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Smith's Castle to Hold First Peoples' Summit

By John B. Dower

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Every day throughout Rhode Island, we encounter dozens of names of cities, towns, waterways, roads, and even businesses associated with words originating from the Indigenous people who were the first to inhabit the area that is now our state. Yet, many of us seldom give a second thought to the fact that the Narragansett people were here before Europeans, long before, and their ancestors were the first people living here perhaps as early as 30,000 years before the arrival of Roger Williams.

Much has changed in the nearly four centuries since the Narragansett encouraged Roger Williams and Richard Smith to establish trading operations at Cocumscussoc, the name the Indigenous people gave to the area just north of Wickford and the site of the grounds and historic house of Smith's Castle. In the mid-seventeenth century, Smith's Castle was a hub of trade and a meeting place for communication and negotiation between white settlers, most notably Roger Williams, and the Narragansett people. Unfortunately, it is also the site where the soldiers of the United Colonies of Massachusetts and Connecticut encamped before and after the brutal raid on the Narragansett camp at the Great Swamp, a tragic story of the past.

For the past seventy-plus years, Smith's Castle has been committed to public education and telling the story of the people and history of Cocumscussoc. In keeping with this tradition, on Saturday, October 2, 2021, from 9:00 AM until 3:30 PM, Smith's Castle will host a "First Peoples' Summit" that will bring members of the Narragansett community to the Castle once again for a day of presentations and discussion of the history, culture, and resilience of Rhode Island's First People.

"Our docents have introduced visitors to our site by invoking the Algonquian name of Cocumscussoc and acknowledging the land of the Narragansett for many years," said Bob Geake, President of the Cocumscussoc Association, the non-profit group that oversees Smith's Castle. "But we have made a concerted effort over the past few years especially, to have indigenous voices return to Cocumscussoc and be a part in the telling of the long and complicated history we present to the public."

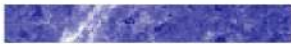
Smith's Castle has, in recent years, coordinated events with the Tomaquag Museum, and the same will be true of this event. Three participants, Tomaquag Museum Executive Director Lorén Spears, Professor Mack Scott, and Brown student Sherenté Mishitashin Harris have ties to the museum. In the words of Bob Geake, "This event carries on the tradition of the Narragansett language being spoken and sung at Cocumscussoc, and likewise continues the legacy of Roger Williams' respect for their culture and beliefs."

The event will also feature keynote speakers Patricia Rubertone, professor of Anthropology at Brown University, and author of the book *Native Providence: Memory, Community, & Survivance in the Northeast* and Christine DeLucia, associate professor of history at Williams College, and author of the book *Memory Lands: King Phillip's War and the Place of Violence in the Northeast*. Both speakers will discuss their works. Other presenters will discuss Land Acknowledgement, Tribal Rights as Sovereign Nations, Identifying as Indigenous, and Patriots of Color in the American Revolution and Beyond.

For hundreds of years, the story at Smith's Castle, and much of New England, had been focused on the European narrative. The First Peoples' Summit will be another step toward a greater understanding of the significant role played by the Indigenous people in the history of Rhode Island. The event is expected to attract anyone interested in the history of the first inhabitants of Rhode Island, including residents, historians, teachers, students, and those connected to the Indigenous communities. All are urged to attend.

For more information on the First Peoples' Summit, go to www.smithscastle.org. Tickets are \$40 per adult, \$25 for students, seniors, or members of Smith's Castle, and may be purchased on Eventbrite or by printing and sending in a registration form available on the Smith's Castle website. This event is made possible through the generosity of the North Kingstown Art Council and the Friends of Smith's Castle.





Letter From the President

by Robert A. Geake

As we enter the fall season we can look back on a summer that was filled with events. We saw large crowds appear at the Castle once again for Strawberry Festival and Harvest Fest. Our Tea and A Slice of History series has also done well, featuring presentations by the URI Master Gardeners, and our own docents Estelle Barrda, and Marilyn Harris. Lectures on the lawn have featured local historians Tim Cranston, Christian McBurney, Bob Geake, and Brian Wallin. Be sure to check the back page of this edition for upcoming lectures in October before the close of the season.

The success of our festivals and events would not be possible without our dedicated volunteers and docents. They have worked tirelessly this season on the Castle's behalf, and we owe them an enormous debt of gratitude. This year has seen an increase in volunteer inquiries, and I have asked former president Denise Boule to serve as a volunteer coordinator for future Castle events. She will work with each volunteer to find where their interests and skills best fit our needs for the future.

We are pleased to announce that the Castle received word from the Rhode Island Chapter of the Society of Colonial Wars that they have placed an application on our behalf for a grant from the national office that would match the \$1500.00 that the local chapter donated to Smith's Castle earlier this year. As the funds need to be used for specific projects, we have asked that if donated, these dollars go to restore and return the wooden sign at the north gate of the property, as well as to replace the Castle information kiosk above the parking lot.

As we look forward to those events after the change of season, we will be installing solar-powered spotlights to illuminate the parking area behind the Castle for those events that end after dark, and of course the paranormal tours that continue until the end of October.

As the season comes to a close we will be making some much needed renovations to the bathrooms and back rooms of the Annex, replacing toilets, vanities, and fixtures in both bathrooms and clearing space, adding shelving, and opening up both back rooms for use as a library. These changes advance our hope of holding meetings and classes in the Annex meeting room on a regular basis next season.

Smith's Castle Weathers Henri

When word came that a hurricane had set its path for the coastline of southern New England, Vice-President Maggie Skenyon quickly organized a group of volunteers to protect the historic house museum from the coming storm.

A platoon of volunteers including office manager Pete Lavalley, Denise Boule, Joyce Fuller, Max Ferrara, and Bob McBroom joined Maggie to secure the windows of the Castle, move and cover furniture away from the windows, and also secure and cover the outside bulkhead. The crew covered trail signs to prevent them from getting damaged, removed any objects that might cause damage from the wind, and placed sandbags of a sort around the basement windows at the front of the house.

President Bob Geake arrived after cutting short his vacation on the morning after the storm and found to his relief, little damage from Henri. Small limbs and leaf litter cluttered Richard Smith Drive and the parking area, but beyond that the only damage done to the grounds were a few limbs fallen in the side yard away from the house, and more small limbs and leaf litter on the trails and in the upper parking area. The one large tree that was blown over in the storm fell away from the Farm Road trail into the woods just beyond the parking area.

We are all thankful that the storm was not worse and for those volunteers who took the time to protect Smith's Castle.



Spinning Wheels Working Once Again



For some years our collection of spinning wheels, gossip wheels, and other early manufacturing machines involved with processing wool and flax have been incomplete. Parts came off and went missing, odds and ends were found and their usage went unknown. Our oldest docent Louise Duckworth was the fount of information on all these accoutrements, but with her passing, went much of the knowledge she possessed.

Just recently however, a young woman whom Louise had mentored stepped forward and volunteered to set all the wheels in motion again. Kailie Raynor is a spinner herself, and not only learned from Louise, but now has been gifted a pair of looms she once owned as well. In recent months we will ask Kaylie to explain the various wheels and devices that are displayed in the upper hall, as well as their use so that docents may have better knowledge of the display.

Tea's Celebrate Gardening, Herbal Care, & History

This year's series of Tea and A Slice of History were some of the highlights of our season's activities. Most were sold out, and featured a variety of activities..

Crafts, a tour and talk by the Master Gardeners, lessons on drying and infusing herbs, and historical interpretations were all presented through the ongoing series.

One of our highlights this year was the return of docent Estrelle Barada who gave a presentation on herbal remedies to a room of masked participants. Other teas, such as the Master Gardener's tour of the historic colonial garden, were largely held outside.

Such teas are another way that Smith's Castle's adult education programs try to present history "outside of the book". Whether by historical interpretation or revisiting remedies that were once household staples, the past can always present a new light.



Fall Calendar of Events at the Castle

Tuesday September 14th 6:00 p.m.

Brian Wallin

Learn about the famed Seaview Railway and trolley that carried passengers from East Greenwich to the beach at Narragansett during the roaring twenties...

Sunday, September 19th 4:30 p.m.

Tea & A Historical Interpretation

Sarah Updike Goddard (as portrayed by Marilyn Harris) will speak against the Stamp Act of 1765 and encourage your opposition to this tyranny

Saturday, October 2nd 9:00—3:30 p.m.

First Peoples' Summit

Tuesday October 5th 6:00 p.m.

James Murphy Esq.

Learn the fascinating story of how local Joshua Teft found himself caught up in the Great Swamp Fight and court-martialed for treason

Saturday, October 16th 11:00 a.m

Robert A. Geake

The local historian discusses the freedom and perils of soul liberty in his talk:

What Hath Roger Wrought: The Simmering Cauldron of Religious Thought in Rhode Island under Soul Liberty

Sponsored by the Roger Williams Family Assoc.

Saturday, October 16th 7:00 p.m.

Paranormal Tour: *please register for this event*

Tuesday, October 19th 6:00 p.m.

Charles Roberts & Fred Zillan

The Executive Director of the Rhode Island Slave History Medallion project, and historian Fred Zillan discuss RISHM's efforts to place medallions at historic sites of slavery throughout the state.

Saturday, November 20th 7:00 p.m.

Paranormal Tour: *please register for this event.*

Around and About Smith's Castle...



Friends of Smith's Castle have recently sent some unearthed photos from the late 19th and early 20th century. East Greenwich historian Rachel Pierce sent this photo of the entrance to the Castle (above) during the Babbit's ownership of the farm, and Tim Cranston passed along the interior photographs from 1927 of the Fox household (right). The Bottom photograph shows daughter Alice Fox Gerster, (left) and her mother Anna Hoppin Fox (right) seated by the fireplace in a chair that belonged to her ancestor Moses Brown.

