

Babcock-Smith House Museum

NEWSLETTER

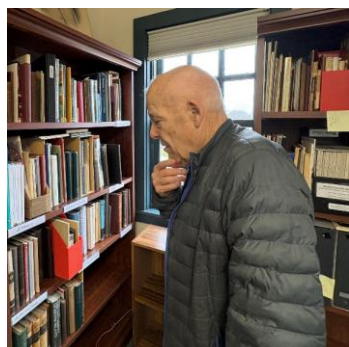
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A Rare Gem

Amid the hundreds of Rhode Island and local history books which Joe Coduri has donated to the museum library, lay an unassuming small publication with a faded blue cover which immediately stood out because of its title: *Pawcatuck Library Association, Westerly, R.I. 1848*. A cursory glance between the paper covers revealed library regulations, a long section on reading hints, and, most impressively, the titles of more than 2000 books arranged by category which were the holdings of the library in 1848. An alphabetical list of authors and their works were in a separate section.

Ashley Hanson, a librarian from Connecticut College and a BSHM trustee, immediately shared that booklets like this were the way in which libraries documented their holdings and shared that information with their subscribers. The card catalogue did not come into common use until the early 1900s.



Joe Coduri peruses the collections.

Also in our library is Maria Bernier's excellent book *Westerly Library and Wilcox Park: Celebrating 125 Years*

in which she reprinted Sallie Coy's history beginning with the Pawcatuck Library, established in 1797. The location of this library bounced around from one private home to another and sometimes ended up with the town clerk being the librarian, not always a job which he relished.

In 1847 the esteemed Henry Barnard became Commissioner of Education in Rhode Island and he energized Westerly citizens to revitalize the library and make books available to all. The officers, Rowse Babcock and Rev. Frederick Denison, turned over eleven hundred dollars to him for the purchase of books and Barnard personally selected the book collection and prepared the catalogue of more than 2,000 titles.

Five times during the ensuing years, the Directors offered the collection to the town and four times the town turned down the offer. Not until it became clear that the Civil War memorial would be a library instead of monument did the collection find a new home in 1894.

Once we made sure that the Westerly Library had a copy of their own, we added this bit of history to our collection of more than two thousand entries as well, but we have the advantage of having a computer and not having to handset type for each entry. We are still cataloguing, but you can peruse our collection from our website and you are welcome to come in in person. Duplicates from our collection will be available for sale at our auction on October 3.



Kathy Gehring and Ashley Hanson were too busy moving books to pose for a photo.

Linda Smith Chaffee Retires



The great-great granddaughter of Orlando Smith and the last Smith to serve on the Board retired after twenty years of following the example of her parents' tireless service to the Museum. Linda's love of granite and the granite industry led her to locate and document monuments all over the United States and her computing skills helped preserve that history for generations to come.

She co-authored *Built from Stone: The Westerly Granite Story* and used her knowledge to educate others. Calling upon her teaching experience at Westerly High School, she gave both inhouse and on-the-road programs, developed brochures, did all the layout and computer work for years of newsletters, and gave cemetery tours, all without fanfare.

Her biscotti sold out quickly at the holiday bazaar and little girls who received the American Girl doll clothes she made were lucky. From quilts to pot-holders, her handiwork raised funds for the museum. She was a tireless resource, innovator, researcher, and good friend. We will miss her.

WE CELEBRATE MAY 4, 1776 IN A GRAND WAY

We honored the anniversary of Rhode Island's own Independence Day which occurred fully two months before the rest of the colonies followed suit. Joshua Babcock was a member of the General Assembly which passed the Act of Renunciation and the exhibit in the Isaac Smith Room pays tribute to him and to his friend Benjamin Franklin.

Hugh Barton did a stellar job collecting scans of the letters between Franklin and Babcock, reproducing both them and the transcripts for close examination. Watch for his upcoming program on the relationship between these two men.

Years ago, Terri Babcock in Colorado used her expertise to transcribe Joshua's will, an inventory of his possessions at the time of his death, and also an earlier inventory of his more valuable possessions. These, too, can be examined in detail.



Maureen Bjorkland put up the final piece, and also the title, of the exhibit.



Nellie Rogers helped her father Andrew Rogers make Dolley Madison's Cinnamon Cakes.



Benjamin Franklin, aka Bob Madison, dropped by to sit a spell.

At the Open House, Alex Nunes read the Act to us, but the bigger draw might have been the cookies and candy which our intrepid trustees baked following the recipes of our founding fathers and mothers.

Meet Our New Trustees

Ashley Hanson is a Reference and Instruction Librarian at Connecticut College, where she also teaches in the Gender Studies department. She learned about the museum while researching her great great grandfather, James G. Batterson, and she and her son paid a visit on the last day of the season in October 2024. "WOW! We were so impressed. I was sold!" Since then, Ashley has given a program about Batterson, filmed other programs, led tours, worked with the fourth graders, and volunteered in both the library and the archives in the vault. She says that she hopes to volunteer more once she retires, but we agree that she has already made a huge contribution.

Vito DiPaola, a native of Westerly, used his Dartmouth College degree in chemistry to work in industry in various technical and management assignments. His second career was that of a Foreign Service Officer in the U.S. State Department where he lived and worked in Nigeria, Montreal, Saudi Arabia, and Oman as a U.S. diplomat. His third career is retirement, during which he has combined his interests in local history, genealogy, and World War II to mount an exhibit in the Westerly Library and present programs on "The Granite Workers from Northern Italy." He says that he was "surprised at the high-level, professional quality of the work being done here by 'amateur historians,'" but we guarantee that his upcoming November program on Westerly veterans from World War II will ensure his place among those amateur historians.

Harry Bjorkland describes himself as a jack-of-all-trades and he has proved just that since coming on board. He has worked for crane, large oil, roofing, precast concrete and mill/pallet companies as well as a large lumber yard and paint manufacturer. There is nothing this man cannot do as he combines his knowledge of electrical and plumbing with his love of antiques and old buildings as he takes over the facilities job from Ed Fazio. We find it a bit challenging to see where his hobby of restoring antique farm tractors will come in.



Front Row l to r: Betty-Jo Cugini-Greene, Ellen Madison, Maureen Bjorkland, Ed Fazio, Vito DiPaola
Back Row l to r: Tom Gulluscio, Ashley Hanson, Andrew Rogers, Harry Bjorkland, Hugh Barton
Missing: Tim Babcock and Susan Sullivan Brocato

FAREWELL DOCENTS; WELCOME FRIENDS

For more than fifty years, docents have supported the museum's mission in multiple ways, but, gradually, circumstances have evolved. Ed Fazio, Docent President, shared that the Docent Executive Committee has developed a strategy for adapting to the current situation in which many volunteers together carry out our mission and few docents attend the monthly meetings. The formal designation of "docent" and the organization itself will disappear. Current docents will be folded into a new structure tentatively called Friends of the Babcock-Smith House Museum. Thankfully, those who coordinate events will continue to do so and we expect no change in our vibrant volunteer community.

If you, the reader, have volunteered to do practically anything at the museum, you are a friend. We thank you.

TIDBITS

We are happy to share Mary Wilbur's 1799 sampler with the Hopkinton Historical Association. Hers will be the oldest one displayed in their exhibit of samplers done by girls in Hopkinton, Rhode Island.

Two more Julia dolls came home after living with Noreen Kepple for many years.

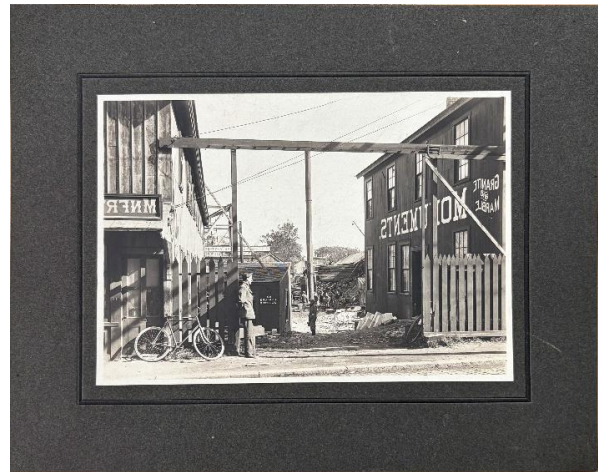
And The Winner Is ...



John and Brenda Linton were the deserving recipients of the History Award presented jointly with the Westerly Historical Society, represented here by President Thomas Gulluscio. If you have even glanced at one of our newsletters, you know the time, energy, and expertise these two retired history teachers put into enriching our knowledge of the granite industry.

Granite News

Bob Ward donated two photographs to the collection.



Noyes Marble and Granite Works on Main Street, Westerly. Nathan Noyes had a marble shop on 97 Main Street as early as 1883 and, by 1896, he had a granite business.



One of only three photographs we have of monuments produced by the Chapman Granite Works. On the back is written "Vail, Vail Memorial Cemetery, Parsippany, NJ. Chapman Granite Works Artistic Memorials, Ed N Burdick." Vail was founder and president of AT&T, and founder of Bell Laboratories. He developed long-distance calling and made the first call between New York and San Francisco.

In 1931 the Newell, Coduri and Smith Granite Companies worked together on a huge mausoleum in Brooklyn, NY. This Memorial Abbey, located in Cypress Hills Cemetery, involved one hundred workers and could hold 3000 bodies.



Robert Piola donated a book entitled "Cesare Piola - Master Stone Carver: Discovering His Journey and His Artistry" (2025). Written by his cousin William E. Oliver about their grandfather, it is both a family history and a story of their Waterbury Granite Company. The Pepe Monument, one of Cesare's treasured and prize-winning monuments, used Sullivan Granite Company stone.

Maureen Bjorkland, who tends our garden, shows off the new sign in Dr. Babcock's Herb Garden. Although we do not know the exact herbs Joshua had in his medicinal garden, Franklin does indicate that he is sending Babcock some rhubarb seeds.

Her husband, Harry Bjorkland finessed our new museum sign on Cross Street.



2026 Calendar of Events

July 29 at 6pm Starts in Wilcox Park	Downtown Walking Tour of Westerly Granite Our annual walking tour of Westerly granite in downtown Westerly always draws a crowd, so plan to be a part of it. Look at buildings, monuments and infrastructure with fresh eyes and you will never look at them the same way again. Meet at the esplanade in the park.
August 10 at 6pm Meet at River Bend Cemetery	Cemetery Tour: Revisit the Granite Masters We have chosen some of the masterpieces in River Bend Cemetery to revisit. Each monument exemplifies the extraordinary skills of both the sculptor and the carver. If you missed the tour in July, don't miss this one.
September 13 at 2pm At Carriage House	Early Currency in Our Area Presented by Lawrence Erhart - 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.
October 3 at 2pm At Carriage House	Auction Bob Ward will auction off donated items of historical, decorative or other interest. Preview will be at 1 and all proceeds benefit the Museum. If you have small items you would like to donate, please contact Ellen Madison.
October 11 at 2pm At Carriage House	Dear Friend: Franklin and Babcock Correspondence Presented by Hugh Barton - Joshua Babcock and Benjamin Franklin were friends and professional colleagues who wrote letters to each other for over 20 years. These letters provide insights into their activities and thoughts in the years leading up to the American Revolutionary War. They evidence the friendship not only between these two men but extending to their families, wives and children.
November 8 at 2pm At Carriage House	World War II Remembered: Westerly's Greatest Generation in Their Own Words Presented by Vito DiPaola - From the World War II battlefields of Germany, France, Iwo Jima and elsewhere, Westerly's young men were heroes. Many paid the ultimate price, and those who survived returned home to build the town into what it is today.
December 5 at 9am At Carriage House	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 homemade items awaits. You can do the bulk of your holiday shopping right here and support our Museum as well.

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.

Babcock Smith House Museum - 124 Granite Street Westerly RI – 401-596-5704
Membership Opportunities Available - please visit babcocksmithhouse.org for more information.