



THE COCUMSCUSSOC ASSOCIATION

The Castle Chronicle

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Letter from the President

By Robert A. Geake

Dear Members and Friends of the Cocumscussoc Association,

As we close another successful season at Smith's Castle, I want to thank each and every one of the docents, volunteers, Executive Officers and Board of Trustee members for their hard work and dedication this year.

As you will read in this issue, our adult education and youth education programs are expanding into exciting new avenues of providing historical programs to our visitors. One such project was well received when members of the adult education committee presented a five-part narrative of the history of enslavement at Cocumscussoc to first year students from Roger Williams University.

Youth education will also expand next year, as we are hoping to provide more trunk shows and school visits to the Castle, as well as collaborate once again with the 4th grade history sleuths at Rocky Hill School.

As we end the season, we will pay tribute to several long-time docents who have passed in the previous two years. Their dedication inspired all of us while they were living, and continues to inspire, as we look to the future and find ways that we can make a visitors experience to Smith's Castle an educational and memorable experience.. All members are invited to our tribute and celebration of our colleagues.

Looking ahead, our 75th year of the Cocumscussoc Association promises to be another lively season Stay tuned for more details.

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Harvest Fest, Christmas at the Castle bring Young and Old to Castle Celebrations.

Our annual Harvest Festival and Christmas at the Castle proved to be popular events for older visitors and families alike. A new vendor at Harvest Fest was Sheffield Farm Petting Zoo whose animal menagerie included a chesnut mare, and an Appaloosa pony, for rides around the lawn, as well as a pair of mischievous goats, a sheep, and an Alpaca. As you might imagine, they were a hit with the many families who attended. Children's games conducted by our junior docents were also popular.

Christmas at the Castle featured a unique theme this year, recreating the December 1735 wedding of Sarah Updike and Giles Goddard. The heavy rain on the opening day of the weekend did not dampen the spirits of visitors who enjoyed the classical pieces presented by the 18th century music ensemble of Mark Burnham, Paul Parvano, and R. Stillman; as well as the salutations of Lodowick Updike to the assembled gathering. With the weather fine on Sunday, the ceremony was held outdoors, and the games planned and constructed by Gabrielle Belmont-Kluck with her family were an added bonus for the children attending.

Anne-Marie Forer returned as Mrs. Claus, telling children stories and leading a carol sing-along and performance with Sheila Reynolds. The bellringers from Wheeler School and the Brown Madrigal Singers also returned to provide holiday entertainment. The Exeter Job Corp once again provided a gingerbread house modelled on Smith's Castle for the festivities.



Anne-Marie Forer as Mrs. Claus, enthalls the children attending with her story of The Christmas Mouse. Performer

Colonial Christmas Weddings by Marilyn Harris

There is not much contemporary writing available about colonial weddings. The majority of the community was invited with the ceremony and reception held typically at the bride's home. The ceremony and party that followed thereafter often lasted two or three days, in which guests were served plentiful amounts of local food fare, beer, and wine and fine food. It appears to have been much more about the party than the actual ceremony. The families would serve the most expensive foods in the largest quantity and the best manner they could afford. In the case of Narragansett Planters, the class to which the Updikes belonged, the celebration often lasted much longer and involved guests from all the other plantations. There is a written record of 600 guests at a wedding celebration in Rhode Island that lasted a week not many years after Sarah's wedding.

The banns of marriage were a public announcement of a couple's intention of marrying. The notice of their intention to marry had to be published either verbally or in writing for three consecutive meetings of their church. If they lived in different parishes, then the banns had to be published in both parishes. This allowed any member of the community who opposed the marriage to make his objections known. If no objections arose, a document was issued that certified that the couple could marry.

The most popular months for colonial weddings were December, January, and early February, although couples married throughout the year, with the exception of Lent and the week before Christmas. For members of the Church of England (the Updikes' Church) the service would be performed by a minister. The Updikes (and other plantation owners) were instrumental in bringing a minister from England and building St. Paul's Church in 1706. The church was originally built near Tower Hill and the building was moved to Wickford in 1800. Rev. James MacSparran was the second rector and had come to Rhode Island in 1721. He became friendly with Lodowick and his son Daniel (a/k/a Col. Updike – Sarah's brother) and was often a guest at the Updike Mansion.

Colonial brides wore a variety of different colors on their wedding day, their best dresses or the finest they could afford. Since fine textiles were costly, brides didn't wear their gowns only once. After the wedding, they typically used them for other important events as well. While the gowns could be white – or any other color – blue seems to have been the most popular.

Unlike our modern tiered wedding cakes, the bride's cake was a thick, rich, spiced cake made with alcohol, dried fruit, and nuts similar to what we know as a fruitcake. It sometimes had a piece of nutmeg baked inside, and the person who received the slice with the nutmeg was supposed to be the next to marry.

We don't read of guests bringing gifts for the couple, but the parents of the bride and groom would have gifted them. The newly-weds would be living in Groton in the colony of Connecticut so they were probably given household goods to set up their new home. The household had likely been making spinning and weaving to make linens for the new household for months. Gifts from Lodowick may have included gifts of property, including enslaved people. We know, by Giles' will 20 years later that the Goddards did own at least one enslaved child and an indentured indigenous servant boy. The enslaved child was only 2 years old, so may have been the child of an enslaved woman who died; we don't know.

SARAH UPDIKE (c. 1700-1770). Sarah was born and raised at Smith's Castle. She was one of 7 children (2 male and 5 female), probably the second youngest of the family (the dates are uncertain). Her brothers were the two eldest. Richard had tragically died the preceding year from a farming accident while he was attempting to move a large stone. Her brother Daniel was the famous lawyer and



John and Becky Dower played Lodowick and Abigail Updike while Rev. MacSparren and his wife were played by Ed and Mary Williamson. The bride and groom were played by newlyweds Walt and Ashley



attorney general – about 42 at the time and married at the time of Anstis Jenkins Updike. Daniel's children were 10 and 8. One of Sarah's older sisters, Esther, had married Thomas Fosdick, a physician like Giles, and they lived with their family in New London. She possibly was the one who had introduced Sarah and Giles.

Growing up as a child in Smith's Castle (or Updike Mansion as it came to be called), Sarah Updike was at the beginning of the Narragansett Plantation era, becoming a world of wealth and privilege. In addition to her six siblings, She was part of a large extended family, including the children of her married older brothers and sister, and numerous aunts and uncles with their own large families. Like other young women of her social class, she had been home-schooled, but "Sarah's education included not only the subjects usual to the day but also French and Latin from tutors who lived in the Updike household." As was said of her brother's education, "Such an education bespeaks a household with financial means and intellectual interests far beyond the average." She was active in her church, St. Paul's, as is evidenced by several notations in church records of her having a pew in the church and being a godmother. It is possible that Sarah met Giles through her family's friendship with Dr. MacSparran and his work in Connecticut.

While many of Sarah's extended family lived in close proximity, there were other branches scattered throughout New England and even in the southern colonies. With few good roads, most travel, at least to those homes within a reasonable distance, would have been made on horseback. Sarah probably learned to ride on a now-extinct horse breed known as the Narragansett Pacer, first recognized as a breed the year she was born. Plantation owners, including the Updikes, had established breeding farms and found a ready market for these highly-prized saddle horses; their sale became a lucrative addition to their commercial enterprises.

GILES GODDARD (1703-1757) Giles was the second of four sons of William and Elizabeth (Fairfield) Goddard, both born in Boston, as were Giles and his siblings. Giles' grandfather, also named Giles, had emigrated to Boston with his wife Mary Sprague from Wiltshire, England in 1648. There are no records as to Dr. Goddard's training as a physician; it is possible that he attended medical school in Boston, but it is more likely that he apprenticed with an established doctor for a period of time.

In any case, he showed up as a young doctor in Groton, Connecticut in 1725 when he is recorded as participating in a subscription to build a church there "conforming to Church of England laws" Dr. James MacSparran was the minister who traveled from Rhode Island several times a month to hold church services for the small Connecticut congregation. Giles had pledged five pounds, not a substantial amount, but probably a sacrifice for a young doctor just starting his career. St. James Episcopal Church, which opened in 1732, was built on a lot, the east end of which was in line with the west end of Bradley Street (which no longer exists). This is, no doubt, where the banns were read for the marriage of Giles and Sarah.



Adult Education Expands for Visitors By John Dower

The Adult Education Committee activities for the year recently concluded with the always- popular Estelle Barada doing a reenactment of “Phillis” the enslaved cook of the Hazard family. Presentations organized by the committee began back in April with our own Marilyn Harris giving a lecture on the press during the American Revolution. That presentation represented our first-ever “Breakfast Talk,” a new format that combines a historical lecture with light breakfast fare on Saturday mornings. The “Breakfast Talks” proved to be very popular and will certainly be used on next year’s schedule.

In addition to her lecture in April, Marilyn also hosted four of her very successful Sunday afternoon teas. The first tea featured the Castle’s Mark Burnham providing colonial music as the entertainment. Just two days later, Mark took to the podium to present a “Lecture on the Lawn” where he talked about the economics of slavery in Rhode Island. Bob Geake once again stepped up and gave us two excellent presentations, one on colonial travelers and another on famous hauntings in New England. In fact, half of this year’s ten lectures were given by members of the Adult Education Committee.

Other well-attended lectures were given by Smith’s Castle favorites Lorén Spears, Tim Cranston, and Brian Wallen. Another new event hosted by the AEC this year was the Ninigret Art Guild Art Show, where many paintings were sold with partial proceeds going to the Castle. We hope to expand on the art show concept next year.

In what has been described as our most successful slate of presentations, at least in recent memory, nearly every event saw between 30 and 40 attendees. “Standing room only” would best describe the seating situation for most of the events. The bar has been raised for the Adult Education Committee to equal or better the 2022 success but the talented members of the committee are certainly up to the task.

A new initiative of the Adult Education Committee this past year has been to make our tours more inclusive by providing additional information to our visitors on the Indigenous people who lived at Cocumscussoc and the enslaved people that called Smith’s Castle their home. Although we have been steadily moving toward sharing more of the stories of people of color that contributed to the success of Smith’s Castle during the 17th and 18th centuries, we have been urged by some of our partners in the historical community to take our programs to the next level.

It was decided that the AEC would begin working on an “Enslaved Narrative” that would be presented to college and high school students beginning next spring. That process was dramatically accelerated when Charlotte Carrington-Farmer of Roger Williams University asked to schedule a tour of the Castle last month. Marilyn Harris, Gabrielle Belmont-Klück, Mark Burnham, Bob Geake, and I quickly went to work and were able to put together a narrative focused on slavery in time for the RWU tour. The “Enslaved Narrative” was given considerable praise by Charlotte and the students, although this was only our initial attempt at such a tour.

The story of Smith’s Castle will always be about the Smiths and the Updikes but there is no doubt we have some room to share the stories of the dozens of enslaved that contributed to the success of the plantation at Cocumscussoc. The AEC will be working with the docents next spring to weave a few of the stories of the people of color into our regular tours. The committee will also be tweaking the narrative that will be presented to those groups, like RWU, that will be interested in a tour focused on slavery. Stay tuned for the announcement of another project that is being taken on by the Adult Education Committee next year.

Book Reviews: Two Weighty Tomes Worth a Winter's Read

By Robert A. Geake

Robert A. Gross *The Transcendentalists and Their World* Farrar, Straus & Giroux 2021 836 pp.

Historian Robert Gross has spent his entire adult life studying and writing about the village of Concord, Massachusetts. From his Bancroft prize winning *The Minutemen and Their World*, to his studies of Thoreau and Emerson's friendship, and finally with his latest offering, *The Transcendentalists and Their World*. With this new work, years in the making; Gross has successfully provided a highly detailed view of the village's history and its inhabitants from the tanners and millers, to the merchants, bankers, to the broad-minded individuals that formed a movement that still motivates people today. I found the historian's telling of the village's formative years a compelling look at what could easily be a microcosm of the virulent, and sometimes violent growth of the young republic.

As the history unfolds, little known facts emerge, such as the settlement of freed African-Americans that built a handful of crude houses at the edge of the woods that surrounded Walden pond after the Revolutionary War.. By Thoreau's time, all traces of its existence was gone, and what blacks remained had been integrated into the labor market of the bustling mill-town the village had become. Weighing in at 836 pages, this book provides a long, and satisfying read.

David Hackett Fisher *African Founders: How Enslaved People Expanded American Ideals* Simon & Schuster 2022 944 pp.

I have long been a follower of historian David Hackett Fisher's expansive body of work. With his latest book, the historian has achieved what I believe to be the most comprehensive history seen thus far, of the enslaved African, and African-American experience in North America.

Beginning with the enslaved people brought with those first settlers in Boston and elsewhere, and the slow trickle of trade that began to come into New England from Barbados; Fisher chronicles the expansive growth of the trade in the 18th century throughout the colonies, and then later into the southern regions. Through regional histories he shows that there were several varieties of slavery in America. Moreover, those enslaved Africans brought with them unique skills in animal husbandry, farming, and linguistics that were useful, and therefore useable as leverage in obtaining more favorable treatment.

Throughout his book, the historian highlights those individuals who rose up against the continued efforts to control African-Americans, even after they had earned their freedom, and the influence and inspiration they imparted on others, both enslaved and free in their lifetimes.

African Founders shows how the influence of such African men and women transformed the regional and national culture of America, and expanded the ideals of the country, even as they fought for their own freedom.

Colonial Kids



<https://clerk.ulstercountyny.gov/sites/default/files/resources/Colonial%20Kingston%20Coloring%20Book.pdf>

If you lived in colonial times, your whole family would probably go to bed with the sun. That's because there were no electric lights and candles did not last very long or give off much light. Unless you lived in a town where you might be able to buy them, families had to make their own candles from fat they collected from cooking their meat.

One way to make candles was by dipping over and over again into the melted meat fat (*tallow*). If your family was lucky enough to have a tin or pewter candle mold, it was faster, but in either case, the candlemaker had to be very careful not to be painfully burned by hot wax!

The field mice who often lived in colonial houses loved the meat fat candles too; that's why candles were kept in tightly covered tin boxes.

Junior Docents Learn and Share Lessons at Castle Events



Pictured at left during Harvest Fest, are some of the Junior Docents who volunteered this seas. At right, two of our younger junior docents helped out with crafts at our Christmas event.



A Passing of the Torch in Docent Leadership

As the 2022 season was coming to a close, long-time volunteer and lead docent Sharon Ferrara informed us that there would be a change in leadership next year. Sharon has long run the Castle gift shop and has also served as recording secretary for the Executive Committee for the last five years. In the past two years, she has also filled in as office manager when needed, especially during a crucial time of transition.

During the past season, Sharon oversaw twenty-two docents, eight of whom were new volunteers. They provided tours for visitors from eighteen states and thirty Rhode Island communities, as well as visitors from three countries outside of the United States.

Succeeding Sharon will be new Lead Docent Donna Correia, who is a veteran of historic house museums, having begun as a docent at the Nathanael Greene Homestead, and later at Varnum House in East Greenwich.

Donna has been married for 51 years, raised two wonderful daughters, and has six grandchildren. In her career she held the position of Administrative Assistant and Office Manager for the East Greenwich Public Schools and Special Education Department for twenty-two years.

Donna is also a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution and has served as Chaplin, Assistant Treasurer, and Chapter Historian of the Phebe Greene Ward Chapter in Westerly. She is also a member of the Varnum Continentals.

She looks forward to her new role, telling us "smith's Castle intrigues me, not only because of the most welcoming people that are there, but the incredible beauty and history of the property, along with the learning and educational experiences that can be found at this site. Thank you for letting me be a part of this".

This season, the resurgence of a junior docent program at the Castle has given us the opportunity to educate young children on colonial life, but also to reap the rewards they bring in chaperoning colonial games and demonstrations.

Under the guidance of long-time educator and docent Marilyn Harris, the group of homeschooled students of all ages learned the history of the house, and the skills that children of their age would have learned in colonial times.

Among other projects this year, the junior docents prepared and presented a candle-making demonstration, helped present a flax, wool, and loom presentation, and helped younger children with games and crafts at our recent Christmas at the Castle.

Our thanks to Marilyn Harris and Rebecca Campbell for their efforts in bringing back this important program at the Castle.

(see Chronicle Vol. 6, issue 3)

Around and About Smith's Castle:

Dec. 10th 1-3 p.m.

Members Christmas Party

Jan. 6th 11:00 a.m.

Executive Committee Meeting

Jan. 12th 6:00 p.m.

Cocumscussoc Association Trustee Meeting

Jan. 28th 9:30 a.m.

Annual Membership Meeting,

North Kingstown Free Library



Mill Cove in winter.

Photo by Bob Geake



Members of the Exeter Job Corp pose with this year's Gingerbread House modeled after Smith's Castle.. The Job Corp has provided our Christmas at the Castle event with a festive house for the past decade..



Other long-time volunteers include Sheila Reynolds and Ann Marie Forer who have provided storytelling and music at our Christmas at the Castle event.s.

WISHING ALL OUR MEMBERS AND
FRIENDS A SAFE AND HAPPY HOLI-
DAY SEASON!

