

Royall House Reporter



Royall House & Slave Quarters

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2010-2011

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COMPLETING THE PICTURE

The 2010 season was a busy and exciting time for the Royall House and Slave Quarters. By August, the carpenters and painters had departed the Kitchen and Kitchen Chamber, leaving behind freshly painted rooms in historically accurate colors. To further enhance the interpretation of the women and men who worked and lived in them, these spaces needed appropriate furniture, textiles, and equipment.

The furnishing plan written by Margaret Vetare for the Royall House and Slave Quarters earlier in 2010 provided the board of directors and executive director with a road map and shopping list for creating a truly immersive experience for visitors. As an ad hoc committee formed to procure these important pieces, its members then had to discuss some of the deeper implications of furnishing these rooms. Should these items be original antiques or reproductions? If they were reproduced, how “old” should they look, and how could they be appropriately aged? Should all objects of one material (for example, redware) all be purchased from the same source or from several?

These questions hint at the challenge of restoring and reinterpreting work spaces like kitchens. Most kitchens likely consisted of a collection of pots, bowls, and tools accumulated over a period of time. While some items were probably purchased in sets and in multiples



Royall House Kitchen with just a few of its furnishings and objects installed.

from the same potter or ironworker, replacements that resulted due to breakage and loss were likely slightly different in shape, style or color. Restored kitchens in house museums often look a bit too well matched and “clean” despite the fact that they were very functional spaces in which aesthetics were not a priority.

One of the biggest challenges faced by the committee was how to interpret the 115 pounds of pewter listed in the 1739 inventory in this room. Ultimately we decided to display a quantity of the most common pieces: two sizes of plates and a selection of hollow-ware. A total of fifty-four pieces were purchased from Woodbury Pewter in Connecticut, all from eighteenth-century prototypes. The pewter arrived as shiny as mirrors, which would have been completely normal to eighteenth-century eyes. The plates will be arranged on dresser shelves opposite from the windows. This was a standard storage method that brightened the room with reflected light.

of his suit and commission the tailor to make them. The average man would have inherited one each—waistcoat, breeches, and coat—from father, uncle, or older brother. At some time in his life, he would have had one each made. The cost of the fabric to make his shirt would have cost a week’s wages and another for the dressmaker to make it. The average man would not ever have had three pieces that even went together color-wise as we think today.”

However, Rick proposed replicating the waistcoat Isaac wears in Robert Feke’s 1741 painting, *Isaac Royall and His Family*. The result is a stunning and thought-provoking addition to the installation, located just around the corner from a copy of the Feke painting in the second floor hall.

Turning again to the inventory, we needed to accurately represent the “beds and bedding” used by the enslaved Africans in the Winter Kitchen and Kitchen Chamber. A search on Etsy, the e-commerce website focused on handmade and vintage items, led us to “grainsack,” an online purveyor of antique linens. We purchased six antique handwoven and handloomed hemp linen grain sacks that likely once held rice, oats, or flour. Though in the mid-1700s such pallets would probably have been stuffed with straw, we filled ours with materials less likely to draw pests, then stitched closed the open side to create a simple thin mattress. Lengths of wool in historically appropriate colors, purchased from Ruth Konrad of Liberty Linens, make simple blankets to complete this bedding.



Inspired by Isaac Royall's portrait, this vest reminds visitors that both sides of the household used this space.

In the Kitchen Chamber, an elegant man’s waistcoat awaits its wearer on a chair before a mirror. Margaret Vetare noticed while studying Isaac Royall Sr.’s 1739 probate inventory that there was a “looking glass” in the Kitchen Chamber but none across the hall in the Royalls’ bedroom. So we made the bold interpretive decision to present the Kitchen Chamber as

a space used both by the Royalls as a dressing room and by enslaved Africans as a sleeping chamber and work space.

Rick Haven, co-owner with his wife Carol of Just Two Tailors, purveyors of historically-accurate eighteenth century clothing for museums and re-enactors, made the perfect waistcoat a reality. Viewing the 1769 John Singleton Copley portrait of Isaac Royall Jr. at age 50, Rick remarked, “The Copley painting is representation enough that Isaac Royall was quite wealthy. The term ‘a man all cut from the same cloth’ indicated that a man was wealthy enough to afford the necessary fabric for all three pieces



A simple bed for enslaved residents features materials like those used for the pallets.

FORGING A PARTNERSHIP

As part of the ad hoc furnishing committee, I volunteered to research and acquire the iron objects for the kitchen hearth. I was familiar with the Assabet Regional Technical High School and its metal fabrication department where they teach traditional forging techniques and offer the only high school program in ornamental blacksmithing in Massachusetts. The instructor, Neil Mansfield, is an enthusiastic and knowledgeable welder who has a knack for engaging the students in extracurricular forging competitions and community service-oriented projects, teaching them valuable life lessons in the process. I immediately sensed a great opportunity for collaboration.

I spent the day with Neil and his students at the school's metal fabrication shop to discuss the project. Neil also brought Fred Mikkelsen into the mix. Fred is on the board of directors at New England Blacksmiths, a member of the Connecticut Blacksmith's Guild, and an invaluable addition to the project. Fred was kind enough to bring both original eighteenth-century forged objects and reproductions from the South County Museum and Farm in Naragansett, Rhode Island, where he also

holds forging demonstrations. Justin Cameron, a graduate of Assabet's welding program, returned to help with the project. Using these loaned objects, and some photographs and books, Justin sketched and measured while Fred offered his technical expertise, and we came up with specifications for a trammel, two skillets, a gridiron, and various cooking utensils. The students milled around the work table, moving back and forth from ongoing projects, while Fred talked about the styles and techniques used by colonial New England blacksmiths. Neil kept the ship running, encouraging the students to take part in the project, and fielding endless



Blacksmith Fred Mikkelsen with students Devin Miller and Micheal Ferrer.



Fred Mikkelsen demonstrating blacksmithing techniques for the Assabet students.

questions from the students.

Neil and the students have since begun forging the objects for the hearth, and their works will be unveiled in the Winter Kitchen this spring. Fred has generously donated his time and knowledge to the project, returning to the school to give demonstrations and guidance, ensuring that the objects remain true to the methods and styles of the period. The students are excited about their contributions to the history of the Royall House and Slave Quarters, and we are excited and grateful to have them on board!

Theresa Kelliher
Collections Committee Member

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The tour season has ended (except for the brave souls who don't mind going through an unheated house) and in November we hosted a successful program by the redoubtable Benjamin Carp. Countless leaves on the grounds have found their way into countless leaf bags, thanks to our landscape volunteers. The gutters have been cleaned and oiled for the coming months.

We had a busy tour season, with a mixture of individuals, families and group tours. Overall, tour visitorship was up about 30% over last year, thanks mostly to group visits, but also an increase in late summer and fall weekend visits. We hosted teacher training seminars, college classes, after school programs and retiree outings. We are seeing repeat visits as well as new classes, professors, and teacher groups. A very big thank goes out to our weekend tour guides and those who helped out during the week!

Our Reinterpretation Project moved ahead in a big way over the summer and fall. Next to be installed will be a "wall of pewter" (polished in eighteenth-century fashion) in the Kitchen. Additional ironware, a butter churn, redware and pottery will complete that phase of the project. Public reaction to the revised tour and "new" rooms has been very positive. As I often tell visitors, the people who lived here are long gone, but we can tell their stories through the narrative, physical environment and material objects. The new rooms greatly reinforce our ability to tell the story of what happened here.

We're entering what rural New Englanders called "the quiet of winter," which is a good time to step back a little and ask ourselves how we doing as a public history resource. A little context behooves us. First, every organization moves through stages of development. Second, like all organizations, our ability to advance our mission is directly related to our human and financial resources. Third, to ensure organizational growth and success, these two factors must move in sync.

On the interpretive front, we have moved some distance beyond a traditional house museum. Our tour, educational outreach and programming are primarily centered on our mission to tell the stories of the two groups of people who lived here. This is a story central to American history and

the development of the society in which we live (and in which future generations will live.) As importantly, we are ahead of the curve when it comes to interpreting and presenting this history. This is not meant to be a normative statement, but it was certainly borne out in a New England Museum Association panel discussion on interpreting Colonial slavery in which I recently participated. It was interesting to hear how other sites are addressing (or not, as the case may be) their historic connections to slave trading, slaveholding, and the Triangle Trade. Of course, the survival of the Slave Quarters, the record (and evidence) of the Royalls' prominence and wealth, and recent advances in reinterpretation all ensure (and reinforce) the centrality of this history at our site. But the widespread presence of chattel slavery in eighteenth-century New England means that a host of connections and concomitant interpretive opportunities exist at many house museums, industrial sites, and local or regional history museums.

Ironically, I suppose, the very fact that we are "ahead of the curve" has created opportunities and obligations that are stretching our institutional resources. We will need additional resources to handle both the day-to-day operations and the development of the institutional and academic partnerships that will carry us to the proverbial next level. The board and I are working to address this issue; of course, our ability to move forward will depend in no small measure on the support of everyone who shares the goals of the Royall House and Slave Quarters. Stay tuned.

One final comment is surely in order. None of our success would be possible without your generous support—we thank you, and we hope you will stay with us on this exciting journey.

Tom Lincoln
Executive Director

NEWS BRIEFS

Special thanks to **Rob Dilman** of Bestsellers Cafe for serving as our cheerful volunteer bookseller, supplying the museum shop with relevant titles and arranging sales when our public programs feature authors discussing their recent books.

Thank you to **Deborah Timby**, who donated a set of beautiful architectural drawings made at the Royall House by her late father, **Albert F. Bird**, in 1934.

The **2010 Tour Season** was very successful. Visitation was up about 30% over last year. Special thanks go out to our intrepid volunteer guides: **Linnea Bennett, Ryan Hayward, Elizabeth Merrick, Ted Raia, Clara Read, Dale Rider, and Brenda Rosenberg**, and board members **Margen Kelsey, Mike Oliver, Penny Outlaw, Jennifer Pustz, and Gracelaw Simmons**. Some of our guides and board members also staffed the shop this season, and **Liz Ammons** and **Karen Manning** provided additional shop coverage.

We welcomed 422 sixth grade students from Medford Public Schools for tours in October. Special thanks go out to **Beth Fuller, Ryan Hayward, Margen Kelsey, Dale Rider, and Gracelaw Simmons** for their help with these groups.

The Landscape Committee (**Lindsay Rider**, Chair) kept our grounds and gardens in great shape, despite a very hot summer. They finished the year with two epic leaf-raking days in November. Thanks to all who helped!

We exhibited at the **re-enactment event** held at the Mystic Riverbend Park in Medford. This first-ever encampment was organized by member **Ryan Hayward** and the **Stow Minutemen** and brought several hundred people to learn about 18th century soldiering, muskets and camp life. We look forward to an expanded event next year!

Executive Director **Tom Lincoln** spoke on a panel about interpreting colonial slavery at the **New England Museum Association (NEMA)** annual

meeting in November.

Special thanks are due to **Kathryn Kucharski, Jay Hurd, and Pamela Speciale**, for contributing refreshments—including, of course, tea—for the November program by **Benjamin Carp** on his new book, *Defiance of the Patriots: The Boston Tea Party and the Making of America*.

Just after the first of the year, a group of board members visited Historic New England's Coffin House in Newbury, Massachusetts, to do a close inspection of the kitchen's rare eighteenth-century dresser. **Ken Germann** (pictured below), a local cabinetmaker, accompanied the group. Ken will be building a replica that will be installed in the Winter Kitchen. The Royalls most likely would have had such a piece to store and display their pewter.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: DALE AND LINDSAY RIDER

Dale and Lindsay Rider are among our most active and versatile volunteers. They donate time and energy in large quantities to the Royall House and Slave Quarters year round. Tom Lincoln, Executive Director, caught up with them at the end of the fall tour season to learn the source of their interest and passion and get their insights into how things are going.

How did you first learn about the Royall House and Slave Quarters?

We had been aware of and visited the Royall House since moving to Medford in 1976. Lindsay met Rosemarie Woods while working at a Medford company and volunteered in 2006 to help her with a quilt show that was being done at the Royall House. It was through her we became involved with the Royall House and volunteering. Dale started as a Tour Guide in Spring 2007.

Do you have a general interest in history, or is your interest in something more specific?

(Dale) I've always been a history buff of sorts. I grew up in upstate New York's Mohawk Valley and was fascinated with colonial forts and battles, and the Iroquois Indian nation. I've always been intrigued with the old castles of England and Europe. When we moved into our "historic" house, it prompted our interest in the local history.

You have gotten more and more involved as volunteers – how did that happen?

We are really doing pretty much what we've always done, just perhaps spending a little more time at it, so we are a little more visible.

What do you most about working as a volunteer? Least?

Most, the sense of community and its history is enjoyed and appreciated by the involvement. As a guide, Dale loves telling visitors to the Royall House the fascinating story of the Royalls and their slaves and that period of time. Lindsay: The hard part is seeing how much needs to be done and not always having the resources (think money and/or people) to do it. It's kind of sad sometimes.

What do you like most about what we're up to here at the RH and SQ?

The renovation of the kitchen quarters [the Reinterpretation Project] is terrific!

Do you have a favorite object/artifact?

Dale: the cameo of Isaac Jr. by John Singleton Copley.

Lindsay: the fireplaces with the tile surrounds – lovely.

Do you have a favorite part of the landscape?

Dale: The summer house (or remains of) and the Beech tree.

Lindsay: The bench setting at the end of the path.



Any words of wisdom for other volunteers?

Try to make whatever you are volunteering at a learning experience to keep up your interest and motivation.

What would you like to see here in 5 years?

1. An increased awareness within the general public of the Royall House and Slave Quarters.
2. Funding efforts for regular upkeep and maintenance of grounds and buildings

Other comments, insights, anecdotes, etc.?

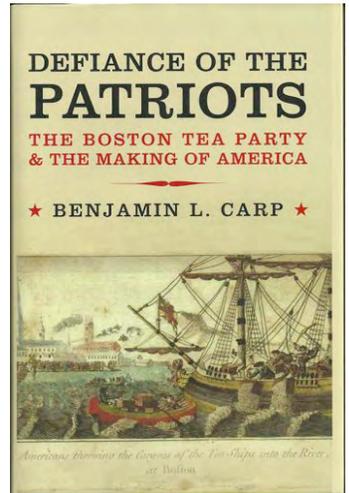
Dale: To think that we came close to losing the RH and SQ a century ago is distressing. It is such a jewel and a unique example of our American history. Medford is very fortunate to have such a place preserved here in our own city. I find it a little alarming that so many people are not aware of it. I am encouraged by the growth in visitorship in the past several years and hope it continues.



It isn't too late to contribute to the 2010-2011 Annual Appeal. Please help us ensure the continued success of the Royall House and Slave Quarters by making a generous contribution. You'll see the benefits all around you as we forge ahead into 2011 (and beyond)!

PROGRAM NEWS

A capacity crowd gathered on November 17 for the first public program of the 2010-2011 season. Benjamin Carp, Associate Professor of History at Tufts University, offered a stimulating overview of his acclaimed new book on the Boston Tea Party of 1773, *Defiance of the Patriots: The Boston Tea Party and the Making of America*, which looks at the Tea Party from both a global and a local perspective.



In his talk, Professor Carp drew out the connections between the Tea Party and the Royall House and Slave Quarters, where he regularly brings the students in his Tufts classes. The tremendous rise in tea consumption in the eighteenth century spurred the development of the Caribbean sugar plantation system that enriched the Royals and was based on the uncompensated labor of enslaved Africans. Tea and sugar were both emblematic of a complex, interdependent imperial economy.

Professor Carp also noted that the preservation of the Royall House and Slave Quarters at the beginning of the 20th century was catalyzed by the Sarah Bradlee Fulton chapter of the DAR, named in tribute to the woman remembered as the “mother of the Boston Tea Party.” Participants in the destruction of the valuable cargo were not publicly named until decades after the event, when verification was difficult. While Fulton’s own participation in the Tea Party remains unconfirmed, Professor Carp outlined her personal connections to known participants and suggested that further research might yet substantiate the memories of her role in the events on Boston Harbor on December 16, 1773.

Professor Carp’s book, published by Yale University Press in October, has already been widely and favorably reviewed. Copies are available for sale at the Royall House and Slave Quarters Shop.

Public Program at the Slave Quarters
March 16, 2011 – 7:30 p.m.

**Music Concert: Tufts University's
Kiniwe Ghanian Performance Ensemble**

Director - Nani Agbeli

Join us for our first-ever concert of Ghanaian music. Tufts University's Kiniwe Ghanian Performance Ensemble will perform traditional music of Ghana, under the direction of Nani Agbeli. Mr. Agbeli, a native of the Ewe from the Volta Region of Ghana, has been a guest artist at schools in Ghana, Jamaica, and the United States. He is the founder/director of Woezo: Drum, Dance, and Art of West Africa, an organization named for the Ewe word meaning "You are welcome! My house is your house," which offers educational programs in Ghanaian arts and culture. This evening will begin with a short performance, followed by an explanation of the components and an interactive opportunity for the audience to play!



Nani Agbeli



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