

RYE HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND TOWN MUSEUM

Covid-19 Statement

Until further notice, the museum will be open by appointment only, limited to 2 visitors per appointment. Masks are required inside, as is hand sanitizing upon entering the building.

Make your appointment online, email us at info@ryenhistoricalociety.org, or call 603-436-9278

Schedule Museum Visit

THE RYE HISTORICAL SOCIETY IS AN INDEPENDENT, NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO COLLECTING AND PRESERVING THE RICH HISTORY OF RYE, NEW HAMPSHIRE BY ENGAGING RESIDENTS AND VISITORS THROUGH OUR MUSEUM AND PROGRAMS

March 2022

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN RYE

The first enslaved Africans were brought to Virginia in 1619 and soon slavery had become an established institution in the south. Africans first appeared in Portsmouth in 1641 and became servants for life, unable to work off their servitude as was the case with indentured whites. Northern ships, including some from Portsmouth, which Rye men may have helped to build and could have served on, participated in the lucrative trans-Atlantic slave trade.

We do not know when the first enslaved person was brought to Rye, but by the 1700s some families owned enslaved people. The Seavey's had Hampshire, who ran away, as well as Titus, Hannah, Bow, and Jenny. The Odiorne's had Jack, the Wallis family had Phyllis and Caesar, the Berry's had Peter Long and Old Black Peter. The Garlands had Black Prince, the Jenness family had Nimshi and Prince and the Libbey and Parsons family also owned people, and there may well have been others, not recorded. (See *Color Me Included: The African Americans of Hampton's First Church and its Descendant Parishes, 1670-1826* by Deborah Knowlton for more details on Rye slave owners). It was not uncommon for enslaved people to escape their owners, but it was a perilous flight into the unknown.

According to the *History of Rye NH*, by Langdon Parsons, 1905, there were 19 enslaved people owned by Rye residents in 1773, twelve male and seven female. Because census records were unreliable at that time, the number could have been higher. Two enslaved people, Nimshi and Prince, were freed on the eve of the Revolution by their owner Job Jenness and fought and died in that conflict.

Quakers were one of the first groups to speak out against slavery. By the 1800s some Rye residents may have joined the growing abolitionist movement. Others were all too accustomed to accepting slavery as the norm,

as revealed in this passage from John L. Parsons' *History of the Churches of Rye, NH*:

According to the record, on March 11, 1838, the first real abolition sermon was preached in the Rye Congregational church by Minister Root of Dover. When Thomas J. Parsons walked into the entry of the church, he heard someone say at the other door: "Insurrection and destruction of the Country." Looking around he saw Gen. Thomas Goss, Gen. Ira Brown, Richard R. Locke, Samuel Jenness, Jr., Reuel Garland, Charles Green and John A. Trefethen leaving the meeting house. Many more refused to attend the service that afternoon.

New Hampshire did not officially ban slavery until 1857, and by that time Rye and most other northern communities had ended this practice of human bondage. In 1865 Reconstruction began, but the controversial election of 1876 ended that effort, leaving Blacks at the mercy of discriminatory "Jim Crow" laws.

Despite all obstacles, Black Americans worked their way into everyday life. In the early 20th century, Rye photographer ARH Foss captured images of Afro-Americans in Rye as tourists, performing musicians for hotel guests and employees of those hotels. In the Cold War era, after the U.S. armed forces had integrated, a few Afro-American airmen serving at Pease Air Force Base realized the New Hampshire seacoast was an ideal place to call home.

Aldrich Mitchell of Rye was elected to the Select Board in 1979 and may have been the only black family in Rye at that time. Phyllis Wallis, one of the last surviving former slaves in Rye, died in 1821. Over two centuries later, the legacy of slavery remains our country's unfinished business, awaiting further healing and reconciliation.

1694 BERRY FAMILY LAND TRANSFER

In 1694 Joseph Berry, one of William Berry's sons, gave half his land in Greenland and half his holdings in Sandy Beach to *his* son Nathaniel. Amazingly, the colonial document recording the transfers survived through the centuries and turned up on eBay, where it was discovered by Terry Packer. Dr. Thomas Packer, Terry's ancestor, had signed the document as justice of the peace.

Terry is writing a series of articles about his remarkable find, and they will be posted on the Rye Historical Society website. Read [Part I – Acquisition](#)

BOARD MEMBER HIGHLIGHT

Jean Briggs Badger

Jean has traced her seacoast roots to 1623 and is a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Her prior experience includes her work as Superintendent of Dover NH Schools and as a

consultant for the Department of Education.



What got you interested in Rye history?

My family has lived in Rye since the 1980's and both my parents grew up in nearby Portsmouth. Indeed my Dad was also a member of the RHS in the 1990's. He was involved in the restoration of Rye's many family graveyards.

Now that I am retired I have the time to engage in my love of history!

What is the most exciting part of RHS for you?

The exciting part of the involvement is spreading the word to adults and children alike about the treasure trove of Rye's rich history and artifacts. Making the past relevant to our present and to our future is an important aspect of getting people interested in our legacy.

What's your favorite Rye Landmark?

Rye Congregational Church, as it so beautifully serves as one of our main hubs and gathering place for our community.



**Thank you to Charles Moore and family
for keeping our steps clear!**

HELP!

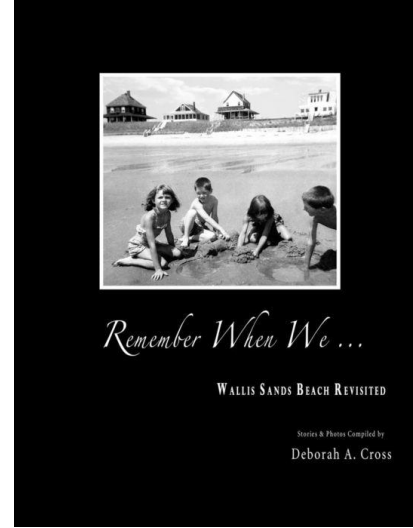
Request for volunteer: RHS is in need of someone to help us create digital marketing materials - invitations to events, etc. Please email us at info@ryenhistoricalociety.org if you are interested

WALLIS SANDS IN BYGONE DAYS

Remember When We...Wallis Sands Beach

Revisited, is now in its 2nd edition. Author Deborah Cross gathered stories and personal photographs from 44 families who lived on or visited Wallis Sands beach from the 1920's to mid 1980's. The storytellers were predominantly descendants of the first community of families to summer at Wallis Sands. Their tales are full of memories of family and friends, sunny skies and salty breezes, and carefree times.

“Whether you spent your childhood at the seaside, the mountains or at your family’s favorite getaway,” the author observes, “ these stories will bring a smile to your face and a tear to your eye.”



Remember When We... is available for purchase at [the RHS shop](#).

February Winner

David Caswell was the first to correctly identify the Rye Motor Inn. Located on Breakfast Hill/Route 1 in Rye, the hotel boasted 27 "large airy rooms," a large dining room, swimming pool, coffee shop and cocktail lounge to "complete your gracious living."



THIS MONTH IN RYE HISTORY

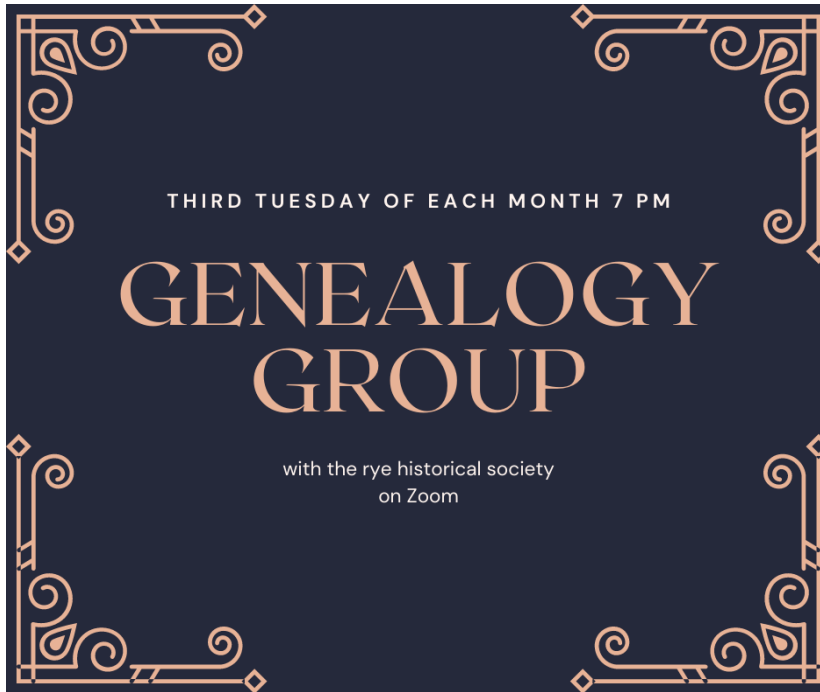
“Say 'No' to the Air Force Base!”

March 13, 1952: The New York Times reported that Rye had joined Newington and six other towns in passing resolutions at their town meetings, all condemning the proposed establishment of an Air Force jet bomber base in the Portsmouth area. The resolutions held that the base would be a menace to public safety and adversely affect real estate values.

Despite the opposition, Pease Air Force Base opened four years later. Long-range bombers of the Strategic Air Command became a daily presence in the skies of Rye. The base closed in 1991.

This year a proposed new air cargo operation at Pease Tradeport is drawing protests. The more times change....

Join the the Genealogy Group's meeting on Zoom
Tuesday, March 15, at 7:30 PM



Audio tour

Rye Beach Block

★★★★★ [4 reviews](#) | [Rye](#) | Free

Did you know there is a guided walking tour in Rye Beach? [Download the IziTRAVEL app and get started!](#)

Don't want to walk? You can take this tour from the comfort of your easy chair!

Support Rye Historical Society by doing your shopping on Amazon Smile!

The Amazon Smile logo, featuring the word "amazon" in black and "smile" in orange, with a curved arrow underneath.

Ye Olde Gift Shoppe

New Items:

REVISED: Remember When
We...Wallis Sands Beach Revisited
by Deb Cross

Rye Historical Society logo
Campfire Mugs

Rye NH 1623 Winter Hats

Shipping and local pick up available.
Local orders can be picked up or delivered free of charge
upon request.



Shop Now



RHS is a 501(c)(3) non profit
organization

Rye Historical Society

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