Looking to the Future—
as we recreate an 18th Century Carriage House

By Fred Engelbach

activities. The planned building also includes a large work/study/processing area for curatorial and archaeological objects, as well as a handicap accessible bathroom. During the last six months our focus has been on moving the project forward. Architect Anne Whitney, (who is also a longtime Warner House member and friend), has been working through countless details such as door and window placement, fire safety, security, and all the code requirements. That initial planning work is now complete. Because our project is in an urban environment, it has been necessary to meet with the City of Portsmouth’s permitting boards. During July and August we met with the Historic District Commission, the Technical Advisory Board and the Planning Board. In every case the result of the meetings was approval of the project. Each of the boards expressed appreciation to the Warner House for making a valuable contribution to Portsmouth’s historic landscape and community viability.

As we go to press Anne is working on the final sheets of the construction drawings. There already been an expression of interest by contractors. We are optimistic that by February or early March there will be a beehive of activity along Chapel Street.

Fundraising is well underway. Please support this important project by sending in your donation soon.

In the Spring edition of the Newsletter there is an article on recreating an 18th Century Carriage House. The article points out that the building being planned includes space for school programs and outreach.
Ona Judge

As John Jack sat in the home that he shared with his wife Phillis and his two daughters on a summer evening in 1799, he could think back on a life of servitude, warfare, and freedom.

Prior to the Revolutionary War, Jack had been enslaved in the home of merchant Jonathan Warner and his wife, Mary MacPhaedris Warner. Jack was not the only enslaved person within the Warner household. Cato, Frank, and Peter worked with John Jack both throughout the house and the Piscataqua, loading and unloading cargo from Warner’s ships, delivering goods to Warner’s clients and patrons, sowing and reaping crops on Warner’s farm, and completing whatever domestic chores were required.

A large wooden ell that was constructed off the back of the Warner house sometime in the 1720s provided not just a kitchen and scullery downstairs, but living quarters for John Jack, Cato, Frank, and Peter. The ell was only accessible either from a door on the first floor in the rear northwest corner of the house, or from the outside, and was separated from the mansion house by its thick brick exterior walls.

Whether guardedly conferring with the broader black population of Portsmouth in meetings or whispers it is clear that the fervor of revolution and freedom had entered the minds of John, Cato, and Peter by 1779. On November 12, 1779, already five years after the raid on Fort William and Mary, both Cato and Peter joined eighteen fellow enslaved men of Portsmouth in a petition to the New Hampshire legislature. The men prayed that the Legislature, now sitting at Exeter, would “for the sake of injured liberty; for the sake of justice, humanity, and the rights of mankind; for the honour of religion; and by all that is dear, that your honours would graciously interpose in our behalf and enact such laws and regulations as you in your wisdom think proper, whereby we may regain our liberty and be ranked in the class of free agents and that the name of slave may not more be heard in a land gloriously contending for the sweets of freedom.”

A post-war depression made life hard on nearly everyone in Portsmouth, and with little information on Jack’s occupation or skills, it is difficult to guess how he made ends meet. At some point, good fortune befell both John Jack and a free black woman named Phillis.

Phillis lived in a small house on a small plot of swampy land in Greenland, New Hampshire. At some point in the 1760s, Phillis’ owner, Deacon James Brackett, manumitted Phillis and allowed her to live in the house until Phillis was able to purchase the plot in 1792. At an unknown date, but likely before the purchase of the home, Phillis and John Jack were married. A bylaw passed by the Town of Portsmouth in 1731 to suppress the public support of poor Black and Native American people led to a fear among slave owners that they would be forced to financially support the offspring of married slaves. Because the statute stated that “every person that shall marry a Negro or Indian so coming into any Negro or Indian of theirs, the master or mistress assent to such marriage shall support persons so as to free the town of any charge”. Portsmouth slave owners routinely denied requests for marriage among the enslaved population until the second half of the eighteenth century. With no such interference given their free status, John and Phillis Jack were not only able to wed, but to have three children, two daughters and a son (who died in infancy) without the fear of their children inheriting a life of enslavement.

On a summer night in 1799 there came a knock on Jack’s door. Ona Judge was at the Jack home that night, carrying her young toddler, to elude her attempted kidnapping by the Washingtons.

Ona Judge arrived in Portsmouth in 1796, having found passage on Captain John Bowles ship Nancy from Philadelphia, at the time the nation’s capital. Ona was in Philadelphia in the service of Martha Washington, the First Lady of the United States. Born in 1773 or 1774, Ona grew up on Mount Vernon and at the age of ten was selected to serve as Martha Washington’s waiting maid. Upon Washington’s election to the presidency, Ona travelled out of the Chesapeake for the first time, accompanying the Washingtons to New York for a year and a half.

Ona’s next move was to Philadelphia, the new seat of government, where she shared living space with an enslaved seamstress and the Washingtons’ grandchildren.
While still in Philadelphia, Martha Washington announced that she would bequeath Ona to her young granddaughter upon her marriage. At that point, Judge made up her mind. With a desire for freedom, a determination “that she was...never to be her [Custis] slave,” and the fear of missing her best chance at escape.

After being recognized on the streets of Portsmouth by Elizabeth Langdon, the daughter of Senator John Langdon, Ona answered a call for a domestic servant at the home of the Customs Collector, Joseph Whipple. Little did Judge know that this was not an interview, but a confrontation. After exchanging letters with George Washington, Whipple agreed to attempt to persuade Judge to return to Mount Vernon. A conversation filled with resistance gave way to surrender as Ona finally agreed to board a ship bound for Alexandria. After several days of bad weather, Whipple procured the ship that would escort Ona back to a world of enslavement. Whipple waited on the docks, but Ona, who never intended on boarding any such ship, did not present herself. Whipple seized the opportunity to write to Washington and bow out of any further efforts to apprehend his neighbour.

The next couple of years were witness to happier times for Ona. On January 14, 1797, after being denied a marriage license in Portsmouth, Ona Judge married Jack Staines, a free black sailor, in Greenland. After moving into a rented house in Portsmouth, Ona gave birth to the couple’s first child in 1798, their daughter Eliza. This happiness was interrupted one day in the summer of 1799, leading to Ona’s knock on the Jack family’s door.

As Ona was ushered into the Jack home with young Eliza in tow, she likely recounted to the Jack family the events of the day. At the same time that Ona’s husband was gone to sea in the support of his young family, Burwell Bassett, a Virginia State Senator, arrived in Portsmouth on the orders of his uncle, George Washington, to bring Ona back to Mount Vernon. Bassett arrived at Ona’s door, attempting to persuade the twenty-five year old with promises, including that she would be freed upon her return to Washington’s estate. Ona, who would not be fooled by empty promises, replied definitively, “I am free now and choose to remain so.” Bassett, stunned at the rebuff, retreated to the Langdon house where he vowed to take Ona by force.

Either tipped off at the direction of Langdon or, more likely, through the information network of Portsmouth’s free black community, Ona, now aware of Bassett’s intentions, rented a boy with a horse and carriage at a nearby stable. By the time Bassett began angrily pounding on Ona’s door, Ona was already eight miles away, knocking at the Jack’s. There she remained until Bassett’s departure, once more foiling the Washingtons.

Ona’s flight to the Jack’s would be the last she would be forced to make from the Washingtons. She, her husband, and her daughter remained in Portsmouth for the next few years, during which time Ona gave birth to a second daughter, Nancy, and a son, William. The return of Ona to the Jack home was inspired by death and destitution. Tragedy struck in 1803 when Ona’s husband, Jack Staines, died. With the death of Phillis Jack in 1804 and both the remainder of the Staines and Jack families struggling financially, Ona and her children moved in with John Jack and his daughters. With the exception of William Staines, who may have put to sea at a young age, the Staines’ and Jacks’ lived for the rest of their lives in the small Greenland house. When, being interviewed in her home near the end of her life, Ona was asked if she ever regretted leaving the Washington’s, she stated “No, I am free, and have, I trust, been made a child of God by the means.”

Corey D. Blanchard
PhD Candidate

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Keep Safe, Keep Healthy,
Keep Happy.
THE NEW HOUSE MANAGER

Please stop by the House and welcome the new House Manager, Alana Rooke. Born and raised in Texas, with a BA (Special Honors) in Art History, Alana was drawn to New England by its rich history. Following receipt of her Master of Letters (with Merit) in Art History: Dress and Textiles History from the University of Glasgow, Scotland, Alana has had successive work experience at the Scottish Opera, Glasgow; the La Rosa Ranch, Woodsboro, Texas; Fort Bend Museum, Richmond, Texas (Collections Intern); Salem Witch Museum (Tour Guide, Cashier); the Nagler Group (Data Entry and Customer Service); and, through the present, Historic New England, South Berwick, ME. (Lead Guide). With this varied background, and particularly with her passion for textiles jibing with recent Warner House textile acquisitions and need to reassess the collections, Alana has much to offer the Association, and we all look forward to supporting and working with her.

Special thanks to members of the Search Committee who spent considerable time and effort in carrying out a meticulous selection process—particularly Peter Michaud, Amanda Horrocks and Martha Pinello.

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Benning Wentworth, His younger years.

By Melissa Walker

New Hampshire’s first Royal Governor, Benning Wentworth was born in 1696 in Portsmouth. He was the first of the fourteen children of Lt. Governor of Massachusetts John Wentworth and Sarah Hunking Wentworth. At that time, the area known as New Hampshire was part of the Massachusetts Colony.

Benning graduated from Harvard at the age of eighteen, fifth in a class of twenty, with the distinction of having the most fines for broken windows and other damages incurred by an undergraduate.

The rank system at Harvard, at that time, was related to social position rather than academic achievements.

After graduation Benning went into the family business importing wines from Cadiz and other Spanish ports. He spent fifteen years in this pursuit. He also began to export timber to Spain.

Benning, his brothers and his father tried hard to have a New Hampshire Colony established utilizing their contacts in England.

When Great Britain and Spain went to war, his Spanish customers refused to pay Benning the money they owed him. He was going to have to declare bankruptcy. Instead of taking that route, Benning sued the British Government for going to war with Spain. The final settlement in 1741 made Benning Wentworth the first Royal Governor of New Hampshire created from land taken from the Massachusetts Colony.
Richard Candee dug up this article from the Portsmouth Herald from 1928 when the cupola blew off the house. After almost 100 years the Cupola needs work again. Plans are being made, lining up carpenters and engineers and money to get this project done. We need your HELP.
Letter from the Chair.

It’s been a roller coaster season for the Warner House, masks on, masks off and masks back on but the wonderful Guides and Greeters have rolled with the punches. The absence of what has been referred to as an Engagement Site Manager has made things difficult, but many have stepped forward to make the season a success. Curt Springer has managed the mail; Martha Pinello the office and e-mail. The Search Committee has worked through the summer and as of the printing of this newsletter we will have a new Manager.

The Building & Grounds Committee has its share of problems to deal with. John Wastrom, in the middle of re-pointing the foundation around the “new” kitchen experienced emergency surgery to his eye, and we wish him a speedy recovery and hope he can return soon. The interior of the kitchen has been refurbished thanks to a gift from Sandra Rux in honor of her brother, with fresh paint, a new soapstone sink and cabinetry, and new lighting. The Cupola has been inspected and is in need of major repairs. Plans are in the works to address the project.

The gardens have been beautiful, as always, but we will miss Caroline Fesquet who is moving south. She has led the Portsmouth Garden Club for years caring for the garden and we owe her a great debt. Led by Anne Whitney and John Chagnon, and aided by Fred Engelbach, the Carriage House permitting process has breezed through with high praise from many of the credentialing committee members. We are in the middle of fundraising and have a way to go, so anyone looking for an end-of-year tax deduction please consider a donation to what will be a tremendous step toward much needed outreach to schools in particular and the community in general.

The glass exhibit has been well-received and any who have not seen it should do so by mid-October when objects will be returned to owners. This is an unusual opportunity to see a large number of rare and early objects including archaeological correlation with shards found at the Warner House.

Wishing All a safe and healthy Fall and Winter,

Maria S. Barth
Chair, Warner House Association

Caroline Fesquet

A fond farewell to Caroline, who is moving south to be close to her son. She has led the effort, for years along with the Portsmouth Garden Club, making the Warner House Gardens spectacular.

THANK YOU!
THANK YOU!
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