.

I invite each of you to enjoy a docent-led tour of the mu-seum following our Annual Open House on the Saturday of Memorial Day Weekend. The museum is also open on Saturdays during June-October from 2:00-5:00 p.m. and Fridays during July/August also from 2:00-5:00 p.m.

I am greatly appreciative of all the volunteer and financial assistance that the Babcock-Smith House Museum receives each year. I encourage everyone to become a member of this active organization and be a part of preserving the past.

John B. Coburn

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* indicates docent
indicates current trustee
+ indicates former trustee

We have made every attempt to make the list accurate as of February 1, 2012. Please inform us of any errors.

SRO at Rock Drilling Movie

More than 100 people crowded into two showings of a 1920 vintage, black-and-white, silent motion picture of rock drilling at the Sullivan Quarry in Bradford. The film was produced by the US Bureau of Mines. On display for hands-on enjoyment were a length of quarry chain, a long drill, detonator, triple pulley, and a jackhammer. Still photos of the quarrying process and Sullivan artifacts were provided by Susan Sullivan Brocato and Richard Comolli.



Printing Plus Ad Black and White

New Docent Officers

New docent officers were elected in January. They include: President Jennifer Davis, Vice President Sharon Wright, Treasurer Jan Tunney, Secretary Meg Barclay, Membership Chair Wanda Butler, Publicity Chair Sharon Wright, and Corresponding Secretary Jean Aiello. The Store Committee consists of Carol Fazio, Jan Tunney, and June Silvestri. Tony Smith and Sandra Abbott are members of the Docent Board of Directors.



From left to right: Jennifer Davis, Sharon Wright, Tony Smith, and Jan Tunney.

Museum Happenings

Sold out: All 800 copies of *Built From Stone: The Westerly Granite Story* sold before Christmas. A second printing of 500 books is now available at either the Museum or The Other Tiger Bookstore.

Thank you to recent donors: Kathy Swain for textiles from the estate of her parents, Rocky and Nancy Kelley; Joseph Coduri for vintage granite postcards; R.D. Madison for a vintage advertisement for cranes featuring Sullivan Quarry; and Kathleen Hval for a piece of homespun.

No more leaks: The Champlin Foundations provided the funding for a replacement of the roof over the resident manager's apartment.

Granite on the road: Linda Smith Chaffee, John B. Coduri, and Ellen Madison have accepted invitations to present programs at the North Stonington and Peace Dale Libraries.

Framed: Emeline Smith's diploma from the first graduating class of Westerly High School which was housed in the present St. Pius School and Emeline's DAR certificate.

On loan: the original charter for Phebe Greene Ward Chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

On the tree: Sun Publishing Co. chose to feature the museum on their annual Christmas tree ornament which is available at Joshua's Store.

Featured: The spring issue of URI's alumni magazine *QuadAngles* will feature the use of Westerly granite on the campus. Dick Comolli and John Coduri served as consultants.

Standing room only: Dwight Brown's program on local shipwrecks attracted a huge crowd. This program is another excellent example of the continued cooperation of the museum and the Westerly Historical Society.

Trustee support: One hundred percent of current trustees made donations to the membership campaign, accounting for nearly 30 percent of total money raised.

Docent support: Docents donated \$4500, raised from the Christmas Bazaar, to the Trust.

Visitor statistics: Ed Fazio reported a decrease in the number of visitors to the Museum in 2011 as compared to 2010. Of these visitor groups, 63 were from out-of-

state, with a whopping 6 from Texas. Ed cites the fact that Tour Rhode Island was discontinued and that tours during events are not regularly scheduled as possible reasons for the decline.

Membership up: 2011 membership increased by nearly 10 percent from 2010. Members enjoy free admission to most programs and a ten percent discount at Joshua's Store.

Volunteers needed: to evaluate moisture problem on north wall of exhibit room and solve it!

More volunteers needed: to plant and maintain the red granite urn which previously belonged to the YMCA, but now sits on our lawn; to help us find programming; to make items to be sold in Joshua's Store, and to transcribe some handwritten historical documents. To help with school tours in May, contact Ed Fazio at 322-8240.

Even more volunteers needed: to help plan and execute an event featuring various holiday trees in each room of the museum. If you know someone who has a wonderful collection of ornaments or would like to help, please contact Ellen Madison at 322-0452.

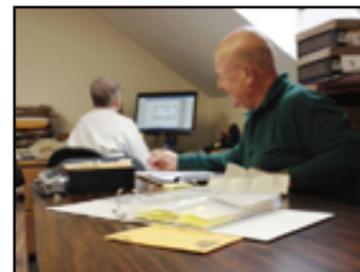
Overwhelming response: More than 100 people attended two showings of a nine minute silent vintage movie on rock drilling.

Thank you: To The Other Tiger Bookstore for providing a second book-signing opportunity before Christmas.



Built from Stone: The Westerly Granite Story is available at the museum store and Other Tiger Bookstore. Order form online.

Old News



Tony Smith has been sorting through letters sent to Emeline Smith, Orlando's widow, in the 1860s.

In a letter, dated Dec. 1, 1863, to her from her niece Mary Ann Geer:

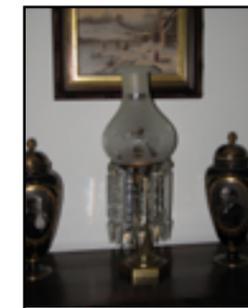
"Uncle Amos Avery has been here, spent about a week. . . . He had been Surgeon in the Army. He was discharged as the Regt he was in was joined with another."

"Grandfather [Emeline's father, Isaac Gallup] has been at work on the foundation for the monument thinking that they would come up with it soon. He has it nearly ready."

Tony wonders if the monument mentioned is the obelisk for Orlando Smith that now sits on the Babcock-Smith House property.

Ginger's Color Ad

Solar Lamp in the Victorian Room?



Yes, indeed. In the Victorian Era, a solar lamp referred to one that was designed so that no shadow is cast on the table by the oil reservoir. This gift from Clement Ruggeri of Hopkinton, RI, adds to the ambience of the Victorian Room.

This particular lamp originally used whale oil, was later converted to burn kerosene, and even later was electrified.

Granite Story on the Web

Literally thousands of pictures and descriptions of monuments have been added to our website enabling researchers all over the world to have access to our magnificent collection of Westerly granite history. Thanks to John Linton for providing many of the contemporary photographs. Linda Chaffee has combined the photo resources at the museum with the database Ike Smith created to publish this website. Chaffee has also developed a list of Civil War monuments cut in Westerly or cut from Westerly granite. These are included on the website and indicate the extent of Westerly's role in commemorating that war. Monuments give tribute to both Union and Confederate soldiers, from privates to generals. There is even a monument to a faithful cavalry horse. Whether your interest is history, art, or Westerly pride, check out the extent of the information on the web site at www.babcock-smithhouse.com; click on Granite Industry.



15th U.S. Infantry monument in Chickamauga National Military Park.

Upcoming Events

Rhode Island, Abraham Lincoln, and The Civil War at 150

Sunday, March 4, 2 pm

At the Carriage House



Noted Lincoln scholar Frank Williams, former Chief Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court, will share his knowledge as we mark the sesquicentennial of the Civil War.

Non-members \$2.00; members free.

Frozen Glory: The Secret Life of War Memorials

Sunday, April 15, 2 pm

At the Carriage House



“War memorials have a story to tell,” says Patti Cassidy, writer and filmmaker with a passion for public sculptures. “When battles end and the din of guns and drums subsides, grieving survivors raise stone and bronze monuments to remember their dead; they are Frozen Glory. This talk explores these monuments. Through stories of the generations and survivors who raised them, their secret lives come to light.”

Non-members \$2.00; members free.

Open House: The Battle of Stonington in the War of 1812

Saturday, May 26, 2-5 pm

At The Carriage House



James Tertius DeKay, noted author of historic books, will present a program on Stonington’s role in the War of 1812 as we mark its 200th anniversary. A related exhibit, featuring items owned by the Museum and others lent by Trustee Ed Fazio, will be on display in the Isaac G. Smith room.

Free tours of the Museum and a ten percent discount at Joshua’s Store for members.

A Sense of Style

Coming Early June

At the Carriage House



A Victorian Tea will kick off a two month exhibit of vintage fashions owned by the museum.

American Girl/Favorite Doll Tea

Wednesday, July 18 2-4 pm

At the Carriage House



This event is very popular with the children! Bring your American Girl or other favorite doll for a very special tea party and a tour of the Museum House. Joshua’s Store will also be open with brand new handmade outfits for the American Girl dolls!

Please purchase tickets in advance by calling 401-348-8178.

Old Money

Wednesday, July 25, 7 pm

At the Carriage House.



You might have wished you had married “old money,” but George Champlin will talk about the real thing, including some old Westerly money.

Non-members \$2.00; members free.

Charles Perry (1809-1890): A Nineteenth-Century Westerly Notable

Monday, October 1, 7 pm

At the Carriage



House

“Banker, farmer, Quaker, abolitionist, pacifist, family folklore, tangential topics and documented details of private conversations with President Lincoln during the Civil War” is how Harvey Perry II describes his talk about his ancestor, Charles Perry.

Non-members \$2.00; members free.

Hours: June-October Saturday 2-5; July and August Friday and Saturday 2-5 or by appointment