

In early 2024, the CHS staff and Education Committee launched an ambitious program to design and implement an African American history learning unit for the Abbott School. The goal was to use the history uncovered about African Americans living in Castine as a springboard to teach local and national history concepts. On our committee is Georgia Zildjian, who now works at the Wilson Museum as their Manager of Museum Learning. The committee worked with Georgia to design and present the unit which far exceeded our hopes and dreams. To view the full text of Georgia's article, along with the students' documentary and book, visit the Castine Historical Society's website and click on the Learn button.

Confronting the Myth

by Georgia Zildjian, CHS education consultant
and Wilson Museum Manager of Museum Learning

One cloudy summer day when I was about 7 or 8, my father took me out in our big old kayak, the color and shape of a banana, to paddle up the Bagaduce and visit the little islands there, now known as Esther and Emanuel. As we approached, I remember him telling me the former names of the islands, and the relentless curiosity it sparked. "Why are they named that?" There wasn't a satisfactory answer, even from the man who I believed knew everything. "Who lived here?" was equally unknowable. I spent the rest of our afternoon exploring the island, barraging my poor father with questions that not even the historians could answer. In fact, we still do not have a definitive answer to my simple childhood questions.

Hiking to the point of the island, covered in fir needles and shells dropped by seagulls, I remember staring down at my feet, and then up and out across the ocean, willing the landscape itself to bring forth the answers the grown-ups didn't have. That moment on the point, equal parts awe and indignance, has lived in me always.

I did not learn about Africans or African Americans in Castine when I was young. I do not blame my teachers for this. They were likely, as many people still are, under the impression that the presence of African and African American people in New England, let alone in Castine, was negligible. This misunderstanding of New England history, an insidious byproduct of our country's systemic racism, is a myth that prevails to this day.



Adams School students at the Trinitarian Church on Main Street.

Why this unit now?

In 2020, shortly after the civil rights uprisings that followed the murder of George Floyd, the questions of the islands' names resurfaced in our town. Volunteering to be on Castine's Island Name Change Committee (INCC) was the first step on a long and winding path that culminated in the creation of the unit I write about today. In 2021, LD1664, a mandate to teach African American history in Maine schools, was passed. This, in conjunction with the significant information uncovered by CHS and in researching for the INCC, and the essential need to diversify the interpretation of U.S. history in secondary education, sparked the idea for the unit.

With the support of the CHS Education Committee and Paul Bocko, my graduate advisor at Antioch University, I sought to create a "pilot unit." That is, a framework for teaching local African and African American history that could be used or adapted by the surrounding peninsula, and potentially repeated at Adams School. This meant that, although we began with an outline, the future of the unit was shaped by the experience of running it and the feedback and inquiry of the students who

2025 Calendar of Events

All exhibits, events, and tours are free. Due to space limitations, registration is required for some in-person talks. To register: castinehistoricalsociety.org or call 207-326-4118.

Monday, June 9

Opening day for the 2025 season.

Our 2025 exhibit is "A History of Castine in 40 Objects." To view hours, visit castinehistoricalsociety.org.

Saturday, June 21

Season Open House, 4:00-6:00 p.m.

Join us for a free reception and viewing of the current exhibits. Refreshments served. No reservations required.

Thursday, July 10

CHS Summer Cocktail Fundraiser, "Senior Prom."

Thursday, July 17

"Castine and the Cultural Landscapes of the Cod Fishery," 7:00 p.m.

Dr. Stephen J. Hornsby of the University of Maine will be speaking on New England, Castine, and the 19th century cod trade. A book sale and signing follows for his new publication *Cod Coasts: Cultural Landscapes of the Cod Fishery from Cape Cod to Labrador*. Mitchell Room, Castine Historical Society. Reservations required to attend in person. To watch remotely visit castinehistoricalsociety.org for YouTube link.

Wednesday, August 6

The 16th Annual Deborah Pulliam Memorial Lecture, 7:00 p.m.

James Eric Francis Sr., the Penobscot Nation's Director of Cultural and Historic Preservation and Tribal Historian, will speak on "Penobscot Sense of Place." Delano Auditorium, Leavitt Hall, Maine Maritime Academy, Castine. No reservations to attend in person. To watch remotely visit castinehistoricalsociety.org for YouTube link.

Thursday, August 21

Annual Meeting and Program. 4:00-6:00 p.m.

The CHS Annual Meeting, open to the public, is held at the Castine Inn and is followed by a social hour. No reservations to attend in person. To watch remotely visit castinehistoricalsociety.org for YouTube link.

Thursday, September 4

"Does Anything from the Year 1776 Matter Today?" 7:00 p.m.

Dr. Liam Riordon, Professor of History at the University of Maine, will speak on the Declaration of Independence's meaning and political ideals in relation to US public life today. Mitchell Room, Castine Historical Society. Reservations required for in person. To watch remotely visit castinehistoricalsociety.org for YouTube link.

Saturday, October 18

Explore the Castine Town Cemetery, 10:00 a.m.

Join Georgia Zildjian and Lisa Lutts for a tour of the Castine Town Cemetery focusing on the lives of Castine residents. This event is co-sponsored by the Wilson Museum. Participants are encouraged to wear sturdy shoes and to expect uneven terrain. Reservations are required and limited to 15. Rain date: Saturday, October 25.

Sunday, October 19

Explore the Castine Town Cemetery, 10:00 a.m. (repeat of Saturday).

Join Georgia Zildjian and Lisa Lutts for a tour of the Castine Town Cemetery focusing on the lives of Castine residents. This event is co-sponsored by the Wilson Museum. Participants are encouraged to wear sturdy shoes and to expect uneven terrain on this walk. Reservations are required and limited to 15. Rain date: Sunday, October 26.

Monday, October 13

Closing day for the 2025 season.

Abbott School Exhibits (17 School Street)

June 9 – September 1

Mon.-Sat. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. / Sun. 1-4 p.m.

September 5 – October 13

Fri., Sat., Mon. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. / Sun. 1-4 p.m.

A History of Castine in 40 Objects

Penobscot Expedition 1779: Making Revolutionary History

The Castine Community Bicentennial Quilt

Grindle House (13 School Street)

Staff work year-round Monday-Friday.

To schedule a research appointment, contact collections@castinehistoricalsociety.org.

Castine Uncovered Walking Tours

June 20 – October 13

Friday, Saturday, Monday: 10:00 a.m.
No reservations required. Private tours may be booked with advance notice subject to guide availability.

Virtual History Tours of Castine

To download the app or access the web version of the tour, visit castinehistoricalsociety.org. Go to the "Visit" drop down button and click on Castine Virtual Tour.

Our Mission

We make Castine history accessible, relevant, and inspiring to all.

Our Vision

The Castine Historical Society cultivates curiosity about our past to foster a more inclusive, empathetic, and informed society. Inside and outside our walls, we build relationships among individuals, organizations, and the community to enhance understanding of our collective experiences.

The Castine Visitor is published two times per year as a benefit of membership.

Karen V. Lyons, Editor



A View from the Common

The *New* Executive Director's Letter

Kate McMahon, Ph.D.

Happy spring to you all! With this season of change, I am deeply grateful to announce that I will be the new Executive Director of the Castine Historical Society. I am so excited to begin my tenure on June 16, 2025, and look forward to working with the CHS staff, board, supporters, and the broader Castine community on stewarding this wonderful institution into the future.

A little about me: I am originally from Shapleigh, Maine, and received my bachelor's in Art History and master's in American and New England Studies from the University of Southern Maine. I received my Ph.D. from Howard University in Washington, D.C., where I completed my dissertation *The Transnational Dimensions of Africans and African Americans in Northern New England, 1776-1865*.

I am coming from the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, where I have worked since 2014. Most recently, I held the position of Historian of Global Slavery in the Center for the Study of Global Slavery, where I led research on the exhibition *In Slavery's Wake: Making Black Freedom in the World*, which opened in December 2024 and will travel to four other global museums until 2028.

During my tenure at the NMAAHC, I worked with broad, global publics centering how local histories could inform our understanding of global histories and complex human

experiences, including slavery. I think that my experience there will lend itself well to thinking about the future of CHS and the ways in which we can expand our offerings—both physically in Castine and online—to show how Castine fits into a much bigger, global maritime history. I have a huge passion for Maine history, and through the many public talks and presentations I give every year to groups ranging from children to adults, I strive to deliver the history of Maine to diverse audiences while focusing on underrepresented histories. I'm eager to think about how I can use this knowledge to advance the goals of CHS and our community.

During a time in which many cultural institutions are struggling to survive due to the continued politicization of history on the national stage, I believe that continuing to showcase the diversity of this beautiful seaside community will only strengthen our future. I look forward to finding partnerships locally with our schools, businesses, nonprofits, and supporters, and to thinking about how we can continue to expand our partnerships across the state, nation, and world.

Please stop by this summer and say hello! My husband, Greg, and I are excited for our almost 3-year-old daughter, Winnie, to grow up in such a wonderful, beautiful community, and we look forward to integrating ourselves into this beautiful town.

continued from page 1
Confronting the Myth

participated. An intrepid group of thirteen 7th and 8th graders began the unit in mid-September 2024, and hosted a culminating event to share their learning with the community that November. To run the unit, I partnered with Adams School's phenomenal middle school social studies and language arts teacher, Kalista Farmer. Kalista designed a parallel language arts unit using the book *Pet* by Akwaeke Emezi. This encouraged the students to draw cross curricular connections between the themes of social justice, identity, and society in the book and the historical events we explored together in the place based social studies unit.

But what does "Place Based" mean?

Place Based education is a method of teaching that is centered in using the local "place" of students – their community, natural landscape, culture, etc. - as a framework for learning universal standards. It is experiential, cross-curricular, and service-oriented. Students in social studies might learn about African and African American historical figures in their community, and then venture into the landscape, interact with historical objects, or map a house site. Through this work, students gain a deeper understanding of the lives of the people they study, and are well prepared to share their newfound perspectives with their community.

Teaching "hard history?"

Hard history – a concept that historian and educator Hasan Kwame Jeffries defines as "those troubling aspects of the past that make us uncomfortable" – requires transparency between teachers and students, and an acknowledgement of privilege, and identity.¹ While my background in both dramaturgy and education lent me experience with some of the tools needed to both research and transmit these histories, the implications of teaching them from my perspective of privilege as a white-presenting individual merited thorough reflection, preparation, and transparency in both curriculum creation and implementation. I spent a lot of time with the question "why me?" as I prepared a unit that focused on the history of a community that I have no claim on. The tension between the importance of the subject matter and the lingering doubts about my ability, and indeed, right to share it were critical to examine both as I prepared and delivered the unit.

Students began the unit with lessons that established a mutually agreed upon code of conduct, explored relevant vocabulary terms, and facilitated the consideration of their own identities. It was crucial that students felt comfortable asking hard questions – if students cannot explore difficult questions about our past and present in the classroom, how can they be equipped to be citizens of the future? And while students did bravely discuss and explore hard history, they also had the opportunity to experience joy and wonder. As Jeffries says, "hard history is not hopeless history."²



What are those kids doing out there?

After some trial and error, Kalista and I developed a weekly routine that incorporated both "traditional" methods of content delivery and experiential, place based learning.

One of the most beloved rituals of this unit was our time spent outside on the land and water, discovering history "in place." Students made thrilling connections while exploring historic sites. From the revelation that their beloved downtown elm tree has witnessed most of the history we talked about, to the development of roles of "class experts" based on students' personal experience on subjects from architecture to boatcraft, students were engaged in actively interpreting Castine's history.

Sharing in the Community

At CHS, my close collaborator and champion was now retired Executive Director Lisa Simpson Lutts. The overarching goal of the CHS Education Committee was to fulfill this important aspect of CHS's mission: *Castine Historical Society seeks to cultivate curiosity about our past to foster a more inclusive, empathetic, and informed society.*

Part of the joy in taking on this mandate was giving students a curatorial voice in spaces that they do not traditionally occupy. Lisa and CHS played an essential role in this by legitimizing my students' voices with their invitation to temporarily become a part of the exhibit gallery in the Abbot School building.

When presented with the requirements for their final project, students boldly took ownership of their learning. While Kalista and I suggested they create a timeline, they had a different (much better!) idea: to create a tree.

The class decided to represent [the African and African American history of Castine] in the form of a tree. The tree had three sections: the past, the present, and the future... The past was the roots of the tree, the foundation you could say. (Student Reflection)

As this student notes, the roots of the tree represented the past, with timelines running along them of the lives of student-chosen Castine historical figures from the unit. The trunk of the tree represented the present day, where students presented

information about why we should remember these stories, what changes are in progress, and how we might honor the people they studied:

On the tree, there are five branches, two of those branches have information on Esther and Emanuel Islands and the name change process. Another one of the branches has two poems, and about six or seven sheets of paper, each with a few sentences about things that had happened in Castine, like a newspaper.
(Student Reflection)

Finally, the canopy of the tree illustrated the connections between their language arts unit and the social studies unit, by writing a story that imagines Castine in the future that is represented in Emezi's book, *Pet*.

Students chose to write and display reflection paragraphs as part of their exhibit. They called this section "The Winds of Change." We also invited the community to leave their own reflections on the exhibit before they left using sticky notes that they could attach to the "winds." Here are a few snippets:

Before we began this project, I hadn't even realized that there were African and African American people in Castine...All of these people have enlightened us so much and encouraged us to learn more as we grow. (Student)

This is [a] beautiful exhibit. Seeing the students so committed and excited and making them part of the discovery process is a great model. (Community Member)

The topic of this project was interesting which motivated me to do more. I was assigned to the "present" group which worked on the tree trunk. One of the things that I did for my group was write a small paragraph about Mary Jackson. In that paragraph, I talked about ways to remember her because she was a big part of Castine's history. The [second] thing I did for my group was write a haiku about the tree by the docks. This poetry representation of the tree is important because it is the core and was present throughout the history of Castine. (Student)



Amazing job, 7th and 8th graders! I loved the tree and how you connected the past, present, and future. (Community Member)

Castine has a long and complicated history of racism but things are headed in the right direction, and giving people the correct information can help shape the future. (Student)

Other features of the exhibit were the students' documentary *The Esther and Emanuel Project* playing on a loop, a display of the picture book *Elms on the Water*, (inspired by the book *Born on the Water* by Nikole Hannah-Jones), and infographic posters that the students created early in the unit to share key learnings.

On the final presentation day, teachers signed up their classes for 15 minute "touring slots," where students in the younger grades could see the exhibit in progress and learn about the unit from 7th and 8th graders. I was full of pride watching my students guide their younger peers through the exhibit. Afterwards, students reflected on how to share hard history with very young people. They shared that they were able to still convey the stories and their import by adjusting their vocabulary while remaining true to the core of the history. In real-time, I watched them take on and wrestle with the same complexities I had while researching and teaching this unit. I was proud of how they handled the challenge with integrity and vulnerability, and the reflection and dialogue generated afterwards helped us further prepare for their community reception.

Students shared their exhibit with the Castine community in a gallery style opening in the CHS exhibit hall, where they stood near their work or led their parents and community members through the parts of the exhibit that they were experts on. Prior to the opening, students practiced different ways of answering difficult questions, seeking help, or gently "calling in" audience members when they inadvertently used outdated terms. They handled the evening with confidence and enthusiasm.

It is imperative to end this article by thanking the incredible students who piloted this unit. I leave you with my words to them:

I do not want to let this year go by without thanking you for your hard work and dedication in uncovering the unsung histories of our town this trimester. Your curiosity, empathy, and enthusiasm bring hope for the future. Because of you, these important people, their stories, and their contributions to our town's history are being remembered and celebrated. That, my friends, is making the world a better place – I could not be more proud of you.

Endnotes

1. OSU College of Arts & Sciences. "Teaching the "Hard History" of Slavery and Racism in America." [Artsandsciences.osu.edu](https://artsandsciences.osu.edu), The Ohio State University, 28 May 2020, bit.ly/43TgRh.
2. Jeffries, Hasan Kwame. "Teaching Hard History." Southern Poverty Law Center, 3 Dec. 2024, bit.ly/3GIXZfg.



Hatch Cove Farm offers a splendid setting for the CHS Summer Fundraiser.

Summer Cocktail Fundraiser 2025 – Senior Prom

Honoring Ruth and Ken Scheer

How would you like a chance to relive your high school prom? Well, here's your chance! Gather your tulle dresses, dust off your shiny shoes, tie those bow ties, and get ready to party at this summer's cocktail party - our very own "Senior Prom!"

This fundraising event will honor Ruth and Ken Scheer, two longtime members with decades of involvement with and support of the Historical Society. Ruth is an Honorary Director, has served on several committees, and co-chaired the House & Garden Tour masterfully for over 20 years. In addition to helping with logistics during the House & Garden Tour, Ken's major undertaking has been recording an engaging series of interviews with several of Castine's most illustrious citizens as they reminisce about aspects of life in town. These living history videos are available on the CHS website for your viewing pleasure. Ruth's and Ken's work is ongoing, and this will be an opportunity to honor their contributions and thank them.

This magical evening will offer something for everyone. Rioux Catering will supply sumptuous gourmet nibbles, and a silent auction will offer many unique experiences, treasures, and art pieces. A DJ will spin tunes to keep the dance floor hopping on the beautiful grounds and in the bedazzled barn at "Hatch Cove Farm." This hipped roof colonial home with its barns commands a knoll just outside the village overlooking Hatch Cove. Its former farmland is now part of Blue Hill Heritage Trust conservation lands. This iconic property hails from the 18th century and was recently acquired by Julia and Brooke Parish, our hosts for the evening.

Festive prom attire is encouraged, though not mandatory, and guests will win prizes in various categories for their sartorial creations! Mary Dearborn, chair of the CHS Development Committee writes, "Come join us for a magical evening of fun, food, and dancing in a 'blinged out' barn on a wonderful historic property to support our programs and mission!"

Save the date of Thursday, July 10 and watch for your invitation in the mail.

What's New in the Gift Shop

We often hear people say we have the best gift shop in town. We strive to offer unique, high-quality items that make great souvenirs or special gifts.

We are excited to show you some of the new products we will be offering this season. Over the winter, the staff seeks out new products that will help you find the perfect gift for friends, family, or yourself. And, best of all, your purchases support the work we do at Castine Historical Society!

We will now be carrying our own custom-designed scented jar candles with Witherle Woods, Wadsworth Cove, and Baron de Castin designs. Magnets and Christmas ornaments featuring Dyce Head lighthouse will keep your memories of Castine alive. Are bags your thing? We have new Castine zip code tote bags, as well as some sturdy made-in-Maine heavy duty canvas totes and wristlets in fun prints. We will be bringing back the 15 oz. stemless four flags wineglasses and adding 10 oz. square rocks glasses for your next party. We have restocked our ever-popular birch wood trays with some new designs and sizes, along with your old favorites. We continue to carry our navy fleece jackets with the four flags logo but have now added the option of a sleeveless vest.

Stop by the gift shop during our hours of operation. If you don't live locally or wish to shop when we are closed, please shop online. Go to castinehistoricalsociety.org and look for the **SHOP** button in the menu. If you shop online, we can ship directly to you, or you can opt for a local pick up. **And don't forget your 10% discount for current members!** Just type **MEMBER** in the discount box in your cart and the discount will be applied.



New after many requests – a sleeveless four flags logo vest



Heavy duty canvas tote



Our own exclusive Dyce Head Light magnets (l) and Christmas ornaments (r)



Bring the scents of Castine home with our exclusive Witherle Woods, Wadsworth Cove, and Baron de Castin scented candles



Ocean-themed birch wood serving tray

2025 Education Series

Most talks are in-person in the Castine Historical Society's Mitchell Room. See descriptions for other locations. **Due to space limitations, you must register in advance to attend in-person talks at CHS and the cemetery tour.** All lectures will also be livestreamed on CHS's YouTube channel. To make reservations or to find the livestream link, visit castinehistoricalsociety.org and go to the Exhibits and Events button. If you have questions or problems, call us at 207-326-4118.

Castine and the Cultural Landscapes of the Cod Fishery

Thursday, July 17, 7:00 p.m.

CHS Mitchell Room

Reservations are required to attend in person. The event will also be livestreamed. Visit castinehistoricalsociety.org to make reservations or for the livestream link.



Dr. Stephen Hornsby Drawing on his new book, *Cod Coasts*, Professor Stephen Hornsby from the University of Maine will discuss the development of the cod fishery industry along the coasts of northeastern North America from the early sixteenth century to the early twentieth century. He will examine the cultural or human landscapes associated with the fishery, ranging from small outports in Newfoundland to major fishing ports in Nova Scotia and New England. He will pay particular attention to Castine, a major center for cod fishing in the 19th century. The talk will be lavishly illustrated and is sure to appeal to those interested in the maritime world of the northeast. Following the presentation there will be a book sale and signing for his new publication *Cod Coasts: Cultural Landscapes of the Cod Fishery from Cape Cod to Labrador*. Copies of his book may also be purchased in advance at the Castine Historical Society's gift shop or online store.

The 16th Annual Deborah Pulliam Memorial Lecture – Penobscot Sense of Place

Wednesday, August 6, 7:00 p.m.

Delano Auditorium, Leavitt Hall, Maine Maritime Academy, Castine

No reservations to attend in person.

Visit castinehistoricalsociety.org for the livestream link.



James Eric Francis Sr.

James Eric Francis Sr., the Penobscot Nation's Director of Cultural and Historic Preservation and Tribal Historian, will speak on "Penobscot Sense of Place." During his talk, he will unpack stories about the origins and meanings of geographic place names in what is now known as Maine from a Wabanaki perspective. Wabanaki, part of the Algonkian language group, is the

first language of Maine, and each tribe has a distinct language that expresses worldview. The original words of this land – Casco, Katahdin, Kennebec, Androscoggin, Pemaquid – exist on any map of Maine today. As settlers colonized Maine with a dominant English language system, they named towns after their founding fathers or English homelands, resulting in a situation where Wabanaki people are now living in a deeply familiar place populated with foreign words. In his presentation, Mr. Francis will illuminate the relationship between natural resources, place names, and Wabanaki worldview. And through place names, Mr. Francis reveals the continued legacies of colonial violence on the landscape as well as the continuation of Indigenous adaptation, endurance, and resistance.

In addition to serving as the Penobscot Nation's Director of Cultural and Historic Preservation and Tribal Historian, Francis also serves as Chair of Penobscot Tribal Rights and Resource Protection Board and is a member of Tekakapimek Contact Station's Wabanaki Advisory Board.

Castine Historical Society Annual Meeting and Program

Thursday, August 21, 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.

Castine Inn, 33 Main Street, Castine

No reservations to attend in person.

Visit castinehistoricalsociety.org for the livestream link.

CHS's Annual Meeting is open to members and the general public. The event begins with a talk on the Historical Society projects and programs since the last annual meeting, followed by the election of new officers and members to the Board of Directors. After the business meeting, Executive Director, Dr. Kate McMahon will give a talk about her current research. A wine and cheese reception will be held after the meeting.

Does Anything from the Year 1776 Matter Today?

Thursday, September 4, 7:00 p.m.

CHS Mitchell Room

Reservations are required to attend in person. The event will also be livestreamed. Visit castinehistoricalsociety.org to make reservations or for the livestream link.



Dr. Liam Riordan

The Declaration of Independence is a fixture of American culture and the reason that many of us try to spend time with family, picnic, and watch fireworks on the Fourth of July. This illustrated talk looks at the text of the famous document (“all men are created equal...with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness”) and considers some of its late-eighteenth century context. This will set the stage for a discussion about the meaning of the Declaration’s political ideals as well as how it relates to US public life today.

Liam Riordan is a history professor at the University of Maine who specializes in the American Revolution. He is the co-editor of *What We Know, What We Wish: Maine Statehood, Historical Commemoration, and the Urgency of Public History*, forthcoming from the UMass Press in June 2025. He helps to organize National History Day in Maine, a statewide research contest for grade 6-12 students. He is also on the Board of Directors of the Great Pond Mountain Conservation Trust in Orland, Maine; the City of Bangor’s Historic Preservation Commission; and the Collections Committee of the Wilson Museum.



Georgia Zildjian leads a cemetery tour

Explore the Castine Town Cemetery

Saturday, October 18, 10:00 a.m. Rain date Saturday, October 25

Sunday, October 19, 10:00 a.m. Rain date Sunday, October 26

Both tours limited to 15 people.

Reservations required at castinehistoricalsociety.org.

Join Georgia Zildjian, Manager of Museum Learning at the Wilson Museum, and Lisa Simpson Lutts, the former Executive Director of the Castine Historical Society, for an hour-long walking tour of the Castine Cemetery. Participants will learn about the history of the cemetery while visiting the graves of Castine women, children, and men from all walks of life. Learn about their fascinating and unique stories and how they made a difference in the town. This is a joint program between Castine’s two museums – the Castine Historical Society and the Wilson Museum. Please note: the same tour is given on both days.



Open House Reception

2025 Season Open House

Saturday, June 21, 4:00-6:00 p.m.

Castine Historical Society

17 School St., Castine

Join us as we introduce our new Executive Director, Dr. Kate McMahon!

Enjoy a glass of wine or soft drink, have some delicious hors d’oeuvres, meet new and old friends, and view the 2025 season exhibits.

Everyone is welcome at this free event that kicks off the Historical Society’s season!

Collections Corner

Jules Thomson, Collections Manager

In late 2023, the Wilson Museum reached out to the Castine Historical Society with an intriguing offer: a potential transfer of their extensive collection of paper-based local Castine history materials to the Historical Society. The records include a diverse array of manuscripts, photographs, maps, ephemera, and books totaling around 150 record cartons worth of material or, in archivist-speak, around 150 linear feet of shelf space.



Why, you may well ask, do our two institutions think this move is a good idea?

There are several reasons. Broadly speaking, the transferred archives would significantly benefit from the excellent storage and preservation conditions available at CHS, as well as allowing for better public access. CHS has state-of-the-art collections storage, built relatively recently in 2015. Our vaults feature stable temperature and humidity control, fireproofing, and bunker-level security located well above sea level. There is also, perhaps most importantly, enough room for the Wilson's archival records in the CHS vault, with adequate space left to receive new collection donations. The Wilson has been collecting objects and archives for over 100 years, so their current storage capacity is quite tight.

Of equal importance is the fact that CHS has a reading room designed for researchers and other members of the public to use our archives and library materials. While the Wilson Museum staff have always done their best to provide space for researchers, the lack of a dedicated space makes it challenging, both for logistics and security of the collections.

Meanwhile, the Wilson's staff and leadership have also been engaged in a reevaluation of their extensive collection holdings, which span a notably broad range of material types and subjects, such as global anthropological and geological collections, and are

mostly object based rather than archival. Both organizations agree that we should work together to provide the most streamlined experience possible for residents and remote and on-site researchers. This ultimately means drawing clearer boundaries between what is collected and held by each institution.

Essentially, this move will allow CHS to become the one-stop-shop for archival research in Castine. Instead of referring researchers to collections held in each museum, the Wilson's staff will be able to refer any archive-based local history enquiries to the Historical Society. This will not only save staff time, but it will also likely cause significantly less confusion for researchers.

Beyond these immediate benefits, the project also positions the Wilson Museum and CHS as pioneers in the archival and museum fields. By setting an example of inter-organizational cooperation that simplifies access and reunites related collections, this transfer has the potential to elevate not only the two museums, but also Castine itself, as a place where stewardship of local history transcends institutional boundaries.

Will there be some challenges? Certainly. To make room for the incoming materials, CHS staff must reorganize our current shelves in the vaults. A number of items will need to be resolved such as the overall cost to the two institutions for this large-scale project, as well as how to handle duplicate materials. Frequent liaison between CHS and the Wilson staff will be essential for smoothly implementing this project. However, we see this collaboration as a big positive, especially for continuing stewardship of our shared history at the community level. For CHS, this project is more than just a transfer - it's a milestone in shaping its identity as the premier repository for Castine's archival treasures.



Our next step is to embark on a pilot project with an initial set of records that have been targeted for transfer. These consist of several boxes of records from Castine's Eastern State Normal School, a teacher's training college that existed from 1867 to 1942. CHS recently received a large donation of ESNS materials from the MMA library, so the transfer of the Wilson Museum's records will represent a final consolidation of records for the Normal School in Castine.

Board, Staff, and Donations

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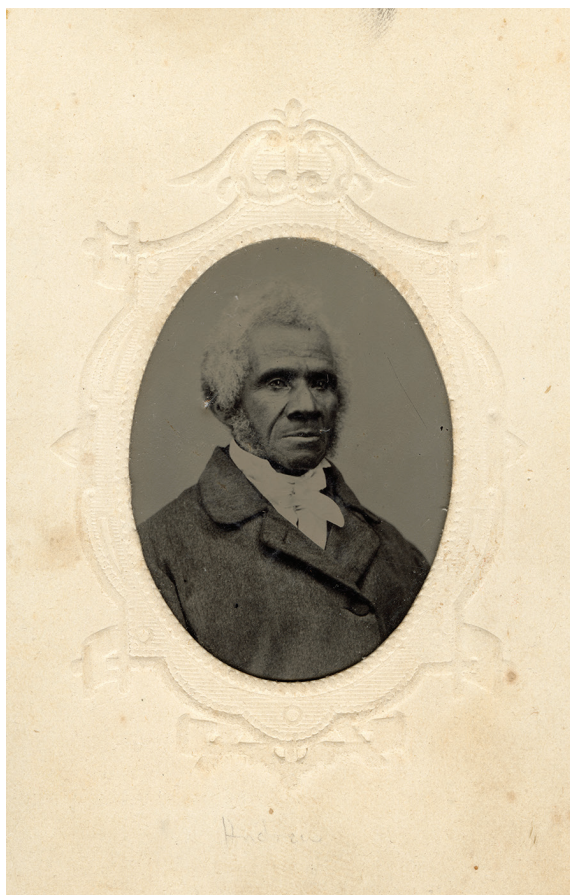


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Andrew Walker, c. 1860s
Donated by Brian Witherspoon

This photograph of Castine resident, Andrew Walker (c. 1778 – 1878), is one of many from the Johnston and Perkins family donated by long-time CHS member, Brian Witherspoon. This striking photographic portrait is a welcome addition to the Historical Society collection.

Walker's obituary noted that he was born on a plantation in Edgefield, SC around 1778. During his life of enforced enslavement, he was sold at least four times to various locations in the south, ending up in New Orleans. Sometime in the 1840s, Andrew was purchased by and continued in enslavement by Castine residents, Daniel and Sarah (Perkins) Johnston. The Johnstons were one of several Castine families living and working in New Orleans who purchased enslaved men, women, and children from the 1830s up through the Civil War.

In the late 1840s, when Daniel Johnston decided to move his family back to Castine to live in their grand Main Street house (today known as the Mary McCarthy house), they brought Walker with them. Walker continued to work for the family as a servant up until his death in 1878.

Uncovering details of Walker's life has been challenging. Recently, our volunteer researcher, Julie Jeffrey, found a sad clue about Walker's death hidden in a Castine resident's diary. The diarist wrote, "Andrew Walker, a coloured man who was found on the shore with face down in the water, was buried today. He probably drowned himself." A search for Walker's inquest papers with the state turned up nothing. It appears that his suicide was quietly covered up by the Johnston family and town residents. His funeral service was held in the Methodist Church (now destroyed), of which Walker was a faithful member.

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