



THE COCUMSCUSSOC ASSOCIATION

The Castle Chronicle

Spring 2024

Vol. 8 Issue 1

Letter from the President

By John Dower

Dear Friends of Smith's Castle

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On behalf of The Cocumscussoc Association, I would like to thank you for your past generous support of Smith's Castle Historic House Museum, one of Rhode Island's most important historical sites. I hope you will again help us continue to share our history, which spans nearly four centuries, by renewing your membership today. If you are not already a member, please consider joining!

While our membership rose noticeably last year for the first time in several years, we must continue to grow to guarantee the future of Smith's Castle. Each year, the costs of operating our wonderful house museum increase alarmingly. We are currently facing significantly rising insurance costs due to the age of Smith's Castle and its proximity to water.

The good news is that we brought our educational programming to new heights last year, and this year looks equally as promising. In addition to our regular colonial tours last year, we added a tour focused on the enslaved people from Smith's Castle. By the end of the tour season, that tour was very successful. Last October, we hosted a daylong seminar on Rhode Island slavery entitled *Anchored in Rhode Island*, which drew nearly one hundred academics, students, and those interested in Rhode Island history. Our multiple lectures and history teas were once again very successful, especially the teas that were completely sold out, including a new Mother's Day tea and a Christmas tea.

This year we have lesson plans created by Smith's Castle historians that will be linked to the Rhode Island Department of Education website. In the coming weeks, we will seek a grant to cover the cost for school districts to send their students to visit our historic house museum. School field trips have dropped considerably in recent years, so we hope that eliminating that hurdle will allow more youngsters to enjoy visiting Smith's Castle once again. Smith's Castle is fulfilling its mission to educate from our Junior Docent Program, which has over a dozen participants, right up to our interns from the area colleges.

Rhode Island history matters, and we can only continue our mission because of your generosity. Thanks again for helping us keep Smith's Castle the historic gem it is today.



CAN YOU SEE YOURSELF IN THIS PHOTO?

SMITH'S CASTLE
(RICHARD SMITH'S 1678 HOME IN WICKFORD)

IS LOOKING FOR MEN & WOMEN OF ALL AGES
TEEN TO SENIOR CITIZEN
TO SERVE AS DOCENTS* & GREETERS
FOR OUR TOURIST & STUDENT GUESTS

*A Limited Amount of Colonial Clothing is Available on Loan

The 3-Week 2024 Training Session
Will Be April 6, 13 & 20, 2024
Noon at the Castle

Questions?—Visit Our Website for Docents Q&A
Ready to Register?
Call Our Office or Register on Our Website

Smith's Castle, 55 Richard Smith Dr.,
North Kingstown, RI 02852
(401) 294-3521 * smithscastle55@gmail.com
www.smithscastle.org





Opening Day Kicks off with Parade of Reenactors, Musket Salute to North Kingstown's 350th Anniversary

This season's Opening Day kicks off with a parade down Richard Smith Drive with re-enactors, docents, and the Wickford Rangers marching off at 11:00 a.m. to the lawn of the Castle, and a musket salute. As this year also marks the 350th anniversary of our town North Kingstown, historian G. Timothy Cranston and councilor Matt McCoy will each offer a few words on the occasion.

Reenactors include the Lebanon, CT. Militia, The Kingston Reds, The 1st and 2nd Rhode Island Regiments, other living history interpreters from our community, and the newly formed Wickford Rangers, a junior militia unit formed at the Castle this spring. The group of boys and girls will perform drills at future events, and march with others in the 350th Anniversary parade in October,

As always, our historic house museum will be open for tours and docents will be placed throughout the rooms to answer questions and offer some of the history of the Castle. Games for children and demonstrations of colonial crafts will also be given. Bake and yard sales will also be offered.

Admission is by donation for this event.



SMITH'S CASTLE

Opening Day at Historic Smith's Castle

Saturday, May 4th 2024
11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Donations for Entry

Opening with a Parade Down Richard Smith Drive and Around the Grounds with a Musket Salute in Recognition of the 350th Anniversary of North Kingstown.

WITH

- The Lebanon Militia
- The Kingston Reds
- The 1st & 2nd Rhode Island Regiments
- The Wickford Rangers
- Smith's Castle Docents & Junior Docents
- Living History Reenactors



ALL DAY

- Children's Crafts
- Colonial Games
- Demonstrations
- Tours of the Historic House
- Vendors

Smith's Castle—A National Historic Site
 55 Richard Smith Drive North Kingstown, RI 02852
 (401) 294-3521 smithscastle55@gmail.com www.smithscastle.org

To All Brave, Able Bodied & Well Disposed Children
 Ages 8 and Older Who Have Any Inclination
 To Join The Troops Now Raising At Smith's Castle

AS THE WICKFORD RANGERS

To March in a Parade In Celebration Of
 The Start Of Smith's Castle's 2024 Season &
 North Kingstown's 350th Anniversary
 On May 4th 2024 At 11:00 A.M.

TAKE NOTICE

Now Recruiting



Any Interested Parties Please Email
 Name, Age, Address and Phone Number
 to smithscastle55@gmail.com

All Those With A Strong Interest
 In The History of Rhode Island Circa 1778
 Are Urged To Join The Ranks!

Muster And Drill Dates Will Occur Before The Parade
 And Enlistees Will Be Informed Of Dates And Times.
 We Hope To Also Call For Your Service Over The
 Summer And To March In The Town Parade In October.

Members may have noticed our posting on Facebook for recruitment of children for the formation of the "Wickford Rangers". For those who may not know, the Wickford Rangers were a real unit at the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, mainly charged as a militia, with guarding the harbor of Wickford and the shoreline beyond along Boston Neck.

Our first muster for boys and girls 8-15 will be held on April 13th at 11:00 a.m. Adults are welcome to attend all musters with their children. On this day we will "enlist" all members, have an educational session about the Rangers, and begin the rudimentary exercises of drilling for a march.

Later musters will focus on drilling and exercises in preparation for the march and presentation on Opening Day with guests from local reenactor brigades.

We hope to muster periodically throughout the summer into fall in preparation to march with Smith's Castle volunteers in North Kingstown's 350th celebration parade in October.

Youth Education Expands To Include Classroom Learning

Over the past year, the Education Committee of The Cocumscusoc Association have worked to expand the offerings of the Youth Education program at Smith's Castle. Thanks in large part to the gift left by longtime education advocate Jann Breault, the committee has begun to think beyond our longtime offerings of school tours and the occasional trunk show.

The resurgence of our Junior Docent program, as coordinated by Marilyn Harris and Bethany Curtis, also showed us the potential for reaching home-schooled students in the community.

This year we will for the first time, offer two specialized classes for student visitors concerning several of the enslaved people who labored on the property. The first, **Absolutely Free: The 1st Rhode Island Regiment** was written by President John Dower and relates the story of the forming of the famous "Black Regiment", in which two enslaved men from Smith's Castle, Caesar and Moses Updike enlisted to earn their freedom.

A second lesson, **The Prince of Smith's Castle** was written by Chairperson Bob Geake, and concerns the story of Prince Updike, whose skill at chocolate making led to his earning an income from merchant Aaron Lopez and eventually his freedom.

These lessons have been reviewed by a vetting sub-committee that includes Trustees John McNiff and Michael Simpson, as well as our educational consultants, Anna Missurelli, and Bethany Curtis..

While the colonial tours and popular activities such as butter-making and quill-penmanship will still be offered, it is hoped that schools throughout the State will take advantage of these classes, as well as our "Lost Voices Tour" for high school and preparatory classes.

The committee will be distributing a brochure on our offerings to local community schools and corresponding with other educational departments in Rhode Island to get the word out about these offerings. In addition, the Grant Committee is seeking to obtain funds through grants from the Rhode Island Council on the Humanities that would help to fund student transportation for tours or classes.

"Black Hands /White Objects" Seeks to Further Connect the Castle to Enslaved Workers

A new installation entitled "Black Hands/White Objects" seeks to further connect visitors to the "unseen" enslaved workers who handled the expensive tea sets, dinnerware, furniture, and fine clothes every day in the Updike household.

An idea inspired by professor Ana Lucia Araujo's observations on how enslavement is presented in both large and small museums around the world, prompted past President Bob Geake to propose a simple, but arresting installation that would further connect visitors to the domestic enslaved at the site, by placing "black hands" on specific objects in rooms throughout the house, bringing the narrative beyond the kitchen, and "Lilly's Room", the small bedroom upstairs next to the "captain's walk" or the steep, narrow staircase to the back hall and kitchen. While these two room represent an important aspect of an enslaved worker's life at Cocumscusoc, their were myriad tasks and work performed by "black hands".

The Cocumscusoc Education committee approved the concept of the installation, and worked with members of the Collection committee to determine what specific objects and artifacts would be used in the installation. An explanatory placard with a QR code will greet visitors as they enter the Castle for tours. Docents were also given talking points to enrich the presentation.

Collections Committee Cleans House, Sets up New Displays for the Season



The newly rejuvenated Collections Committee worked over the winter into spring to “clean house” so to speak of the many items donated to the house that are not period correct, have not been catalogued, or have been added to a over-collection of some items. Can we really ever have too many spinning wheels or cast-iron pans?

Co-Chairs Susan Danforth and Denise Boule led the committee, consisting of Maureen Blazjewski, John Blinz, Donna Correira, Martha Dwyer, Sharon Ferrara, Elsie Hall, Marilyn Harris, and Paulette Holbrooke, room by room to examine and discuss the artifacts and how they were used, or referred to during tours. This helped to identify misplaced or underused artifacts that might be moved elsewhere in the house, or returned to the archives collection.

Artifacts displayed in the Castle will be categorized using standard museum nomenclature guidelines and entered into the Filemaker Collection database. The nomenclature will be made available to the working groups of the committee for guidance in forming permanent displays, special exhibits, and installations. Signage with a uniform design will be developed by the Signage Design sub-committee to provide credit lines for items on loan, explanatory text as needed for permanent displays, such as the textile making tools and furniture in the Hall chamber, and rotating exhibits in the glass display cases in the kitchen. Signage for temporary, themed exhibits can be unique in their design and presentation to signal their difference from permanent installations. Thanks to Kailie Raynor and Loren Porrier for their help with the looms and spinning wheels.

Interns Begin Research Using Library

If you happen to stop by the annex these days, you are likely to spot two young, unfamiliar faces in the library. Becca Pierce, a history major from the University of Rhode Island, and Zach Beaudoin, a history major from Rhode Island College, are doing credit bearing internships with us this semester. Much of their preliminary work has been focused on research in the library where they are both interested in enslavement during the colonial period. In the coming weeks, both students will also be doing additional studies related to some of the artifacts in Smith’s Castle.

Just having young people around that enjoy the history of Smith’s Castle is particularly refreshing, but there is another aspect to their presence that is equally pleasing- seeing the library being used to its potential. Susan Danforth and Susan Murphy have spent countless hours cataloging and arranging the hundreds of books that have been acquired by the association over the past decades. The interns joined us just as the two Susans were putting the finishing touches on the collection, so the timing could not have been any better.

John Dower

Afternoon Teas to Start Again Soon by Marilyn Harris

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A special Mother's Day Tea on Saturday, May 11th at 4:30 pm will open our fifth season of popular Afternoon Teas. You will notice that to allow our docents – and our guests - time with their families on Mother's Day itself, this event will be held on a Saturday rather than a Sunday afternoon. As with all our teas, there will be plenty of teas, fruit, savouries, tea sandwiches, and sweets for your enjoyment, as well as just a “pinch of history.” Mark Burnham and Paul Parvano will be on hand to tell us about the origins of this day and entertain us with electric harpsichord and vocal selections as you enjoy your dessert.

For the rest of the season, the Castle will host teas on Sunday afternoons: June 8th, July 14th, August 11th, and September 8th at 4:30. A Christmas Season Tea is in the planning stages as well. In June, Lauren Poirier will be speaking about the Castle's 19th century Barn Loom and demonstrating its use. The popular Ladies of the Greene will be back to present another Colonial Fashion Show in July. When the Castle's beautiful gardens are in full bloom in August, the RI Master Gardeners will be with us to provide background and guided tours. To close out the season in September, Veronica Mays, a quilter and poet will display some of her extraordinary quilts and read her quilt-related poems.

The Teas are held in the Urdike Dining Room of the Castle, so we have limited seating – only 20 for each tea. If you would like to join us, reservations will be open on-line starting soon. Make your reservations early as the seats go quickly!



The popular **Ladies of the Greene** fashion (pictured here at last year's event) will be back again this year with new designs for colonial apparel, as well as the musical entertainment of **Mark Burnham** and **Paul Parvano** singing classic radio tunes.

The Tea & History events have been a tremendous success in the past few years thanks to the hard work of Marilyn Harris, Loren Porrier, and many other volunteers.



Breakfast Talks, Evening Lectures and Readings Offer an Eclectic Season and Every Reason to Attend events at the Castle this season. Award-winning professor **Charlotte Carrington Farmer** (left) will join us for a Breakfast Talk on June 8th, and **Kiley Knott**, (right) an accomplished scholar, member of Ladies of the Greene (above) and now author, will read from “Lafayette's Heart” on what is sure to be a sultry evening August 16th. Other events will include **Root Cellar**, a trio of banjo, fiddle, and guitar that will play as member **Bob Woods** describes as “old-time fiddle tunes.



Around and About Smith's Castle:



Master ship model maker Ken Griffith showed his techniques during Christmas at the Castle



President John Dower (above) and past president Bob Geake (below) wait to be interviewed for a segment of the PBS program "Treasures in the Museum". The program is expected to air sometime this season.



Schedule of Upcoming Events:

Saturday, May 4th 11:00 a.m. - 4:00pm.

Opening Day

Saturday, May 11th 4:30-6:00 p.m.

Tea & History: Mother's Day Tea

Mark Burnham and Paul Parvano entertain

Saturday, May 25th 9:30-11:30 a.m.

Breakfast Talk: Marilyn Harris *The Enslaved Women of Cocumscussoc*

Saturday, June 8th 9:30-11:30 a.m.

Breakfast Talk: Charlotte Carrington-Smith: *The Finest Ass in All of America: Mules and Rhode Island's Money Making Scheme in the 18th and 19th Century*

Sunday, June 9th 4:30-6:00 p.m.

Tea & History:

Demonstration of the 19th century barn loom with Loren Porier

Thursday, June 13th 6:00-7:30

Lecture on the Lawn:

Michael Simpson: *The Ballad of Prince Greene: Resilience in Rhode Island in the Revolutionary Era*

Tuesday, June 18th 6:00-7:30 p.m.

Lectures on the Lawn:

Mark Burnham: *Slavery & The Making of the U.S. Constitution*

Saturday, June 22nd 12:00-4:00 p.m.

Strawberry Festival

Thursday, June 27th 6:00—7:30 p.m.

Lecture on the Lawn: Christian McBurney discusses his book *Dark Voyage: An American Privateer's War on Britain's African Slave Trade*

