

PRIMITIVE PIECES

The Newsletter of The Peace Dale Museum of Art and Culture

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Spring 2019

Four Hundred Years of Agriculture in Southern Rhode Island

“How well may our modern aristocracy of professions and pretensions sink into insignificance when we remember that *the first man was the first farmer,*” Charles C. Van Zandt told the Rhode Island Society for the Encouragement of Domestic Industry at their 50th anniversary meeting in January of 1870. Van Zandt, who would become governor seven years later, continued, “It appears to me that the only genuine device for our armorial bearing is a spade— for by it we have always lived, and under it we are at last laid to sleep.”

The Society for the Encouragement of Domestic Industry sponsored the annual Pawtuxet Fair, where each October farmers competed for cash prizes for the best lot of cheese, the best calf, and the speediest plowing of a quarter-acre. When agriculture waned in Providence County, the event moved south and eventually became the Washington County Fair.

The first man may have been the first farmer, but the first

THURSDAY MARCH 28

farmer in Rhode Island was a woman, not a man. In the Narragansett Indian culture, women were in charge of cultivating and harvesting. They sowed the three sisters— “Corne, and Beanes out of their Great God Cautántouwit’s field” and “Askútasquash, their Vine apple, which the English . . . call Squashes,” in the words of Roger Williams.



The Native Americans farmed in the same area the Narragansett planters would later farm— the narrow strip of coastal lowlands along the shores of Block Island Sound and

Narragansett Bay. Its fertile soil, high-quality grass, and open fields made it ideal for raising livestock. From the early 1700s until just before the American Revolution, the Narragansett planters shipped livestock, surplus crops, and cheese to the American South and the West Indies.

The wealthiest planters, members of only a handful of interrelated families, owned thousands of acres. They relied primarily on the labor of black slaves for their prosperity.

Agriculture would dominate Rhode Island’s economy for many more generations, but few Rhode Island farmers would ever match the prosperity of the planters.

On Thursday, March 28 at 7:00 p.m., historian Tim Cranston will explore the history of agriculture in southern Rhode Island, taking us from Native American horticulture to twentieth century “gentleman farmers.”

The program will open our Spring Lecture Series. Admission is free, and refreshments will be served.

Fiddling in America

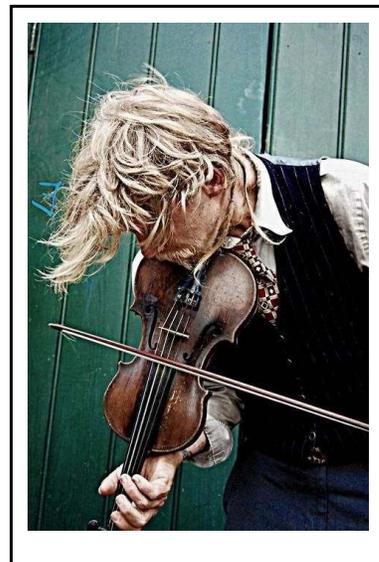
Between the early 1700s and the start of the American Revolution, hundreds of ships laden with immigrants landed in Philadelphia. These immigrants were distinctive in dress, speech, and manner—in the eyes of Pennsylvania Quakers, they were vivid to the point of outlandishness. They came from Ulster, lowland Scotland, and the English borders, and they brought their fiddles with them.

Appalachian fiddling, featuring droning, double-stops, and syncopated bowing patterns, is not the only traditional fiddling style, and it may not have been the first to arrive in this country—Native Americans and Mexican Americans have their own fiddle traditions. But it is

probably the best-known style of traditional fiddling in the United States and the one most similar to traditional Irish, Scottish and English styles.

Many fiddle tunes played today have their roots in Appalachian tunes, which in turn are the grandchildren of Irish, Scottish and English tunes. “Natchez Under the Hill,” also known as “Turkey in the Straw,” is distinctly a variation of the eighteenth century British tune called “The Rose Tree,” according to the Library of Congress American Folklife Center.

On Thursday, April 11 at 7:00 p.m., ‘Root Cellar’— Bob Woods on guitar and Greg Badigian on fiddle— will be in our Museum Gallery to play



**THURSDAY
APRIL 11**

some music and share what they know about the history of the fiddle in America.

Frozen in Time

Five years after he graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy, and long before he was a war hero, Lt. junior grade Dixwell Ketcham mounted a military reconnaissance camera on his floatplane (a biplane on pontoons) and flew over Narragansett Bay, taking photographs of whatever he happened to see.



The crystal-clear photos permanently preserved a landscape that no longer exists: A ferry brought travelers from Jamestown to Newport, the Newport “cottages” were new, and grand hotels lined Jamestown’s eastern harbor.

Almost a hundred years later, historian Christian McBurney found those black and white photographs in the archives at the Naval History and Heritage Command in Washington, D.C. On Saturday, May 18 at 1:00 p.m., in the Museum Gallery, Christian will show us the best photos in the collection.

**Saturday
May 18
1:00 p.m.**

The Peace Dale Museum of Art and Culture

1058 Kingstown Road, Room 5 • Peace Dale, Rhode Island 02879 • (401) 783-5711

www.peacedalemuseum.org

Beth Hogan, Museum Administrator

Louise Weaver, Administrative Assistant • Mary Brown, Educator

The Museum Gallery is open Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and by appointment.

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Karen R. Ellsworth, *Primitive Pieces* Editor
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Students from Sandcastles Montessori School visited the Gallery on November 28, 2018 for a program on Native Americans led by Educator Mary Brown.

Each program in our Spring Lecture Series takes place in the Museum Gallery on the second floor of the Peace Dale Office Building, 1058 Kingstown Road, Peace Dale, across the street from the Peace Dale Library. Refreshments will be served. The program is free for Museum members. Donations from non-members are gratefully accepted.

Peace Dale Museum of Art and Culture
1058 Kingstown Road, Room 5
Peace Dale, RI 02879



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Save the date! Our annual Trash or Treasure fundraiser is on Sunday, September 29