

# MUSEUM PIECES

The Newsletter of The Peace Dale Museum of Art and Culture

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## Roger Williams and His World *A History in Documents*



National Park Service

Roger Williams – his name is everywhere in Rhode Island. But how much do we really know about him? Charlotte Carrington-Farmer, Professor of History at Roger Williams University, believes that one way to understand Roger Williams and the complexity of his life is to read documents created during his lifetime.

Professor Carrington-Farmer's new book, *Roger Williams and His World: A History in Documents*, reproduces forty documents that illuminate Williams's world, his beliefs, and his interactions with others. She explains each document in the context of William's life and times by defining 17th century words and concepts, and she invites us to read the original text and decide for ourselves what it tells us about Williams.

The first document is a map of London, Williams's birthplace, as he

knew it. The last is excerpts from Williams's book *George Fox digg'd out of his burrows*, published in 1676, a description of William's public debate with Quakers and his disagreements with George Fox, the founder of the movement. Williams was no fan of Quakers, but he allowed them to live in Rhode Island and practice their faith freely because of his profound belief in "soul liberty."

In between are documents written throughout Williams's life, including the deed to Providence from the Narragansett sachems; excerpts from William's 1643 book *A Key into the Language of America* ("It is a strange truth, that a man shall generally find more free entertainment and refreshing amongst these Barbarians, then amongst thousands that call themselves Christians"); letters he wrote as a government official, and his

private correspondence with friends. In a 1641 letter to Massachusetts Bay Colony Gov. John Winthrop, Williams complains about the antiauthoritarian Samuel Gorton, a founder of Warwick ("Master Gorton having foully abused high and low at Aquidneck, is now bewitching and bemaddening poor Providence . . ."). In a 1676 letter, probably addressed to his brother Robert, he describes the devastation caused by King Philip's War ("We see smokes rise from Pawtuxet and from my Daughter Mercies House in the Woods . . .").

On Thursday, April 3 at 7:00 p.m., Professor Carrington-Farmer will be in our Museum Gallery to talk about Roger Williams's personal, political, and spiritual worlds and how the documents in her book help us understand them. The program is the first in our 2025 Spring Lecture Series.

***Our Spring Lecture Series Begins on Thursday, April 3 in the Museum Gallery.***

# Conflict Archaeology and the Battle of Rhode Island

In August of 1778, British troops had been in control of Newport and the rest of Aquidneck Island for nineteen months. The Rhode Island Campaign, the first joint French and American campaign of the Revolutionary War, was aimed at taking back the island.

But the campaign did not proceed according to plan. A major naval battle off the coast, and a hurricane that damaged the French fleet, meant that the Americans had to take on the British forces and their German auxiliaries without the help of the French. The American forces, made up of Continental, state and militia units from throughout New England, traded cannon fire with the British near Easton's Pond, but the engagement was a stalemate.

On Aug. 28, when Gen. John Sullivan learned that British reinforcements were on their way, he decided to order an American withdrawal. Gen. Robert Pigot ordered his British and German troops to attack the retreating Americans. He expected a rout, but what happened instead was seven hours of confrontations between the opposing forces that took place throughout Portsmouth— including three



**THURSDAY  
APRIL 24  
at 7:00 p.m.  
with JAY WALLER**

successive German attacks on the Americans on the western side of the island that were repulsed by the First Rhode Island Regiment, made up of white, Black, and Indigenous troops. Those confrontations, which enabled a successful American retreat from Aquidneck Island, are known collectively as the Battle of Rhode Island.

Butts Hill Fort, the American command center during the battle and the largest Revolutionary War earthwork in southern New England, is on the National Register of Historic Places and is maintained by the nonprofit

Battle of Rhode Island Association (BoRIA). But many locations in Portsmouth where fighting took place have never been studied. Most have been developed, and only a few sites remain that can reveal information about the battle and its participants.

In 2022, a group of volunteers began preliminary archaeological investigations at two privately-owned properties in Portsmouth. The battle-related items discovered during four days of metal detecting include a British coin, musket balls, a coat button, knee buckles, and shoe buckles. The location and condition of such items can disclose important information about what type of confrontation took place and who took part in it— information not necessarily included in official reports of the engagement.

Jay Waller, a Senior Archaeologist and Principal at The Public Archaeologist Laboratory, Inc., was one of the volunteers who investigated the two Portsmouth properties. On Thursday, April 24, Jay will be in our Museum Gallery to talk about what has been discovered, why it's important, and what may yet be found.

*All the programs in our Spring 2025 Lecture Series will take place in our Museum Gallery. The programs also will be live-streamed so our members and friends can watch live on a computer or other device. To watch, go to <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQZtR6kJyDMO1v0AKQoYrHA>*

## The Peace Dale Museum of Art and Culture

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## Historic New England's Rhode Island Properties



Casey Farm in Saunderstown

Historic New England (HNE), previously known as the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, is the oldest and largest regional preservation organization in the United States. It owns 38 properties, four of them in Rhode Island.

The Arnold House in Johnston and the Clemence-Irons House in Johnston are rare "stone-enders" with massive chimney end walls. The Arnold House, built by Eleazer Arnold in 1693, and the Clemence-Irons House, built by Richard Clemence in 1691, feature the type of stonework done by settlers from the west of England.

The other two Rhode Island properties are historic farms. Watson Farm, in Jamestown, is a 265-acre working farm where heritage Red Devon cattle and multi-colored sheep are raised. The house, built in 1796, is still used as the farmers' residence.

Casey Farm in Saunderstown is HNE's most-visited site, hosting about 50,000 visitors a year. The 300-acre farm was owned by one family from 1702 until 1955, when the last owner donated it to HNE. Casey Farm is a Rhode Island Certified Organic farm, growing vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers and raising barnyard animals. Its Climate Action Plan is the first such site-specific plan HNE has adopted.

Join us on Thursday, May 22 when Dan Santos, HNE's Site Administrator for Southern New England, will talk about HNE's Rhode Island properties, with a particular emphasis on Casey Farm. We will learn about the history of the properties, the people who lived in them, and how they are shared with the public today.

The program will take place at 7:00 p.m. in the Museum Gallery.

**Thursday, May 22 at 7:00 p.m. in the Museum Gallery**



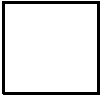
Watson Farm



Arnold House



Clemence-Irons House



## **Do you have a Peace Dale relic?**

Our Museum Educators, who conduct tours of Peace Dale's historic sites, would like to be able to show visitors, especially students, what was made or used or seen at those sites. Do you have a piece of fabric or a piece of clothing made at the mill? Do you have a coin used at the mill store or an advertisement for the mill store? If you do, please get in touch with Julie Wardwell, our office administrator, at 401-783-5711.