

The Babcock-Smith House Museum Newsletter

Volume 17 Number 1

Summer 2021

Auction to Feature Treasures from our Attic

Literally, we are extracting treasures from OUR attic, mostly duplicates or objects which do not fit our collection, many of which have been in the attic of the Museum for one hundred years or more and belonged to the Smith family. Other items have been donated over the years and need a new home. Some have been on display in the house itself and others have never been seen by the public. Butter churns, many chairs (some without intact caned seats), a Victorian desk, wash-stands, a shelf clock, a needlepoint bell pull, tinware, and a zillion spinning or wool wheels of various types are just the thing for an accent (or useful) piece in your home. And you get bragging rights that the item is part of Westerly's heritage.

Bob Ward, professional auctioneer, has generously donated his services and his team to conduct this auction on the BSH lawn on **September 18** with a preview at 1 and the auction at 2. As time grows closer, you can see photos of many of the items on his website Auctionzip.com ID # 3745.

Our librarian Joseph Coduri will offer duplicate copies of books from our library, primarily of local or Rhode Island interest, ranging from collector's items to those published more recently. All will be offered for sale at very reasonable prices.

Vendors of specialized products such as handmade soaps and chocolate will be selling their wares for early Christmas shopping or for just enjoying at the moment.

Thank you, Fran.

Frances "Fran" Kelly, who died in March at 100, was a valued member of the Museum family, serving as longtime treasurer for both the Docents and the Trust and keeping her meticulous records--all written out by hand. Whenever she felt that the trustees were thinking about spending money in a way which she might consider a bit frivolous, she reminded us that our first commitment was to pay off the mortgage for the original Carriage House. And we did.

Lucky visitors who had Fran as their tour guide received an education on the colonial history of the house and of its occupants. She took this role very seriously and continued to learn as much as she could about colonial history and the history of this home and its families.

A talented artist and crafter, Fran donated beautiful artwork that helped raise funds to support the Museum.

After her retirement, Fran was named a trustee emerita and continued to diligently review meeting minutes to keep informed. She welcomed trustees who visited her at home and often gave her opinion on some sort of action which the Trust was contemplating. We were fortunate to have Fran's contributions and commitment for many of her one hundred years.

Joshua's Store will be open for really special items made by the docents or their friends. Our publications and DVD's will also be available.

And what would an event be without food, much of it lovingly created by the docents?

So, do come and participate in the events of this memorable afternoon.



Scholarship Winners

Roberta Mudge Humble, the longtime driving force behind the success of the Westerly Armory, and Judy Crandall Harbold, a tireless researcher and recent author, are the two recipients of the 2021 History Award co-sponsored by the Museum and the Westerly Historical Society.

For thirty years Roberta has volunteered 20 hours per week at the Armory following her lifelong passion of preserving the building and adding, documenting and displaying items of local interest. She serves as president, is the author and "inventor" of many Rhode Island books and games, and is a dedicated speaker and Rhode Island ambassador all over the United States.

Judy is currently President of the Crandall Association, but is also known for her articles on local Westerly families published in *Rhode Island Roots*, the journal of the Rhode Island Genealogical Society. Her research has resulted in publications on the Crandall family and on collaboration of *John Clarke's World* for which she supplied most of the research on Westerly. Her most recent endeavor is preparing an abstract of 17th century town records for publication. This last project will enable researchers to use the old Westerly records without much of the frustration which they now encounter.

Both women were honored at the Annual Meeting of the Westerly Historical Society.

Library Work Never Ends

Museum member Joseph Coduri has been a long-time supporter of the Museum library. His first donation was a rare promotional booklet of Smith Granite Company agent Frank Tingley of Providence, published in 1876. So far, Joe has contributed 544 books to our library, making it one of the finest collections of Rhode Island history in the state.



Joe, Tony Smith, Ellen Madison and Linda Chaffee have been entering information into our database to make our library useful to scholars. We hope to have our shelf list searchable online in the coming months. The library will eventually be available to researchers by appointment.

Partners

Lorén Spears, Executive Director of **Tomaquag Museum**, was pleased to receive several antique baskets which we believe had origins with the Southeastern New England Native Americans. This transfer of objects to a home more suitable is part of our philosophy and helps establish valuable relationships with other institutions which are doing great work.



A happy coincidence occurred after several trustees watched a zoom presentation by the **Stony Creek Quarry** folks which featured their vast expanse of granite work including the base of the Statue of Liberty. Opened in 1858 and still operating, the SC Quarry is known for its beautiful granite primarily used in buildings. Their granite is featured in art and architecture throughout the greater New York area and beyond. An exchange of emails resulted in reciprocal invitations to each other's museums and the discovery (for us) that the President is Bob Babcock who is also a member of our Museum.

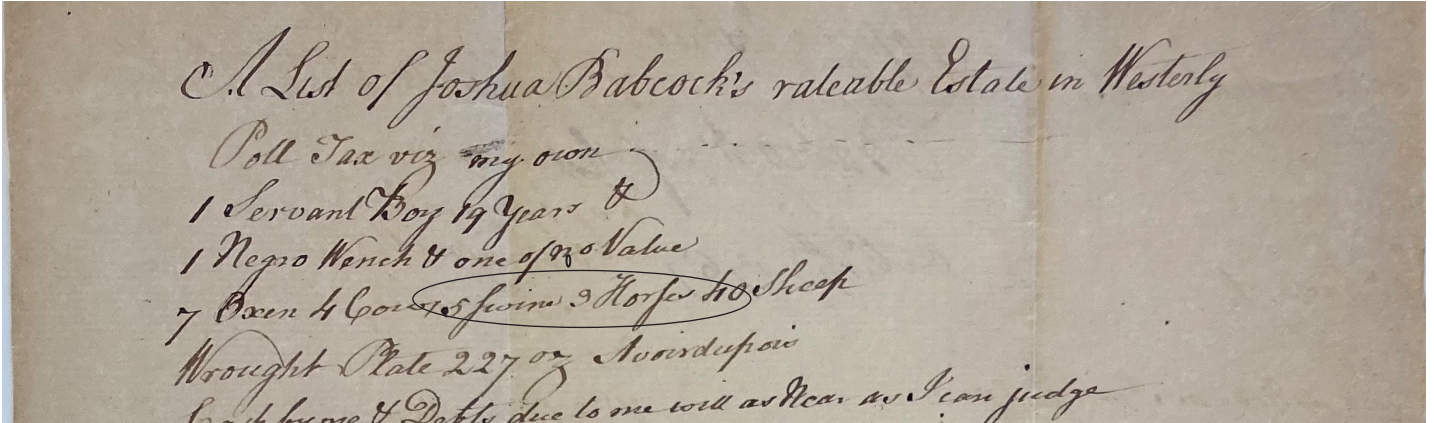
Linda Christensen, President of the **Preston Historical Society** in nearby Preston, CT, came with her husband Mark to receive some Gallup and Geer family documents along with several photos of local interest which were contained in the shipment from Jean Townes mentioned elsewhere in the newsletter.

Greg Howard, Superintendent of **River Bend Cemetery**, has shared digital photos of all the monuments in the cemetery along with names and locations. We will use this very powerful tool as we continue to expand our work with monuments in the cemetery.

Lattner Foundation Awards Grant

Chair Maureen Bjorkland was very pleased to announce that we have received a \$5000 grant from the Lattner Foundation towards the installation of air conditioning for the second floor of the house, thus helping to preserve our collection there and make it more comfortable for visitors and tour guides in the summer.

“one of no Value”



The phrase, “one of no Value,” circled in the above listing of Joshua Babcock’s estate in 1767, hit several of us hard. We have no idea whether the “one of no value” referred to a child, an old person, a slave or someone else, but it goes against the belief that most of us share -- that every human being has value.

The inventory lists three people:

- 1 Servant Boy 19 Years &
- 1 Negro Wench & one of no Value

We do not know whether these were slaves or indentured servants.

Visitors often ask us whether Joshua Babcock (1707-1783) owned slaves, and we have always answered truthfully that we had no record of his having had any; his will, recorded in 1783, does not show any slaves.

We freely acknowledge that his grandfather John Babcock, who died without a will, had "one negger valued at 20 pounds, two Injin men and Indian garls valued at 30 pounds" listed in the inventory created by the Town Council in 1685. (Source: BabcockAncestry.com)

Now we have nearly certain proof that John's grandson, our Joshua, had servants or slaves at one time.

Pete Ogle was doing research on the history of the ownership of the land which is now Wilcox Park when he came across a 1767 list of the contents of Dr. Babcock’s estate in the records at the Newport Historical Society. He sent a photo of the page to us and we sent it to Teri Babcock in Colorado who had previously transcribed Joshua’s lengthy will for us. Our thanks to Pete for sending us this discovery as it adds to our story.

She sent the following transcription:

Transcribed May, 2021 by Teri Babcock.

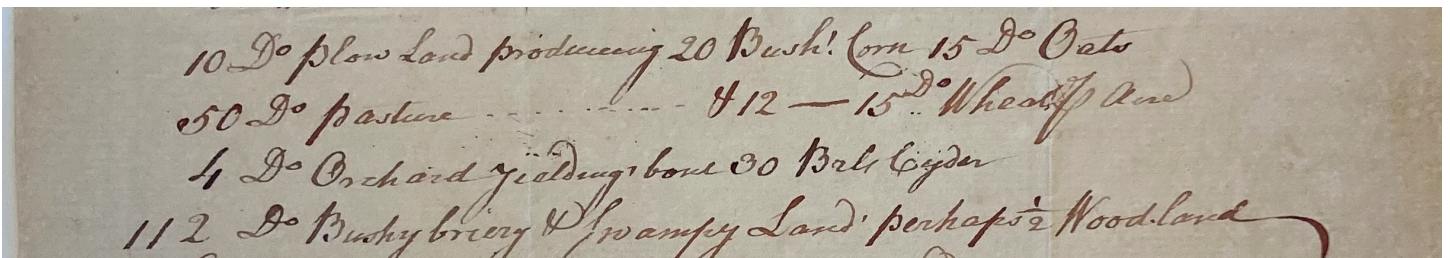
The terminology, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization are as they appear in the original. The long “s” was transcribed as a regular “s”.

A List of Joshua Babcock’s valeable Estate in Westerly

Poll Tax viz my own
 1 Servant Boy 19 Years &
 1 Negro Wench & one of no Value
 7 Oxen 4 Cows 5 Swine 3 Horses 40 Sheep
 Wrought Plate 227 oz Avoirdupois
 Cash by me & Debts due to me will as Near as I can judge
 not more than pay the Debts I owe & stand liable to pay
 The Goods I have on Hand (not ow’d for) bout £200 [n] £[MY]
 The Land I possess in this Town is as follows viz
 containing (with my Dwelling–House & out Buildings viz Crib Barn
 Warehouse [?] of Meadows bout 18 Acres producing annually
 bout 12 tons hay
 Salt meadow 12 D^o.....8 D^o
 10 D^o Plow Land producing 20 Bushl Corn 15 D^o Oats
 50 D^o Pasture.....& 12—15 D^o Wheat [?] Acre
 4 D^o Orchard yielding bout 30 Brls Cydar
 112 D^o Bushy briery & Swampy Land perhaps ½ Woodland
 206 The pasture will keep the Stock [anumeraed]

As we can see, lines 2 and 3 indicate that Joshua at one time probably owned slaves even though the word “slave” is not used and also that he no longer had them at the time of his death.

It is also interesting that the total number of acres of land that he owned differs from the total at other times in his life.



It Was a Different Time . . .

One of the values of historical documents is that they reflect the culture of their time. Our documents revealed these three examples of a different time.

Here is an over-the-top description we found in one of our local history books as we updated the library information in our computer database:

The inhabitants of Westerly have found in its rugged and unsightly rocks a mine of wealth far exceeding any foreign treasure which their wildest imaginings would picture as hidden in caves and recesses with mysterious ceremonies, and under the cover of darkness. There is no granite in the country, if indeed there is any in the world, which in fineness of grain, beauty of coloring, susceptibility to polish, and strength of resistance to the destroying power of time and the natural elements, surpasses that quarried in Westerly.

Picturesque Rhode Island,
by Winifred H. Munro, 1881

Brenda Linton and Susan Brocato, while working in the vault, found an acknowledgement of a donation from the Granite Workers Union dated April 23, 1951. It reads "The United Negro College Fund thanks you for your subscription of \$5.00 and payment of \$5.00 receipt of which is hereby gratefully acknowledged."

They also found, from the McCarthy era, an affidavit form which "must be filed by each officer of a labor organization before that organization may use the facilities of the National Labor Relations Board."

The "AFFIDAVIT OF NONCOMMUNIST UNION OFFICER," requires

the undersigned to be duly sworn and deposed that

1. I am a responsible officer of the union named below.
2. I am not a member of the Communist Party or affiliated with such party.
3. I do not believe in, and I am not a member of nor do I support any organization that believes in or teaches, the overthrow of the United States Government by force or by any illegal or unconstitutional methods.

These facts were required to be sworn to before a notary public and the form was for Local #18 in Westerly of the United Stone and Allied Product Workers of America, AFL-CIO.

Mary's Grave Sparks Interest of High School Senior

Frost Infante, a 2021 graduate, is interested in both history and psychology and plans to attend the University of Rhode Island. This spring, as she completed her History Pathway, Frost spent eight hours with Trustee and Archivist Susan Brocato and Granite Archivist Brenda Linton, former Social Studies Chairperson at Westerly High School.

Westerly High School participates in a Rhode Island Department of Education program entitled Pathway Endorsement Council Designation which encourages students to independently pursue one of their personal interests in one of many areas. Each discipline has its own parameters and evaluations.

Frost's program included an "insider's" tour of the Babcock-Smith Museum House where she marveled at the variety of children's toys, the corner cabinet in the parlor and the pictures of a by-gone Westerly in the Isaac Smith Room. Her next visit included a walk to the former Smith Quarry, behind the Granite Shopping Center, and then lessons in the Babcock-Smith Granite Museum. At a third meeting, Frost worked with some granite vault artifacts: researching, identifying and cataloging primary resources. Linton found her research skills to be exemplary. A visit to River Bend Cemetery concluded her pathway where she could readily speak about the various monuments and stones. She was especially

drawn to the children's graves and to the mysterious Mary's Grave.

Linton reports that "this was a rewarding experience for all three of us and we hope that this program continues."



Frost Infante, complying with COVID mask requirements, pauses at Mary's Grave in the Ross burial plot. Many have speculated that Mary was a slave of Lois Ross, but there is no confirmation.

Tidbits

- If you missed the three-part Rhode Island PBS *Chasing Silver: the Gorham Story* which “starred” our Ed Fazio and the Museum in the first installment, you can access it at <http://bit.ly/ChasingSilverVOD>.
- In response to our request for photographs of moving the Columbus statue, Gail Bonner, daughter of Donald Bonner who moved the monument, gave the Museum several photographs as well as a stamp to emboss documents with “Bonner Monument Company.”
- Patricia Hval volunteered to organize newspaper clippings about the Babcock-Smith House that had been gathering in piles for many years. She has placed them in page protectors and filed them in binders in chronological order. From random papers she has created a history of the Museum.
- During the off-season months, tours of the Museum have been available by appointment. We have had a very positive response and will probably continue this policy. Now guides will give tours at 2 and 3:30 on days that we are open.

In Person at Last

The docents have resumed in-person meetings. Although Zoom was better than no meeting at all, all are excited to be back together. Docents meet the first Monday of the month. Refreshments are served at 9:30, followed by the meeting at 10:00. New members are always welcome. There is a niche for everyone as the Museum expands its activities. Call Docent President Ed Fazio, (401.322.8240) for more information.

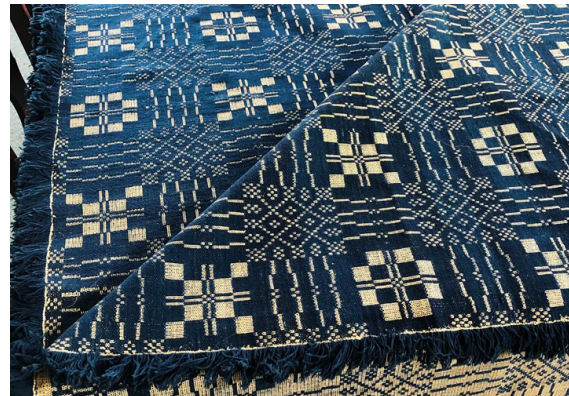


Pictured above: Carol Fazio, Mary Keniston, Billy Ann Hutchins, Tony Smith, Meg Barclay, Susan Hayes, Mary Ann McCarty, Jan Tunney, Ed Fazio

Huge Cartons Arrive from Oregon

It seemed like Christmas. Each day brought more large boxes from Jean Townes in Corvallis, Oregon. Unpacking them was a true treasure hunt. One package was filled with clothing, another with household linens, another with papers that gave a glimpse into life in the late 19th century.

Jean Townes, a descendent of Sarah Smith Chapman (daughter of Orlando Raymond Smith and his second wife Julia), has carefully sorted and preserved textiles, photographs, correspondence and assorted bills and receipts from Sarah Smith Chapman and her family. All the gifts have been sorted and catalogued as part of the Museum holdings. Thanks to Jean Townes for preserving this bit of history.



This coverlet of woven cotton with blue and white geometric pattern dating from around 1900 was one of the gifts from Jean Townes.



Come check our new Blacksmith Exhibit!

Babcock-Smith House Museum
124 Granite Street
Westerly, RI 02891



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US Postage Paid
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Return Service Requested

babcocksmithhouse.org

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Upcoming Events

Open House

Saturday, July 3, 2-5 pm

Delayed because of uncertainty due to COVID, Open House is a bit later than usual. Admission and refreshments are free. There will be tours of the Museum at 2:00 pm and 3:30 pm. A tree dedication ceremony will be held at 4:00 pm. Kim Temblay of the Children of the American Revolution had spearheaded a project to plant a tree, dedicated to our veterans, on the museum grounds.

Down by the Riverside

Thursday, July 21; (rain date July 27)
repeated August 10 at 6 pm; (rain date August 12)

Volunteers from the BSH Museum will conduct a guided tour of some of the monuments along the river. No need to make reservations. Come and enjoy the exquisite outdoor art and hear stories behind the monuments.

We will be gathering at the Henry Nardone monument. Park in the office area and walk down to the river, or park closer to the river on the north side. Members free; not-yet-members: \$5.

Treasures from the Museum: Auction and Boutique Market

Saturday, September 18; preview at 1 and auction at 2
On the Lawn of the Museum.

Literally, we are cleaning out our attic. See article on page 1 for all the additional activities included in this memorable afternoon.