



THE COCUMSCUSSOC ASSOCIATION

The Castle Chronicle

Summer 2022

Vol. 6 Issue 2

Letter from the President By Robert A. Geake

Dear Members and Friends of the Cocumscussoc Association

Our 2022 season is well underway, having begun April 27th with a well attended talk by docent, educator, and historian Marilyn Harris on the role of the colonial press in the American Revolution. As the first in a series of new “breakfast talks” on selected Saturday mornings, we hope the popularity of this event will continue through the summer into fall.

Opening Day was another successful day, our third year of hosting an open-house for the community filled with family activities and tours of the house museum. We used the opportunity to introduce the Castle to visitors and to tout the upcoming fund-raising and educational programs we offer at Cocumscussoc.

Tours have also begun, with six new docents being added to the volunteers this season after recruitment and training conducted by Marilyn Harris, and aided by other docents including Sharon Ferrara, John Dower, Catherine Delorme, and Mark Burnham.

Our Youth Education program is also off to an active season, giving tours of the Castle to schools and transition programs beginning in May, with tours booked through the end of the school year.

We hope that you will join us for our upcoming Strawberry Festival, and the host of lectures, breakfast talks, historic teas, and more that promise a busy season at Smith’s Castle.

All that we offer to the public is only possible through the dedicated efforts of volunteers, docents, and donors who serve The Cocumscussoc Association in often a multitude of ways. We are grateful for their continued support .

Wishing you a safe and enjoyable summer,

Robert A. Geake

President, The Cocumscussoc Association

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Opening Our Doors to the Community

This year’s Opening Day on May 7 brought over 300 visitors to the Castle, many coming to Cocumscussoc for the first time, others returning years after a visit. The event brought out individual reenactors and members of the Kingston Reds, now mustered at the Nathanael Greene Homestead as well as Steve Salisbury of Big Bear Trading Post, and the Rhode Island Pirate Players.

Entertainment was provided by fiddler Chris Heinzmann, and visitors also joined in on a history lesson and sing-along of “Yankee Doodle Dandy”. The dining room of the house museum was also the site of an exhibit on the changes and challenges brought upon the Updike’s during the American Revolution, including the two enslaved men who enlisted to earn their freedom.

Children’s games and crafts were provided by our new junior docents along with other volunteers. A popular mock-court also placed several in the stocks that afternoon. A fun day was had by visitors and volunteers alike.



Junior Docent Program Revived

By Marilyn Harris

Opening Day 2022 was the first public event for our newly-revived Junior Docent Group at the Castle. Dressed in colonial attire, they assisted adult docents in demonstrating and leading games popular with children of the period and helping at the crafts table inside. It was a heartening experience to see “colonial” children in the Castle and frolicking on the Castle lawns.

From 1999 to 2004 there was an active organized group of young people who were instructed in colonial ways and who assisted at various Castle events. While individuals frequently served as junior aides at various events over the subsequent years, no organized training was provided. That changed in April of 2022.

Rebecca Campbell, an area home-school parent, contacted us about the possibility of her daughter serving as a Greeter at the Castle and in the course of our discussion a plan was made to explore the possibility of reviving the program. There was a definite interest! Nine home-schooled students and their parents agreed to meet at the Castle once a week in the month prior to our public events to receive instruction about the Castle, the people who lived here, and the skills, crafts, and games they would have used in their daily lives. Our new Junior Docents are: Caleb & Sadie Ankrom, Reese Campbell, Aiden & Ethan Commiskey, Talitha, Ana & Alethea Curtis, and Gabriella Goglia. We’re looking forward to seeing them again at Strawberry Festival on June 18th.



New Library Opening for Members Soon

Once a paint job has been completed and new shelving put in place, the new library in the Cocumscussoc Annex will be ready for cataloging the collection and then open for members to use throughout the year.

Many of our present members may not know that a library was once off the meeting/greeting room of the Castle, in the space that is now the Castle gift shop. Modest as it must have been, it was apparently popular, and the collection of books, largely donated by members grew into a larger collection housed in the Annex within a hodge-podge of bookcases and shelving.

Archivist Susan Danforth has long wanted the collection all in one place, and the use of the two adjoining back rooms of the Annex will provide that space. Donations of shelving and the purchase of additional bookshelves will hold the collection along with additional donations from the Duckworth family and Bob Geake. They will also provide for future growth of the collection

Visitors to the new library will be encouraged to make an appointment and use the separate (now marked) entrance to the room.

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Recommended Reading

Improvements to Annex and Castle to Continue in 2022

Improvements to the Cocumscussoc Association Annex, which houses the Association's office, archives, meeting rooms, and library are continuing into the new year.

After receiving a new roof, new coat of paint, and a number of new windows during projects in the past two years, the Executive and site Committees have turned to improving the grounds and interior of the building.

Space in the meeting room will be improved as the library is completed, and new appliances, including cost efficient air conditioners, and a new fridge have been purchased for the building. Signs designating the office and library entrances have also been posted.

Thanks to a generous donation, a new toilet has been installed in the rear bathroom of the Annex and another will be installed with a new vanity after improvements to the bathroom off the office.

The landscape around the Annex has also been improved. Four native blueberry bushes were planted in a recovered garden last year, and this year two more were planted along with raspberry bushes from the Master Gardeners.

The next phase of the Annex improvements will be to obtain a grant to increase accessibility to the rear bathroom.

The Castle will also undergo improvements during the coming year. After damage was noticed to the chimney following a storm early in the, it was determined that repairs were needed. The Rhode Island Historic Preservation Commission was notified, and vendors were sought to make the needed repairs. This process has now come down to one vendor, approved by RIHPC who has inspected the project and placed it on the calendar for September.

In addition, during a walk through by Site Committee co-chairs Susan Danforth and Denise Boule, along with President Bob Geake, several key areas in need of restoration were noted on the interior of the Castle. The site committee will be working to seek out potential grants that will help address these issues, and the Executive Committee will form a plan to raise matching funds. It is the president's intention to make this a priority in the coming year.

Volunteers Sought for 75th Anniversary Celebration, Fundraiser

The Executive Committee is seeking volunteers to form a committee that will plan for a 75th Anniversary celebration of The Cocumscussoc Association in 2023. It is hoped that the event will be a major membership and fundraising drive as we look to build our coffers for funds to match needed grants and meet our rising expenses.

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact us at smithscastle55@gmail.com

Around and About Smith's Castle...

Sunday, June 12th 4:30 p.m.

Tea & History: 18th Century secular music performed by Mark Burnham and Paul Paravano. Reservations must be made prior to event.

Tuesday, June 14th 6:00 p.m.

Lecture on the Lawn: Mark Burnham gives a presentation on *The Economics of Slavery in Colonial Rhode Island*

Saturday, June 18th Noon-4:00 p.m.

Strawberry Festival featuring puppeteer Dan Butterworth, the Jesse Liam Band, pony rides, strawberry plants, and our famous strawberry shortcake

Saturday, June 18th 6:30—midnight

Paranormal investigation. Reservations must be made prior to event

Saturday, June 25th 10:00 a.m.

Breakfast talk with historian Tim Cranston who reveals the history of *The Updikes in Wickford*

Saturday, July 9th 10:00 a.m.

Breakfast talk with National Park Ranger John McNiff of the Roger Williams Memorial Park in Providence in a question and answer program called *Ask Roger*

Sunday, July 10th 4:30 p.m.

Tea & History: Author Debbie Tillinghast gives a presentation on island living in the 1950s from her book *The Ferry Home: A Memoir* Reservations must be made prior to event

Saturday, July 16th 6:30—midnight

Paranormal investigation. Reservations must be made prior to event.

Monday, July 18th 6:00 p.m.

Lecture on the Lawn: A discussion of Roger Williams' *A Key into the Language of America*, with Loren Spears and Ted Widmer

Saturday, July 30th 10:00 a.m.

Breakfast Talk: Bob Geake discusses *18th Century Travelers in Southern Rhode Island: The Sites They Saw, Places They Visited, and People they Met Passing Through*

Saturday, August 13th 10:00 a.m.

Breakfast Talk: John Dower and Varnum Museum curator Patrick Donovan give a presentation on *The Enslaved Men who Enlisted in the Black Regiment*

Saturday, August 13th 6:00 p.m.

Kayak tour: Ecological use of Cocumscusoc lands and Waters with Loren Spears and Bob Geake. Reservations must be made prior to this event.

Sunday, August 14th 4:30 p.m.

Tea & History: Estelle Barada presents *Herbs & Teas of Colonial Times*

Saturday, August 20th 6:00-midnight

Paranormal Investigation, Reservations must be made prior to this event.

Saturday, September 10th 12-4:00 p.m.

Harvest Festival : Family fun with reenactors the *Crew of the Mermaid* , petting zoo from Sheffield Way Farm, the Great Pumpkin Roll, and much more!

Sunday, September 11th 4:30 p.m.

Tea & History: A Tour of our colonial and medicinal gardens and gardening advice from our University of Rhode Island Master Gardeners.. Reservations must be made prior to event.



Scribe Gene Pouliot, Sheriff Max Ferrara, and Mark Burnham as Judge Hezekiah Fairknot give just punishment to wench Jessica Jameson during our General Court of Tryalls on Opening Day.

Around and About Smith's Castle



Members of the PLS Paranormal group pose during a recent investigation of the Castle. The group not only donates most of the proceeds from paranormal investigations, but has also volunteered for Window Days, and for special projects such as grounds improvement. They have become true friends of Smith's Castle. Photo by Max Ferrara



Cheryl Tefft of Michigan arrived at the Castle with her daughters Michelle and Heidi on her 80th birthday in the midst of a genealogical roadtrip. They were given an impromptu tour by President Bob Geake. She later wrote to express her thanks for one of the most memorable birthdays she has had. Glad we could make your day, Cheryl!

Northeast Boundary, Colonial Gravesite see Improvements



Much needed landscaping improvements have recently been completed around the colonial grave site.

The Society of Colonial Wars, as stewards of the memorial, have regularly contributed funds to the maintenance of the site. Two years ago, a tree was removed that was uprooting the monument, and then a later blowdown of a large cedar during a winter storm left neighbor Jim Ball's property exposed to view from visitors.

After some delays, the planting of three large saplings, and the addition of native plants donated by Denise Palermo and the Master Gardeners allowed us to create a green boundary and improve the gravesite.

Compact holly bushes were planted along the border, and a granite bench was moved closer to the marker to help define the space.

Thanks goes to Vice-President Max Ferrara, and volunteers Yates Exley, Gina Capuano, and John Dower for their help on planting day.

