SEWFUL WORK
An Exhibition of Historic and Contemporary Needlework
I was lucky enough to be able to travel to Rome over the New Year holiday. Seeing Italy just a couple of months later on the news, succumbing to COVID19, was heartbreaking. We will all be changed by the pandemic. And when we emerge, where will we find comfort? How might we reclaim a feeling of being in control? For some of us, it might be a contemplative visit to a historic site.

In Rome, every day brought me on a walk past the Colosseum or the Forum. On one of our walks, my friend remarked, “Can you imagine if at some point, they had just decided to demolish this for redevelopment?” Indeed, the Catholic Church had repurposed many earlier buildings that they considered to be pagan temples. In the neighborhood of our BnB, the Basilica of San Clemente was one such structure, having been built upon, at its earliest, a temple to Mithras. In all, three layers of buildings were preserved and open to the public to visit for just ten euro.

Preservation efforts are highly visible in cities like Rome, as they are in many American cities, like Boston, New Orleans, Santa Fe, and Charleston, South Carolina. These historic facades survive due to concerned citizens, legislation, grants, private donors, and a cadre of architects and historic preservationists. Consider the RJD: the mansion at 396 County was saved from a development project by several concerned citizens and a young Waterfront Historic Area League (WHALE). Once it was purchased from its last resident, Beatrice Duff, it was in need of attention. Enter—the Garden Club of Buzzards Bay and their members who transformed the overgrown garden, as well as a team of generous volunteers who began restorations of the building.

Just last year, the RJD installed new gutters on our Coachman’s House and rebuilt the historic parapets on the roof. That was paid for by a Community Preservation Act grant: a state-fund administered through the city. Thirty-seven thousand dollars was invested in this project. Additional less visible, but vital, preservation projects are scheduled for this year at RJD, including the methodical monitoring of temperature and humidity inside our buildings and the drafting of an emergency preparedness plan should flood, fire, wind or rain—or even pandemic—threaten our collections and buildings. Not to be confused with the “CPA,” our CAP (Collections Assessment for Preservation) report will be our guide on best practices and priorities for the next few years.

If you are an RJD member or donor, you are a partner to preservation. If you are a concerned citizen who attends meetings about zoning, permitting, community development, or conservation, you are a partner to preservation. You can also be a partner to preservation by telling your legislators to support these efforts, locally and nationally.

These efforts help save not just structures, but history itself. Nothing captures the physical and tangible in its totality more than the site itself: the sound of the fresh water running beneath the Mithraic Temple; the chill in a Roman Catholic church which has remained unheated for centuries; or the microclimate created by the urban gardens at the RJD. No one could imagine Rome without the Colosseum—the same way, I would hope, that no one could imagine County Street—or New Bedford—without the “big gold house on the hill.”

Dawn E. Salerno
Executive Director
Collections

Jones Family Treasures

BLAIR WALKER
CURATOR AND MANAGER OF COLLECTIONS

Sarah Forbes, a Jones family descendant who lives in Oregon, has been a frequent donor of books and objects to the RJD. Just before our winter break, a box arrived. It was from Sarah Forbes and was filled with a nicely organized collection of notebooks containing handwritten letters from members of the Jones family dating as far back as 1817. This wonderful gift has yielded countless surprises.

Discovered amidst the collection were two miniature paintings. One is labeled “Amelia Hickling Chambers Nye” (1796–1872), mother of Emma Chambers Jones (1823–1852), Edward Coffin Jones’ second wife and mother of the ‘Jones girls.’ A trip to the New Bedford Whaling Museum, a source of equipment and expertise offered by Chief Curator, Dr. Christina Connett Brophy, Director of Collections, Jordan Berson, and Curator of Maritime History, Michael Dyer, revealed that this small oval painting of Amelia Hickling Nye may have been painted early in the 19th century on a very thin sheet of ivory.

The other miniature is of an older man. On the back of a letter Amelia Nye wrote to Marianne Ivens in 1855, she mentions that her father’s miniature which had belonged to her sister Prescott had been left to her by Harriet. This suggests that indeed the other painting may be Thomas Hickling, Amelia’s father. It was painted with gouache, a water based paint, on cardboard. Thomas Hickling (1743–1834) served as Vice-Consul at St. Michael’s in the Azores and was the grandfather of Emma Chambers Jones.

Another surprise was a group of stories and poems entitled “The Weekly Garland.” Written in 1859 the series bears the initials S.C.J. (Sarah Coffin Jones) in the corner. A delicate wreath of flowers decorates the pages. Sarah may have had contributions to the weekly from her very creative sisters, Emma and Amelia, who each identified themselves as a different flower.

Also among the letters was a mysterious little handwritten paper copy book with a marbleized cover. It opens with a list of the “Trustees” who, after research, turned out to be the founders of Friends Academy. Subsequent pages list periods of study, beginning with “First Quarter 9 mo. 22 and ending 12 mo. 6 1817.” Similar records continue to 1820. The students are listed each with his particular subject for each quarter of study. Among the students is Edward Coffin Jones. Edward studied Ferguson Astronomy and Arithmetic in 1818. At another time he studied French, Bowditch’s History and some Philosophy. A list of the titles available to the students ends the book.

Many thanks are due to volunteers Beth Luey and Jalien Foster who helped to organize and catalogue the letters. Keep in touch to hear of new discoveries in this wonderful box from Sarah Forbes.

Taking Care and Staying Healthy

People’s parting words these days are often “take care” or “stay healthy.” The Museum leadership has been researching and discussing our role in that charge. To that end, when you next visit the RJD, you may encounter everything from a plexiglass-enclosed greeter, to a new downloadable self-guide. Staff and volunteers will have new cleaning regimes, and everyone will be required to socially distance and, most likely, wear a mask. These were just some of the safeguards in place as of the publish date of this newsletter. Also unknown at the time of its publishing: whether all the wonderful in-person programming listed in our calendar section would be feasible—so NOT listed in this newsletter are all the contingency plans for virtual and rescheduled programming that may be necessary.

We ask your patience and understanding as we respond to the latest research and directives coming from our city, state and federal governments, and we urge you to check our web site for the most current information before visiting or attending any RJD programs. We will be diligent about keeping you safe and healthy while still offering the engagement with history, art, architecture and gardens that you’ve come to enjoy from the Museum. Take care, and stay healthy.
Sewful Work
July 9 through December 24, 2020

BLAIR WALKER

What might 19th century bed quilts and a pair of embroidered sneakers have in common? Sewful Work, the RJD’s newest exhibition opening June 26, includes examples of hand needlework that date from the early 19th century to the present. In this display, the viewer will find historic samplers; a silk bedcovering owned by William Rotch, Jr.’s daughter, Sarah Rotch Arnold; tatting; and tambour and traditional embroidery. White work and eyelet lace edging table linens, along with a few garments ornamented with handwork will also be on exhibition.

“Inspired by family samplers from the 19th century,” artist Judy Lund reminisces that she “began collecting local examples of needlework and researching the schools in the greater New Bedford area that taught these skills.”

Lund has contributed examples of tambour embroidery to the exhibition, a style that was taught in New Bedford in 1821. “This style of needlework originated in the 15th century when it was called Spanish chain work,” Lund explains. “Fashionable ladies in the 18th century discovered it, including Madame de Pompadour in France.”

Lund has also loaned historic samplers to the exhibition.

Ingenuity and perseverance characterize the creators of each work in this exhibition. Small pieces embroidered by Boston-area artist Elaine McBride illustrate her feelings and thoughts. Deidre Scherer of Williamsville, Vermont, creates portraits in cloth intricately defining the characteristics of each face. Annette Cook, recently retired from nearby Friends Academy, enjoys designing quilts and pillows herself so that they are original. Her embroidery is heavily inspired by nature with some poetic license taken. She aspires to make her work “handgemacht” not “heimgemacht” (handmade not homemade.)

Many pieces demonstrate how artists often adapt old techniques to contemporary expression and work. For example, Melinda Medeiros, an artist based on the Cape, delights in embellishing her crazy quilt pieces with ribbon work and beading. Local quilter Christine Dole has accepted the challenge of a hand-sewn quilt to decorate a bed. Faith Baci, of Dartmouth, Massachusetts, skillfully tets delicate pieces of cloth for handkerchiefs. Louise Travers gave in to her whimsical side and embroidered sneakers for herself and her husband.

These historical and contemporary pieces will adorn the second floor of the mansion this summer and fall, connecting past to present with the thread of a timeless art form.

2020–2021 Exhibition Calendar

SEWFUL WORK
July 9 – December 24
An exhibition of historic and contemporary needlework, including regional artists.

LAURA CHRISTENSEN: REIMAGINED HISTORIES
March 18 – May 31
A contemporary artist explores historical images through a modern lens.

THE PERMANENT EXHIBITIONS OF THE ROTCH, JONES AND DUFF FAMILIES
Ongoing.
JUDY LUND

Tambour embroidery is embroidery worked with a hook, as opposed to a needle. It’s a traditional technique, done much less by hand now than it used to be. The technique is thought to have originated in the Orient, and it made its way westward slowly.

In the 17th and early 18th centuries, tamboured coverlets and the art of working them were brought to Europe by Portuguese navigators. In about 1760, the technique of tambour embroidery was discovered by the fashionable people of Europe.

What was fashionable in Europe rapidly became fashionable in the American colonies. In Philadelphia in 1768, a Mrs. Bontemps advertised in the Philadelphia Gazette that she “embroiders in Gold, Silver, Silk, and Thread, upon the late invented Tambour.”

By the end of the 18th century, tambour embroidery had become part of the stock and trade of the private instructresses and female academies in America. Even in New Bedford, a conservative Quaker city, tambour instruction was offered by 1821.

The patterns were executed with a slim hook, not unlike a crochet hook, on fine fabrics, usually linen or silk. The hook was held in a handle by the use of a thumbscrew and therefore was interchangeable in size for the thread being used.

The handles were often very ornate, and made of bone, ivory, or agate. The hook was used to draw interlocking loops of thread through the fabric from the backside of the fabric, requiring two hands: one to hold the hook and one to hold the thread. Therefore the ground fabric needed to be stretched on a frame, sometimes rectangular, but often round, reminiscent of a drum. (Tambour is French for drum.) The round embroidery hoop, frequently used today, comes from the Tambour tradition.
The Museum is taking precautions to mitigate the spread of corona virus. At the time of the printing of this calendar, it was unknown what specific federal and state guidelines might govern public gatherings, even in the outdoors. For that reason, this calendar lists only programs we were able to confirm with contingency plans. Many more programs are under development! Please visit our web site for additional programming, the links to virtual events, and the most up to date information.

**JUNE**

**RITUALS POETRY READING**  
Friday, June 26, 7pm  
Join Domesticated Primate and Anomaly Poetry for the release of their Summer 2020 anthology, Rituals. Anomaly Poetry will host a virtual reading featuring local poets.

**JULY**

**APPRaisal DAY**  
Saturday, July 18, 9am - Noon  
Do you have a family heirloom? Paintings passed down to you by a relative? Or a great flea market find? Discover their potential worth with the help of an expert appraiser. Appraisals will be done on a first-come, first-served basis. Appraisers: Frank McNamee, Alfred J. Walker, Paula Dean (read more on our web site). Suggested donation: $10 per item / $25 for three items. This event will run virtually, if not in person.

**GIVE ME A BLOOMIN’ BREAK**  
Wednesday, July 15, 12pm  
Enjoy your lunch break amongst roses, in the parterre garden of the Museum. Rick Finneran, RJD’s Manager of Facilities, gives a 30-minute tour in the garden, addressing design elements and rose care. These tours will be restricted in numbers to allow for social distancing. Free.

**AUGUST**

**GLASS HORSE PROJECT PRESENTS: CAESAR**  
August 3 - 8, 8pm  
Imagine a fight for equality in ancient Rome: what may have happened if Caesar and Brutus had been women focusing on equality? This production of Caesar serves as a warning of what can happen when we do not stand united to achieve equality and acceptance. This performance will stream live, on line, on the noted dates.  
This program is supported in part by grants from the New Bedford Local Cultural Council, Fairhaven Local Cultural Council, Dartmouth Local Cultural Council, Mattapoisett Local Cultural Council and Acushnet Local Cultural Council—all local agencies which are supported by the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency.

**GIVE ME A BLOOMIN’ BREAK**  
Wednesday, August 12, 12pm  
Enjoy your lunch break amongst roses, in the parterre garden of the Museum. Rick Finneran, RJD’s Manager of Facilities, gives a 30-minute tour in the garden, addressing design elements and rose care. These tours will be restricted in numbers to allow for social distancing. Free.

**TALK: DANIEL DRAYTON & PHOTIUS FISK**  
**GEORGE KONTANIS, RJD DOCENT**  
Thursday, August 20, 3pm  
Daniel Drayton became known for helping enslaved individuals escape to northern ports in the early to mid 1800s. He is now buried in New Bedford’s Rural Cemetery where his monument has been recently restored. Several men, including Photius Fisk, had a role in Drayton’s honoring. Free with the price of museum admission. This event will run virtually, if not in person.

**VIRTUAL MEMBERS RECEPTION – SAVE THE DATE**  
Sunday, August 23, 11am – 12:30pm  
Enjoy a behind-the-seams tour of the Museum’s newest exhibition, “Sewful Work.” Members are invited to mix up RJD’s summer refresher before they join the virtual tour. The drink recipe and meeting invitation will be sent to members by email.

**SEPTEMBER**

**ANNUAL MEETING**  
Thursday, September 10, 5pm  
Join the museum’s staff, board, Corporators and fellow members for a look back at the past year of museum activities and enjoy a special talk with Carrie Taylor, Director, Lippitt House Museum. Free admission. This event will run virtually, if not in person.
OPEN HOUSE
Saturday, October 3, 10am – 4pm
Explore the mansion and current exhibition, Sewful Work. Exhibiting artist Faith Baci will be doing a tatting demonstration from 11am to 1pm. Donations accepted in lieu of admission. Call ahead to schedule your visitation time.

VIRTUAL HISTORY HAPPY HOUR: THE HERSCHEL ISLAND BASEBALL LEAGUE
MARK PROCKNIK, LIBRARIAN, NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM
NICK SERPA, BARTENDER
Tuesday, September 15, 5:30pm
A shot of history with a chaser of networking – this brief talk on a historical topic is accompanied by a virtual beer tasting. Local bartender, Nick Serpa will recommend a brew or two for you to share from home while you watch. During Arctic whaling voyages when the winter ice made cruising for whales difficult, whale men needed to pass the time until spring. During the winter of 1895, they formed an informal baseball league with scores and statistics recorded in a journal kept by Captain Hartson Bodfish. Suggested donation: $5 Members / $10 Public.

HARRIET JACOBS IN NEW BEDFORD TALK AND BOOK-SIGNING WITH PEGGI MEDEIROS
Tuesday, September 29, 1pm
In 1861, Harriet Ann Jacobs published a masterpiece, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Her book is the first and only narrative to give voice to a woman who escaped slavery. Cornelia Grinnell Willis not only purchased Harriet’s freedom, but she also developed a bond with Harriet and her daughter, Louisa, that lasted a lifetime. Join author and local historian Peggi Medeiros as she traces the fascinating lives of the Jacobs, Grinnell and Willis families. $5 Members / $8 Public / Free with purchase of book. This event will run virtually, if not in person.

DR. MARIE EQUI AND THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT
DAN EVERTON, HISTORIAN
Thursday, October 8, 5:30pm
Who is Dr. Marie Equi? Did you know New Bedford had a suffrage march on 8th Street? Equi has gained attention lately given her role as an activist in the suffrage movement and her inclusion in New Bedford’s Lighting the Way tour. Find out more at this talk. Part of AHA night. Free admission. This event will run virtually, if not in person.

THE GREAT PUMPKIN PARADE
October 15, 4pm – 8pm
Visit the grounds of the RJD to see a display of Jack-O-Lanterns, carved with care by community members. Costume encouraged! Free.

TAMBOUR TALK
JUDY LUND
Tuesday, October 20, 3pm
Tambour, from the French word for “drum”, is a type of chain stitch embroidery. One of its practitioners and an artist with work on display in the current exhibition, Sewful Work, will demonstrate the method and speak about some work in her own collection. Suggested donation: $5 Members/ $10 Public. This event will run virtually, if not in person.

VIRTUAL HISTORY HAPPY HOUR: DOCUMENTING NEW BEDFORD THROUGH PHOTOJOURNALISM
PETER PEREIRA
Thursday, November 12, 5:30pm
A career photographer and former photojournalist speaks about his work over the years. Part of AHA night. Free admission. This event will run virtually, if not in person.

VIRTUAL HISTORY HAPPY HOUR: THE BLACK SHEEP BY FRANCIS DAVIS MILLET
ALEXANDRA COPELAND, ART CURATOR, NEW BEDFORD FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY
November 10, 5:30pm
A shot of history with a chaser of networking - H3 is a brief talk on a historical topic accompanied by a virtual beer tasting. Local bartender, Nick Serpa will recommend a brew or two for you to share from home while you watch. Hear about an artwork in the NBFL collection, including tragic details from the piece’s acquisition after the artist’s death aboard the Titanic. Suggested donation: $5 Members / $10 Public.

NOVEMBER

DR. MARIE EQUI AND THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT
DAN EVERTON, HISTORIAN
Thursday, October 8, 5:30pm
Who is Dr. Marie Equi? Did you know New Bedford had a suffrage march on 8th Street? Equi has gained attention lately given her role as an activist in the suffrage movement and her inclusion in New Bedford’s Lighting the Way tour. Find out more at this talk. Part of AHA night. Free admission. This event will run virtually, if not in person.

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SAVE THE DATE: ANNUAL MEETING

TO LABOR FOR THE COMMON GOOD: RECONTEXTUALIZING THE HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUM EXPERIENCE

CARRIE TAYLOR, ANNUAL MEETING SPEAKER 2020

Thursday, September 10, 5pm

Join the museum’s staff, board, Corporators and fellow members for a look back at the past year of museum activities and enjoy a special talk with Carrie Taylor, Director, Lippitt House Museum. Free admission.

This event will run virtually, if not in person.