

Rhode Island Roads

JACK O' LANTERN

SPECTACULAR

Leef Peeping Across RI

Celebrating Guy Fawkes Day

October 2021

Rhode Island Roads

Rhode Island Roads Magazine

2 Barber Avenue
Warwick, RI 02886
www.riroads.com
401.480.9355

Managing Editor

Paul Pence

Contributors

Paul Pence
Linda Eagleson

Photography

Paul Pence
Linda Eagleson
Roger Williams Park Zoo
Amy Martira

Stock Photography under Creative
Commons, courtesy of Pixabay
www.pixabay.com

All travel involves risk. Confirm
directions and critical information
before traveling. Be aware of
health and other concerns.

Copyright © 2021 by
Rhode Island Roads Magazine



October 2021

Fall Foliage



4

Where Am I?



15

**Jack-o-Lantern
Spectacular**



18

**Guy Fawkes
Bonfire Night**



26





The Magic of RI's Fall Foliage

**Story and Photos By
Paul Pence**

The untouched forests of Rhode Island vanished in the early 1800's, burned for the charcoal that fed the era's iron forges and creating the iconic patchwork of stone-walled farms that blanketed the rolling hills of New England. But the bucolic scenery so familiar from Currier and Ives prints existed for just a generation; over the last 100 years, the cleared fields have regrown into lush hardwood forests. Every year, as the cooler nights set in, those forests burst into brilliant autumn oranges and reds and browns and yellows and purples that attract leaf peepers from every corner of the country.

Before I came to Rhode Island, “autumn” was an abstract concept. I grew up in Texas, two thousand miles southwest of Rhode Island, where autumn is best described as the brief time between summer and winter when you can turn off the air conditioner and open the windows for fresh air. Colorful leaves appeared only on the teacher’s bulletin board, and what real leaves that didn’t stay green year-round turned a dusty dull beige before collapsing at the base of the trees.

Now that I live in Rhode Island, on autumn mornings my wife and I sip our tea on the slate patio I built

behind our house and listen to squadrons of Canada geese squawking in their flying wedge formations as they migrate to warmer climates.

To her, as a born-and-bred Rhode Islander, New England autumns are normal, but to me it is magical. I had no idea that I could wake up one morning and see a golden yellow tree outside my window, that I would look forward to walking my dog just so that I could see her dive nose-first into a sea of vivid orange oak leaves in quest of an imagined chipmunk, or that a gust of frosty wind could



shake red maples, causing them to toss their leaves into the air like a flock of crimson birds.

Not every tree erupts into color at the same time. The first hints of yellow appear on the birch leaves at the end of September with the onset of the first cool nights, particularly those lining the south and west sides of ponds and fields where the northern wind blows unrestricted against their canopies.

As the days progress, the red maples, almost black through the summer, retake their vivid red springtime hue. By the time the last tree starts changing colors, the first

trees are already bare and ready for winter. The best colors appear in northern Rhode Island's Blackstone Valley area first, usually around Columbus Day; the Atlantic coastline 70 miles to the south reaches its peak a week later.

Living in Rhode Island, I've learned that you very literally can't see the forest for the trees; vistas where you can look out and see entire forests are rare in Rhode Island, and with every clear line of sight blocked by a tree, you can't see entire forests.

One of the few vistas in the state is just off Tower Hill Road in South



Kingstown, where a round half-dome of stone called “Treaty Rock” or “Pettaquamscutt Rock” offers a view across the fjord-like Long Lake, outward toward Jamestown Island and Narragansett Bay. Athletic hikers can scramble up the steep trail to its summit to take in the foliage without too much difficulty.

Legend says that a lovelorn maiden waited her entire life on a nearby cliff overlooking Narragansett Bay’s west passage, waiting to spot her true love when he returns from the sea. But with the resurgence of the forests, her perch’s view is now obstructed in all directions by just a couple dozen trees.



For a while, lovers of sweeping vistas could thank the forest service for building a watchtower on the maiden's site that is open to the public, provided that they don’t mind a serious climb. But now the trees have grown up taller than the tower, making the views more and more restricted each year.

But you don’t have to trudge up a cliff or climb a forest ranger’s watch tower to admire expanses of forests. Rhode Island’s many ponds make excellent vantage points, letting you see the foliage laid out like a Degas



canvas in splashes of bright colors along the line of the opposite shore.

On almost any hike in Rhode Island forests or almost any car trip through the back roads of the Ocean State, there will be a chance to stop at a pond and enjoy the view.

The state's Department of Environmental Management maintains the state parks, frequently placing picnic tables and information boards at the ponds with public access. And since October is also migration season for Canada geese, there's a

chance to see these large birds up close.

Rhode Island's ponds, as beautiful as they can be, once served a purely functional purpose. They date from the days of powering mills, at first just simple grain mills with picturesque overshot water wheels. These water-powered mills, along with their windmill and tide-mill cousins were the height of agrarian technology in the 1700's, grinding grain into flour.

The Gilbert Stuart birthplace museum in Saunderstown, for instance, is a great stop on a drive





through Rhode Island's South County. Its functioning overshot water wheel is still capable of grinding dried tobacco leaves into a fine powder snuff

But ponds in Rhode Island tended to be small – that was until Samuel Slater built the first water-powered textile mill in Pawtucket along the Blackstone River in 1793. Using designs based on pirated British technology, he launched the American Industrial Revolution. Soon, every useful stretch of running water in Rhode Island had been dammed and rerouted to drive the water turbines which powered the

factories of Rhode Island's textile industry. Water power reigned supreme for fifty or so years until steam power took over, but the ponds and lakes created to power the mills remain.

Consider a hike around Ryan Park's ponds in North Kingstown or the Frenchtown Park in East Greenwich, both former

textile mill sites turned to public use, featuring extensive hiking trail systems and beautiful foliage vistas across their mill ponds.

Or take a more leisurely stroll through Providence's urban parks, like the Roger Williams Park with its world-class zoo, formal



gardens, museum, and antique carousel. While you won't be surrounded in a seemingly endless patchwork of color, you can still stop under a tree, crunch through the confetti of leaves on the ground, and take a break from your trip.

Some people aren't satisfied by looking out across bodies of water;

they want to get out on the water directly by renting a kayak or canoe in Wickford to follow along the coastline of the Narragansett Bay as it cuts through the center of the state?

Canoeists also love the waterway of the now-defunct



Blackstone River canal with its placid waters and overhanging trees. More adventurous paddlers seek out the occasional swoop of rapids along the Wood River as it winds through the west half of state, punctuated by portages over Stepping Stone Falls and the occasional mill dam.



Bicycling Rhode Island is not a task requiring Lance Armstrong – unlike the Alps, Jerimoth Hill the highest point in the state is just 812 feet. Bicycling is especially easy along the many train right-of-ways that have been turned into hike-and-bike trails.

Trains can only navigate a slight grade, usually just one or two percent at most, making these trails a casual cruise rather than a test of physical endurance. The best bicycle trails include the East Bay Bike Path that runs from East Providence southward to Bristol and the Washington Secondary Bike Path that winds through Cranston and West Warwick into Coventry. You can find bicycle rentals in several locations.

A driving tour has the advantage of letting you stop and poke through country diners, antique shops, and farm stands. Look for a route that takes you through



farmland, past ponds, and ideally on roads that don't have a lot of telephone wires to distract from that perfect view. My favorite autumn drive follows highway 102 from North Smithfield all the way down to Wickford village. If we go out for a drive in early October, we'll stick to the north end of the state. Later in the month, we concentrate on South County, looking for open farmland and swaths of colorful trees beyond.

The side trips and country are really the reason my wife and I go off to see the foliage. On our outings, we can enjoy a home-style meal at





Wright's Chicken Farm, pick tart apples that will end up in pies at one of Smithfield's pick-your-own farms, stand under the arched Washington Bridge in Lincoln to listen to the bouncing echoes when we speak, feel the mist rising up from the Blackstone River as the water rushes over the Woonsocket dam, and comb through Chepachet's antique stores in search of bargains.

We head off to the rural festivals, like the Scituate Art Festival, and stop at farm stands and garage sales. If we discover a new historical site, a museum, or a cemetery, we'll stop and learn a

little more about the history of the land in which we've made home. Of course, along the way we always gawk in amazement at the foliage, especially when we crest a hill while we're driving and we can see kaleidoscopic trees stretching a mile down the road.

If you prefer to let someone else do the driving, there are tours organized by both local and national bus services that will wander throughout New England. The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council runs train excursions each October to explore the foliage. The 46-mile trip follows the Blackstone





River northward from Cumberland into Massachusetts and lasts the entire day.

A creative way to get an inexpensive foliage tour is to catch a commuter train from Providence to Boston and back, or take the Newport ferry from Providence. Once you're in Newport, the city's shops, galleries, restaurants, and historical sites are readily available and generally walkable. Newport is the home not only of the famous Gilded Age mansions of the super-wealthy like Cornelius Vanderbilt

and Doris Duke; it's also the home of the Turo Synagogue, the first synagogue in the New World.

Since I've come to Rhode Island, I've experienced more magical experiences than I even imagined could exist. I've been overflowed by a pair of swans, found a starfish under a flat rock, sat quiet on a rock in fog so thick I couldn't see the ground, and, perhaps most magical, I've experienced the colors and tastes and sounds of a real autumn.



Where Am I?

Clues

1 It's art!

**2 There's a stone tower
nearby.**

3 Lots more art inside.



“Reconfiguration” by Michael Hansel sits on the lawn outside the Newport Museum of Art.







Roger William Park's Jack O' Lantern Spectacular

**Story and Photos by
Linda Eagleson**

2

Creating an atmosphere of delight and amazement, the annual "Jack o' Lantern Spectacular" at the Roger Williams Park Zoo each October is a truly inspiring demonstration of artistry and dedication.

Each year's theme changes – One year, the theme was 'Around the World', featuring pumpkins carved into artistic depictions of places and things from around the world, from the Eiffel Tower to Australian kangaroos.

But the theme didn't stop there; it featured a variety of pumpkin carving celebrating celebrities like Ghandi and fictional characters like James Bond -- each identifiable as icons of their own parts of the world.

The event's primary artist, John Reckner, an Oxford, Massachusetts mailman, was



inspired by a Vermont farm that he had seen lined with glowing jack o' lanterns.

In turn, he organized the first jack o' lantern spectacular in Oxford in 1988. There were 185 jack o' lanterns featured in this first event, all carved by local residents and displayed on a hillside behind a local school. About 300 spectators attended.

Now a resident of Rhode Island, Reckner has taken on the responsibility of organizing this event for the Roger Williams Park Zoo.







The premier presentation of the jack o' lantern event attracted more than 80,000 visitors, making it a tradition for many New England families. A team of over 30 professional pumpkin carvers spend six weeks creating the trail,



developing different themes, backgrounds, and a truly breathtaking display of over 150,000 pounds of jack o lanterns, each carved with painstaking detail and artistry.





The centerpiece of the display, known as the "tree of light", is displayed in the focal point of the trail, with individual carvings of fantastically illuminated pumpkins -- hanging from trees, mounted on tree stumps, and some even



emitting smoke and fire. The wonderment of the whole event would keep the family entertained and very appreciative of the monumental undertaking.

Visitors feast their eyes on scenes of famous sports heroes,



celebrities, historic figures, and, of course, a wild pumpkin patch of endangered species. A very family-oriented event that will continue to entice thousands for years to come.

Expect a long wait, but also expect to be entertained while waiting. Costumed characters and clowns stroll up and down the lines to help make the time pass quickly. A jazz band eases the wait once the line winds through the gates of the zoo. Booths sell glowing and flashing trinkets, and there's a chance to purchase cider to warm your insides. There's even a large

screen TV showing animal documentaries. Visiting the Jack O' Lantern Spectacular on a weeknight or closer to closing time will help reduce the length of the lines.

Come and enjoy the marvel of it all. Plan on an evening of fun and entertainment. And, don't forget, bring along a trusted friend, as this is "Halloween"!

The Jack O' Lantern Spectacular runs through October 31st. Check www.rogerwilliamsparkzoo.org for details.



Probably the most asked questions about the Jack O' Lantern Spectacular have to do with carving technique – what are the secrets of the Spectacular's expert carvers? Here are some tips from the experts on how to get crafty with pumpkin carving.



- Carve the hole and gut your jack o' lantern in the bottom of the pumpkin, not at the top. This provides more stability as it gets
- softer and it is easier to light.
- Use the features of your particular pumpkin to your advantage. For example, if the pumpkin has a long, curly stem, place the pumpkin on its side and use the stem as a nose.
- Use a detail carving tool, such as those used in ceramics, to peel



the pumpkin skin for more detail, rather than just carving holes into the pumpkin.

- Practice peeling more or less of the skin away. to create a 3-D shading effect when the light shines through.
- Use markers to draw your design before you carve.

- To help your pumpkins stay fresh longer, coat the inside of your finished jack o' lantern with garden lime. You can also spray the outside with a diluted bleach solution.





Guy Fawkes Bonfire Night

A photograph showing a group of people in historical costumes, likely representing the Gunpowder Plot. In the foreground, a man in a red and white robe and a tall, pointed hat is looking to the left. Behind him, another person in a similar costume is visible. To the right, a man in a dark robe and a tall, pointed hat is looking towards the camera. The background is dark, and there are some wooden structures visible. The overall scene is lit with warm, reddish light, suggesting a bonfire or a stage light.

In early October each year, the folks in Misquamicut celebrate Guy Fawkes Day with a play and bonfire.

The Misquamicut Players have made an annual tradition of reenacting this night of inquisition and execution. Written and directed by Caswell Cooke, Jr. and presented by the Misquamicut Business Association at the Windjammer Hotel, this evening brings together local actors and musicians for a comedic look at this English holiday.

But before we get to the fun and games... who the heck is Guy Fawkes?

The story begins in 1605, when Guy Fawkes (also known as

Guido-yes, really) and a group of coconspirators attempted to blow up the Houses of Parliament. The conspirators were angered because King James had been exiling Jesuits from England. The plotters wanted to wrest power away from the king and return the country to the Catholic faith. Today, they would be known as extremists.

However, in an attempt to protect a friend in the House of Lords, one of the group members sent an anonymous letter warning his friend to stay away from the parliament on the evening in





question. The warning letter reached the King, and the conspirators were caught, tortured and executed. Guy Fawkes and his friends had rolled 36 barrels of gunpowder under the Houses of Parliament.

These days, Guy Fawkes Day is also known as Bonfire Night. The event is commemorated in England every year with fireworks and burning an effigy of Fawkes on a bonfire. The effigies are simply known as “Guys”, which the English have been burning to mark Guy Fawkes Day for almost 400 years.

In the first bonfires, called “bone fires” at the time, it was not the bones or effigies of Guy Fawkes which were burned. Not until 1806, two centuries later, did the people start burning effigies of Guy Fawkes himself. Still today, communities throw dummies of Guy Fawkes, politicians and people in the news on the bonfire.

All of this is brought to life in Misquamicut each year when a bonfire and bit of fun is called for.

Actors play the parts of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Duke of Earl, Earl of Nottingham and King. The setting is the Court of King

James I in England circa 1605. There are flutes, a five piece trombone section, and marvelous costumes. Then there are bagpipes, hot cider, the large bonfire, fireworks and so much more. The whole family is invited to step back in time and enjoy this magical evening.

The players present their reenactment of the Guy Fawkes Trial and bonfire, concluding in a grand finale fireworks display .

The reenactment performance features “The Misquamicut Players,” a group of local actors,

and “King Crimson’s Jesters,” an ensemble of local musicians (aka The Beach Bums), and will begin at 7PM on Misquamicut Beach.

Each season the Guy Fawkes performance incorporates a different thematic element into the 17th century trial and execution of Guy ‘Guido’ Fawkes, who attempted, for religious reasons, to blow up British Parliament with the everyone it, including the King.

One year, musicians performed the Beatles Classics “All You Need Is Love,” as well as a medley from the famous 1969 album Abby Road. Past performances have



included Star Trek, Monty Python, and Braveheart themes.

The 2021 performance will include a special guest, Ford Coley of the duo England Dan and John Ford Coley, adding a “Yacht Rock” flavor to the night.

The event includes an enormous bonfire on the beach, usually with displays by the Westerly Morris Men, as well as the full marching regalia of Rhode Island’s Kentish Guards Fife and Drum Corp.

All are welcome and the event is free of charge.

Just a side note to the celebration: Even 400 years ago,

people had a love of conspiracy theories -- A common question asked is; “was there really a gunpowder plot, or were the 'conspirators' framed by the king?”

There was no doubt an attempt to blow up parliament. Guy Fawkes and his associates may have been caught in a Jacobean sting operation. Many of the plotters were known traitors. It would have been almost impossible for them to get hold of 36 barrels of gunpowder without the government finding out.



As for the secret warning letter, many historians believe the King's officials fabricated it.

Of course, Rhode Island's presentation is a bit more tongue-in-cheek, but if you're in an English sort of mood, you might consider buttering your crumpets and heading to Misquamicut Beach for a bit of British entertainment. Oh, and it's free. For details on the next (and previous) Guy Fawkes bonfires at Misquamicut Beach's Windjammer Hotel, 321 Atlantic Avenue in Westerly, visit guyfawkesusa.com



**Did you notice anything
missing?**

**You might have noticed that this
issue has no advertising.**

**If you want our readers to know
about your business, now is the
time to take advantage of this
opportunity to lock in low
advertising prices as our readership
grows. Visit us online at
www.riroads.com to learn more.**