

The Castle Chronicle

Vol. 7 Issue 2



Letter from the President

By John Dower

Greetings Friends of Smith's Castle,



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It is hard to believe it is already July and we are well into our seventy-fifth season. Tours have been taking place for over two months, and while we have had our occasional slow day, we have also had some very busy days with several tours being given. Thankfully, our new docents have stepped right in and helped us meet the scheduling demands.

Our Adult Education Committee events continue to be popular this year. Marilyn Harris and her Afternoon Teas are once again a summer highlight. As usual, every tea sells out in advance, so if you are interested in attending any of the remaining Sunday teas, please sign up early. Bob Geake has assembled some great speakers for the Saturday Breakfast Talks and evening lectures. Two of the recent Breakfast Talks, one by Town Historian Tim Cranston and the other by Rocky Hill School educator Charlie Laurent, were exceptional. Please see the Upcoming Events section on our website for more info on the upcoming Adult Education Committee offerings.

Things have also been busy with the Youth Education Committee. In addition to finishing up the school year with some school tours, we will host two summer camp groups this week. Members of the committee also attended a webinar last month held by the Rhode Island Department of Education. The purpose of the webinar was for RIDE to give us information on the new Social Studies Standards that are being used to teach history. RIDE would like Smith's Castle (and some other historic sites) to develop education programs that can be used by educators throughout the state. The creation of lesson plans for this project is already underway.

Closely associated to the education programs being developed with RIDE's encouragement, is the investigation of grants to help promote our program. New member and education grant writer, Sheila Quinn, is hard at work identifying grant opportunities that will enable us to bring teachers across the state to Smith's Castle to learn about our unique history. Sheila is busy investigating other grant possibilities as well.

We also received some long-awaited good news at the end of May, our grant request from the Champlin Foundation for the costly repair of the chimney was approved! Work is slated to begin sometime in mid-October, so fortunately it will not interfere with any events. Other work that was recently completed at the Castle includes refinishing the floors in three rooms and painting the ramp into the meeting room. Thank you to Susan Danforth and Bob Geake for rolling up their sleeves on this work. We are hopeful that another grant request we just submitted will be approved. That grant will pay for the restoration of the interior shutters in three rooms and ceiling repairs in the buttery.

Unfortunately, we had to cancel this year's Strawberry Festival. It was the first time in recent memory that one of our special events had to be cancelled, and is an unfortunate sign of the times. The cost of holding such an event requires a significant investment and with weather forecasts calling for almost certain rain the entire weekend, it was too large a financial gamble. We will regroup in coming weeks and put our time and energy into hosting an exceptional Harvest Festival in September.

Lastly, I would like to thank Joyce Fuller, Marilyn Harris, Mary Ann Hackett, and Becky Dower for helping hand out water and information at the Smith's Castle table at the Wickford Memorial Day Parade. Likewise, thank you to Gabrielle Belmont-Klück, Mark Burnham, Sharon Ferrara, and Bob Geake for attending the Juneteenth Celebration in Newport and manning the Smith's Castle Table.

Our 75th Season Continues to Build Membership

Coming into our 75th season, we renewed a commitment to increase membership by increasing our presence at local and state events so that we may give out information about programming, membership, and donations to the Castle. To that end, members of the 75th Anniversary Committee have attended the annual Wickford Memorial Day Parade, Histwick's Annual Meeting, held here on the Castle grounds, and the Juneteenth celebration held by the Rhode Island Slave History Medallion organization at Eisenhower park in Newport.

Our Membership committee also mailed some 300 membership and renewal invitations, including out-of-state visitors, and families beyond the town of North Kingstown, which has remained our base of membership for many years. As we look to increase our range of visitors to events and programs, we will be encouraging membership throughout the season, and ask that current members pass the benefits of belonging to The Cocomuscussoc Association to their friends and neighbors.



Left– Joyce Fuller, Marilyn Harris, and Mary Ann Hackett man to table at Wickford's parade.
Right– Gabrielle Belmont and Mark Burnham were part of the team who promoted the Castle programs at the Juneteenth celebration in Newport.



Docents Greet Visitors from Far & Wide

Just a glance at our visitor's log in the Castle meeting room shows that tours so far this season have been given to visitors from a wide range of states, and even several countries.

The season is off to a brisk start with our tours, and we have a dedicated contingent of docents that will continue to guide visitors on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from noon to 4:00 p.m., through August, and then three days a week for the remainder of the season. For those of us who have volunteered at various museums over the years, you know that this is a remarkable achievement: to have an historic house museum available for tours four days a week at the height of the tourist season. We are grateful for our docents and all our volunteers who help to keep our seasonal tours active.

This season has also seen the debut of our "Lost Voices" tour, which highlights the enslaved individuals who lived and worked at the Castle during the Plantation era. These tours are offered in addition to the regular house tours on the first two Saturdays of the month at 12:30, 1:30, and 2:30. Volunteers have given several of these tours in the past few weeks and we hope that interest in the tour will continue to grow.



Youth Education to Offer Classes, Expanded Tours, to Grade School and Home Schooled Students

by Bob Geake

For many years Smith's Castle has offered youth-oriented tours to local elementary schools that focused on colonial life, and the many changes that have occurred in our way of living, the ways we dress, and how we spend our leisure time. These tours continue to be popular today for elementary school students, and we provide trunk shows as well, largely based upon these same themes.

For some years however, there has been a recognition of the need for historic house museums, to expand their educational offerings to provide a resource for both public schools and homeschooled students and their parents, and to strengthen the thread of local history for those students who live within the community, and the state of Rhode Island.

While some saw the need to offer more in the way of youth programming, the challenges of the past few years placed any plans on hold, and the opportunity did not arise until recently with an influx of new volunteers and support from the Rhode Island Department of Education.

A generous gift from the late Jan Breault who once coordinated Youth Education for the Castle, opened the possibility expanding our offerings to local schools. Also, the revival of our Junior Docent program, spearheaded by Marilyn Harris and comprised of local homeschooled students highlighted the opportunity to develop and offer programming for them. Consulting with the Rhode Island Department of Education, members of the education Committee attended a webinar offered on social studies standards, and reviewed sample lesson plans designed to meet them.

With the important history we have at our very site, we can offer specific classes to fourth and fifth graders on enslavement in Rhode Island, including the lives of enslaved individuals, the customs and culture they kept alive even while enslaved on plantations like Smith's Castle, as well as lessons on colonial life from various perspectives, including those of indentured servants, craftsmen, laborers, and women, whose role, even in such a wealthy household was comfortable, but marginalized.

A sub-committee was formed with co-chairs John Brinz and Anna Missurelli PhD, leading a team of volunteers from the committee as well as from outside the committee to assist with the forming of a curriculum. Trustee John McNiff, town historian G. Timothy Cranston, educator Bethany Curtis, and civic leader Keith Stokes will serve as advisors to the committee. Tim Cranston, John Dower, Bob Geake, and Marilyn Harris have committed to working on lesson plans. Once the draft of a curriculum and lesson plans are drawn up, these will be submitted to RIDE for their review to ensure that they comply with applicable standards and that we are offering quality instructional materials

President John Dower is also working with Sheila Quinn, a member and educational grant writer on an NEH grant that would allow teachers to utilize our site and resources in special seminars and workshops. Additional grants have been written for financial support from the Rhode Island Foundation and the RI Supreme Court Historical Society. We hope to complete our work and offer some classes next season.



Last year's team of junior docents contributed greatly to our events and allow us the opportunity to expand youth education.

AFTERNOON TEA AT SMITH'S CASTLE – A POPULAR SUMMER EVENT

by Marilyn Harris

Since 2019 – with a Covid hiatus in 2020 – the Castle has been hosting monthly Sunday afternoon teas from June to September. After various hot and iced teas (less than traditional but very welcome in the summer heat), scones, savouries, assorted tea sandwiches, and sweets of all kinds, our guests are treated to a *taste* of history. This year we added a special Mother's Day Tea as well.

Our history offerings so far this year have included: Mother's Day Music and History, the Castle Barn Loom and the Weaver Rose Story, and just this month, A Colonial Fashion Show.

The Ladies of the Greene are a group associated with the Nathaniel Greene Homestead who research, assemble - and frequently sew themselves - authentic colonial women's wear. At our July Tea, they modeled dress styles from the decades of the late 18th and 19th centuries. "Lady Tess" narrated the presentation to provide historical background and behind the scenes tidbits (in this case, under the skirts). It was a delightful afternoon.

In September (sold out with a long waiting list), Anne Casey and other members of the Rhode Island Master Gardeners will give a presentation and a lead a guided tour of the lovely Smith's Castle gardens. A few seats are still available for the September 10th Tea. when local author Lynne Heinzmann will give a presentation on the Saving of Rose Island Light-house.

The Smith's Castle Teas are made possible through the hard work of our docents and volunteers from the Cocumcussoc Association and community. Please see the events section of our website for further information.



L-R Trustee Mark Burnham performed classic tunes at our first ever Mother's Day tea. The Ladies of the Greene brought their fashion show to the Updike dining room, the perfect setting for such grace and elegance.

Book Recommendations by Robert A. Geake

***This Other Eden* by Paul Harding, W.W. Norton & Co. 2023 231pp.**

Author Paul Harding found a unique voice to offer readers in his debut, and Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Tinkers* in 2010. He continued the narrative of the Washingtons, an old New England family that struggled through decades of hardship and loss in his novel *Enon*, named after the town in which the family had settled and remained.

With his new work, Harding tears a page of astonishing history from the age of progress and scientific advancement, and its inevitable and tragic impact on the small island of Malaga, located off the coast of Maine.

First settled in 1793 by Benjamin and Patience Honey, a former enslaved man and his Irish wife, began a family and planted an apple orchard. Both grew prodigiously in the coming years, and the island's population as well, as more former slaves and outcasts from the changing mainland arrived and established a mixed race community of fishermen, washer-women, and farmers.

Through his skillful narrative and poetic, evocative prose, Harding renders these astonishing individuals for the reader, who learn of their lives and love of the island, the only home they have ever known. With tide like surges of hope and despair the community faces examination by state and medical officials misinformed by the faulty theory of phrenology that the islanders were surely all interbred and "feeble-minded". At the close of the 19th century such theories of racial superiority began to gain hold on scientific opinion.

That Harding has portrayed those of the community so evocatively makes the heartache of the tragedy that befalls them all the more difficult for the reader. An important reminder of the importance of such historical fiction, and the impact it can have bringing often overlooked episodes of history to the reading public.

***Jamie McGillivray, The Renegade's Journey* by John Sayles, Melville House 2023 696pp.**

This hefty tome might make some readers wary of commitment, but I found this story a rollicking, care-free ride through thirteen years of history that still cause tremors between Great Britain and Scotland today.

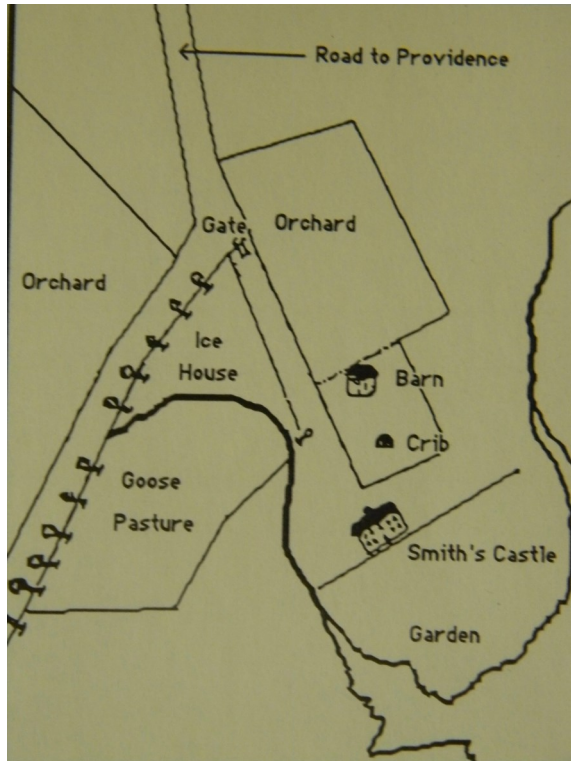
The story begins in 1746, in the thick of the uprising that attempted to place the "pretender" Bonnie Prince Charlie on the throne of the British Empire. The protagonist or "renegade" of the tale is one Jamie McGillivray, the heir to one of Scotland's greatest clans, who joins the uprising to reclaim lands stolen from his family by the Crown. In fact, as this epic opens, he is galloping toward the Battle of Culloden to join forces there. He arrives too late to take part in the battle, some are already fleeing the British as he approaches, and stops to get a drink and news of the battle from a young farm girl. As he comes to realize he will likely be killed or captured, he gives the girl a keepsake of his mother's golden wedding band.

As readers might suspect, these characters will cross paths later in the story-and as he suspected Jaime is captured and sent with other prisoners of war to be sold as slaves. He is placed aboard a ship where will be taken to America and sold to a Delaware plantation owner. Escaping from there with others, he is captured by a band from the Lenape tribe, and in time becomes one of their warriors, and part of a nation that along with other indigenous peoples were forced to make hard choices between allegiance to the English or French during the years of fighting over their native lands.

The girl Jenny, is captured as well and sold as a domestic worker to a French officer, in command of an Artillery company manning a fort in Martinique. Her white skin sets her apart from the other enslaved workers, and soon draws the attention of the Lieutenant Colonel himself who soon takes her as his mistress. The novel then follows their parallel stories through a decade and more of conflict and turmoil that our characters are swept into, surviving only by grit and often by their own wiles until converging together once again near the end of the tale.

A rollicking ride indeed, but one that in novelist and cinematographer John Sayles hands retains the scope and cinematic feel of a movie epic, but maintains its intrigue and interest throughout in surprising ways that reap great rewards for the reader.

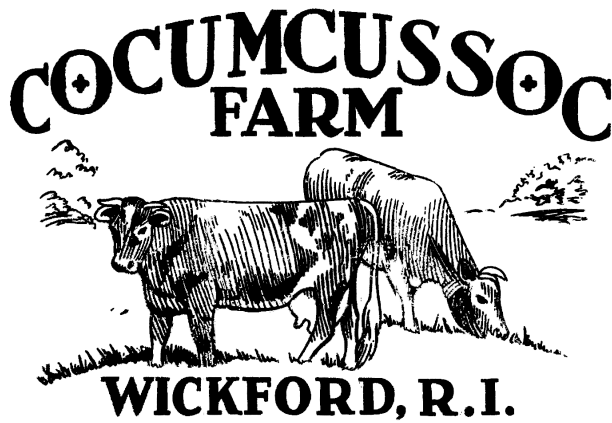
Children's Pages



This 1805 map of the farm outlines where the house, barn, corn crib and ice house were located, as well as the orchard, pastures and garden.

What animals were kept on the farm during this era?

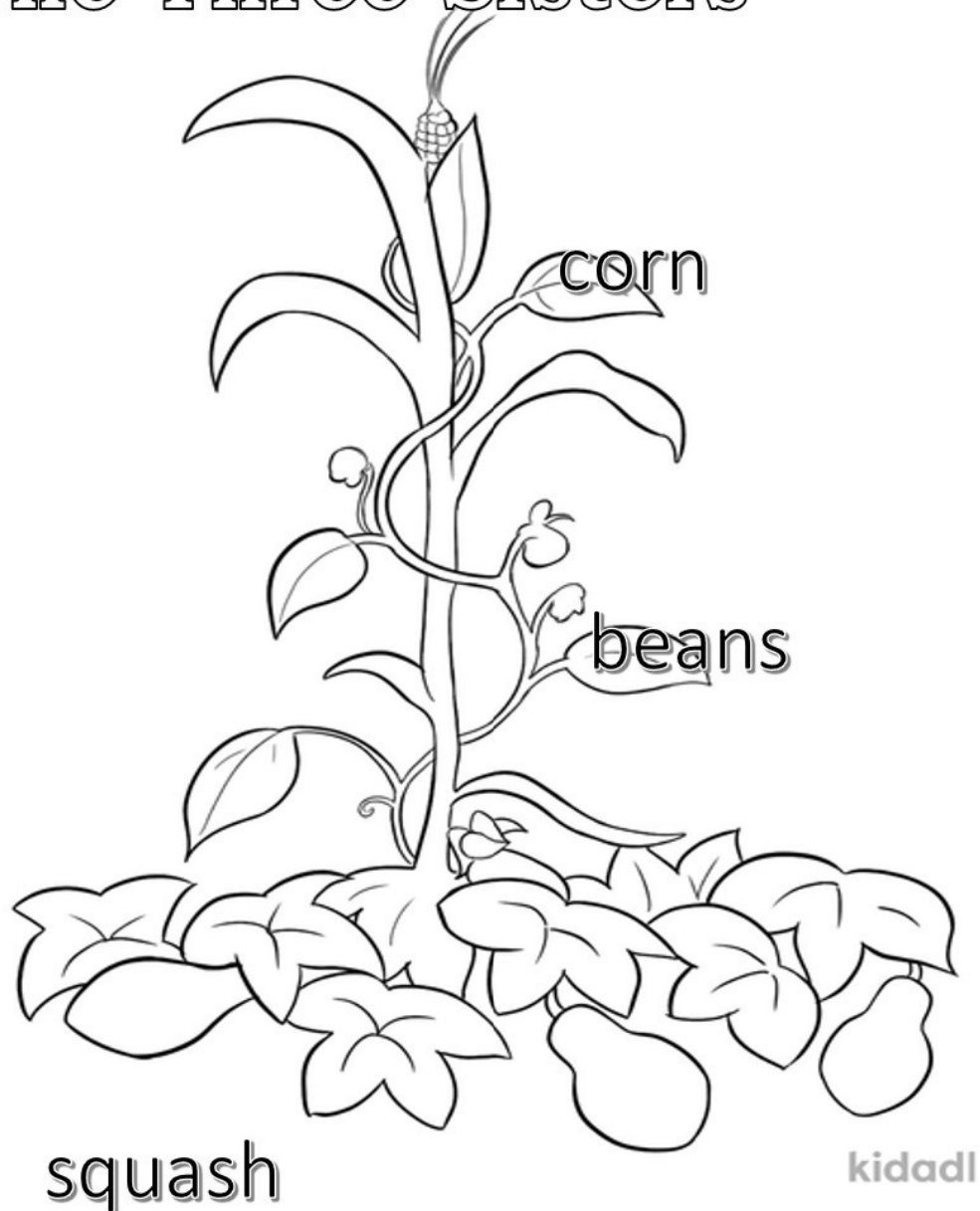
In the early 20th century, our site was home to the Cocumcussoc Dairy, as it was spelled by Austin Fox, who with his wife Alice, would establish one of the more successful dairy farms in Rhode Island. The label below was from their advertising and bottles. The farm held over 100 cows for milking. Besides the farm, they also operated an ice cream shop at the entrance to Wickford Village at the corner of Routes 1 and 1A.



Animals of a different variety will be at Cocumcussoc at our Annual Harvest Festival on September 23rd 12:00-4:00 p.m.

The Narragansett , Our First Farmers

The Three Sisters



The Narragansett People, who first lived on this land, learned how squash, beans, and corn planted together helped each other grow stronger. They called these plants the Three Sisters. When the colonists came, they taught them this planting trick.

Around and About Smith's Castle:

August 5th 10:00-11:30 a.m. Breakfast Talk:

John Dower presents

All In A Day's Work focuses on the daily struggles of enslaved people on 17th and 18th century plantations such as Smith's Castle.

August 5th & 6th 12:30, 1:30, 2:30 p.m.

Lost Voices tours

August 13th 4:30-6:00p.m. Tea & History

URI Master Gardeners take visitors on *A Stroll Through the Garden*

August 29th 6:00-7:30 p.m. An Evening with...

John Dower, Bob Geake, and Jason Roomes

A Commemoration of the Battle of Rhode

September 10th 4:30-6:00 p.m. Tea & History

Author Lynne Heinzmann discusses her book *Rescuing Rose Island Lighthouse*

September 12th 6:00 p.m. An Evening with...

Attorney Mark Burnham discusses

Rhode Island's Colonial Legal System, including its infamous "black code".

September 16th 10:00—12:30 a.m. Breakfast Talk

Trustee James Murphy presents

A Murder in Wickford 1670

September 23rd 12:00-4:00 p.m.

Harvest Festival featuring the **Sheffield Farm Petting Zoo & Pony Rides, Farm Dog Band,** and the

Great Pumpkin Roll with much more!

September 29th 6:00-10:00 p.m.

The Cocumscussoc Association 75th Anniversary Dinner, Carriage Inn, North Kingstown

Members & guests only

October 7th 10:00-12:30 Breakfast Talk

Marilyn Harris relays the history of the docents at our historic site with *75 Years of Interpreting Smith's Castle and RI History*

October 14th 9:30-3:30 p.m.

Anchored in Rhode Island: The Slave Trade & Reckoning with Our Past

An all-day seminar for teachers, students, and the public featuring speakers **Charlotte Carrington-Farmer, Joanne Pope Melish, and Seth Rockman.** Workshops will feature discussions from **Tim Cranston, John Dower, Robert Geake, Charles Roberts, and Loren Spears.,**



Smith's Castle is planning to host an art show based upon the house, grounds, people and history of the Castle. We are looking for local artists who might be interested in submitting work for this exhibit.

The exhibit will be displayed from the Opening September 9th through the seminar "Anchored in Rhode Island: The Slave Trade and Reckoning with Our Past" which will be held on October 14, 2023.



More than thirty students and staff from Cranston Public Schools XL program visited the Castle recently, pictured with docents and adult visitors.

Coming October 14th 2023 to Smith's Castle

Anchored in Rhode Island: The Slave Trade and Reckoning with Our Past

- A day-long seminar on over two centuries of enslavement in R.I.
- Keynote Speakers- Joanne Pope Melish, Charlotte Carrington-Farmer, Seth Rockman
- Many other presentations by experts on the history of R.I. slavery.
- More info coming soon at- smithscastle.org



- *Admission includes continental breakfast
- *Attendance at all workshops and three keynote presentations
- *Box Lunch and refreshments
- *Tour of Historic Smith's Castle

REGISTER TODAY

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

EMAIL: _____

____ADMISSION : \$40 ____ STUDENT \$25 ____ SENIOR \$25 ____MEMBER –FREE

Make check to The Cocumscussoc Association and mail to 55 Richard Smith Dr. North Kingstown, RI 02504