

BUILT FROM STONE

THE WESTERLY GRANITE STORY

VOLUME
9 of 52

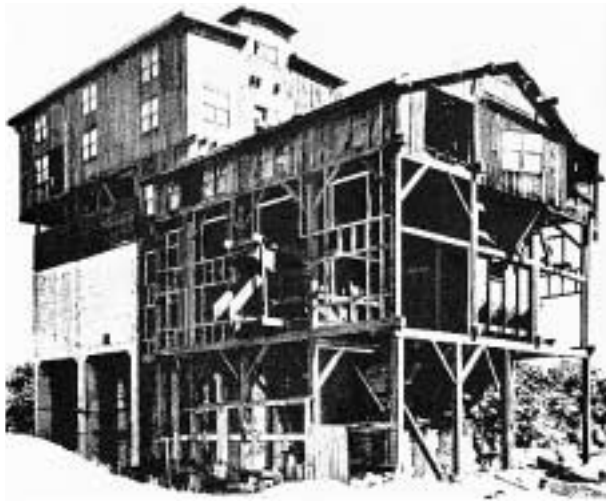
SEVERE BLOWS TO THE GRANITE INDUSTRY (1930-1945)

After decades of growth and prosperity, the granite industry was dealt a crushing blow following the crash of the Stock Market on October 29, 1929. The granite industry thrived on elaborate monuments that were costly and non-essential. As unemployment skyrocketed, the economic situation forced people to focus on the essentials of life. Food, shelter and clothes were needed; artistic, expensive monuments were not. Sales dwindled and the business fell into a decline from which it would never fully recover.

The 1938 hurricane delivered its own destructive blow to the struggling industry by ravaging the buildings and facilities. The Smith Granite Company blacksmith shop blew down; windows blew out of the big shed on Granite Street and the crane barn blew down. Most critical was the loss of electrical power. There was no power to run the pumps in the quarry. No air compressors. No cranes. Even steam cranes could not be used because water could not be pumped to the boiler. All operations had to be curtailed, many employees laid off, and all belts tightened.

On the other hand, the hurricane brought in a different kind of business. A.M. Gencarelli Co. moved tons of rocks from the Old Red Stone Quarry to the Snowden Cottage in Watch Hill and built jetties, walls, and breakwaters.

Susan Sullivan Brocato



Sullivan Granite Company stone crushing plant played a part in the war effort.



Damage to the Smith Granite Company from the September 23, 1938 hurricane. Some machines still stood after the storm. In this photo some wreckage has already been cleared and a section of one side has been braced up.

BSh Museum

When World War Two came, men who had used a pneumatic hammer were sought by the Electric Boat Company to work as chippers on the hulls of submarines. It was almost impossible for an unessential

business to obtain steel, coal, power, tires and other supplies. Sullivan Granite Company, however, converted to the war effort on September 11, 1942. It had a giant crushing plant (sometimes referred to as a "breaker") which had cost \$100,000. The company immediately started crushing thirty years of accumulated scrap pieces of stone to be used for airfields, runways, and roads. The crusher ran at least ten hours a day, crushing two tons of stone a minute, and continued for three years until the end of the war. The company worked around the clock. Charlestown Air Base, now Ninigret Park, was built from Sullivan granite.

Linda Smith Chaffee

In 1934 a contract was signed with the PWA (Public Works Administration) to rebuild Weekapaug Bridge. The contract specified that Westerly Granite from existing quarries had to be used, adding \$10,000 to the \$60,000 which the federal government had specified for the project.



TODAY IN GRANITE

UNITED BUILDERS SUPPLY, along with the Babcock-Smith House Museum and The Westerly Sun, is proud to be part of this effort in bringing the heritage of the Westerly Granite industry back to the people of Westerly.

A treasure from the past, United Builders Supply is excited to be able to offer these historic granites to the marketplace again.

Westerly Granite is again being used successfully in the region.

All masonry materials were supplied by United Builders Supply Co., Inc.



This picture shows Westerly Blue granite being used as a pool coping and infinity edge along with Westerly Pink veneer wall stone in new construction of a home in Westerly. Each stone hand worked to perfection by local mason Fred Lindsley.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

This week we feature a power tool. The gang saw is a large saw using reciprocating steel blades and steel shot for cutting granite blocks into slabs. This process approximates two of the six sides of the monument with minimal waste. The gang saw saved time and material making this improvement which increased the amount of work the granite companies could produce.



BSh Museum

The Smith Granite Company had the first gang saw in Westerly. It was a very noisy operation that affected the hearing of the operators and, therefore, was run at night. If anyone has a better picture of the gang saw, we would love to have a copy.

WHERE IN WESTERLY?



PEOPLE WHO BUILT WESTERLY DOCUMENTED GRANITE WORKERS

Bray, John H.	Broadfoot, Thomas
Bray, Michael	Broady, Thomas
Bray, Michael J.	Broccolo, Joseph
Bray, Owen P.	Broady, Thomas H.
Brewer, Edward A	Brodie, Peter
Briens, William	Brody, John E.
Brines, John	Broggi, A.
Brines, John Francis	Broggini, Henry
Brines, John Sr.	Broggini, John
Brines, Richard	Broggini, Joseph
Brines, William	Broggini, Louis
Broadfoot, James T.	Brooks, Henry F.
Broadfoot, John	Brown, Dorothy

STONE CHIPS

"The Italian men in those days had a great habit of eating the eggs raw. They'd put a pinpoint in both ends and just drink the egg right out of that little pinpoint. That's what the granite cutters used to do. They'd take two or three eggs with them to work and you'd find all these egg shells around. They'd eat the eggs raw.

Nettie Coduri Jones (b.1910) interviewed in 1984

YOUR PART IN HISTORY

An Open House will be held at the Babcock-Smith House Museum on Saturday, May 29 from 2:00 pm – 5:00 pm. We will be happy to record biographical information about your granite workers and to scan relevant pictures that afternoon.

Please call us at 401-377-8490 or 401-322-0452 or e-mail us at builtfromstone@gmail.com

COMING NEXT WEEK

Small companies carry on. (1945-1995)



Babcock-Smith
House Museum

SUN PUBLISHING CO.
theesterlysun.com

United Builders
Supply Co. Inc.
401-596-2831
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