

BUILT FROM STONE

THE WESTERLY GRANITE STORY

VOLUME
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COMOLLI: THE LEGACY LINGERS

Around 1910 Ferruccio "Frank" Comolli left his native Breno in northern Italy near the Swiss border and came to America. Only 16, he initially settled in Elberton, Georgia to work in the local granite industry with one of his brothers. His future wife, Jennie Caccivio had immigrated the year before when she was only 8 years old and first lived in Milford, New Hampshire, another New England granite center. She met Frank when he relocated to Milford to be near his older sister and brother Martin. Little did Frank and Jennie know that their son Richard would continue the family interest in granite and become one of the finest carvers to work in the Westerly area. After his discharge from the military, Richard "Dick" Comolli began



The Serra Monument in St. Sebastian Cemetery in Westerly was carved by Richard Comolli. Note the amazingly realistic look to the drape of the dress. It is worth a special trip to the cemetery to view the beautiful craftsmanship.

his stonecutting training at the Columbia Granite Company operated by the Monti Family on Old Hopkinton Road. By this time, his parents and siblings had also moved to Westerly where his father worked for the Smith Granite Company. Dick remained at Columbia for about six years, learning and developing his stonecutting and carving skills. During those early years he studied and worked with well-respected local carvers such as Angelo Buzzi, Charlie Gattoni, and Peter Zanzi. He also studied monuments in local cemeteries to observe the techniques used by other carvers, such as Joe Gervasini, in creating elaborate statues and monuments. Upon leaving Columbia, he went to the Bonner Monument Company where he continued to work for the next 15-20 years. While at Bonner, he carved the War Memorial on the Westerly side of the Pawcatuck River Bridge.



You can almost hear the wind in the sails on the Rathbun Monument, carved by Richard Comolli, in River Bend Cemetery.

In 1984 the opportunity arose to purchase property on the corner of the Ashaway and Chase Hills Roads and the Comolli Granite Company was created. In 1998 Dick bought the Sullivan Quarry in Bradford and pumped the 80' deep Percy Bliven Hole dry. Richard Champlin used a 100-ton crane to pull out 10 or 12 pieces of Sullivan blue white granite. When a car ran into the Westerly War Memorial at the foot of Granite Street in 2009, Dick was able to match the granite and make the necessary repairs.



These delicately carved flowers by Richard Comolli are on the front face of the Moore Cross in River Bend Cemetery in Westerly.

One of the more interesting demonstrations of the interconnections between local granite companies occurred when Dick, then working for the Bonner Monument Company, used Sullivan granite to carve cemetery tablets for members of the Smith Granite Company family. For the past twenty-five years, Dick and his team of 5-7 workers have continued the legacy of the Westerly granite industry, producing many fine granite monuments.

John B. Coduri

TODAY IN GRANITE



(coming)

HISTORY

New London's Fireman's Statue, first dedicated in 1898 to New London's volunteer firemen, was produced by the Smith Granite Company for \$2250. It has been situated in several locations. Following extensive rehabilitation in 1976, it was moved by the Bonner Monument Company from the New London County Courthouse area to its current location in front of the North Station, 240 Broad Street.

The rehabilitation included fitting the granite statue with a new hat and nozzle, both of which had been heavily damaged by time and vandals. Richard Comolli, then the foreman at the Bonner Monument Company, sculpted the new hat and nozzle. It took four days just to remove the old hat and another four days to fit the new hat onto the statue using bronze dowels. The total cost in 1976 dollars for the rehabilitation and relocation was \$6,000.

A statue of a fireman carved from the same model as the New London Fireman's Memorial shows details of the nozzle and helmet. This particular statue, a tribute to Providence firefighters, was produced in 1885 by the New England Granite Works and is located in the North Burial Ground in Providence, RI.



Dwight C. Brown, Jr.

STONE CHIPS

On becoming a stone cutter: "I wasn't crazy to learn about it but I'm glad that I did because I liked it. [I thought] well, okay, I'll try anything. I can quit. What a hell of a time I had, trying to get going. My hands where I used to miss with the hammer [were] cut, black and blue, and bleeding all day. They would heal over at nighttime a little, stop and clot you know. ... next morning go 'bump' hit and oh, Jesus. Then, after a while, you got used to it. You never missed no more. You can close your eyes and go automatically."

Patsy Capizzano (b.1911) in an interview in 1983

YOUR PART IN HISTORY

Share your stories, photos and artifacts. Earlier volumes of "Built From Stone" are now on the museum's website; www.babcocksmithhouse.org.

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

COMING NEXT WEEK

What an Order Book Page Reveals

PEOPLE WHO BUILT WESTERLY DOCUMENTED GRANITE WORKERS

Rossi, Nicola	Rowling, R.
Rossi, Victor	Ruga, Cosmo (Charles)
Rossi, William	Ruschet, Victor
Rostelle,	Rusconni, D.
Rosyter, Andrew	Rusick, V.
Rosyter, Charles	Rush, Isaac
Rowan, Joseph	Sanders, Samuel
Rowe, George	Santoro, Albert
Rowe, John	Saunders, Samuel
Rowe, William	Sawyer, A. J.
Rowe, William W.	Sawyer, Adam
Rowling, C. J.	Sawyer, Adam Jr.



Babcock-Smith
House Museum

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