

Castle Chronicle



Volume 15 Number 1 ■ Spring 2006

Published by the Cocumscussoc Association at Smith's Castle ■ 55 Richard Smith Drive ■ Wickford, Rhode Island 02852

Buttons from Cocumscussoc

Jillian Odland, BA, Brown University, 2003

There are twenty-four buttons among the finds from excavations conducted at Cocumscussoc, Rhode Island, also known as Smith's Castle, by Brown University between 1989 and 1994. This is a relatively small cache of buttons, especially when compared with major finds such as the 1,333 buttons recovered from Fort Michilimackinac, Michigan, 507 buttons from Brunswick Town and Fort Fisher, North Carolina, and 142 buttons from the Lowell Boott Mills (Stone 1974: 45; South 1964; Ziesing 1989: 141). However, there is value in looking at these few buttons; they can tell us something about the relative domestic economy and personal adornment of Cocumscussoc's residents in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Buttons have been used in Europe since at least the 14th century, but it was not until the late 16th century that they began to be used as a clothing fastener rather than as non-functional decorations (White 1977: 67). Even after this, and through the 18th century, most buttons were made of flashy material such as cloth or gilt metal and continued to serve a mainly decorative purpose. Metal buttons would often line the sleeves of fine gentlemen's coats and the legs of their breeches. In his article on the Birmingham button industry White asserts, "The Birmingham metal button industry prospered, nurtured by the continuing desire of men, women, and children to ornament their persons with small glistening objects. Throughout the period 1760 to 1840, the button held high sway as a popular status symbol and as early as 1763 there were continuing references in issues of *St. James' Chronicle* to tradesmen who tried to ape their superiors by covering their coats with gilt buttons." (White 1977: 70)

Lower class people in 17th- and 18th-century Britain and America fastened their clothes with hooks and eyes or points, which were strings with metal ends (Crummett 1939: 26). Cheap bone or metal buttons could be used to fasten the neck of a man's shirt and the waist of his trousers from the mid-18th century on, but women's clothing of this era almost never included functional buttons (Olsen 1963: 552). Many 18th-century metal buttons found in America have a military origin, sometimes with regiments' numbers stamped on them. However, civilians often used left-over military buttons or ones that looked quite similar.

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Brass button with floral design (artifact number 36) excavated at Cocumscussoc by Patricia Rubertone and students in 1992. Photo courtesy of Patricia Rubertone.

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Castle Chronicle is published quarterly by the Cocumscussoc Association at Smith's Castle
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Wickford, RI 02852
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Web site: www.smithscastle.org

Subscriptions are by Smith's Castle membership only, beginning at \$25.

The views expressed by contributors to *Castle Chronicle* are not necessarily those of the Cocumscussoc Association.



Note from the President

I recently signaled my willingness to return as President of the Cocumscussoc Association, and on March 20, the Board of Trustees voted to take me up on my offer. I am returning at a difficult time for the Association.

We have recently lost some very key people. Sadly, outgoing president, Chris Kalina, has resigned from her activities at the Castle, including her critical work as Youth Education chair. We deeply regret her decision. We now must fill this enormous gap in one of our most important program areas. If you can help with our school programs, please step forward.

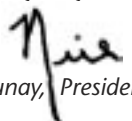
John Weaver, who recently completed a term as Trustee, has resigned as chair of the Buildings Committee. Again, we regret this loss. John did a tremendous job maintaining the health and historic integrity of the Castle and Annex over the past several years, and he will be missed. Don Kern, a new Trustee, has stepped forward to chair the Buildings Committee, and we are indeed grateful to him. This committee is always looking for hands to help keep the Castle in tip-top shape, so please consider volunteering some of your "tinkering time" to our worthy cause.

Finally, on March 27, Kari Van Buren informed the board of her resignation as Resident Director of Smith's Castle. Kari has decided to accept a position at a museum closer to her New York home. I regret Kari's departure. I hope all of our members and volunteers will join me in thanking her for her hard work on behalf of Smith's Castle and in wishing her all the best in her new position. Kari's last day at the Castle is April 22.

We are seeking volunteer assistance to help staff the office until a new director can be found. If you are interested, please let me know. A committee is being formed to review the director's job description and to seek qualified candidates. Your input on the qualities and experience you would like to see in a new director will be gratefully received.

There are some promising developments to report. Paul Christianson, who became Vice President only to have the responsibilities of three officers thrust upon him, has agreed to slide over to the position of Treasurer, pending Board approval. I anticipate the selection of a new Vice President shortly, so we will soon have a complete set of officers and a functioning Executive Committee. Also, Trustees are expected to finalize a budget on April 24. We are positioned to move forward.

My decision to return as President was not an easy one. While this unique site and its eventful history have always intrigued me, it is the corps of dedicated volunteers, their incredible camaraderie and cooperative spirit, and the friendships I have formed that make Smith's Castle such a special place for me. As President, I am determined that recent events not redefine the Smith's Castle I have come to know and love. I promise to do my utmost to foster a welcoming environment, an open environment, a friendly and fun environment. Let's put our collective mind and muscle to work, focus on the important educational and preservation mission of Smith's Castle, and make 2006 our best year yet.


—Neil Dunay, President

View from the Annex

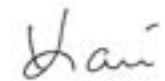
March 27, 2006

Board of Trustees
Cocumscussoc Association

I am resigning my position as Resident Director of Smith's Castle. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to work with all of you. I wish you all the best of luck and will remember the Castle with fondness always. It has been an honor to work with so many wonderful and dedicated volunteers. I leave with a sad heart and will miss the many great friends that I have made here at the Castle.

My last day will be April 22, Castle Clean up day.

Best wishes,


Kari Van Buren
Resident Director

Newly Elected Officers and Trustees Begin Terms



Jackie Gildersleeve, secretary



Paul Christiansen, vice president



Rebecca Allen, trustee

At the annual meeting of the Cocumscussoc Association in February, newly elected officers Paul Christiansen, treasurer, and Jackie Gildersleeve, secretary, began their terms. Neil Dunay was named president by the board of trustees on March 20. The office of vice president remains vacant.

Trustees Rebecca Allen, Frank Boffi, Donald Kern, and Edward Rawlings begin their three-year terms. The docents have chosen Betty Fenik as their representative on the board for the coming year.



Frank Boffi, trustee



Donald Kern, trustee



Edward Rawlings, trustee

Welcome New Members

Frank & Donna Boffi
Paul Christiansen
Melissa Devine
Andy Diagle & Bonnie Baker
Janet Hirsch
Kimberly & Stuart Mears
Thomas Marsocci, Pro Paint Plus, Inc.
Gayle Anderson, Silver Sneakers

—as of 3/15/06



The *Chronicle* has been informed of the death of Castle member **John S. Dunay**. On behalf of the membership we extend sincere sympathy to his family and friends.

Castle Welcomes Intern



Amy Valentino, a senior majoring in history at Salve Regina University, has recently begun serving as an intern in the Annex office. Amy works primarily on important collections-related tasks: She is responsible for monitoring the hygrothermographs that record the levels of relative humidity and temperature in the Castle. She has begun the process of computerizing the collections database using the newly acquired museum software, *PastPerfect*. Accessioning of objects into the collection is her current focus. As time permits, Amy also pitches in and helps the resident manager with general office tasks that keep popping up. Thank you, Amy! ■

Thank You!

The 2006 Annual Appeal letters were sent out early in the new year. We encourage all supporters of Smith's Castle to return their gifts at their earliest convenience. This year the fund will support work to be done on the chimney and fireplaces. Help with this vital project now!

—Paul Carlson and Barbara Dawson, Co-Chairs
Development Committee

Donors to the 2006 Annual Appeal (as of March 15, 2006)—

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Mr. and Mrs. Rob Viani
Village Reflections
Mrs. Judith White
Mr. and Mrs. Steve Zambarano

Volunteer Opportunities



If you are you interested in the history of Smith's Castle and enjoy working with people, consider joining the **Docents of Smith's Castle**. Docent and greeter training begins on Tuesday, April 11 and continues weekly through May 16. Call the office for more information and to register.

With the recent resignation of the resident director, there is an urgent need for volunteers to staff the Castle office. Any time you can give will be greatly appreciated. Call the office at 294-3521.

Betty Fenik, Castle docent, shows a tour group through the Castle.

Upcoming Events

Travel Back to the 1600s

Smith's Castle, in collaboration with Roger Williams National Memorial, will host *Bridge to the Past* from noon to 4:00 p.m. on Saturday, May 6 and Sunday, May 7, 2006. Re-enactors, soldiers, sailors and privateers, and sutlers and traders will take over the Smith's Castle grounds and recreate the period when Richard Smith Jr. built his Castle in 1637. Visitors will be treated to the sights, smells, and sounds of the 17th century with fireside cooking, weapons demonstrations, games, and much more. The Castle will be open for tours.

On Sunday from 1:30–2:30, actress Jessa Piaia will reprise her portrayal of Rhode Island Quaker, Mary Dyer. Dyer was twice expelled from Massachusetts Bay Colony because of her non-conforming religious beliefs. When she returned a third time, she was hanged on Boston Common. Piaia depicts Mary Dyer's life set against the historic events and issues of the day. Her performance is made possible with the support of the North Kingstown Arts Council.



Jessa Piaia studied performance at London's Oval House Theatre and graduated from the University of Massachusetts in Boston. Since 1998, she has performed as Mary Dyer at various educational and cultural sites throughout New England. Photo: Charpentier Photography.

Admission: \$5 (members, free); children 6–12, \$1; children under 6, free. For more information, call 401-294-3521, e-mail smithscastle@earthlink.net, or visit the website (www.smithscastle.org). ■

Strawberry Festival

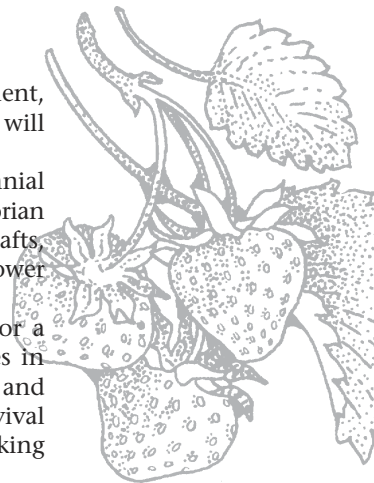
Haven't yet savored Smith's Castle's famous homemade strawberry shortcake smothered in whipped cream? Then don't miss the annual Strawberry Festival celebration on Saturday, June 10, 2006 from noon to 4 p.m. Beat the June heat with thirst-quenching lemonade and strawberry drinks. Family entertainment, sponsored by the North Kingstown Arts Council, will fill the afternoon.



The children's craft area will feature two perennial Castle favorites: Make a Tussie Mussie, a tiny Victorian flower bouquet, or, if you prefer more physical crafts, hammer flowers to make a lovely keepsake flower print or note card.

The first floor of the house will be open for a walk-through with docents in period costumes in each room to answer questions about the house and its history. Stroll through the lovely Colonial Revival Garden and enjoy the beautiful grounds overlooking scenic Mill Cove.

Admission to the grounds, entertainment, and walk-through of the house is \$3 for members six and older; \$6 for non members six and older; and free for children under six. Admission includes one serving of shortcake and one beverage per person. Additional strawberry shortcake, \$2; beverage, \$1. Children's crafts \$1 each. Rain date is June 11th. ■



Lauren Keough and Grace Palmer show off tussie-mussies at last year's Strawberry Festival. Photo: Chris Kalina.

Transportation Enhancement Project

Cultural Landscape Study Underway

Lucinda Brockway, principal, Past Designs of Kennebunk, Maine, has just begun work on a comprehensive study of the history of the Smith's Castle landscape. Ultimately, the study will provide the research necessary to support the design and construction of transportation-related landscape enhancements funded by the Rhode Island Department of Transportation.¹

Before any construction takes place we must be certain no valuable historic features will be disturbed. Exactly what is to be built will be determined during the research and design phases of the project. However, the grant application submitted to RIDOT identified several possible features that we might see in the future. These include a reconfigured entry from Post Road, a relocated and enlarged parking area, lighting, pedestrian pathways, and informational signage.



Lucinda Brockway

Planning for these landscape enhancements is just one reason to study the Smith's Castle landscape. Recent archaeology conducted on the site led to the property being listed as a National Archaeological Landmark and concluded that a wealth of information on European-Native American relations, frontier life, 17th-century military garrisons, and the lives of the masters and slaves who lived on Rhode Island's 18th-century plantations lies beneath the soil of Cocumscussoc.²

Above the ground, much of the history of Smith's Castle may be written on the land. The topography; the adjacent waterways and nearby trading markets; the buildings; the archaeology; the fields, the crops, the trees and shrubs, the gardens; the graves; the roads and pathways—all will be examined for clues to the history of the site and the lives of its inhabitants.

Brockway, with over 20 years of experience studying Rhode Island landscapes, knows how to read and interpret these features. She also knows her way around Rhode Island archives where she will augment her site surveys with a thorough examination of the written record pertaining to Cocumscussoc's landscape history.



Federal and State planning archives, such as this 1938 pre-hurricane aerial photograph of Blithwold, are used to understand the landscape design development and its change over time. Blithwold archives.

Lucinda Brockway's study of Rhode Island landscapes goes back to her student days at the University of Rhode Island in the late 1970s, before historic landscape restoration was a recognized field. She created her own major by combining history and horticulture and supported her studies with hands-on experience at various historic sites. She conducted fieldwork and research for *Historic Landscapes of Rhode Island* published by the R.I. Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission.³

The final product of Brockway's research will be a Cultural Landscape Report (CLR). The CLR, scheduled to be completed in approximately one year, will document the landscape history of Smith's Castle



View of the enclosed garden, Blithwold, c. 1930. This pre-hurricane image was one of many resources consulted when planning for the rejuvenation of the hedges, garden bed plantings, and walkways in the enclosed garden. Photo: Blithwold archives.



Based on historic information and on-site inventory of existing plantings, overgrown *Chamaecyparis* hedges were removed and replanted with plants of the same species. Garden beds were rejuvenated and the original path, which had been lost to lawn, was restored. Photo: Lucinda Brockway, fall 2005.

and place it within the context of similar 17th and 18th century sites in Rhode Island and the Northeast. Specifically, it will include

- a narrative of the evolution of the property from settlement to present, its significant historic periods, and an analysis of the changes to the landscape over time;
- an assessment of the current landscape's historic integrity and significance;
- preservation strategy and treatment recommendations to achieve the goals defined in the report;
- plans of three distinct time periods, c. 1650, the Richard Smith era, c. 1800, the plantation era, and c. 1930, the Cocumscussoc Dairy era;
- an existing conditions map identifying all landscape features and remnants of historic landscape elements, including the location and identity of below ground features excavated by previous archaeological digs and potentially sensitive archaeological areas;
- photographs documenting the existing site conditions; and
- a research binder including copies of all historic documents pertaining to the landscape's evolution, arranged chronologically.

The preservation goals, preservation strategy, and treatment recommendations contained in the CLR will provide the basis for the next phase of the project—development of a master plan for the site. A priority of the master plan will be the siting, configuration, and design of the specific transportation-related features for which RIDOT funding is currently available. On a broader level, the master plan will define the framework and provide a rational basis

for design planning and decisionmaking for future landscape features recommended for the site.

The house built by Richard Smith Jr. and modified over subsequent generations has been studied, restored, and lovingly maintained over the years. Under the stewardship of the Cocumscussoc Association, Smith's Castle is today a beautiful, award-winning, nationally significant historic house. It is time we turn our attention to the land. The project now underway is the beginning. Ultimately, the CLR and the master plan will enable us to create a landscape that will provide historic and aesthetic context to the house, will enhance the interpretive and educational programs of Smith's Castle, and will serve to significantly enrich the experiences of future visitors to our site. Roll up your sleeves, Castle members, there is a lot of work ahead of us. ■

—Darrell McIntire, Chair
Long-Range Site Committee

References

1. Mary Packard Turkel, "Long Range Site Committee Secures \$200,000 Grant to Improve Smith's Castle Landscape," *Castle Chronicle*, Volume 1, Number 4, Winter 2002.
2. Patricia E. Rubertone and Robert Fitts. *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Smith's Castle*. On file, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Harpers Ferry, W.Va., 1991.
3. Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, *Historic Landscapes of Rhode Island*, Providence, R.I., 2001.

Buttons (from page 1)

The development of manufacturing processes in the mid-19th century allowed buttons of porcelain, shell, vegetable ivory, and plastic to be made very cheaply and easily; it was only then that buttons became the dominant method of fastening on both men's and women's garments (Ziesing 1989).

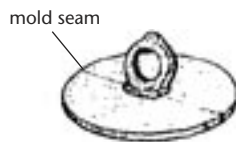
The majority of the buttons in America in the 18th century and earlier were imported from Europe. Birmingham, England, was a particularly notable center for button manufacturing; many brass, ivory, and shell buttons imported to America in the mid-18th to mid-19th centuries came from this city (White 1977). In the mid-to-late 19th century, porcelain buttons usually came from France and glass buttons from Germany and Austria (Zeising 1989: 147). In 1784, Lord Sheffield wrote of buttons in his *Observations on the Commerce of the United States*, "Whilst Great Britain supplies a great part of Europe with this article, it cannot be questioned from whence the Americans will import it; and this will be one of the last manufactures which it will be worth the while of the Americans to attempt." (Nöel Hume 1969: 92). However, it seems that button manufacturing on a fairly large



1a. Button mold, open.

Buttons of all materials can be classified by their means of attachment to the clothing. Sew-through buttons are the type most prevalent today; they have holes in the face through which the thread is sewn. The number of holes can range from one (actually one hole on the topside that splits into two on the backside) to five or more, with two or four holes being by far the most common. When there are five holes in a button the center hole was made as part of the manufacturing process; it was "used to index

Type 11
one piece cast whitemetal



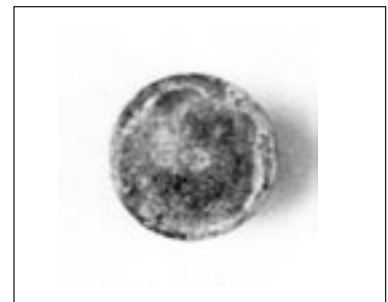
2. Cast whitemetal button.
(South, 1964)

Type E
cast whitemetal, 1750–1812

eye and button, one piece



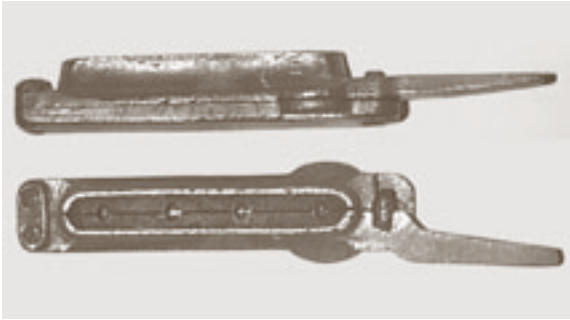
3. Cast whitemetal button.
(Olsen, 1964)



4. Domed whitemetal button (artifact #173).
Photo courtesy of Patricia Rubertone.

scale had already begun in America by the end of the 18th century. Nöel Hume notes the establishment of early metal button manufacturing in Philadelphia and New York City in 1739, 1750, and 1793; this last factory was actually a branch of a Birmingham button manufacturer (Nöel Hume 1969: 92). The American Civil War caused a temporary cessation of European imports, during which time domestic button-making in other materials began; by 1900 the majority of the glass and shell buttons in the United States were made domestically (White 1977: 72; Zeising 1989: 144). Molded whitemetal buttons had been produced in America since the 17th century; they could easily be made inside the home or at a military fort using a button mold (Olsen 1964: 389).

the turning tool" when the button was being carved. The other four holes, used to fasten the button to the garment, were drilled after the button blank was cut (Olsen 1963: 552). Shank buttons have an added shank or eye through which thread is passed to attach it to the clothing. The shank is usually made out of a wire, either the same or a different material as the button, bent with the two ends attached to the back of the button. The shank could be molded into the button, soldered on, or set into a shank-plate that was then attached to the button crown (Zeising 1989: 148). Self-shanked buttons also make use of a shank, but in this case the button and the shank are one piece. Usually this is a result of the button crown and shank being molded as a single unit. Metal and glass



1b. Button mold, closed.

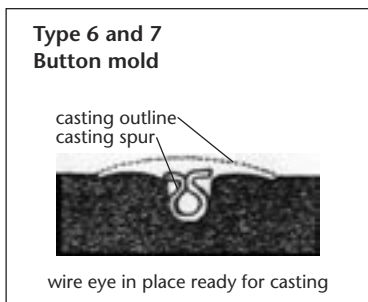
buttons are usually shanked or self-shanked, while porcelain, shell, bone, and wood buttons are usually sew-through.

Artifact Analysis

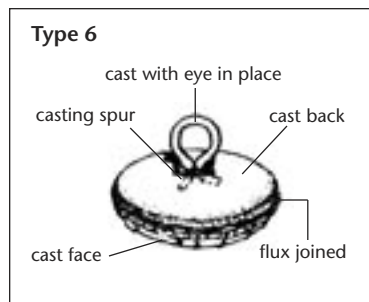
All of the buttons found at the site date to the 18th and 19th centuries. They include sixteen metal buttons (eight whitmetal and eight brass); five porcelain buttons; and three bone buttons. All of the buttons

a time (Olson 1964: 389). The metal and mold were heated over a fire, the metal was poured into the mold, and, once the buttons were cooled and set, they were hand finished and their seams shaved off with a knife (Olson 1964: 390). Figure 1a and b are two views of a typical early American mold. Whitmetal buttons were usually plain and undecorated, although military buttons of this sort included regiment numbers after 1767. These buttons were widely used by the British Colonial and Revolutionary American armies as well as by civilians from the mid-18th century until well into the 19th century (Olsen 1963: 552). South labels this style of button as his type 11, and has found them both in a 1726 to 1776 context and in a later 1837 to 1865 context (South 1964). Stone suggests a date range of 1740/1745 to 1780, and Olsen a date range of 1750 to 1812 (Stone 1874: 47; Olsen 1963: 552). Figures 2 and 3 are examples of this type.

There are seven buttons of this type in the Cocumscussoc collection: small finds numbers 8, 35, 38, 40, 106, 147, and 173. They range in diameter from 1.5 to 2 cm. Three buttons (numbers 8, 106, and 173) are whole, with shanks remaining. Three others



5. Wire-shanked button mold. (South, 1964)



6. Cast domed button with wire shank. (South, 1964)



7. Brass button with cross-hatched design (artifact #39). Photo courtesy of Patricia Rubertone.

were found at Cocumscussoc in the area southeast of the existing dwelling house, directly between the house and the waterfront. The units where they were excavated range from N518 to N566 and E535 to E600, from levels two to five.

Whitmetal

The term whitmetal includes pewter, lead, tin, and other alloys of lead or tin. All whitmetals are soft and malleable and light or grayish in color. One-piece whitmetal buttons, cast with an attached heavy shank, were the most common type of button in pre-Revolutionary America. They could easily and quickly be produced in a household or military fort using a small mold that made up to six or seven buttons at

(numbers 38, 40, and 147) are fragments, with their shanks broken off. The shank of number 35 is twisted and bent over—possibly a result of a manufacturing mistake. All of the buttons other than number 173 have a flat or very slightly convex face. The face of number 173 has a convex domed center with a flat lip or border; however, the manufacture and dates of this button seems to be the same as the others (figure 4). Numbers 8, 106, and 173 each have a visible mold seam on the back. Self-shanked whitmetal buttons were easily made, but the soft metal shank wore through quite easily. In the mid-to-late 18th century, some whitmetal buttons were made with an iron or brass wire shank, which was more durable.

—continued on page 10

Buttons (from page 9)

The buttons would be cast around the shank, as seen in figure 5. This type of button was popular mainly around the time of the Revolution with both civilians and the British army; Olsen dates them from 1760 to 1790, South finds them in his 1726 to 1776 context, Stone dates them from 1770 to 1781 (Olsen 1963: 552; South 1964; Stone 1974: 49).

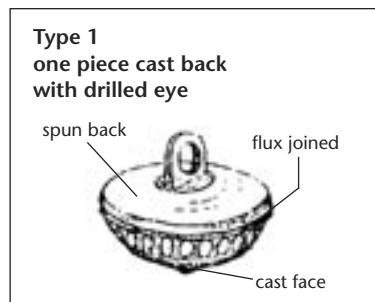
One Cocumscussoc button, number 32, is made of whitemetal with a brass wire shank. This button is 1.3 cm. in diameter, and is really a fragment of a button. It is the back of a two piece button, which would have been brazed or crimped onto a domed face made of whitemetal, brass, or glass, similar to South's type 6 (figure 6). This button was cast around the shank; the shank goes entirely through the button back and is bent over on the inside.

Brass

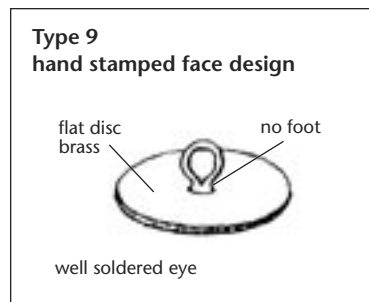
I use brass here as a general name for all copper alloys. These types of buttons were usually made of brass but could also be bronze or other copper alloys; analysis of the metal would be necessary to make a precise determination. Brass buttons were in use in

with Cap. Jenkins who carried on the button-making Business, and has bro't over the Materials, for making all sorts of gilt buttons—A manufacture not known by any in America" (Crummett 1939: 41). Major brass button manufacturing, including mechanized production, was set up in America by the end of the 18th century (Nöel Hume 1969: 93). Brass buttons tended to get larger as the 18th century went on, so size can be a good indicator of relative age (Olsen 1963: 552).

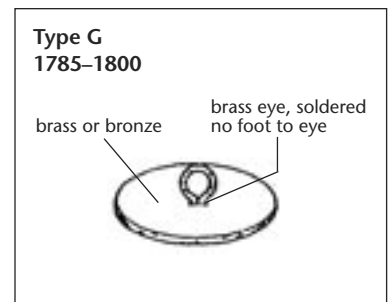
The earliest brass buttons were roughcast and self-shanked, with the eye drilled through the shank after the casting process. Olsen dates this type of button to 1700–1765; South finds them in his 1725 to 1776 context (Olsen 1963: 53; South 1964). There are two buttons of this type found at Cocumscussoc, small finds, numbers 39 and 51. Number 39 is 1.2 cm. in diameter, with a slightly domed crown; it has a cast decoration on the face, a crosshatching design, which is commonly found on 18th-century buttons (figure 7). Number 50 is also 1.2 cm. in diameter and is the backing of a button only; it is missing the domed face which was probably made of cast brass or glass. This button is very similar to South's type 1 (figure 8).



8. Cast domed whitemetal button with drilled eye. (South, 1964)



9. Pressed brass button. (South, 1964)



10. Pressed brass button. (Olsen, 1963)

the American colonies from at least 1700, mostly by the British military at this early date, although they were widely used by civilians and the American militia in the second half of the 18th century. They were often gilded with gold or silver-plated and used for decoration, although some types were mainly functional (for fastening breeches) and might be covered with cloth (Olsen 1963: 552). The majority of these buttons were manufactured in England, particularly Birmingham, and exported to America. However, brass was the first button industry set up in America, and brass buttons were being made on a small or individual scale in certain American cities in the northeast by the third quarter of the 18th century; a 1772 Boston newspaper advertised a "Button-Maker—A Person came passenger

Brass buttons did not surpass cast whitemetal buttons in popularity until about 1760, when pressed and cast brass buttons with brass or iron wire shanks began to be produced. Pressed brass buttons were often plated and decorative while cast buttons were usually plain and functional. Pressed brass buttons were made by first cutting button blanks from strips of copper alloyed with zinc, then flattening or shaping them, possibly pressing in a design. The shanks were then soldered on, followed by cleaning and possibly gilding, and finally burnishing (White 1977: 68). Pressed brass buttons enjoyed a long period of popularity; Olsen dates plain, flat pressed brass buttons from 1785 to 1820, with domed cast brass buttons in use throughout the 19th century (Olsen 1963: 553). South finds this type of button in all of his

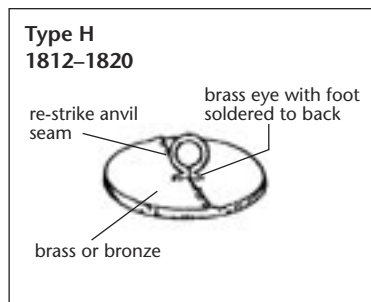
contexts, dating from 1726 to 1865 (South 1964). Early types of pressed metal buttons had problems with the shank snapping off; later buttons fixed this problem by soldering on more surface area of the wire shank, but many buttons found in archaeological contexts are missing the shank. See figures 9–11 for examples of pressed brass buttons.

Cast brass buttons, unlike cast whitmetal buttons, were impossible to make in the home and thus were produced at factories in America and abroad. They look very similar to pressed brass buttons, but on the backsides one can see that the buttons were cast around the wire shanks. In addition, cast brass buttons often were ‘spun’; cut to the required thickness by shaving the button while spinning it quickly. Buttons made in this way have visible circular striations on the backside (Olsen 1963: 552). This type of brass button was not used for as long a period as the pressed brass buttons and is thus easier to date. Olsen assigns them a date range of 1760 to 1785; South finds these buttons, his types 7 and 8, in his 1726 to 1776 context; Stone suggests a date range of 1750 to 1780 (Olsen 1963: 552, South 1964; Stone 1974: 53). Examples are figures 12–14.

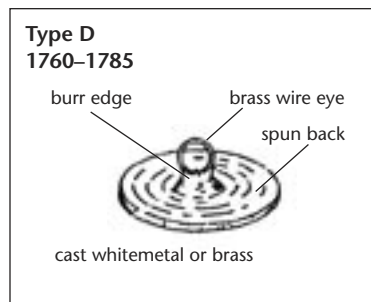
The four cast brass buttons range from 2 to 2.4 cm. in diameter. Numbers 7 and 37 each have a slightly convex face and concave back and brass wire eyes; number 37 also has a spun back. Number 131 has a very flat crown and its shank was probably made of iron; the shank is missing but the rust left behind on the button back is the clue. Number 198 is the back only of a button with a two-part crown; the domed face is missing (similar to figure 14). The lost button face was probably also made of cast brass and was attached through brazing; Stone suggests a date range of 1760 to 1780 for this exact type of button (Stone 1974: 54).

Porcelain

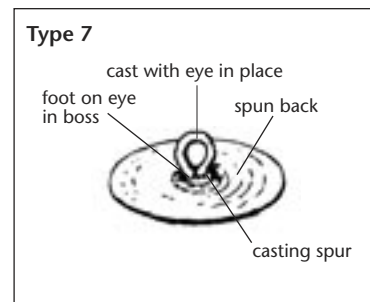
Porcelain buttons are often misidentified as white glass or milk glass; the materials are similar looking but the usual forms are very different. Porcelain buttons are always small and sew-through, while glass buttons can be quite large and are usually shanked, domed, and faceted. Porcelain buttons were available in America from the early 19th century, but they were a hand-made luxury item until the mid-19th century.



11. Pressed brass button. (Olsen, 1963)



12. Cast metal button with spun back. (Olsen, 1964)



13. Cast metal button with spun back. (South, 1964)

The Cocomuscussoc finds include two pressed-brass (numbers 36 and 119) and four cast-brass (numbers 7, 37, 131, and 198) wire-shanked buttons. Both of the pressed brass buttons have soldered-on wire eyes and interesting designs pressed into their crowns. Number 36 has a diameter of 1.2 cm., is very thin with a totally flat crown that has a floral design pressed into the face (page 1). This button is very like South’s type 9 (figure 9) that dates to 1726 to 1776 (South 1964). Number 119 is 1.3 cm. in diameter, also with a very thin and flat crown. It is stamped with the word ‘plated’ on the backside, referring to its silver plating (that is now totally gone). It is exactly like South’s type 18 (figure 15), which he dates from 1800 to 1865 (South 1964).

This changed about 1840 when a button manufacturer in Birmingham invented a process that involved compressing clay into molds, enabling them to “mass produce small, uniform” porcelain buttons (Ziesing 1989: 147). The French quickly took over the ceramic button industry and in the second half of the 19th century they exported vast quantities of inexpensive, utilitarian porcelain buttons to the United States. They came in many different colors and with numerous types of decoration, but were usually small and sew-through in style (figure 17). The buttons were incredibly cheap; one contemporary source claims that a “twelve gross each of twelve dozen” were sold for elevenpence, which wasn’t much more than the price of the paper cards they came attached to (Ziesing 1989: 147). —continued on page 12

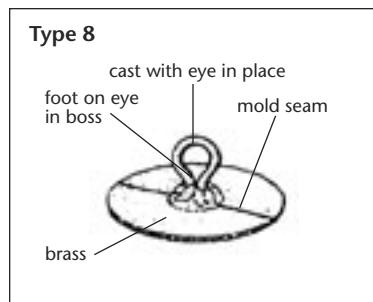
Buttons (from page 11)

Porcelain buttons were very popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; 29 percent of South's collection of buttons from Fort Fisher and 71 percent of Ziesing's buttons from the Boott Mills were porcelain buttons of this type (South 1964; Ziesing 1989: 166). Low cost and wide availability are major explanations for the popularity, but another reason was the changing use of buttons in the late 19th century. Buttons were used almost exclusively for decoration until the late 19th century; women's clothing in particular had no functional use for buttons. However, changing taste in fashion led to the introduction of men's shirts with buttons all the way down the front, rather than just at the neck as previously, as well as the introduction of the women's shirtwaist dress, which had buttons down the front and at the cuffs (Claassen 1994: 66). Ziesing designates 1840 as a start date for this type of porcelain button; South finds them, his type 23, in his 1837 to 1865 context (Ziesing 1989: 147). Buttons of this type continue to be made even today, but their popularity fell off drastically by the 1920s because of the introduction of pearl, plastic, and other synthetic buttons (Ziesing 1989: 147).

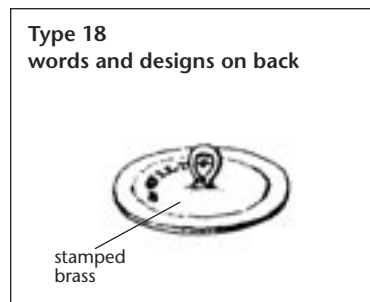
Bone

Sew-through bone buttons were common in America beginning in the mid-18th century, but unlike metal buttons from this period, bone buttons were entirely functional; they were most commonly used to fasten the waist of trousers (South 1963: 552). This type of bone button was made by hand, often at military forts. In the process of cutting button blanks a hole was drilled into the bone that the cutting tool was then centered on (figure 20). Four other holes were then drilled into the button resulting in five holes total (South 1963: 552). Sometimes the buttons were totally flat but usually a center circle including the holes was recessed, leaving a raised border. Bone buttons like these continued to be used well into the 19th century (figures 21 and 22). South's types 19 and 20 are bone buttons of this kind; he dates them to 1800–1863 (South 1964). Olsen gives a date range of 1750–1830 (Olsen 1963: 552). Stone finds them in a 1760–1781 context (Stone 1974: 57).

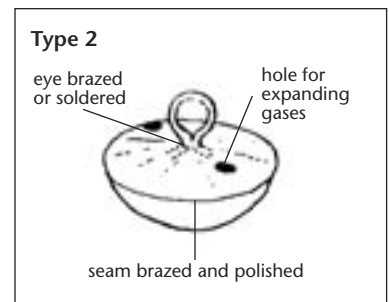
There were three bone buttons found at Cocumscussoc, artifact numbers 26, 110, and 167; however, I could not find any of these buttons in the archaeology



14. Cast brass button. (South, 1964)



15. Brass button with words stamped on back. (South, 1964)



16. Domed metal button with wire shank. (South, 1964)

Porcelain buttons found at Cocumscussoc include numbers 41, 42, 43, 141, and 128. Each is 1.1 cm. in diameter and sew-through with four holes. Four of the buttons are white and one is blue (number 43). Ziesing developed a formal typology of porcelain buttons from the Boott Mills; all of the Cocumscussoc buttons can be described as her 'inkwell' shape (figure 18) (Ziesing 1989: 149). However, they are not a set; each button has a very slightly different shape. Three of the white buttons and the blue button are whole and undecorated. The other white button, number 128, is a fragment, but a 'pie-crust' design on the border, after Ziesing, is visible (figure 19).

lab. From the descriptions in the small finds catalogue we know that they are each 1.1 cm. in diameter, and number 167 is a fragment. From the information in the catalogue it appears that these buttons may have been unfinished blanks, with only one hole drilled in them before they were discarded (figure 20).

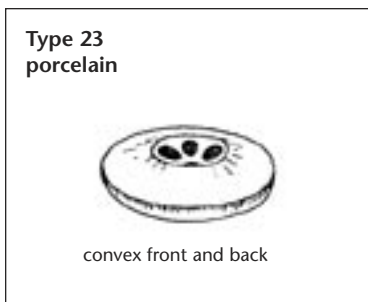
Discussion

The buttons in the collection provide physical evidence for the economic decline that we know from historical documents occurred at Cocumscussoc in the 19th century. The Updike family, owners of Cocumscussoc from 1692 to 1812, were prominent and well-to-do farmers and under their control the plantation prospered, at least until the early 19th century, when

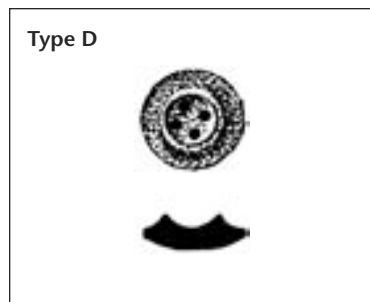
general farming conditions went into decline (Woodward 1971: 163). Given this knowledge, it is not surprising that many of the 18th century buttons found on the site are decorative and fancy rather than purely functional. Brass and whitmetal buttons dating to the mid-18th to early-19th century, like those from the site, were mostly put to decorative use. At least one brass button was originally silver-plated (Number 119) and others may have been gilt with gold, as was common with metal buttons until the 1840s (White 1977: 70). Some of the buttons from this period also have detailed designs on their face, including a floral design on number 36 and cross-hatching on number 39. Three other metal buttons are just the backing of what were originally more elaborate domed buttons, possibly faced with glass or design-impressed brass (numbers 50, 198, and 32); button number 173 has a decorative domed shape as well. All of these buttons would have been worn on fine men's clothing, either on the front of a vest, on the cuffs of a jacket or shirt, or on the sides of the knee britches, and possibly as decorations on fancy women's dresses. These types of buttons were used by the military, but were also

outbuildings (Woodward 1971: 173). The buttons from the site confirm these assertions; the mid- and late-19th century buttons, in contrast to the earlier buttons, are all cheap, functional examples. The porcelain buttons found were very inexpensive, mostly undecorated pieces, used to button up dresses and shirts rather than for any decorative purpose. The total paucity of late 19th century decorative buttons, including any made of glass or shell, tells us that the economic circumstances of those living at Cocumscussoc at this time required that they carefully curate their nice personal ornaments or that they were simply too poor to own any at all.

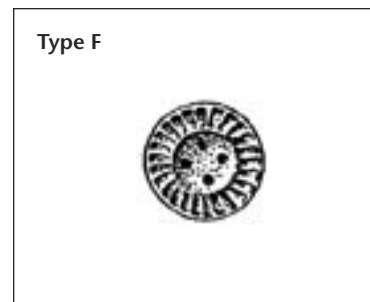
None of the buttons excavated at Cocumscussoc matched with any others; they were not discarded as sets of buttons on any one garment. Each button was lost or thrown away individually, ending up in the main foot traffic area between the waterfront and the front of the house, where a formal garden stood in the 18th century. Some of the buttons are broken; several metal buttons are missing their shanks, others are missing the fronts of their crowns; one porcelain button is broken in half. These buttons might have broken



17. Porcelain button.
(South, 1964)



18. Inkwell-shaped porcelain button.
(Ziesing, 1989)



19. Porcelain button with pie-plate design.
(Ziesing, 1989)

common in use among civilians. The bone buttons found at the site are examples of purely functional buttons from the 18th and early 19th century, and may have belonged to slaves or other laborers.

By the mid-19th century, however, the economic situation had changed at Cocumscussoc. The Updikes were forced to sell out in 1812; the land was divided up and changed hands numerous times in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The lot with the house was owned by five different families from 1812 to 1919, about whom almost nothing is known. It does seem clear that in these years the owning families were of much lower economic status than the Updikes had been; in these years the house plot now included a much reduced amount of farmland and only a few

and fallen off a piece of clothing while the wearer was walking between the house and shore, or they might have intentionally been thrown out there because they had broken. The cast shanks of whitmetal buttons wore through easily and the soldered-on wire shanks of brass buttons often snapped off. There was nothing one could do to repair these buttons, but a family who owned buttons of this type could probably afford to replace them quite easily.

There is evidence that some types of buttons were being produced at Cocumscussoc, and it seems that a few of the buttons found there may have been thrown away as leftovers or mistakes of production. One whitmetal button looks as if it was miscast, with the shank

—continued on page 14

Buttons (from page 13)



Nine of the twenty four buttons excavated at Cocumscussoc.
Photo courtesy of Patricia Rubertone.

extras cut off an old shirt or dress. Griggs (2001) and LaRoche and McGowan (2001) have both pointed out how mid-to-late 19th-century immigrants in the Five Points area of New York City made extra money as rag-pickers, selling rags they found in the street or in empty lots to paper mills or shoddy-cloth factories for pennies a week (Griggs 2001: 84). However, it does not seem likely that the families who were able to afford to live at Smith's Castle or were earning wages there were in such dire economic straits as to need the few cents that selling rags would have given them. People impoverished enough to pick rags would probably also save any porcelain buttons, however little they were worth, and reuse them as well. A more plausible theory is that old cloth would be used by the women of the house to make rag rugs or scrap quilts. Reuse of this kind reflected frugality and industry, not poverty. The fact that two of the porcelain buttons were excavated from the same unit and level, with a third in the next unit over, suggests that the buttons were discarded intentionally at the same time rather than having simply fallen off clothing.

Type 15

no off-set rim



bone disc

20. Bone button blank.
(South, 1964)

Type J
1750–1830

center hole to index-
turning tool



bone disc

21. Bone button.
(Olsen, 1963)

Type 19

center hole
for cutting tool

bone



back usually flat

22. Bone button.
(South, 1964)

not fully formed (number 35). Mistakes like this were common in home casting—if the mold and metal were not hot enough the metal would cool and set too quickly, before it could flow into the entire mold (Olsen 1964: 390). Bone buttons could also be made at home with simple cutting tools, and the examples from the site may have been blanks in the process of production, which could have been tossed out before completion for any number of reasons.

Interestingly, the 19th-century porcelain buttons may have been discarded because the cloth they were attached to was going to be reused. Porcelain buttons were very inexpensive, and it may not have been worth the trouble to save a few mismatched

The buttons found at Cocumscussoc perfectly reflect what we know about changing economic circumstances of the 18th- and 19th-century residents. When taken together, written sources and material objects can support each other, especially by providing researchers with insights into areas that one of the forms of evidence does not fully explain. Domestic economy and personal adornment are subjects that early documents are often silent on, in comparison with major property ownership and major sources of income. Small personal items such as buttons can tell us much about the conditions and realities of daily life, particularly for women—subjects little touched on in historical documents. ■

Artifact No.	Diameter (cm)	Attachment	Condition	Unit Number	Description
Whitemetal					
8	1.8	Self-shanked	Whole but corroded	N536 E575, L3	Mold seam
32	1.3	Shanked	Backing only	N540 E585, L3	
35	1.7	Self-shanked	Whole	N540 E590, L4	
38	1.6	Self-shanked	Broken shank	N524 E600, L3	
40	1.6	Self-shanked	Fragment, broken shank	N524 E600, L3	
106	2.0	Self-shanked	Whole but corroded	N540 E590, L5	Mold seam
147	1.8	Self-shanked	Badly corroded	N566 E588, L4	
173	1.5	Self-shanked	Whole	N530 E555, L3	Domed face, mold seam
Brass					
7	2.2	Shanked	Shank missing	N546 E588, L2	
36	1.2	Shanked	Whole	N534 E590, L3	Flower & fleur de lis design on face
37	2.4	Shanked	Whole	N540 E590, L3	Spun back
39	1.2	Self-shanked	Whole	N529 E595, L3	Cross-hatching design on face
50	1.2	Self-shanked	Backing only	N534 E595, L3	
119	1.3	Shanked	Whole	N529 E580, L2	"Plated" stamped on back
131	2.4	Shanked	Fragment, shank missing	N524 E580, L2	Iron shank
198	2.0	Shanked	Fragment of backing only	N530 E535, L3	
Porcelain					
41	1.1	Sew-through	Whole	N529 E595, L3	White
42	1.1	Sew-through	Whole	N529 E595, L3	White
43	1.1	Sew-through	Whole	N534 E595, L3	Blue
128	1.1	Sew-through	Fragment	N518 E600, L3	White, pie-crust border
141	1.1	Sew-through	Whole	N529 E580, L3	White
Bone					
26	1.1	Sew-through	Whole	N536 E575, L3	
110	1.1	Sew-through	Whole	N551 E600, L2	
167	1.1	Sew-through	Fragment	N540 E575, L2	

—continued on page 16

Buttons (from page 15)

Jillian Odland graduated from Brown University in 2003 with a degree in History and History of Art and Architecture. She earned a Master's degree in Material Culture from the University of London in 2005 and currently works as a historic site guide for the Minnesota Historical Society.

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Smith's Castle Archaeology Subject of Ongoing Study at Brown

The paper on buttons, the first in a series to appear in the *Castle Chronicle*, was written for a material culture course taught by Dr. Patricia E. Rubertone of Brown University's Anthropology Department in fall 2002. The course encourages students to think about material objects as sources of history by providing them with the skills for identifying and interpreting artifacts from historical archaeological sites. In 2002 and again in spring 2005, students learned by working first-hand with the artifact assemblage excavated from Cocumscussoc by Brown University (1989–1994) and the University of Rhode Island (1972–1973). Student projects from the material culture class—which in addition to this report include studies of chinaware and other ceramics, metal hardware and household items, smoking pipes, and glassware—represent the latest phase in Dr. Rubertone's long-term involvement in the excavation, conservation, and interpretation of Cocumscussoc's material record. Since the late 1980s, she and her students have attempted to make sense of that record, and to illuminate in new and important ways the lives and experiences of Cocumscussoc's European colonists (and later European Americans), African slaves, and Native Americans in the 17th through 20th centuries. The editors of the *Chronicle* are indeed grateful to Dr. Rubertone for sharing this and future papers with members of the Cocumscussoc Association.

Next time: *Traders and Tea Drinkers: Porcelain at Cocumscussoc* by Caroline Frank.

Arcadia Publishing, Images of America Series

North Kingstown: 1880–1920

G. Timothy Cranston

Smith Castle member and expert local historian, G. Timothy Cranston, has compiled a wonderful book of photographs of North Kingstown at the turn of the 20th century. Elwin “Doc” Young who owned the first

pharmacy in Wickford, at the present site of Brooks Pharmacy on Brown Street, took numerous photos of the town and its people that he sold as postcards in his store. Tim Cranston acquired the old glass plates and has reproduced them with excellent captions that reveal some information for the first time. The photos cover both the elite who traveled through Wickford from New York City and Boston on their way to their summer homes in Newport, as well as the ordinary town folk and their dwellings. On page 42 there is a photo of the “Richard Smith Blockhouse” taken by Young in the late 1800s when it was a private home, along with a view of the graves on the property. The photos are not confined to Wickford, but also include shots of the Rhode Island Militia training grounds at Quonset and a section devoted to mill villages. From tourist destinations to transportation and public places, Doc Young’s camera caught it all. This book will be a welcome addition to any Castle member’s library. ■

—Norma LaSalle



North Kingstown: 1880–1920

G. Timothy Cranston
Arcadia Publishing, Images of America Series
2005
\$19.99



A Doc Young postcard features the Great Grave memorial found on the grounds of Smith’s Castle.



This image of Smith’s Castle was taken by Doc Young in the late 19th century.

Daniel Updike's Waistcoat

Daniel Updike (1694–1757) was a prominent member of the Colony of Rhode Island. He was a lawyer and served as Attorney General for many years. As an important official of the Colony, Updike frequently entertained, early in his career in Newport and later at Smith's Castle. Updike's wardrobe reflected his wealth and social status as well as his prominent official position in the Colony.

One of Updike's waistcoats and a fine linen shirt, stitched and initialed by his second wife, Anstis Jenkins Updike, are in the collection of The Rhode Island Historical Society. Another waistcoat was donated to Smith's Castle by Clarkson Collins, an Updike family descendant, in 2000. It was in very bad condition, with much underarm and armscye wear, the back split in half, and some of the lining frayed.

The waistcoat front is very long and would come halfway down the thighs of the owner, whereas the back of this style waistcoat is short, ending at, or just below, the waistline. The fronts would have been ordered from a tailor, probably in London, Boston, or another large city. When delivered, the two pieces were lined and attached to a back that was constructed to fit the owner's girth. Very little other "fit" was required. Like the bright red waistcoat in Providence, ours is silk faille and cut velvet, in a soft blue green color. The long style was popular circa 1740–50.

The waistcoat remains quite faded and still shows wear, but major repairs were recently completed by the Textile Conservation Center at the University of Rhode Island's Fashion Merchandising and Tex-



Daniel Updike's waistcoat belonging to Smith's Castle is made of silk faille (a soft, transversely ribbed fabric). A cut velvet pattern in a foliate motif adorns the front.

tile Department. A new back was constructed and the armscye and lining areas were repaired. The waistcoat will likely be on exhibition in the Updike bedchamber in the summer of 2006. ■

—Linda Eppich, Chair
Collections Committee



The armscye (arm hole) of the waistcoat was well worn and required a patch of matching silk faille.



The back of the waistcoat was beyond repair and was completely replaced. Shorter than the front, it typically ended at, or just below, the waist of the wearer.



There are pockets with flaps on either side of the waistcoat. The buttons, probably wood, are covered with the background fabric.

This Spring at Smith's Castle

April

Day	Time	Event
Tuesday, 11	6:30–9:00 p.m.	Docent training #1
Tuesday, 18	6:30–9:00 p.m.	Docent training #2
Saturday, 22	8:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m.	Clean-up Day at the Castle Coffee, donuts, and lunch provided
Monday, 24	7:00 p.m.	Trustee meeting
Tuesday, 25	6:30–9:00 p.m.	Docent training #3

May

Day	Time	Event
Tuesday, 2	6:30–9:00 p.m.	Docent training #4
Saturday, 6 & Sunday, 7	Noon–4:00 p.m.	Bridge to the Past
Tuesday, 9	6:30–9:00 p.m.	Docent training #5
Saturday 13	9:30–11:00 a.m.	Docent training #6
Tuesday, 16	6:30–9:00 p.m.	Docent training #7
Saturday, 20	10:00 a.m.	Edible Flowers, a lecture by Susan Scotti

June

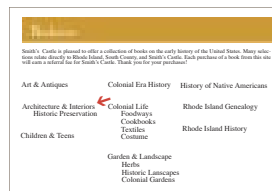
Day	Time	Event
Saturday, 10	Noon–4:00 p.m.	Strawberry Festival (rain date Sunday, June 11)
Monday, 19	7:00 p.m.	Trustee meeting

Earn \$\$\$ for Smith's Castle with 4 Clicks of Your Mouse

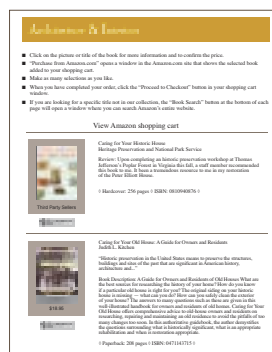
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Smith's Castle Garden Journal

Annuals—Perennial Favorites

The Colonial Revival Garden will feature some special new additions this year. We will be introducing annuals which are the species or 'wild' varieties of plants. These varieties would have been quite familiar to colonial New Englanders. Many of the species varieties have much simpler flowers than today's versions. For example, China Asters have been included in the Smith's Castle garden for several years. The China Asters that are widely available today feature a range of flower colors; the flowers have many petals and the plants are often less than a foot tall. The species variety which will be in the 2006 garden offers simple, single blue flowers; the plants are two to three feet tall. Other species annuals in the 2006 garden will include:

Snapdragon (*Antirrhinum majus*). The species variety plants are two to three feet tall and have deep wine red blossoms.

Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*). This plant, which in the 1700s was called Marygold, dates back to the Middle Ages. We will be growing the species type that has single yellow flowers, rather than the more elaborate versions often grown today.

Double white stock (*Matthiola incana*). Double white stock were popular even in Elizabethan times when they were known as Stockilloflowers. These tall plants have a very sweet fragrance and lovely white flowers.

Joseph's Coat (*Amaranthus tricolor*). These showy plants feature scarlet, yellow, green, and maroon leaves and reach a height of about six feet. They were popular in America from the early 1700s.

Stripped hollyhock (*Malva sylvestri*). This ancient favorite was also called cheese mallow since the seed pods look like little wheels of cheese.

Scabiosa "Black Knight" (*Scabiosa atropurpea*). This was a favorite in Britain in the 1600s where it was called Mournful Widow.

We will also be welcoming back Globe Amaranth, Larkspur, Canterbury Bells, and Balsam Impatiens.

Please be sure to stop by the garden and enjoy the show this summer. As always, if you are interested in being a part of the garden group, we'd enjoy your participation.

These plants and a good many other antique flowers and vegetables are available at:

Monticello (The Thomas Jefferson Foundation)

<http://store.yahoo.com/monticellostore>

Select Seeds, www.selectseeds.com

—Donna Shammass, chair
Garden and Grounds Committee



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