

The Castle Chronicle

Vol.2 Issue 1

Letter from the President

By Denise Boule

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In 1949, the Cocumscussoc Association formed to protect and cultivate Smith's Castle located on the shore of a small cove, just north of Wickford, Rhode Island. This great house, built by Richard Smith Jr. in 1678, sits on the site of the first trading post in Narragansett Bay. The Cocumscussoc Association has had many volunteers, whether they were part of the Board of Trustees, the Officers' team, the Docents and/or Volunteers at-large. Each group has had the belief that the history of the people who settled here and the 338-year old structure must be preserved. I am pleased to be in the group of a long line of presidents of the Association which continues to build the bridge to the past, and continues to follow our mission to keep the rich history of the castle alive and known to our North Kingstown community and nationwide.

This past spring and summer the exterior project on the Castle was completed. It included but was not limited to: a new roof, a new front door, five rebuilt windows, and painting of the entire house. The Site Committee/Grant Committee spearheaded by Susan Danforth are to be congratulated for a job well done. Funding was secured through the Rhode Island State Preservation Society and the Champlin Foundation. The Education Committee lead by Maggie Skenyon has forged a partnership with the Rocky Hill School, to open up doors to project-based learning. The students are working to make history come alive. This effort adds to an already vibrant educational program. The Smith Castle Docents are amazing people! There is so much to share and learn from our many talented volunteers, many of whom you must meet!

Golf Tournament a Winning Round for Castle

This year's annual golf tournament, held once again at Laurel Lane Country Club in North Kingstown provided another healthy dose of fundraising, according to chairman and former president Bob Stone.

Stone, along with long time member Bob Verdi have organized the tournament for the past seven years, and the event has become an important annual fundraiser for Smith's Castle.

On September 22nd over 100 golfers with teams from Rhode Island sponsors participated in this year's tournament.

The pair are now looking to recruit new volunteers to organize the tournament in the future. If any golf enthusiasts among the membership are interested, they may contact Bob Stone through the business office.

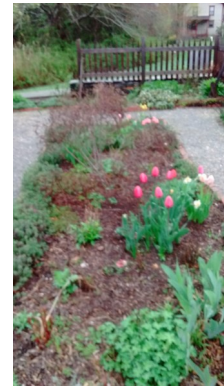


Master Gardeners Expanding Colonial Gardens

The University of Rhode Island's Master Gardener program has been maintaining a colonial era garden at Smith's Castle since 1960.

In the spring of 2018 the Master Gardeners of the University of Rhode Island will once again be expanding the colonial gardens on the grounds. In addition to the Colonial herb and dye gardens, and the newly planted "Three Sisters" garden, there are now plans to establish a plot for tobacco and flax, early cash crops grown in the colony.

The main garden will undergo a renovation, with a new border featuring native plants that attract many pollinators. The new plants will be provided by the MG greenhouses as a way to expand the educational goals of the program, and as such, plant signs and handouts will also be provided for the public.



Rocky Hill Students Fete Castle in Presentation

On Wednesday, December 6th, 2017, students from the fourth grade "Caretakers of History" in teacher Charles Laurent's classes gave a team presentation for members of Smith's Castle and the Master Gardener's from the University of Rhode Island.

As part of their project, students created a kid-friendly website, highlighting the history,

artifacts and the importance of Smith's Castle to the economic history of Rhode Island.

They also offered potential ways of increasing tour attendance, with suggestions of "hands-on" artifact displays in the Castle, and the potential of Rocky Hill students serving as junior docents.

The presentation, attended by Youth Education Coordinator Maggie Skenyon, Vice-President Bob Geake, and URI master Gardeners was very well received, and the work of the students highly praised. Included in the presenta-

tion was an article about Smith's Castle that students hope to get published in both local and national newspapers.

Vice-President Bob Geake praised the group for their efforts in learning the history through exploring primary sources. Maggie Skenyon commended the "Caretakers of History" for "genuinely working as a team, a skill she added, "that is such a valuable skill to have whether it is in your class at school, at home with your family, and eventually in the workplaces you choose for your careers",

Castle's Events Have Successful Year

Despite setbacks from poor weather and competing events throughout the state, Smith's Castle's four main events of the year remained successful this season. While the poor weather during opening weekend meant fewer visitors, the docents, who had suggested our theme of Colonial Days, provided a good many demonstrations, children's games, a mock court, entertainment, and tours of the house.

Strawberry Festival in June was held on a day of perfect weather, and this year's event proved to be just as successful as in the past, with families returning to see puppeteer Dan Butterworth perform, as well as enjoy the home-made strawberry shortcake.

Harvest Festival was postponed a day due to bad weather, but Sunday proved a beautiful day and brought out many families to see the Jesse Liam band, take part in mock court trials, and let the kids participate in an obstacle course on the front lawn which proved very popular.

Christmas at the Castle was also a success with classic entertainment, Christmas cookie decorating, and the ever popular bake sale. Thank you to all the docents and volunteers who made these events such a great part of our season.



The Stewardship of Smith's Castle

by Bob Geake

When one thinks about it, we hold both an awesome and awe-inspiring responsibility-the stewardship of one of the most important historic sites not only in the state of Rhode Island, but in the country.

The site where the sachem of the indigenous people of Rhode Island "laid out" the boundaries of the land where Roger Williams could erect a trading post, as well as the lands around the Castle, and the beautiful "Queens Island" offshore which has become a sanctuary for north Atlantic seabirds, and the natural spring close to Post Road, whose stone enclosure was repaired last year by Narragansett stone mason Craig Spears.

This is also the site of Richard Smith's abode and place of business-the "first English-style house built in the wilderness" of Cocumscussoc, a house that would also change during the Plantation era, whose history would include the Updikes and their slaves for three generations, and the later history of the Congdons, the Babbitts, and the Foxes, collectively culminating in a site rich with history that must be preserved.

This year our stewardship has reached new and exciting levels.

The town has partnered with the Cocumscussoc Association with a grant to furnish signage for the trails and Castle grounds, improvements that will enhance the property for visitors on and off season.

Long sought plans to improve the Annex have also been moved forward with a grant application to the State Council of the Arts which would allow us to improve the building and redesign its interior for use as a more public space, enabling us to host caterers for events, and have an extensive library, archival, and meeting space, as well as a handicapped accessible bathroom for Castle visitors.

Our Annual Appeal letter will highlight these accomplishments and hopes to broaden the appeal of the Castle to those within the community, as well as those who have visited the Castle from far away, and wish to support our continued commitment to stewardship.

Castle Renovations Complete, Look to Annex Next Year

A new roof, chimney and window repairs, and a new paint job were among the renovations made to Smith's Castle this past season, thanks to a grant obtained from the Champlin Foundation. The grant, administered by the historical architects of the Brewster Thorton Group in Providence, was completed in early fall. The group also compiled an historical document of the renovations done to the Castle over the years with documents and images provided by archivist Susan Danforth.

President Denise Boule also worked hard to see the grant through to fruition as she compiled progress reports and documentation of the repairs to the Foundation.

Smith's Castle's Site Committee has also put forward a grant request from the Rhode Island Humanities Counsel, as well as a professional architectural rendering of renovations to the Annex which would enable us to use more space for educational programming. If the grant is approved, the Castle will begin a capital campaign to raise funds to match the grant and make improvements to the structure.

Stay tuned for more details at the Annual Meeting.



Round and About Smith's Castle

Annual Meeting, NK Free Library

Saturday, January 20, 2018

9:30 am

Docent Meeting

Saturday, March 3, 2018

9:00 am

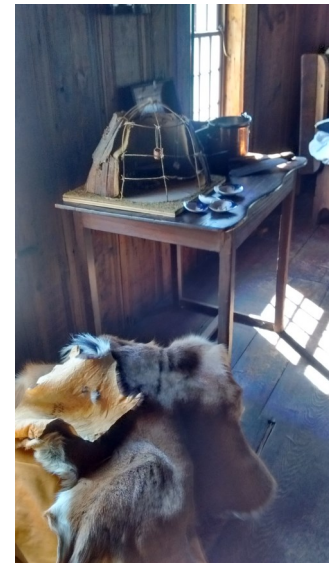
Opening weekend

"A Tour of Rhode Island History"

Saturday, May 5, 2018

Sunday May 6, 2018

12:00 to 4:00 pm



At right are photos of Christmas at the Castle. Clockwise, Jesse Liam and Father were a pair of performers at this year's event. President Denise Boule and Vice-President Bob Geake gave an award of appreciation to Chet and Janice Robinson for their efforts in maintaining the Castle during the past year. A model Wetu was donated to the Castle for the Trading Post. Margaret White, Maggie Skenyon and Cathy Rezendes were among the volunteers for the bake sale that weekend. (Thanks to Gail Burda and Chet Robinson for photos)
