

Royall House Reporter



Royall House & Slave Quarters

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IN THE KITCHEN

Many Americans see the kitchen as the heart of the home. Today, this is the place where we prepare our meals, entertain, pay the bills, and help the kids with their homework. Visitors to the Royall House's winter kitchen over the past one hundred years have probably imagined its kitchen hearth in a similar way, with its small dining table set with pewter plates and a cradle and child's chair suggesting the presence of family. This interpretation of the colonial kitchen was common in New England house museums and period rooms in the early twentieth century. The presence of spinning wheels and cooking tools reminded visitors that colonial women worked here, but this labor was presented with a romantic glow.

The kitchen was indeed the hub of activity in the Royall House, but it was the heart of the home in a very different way. For the Royalls, this was a work space, a place Elizabeth Royall likely visited infrequently, and when she did, she would have been there for "business" reasons, such as to deliver provisions and discuss meal plans with the enslaved cook. The work of the cook (and that of those who assisted her) was hardly the stuff of romance.



One year ago, the Royall House and Slave Quarters had already made a commitment to reinterpreting the second floor above the kitchen. Since then, a \$45,000 grant by the 1772 Foundation has allowed us to expand the project to include the winter kitchen and the staircase that connects the two rooms. The new look for these three spaces will help us present the story of the enslaved Africans who worked and lived there more accurately. Since receiving notification of the grant this spring, the board and our executive director have been busy with this project's planning stages, which have included studying available evidence in our archives and in the spaces themselves, engaging consultants to examine paint evidence and recommend furnishings for the kitchen and the chamber above, and meeting with contractors to plan the physical work. During the course of the 2010

tour season, visitors will have the opportunity to see these rooms take shape.

As of this writing, preparation for the project is largely complete and the physical work is just beginning. Board member Anne Donaghy and volunteer Theresa Kelliher completed a detailed inventory and photographed hundreds of items formerly in the kitchen. These objects were stored in preparation for the carpenters and painters. Carpentry has begun. The guided tour has also been rerouted to begin in the winter kitchen to bring the story of the Royall House's enslaved residents to the foreground.

To ensure a uniform look, we will restore the service stairway from the first floor to the third. This will involve painting the treads and risers a color that is more consistent with their original unpainted pine. Paint analysis suggests there was a black "dado band" on the walls of the staircase, which kept dirt from showing on the walls, which will be covered in faux whitewash.

Most of the carpentry work will take place in the kitchen chamber, starting with extensive restoration work on the two window surrounds, sashes and sills. Research has shown that the current interior shutters were installed later than 1750, so they will be removed and stored. Based on the results of paint analysis, the walls will be covered in a faux whitewash and the trim will be a brownish red. The baseboards will be painted black, as they were in the 1700s, again most likely because it hid dirt.

All the physical work will be approached with a goal of reversibility, should new research come to

light or should those who follow us decide to present another period of time. When we are in doubt about when a feature was added to a room, it will remain. The kitchen presents many such challenges because later owners of the Royall House made changes as kitchen technology advanced and styles changed. Early twentieth century restorations were not documented in detailed reports and further complicate our understanding of which material is original or appropriate to the period of 1739-1760.

Once the physical restoration is complete, these rooms will be brought to life with furnishings and objects that will evoke the lives of the people who worked and lived in them. We have received the initial draft of a comprehensive furnishings analysis from Margaret Vetare, a restoration consultant with particular expertise in interpreting northern colonial slavery. Using Isaac Royall, Sr.'s 1739 probate inventory, evidence retrieved from the archaeological dig on the site, and her knowledge of material culture of this era, Ms. Vetare has recommended installations for these rooms that will bring these spaces and their past inhabitants to life.

This summer promises to be a very busy one for us at the Royall House and Slave Quarters. The reinterpretation of these important spaces will allow us to present the intertwined lives of the Royalls and the enslaved Africans who lived here in a way that few house museums in this region can. If you haven't been to the Royall House in a while, this is a great time to come for a tour and see this exciting project unfold.

We are grateful to the 1772 Foundation for its significant support of this reinterpretation project. The foundation supports restoration projects throughout the United States and has a particular focus on opportunities to present little known aspects of the history of African Americans.

We also thank the Eastern Bank Charitable Foundation for its continued support of our public education work.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This past winter I attended a two-day conference in Providence entitled *The Business of Preservation: Northeast African American Historic Sites Sustainability Workshop*. My experience provided a chance to reflect on where we are as an organization devoted to public history.

During my tenure here, we have undertaken major changes that have moved us from a traditional house museum to a site with a primary focus on the stories of colonial slavery. This transition has been interesting, not always linear, and fraught with questions both practical and philosophical. Most of these questions were asked, and many answered, in Providence.

The *Business of Preservation* conference was sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the 1772 Foundation, and the John Brown Center. There were about 30 sites and projects represented from seven northeastern states. Organizations varied greatly; some were brand new, most were small, and their focuses ranged from the 18th to the 20th century, with most in the 19th century.

The conference covered a wide range of institutional development and sustainability topics. The presenters were experts from the consulting business, the National Trust, and museum professionals. They focused on best practices, practical solutions, and engaged in a lively, varied and multi-faceted dialogue with the attendees, who were passionate and sometimes outspoken (just the way I like it!).

The best part of the conference, of course, was the opportunity to talk with those who are in the same “business” we are, and are focused on people and subjects that have too often been long neglected. The types of sites represented at the conference varied widely: meeting houses; a farm; houses; a baseball stadium; commercial buildings and estates. Most consist of a single site with one small building. Collectively, they reflected the incredible range of African American history, from stories of

individual fortitude to collective struggle, in urban, rural and suburban settings, and dating from the height of slavery in the U.S. to the Civil Rights movement.

Several themes came up in these conversations. First, it is passion that makes any of this possible, no matter how small the organization, how new the effort, or how daunting the prospects. Second, despite our venerable nature, our mission and focus at the Royall House and Slave Quarters are on the cutting edge of public history. Third, there was a strong sense that African American history has been neglected, and there is a lot of catching up to do on the public history front. Fourth, the contextual picture doesn't make it any easier; we all live and operate in a society with a short attention span. Finally, if one is not having fun doing this work, one might think of another way to spend one's time.

These myriad conversations also yielded management, fundraising and outreach tips to consider in our own development. Commiseration was also in evidence on the difficulties of board and membership development (including diversity issues), the perennial need for more money, and the hope that more people would be interested in history.

Most gratifying, however, were the comments that confirm that we are doing quite well. People commented favorably on our mission (I should say very favorably), how we handle tours, the AAC, our outreach to teachers, and other aspects of what we do here in Medford. And, we had a lot of laughs.

We made some friends at the meeting, and I hope that subsequent events will give us even more valuable information and insights. (Now if they'd only hold the conference somewhere a little warmer.)

Tom Lincoln
Executive Director

NEWS BRIEFS

The **Spring Celebration** on May 22, 2010, was a big success. Over one hundred guests enjoyed the food, conviviality and an insightful and provocative talk by M. T. Anderson (below), author of the *Octavian Nothing* novels, whose hero grows up in slavery in eighteenth-century Boston. Special thanks to our sponsors and **Elizabeth Merrick, Matt Pustz, Ted Raia, Clara Read, and Brenda Rosenberg**. Signed copies of the *Octavian Nothing* novels are available in the Museum Shop.



This year's **Annual Meeting** on May 19 featured a fascinating talk by Liz Fisher of the SEA Semester program on the Maroons, the formerly enslaved persons who fled bondage and established independent communities in the Caribbean at the height of the sugar plantation era in the eighteenth century. She compared the Maroons of Jamaica and their counterparts in the Danish and British Virgin Islands, Vieques, Antigua, Tortola and Puerto Rico.

Thank you to our Annual Meeting and Spring Celebration bakers: **Beverly Cohen, Jay Hurd, Margen Kelsey, Kathryn Kucharski, Tom Lincoln, Jennifer Pustz, and Pamela Speciale**.

Rex Passion, an expert on historic restoration and repairs, has offered to advise the Royall House and Slave Quarters on maintaining the architectural fabric of our two buildings. He began

work this spring with a careful examination of the gutters and foundations to look at systems for keeping rainwater away from the buildings.

Our guides are hard at work giving tours for our 2010 season. **Elizabeth Merrick** is a new guide-in-training, and board member **Jennifer Pustz** joined the guide staff. Thanks to all, and a special welcome to our newcomers!

We had the busiest April in memory for group tours with groups from Newton, Belmont, Somerville, Brandeis University, Tufts University, UMass-Boston, Bunker Hill Community College, and the Beacon Hill Scholars, among others. Special thanks to **Margen Kelsey, Mike Oliver, and Dale Rider** for their help!

Despite the torrential rains in April, the flowerbeds and shrubs have flourished thanks to **Lindsay Rider** and the **Landscape Committee's** hard work and perseverance. They held a clean-up of the grounds on May 1 and worked with members of the neighborhood to rake and bag the detritus of the winter. The peonies blossomed right on schedule for the Spring Celebration! Thanks to all!

The **Medford Arts Council (MACI)** held a lovely reception for current grantees in the Slave Quarters on May 16, followed by the Medford artists on May 27.

We welcomed the Burlington **Teaching American History** and the **Using Essex History** teacher groups for meetings, seminars and tours in June and July. We have increased our outreach to teachers and now have several groups who come to our site regularly.

Academic Advisory Council member **Rachelle Brown** paid us a visit from Washington, DC. and commented enthusiastically on our plans for the Kitchen, stairs, and Kitchen Chamber.

PLEASE WELCOME OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Emily K. Fletcher recently joined the Royall House and Slave Quarters Board of Directors as Treasurer. Emily has held financial management positions of increasing authority since 2002, at a management consulting firm and several high tech companies. In 2001 she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in business administration, with a concentration in finance, from Boston University. Emily is a student pilot and worked after college as a surfing instructor in Australia. She is a history buff who is interested in getting more involved in local history, while adding value to a history-themed nonprofit. She works for the start-up company OpenMile, Inc. Emily is originally from Seattle and now works in Cambridge.

Kathryn Kucharski is a museum educator and event planner with over ten years of experience. She has developed and taught museum programs involving art, culture, and science for preschool and elementary school students in a number of Boston museums including the MFA, the Harvard museums, and the Children's Museum. As an event planner and marketing professional, she has organized events ranging from intimate gatherings for corporate clients to large scale, all-day dedication ceremonies for academic and museum clients. She holds graduate degrees in art history and anthropology/archaeology, and has a museum studies diploma.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

The Royall House and Slave Quarters is pleased to welcome **Theresa Kelliher** as a new collections volunteer this year. A Medford resident, Theresa chose the Royall House for one reason—it's very close to home—and her timing was perfect since she happened to offer her services just as the kitchen reinterpretation project was about to start. Theresa works in the Preservation and Imaging Services department of Harvard College Libraries, digitizing rare and fragile library materials, primarily medieval manuscripts and photographic collections and also digitized collections at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology at Harvard, so she was a perfect match for the inventory phase of the project.

Theresa has a MLA in Museum Studies from the Harvard Extension School is about to begin work on a Certificate of Advanced Study in Digital Libraries at Syracuse (online). Of her involvement with the inventory project she says, "Small museums have significantly fewer resources with which to digitize, preserve, and provide access to their



Kitchen documentation photograph taken by Theresa Kelliher.



An eighteenth-century pestle, one of many objects photographed by volunteer Theresa Kelliher.

collections. I thought it only natural to work with a small historic house. Initially I was willing to do just about anything, but there was a need for me to do what I enjoy, which is just fantastic for everybody." We're delighted Theresa has joined us and look forward to working with her.

FROM THE SHOP

What We're Reading

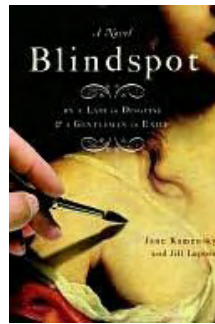
Beach season is here, so the Museum Shop is stocking up on historical fiction. Through a generous arrangement with Rob Dilman of Bestsellers Café, thirty-five percent of the purchase price of these titles will support Royall House and Slave Quarters preservation and programs.

Someone Knows My Name by Lawrence Hill — Kidnapped as a child from Africa, Aminata Diallo is enslaved in South Carolina but escapes during the chaos of the Revolutionary War. In Manhattan she becomes a scribe for the British, recording the names of blacks who have served the King and earned freedom in Nova Scotia. But the hardship and prejudice there prompt her to follow her heart back to Africa, then to London, where she bears witness to the injustices of slavery and its toll on her life and her people.

The Widow's War by Sally Gunning — Lyddie is used to the trials of being a whaler's wife in the Cape Cod village of Satucket, running a household herself during her husband's long absences at sea and living with the daily uncertainty that he will return. When her worst fear is realized, she finds herself overwhelmed by grief, with her property and rights now legally in the hands of her nearest male relative, her daughter's overbearing husband. Lyddie decides to challenge both law and custom for control of her destiny, but soon discovers the price of her bold "war" for personal freedom.

Blindspot by Jill Lepore & Jane Kamensky — A Scottish portrait painter fleeing his debtors arrives in Boston, lately seized with the

spirit of liberty. Eager to begin anew, he advertises for an apprentice, but the lad who comes knocking is no lad at all, but Fanny

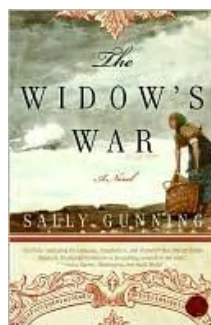
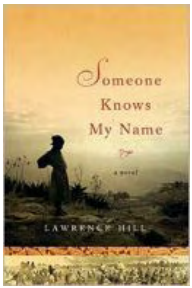


Easton, a young woman from Boston's most prominent family who has disguised herself as a boy. Written with wit and exuberance by two accomplished local historians, *Blindspot* is an affectionate send-up of the best of eighteenth-century fiction that

celebrates the art of the Enlightenment and the passion of the American Revolution through stories of ordinary people caught up in an extraordinary time.

The Known World by Edward P. Jones — On a small Virginia plantation in the 1850s, a freed black man named Henry Townsend lives with his wife and the thirty-three slaves he has bought, some with the help of his former owner. This kaleidoscopic novel, by a Pulitzer Prize winning author, depicts daily life for Henry and his friends, for the plantation's slaves, and for the county's white inhabitants, who coexist uneasily with their slaves and their emancipated black neighbors. *The Known World* takes an unflinching look at slavery in all its moral complexities. Author Dave Eggers raves: "One of my favorite living writers is Edward P. Jones. *The Known World* is probably my favorite book by a living author; I reread it often, just to be reminded what it looks like when an author has absolute command over the world he's created. There's not a word out of place."

New in the Museum Shop: A pair of new postcards by Laura Dorson, a local graphic designer and illustrator, capture the complex architectural detail of the Royall House and the surprising proximity of the Slave Quarters to the main house. Laura describes her illustrations as "hand-done, if that can be said of digital art." The cards are available for \$1 each.



The Museum Shop is open during regular tour hours: Saturdays and Sundays, from 1 pm until at least 4:30 pm, through October 31st. In addition to books for adults, Shop merchandise includes fiction and non-fiction for younger readers, linen tea towels depicting the now-demolished Garden House, photo cards and postcards, commemorative pen-and-letter-opener sets, all-natural soaps in colonial scents, beeswax candles, “tumbled shard” brooches made from vintage plates, and much more!



SHOP VOLUNTEER NEEDED occasional weekend afternoons. Please call 781-396-9032 or email RoyallHouseEvent@aol.com for more information.

“THE PETITION OF BELINDA ...”

Enslaved by the Royall family for 50 years, Belinda was left destitute when Isaac Royall, Jr. fled to England at the start of the Revolution. After slavery was abolished in Massachusetts in 1783, she successfully petitioned the state legislature for a pension for herself and her infirm daughter as recompense for her enslavement. Belinda's eloquent petition was the inspiration for Rita Dove's poem, which is reprinted with permission from the author, for which the Royall House and Slave Quarters is deeply grateful.

Belinda's Petition

(Boston, February, 1782)

To the honorable Senate and House
of Representatives of this Country,
new born: I am Belinda, an African,
since the age of twelve a Slave.
I will not take too much of your Time,
but to plead and place my pitiable Life
unto the Fathers of this Nation.

Lately your Countrymen have severed
the Binds of Tyranny. I would hope
you would consider the Same for me,
pure Air being the sole Advantage
of which I can boast in my present Condition.

As to the Accusation that I am Ignorant:
I received Existence on the Banks
of the Rio de Valta. All my Childhood
I expected nothing, if that be Ignorance.
The only Travelers were the Dead who returned
from the Ridge each Evening. How might
I have known of Men with Faces like the Moon
who would ride toward me steadily for twelve
Years?

Rita Dove, U.S. Poet laureate from 1993 to 1995, is the author of the novel Through the Ivory Gate, a collection of stories, a verse drama, and five books of poetry, including the Pulitzer Prize-winning Thomas and Beulah. Recipient of numerous literary fellowships and awards, she is currently Commonwealth Professor of English at the University of Virginia.

FORGOTTEN HISTORY

Sometime in the late nineteenth century, the fanciful summer house commissioned by Isaac Royall, Jr. was taken down. The elaborate eight-sided structure featured arched windows, carved ionic columns, and atop its bell-shaped roof stood a life-size wooden statue of the god Mercury. At the time of its demolition, the summer house was badly deteriorated, yet because its architectural



significance was recognized by the owners, representative pieces of the building were saved and stored. Years later, a single section of the summer house was reconstructed, but the other fragments remained hidden away in a rarely accessed section of the Slave Quarters attic. Only Mercury was on display in the mansion.

During a routine inspection of the tiny attic over the “Out Kitchen” this spring, the remaining fragments of the summer house were rediscovered. To celebrate this exciting find, representative elements have been moved to the third floor of the mansion and are displayed along with architectural drawings and a photograph of the structure from the 1880s. Carved capitals, a fluted pilaster, and the only surviving window sash are now reunited with Mercury for the first time in more than 100 years.



Royall House & Slave Quarters

2010 Tour Season

Saturdays and Sundays
through October 31, 2010

Tours at 1, 2, 3, and 4 p.m.

A modest admission is charged

Members are Free