

Letter from the President by Catherine Delorme



Castle in Early Spring photo by Bob Geake

Dear Members, Friends, and Volunteers of Smith's Castle,

We are gearing up to launch a terrific season for 2025. By now, many of you have received a membership packet that was recently mailed out. I sincerely hope you will consider renewing your membership with Smith's Castle if you haven't already done so. The funds we raise with our membership drive help support our ability to care for our 347-year-old House Museum.

Last fall, we introduced a new adult event called Raise a Glass to Colonial RI. This was a fun evening, and all participants indicated that they would like to experience another evening event again. We are currently planning for the next one on June 6th. Information will be posted on our website; space will be limited, and reservations will be accepted prior to the event. Keep an eye on our website for an announcement of when registration will open. An art show, with prizes for different age groups, will be held this season. Winners will be selected by visitors' votes and will be featured in our new Smith's Castle 2026 calendar.

Our education committee has been busy preparing a superb schedule of talks for 2025. In September, we will hold a day-long seminar focusing on Roger Williams and his times.

Our 2025 docent and greeter training starts March 29th and lasts three weeks. If you ever wondered about helping out at Smith's Castle, this training may be for you. Our greeters welcome people to the Castle, and our docents escort them through our wonderful house, sharing the history. If you are unable to attend the group sessions, we also offer individualized training on a person-by-person basis. Everyone is welcome to explore this fun and rewarding opportunity at a place where "everyone really does know your name."

Thanks to a grant from the Champlin Foundation, construction will begin on the front façade of Smith's castle (the view facing the water), which takes the most abuse from the weather. This \$50,000 renovation will begin shortly and includes repairing water damage and other structural damage, as well as fixing the front door to ensure it stays attached to the structure! Local lore has it coming out of its frame onto a previous president and this president wants to avoid that happening again! If you're enjoying walks around the property, you will notice a scaffolding will soon be in place on the east side. Please be safe and keep a distance away from it.

Last year, we were recipients of a generous grant from the Kimball Foundation to allow us to help bring elementary school children to Smith's Castle. Smith's Castle's educators created some wonderful plans to meet RIDE's new 4th-grade social studies requirements, and our grant allows us to pay up to \$400 towards their transportation and the cost of admission of the children into the castle. So far, five 4th-grade teachers have scheduled tours for their classes. We are excited that our programs are helping to meet the curricular needs of the children in our South County schools.

Opening Day kicks off our 2025 season on May 3rd. We hope to see you and your family this year at Breakfast Talks, Conversations at the Castle in the evening, Teas with History, adults-only Colonial Beverage Tastings, and other special events as the season progresses to Christmas at the Castle. We look forward to meeting you and your family.



Opening Day to Kick Start ‘A Month of Roger’

This year’s Opening Day on May 3rd will kick start a month of events relating to Rhode Island’s founder, Roger Williams. The day will feature a book reading and signing by Prof. Charlotte Carrington-Farmer for her recent work *Roger Williams and his World: A Documentary History*. The 17th century -themed day will also include mead and bread making demonstrations. Castle tours will feature Williams’ time at Cocumscussoc and his trading post, and on May 24th, retired National Park ranger and Trustee John McNiff, will give a presentation on that early era of Cocumscussoc, and what became known as Smith’s Castle.

Castle’s Tea & History Season to Begin Soon

By Marilyn Harris

The 2025 Smith’s Castle Teas will begin with a Mother’s Day Tea on May 10th. In addition to a variety of teas, fruit cups, scones, savories, tea sandwiches, and desserts will be served, along with information about Rhode Island history. Except for the Mother’s Day Tea, which will be held on a Saturday, events will occur on the second Sunday of each month from June through September, between 4:30 PM and 6:00 PM (\$25 per person). We are hoping to have another Teddy Bear Tea for children in late October or early November, but these plans have not yet been finalized. The year will conclude with a Christmas Tea on December 14th.

At the Mother’s Day Tea, Mary Mangan of the New England Lace Group will provide a presentation and demonstration of Ipswich Lace Making, a commercial craft practiced by more than 600 women in Ipswich, MA in the 1790s. The Updikes of Smith’s Castle, one of Rhode Island’s wealthiest families at the time, likely valued this fashion and home accessory.

For more information about other Teas and to register online, please visit our [website](https://www.smithscastle.org/teas). Seating in the Updike 18th century dining room is limited to 20 and reservations book quickly, so planning ahead is advisable.

(<https://www.smithscastle.org/teas>).

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Signs of spring in the Colonial garden

Smith's Castle to be Spruced Up this Spring

By John Dower

Thanks to a nearly fifty thousand dollar grant from the Champlin Foundation, the façade of the Castle will be refurbished in early May following our Opening Day weekend. Our good friends at Abcore Restoration will once again be the contractor for this significant project. While we will have to work around some scaffolding for a few weeks, fortunately, Abcore will minimize the disruptions and maintain a safe environment for our visitors and volunteers. We hoped to get more cooperation from Mother Nature and have the work completed by Opening Day, so we have to squeeze this overdue project in when possible.

The work will entail replacing or repairing considerable trim, repainting the entire façade, and removing and rebuilding the entire front entryway. The front door will be refinished and then rehung with more substantial hardware. At the time of this writing, we are anxiously waiting for word from the 1772 Foundation and Preserve Rhode Island on the status of an additional grant that would cover refinishing and repairing the sides and back of the Castle. Next up will be grant applications to pay for much-needed work on the Castle interior. Stay tuned!

Castle Historians to Give Revolutionary War Presentation Through Documents

On May 8th, plan to spend an evening with Smith's Castle historians Marilyn Harris and John Dower at the North Kingstown Town Hall (at the old, renovated Town Hall at 80 Boston Neck Rd.) and peruse some of the most important documents held in the Rhode Island State Archives. Hear our historians share the stories of the people of North Kingstown and surrounding communities that participated in the American Revolution. Come early (6:00 PM) to not only get a good seat but have a little extra time to view the original documents from the little state that played an oversized role in America's fight for independence. The event is sponsored by our good friends from HistWick and the Town of North Kingstown. The event is free, so come and support our local history!

Revolutionary North Kingstown

WITH JOHN DOWER & MARILYN HARRIS

HOSTED BY HISTWICK



It was some 250 years ago that events were already taking place that would lead to the American Revolution and the birth of the United States. Join town residents and historians John Dower and Marilyn Harris as they describe stories and circumstances surrounding fifteen original documents from the years around the Revolutionary War.

An added bonus to the in-person event will be an exhibit set up by the Rhode Island State Archives entitled, "Rhode Island's Revolutionary Communities" featuring original documents talked about by Dower and Harris.

May 8
6:30 p.m.

TOWN HALL
COUNCIL CHAMBERS
80 BOSTON NECK RD.

Book Reviews by Bob Geake



Through the Eye of the Deer: An Anthology of Native American Women Writers Ed. by Carolyn Dunn and Carol Comfort (San Francisco, Aunt Lute Books 2024)

This new anthology of Native women's voices was a wonderful return for me to anthologies past of indigenous animal stories, especially collections of Coyote stories I had read as a young man. Coyote is the indigenous prankster who appears in a wide-range of indigenous stories in which he always seems to learn the hard way. Coyote appears again here, but so do a host of other spirit creatures from blue horses, owls, fish, crows, bear, deer, and dolphin, to beaver, wolves, spiders and snakes that inhabit the indigenous stories of creation, life, and its lessons.

Co-edited by Carolyn Dunn and Carol Comfort, the indigenous women writers in this collection range from the well-known such as Joy Harjo, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Louise Erdrich to younger sisters like the poets Deborah Miranda, and Karen Lynn Wallace. The collection also includes prose contributions from the editors as well as other stories kept alive by oral tradition such as that told by Mary Ike who died in 1946, but passed along a Coyote story published here for the first time.

As always, anthologies like this provide insight into indigenous mythology and oral history which only adds to the depth and beauty of these stories and poems.

Reading Roger Williams : Rogue Puritans, Indigenous Neighbors, and the Founding of America, A Documentary History by Linford D. Fisher, Sheila M. McIntyre, Julie A. Fisher (Eugene, Pickwick Publications 2025)

Roger Williams and His World: A History in Documents by Charlotte Carington-Farmer (Ontario, Broadview Press 2025)

These scholarly works utilize Williams own writings and those of his contemporaries to offer a well organized, chronological order of Rhode Island founder's life, belief, and political ideology. Always an engaging figure to Rhode Islanders, the authors aptly describe the theologian's writings as "rambling, cranky, and hard to understand"; a description that also explains the reluctance of many readers to delve into his work at all.

Reading Roger Williams of course, hopes to overcome that obstacle for readers by providing an ongoing narrative that is illustrated by selections of Williams, and his contemporaries writings concerning the timeline of events, religious debates, and the governing of New England through the early years of its existence.

The book then is helpful in coloring in the backdrop of events and Williams crisis in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and his struggle to maintain the vision he had for Rhode Island as a refuge for religious freedom even as more secular pursuits slowly dimmed that vision in the eyes of the majority of inhabitants.

Roger Williams and His World provides more of a narrative in its first section, with a refreshing and readable narrative of the complex man's life and struggles to maintain his vision of the colony amid religious strife and civil discontent. Carrington-Farmer gives due credit as well to Mary Williams for her steadfastness as a partner in Williams efforts for a self-ruled colony.

In many respects, this work is the more accessible to those less familiar with Williams and his work. It is meant to be a text book for higher education, and as such has sidebar explanations of civic and religious terms, biographies, and other information for readers. Both deserve wide readership from students and others interested in the early years of settlement in New England.

Madeira Tasting in June

Smith's Castle will host a **Madeira Tasting with Lite Colonial Fare** on the evening of **June 6, 2025** from **6:00 - 7:30 p.m.** Guests will be treated to tastings of the variety of Madeira wine, and learn through the course of a three room tasting and tour, about the origins of the popular drink, stories of smuggling and piracy on the high seas, and in the end, how it was served in the colonial homes and taverns of New England. Lite colonial fare, including a variety of historically appropriate cheeses, home-baked crackers, and deserts will also be served.

Cost for this fundraising event will be **\$50.00** per person. You must register for this event as it will be limited to 45 guests. For more information and to register, go to <http://smithscastle.org/events>

Coming Events in Adult Programming

Our Adult Education offers it's first Breakfast Talk of the Season on Saturday, **May 24, 2025 at 9:30 a.m.**, with retired National Park Ranger **John McNiff** as **Roger Williams**, explaining his years at Cocumscussoc from 1637-1650, and his neighborly relations with the **Narragansett** and **Richard Smith**. The first early evening talk of our season will be on June 5th at 6:00 p.m. when we'll be hosting Brown University Professor **Seth Rockman** who will talk about his recent book **Plantation Goods**, a revealing book that shows how Rhode Island Textile Mills and Manufacturers entwined the State's economy and workers to southern enslavement. (see last Chronicle's book review)

Our evening talks continue on **June 10th at 6:00 p.m.** with a presentation from **Gregory Duhamel**, on his book *The Sloop Ranger*, a detailed look at the misadventures and crew aboard the famed pirate vessel who harassed merchants and fishing boats alike off the New England coast in the early 18th century.

As the month continues, Professor and Trustee **Michael Simpson** will offer a presentation on **June 24th at 6:00 p.m.** concerning Cambridge Taylor, an enslaved man who attempted to raise a rebellion in Newport in 1760.

All attendees of Smith's Castle programs are invited to attend the coming symposium "*Forgotten Founders: The Underwritten of the American Revolution*", which will be held at the **James Mitchell Varnum House** on **June 28th from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.** Smith's Castle Jason Roomes will take part in opening and closing ceremonies, and **Robert Geake** will give a presentation entitled *Witness To A Fragile Freedom: Resurrecting the Life of Silas Royal*, the story of a manumitted enslaved man of the Varnum family, who served as an infantryman, and a privateer before being kidnapped and nearly sold again into enslavement.

This is a ticketed event. Please go to

for further information.

School Tours Increase with Kimball Grant

Our season at Cocumscussoc has already kicked off, with a record number of school tours on the spring calendar. Thanks to the Kimball Grant which helps to pay bus expenses and admission for school tours, we have seven tours lined up between April 25th and June 6th. This generous grant not only provides help for schools, but the castle also stands to receive \$2,160.00 for these tours alone. A great way to kick start our season!

The largest tour, will be on April 25th at 9:00 a.m. with 104 students, plus teachers and chaperones. Thankfully, John McNiff has agreed to come and address the assembled students on the lawn before they tour the house. Docents will be placed in separate rooms to give students a "Lost Voices" tour from 9:00 – 10:30 a.m.

In addition to school tours, the local Girl Scouts and Enrich from East Greenwich have reached out for tours in June. Over the season we can expect a few more tour requests from summer camps, and youth organizations and then a larger number of school tour requests again in the fall.

Lead Docent Donna Correia has been a great help in organizing the docents needed for tours. Some members of the Education Committee who also serve as docents, have volunteered as well. The committee continues to work to promote our RIDE approved programs to school regions beyond South County.

The potential for significant income to bolster that from our tours, as well as programs and fundraising events, could go a long way in easing the burden of our day to day expenses, as well as long-term planning for an outbuilding to house programming and events in the future.

Collections Committee Prepares Castle for Season

By Denise Boule

The Collections Committee has been inactive in recent years. However individual efforts on the part of members/ volunteers has kept the work moving in the right direction. Late in 2023 the Collections Committee was reestablished as an active working committee. The Committee focused initially on three areas:

- (1.) Assessment of permanent artifacts on display in each room, in the castle and uniformed signage. Included in this category are the temporary exhibits and storage of such when the exhibits ends
- (2.) Castle Maintenance-Daily and weekly during the season, including but not limited to: dusting, sweeping, ensuring artifacts are kept in the designated room etc...
- Long term, floors, organizing Storage, thorough cleaning, storm windows, painting etc....
- (3.) Decision making associated with artifacts, appraisals if need be, what comes into the collection what is removed..

Over the last year and a half much work has been completed, and systems are falling into place. Committee members went room to room. The castle has been organized, artifacts are being categorized, and exhibits are coming in and out of the castle in a systematic manner. This is an ongoing process.

Some highlights of the Committee's Efforts include the responsibility of documenting items in the Castle. Archivist Sue Danforth has created a database to document all the artifacts and other items in the Castle. The database has a picture of the item, where it came from, either donated or bought, the value and any other information she can find on each

John Dower has purchased a 1677 John Foster Woodcut Map of New England, from William Hubbard's Narrative of the Troubles with the Indians in New England. It is the earliest map created and published in New England. (Hangs in the Trading Post)

Signage for the donated items was also discussed. It was decided to use the acrylic Bookman, centered with left align. Lauren Poirier had ordered two demo signage for the committee's viewing. A decision has been made and we hope to complete the project, uniformed signage for the wall hangings in the Castle.

The Committee began the off season work on February 26. Our Spring Activities included but were not limited to assessing artifacts on permanent display in each room, developing content and uniform signage design for artifacts on display, for both temporary and permanent installations, maintain and update the collections database, and select and organize deaccessioned collection items for electronic and on-site yard sales.

In closing this is a very dedicated and hard working group of volunteers. Many thanks to the committee members Paulette Holbrook, Sue Danforth, Sharon Ferrara, Elsie Hall, Maureen Blazejewski, Martha Dyer, Robert Geake, Lauren Poirier, John Dower, and Marilyn Harris.

Around and About Smith's Castle:

Upcoming Events:

May 3, 2025 11:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Opening Day, featuring Charlotte Carrington-Farmer

Roger Williams and His World 12:00 p.m.

Mead -Making demonstration 1:30 p.m.

Bread- Making demonstration 2:45 p.m.

All day: tours of the house, children's activities, the South County Spinners



May 10, 2025 2:30- 4:00 p.m.

Mother's Day Tea

by reservation on our website, see <https://www.smithscastle.org/teas>

May 24, 2025 9:30 – 11:00 a.m.

Breakfast Talk, John McNiff discusses Roger Williams' time here at Cocumscussoc

June 5, 2025 6:00 p.m.

Conversation at the Castle

Brown Professor Seth Rockman discusses his book *Plantation Goods* concerning the ties that textiles and manufacture that bound Rhode Island to the enslaved of the southern plantations.

June 6, 2025 6:00 p.m.

Tastings of Madeira and Lite Colonial Fare

Adults only, by registration on our website

June 10, 2025 6:00 p.m.

Conversations at the Castle

Author Gregory Duhamel discusses the research and writing of his book *The Sloop Ranger* concerning the pirate ship that harassed commercial and fishing vessels off New England's coast in the early 18th century.

June 24, 2025 6:00 p.m.

Conversations at the Castle

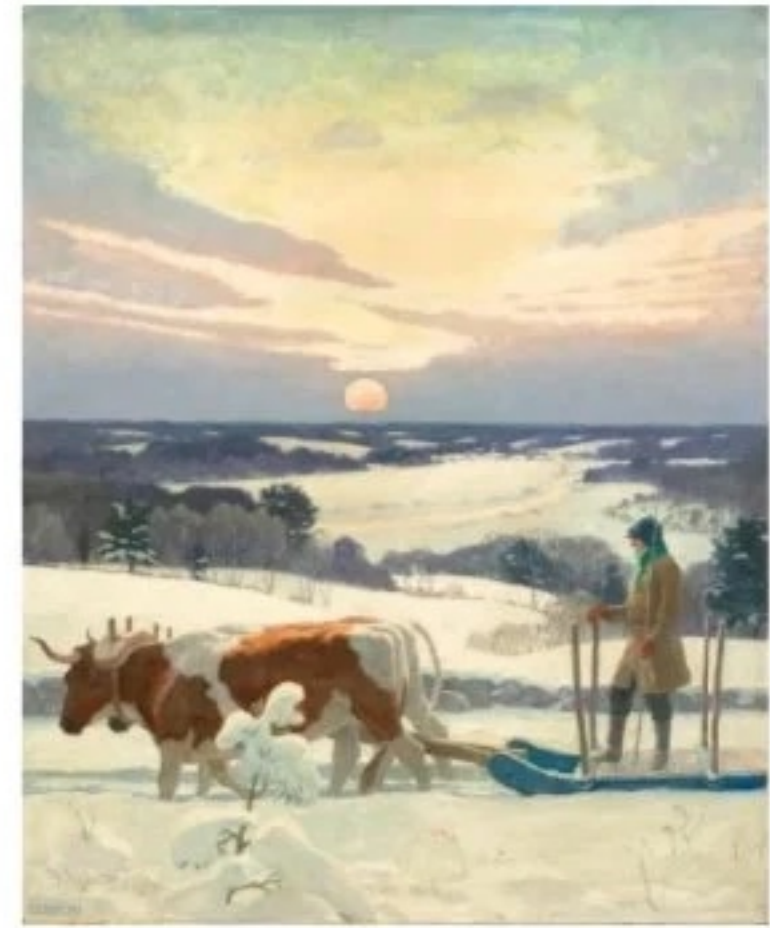
Professor and Cocumscussoc Trustee Michael Simpson offers a presentation on Cambridge Taylor, an enslaved man who attempted to organize an uprising in Newport in 1760.

Pictured above, Charlotte Carrington-Farmer who will kick off our lecture series on Opening Day, and Seth Rockman who begins our Conversation at the Castle talks. (below) Professor Michael Simpson will discuss an attempted slave revolt in Newport in 1760 at a later talk in June.



South County native and Historian Christian McBurney will be one of the featured speakers at the symposium *Forgotten Founders: The Underwritten of the American Revolution* at Varnum House on June 28th 9:30 – 3:30 p.m.

From the Archives: On display in the buttery are a horse collar, ox-bow, leather bell harness, horseshoe, wooden snow shoes for oxen.



Oxen on Farms

In terms of sheer muscle power, an ox was generally considered to be half as strong as a good horse, though two oxen could take on any single horse. Oxen also had the advantage of being more robust than horses, less likely to get injured, and when times got bad they could survive on poor quality straw, or even on grazing.

Oxen usually worked in pairs and animals had to be carefully matched for size, strength and especially for height. Once a pair was selected they became each other's companions for life, working side-by-side and never far apart whether grazing in meadows or sleeping in the ox barn.

The power of a working horse is transmitted via a padded collar and body harness, but oxen achieved this via a heavy wooden collar or yoke, which fitted on top of the neck and in front of the shoulders. That yoke was then held in place by an ox-bow, which curved around under the beast's neck. Oxen were used in summer for plowing, pulling stumps to clear a field, pulling wooden sleds to move stones or lumber, and taking goods to market by wagon.

Working cattle had to be shod and, since they had cloven hooves, that involved fitting two half-moon shaped iron shoes or "cues" to each foot. With the onset of winter, wooden snowshoes were used so that the oxen could pull sleds or help to tamp down the snow with a wooden roller, or later, a metal barrel that was pulled to smooth down a pathway for sleds and sleighs.