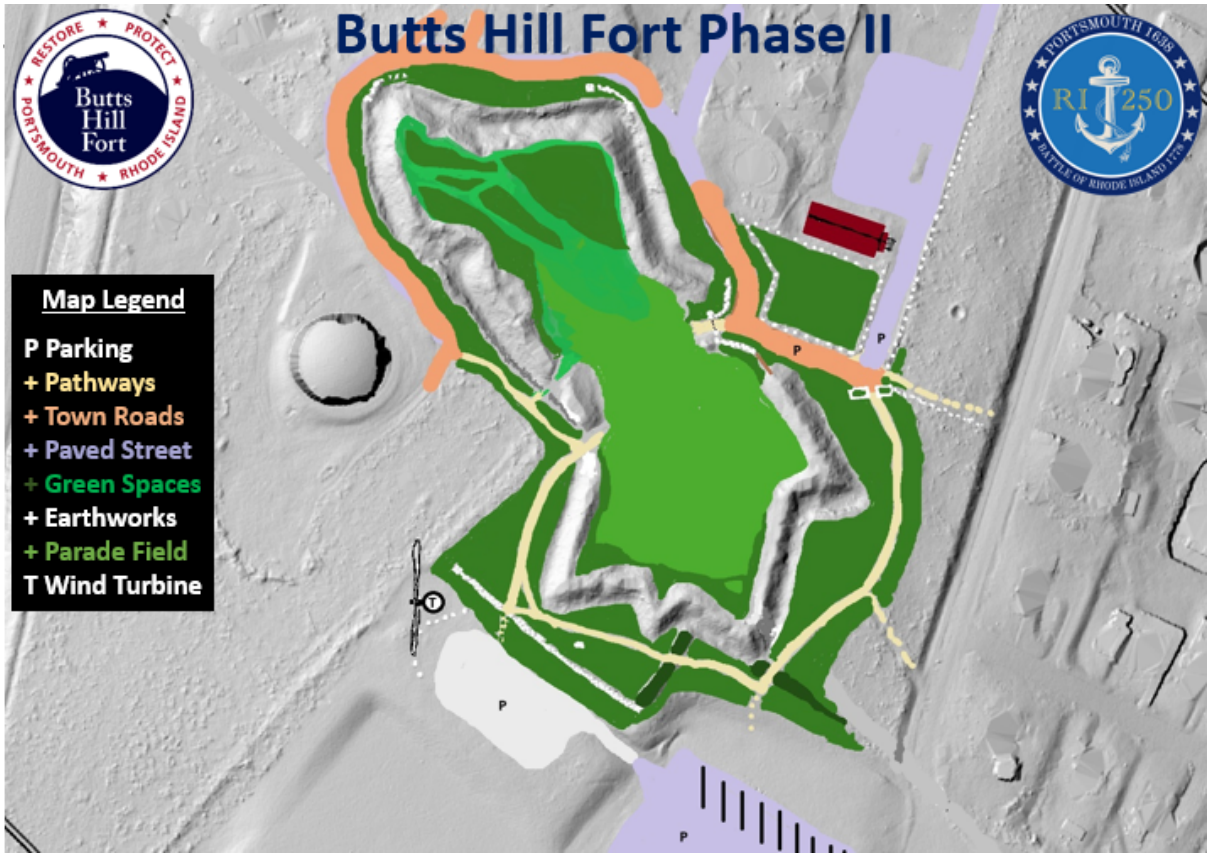
Annual Report 2025
- Paul Murphy-Chair, Butts Hill Fort Restoration Committee (BHFRC), BoRIA Director

Butts Hill Fort Restoration Committee (BHFRC) is pleased to report the current physical status of the fort site is excellent in all areas we have cleared and improved over the past three years. The full southern half of the fort adjacent to Portsmouth High is in wonderful shape and in use daily as an easily walkable, pathway-connected piece of Portsmouth's Butts Hill neighborhood. In calendar year 2025 our volunteers consolidated and maintained the major progress made in our 2023 and 2024 **"Phase I"** the **Southern Earthworks Improvement Project.**

Working in concert with Department of Public Works, we continued to keep the multi-acre site maintained, the grounds mowed, uncluttered, and litter free. We worked weekly to ensure the newly cleared southern seven segments of the 250-year-old earthworks remained carefully cultivated with the protective desired grasses intended to replace the prior out-of-control invasive vegetation varieties removed in 2024's Phase I execution. Further, we continued to enhance the many dozens of "keeper trees"—those with optimum shade and the most aesthetic value--selected with the approval of Town Tree Warden and Commissioner during Phase I planning. BHFRC continues to perform weekly routine maintenance where needed. We also continue to enhance and maintain the Southern Battery Green and the BHF Fort Green between Dyer, Earl and Butts Streets at the fort's main entrance. We take pride in demonstrating effective land and earthwork stewardship, as we provide a living history backdrop to our educational outreach and historical tour teams. BHFRC maintains Butts Hill Fort as always in a "visitor-ready" state.

Phase I. Southern Earthworks Improvement Project (enhanced photo from November 2024).

Phase II Plans. The operative plan for completing BHF's northern half encompasses stabilizing and maintaining the final seven of fourteen earthwork segments and is reflected in the graphic below: **Phase II. Northern Earthworks Improvement Project**. This second phase is intended to mirror the methodology and official coordination/approval processes followed to realize Phase I, the physical restoration project generously underwritten by van Beuren Charitable Foundation. For Phase II we also intend to use the same combination of professional grade tree removal contractor and equipment augmented with our own organic BHFRC 100% volunteer labor to maximize efficiency and to make every single grant dollar count. The work concept is also straightforward: To selectively remove all unwanted trees, invasives, shrubs and debris from the northern half of the fort's interior and exterior slopes, the surrounding trenches and adjacent path system in order to arrest deterioration and erosion. It will culminate with the hydroseed of all cleared earthworks with select grass varieties in order permanently stabilize and maintain their structural integrity, while simultaneously transforming the all new "fort campus" into a more accessible and desirable national heritage site.



Phase II Northern Earthworks Improvement Project (End State Proposed BHF Design v 2026).

For project flexibility, Phase I and II plans are specifically designed to be scalable. For that purpose BHF earthworks are designated by segments #1-14. Therefore, the number of segments achievable will be proportional to the funding obtained. The level of funding available in 2024

allowed us to achieve the first seven segments (#1-7). We could have gone further with more, or done less with less (funding). Finally, given the fact that vegetative removal work of the size and scope required needs professionally contracted equipment and expertise running into the five-figure range, we will execute to the level of funding available. We will start with the next west segment/#8, and will continue clockwise around the north to segment #14, which completes BHF's circumference at the main gate and meets segment #1, completed in 2024's Phase I.

Funding procurement via grants that are specifically targeted for BHF clearing and restoration work continues to be the largest challenge we face entering 2026. Yet our stated BoRIA/BHFRC "origin story" goal remains to complete the fort (i.e. both phases) prior to the forthcoming 2028 250-year anniversary of the Battle of Rhode Island. Therefore, we need to shift BHFRC's 2026 priority into fundraising efforts specifically targeted for physical fort restoration work. We believe $100K is a solid planning number sufficient to complete the physical aspects of Phase II, and help with other site enhancements such as permanent historical signage which also will be funding dependent to achieve at professional scale. That will be our funding goal advocated via Battle of RI Association 501(c)(3) channels this year. In essence we hope to dovetail saving the largest Revolutionary War earthwork in New England with the 250th celebrations highlighting Rhode Island's unique role in the War, and 2026 is the key year to achieve both goals.

Fort Enhancements and Initiatives. In 2025, several major and minor site enhancement projects at Butts Hill Fort were pursued individually. These will all continue into 2026. Each is pending its own volunteer commitment, levels of effort and/or potential funding. These include:

1. **Permanent Signage.** We are pursuing historical, navigation and informational sign varieties. We will continue work on signage content, designs and storyboarding for selected locations. These locations coincide with the three fort entrances, key features (Barracks site, Northern battery, magazine) and scenic vantage points. Currently, light weight temporary metal BHF tour and navigation signs exist which are indicative of where we would put permanent signage. Historic Signage, is a separate and discrete effort that is ongoing, but the current Fort "campus" grounds are ready for installation of up to six historic interpretive signs. We have selected six best view line and spatially desired locations:
   1. The "Battle Overlook" south across the valley to Quaker, Turkey and Almy hills;
   2. battlements/earthworks information; 3. British barracks site and period lifeways;
   4. Fort phased development by British 1777-79 thru French final plan 1780-81;
   5. Major period actors involved at the site; 6. French cooperation and engineering period (under Lafayette Rochambeau's direction)

   We are working with the American Battlefield Trust to make BHF the potential anchor and first state location developed in ABT's "Liberty Trail Rhode Island" initiative. And are also pursuing grant funding dedicated to signage from multiple sources. We believe professional signage will complete the site by explaining its key facets, historical relevance, and role the strategic hilltop area played throughout each period of the war, and the battle of RI itself.

2. **Stone wall and BHF main gate area upgrade and repairs**. Existing esthetic stone walls in various states of repair flank the stone-pillared main gate, the length of the southern battery green, and the northwest and northeast corners of the site. These are not original to

Revolutionary War BHF. However, they do date back to the 1923 original Terry preservation work period and that original BHF site design. In 2025 and prior years, we have made only rudimentary repairs as the walls are secondary to the main priority of invasive vegetative clearing. The 100-yard-long stone wall enclosing the southern battery green is by far the largest and in the best current condition. It was literally cut out of the invasive vegetation and improved on both sides in 2023-2025 along with the green space the wall encloses. However, the badly deteriorated main gate area will require a dedicated sub-project, to include professional expertise and adequate funding. The adjoining Butts Hill Fort Green (Town Lot 72) has been maintained and improved in 2025, and we have accepted a local Eagle Scout's proposed project to repair the entire enclosing wooden railed fence in 2026. Finally, BHFRC is working with town officials on our proposal to remove the legacy dirt-mound traffic barrier at the top of Dyer Street, and replace it with traffic blocks to protect the eastern footpath entrance. This would open the (newly cleared off) Earle Street connection to the main gate area, and allow thru traffic from Dyer to access the gate, while providing BHF dedicated parking on Earle. (See **Phase II** diagram above which reflects the latter proposal).

2025 BHF Events. Throughout calendar year 2025 BHFRC held several public volunteer cleanup and clearing events, bookended by April's American Battlefield Trust "Park Day" weekend and culminating with the "Colonel Burt Quist/US Marine Corps Commemorative" in November.

BAR Living History Weekend. The Brigades of the American Revolution (BAR) collaborated on a living history encampment 2-4 May, bringing together over a dozen of the organization's reenactment regiments under the BAR umbrella. British units including the 54th Regt camped overnight on the southern "British barracks" plateau end of the fort, with Continentals and State units encamped on the north end of the parade field. The immersive experience was open to the public allowing reenactors to share their knowledge and personal experiences. Unit drills were conducted to include a mock attack by British and Loyalist troops that was repelled by American forces including our 1st and 2nd RI Regiments. We wish to thank Ocean State Air Solutions and WealthCare Investment Partners for the generous use of their building facilities in support of the participants including the hosting of the BAR's annual business meeting, which featured a keynote speech by noted historian Don Hagist.

Archeology Field School. Stonehill College adjunct professor Dr. Alexandra Uhl returned to the Butts Hill Fort campus from May thru July, leading a team made up of recent graduates from the college's Anthropology program and Salve Regina's Cultural Historic Preservation program. This summer, the field team brought a top-of-the-line ground penetrating radar from University of Kentucky's Engineering department to search for potentially hidden structures important to the Battle of Rhode Island and the fort's evolution through time such as the magazine, trash pits, privies, and cannon batteries. Additionally, this season the team had gained permission for archeological test pits on sites where historical education signs are expected to be installed. Items recovered from test pits and scientific metal detection (on private properties outside the fort) included buttons, musical instrument parts, musket balls, ceramics, clay pipes, clay marbles and a dice carved from a musket ball. This exciting assemblage represents the period lifeways of soldiers and their families, including the hundreds of children that accompanied the international troops who were stationed at the fort over the years, including the apparent love of games (clay marbles and dice). Recovered horse teeth, shells, and "faunal remains" (such as cow and deer) give insight into the importance of the horse to the garrisoned soldiers, as well as insight into their typical diets. After analysis, all artifacts of interest will be preserved, stored, and available for potential public display in Portsmouth Historical Society's collection.
The student team also made use of a "Leo Arctec 3D" handheld scanner to capture full scans of accurately-dressed Revolutionary War period re-enactors for use in future virtual reality displays and informational signage around the fort's vicinity. Local community and high school visitors were fortunate to see the re-enactors dressed in the historically-accurate Battle of Rhode Island period regalia of New England militia, Hessen, French, and British troops. The 2025 Field School was made possible through a generous grant from the van Beuren Charitable Foundation.

Other Endeavors, Events and Updates.
-Newly cleared BHF is officially listed as a public park and "recommended location to visit" by Portsmouth Parks & Recreation. **www.portsmouthri.gov/170/Public-Parks-Playgrounds**
- Ragged Island Brewery highlighted BHF/RC for public engagement at July 9th band concert.
- BHFRC became a foundational partner in **Portsmouth's 250 Commission** led by Craig Clark.
- 29 August BHF's 3rd annual **Sunset Salute** to the fallen. (re-enactors included: 1st RI, 2nd RI, Massachusetts militia, Knox Color Guard, British 54th Regt, Kentish Guard. Pawtuxet Rangers).
- Gloria Schmidt created a dedicated BHF website: **buttshillfort.com** to provide information and tour guide support to anyone interested. Another wonderful Gloria gifted resource.