

THE COCUMSCUSSOC ASSOCIATION

Spring 2022

The Castle Chronicle

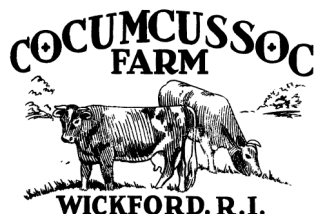
Vol. 6 Issue 1

Letter from the President

By Robert A. Geake

Inside this issue:

President's Letter	1
The Cocumscussoc Review	2
Recommended books	3
Upcoming events	4



Dear Members of the Cocumscussoc Association

Perhaps it is a natural outlet from our observance of the turning of the seasons as buds grow on the trees and sprouts emerge from under the garden's cover of leaves, but the season of spring has always represented to me as a season of new opportunities, and of hoped for possibilities in the coming year.

We feel the same at Smith's Castle each year as we look forward to the coming season. Planning for our annual Opening Day on May 7th is well underway, as are meetings to plan for docent trainings, our three other seasonal events, as well as lectures, teas, and other special activities, so stay tuned. You can always find the latest upcoming events on our website and Facebook pages.

Our annual membership drive begins in March as well, and we are fortunate to have a new membership committee formed that will send both traditional mailings and orchestrate an online campaign; with a goal of increasing the membership by a third; or 100 new members by 2023.

With the launching of our new blog *The Cocumscussoc Review* we hope its readership attracts new members as well as contributors as we continue our mission of presenting the history of Cocumscussoc and the history that surrounded the site for the three hundred plus years of its existence as a trading post, plantation, and working farm. John Dower's article will explain more about this exciting new venture.

We look forward to seeing our friends and members this coming season. Come out and support those docents and volunteers who give of their time and talent to sustain the programs and festivals we offer.

Sincerely,

Robert A. Geake

President, Cocumscussoc Association

Changes in the Annex Office

As of March 1st, The Cocumscussoc Association will have a new, but familiar face as our office manager. Former docent Leslie Eagle has agreed to take the position.. With an office-related career at Brown University, Leslie will be a welcome addition.

Last December, Arthur "Pete" Lavallee who had served as office manager for the past three years but decided he needed to leave the position due to family concerns. We want to thank Pete for the job he did, in keeping communications open between parties, and insuring that bills and banking were coordinated with our treasurer. Pete often went above and beyond his duties in helping secure permits for our seasonal events, in checking on the Castle property after severe storms, and in making runs to the dump to dispose of clutter in the rear of the Annex.

We would also like to thank Lead Docent Sharon Ferrara who put her own considerable office experience to use and served as the interim office manager. Sharon did an amazing job in not only keeping the office running efficiently, but also tackling the sorting of years of paperwork that had filled the filing cabinets; ensuring that the new office manager came into the position with a well organized working space.



New Blog *The Cocumscussoc Review* Debuts by John Dower

Wednesday, February 9th marked the launch of the Cocumscussoc Review, our blog that appears on our website (smithscastle.org). The opening article on the blog, written by Bob Geake, tells the story of the struggles of Rhode Island's Indigenous veterans of the Revolutionary War as they attempted to obtain pensions. That first article was followed up on February 20th with my piece about the first people of African descent at Smith's Castle.

The Cocumscussoc Review was created for several reasons. We want to use the platform to educate and entertain members, docents, and friends of Smith's Castle about the rich history that took place at Cocumscussoc and the surrounding areas. In the process, we would like to use the blog articles to be shared on social media in order to promote Smith's Castle to others unaware of our story. That is where everyone reading this article comes in. Please share the articles with others on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or any social media platform. You can even email the link to those you think would be interested in the stories.

Another aim in creating the blog is to allow those associated with Smith's Castle to tell other hidden stories that are of interest to them. Certainly, members of the Adult Education Committee will be contributing to the Cocumscussoc Review; however, all are invited to participate by submitting their own articles or comments. Topics for articles may cover early politics, religion, black and indigenous history, women's history, colonial law, lifestyles, and events. Please keep submissions to a Word document of 10-12 pages and include any images you want included in the article. Longer articles of significance will also be considered. Email submissions to smithscastle55@gmail.com

Docent Recruitment and Training Review Underway

The time of year has come again to recruit new docents and provide a training review for our current volunteers.

Beginning this month, advertisements in the local paper and online will offer the opportunity to Rhode islanders to docent at Smith's Castle for the upcoming season, and training dates via Zoom and in-person will also be scheduled for the month of April.

This year, we will provide a special session on providing visitors with information about the enslavement of African-Americans at the Castle, and specifically how to engage visitors in the broader discussion about the practice of slavery in New England and on the local estates known as the Narragansett Plantations.

Look for email notifications and postings on our website and Facebook pages for dates and times of docent training.





Recommended Reading

Power and Liberty: Constitutionalism in the American Revolution

By Gordon S. Wood Oxford University Press \$24.95

Through the years of the historical recounting of the formative years of our nation has often been obscured by the patriotic fervor occasioned by the establishment of the most democratic republic that the world had seen at the close of the tumultuous 18th century.

The outcome however, was never as easy as some led readers to believe. In his latest work, Gordon Wood, Professor Emeritus of History from Brown University, has given us a telescopic view of the critical events, debates, missteps, and strides forward that would ultimately lead to the form of government in the United States that we recognize today.

As Wood describes, from the initial disputes with Great Britain in the 1760's through the declaration of Independence, the formation of state constitutions, the creation of the Bill of Rights and the Federal Constitution all occurred within the last forty years of the century, and was undoubtedly "the most creative era of constitutionalism in American history".

Within a highly skilled narrative, Wood explores the varied debates that led to independence, and the Confederation of States, each a sovereign, separate entity, that grew through the process of separate constitutions and governments created after fierce arguments in person and in the printed word, over the separation of powers, representation, human rights, sovereignty, and judicial authority. The wide differences of opinion and perspective come alive in Wood's prose, and the complex path to what would become the Federal Constitution of 1787 becomes easier to follow with his insight, wisdom, and clarifying conclusions on a system of government that while imperfect, has withstood the test of time. **Bob Geake**

Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence by Carol Berkin, New York: Knopf, 2005. Paperback: Vintage Books. Also available as E-Book. Available at bookstores, Amazon.com, and through R.I Library System.

Dr. Carol Berkin, an American historian, author, and lecturer, is currently the Baruch Presidential Professor of History at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, specializing in women's role in colonial history.

In this very readable but historically accurate and well-documented account, Dr. Berkin offers a window into the vital roles women played in the Revolutionary Period. Abigail Adams, Lucy Knox, Catherine (Cathy) Greene (wife of Nathanael), and Martha Washington are familiar to you. The names of hundreds of camp-followers (the wives and mothers of Washington's soldiers) were lost to history, but they provided essential services by cooking, laundering, and nursing the men. Messengers and spies, Deborah Champion and Jane Thomas among them, dared to cross enemy lines to aid their country. Deborah Sampson and Margaret Corbin are just two who took up arms and were wounded. Women financially supported the cause and took over family farms, printing presses, and businesses in the absence of their husbands.

Dr. Berkin examines the impact of this home-front, civil war on colonial women on both sides of the conflict, the enslaved, freed, and Indigenous. If you have not already read it, I strongly recommend *Revolutionary Mothers*; it provides an often ignored but unique insight into the beginnings of the American story. **Marilyn T. Harris**



Around and About Smith's Castle...

Upcoming Events at the Castle

Thursday, March 10th 6:00 p.m.

Board of Trustees meeting

Saturday April 16th 9:00 a.m.

Windows/Clean-up Day

Paranormal Tour 7:00 p.m.

Friday, May 6th 11:00 a.m.

Executive Committee Meeting

1:00-3:00 p.m.

RI Transition Academy at CCRI

House Tour

Saturday, May 7th 12-4 p.m.

Opening Day

Saturday, May 14th 1:00-3:00 p.m.

Davisville Community Health Workers

House Tour

Saturday, May 21st 9:30 a.m.

Lecture on the Lawn (TBA)

Around Rhode Island:

Saturday, March 12th 10:00 a.m.

Histwick Rome Point Walk

Wickford historian Tim Cranston leads a walk through the history of Rome Point.

Saturday, April 2nd 10:00 a.m.

A Stroll to Wickford's Oldest Places with Tim Cranston

Sunday, April 10th 1:00 p.m.

Paine House Museum, Coventry

Family Learning series: Knitting

Saturday, April 16th 10:00 a.m.

Elm Grove Cemetery

Stroll through historic cemetery with Tim Cranston, sponsored by Historic Wickford

Thursday, May 5th 7:30 p.m.

Peace Dale Museum

Presentation via Zoom

Bob Geake: 18th Century Travelers in King's County: Their Accounts of Accommodations, Sights They Saw, and the People they Met while Passing Through"

Saturday, May 14th All Day

Nathanael Greene Homestead

Re-enactment Event

Opening Day to Feature Colonial Living

As has become our tradition, our Opening Day at Smith's Castle will feature Colonial entertainment, lifestyles, re-enactors, and a display entitled "Their World Turned Upside Down: The Updikes, Narragansett Planters, and the American Revolution."

Featured re-enactors will include the Rhode Island Pirate Players who will perform an exhibition, members of the Kentish Guard and Pawtuxet Rangers, and the Kingston Reds, who will perform a muster drill and talk about the history of their colonial militia regiment.

Vendors will include Big Bear Trading Post,

Around and About Smith's Castle

In the final chapter of my book "New England Plantations" entitled "Long Buried and Forgotten", I highlighted the forgotten burial places of some of the early slaves and free blacks of Rhode Island.

I retold the poignant first entry in Nailer Tom Hazard's diary in which a free black laborer named Coggeshall died aboard a transport ship that had departed from Newport and was on route to Providence.

The small crew, with Nailer Tom, anchored the ship off Warwick Neck in the midst of an eclipse, rowed the body ashore and hastily buried him on the beach.

I believed that to be the tragic end of the incident, but I was wrong. Reading through Volume 1 of James N. Arnold's *Narragansett Historical Register*, a letter from descendant Joseph P. Hazard tells the rest of the story:

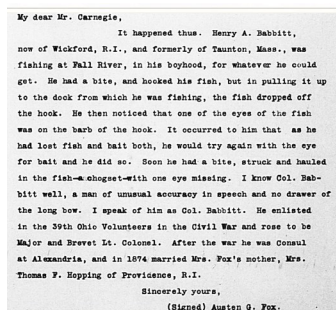
According to the story told to Joseph by Nailer Tom himself,

"Some thirty years or so after that, on one of my then frequent journey's from my house here (at Peace Dale) to Providence on horseback, I stopped for the night at the house of my friend (Greene I think it was) on Warwick Neck. Next morning, while dressing, I looked out of my chamber window and saw the beach covered with people, who were digging in the sand in all directions. I could not imagine what the matter was, but on going downstairs to breakfast my friend told me that about a week ago a box containing a human skeleton was worked out by the tide, and these people had been digging ever since for the money that Captain Kidd (who was often at Newport...) had buried there, as they believed, and for reason that the skeleton they had found was that of the man he had killed and buried there to watch it".

And that, as Paul Harvey used to say, is "the rest of the story", and truly a Rhode Island story at that.

Bob Geake

A FISH STORY?



This December 21, 1907, letter from Austen G. Fox to Andrew Carnegie tells a far-fetched story about another former resident of the Cocumscussoc property, Col. Henry A. Babbitt, the second husband of Anna Almy Jenkins (Hoppin) Babbitt.

Anna, the great-granddaughter of Moses Brown, owned the property from 1879-1919. This was the first time a woman officially owned it. Anna married Henry in 1873.

Colonel Henry A. Babbitt was a Civil War hero, part of Sherman's March to the Sea. His outstanding service resulted in his appointment as Vice Consul General to Egypt in 1873, the same year he and Anna were married. After their return from Egypt, they lived in Pomfret, CT several years before moving to the Babbitt Farm (Smith's Castle), where Henry died in 1911.

In 1919, Anna Babbitt left Cocumscussoc to her daughter by her first marriage, Alice Hoppin Fox, Austen's wife. Alice is listed as the owner until her death in 1933, when Austen inherited it. We have no record of how Austen heard this fish tale, but perhaps it was while he and his wife were visiting her mother and stepfather on a lazy summer day at Cocumscussoc.

Marilyn T. Harris

