

# The Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum

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Winter 2014

## What's new at the Museum?

### Grand Opening of the Welcome Center and Bell Gallery

June 20, 2014

One hundred fifty friends of the museum gathered to celebrate the long awaited grand opening of the Welcome Center and to kick off the opening of our very first exhibit in the new gallery space. The new gallery and professional lighting system highlighted original works by both Gilbert Stuart and daughter Jane Stuart, as well as the featured exhibit, *Natural Rhode Island*, showcasing the photography of Ed Hughes. The stunning original Stuarts and Ed's hauntingly beautiful and intimate photographs of local wildlife were an instant hit with visitors.

The new gallery is named in honor of our chief donor, former Museum president Dan Bell, who donated the funds in memory of Daniel A. Bell, Jr. We are deeply grateful to Dan Bell, to major donor The Champlin Foundations, and to all of you who gave donations to the Capital Campaign to make this project possible.



Former Museum Presidents Curtis Givan and Dan Bell



Trustee Gail Stokes



Museum President Peggy Todd with photographer Ed Hughes



A portion of the new gallery space. Thank you to our friends at Robin Hollow Farm for the donation of this beautiful bouquet for the gallery opening.

## President's Message Winter 2014



Dear Friends,

What an amazing season for the Museum! The doors officially opened to the new Welcome Center and Bell Gallery on June 20<sup>th</sup>. Featured was the extraordinary photography of Ed Hughes. There were smiles galore and some tears as all of us here at the museum watched in amazement as visitors and friends came in and gathered for the celebration! Many thanks and gratitude to you all who made this possible with your generous contributions whether it be monetary or time and talents!

Two more featured exhibits followed: "**Rhode Island Revealed**" and "**Inspired!**" We all are indebted to our dedicated Executive Director, Peggy O'Connor for planning and executing all that was needed for these beautiful exhibits. Many thank you's to the artists who entered their work... so beautiful, amazing and captivating!

We are very pleased to announce the hiring of Elizabeth Stone as an assistant to the Executive Director. Elizabeth is experienced in museum collections and the daily operations of a museum organization. Her youth and energy coupled with Peggy's experience make for a dynamic duo!

The annual fundraiser featured Anthony Tomaselli as our Honorary Chair. His easy manner is equaled only by his breathtaking works of art! A delightful evening with music, wine, and fine food was enjoyed by all!

Plans for the use of the beautiful gallery space are in the works. There are many possibilities that will attract new visitors as well as our faithful friends. We are very hopeful that the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum will become one of the premier places to visit in Rhode Island. This lovely spot "nestled in the hollows of Saunderstown" offers varied and unique experiences. Please share yours with family and friends!

Fondly,

*Peggy Todd*

**Peggy Todd**  
**President of the Board of Trustees**

# Annual Appeal

## December is Annual Appeal month.

Donations may be made on our website:

[www.gilbertstuartmuseum.org](http://www.gilbertstuartmuseum.org)

(on the membership page under "donate")

or sent in to the museum office

815 Gilbert Stuart Road

Saunderstown, RI, 02874

**All donations are tax-deductible.**

**Over 1250 visitors viewed our exhibit  
"Rhode Island Revealed" July 18 - September 1, 2014.  
We sold 13 original works of art.**



Artists Nina Ackmann and Nancy Beck enjoy the opening reception for "Rhode Island Revealed"

## *Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum*

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### Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum Mission Statement

The Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum preserves the birthplace of Gilbert Stuart and its surrounding acreage. Focused on history, art, and nature, the Museum is charged with directing and supporting its operation as a National Historic Landmark and with the conservation of its natural setting

## WILLIAM BINGHAM

William Bingham is not a well known eighteenth century American but he certainly made his mark on the early history of the nation. Born in 1752 in Philadelphia, he became the richest man in America. Besides being active in the Revolution, he was a statesman, a banker and a patron of the arts. And, of course, he had his portrait painted by Gilbert Stuart.

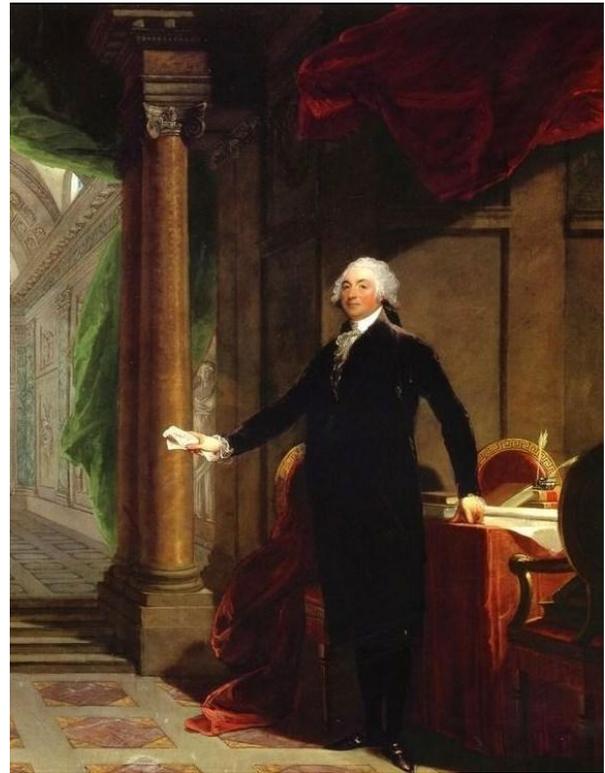
He first accumulated wealth during the Revolution when he acted as a privateer, capturing British ships in the Caribbean. He then engaged in trading with the West Indies. By the age of 29 he was the richest man in Philadelphia, acquiring a fortune as an international trader, an investor in land in New York State and Maine and a stockholder in the Bank of North America.

Bingham met Stuart in London in 1783 while arranging trade with the British. The artist began a portrait of the Bingham family there but it was never finished, possibly because of a disagreement with Anne Bingham over the composition of the painting. This did not sour their relationship and Bingham was instrumental in getting Stuart one of his early commissions in America, that of John Jay.

In 1786, the Bingham's returned to Philadelphia and moved into their new home, reportedly the grandest in the city and perhaps the country. Although William Bingham was known to be good humored and very sociable, he was not generally liked because he was extravagant, ostentatious and constantly intent on making money. Nonetheless, he was chosen as a representative to the Continental Congress, elected to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in 1790 and to the United States Senate in 1795.

Gilbert Stuart was commissioned, in 1796 by William and Anne Bingham, to paint what would become one of the most celebrated portraits of George Washington. The artist spent about six months creating a full-length picture of the President, now known as the Lansdowne portrait.

William decided to make a gift of the Washington portrait to Lord Lansdowne, perhaps in appreciation for the Englishman's support during the War of Independence. Because the Bingham's did not know the former Prime Minister well, Stuart was concerned that he would not welcome the obligation of accepting the gift of a portrait of George Washington from Bingham. So the beautiful and charming Mrs. Bingham was charged with making the arrangements for the gift to Lord Lansdowne. Lansdowne was very pleased with the painting and it was hung in a place of honor in his home.



**William Bingham** Gilbert Stuart  
1797 oil on canvas, 44 7/8 c 34 5/8"  
ING Bank NV, London Branch

The following year Gilbert Stuart had another commission to paint William and Anne Bingham's portraits. Beside the individual portraits, the artist did a small, full length rendering of Bingham. This is an unusual work because the artist rarely painted full-length portraits. It shows the wealthy merchant standing in the hall of his grand house, dressed in a dark suit with his powdered hair in a queue, lit from above. He stands beside a table, which holds books, papers and an inkwell - indicating his involvement in commerce. Bingham's raised hand holds a document and he gestures toward the interior of the house, beyond columns and a rich green drape. The sculptures lining the impressive hall, which is brightly lit by clerestory windows in the barrel-vaulted ceiling, give an impression of wealth and grandeur.

Three years later, Gilbert Stuart's relationship with Bingham was ended when the artist disagreed over who had permission to make the engraving of the Lansdowne portrait. It was done in England by James Heath and Stuart deemed it of inferior quality. Stuart's outrage was made known to Bingham but he did not receive a satisfactory resolution to the problem. The artist probably would have accepted recompense for the lost income from the engraving.

Anne Bingham died in 1801 and William moved to England where he died three years later.

# *Milling Around at the Museum*

## **What is this?**



Lye stone, also called a leaching stone, at the Gilbert Stuart Museum

Lye, used for making soap in colonial days, was made by leaching water through wood ash. Hardwood ashes from the fire were saved throughout the year. To make the lye, the colonists would first prepare a "lye stone." They would find a hard, flat stone and, on the top of the stone, carve a circular groove (the size of the bottom of a barrel) with a lip or spout from that groove to the edge of the stone. The lye stone would be elevated above the ground to allow a collection container to be placed below the spout. A barrel, holes drilled in the bottom, was then placed in the circular groove atop the lye stone. Straw or some filter material was placed at the bottom of the barrel, the wood ash added, then the barrel was filled the rest of the way with water. The water leached through the ashes producing lye. The lye drained out the holes at the barrel bottom, through the grooves in the lye stone and into the collection container. Colonists would use the lye, combined with rendered fat, to make soap. Lye could also be sold for additional income.

***The leaching stone was donated to the Museum in 1980 by Edith Sarwin (from her own garden) in conjunction with Dorothy MacCall.***  
M. O'C.

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August 8th fundraiser gala "Keep the Wheels Turning"  
honorary chair RI artist Anthony Tomaselli  
with event co-chair and Trustee Ray Wertz

## **Rhode Island Masters Exhibit:**

We are planning an exhibit of original works of art by 18th and 19th century Rhode Island artists for the summer of 2015. We have been offered the loan of several paintings of "Rhode Island Masters" and are actively seeking works to display in this exhibit. Do you own a RI Master original work of art? Please contact the Museum if you would consider the loan of your RI Master artwork for this exhibit. ([info@gilbertstuartmuseum.org](mailto:info@gilbertstuartmuseum.org) 401-294-3001)

Here are some of the Rhode Island Masters:

- **Gilbert Stuart** (1755 - 1828)
- **Jane Stuart** (1812-1888)
- **Edmund Darch Lewis** (1835-1910)
- **John LaFarge** (1835-1910)
- **Edward Mitchell Bannister** (1828-1901)
- **George William Whittaker** (1840-1916)
- **William Trost Richards** (1833-1905)

## What are people saying about us?

- \* ***"We loved the history. The museum is a true gem"***
- \* ***"Great guide, beautiful day, wonderful place! Thank you!"***
- \* ***"The guide was very informative and engaging. The day was beautiful and the site very peaceful and historical. It was like a step back in time."***
- \* ***"Great to have children involved and so informed."***
- \* ***"Very impressed at how well the site is maintained."***
- \* ***"Great part of American history being preserved for future generations."***

## Thank you to our friends:

- \* The late **James Truslow**: donation from his estate, which allowed us to purchase fabulous folding chairs from the Mity Lite Company.
- \* **The Kimball Foundation**: grant of \$10,000 for the painting of the Birthplace and caretaker's cottage. Work will begin in April 2015.

Thank you to all who support the Museum with your yearly membership, donations, and your valuable time and spirit! As a private non-profit organization, we rely on our friends who keep the Museum vital. You help to preserve this National Historic Landmark for future generations.

***Please consider a donation to our December Annual Appeal!***