

MUSEUM PIECES

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Betsey Williams, Benefactor

Every year, more than 1.5 million people visit Roger Williams Park in Providence. Most of them do not know, and may not care, how the park came into being. But the person who gave her family farm to the city to create the park should be remembered, not only as a benefactor but as an independent woman.

Betsey Williams was born on June 29, 1790 in the house known as the Betsey Williams Cottage that still stands in the park. The house, built in 1773 for Betsey's parents, James Williams and Mary Waterman, was on the 102-acre farm Betsey inherited from family members.

The farm was all that remained of the 730 acres owned by Joseph Williams, Roger William's youngest son, who died in 1724. Both of Betsey's parents were descendants of Roger Williams through his son Joseph; Betsey was Roger's 3rd great granddaughter on her father's side and his 4th great granddaughter on her mother's side.

Betsey never married. In her will, made three years before her death in 1871, she donated her farm to the city for public use on the conditions that the



**Thursday, April 18th
at 7:00 p.m.**

city must "erect a monument to the memory of Roger Williams" costing not less than \$500, must name any use established on the property for Roger Williams, and must maintain the family cemetery on the property. She left her other real and personal property to relatives and friends.

Some people believed that only an eccentric woman would donate a valuable farm to the public. The Boston *Daily Advertiser* reported on Feb. 15, 1872 that Betsey's heirs planned to contest the will because she was of unsound mind. According to the paper, "her peculiarities were many." She required

visitors to remove their shoes, she required them to stand hatless before her many portraits of her distinguished ancestor, she was reluctant to spend money although her estate was worth \$2 million, and she read tea leaves every day before an altar in her home. Although there was no truth to any of it, the tale spread like wildfire. Different versions, with headlines such as "A Queer Old Woman," and "A Crazy Millionaire," appeared in newspapers in New York, Ohio, Tennessee, Indiana, Minnesota, and Oregon.

The Providence *Evening Press* made the mistake of printing a version of the story and was forced to apologize after a friend of Betsey's wrote an irate letter to the editor.

What was Betsey Williams really like?

On Thursday, April 18, Dr. Charlotte Carrington-Farmer, associate professor of history at Roger Williams University, will visit our Museum Gallery to talk about Betsey's bequest to the city, the radical life she lived with her sister, Rhoda, and her connection to Roger and Mary Williams.



The Wangunk:

A little-known but historically important Connecticut tribe

For more than two decades, archaeologist and ethnohistorian Timothy H. Ives has studied the Wangunk, a little-known but historically important central Connecticut Native American tribe. On Thursday, May 2, Dr. Ives will return to our Museum Gallery to tell us about his latest research into the tribe's history and its relations with European settlers.

The Wangunk occupied an area in and around what is now northern Middlesex County, including present Middletown, Portland, and Haddam. Their first reservation, established in 1673, contained about 300 acres of prime land, most of which was still in tribal possession when the reservation was surveyed in 1763.

Colonial-era documentation shows that members of the tribe contributed to the outbreak of the Pequot War, took part in King Philip's War, and maintained a colonial-era reservation in what is now Portland.

Land records show individual tribal members owning and selling parcels of land in the section of the reservation known as Indian Hill. In 1728, Bartlett Street was extended east through the Wangunk reservation. The survey team that measured and mapped the street included Cushoy, the Wangunk sachem.

Female members of the tribe exercised authority through the English legal system. Proprietors of reservation lands included women such as Moll "Wife of Sam," Susannah Pochomogue, Hannah Mamanash, and Prudence Hubban. Their signature marks appear on a 1760 document.

Under the leadership of the Christian preacher Samson Occum, a Mohegan, some Wangunks joined the Brotherton Movement, relocating to Oneida County, N.Y. in the 1770s. Other Wangunks continued to live in the Middletown area, and some of their descendants still live there today.

Dr. Ives is a senior archaeologist with Archaeological & Historical Services, Inc. in Storrs, Conn. He earned his B.A. in anthropology at the University of Connecticut, his M.A. in anthropology at the College of William and Mary, and his Ph.D. in anthropology at the University of Connecticut, and has published peer-reviewed research on a range of subjects including coastal archaeological surveys, colonial-era ethnohistory, and contemporary identity politics. He formerly was an adjunct professor at UConn's Anthropology Department, and he is a former principal archaeologist for the R. I. Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission.

Thursday, May 2 at 7:00 p.m. in our Museum Gallery



The Peace Dale Museum of Art and Culture

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The Lost Mill Villages of South County

Old mills are an essential element in southern New England's historic landscape. Water provided the power for 18th century grist mills and 19th century textile mills, so those mills, and the communities that grew around them, were located on rivers. At one time, the Wood, Pawcatuck, Saugatucket, and other local rivers and streams were studded with such villages. Some of those villages, such as Peace Dale and Wakefield, grew into modern communities, but others, such as Woodville and Burdickville, did not. Some former mill buildings have

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at 7:00 P.M.**

been repurposed, and live on as commercial or residential space. But in many places, stone foundations, dams, houses built for workers, and the names of the roads that connected one village to another are the only remaining evidence of once-thriving communities.

For several years, Mark Kenneth Gardner has been documenting the history of

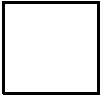
the lost mill villages of South County, including the ones he calls "liminal villages" that straddled the boundary of two towns.

On Thursday, May 16, Mark will be in our Museum Gallery to talk about some of the mill villages that have been lost, and some that have persevered in South County's post-industrial but still largely rural landscape.

Mark teaches U.S. history at Chariho Regional High School, is state coordinator for Rhode Island Model Legislature, and is the historian for the Western Rhode Island Civic Historical Society.



Peace Dale Museum of Art and Culture
1058 Kingstown Road
Peace Dale, RI 02879



Our Spring Lecture Series begins on Thursday, April 18th



The former mill site at Woodville, R.I.

Our 2024 Spring Lecture Series will take place in our Museum Gallery. The programs also will be live-streamed so our members and friends are able to watch the programs live on a computer or other device. To watch the live stream, go to our YouTube page at

<https://www.youtube.com/@pdmac6899>