



# *The Babcock-Smith House Museum Newsletter*

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## *Caring for Our 1734 Treasure*

We had planned some cosmetic exterior repairs to be done by Bill Smith of Morgan and Smith prior to repainting the entire mansion house in September. When he started, Smith unexpectedly uncovered some serious structural damage.

In the early 1970s, the entire building had been tented and treated to kill any insects. At that time, there was no way of knowing the extent of insect damage without tearing the walls apart, but extensive bracing was added in the building basement to ensure proper support of the house.

This fall, when the exterior clapboards were removed near the keeping room entrance, Smith discovered that the sill, a 9" square beam running the length of the back wall, had been badly eaten away by the beetles. And the bad news kept coming. We found that the structural post at the southwest corner of the mansion, the original planking on the second floor master bedroom wall, and a floor sill beneath the front door of the Resident Manager's apartment had also suffered insect damage long ago.



Fortunately, there was absolutely no evidence of recent beetle infestation in any of these locations. Bill did an outstanding job of replacing the damaged structure with pressure-treated beams, and the repairs were completed before the damage could affect the structural integrity of the building.

Shoreline Painting then painted the exterior. John Henderson Roofing replaced the roof. We are grateful to Preserve RI, the Roberts Foundation and the Champlin Foundation for helping us fund these projects.



## Upcoming Events



Join us for a  
Holiday Open House  
at the  
Babcock-Smith House  
Saturday, December 7, 2024

9 a.m. – Noon  
124 Granite Street, Westerly

Take Home Our Popular Cookie Platters  
and Homemade Biscotti  
Visit Joshua's Store and  
Play Our Gift Certificate Raffle

Free Hot Cider, Muffins  
Gourmet Soup and Museum Tours

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### ***Westerly Granite as Infrastructure***

Sunday, January 26 @ 2 pm

Presented by Hugh Barton

Granite used for infrastructure was and is a mainstay for the Westerly industry. Hugh will discuss the use of granite for paving stones for streets, crushed granite for airplane landing strips, and larger pieces for seawalls and breakwaters. These uses date from the earliest days of the granite industry to the present day.

### ***Food and Cooking in the Colonial Era***

Sunday, February 16 @ 2 pm

Presented by Maureen Bjorkland and Ellen Madison

Have you ever wondered what preparing food was like in the colonial era? Join us as we explore the differences between then and now.

### ***Dates to be announced***

Watch this winter for two John Linton programs on *Westerly Granite and Gettysburg*. John is returning with another one of his well-researched and photographed programs. One will probably focus on the condition of the monuments and show us how several have been repaired.

### **In Memoriam**

**Audrey Thorp**

**Docent**

## ***Norman Isham and the Colonial Restoration***

Homeowners often sought the services of Norman Isham, a leading New England architect in the field of colonial restoration.

Orlando R. Smith Jr. hired him to remove the Victorian gingerbread and restore the mansion to the home we know today. In our vault are a dozen blueprints and several drawings prepared by Isham between 1925 and 1930. Surprisingly, however, we had no further documentation of this restoration.

To learn more, we went to the Rhode Island Historical Society to search their Isham archives. Lido Mochetti, Ed Fazio, Hugh Barton and Ellen Madison used an online index to choose which sources might prove lucrative and the helpful staff had them waiting. Stored in nine boxes, taking up three and a half linear feet of shelf space, the collection covers much of Isham's career from 1899 to 1943.

Diaries and notebooks turned out to be rich sources of information about the project at the Babcock House. Reading through 365 diary pages for each year and deciphering Isham's handwriting was not easy, but did reveal some fascinating information.

A note in the papers indicated a collection of photographs, which we had not requested in advance. To everyone's surprise, the photographs included interior photos from 1909 of the house with

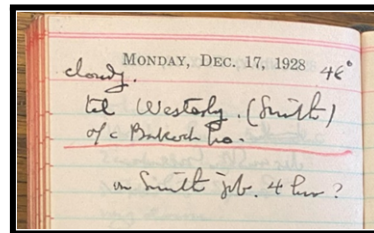


the rooms resplendent in their Victorian décor and a

dozen smaller black and white photographs of the exterior, showing the house prior to, during and after the remodeling work.

In July and August 1925, Isham had come with an assistant to take measurements. Eight pages of measurements were supplemented with additional pages of information and drawings largely from 1926. Isham's daily diaries contained records of visits to the house from 1925 through 1931.

His first visit on April 3, 1925, noted, "To Westerly in car looked over Babcock Ho(use) with Mr. O. R. Smith." One of the last was to review interior details on January 9, 1931. "To Westerly in car. Met Paul Crocker and Mr Morris there (OR Smith) looked at hangings and at lighting fixtures."



In late May 1926, the order was placed for the steel beam in the keeping room to support the second floor. The parlor fireplace design was prepared in 1929 and revised in 1930, indicating that final interior details were being completed.

Orlando R. Smith Jr. spoke about the restoration at the Westerly Historical Society on October 11, 1929, as reported in the *Westerly Sun* the next day. No copies of this talk have been found (let us know if you have one!), but the story says that the work "was begun two years ago." These nuggets have provided us with a bit more information about the colonial restoration.

*Left: the back of the house showing kitchen ell 1909*  
For more information, refer to blog on website.

## ***Learning from the Past***



Lido Mochetti, one of the original volunteers to turn the mansion into a museum, began his tour by telling us that the house exterior was painted Newport Rogers House Beige—appropriate since we were about to begin painting. Then he pointed out some original paint hidden behind a shutter in the parlor. He shared that only the dining room wallpaper could be saved and that the inside of the corner cupboard, presumably made by a Newport craftsman, had always been red. Small Turkish carpets usually graced table tops instead of large ones on the wide-board floors which were kept bare for easier cleaning.

Tipping over one of the Chippendale parlor chairs, he showed us the whole history of the many layers of the seat construction which he had recently discovered and documented when the chair was reupholstered. Other pieces of furniture with a story are the sweetheart chair, the Brewster chair, the William and Mary daybed (which is believed to have its original finish from the 1690s) and the Geer highboy, made by John Wheeler Geer, uncle of Emeline Gallup who was the first Orlando Smith's wife. Last, he reminded us that Windsor chairs were the colonies' first outdoor furniture and Mount Vernon still welcomes visitors on the front veranda with comfortable Windsor chairs.

## ***From the Vault***

The recent discovery of a county courthouse in South Dakota made of Westerly granite by the New England Granite Company brings our state total to 41 states in which Westerly granite can be found. John Linton also discovered a monument sent to Santiago, Cuba.

Approximately 80 people attended one of three summer tours given at River Bend Cemetery. Brenda Linton and Susan Brocato, with help from Nina Wright, Barbara Fallon, Ellen Madison and the research of the late Dwight Brown, researched and put together the tour. Ed Fazio, Maureen Bjorkland, Cemetery Superintendent Greg Howard, Ellen Madison, and Brenda Linton served as tour guides.

John Coduri donated his Coduri Granite Company Binder which contains the history of the company and many examples of monuments it created.

Susan Brocato and Brenda Linton worked with Hugh Barton as he updated the granite vault database.

Bill Mitchell contributed worker names and information.

Mary Keniston donated photos of the Westerly granite monuments to Pillsbury (flour) and Faber (brick) in Minneapolis, MN.

John Linton is working with the National Park Service in Gettysburg and the Adams County Historical Society as he prepares for his 2025 presentations. He is also in communication with folks from Forest Lawn Cemetery in Buffalo, New York, who have asked for any Smith and New England Granite orders done for them.

Trustees: *Andrew C. Rogers, Chair, Timothy J. Babcock, Hugh A. Barton, Maureen J. Bjorkland, Susan Sullivan Brocato, Linda Smith Chaffee, Edward A. Fazio, Betty-Jo Cugini Greene, Thomas J. Gulliscio, Jr., Ellen L. Madison, Ph.D., Jacquelyn A. Smith. Official publication of the Orlando R. Smith Trust, DBA Babcock-Smith House Museum, 124 Granite Street, Westerly, RI 02891 401-596-5704 babcocksmithhouse.org*

## ***Tidbits***

Most of our programs are now live-streamed on our Facebook page.

Linda Smith Chaffee is busy adding a granite story every so often to our Facebook page.

After presenting her program to an overflow audience, Catherine Shotick, the Director of the new Westerly Museum of American Impressionism, graciously repeated it for the United 1926 Club, a group associated with the United Theater.

Linda Smith Chaffee and Ellen Madison finished sorting the Smith materials which came from the estate of Isaac and Gertrude Smith.

The Westerly Historical Society will host *The History of Sports in Westerly*, a new exhibit in the Isaac Smith Room. This special exhibit contains artifacts from its collection which showcase the town's rich sporting history. Among the items are uniforms, scorecards, programs, and photographs from the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century.

After spending a few months at the Gilbert Stuart Museum with other samplers from South County, our samplers are now back on the walls of the museum.



With the Westerly Historical Society, we hosted a successful After-Hours for members of the Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce.

Pictured are Trustee Tim Babcock and Jan Chamberlain of First Physical Therapy.

An appreciative audience enjoyed learning about and sampling oils and vinegars at a program presented by Stephen and Suzanne Capizzano of Olive Oils and Vinegars.

Trustees spent two afternoons focused on long-range planning. One ambitious undertaking is the addition of the option of self-guided tours, which will involve the installation of a video camera system in the mansion and signage in each room. We are also looking at formalizing our maintenance plan, encouraging more corporate giving, increasing our social media presence, and swelling our ranks of volunteers.

## ***New Trustees***

We welcome Thomas Gulliscio Jr. and Jacquelyn Smith to the Board as we bid goodbye to Bill Hofferth.



Tom has a passion for history and has served for ten years as president of the Westerly Historical Society. He served as Animal Control Officer for 21 years, 35 years in the police reserves, and is presently working as a security officer at the URI Graduate School of Oceanography.

Presently, he is coordinating interviews with lifelong residents of Westerly who are 80 or older for a video project titled "Reflections."



Jackie was well-known to us as our Resident Manager from 2017 to 2022. Serendipitously, one of her direct ancestors was the sister of Joshua Babcock's second wife. Her passion for genealogy began at age 11 and continues to this day. She was the third generation of her family to serve as State Regent of the Rhode Island State Society Daughters of the American Revolution.

Jackie is presently a designer and social media coordinator, primarily working with nonprofits, and hopes to contribute to our social media outreach.

## ***The “1884 Stone” Has Come “Home”***

Thanks to the generosity of Dion Luzzi of SERVPRO of Washington County, the “1884 Stone,” which once graced the Smith Granite Company Store, is now part of our exterior exhibit.

The first company store, a wooden building doing business as early as 1857, was replaced in 1884 by the iconic granite building on the corner of Tower and Granite Streets. The stone, engraved with the date, was located in the peak, above the second floor window.



In 1919, the building was rented by the Panciera brothers, Ernie and Tony, who operated a garage there. By 1952, it was the Holliday and Joyce filling station and later Hoxie Buick. It stood vacant for many years until Luzzi bought it and tried valiantly to save the building, but it was too far gone and the granite walls bowed out when he tried to shore up the structure above the wide garage doors.

Westerly residents mourned its demise, but will be happy to know that the stone with the carved date will be found mounted on the side of Joshua’s Store.



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## ***Stained Glass Connection Continues***

Woodlawn Cemetery Associate Sophia Kemp recently presented “Monumental Relationship: Stained-Glass Studios, Monument Makers and Their Patrons” as part of Woodlawn’s daylong program on the stained glass in its mausoleums.

Woodlawn’s 1200 vaults contain an estimated 1500 stained glass windows. Sophia credited our resources for helping to locate New England stained glass window companies who did work for these mausoleums.

## ***History Award***



David Smith, local historian who now publishes extensively-researched articles in the *Westerly Sun*, received the History Award at the Annual Meeting of the Westerly Historical Society. The Museum co-sponsors this award.