



The Babcock-Smith House Museum Newsletter

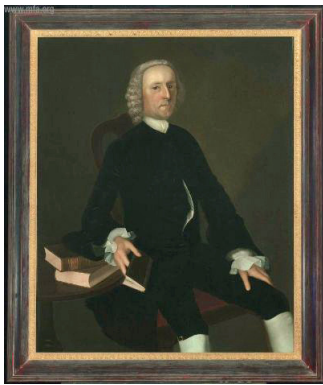
Volume 25 Number 2

Fall 2025

Celebrating the 250th

Joshua Babcock and the Town of Westerly played an important part in the effort to achieve independence. Jean Gagnier kicked off the 250th celebration of the Declaration of Independence with an excellent program about Westerly's role, which he presented for the Westerly Historical Society and is available to view on its website.

Among his many roles, Joshua Babcock served as the second and tenth Chief Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court from 1749 to 1751 and then again from 1763 to 1764. In 1759 he was elected speaker of the House of Deputies and served for one year. He returned to the General Assembly and served from May 1773 until May 1777. It was during this tenure that perhaps his most important service occurred.



On May 4, 1776, the General Assembly voted to declare Rhode

Island's independence, and the Rhode Island Act of Renunciation was passed two full months ahead of July 4, 1776. All allegiance to King George III's Great Britain was formally severed.

During the war, he served as Major General over all the Rhode Island Militia units. As a member of the Colony's War Council, he procured equipment for and served as paymaster for Westerly troops. It is said that, in this role, he hosted George Washington.

Samuel Ward, who owned a house where Langworthy B&B and Winery is now, had served as Governor of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence from 1762 to 1763 and was a delegate to the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia in 1776. He was scheduled to sign the Declaration of Independence. Unfortunately, he died of smallpox on March 25, 1776, just four months before the Declaration was signed, thus not gaining the acclaim that he so richly deserved for his many different contributions to the colony and to the country.

Julia Dolls Return Home

Five of the one hundred Julia Dolls have returned to the museum to keep alive their story. Their namesake, Julia Abby Smith, was the youngest sister of Orlando Smith who bought the old Babcock farm in 1848. Julia lived at her brother's house from time to time.

Docents Kathleen Fyfe and her friend Elsie Oates studied fashions of the pre-Civil War era and designed patterns for clothing. They chose styles from 1851 since that was the year Julia, age 32, married sea captain Henry H. Rogers of New London, CT.

Construction of the dolls began in 1986 and was completed in 1990. Each doll, about a foot tall, is unique. She has a hand-painted face to resemble a portrait of Julia and a historically appropriate hairstyle. Every doll is fitted with a shift, petticoat and pantaloons. A variety of styles of dress, fabrics, trims, and accessories gives each doll her personality. She might carry a muff, a hat box, a basket of eggs or a small bouquet of flowers. Each doll was numbered, registered and carried a tag with a bit of history of the doll. Because of this careful documentation, we know who purchased each of the dolls



Original owners of the dolls

Seated:

#6 Linda Chaffee—great-great-grandniece of the real Julia

#93 Shirley Onorato

Standing:

#24 Jessie Mearns, #4 Mildred Beam, #92 Shirley Onorato

Down the Granite Rabbit Hole: Exploring the Mystery of Laura Keene's Memorial

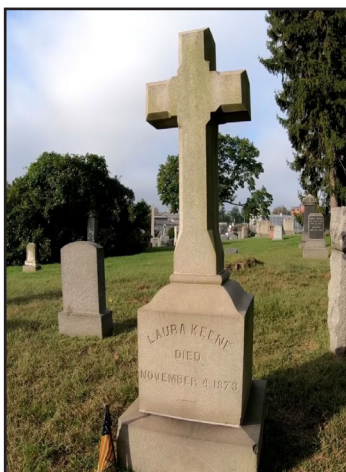
By Mary Weiss

Just like Alice in "Alice in Wonderland," I fell down my own rabbit hole trying to discover whether the memorial of Laura Keene, the cousin of my maternal great grandfather, was made of Westerly granite.

My research began and ended with Brenda Linton of the Babcock-Smith House Museum. In between, my journey over the telephone and on-line would take me from Westerly to England (where Laura was born) to New Jersey and New York. As Alice would say, things became "curiouser and curiouser."

Laura was a famous, some might say infamous, actress and was also an author, producer of plays, and a manager and owner of theaters, all quite remarkable for a woman in the mid-1800's. She starred in "Our American Cousin," at Ford's Theatre, and the night President Abraham Lincoln was shot, she calmed the audience and then comforted him before he was taken across the street to where he later died. Although Laura was initially arrested as a suspect in John Wilkes Booth's conspiracy, she was exonerated and died several years later in 1873.

Starting with an image of Laura's memorial, I approached the BSH Museum to identify the stone. Unfortunately, the museum's records did not go back far enough to verify her memorial as Westerly granite. "Find a Grave" had told me that Laura was buried at the Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, NY, a massive cemetery founded in 1838. Both the Smith Granite Company and New England Granite Works had done work in that cemetery, but the cemetery could be of little help beyond the fact that Laura was buried in Lot 21444, Section 182 with her mother, her two daughters and son-in-law. It was curious that Laura was buried there on April 20, 1876, but her memorial said she had died on November 4, 1873.



Laura was buried in Montclair, NJ at the Immaculate Conception Cemetery which had no records of how her remains got from New Jersey to New York. Nor did the Township of Montclair. I learned, though, that current New Jersey law requires permits to exhume a body and transport it outside of the state. From the New Jersey state archives, I learned that, in the 1870's, a permit was required to bring a deceased person into the state, but no permit was required to remove one out of the state. Images of Laura's memorial and the inscriptions on each of

the four sides from the Rawson Family Facebook page (Laura's daughter Emma married Albert Leighton Rawson) reveal the names of Laura, her mother and her unmarried daughter Clara. A quote on the fourth side states "He giveth his beloved sleep." Emma and Albert are buried in the same lot, but without any gravestones. From the Facebook group for the Green-Wood Cemetery, I learned that visitors often leave Lincoln pennies on Laura's memorial.

I thought my journey had ended without being any closer to learning if Laura's memorial was made of Westerly granite until a handwritten entry dated April 4, 1872 in the ledger of the New England Granite Works at the BSH Museum provided a missing clue. The ledger described the "Palmer Cross," a memorial made of Westerly granite, in Evergreen Cemetery in Stonington, CT. Although the bases of the two memorials are different, a visual comparison of the two crosses atop each memorial reveals that they are quite similar. A further examination of photographs of Laura's memorial with an illuminated magnifier reveals that her cross is made of very fine white, small-grain granite with a yellowish tinge on the base that is typical of Westerly granite.



Palmer Monument
Stonington, CT

Although I unearthed several curiosities, it can be said only that Laura's memorial "resembles," is "similar to" or is "consistent with" those made in the 1870's of Westerly granite. There is a "distinct possibility" that Laura's memorial is made of Westerly granite based on the granite grain and color, the comparison to the "Palmer Cross" known to be made of Westerly granite, and the fact that other monuments, done by Westerly companies, are in the Green-Wood Cemetery. Although I am disappointed that no definite statement can be made, I certainly do not regret the time and energy that led me "down my granite rabbit hole."

Still in Demand

Travis Parsons, of the Department of Earth, Environmental and Planetary Sciences at Brown University, relayed a request from the Mineralogical Society of America for a piece of Westerly granite. Our donation would be part of a collection of samples to be displayed at upcoming professional meetings. "2026 will mark the 75th anniversary of the release of United States Geological Survey (USGS) Bulletin 980 and the availability of the USGS geochemical reference standards G-1 and W-1. These were the first such geological standards. Reference standard G-1 is Westerly Granite, sourced in June of 1947 by Felix Chayes from the Smith Granite Company." We were proud to comply.

Tea Brick Myth Debunked

Years ago, Carolyn Longolucco visited Williamsburg and brought back a tea brick which sparked the curiosity of our visitors. Recently, Meg Barclay bought a replacement when she visited Boston as the old one had lost its aroma. MaryEllen Tunsky, a third docent, had her curiosity aroused and she set out to investigate.

Evan O'Brien of the Boston Tea Party Ships and Museum, sent her a long, detailed and very definitive answer.

"The question of what form the tea came in continues to be one of the most commonly propagated myths connected to the 1773 tea crisis, and one that we are happy has a definitive answer. In short, all teas involved in the Boston Tea Party of 1773 were in loose-leaf form. None of them were in brick form. We know this because the process of growing, picking, drying, shipping, and selling tea was extremely well-documented around the time of the Boston Tea Party. Additionally, East India Company records, and the experiences of the Sons of Liberty themselves, paint a very clear picture for us."

He went on to share extensive shipping records and other proof, but one sentence says it all. "If brick tea did appear in London or Boston, it was largely a novelty." In this time of celebrating our nation's origins, we will interpret our tea brick as it should be interpreted.

Community Outreach Peaks

Two cemetery tours for the public, a special cemetery tour for the SALT (Senior Adults Living Triumphantly) group from Central Baptist Church, and a downtown Westerly tour brought Westerly granite to the attention of audiences old and new. Ellen Madison and Linda Chaffee presented a granite program to the Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center and Linda presented a different program highlighting the variety of people who are memorialized by Westerly granite to the SALT group of Central Baptist.

If your organization is looking for a program, we offer a variety. You can find a list of available programs on our website [Babcock-smithhouse.org](http://www.babcocksmithhouse.org). From the home page, click on **About**; from the pull down menu, click on **Our Services**; scroll down to **Programs to Go**, click on **Read More**.

From the Archives

Researched and gave three River Bend Cemetery Tours. James Wolfe presented his findings on The Old Town Plot.

Revised and planned two downtown Westerly tours. Lido Mochetti, Christ Church historian, explained the variety of ways Westerly granite was used in the building's exterior and showcased their granite baptismal font inside.

Added information about the Swan Granite Company to our collection. Horace Swan was an agent for Smith Granite Company and owned his own company as well. A picture of him, with some information, was donated by the estate of Charles Kitchen.

Rachel Wolgemuth from Laurel Hill West Cemetery sent us several pictures of the unusually large sarcophagus for Cornelius Harrigan being set. This unusually large sarcophagus was cut in Westerly by the Newall Granite Company circa 1897. Its lower base is 15'6" by 10'6" so that it can accommodate two caskets side by side.

The Soldiers' Monument in York, Maine was ordered by Civil War veterans to honor all who served their country in conflicts from the Civil War to 1905. Fred Barnicoat Company of Quincy, MA. almost certainly used granite from Sullivan Granite in Bradford, RI. A photo of the Barnicoat Cutting Shed circa 1909 shows a number of models in production including this one. The uniform on the soldier is from the Spanish American War era. It has often been mistaken for a Confederate Soldier's uniform.

Local author Kelly Sullivan wrote that a monument to General Sherman, of the 'March to the Sea' fame, was created by the Chapman Quarry Co. of Westerly, RI. We had just two documented monuments from the Chapman Quarries: one in Syracuse, NY and one in Norwich, CT. Hugh Barton stepped in and found a *NYT* article further supporting the General Sherman discovery.

Just for fun: Robert Redford's paternal grandparents lived and died in Westerly, RI and are buried in River Bend Cemetery.

In Memoriam

Jesse Mearns
Docent

History Award



Alan Angelo (right) received the 2025 History Award, presented jointly by the Museum and the Westerly Historical Society. A retired history teacher, Alan has dedicated hundreds of volunteer hours to the Charlestown Historical Society, doing everything from clearing brush, to holding elected office, to serving as tour guide. He has been particularly involved with documenting, cleaning and maintaining historic cemeteries. Known to us as being the Lintons' companion on documenting Westerly granite works, he has traveled all over the Northeast, adding to our local history granite research.

She Returned to Life

A German doll circa 1900 came to us as a gift from Sandra Tisch. Brenda Linton searched and searched for someone to repair her and finally found Calling All Dolls (now closed) in Cobalt, CT. There the doll received some tender loving care involving her arms, some new boots and undergarments as well as a dress. She is now happily ensconced in the Toy Room.



Tidbits

Special programs were offered this season designed especially for members at specific membership levels: hands-on granite tour for families, an in-depth look at the Smith Granite books, and an outdoor tour of granite on the grounds.

Self-guided tours have been successfully implemented with signage located in each room. Guided tours are also available at specific times.

The docents held their 100th candlelight dinner. Guests were from the Ashaway Free Library.

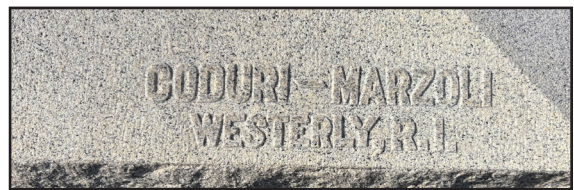
A celebration was held on October 18 to honor everyone who has worked on the candlelight dinners.

Our Trustee Chairperson Andrew Rogers has been promoted to President of the Westerly Community Credit Union. He will become CEO in February.

Westerly High School Class of '63 made a \$1275 donation to the museum in honor of Ellen Madison in recognition of her service to the class.

Our thanks to Keaton Hansen and Kathy Gehring for filming our Sunday afternoon programs. Also thanks to Sarah Madison for linking the YouTube videos to our website. If you missed a program, you can find the videos on our website Babcocksmith-house.org; click on **Resources and News**; scroll down to **Videos**; select the one you wish to watch and click **Watch Video**.

Surprise Discovery



John and Joe Coduri were overcome with emotion when a significant inscription on the base of the Faverio monument in River Bend Cemetery was uncovered by the staff when they cleaned the monument in preparation for one of our summer tours. Neither brother had ever seen the inscription of "Coduri and Marzoli." Their grandfather Joseph Coduri and his brother-in-law Joseph Marzoli had formed a company that began the Coduri legacy in Westerly.



Celebrating the 250th

Events at BSH Museum

The Museum has gone all out to offer programming to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Specific topics such as the enslaved people in Westerly, Rhode Island's role in the sinking of the *Gaspee*, and the Dorr Rebellion, often called Rhode Island's Second War of Independence, will certainly inform. More generalized, but relevant, will be programs on art, currency, music, poetry, and the courts of the Revolutionary War time period. Additional programs will highlight facets of the Westerly granite industry.

December 6 @ 9:00 am - 12:00 pm

Holiday Open House at the Museum

Why bake? Come cookie shopping and, while picking out your platter of cookies, enjoy some free soup, muffins, freshly-baked cookies and hot cider. Then head to the raffle baskets and to Joshua's Store where a fine selection of handmade items awaits. You can do the bulk of your holiday shopping right here and support the Museum as well.

December 14 @ 2:00 pm

Granite Workers from Northern Italy

Presented by Vito DiPaola

With the aid of photographs, maps and other illustrations, Vito will tell a short biographical story about Giuseppe Coduri, Giuseppe Gervasini, Attilio Fraquelli, Feruccio Comolli, the Zerbarini brothers (Angelo and Columbus), the Cugini brothers and others. He will focus on their hometowns, their voyages to the United States, their apprenticeships, work histories and a few of their accomplishments.

January 11, 2026 @ 2:00 pm

Courts in Colonial America

Presented by Judge Frank Williams

Judge Williams, a perennial favorite at the Museum, will share his knowledge about courts in early America. Sure to be fascinating and, perhaps, a little timely. Snow date will be the following Sunday, January 18.

February 15, 2026 @ 2:00 pm

Westerly Monuments Dealing with the Revolutionary War

Presented by John Linton

Although the Westerly granite companies are well-known for their works dealing with the Civil War, John, who is known for his painstaking research, has uncovered monuments dealing with the Revolutionary War and will share his discoveries.

March 8, 2026 @ 2:00 pm

The Colonial Kitchen

Presented by Maureen Bjorkland

Program highlights cooking and food preparation during the Colonial period by comparing today's kitchen to the keeping room of the museum. Differences in the diet and the eating habits of the 18th century compared to the 21st century will be addressed.

March 22, 2026 @ 2:00 pm

Music of Early America

Presented by Peter Piacquadio and other musicians

Music was much more than entertainment during the Revolution. It carried narratives, spread political messages, and helped unify people in a time of conflict. Musicians will perform musical examples.

April 12, 2026 @ 2:00 pm

The Westerly Granite Companies' Coming and Going

Presented by Hugh Barton

During the course of a century (1850 – 1950), more than 100 granite companies came and went in Westerly. At the industry's peak between twenty and thirty companies were operating. Some lasted just years or decades. One lasted even a century. The company lifespans and official reports of numbers of workers provide a view of the industry changing over time.

Celebrating the 250th Events at BSH Museum

April 26, 2026 @ 2:00 pm

Recognizing the Enslaved in Westerly

A journey to uncover the history of some who were enslaved in Colonial Westerly.

Presented by Peter Ogle

May 3, 2026 @ 2:00 am

The Conspiracy to Destroy the British Revenue Schooner Gaspee in 1772

Dr. Concannon is a semi-retired pediatrician, but, importantly for us, also the historian for the Gaspee Days Committee. As such, he brings us information on this important Rhode Island event prior to the Declaration of Independence.

Presented by John Concannon

May 17, 2026 @ 2:00 pm

Babcock Portraits by Joseph Blackburn

Four members of the Babcock family were painted by Joseph Blackburn, one of the most sought-after portrait artists in America during the late 1750s and early 1760s. This fact demonstrates that some early residents of Westerly were aware of artistic trends and talents beyond what was locally available, and that at least one Westerly family had enough social clout to attract the artist's attention and could afford to pay him for multiple portraits. This presentation by local Art Historian, Dr. Sara Champlin, will consider what having four portraits as opposed to one – or even a pair – can tell us about the family's hopes, dreams, and ambitions, as well as about their economic and social status.

Presented by Sara Champlin

June 17, 2026 @ 6 pm

Philip Freneau's War Poetry Reading

On the anniversary of Bunker Hill, and two days before the anniversary of the date that the *Bon Homme Richard* sailed from France, this group will present a program around Freneau's war poetry. Please note that this will be *at the Westerly Library*, not the Carriage House.

Presented by Robert Madison and three readers

June 28, 2026 @ 2:00 pm

Rhode Island's Second War for Independence

The Dorr Rebellion and the "Battle" of Chepachet (on this date in 1842) were famous enough to warrant some poetry which will be shared in this program.

Presented by Robert Madison

September 13, 2026 @ 2:00 pm

Early Currency in Our Area

Owner of Colonial Coins and Currency and active in many coin-collecting organizations, Larry will share his knowledge of early local currency with examples and stories.

Presented by Lawrence Erhart

October 3, 2026 @ 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Auction

Bob Ward will auction off donated items of historical, decorative or other interest. Preview will be at 1 pm and all proceeds benefit the Museum. If you have small items you would like to donate, please contact us.

Unless otherwise indicated, all programs are at the Carriage House. Free for members: \$5.00 for not-yet members

Auction

Due to popular demand, the BSHM auction will return on Saturday, October 3, 2026. Bob Ward will return as auctioneer. We are in the process of collecting items, so, if you have something you would like to donate, please contact Ellen Madison at ellenmadison1945@gmail.com. This year, we are NOT accepting large pieces of furniture, but if you have something of historical or decorative interest, we would be happy to accept it. Once again, the Westerly Community Credit Union has offered its lower level for us to use as storage.