

Westerly Granite Quarries Focus of April Regional Meeting

In 1845 Orlando Smith discovered a granite outcropping at the Babcock Farm in Westerly, Rhode Island. He purchased the farm and started the Smith Granite Company, the first of several companies in the area that quarried the now famous Westerly granite. The granite was used for everything from humble curbing to skyscrapers to monuments for the Civil War dead and mausoleums for Gilded Age robber barons.

On Saturday, April 18, 2015, the EAIA will hold a regional meeting at the Babcock-Smith House in Westerly (www.babcock-smithhouse.com). EAIA member Paul Wood will be the featured speaker, discussing “Tools and Machinery That Created the Granite Industry,” which describes the changes in granite industry technology up to World War II. Paul has written extensively on the tools of the granite industries (available at earlyamericanindustries.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/GraniteIndustry.pdf)

The Babcock-Smith House is the home of Orlando Smith, next door to his original quarry. The Smith Granite Company thrived following the Civil War, when there was a great demand for the granite to build post-war monuments. There are sixty-nine monuments built by Smith Granite at Gettysburg, and more at other battle fields—Chickamauga (38), Antietam (8), and Vicksburg (1). In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Westerly granite was the stone of choice for wealthy individuals for their mausoleums, including Jay Gould’s in New York’s Woodlawn Cemetery.

Today, the restored Babcock-Smith house interprets the story of the families who lived there. The museum’s collection, however, emphasizes the tools and ephemera of the granite industry in Westerly. Among the items are the order books of the Smith Granite Company, which describe in detail the design of the work, the stones that were cut, the names of the workers, and the cost of stock and labor. The order books will be on display during the meeting.

The day will begin at 8 A.M. with tailgating in the museum’s parking lot. Coffee and doughnuts will be available, and at 9 A.M., attendees will divide into groups for tours of the house, viewing



A Westerly, Rhode Island, granite quarry

of a DVD on rock drilling and a trailer of the recent PBS documentary on the Westerly granite industry, and a walk-through of the museum’s vault where the order books are located, as well as a tour of quarry industry tools (including some “whatsits”) in the museum’s basement.

Following the box lunch in the Babcock-Smith Carriage House, Paul Wood will speak. After his talk and a Q&A, there will be walking tours of downtown Westerly and the River Bend Cemetery where many of the works produced from the local quarries may be found.

Cost for the day is \$18 for EAIA members, and includes the lunch and the museum tours and all the other activities. Deadline for registration is April 10. Use the form below to register or register online at www.earlyamericanindustries.org.

Westerly is close to Mystic, Connecticut, and the Mystic Seaport Museum (www.mysticseaport.org/), and lodging is available there and in nearby Stonington, Connecticut.

EAIA Regional Meeting, Babcock-Smith House, Westerly, R.I., April 18

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Please make check payable to EAIA. Cost is \$18 and includes program, coffee and doughnuts, and lunch.

Please indicate here if you wish a vegetarian meal and/or describe any food allergies _____

Please check if you plan to tailgate _____

Mail to Patty MacLeish, 31 Walnut St., Newport, RI 02840. Questions? Contact Patty MacLeish, pmacleish@verizon.net or 401-846-7542.