



The Gilbert Stuart

Birthplace and Museum

815 Gilbert Stuart Road
Saunderstown, RI 02874
Phone 401-294-3001
Fax 401-294-3869
www.gilbertstuartmuseum.org

Spring 2012

Bat Houses at the Museum

Visitors to the Gilbert Stuart Museum may have noticed two new bat houses near the Mill Pond. These bat houses were made and installed by Girl Scout Kelsey Brown of North Kingstown Troop # 163. Kelsey became interested in bats several years ago and decided to make them the subject of her Girl Scout Gold Award project. Her project not only included installation of the bat houses, but talks to NK elementary school children and creating a brochure "Understanding the Bats at the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace" (available at the Museum) describing her activities. She also incorporated her project and the description of her activities into her North Kingstown High School Senior Project.

Kelsey approached Gilbert Stuart Museum Executive Director Peg O'Connor two years ago about the possibility of doing her project at the Museum. At the time there was a rather large population of bats in the Birthplace attic. Kelsey formulated a plan to install the bat houses on Museum property. Since the Museum has the reputation of being, if informally, a wildlife refuge of sorts, Peg felt that bat houses fit right into the Museum's *persona*. When the Birthplace was restored and the roof replaced, however, the building was no longer bat-accessible. In the spring, bats returning from hibernation had to find other accommodations. Kelsey presented an opportunity by offering them a more appropriate living space. The bat houses were erected in May of 2011, a bit too late that year according to Kelsey since the resident bats appeared to have already found living space. Kelsey is monitoring the houses again this year and hopes and expects that they will be occupied. Kelsey expects occupants to be one or both of the two most common local bats, i.e., the little brown bat (*Myotis lucifugus*) and/or the big brown bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*). Both species are insectivores. Their major sources of food, according to Kelsey, are mosquitoes and moths.

So if you see a seventeen-year-old Girl Scout peering into the Museum's bat houses this season, that will probably be Kelsey, checking on the occupants. In this, the 100th anniversary of the Girl Scouts in the United States, Kelsey received confirmation of her Gold Award (the highest award given). The Museum not only



Kelsey Brown (right) with her father Robert Brown and Executive Director Peggy O'Connor

offers Kelsey its deepest thanks for her installation, but also its sincerest congratulations on her award.

Harriet Powell

FISH ON THE RUN / SPRING FAIR AT THE BIRTHPLACE

Sunday, April 29, 2012 ~ 1:00 – 4:00

- * Fish on the Run presentation by DEM /underwater camera
 - * Corn grinding in the Hammond Mill & Jonnycakes
 - * "Meet the Reveres: Paul and Rachel Revere Ride Again!"
 - * Book signing by Tim Cranston
 - * 18th Century Woodworks ~ Sam & Ray Clidence
 - * Little Rhody Thrummers rug hooking
 - * Narrow River Land Trust
 - * Rhody Warm Exhibit
 - * RI Spinners Guild spinning and weaving
 - * RI Wild Plant Society
 - * Wooden furniture, bowls, burl, and gift items
 - * Activities / Fish printing / Nature Trail self-guided tours
 - * Birthplace Open House
- Adults \$5 Children (ages 6-12) \$2
2012 Members Free



Dear Friends,

Our Capital Campaign is well under way. I am pleased to report that we have raised \$116,000 of the \$230,000 that we need to complete the final Capital Campaign project. We are nearing our goal of carrying out the most comprehensive restoration since the Museum opened in 1931. I have agreed to stay on as President of the Museum for another year to see the project to a conclusion. Thanks so much for your trust, support, and kind words. The addition of the handicapped accessible entry and restroom, climate controlled heating and cooling system, and replacement of the deteriorated roof for our Welcome Center is the last piece of the project.

Our plan is to better tell the history of the Museum and the incredible life of Gilbert Stuart. To do this, we need a safe, secure, and accessible place to tell this story. We have a magnificent portrait of Gilbert Stuart painted by his daughter Jane Stuart that will be gifted to the Museum when the Center is complete. Other certainties include the loan of at least one documented original Gilbert Stuart painting and a handwritten letter from George Washington. We have had many offers for loans and gifts of great interest, but at this point we are still unable to accept and accommodate them. A Welcome Center with ever-changing exhibits will keep our offering fresh and no doubt will generate the visitors and new memberships that we will need to move forward into the 21st century.

Please be as generous as possible to ensure the sustainability of the Museum for another eighty years and beyond. With your help, we can continue to make this museum a true destination for the ages.

Sincerely,

Dan Bell
President of the Board of Trustees

P.S. Thank you so much for your support and confidence over the past four years. I am confident that with your help we can accomplish this essential project and break ground within the year.

Save the Date!

On the Lawn...

Saturday, June 16, 2012
from 4:00—7:00 p.m.



Come celebrate a summer evening
with Wine, Lively Music, and Grazing ...

On the Lawn...

"Sliders, Snacks, and Strawberries"

Music by Rocky Hollow ~ Attic Perennials Unique Offerings
Raffle ~ Silent Auction ~ Live Chat with Rich Schartner
"Art in Bloom" Art Exhibit & Sale ~ Special Guest Gilbert Stuart!

Harley Bartlett Honorary Chair

Tickets \$50.00
Event will be held rain or shine under tents.
Reservations requested by June 8, 2012.

All proceeds to benefit our Capital Campaign special project –
the addition of a handicapped accessible entry and rest room in the Welcome Center.

Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum

Board of Trustees

Daniel A. Bell, President
Dennis E. Stark, Vice President
Harriet E. Powell, Secretary
Wheaton C. Vaughan, Treasurer

Cathy DiColo	Louis R. Sansone
Dr. Joseph Dowling, Jr.	Robert J. Sgroi
Barrie Ekman	Gail Shields
Patricia D. Fuller	Peggy Todd
Curtis V. Givan	M. Ray Wertz
Carol H. Hueston	Alice V. Westervelt
Thor S. Johnson	Joseph B. White
Norine J. Keenan	<u>Trustee Emeritus</u>
Lillian C. Patterson	Henry L. P. Beckwith
Alan R. Post, D.C.	<u>Executive Director</u>
Kathleen Romeo	Margaret M. O'Connor

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

SARAH WENTWORTH MORTON



Sarah Wentworth Morton by Gilbert Stuart
c. 1805 oil on panel 47" x 38.5"

As you look at the turn of the 18th century portraits painted by Gilbert Stuart is there one that looks as if it doesn't belong? That perhaps instead of Stuart, it was done by the American impressionist, Childe Hassam. You check the identification and wonder who is this Sarah Wentworth Morton and why her portrait is so different from other Stuarts?

Mrs. Perez Morton was a well born Bostonian, married to a lawyer and politician. More importantly, she was a leading American poetess and is often referred to as the "American Sappho". A few years after their marriage, her husband had an affair with her sister Francis (Fanny) which resulted in the birth of a child in 1788. Fanny killed herself by poison. The resulting scandal was widely reported in the Boston papers although the courts found Perez Morton innocent of any wrongdoing. Even though she was greatly hurt by the affair, Sarah remained married to Perez.

In 1802, the Mortons journeyed to Philadelphia and while there, Mrs. Morton sat for Gilbert Stuart. The artist was in a state of lethargy and deep depression at that time due to a business failure and had not been able to paint. Sarah was such an engaging person that she was able to rouse him from his depths with her wit and humor. Sarah and Stuart developed a strong and long lasting friendship. The poet published a poem extravagantly praising Gilbert Stuart and he replied with

a poem of his own. Eventually she wrote two more poems about the artist after he moved to Boston in 1805.

Between 1802 and 1803, the artist produced two, maybe three portraits of Sarah Morton. The first was a beautiful likeness of Sarah in a black dress in a three quarters pose. It can be seen at the MFA in Boston. The second was probably done as a copy of the first and is a similar pose but with the addition of a bust of George Washington in the background. It is at Winterthur.

It is the third portrait that is so different. Mrs. Perez Morton appears in a white dress of a different style in a slightly longer than half-length pose. The brush strokes, which define the dress, are long and sketchy. Most unusual for this period. Sarah's face is perhaps even more beautiful than in the other portraits. It is more finished than the rest of the picture but it is not as crisply defined as in the other two portraits. Her lips are somewhat blurry and her dark eyes are not sharply delineated.

Next, examine her pose. It is dynamic and spontaneous. Is Sarah putting on or removing the diaphanous mantilla? The lines of the veil suggest movement, something not found in other Stuart portraits. Infrared photographs show that originally Stuart painted her right arm across her midriff. The change in pose makes the portrait vibrant and exposes a private and personal moment.

Gilbert Stuart painted the background boldly. Blue sky and creamy clouds fill the upper part of the picture. The lower parts are daubs of dark colors with a smattering of red and yellow.

So, was this an unfinished portrait of Sarah Wentworth Morton painted around 1800? Perhaps. Or could it have been painted later in Boston when Sarah accompanied her daughter Charlotte to Stuart's studio for her portrait around 1808. And in 1825 Mrs. Morton again visited Stuart.

This unusual painting was found in Stuart's studio after his death. But many unfinished portraits were found there. However, the others were disembodied heads of the sitters without backgrounds. Sarah's portrait was completely painted and framed as no other unfinished canvas was. When the Worcester Art Museum received the painting, it was in the original frame, which is identical to one on another Gilbert Stuart portrait (John Holker, 1815) and believed to be the work of John Doggett. Gilbert Stuart must have had deep feelings about the portrait of Sarah Wentworth Morton, which he framed and kept for the rest of his life.

Gail Shields

Milling Around at the Museum

On the Lawn: Our very dedicated Special Events Committee has been working for many months to plan a different and exciting fundraising gala for this season. The goal is to raise funds for our Capital Campaign special project: the addition of a handicapped accessible entry and rest room in the Welcome Center.

How can you help?

Call or email the office to find out how you can:

- Become a sponsor for the event
- Purchase an ad or place a message or memorial in the program booklet
- Create a table centerpiece (which will be auctioned in our Silent Auction) - friends and businesses - live materials or gift baskets
- Donate an item for "**Attic Perennials Unique Offerings**"

"Attic Perennials Unique Offerings"

We need your help!!! Check your attics!

The committee is looking for items for this sale!

Items may be new, vintage, antique, decorative, garden-themed, eclectic, distinctive, or one-of-a-kind exclusives! Here's a great way to re-purpose items that are in excellent condition and would be desirable to others. (Some examples of items that have been donated are: vintage hand painted small table, antique quilt, decorative ironwork for garden or wall, handmade oak shaker box, large pottery strawberry jar, ...)

Larger, higher priced items are welcome!

Please call Peg at the office (401-294-3001) if you have questions or to arrange drop off or pick up.

Donation deadline May 31, 2012

Hooked rug donation:



Hooked rug donated to the Museum to raise funds for Capital Campaign projects.

Many thanks to Museum volunteer Pam Mead for the generous donation of her hand-hooked creation! The rug will be offered for sale in the gift shop.

Senior Project: North Kingstown High School student Byron King culminated his senior project on the importance of local cemeteries with a special project at the Hammond cemetery at the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum. Byron met with the Museum director to see how he could help with either of our cemeteries. The Hammond cemetery had already been cleared so Byron volunteered his services and coordinated a work crew to plant Vinca plants as a ground cover. Many thanks to Byron for the plants and coordinating this project, to his parents, and to his assistants Stephanie Anderson, Michael Avansato, Jonathan Persia, Graham Sutherland, and John Tillotson for their help.



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

There are many ways to help - large and small:

- become a member of the Museum
- become a docent or greeter
- weed a garden! (once or twice a season)
- design a garden (in front of the caretaker's cottage)
- join the newsletter committee (or any committee)
- help at an event
- make food for an event
- provide cut flowers for the Birthplace
- paint the restroom

Can you help? Call or email and let us know. 401-294-3001

Value of Saunderstown baskets would shock the maker



Saunderstown basketmaker Rouse Matteson

Well, I've got to say; I can't imagine that old Rouse would know what to make of it. Well sure, he knew he was a good basket weaver; he was mighty pleased and proud of "his wide reputation for the excellence of his product." He could weave a basket of any size or shape, from a great big old basket large enough for a bushel of fruit right down to the tiniest little one, sized quite properly to set upon a ladies bureau top and hold her precious memories and niceties.

Rouse's baskets were woven in an exacting fashion, tight enough to hold water in some cases, and were each and every one a one-of-a-kind creation; why Rouse would often whittle out a special form for the specific shaping of each individual basket so it would fit the needs of its user just so. But \$500, \$750, \$1000, even \$1500 for just one Matteson Saunderstown basket; well, old Rouse just wouldn't know what to make of it!

Rouse Matteson (he later changed his name for some unknown reason to Matterson) was born in May 1853, in the village of Bridgetown, now known as Middlebridge, the son of Calef Matteson. He began his adult life as a house carpenter who worked primarily in the village of Saunderstown. While there, he became acquainted with members of both the locally prominent Saunders and Briggs families and eventually resettled just outside of Saunderstown proper in an area then called Rose Hill on a parcel of land he bought from them. His fine little home on Miner Road, which he may have constructed, still exists. After the turn of the century, Rouse switched occupations and began to identify himself as a saltwater fisherman, working with his sons, William, Archie and Elisha.

Rouse married twice during his life, first to Mary Alice Mitchell, and later to Mary Ann Allen of Block Island. I the off time from fishing when the weather

was just too harsh to consider heading out on the bay in his fishing skiff, he began to weave baskets, not only to make a few extra dollars for his family, but to help wile away the long winter hours. Rouse got pretty darn good at making baskets; as a matter of fact, he seemed to be a natural at it. The baskets he created were shaped precisely, the hand-carved handles fit in one's palm just perfectly. Before long, Rouse, who in the beginning, according to long-standing family tradition, occasionally rowed his fishing skiff to Block Island to sell some baskets, couldn't make them fast enough. As he got older and the rigors of fishing got harder on is aging body, he was able to make an adequate living from his basket weaving.

The accompanying photo shows Rouse Matteson at this stage in his life: a master craftsman doing what he did best, making extraordinary baskets, one at a time, each one an individual masterpiece.

The baskets shown here were made by Rouse as a wedding gift in 1893 for his young niece, Lottie May Mitchell, to celebrate her marriage to South Kingstown farm worker James John Redmond. These are special baskets, designed as nesting baskets, each one fitting inside of the other in perfect symmetry. They were donated to the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum by James and Lottie's grandson, Henry Bannister, and are now displayed proudly in the museum. They are of great value that is eclipsed by the worth of their maker, Rouse Matteson, who passed away in November 1936.



This article is reprinted from The View from Swamptown by permission of the author, Tim Cranston. Tim will be at our Spring Fair on April 29th for a book signing for his new book "Walking in Olde Wickford vol.2 - The History of Elamsville and the Wickford Business District, One Building at a Time" is the second in a series of four walking guides that detail the history of a specific area in Wickford and the stories told by the houses and buildings within it. This guide covers the 65 buildings in the Brown and Elam Street areas as well as lower West Main and Phillips Streets. Both of Tim's books will be available in our gift shop.



Rouse Matteson baskets donated to the Museum by Henry Bannister

Gilbert Stuart
Birthplace and Museum
815 Gilbert Stuart Road
Saunderstown, RI 02874

NON-PROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE PAID
N. KINGSTOWN RI
PERMIT NO 169

Return service requested



Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Hammond Gristmill with attached shed over the millstream. Early 1900's.