

# PRIMITIVE PIECES

The Newsletter of The Museum of Primitive Art and Culture

1058 Kingstown Road, Room 5

Peace Dale, R.I. 02879 ♦ (401) 783-5711 ♦ [www.primitiveartmuseum.org](http://www.primitiveartmuseum.org)

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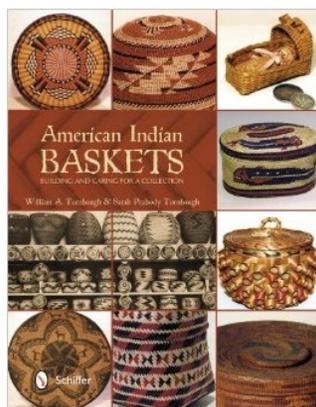
## The Beauty of American Indian Baskets

When Sarah and Bill Turnbaugh wrote their first book about Native American basketry, there was so little interest in the topic that they had a difficult time finding a publisher. That book was published in 1986, just as general enthusiasm for Native American culture was blossoming, and it has never been out of print.

Their new book, *American Indian Baskets: Building and Caring for a Collection*, appears at a time when interest in Indian baskets is as great as it ever was. The internet has increased the availability of information about baskets, and it has also increased the availability of the baskets themselves. As a result, it's more important than ever to be able to tell a genuine Indian basket from a genuine basket that was made in India.

In the book, Sarah, our curator, trustee, and retired Director Emerita, and Bill, a Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at URI and a long-time member of the museum's Advisory Board, cover

just about everything you ever wanted to know about the topic, and then some.



More than 750 color images illustrate the diverse range of vintage Native basket styles made in nine basketry regions: Southwest, Great Basin, California, Plateau, Northwest Coast, Arctic and Subarctic, Plains, Southeast, and Northeast. The book also provides an in-depth comparison of imported baskets that at times are passed off as American Indian work.

The cultural and historical background, and the influence of

cultural changes including the Industrial Revolution, the late 19th-century "Indian basket craze," and the American Arts and Crafts Movement are also examined. The book provides valuable guidance on buying, selling, and caring for baskets, outlining approaches that are also relevant for other collectible categories. A frank discussion of legal issues impacting the topic is included.

On April 24, Sarah will tell us how to recognize American Indian baskets from around the country. She'll also mention some of the cultural events that have contributed to basket-making's longevity and survival to the modern day as a Native craft-art.

We'll learn how to distinguish real Indian baskets from similar look-alikes made elsewhere in the world.

Sarah and Bill will have some books available for signing. The price is \$55 for members, \$60 for non-members (tax included), with a portion of the proceeds to benefit the museum's outreach funds.

Our Spring Lecture Series begins on Thursday, April 24

Thursday, May 22nd

## A visit to the birthplace of Chinese Export Porcelain

The Forbes House Museum in Milton, Mass. could be called "The House that the China Trade Built." The museum chronicles the history of the entrepreneurial Forbes family and displays four generations of their treasures, including 19th-century export porcelain that Captain Robert Bennet Forbes brought home from China.

As you would expect, the director of this museum, Robin Tagliaferri, is fascinated by Chinese porcelain. On May 22, she will tell us about her trip to China in October 2012, where she was one of the presenters at the Second Seminar on Chinese Export Porcelain of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, sponsored by Professor Yu Chunming and Nanchang University.

She will illustrate her talk with more than 150 photos of the big cities, bustling with activity, along with the beautiful mountains and landscapes in the Fuliang County, where the ancient kiln sites are located. She will give an overview of the porcelain-making region of Jingdezhen, and discuss partnerships and programs at the Forbes House Museum initiated through collaboration with new China Trade colleagues and scholars.

Ms. Tagliaferri is a Rhode Island School of Design graduate who has worked at the Worcester Art Museum, DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, the RISD Museum, and AS220 Center for the Arts.

The program is on Thursday, May 22 at 7:00 p.m. in the Museum Gallery.



Thursday, May 29th

## Women and Ledger Art

Before Anglo-Americans overran the Great Plains, Plains Indians memorialized their visions and their feats in battle and hunting by drawing on animal hides with mineral pigments, using brushes made of bone or wood. But the systematic destruction of the buffalo herds beginning in the 1860s made animal hides more and more difficult to come by.



'Social Dance.' Black Hawk (ca. 1832-1890, Sans Arc band of Lakota Sioux).

At the same time, Plains tribes began to obtain colored pencils, crayons, pens, and canvas, muslin, and paper— sometimes in the form of accounting or ledger books— from traders, government agents, missionaries, or military officers. The change in materials coincided with the drastic social and cultural changes forced on the Plains peoples by reservation life. The result was a form of artistic expression now known as "ledger art."

Ledger art flourished mostly from the 1860s to the 1920s, and a revival began in the 1960s and 1970s. Women artists played an important part in that revival, using the traditionally male art form to tell stories about women's lives.

On May 29, Richard Pearce will talk about four of those women artists and how their work contributes to Plains Indian history and culture.

Mr. Pearce, Professor Emeritus of English at Wheaton College in Norton, Mass., spent six years talking to the artists about their work for his book, *Women and Ledger Art*.

The program is on Thursday, May 29 at 7:00 p.m. in the Museum Gallery.

**Each program in our Spring Lecture Series begins at 7:00 p.m. in the Museum Gallery on the second floor of the Peace Dale Office Building, 1058 Kingstown Road, across from the Peace Dale Library. Refreshments will be served. Admission is free for Museum members. A donation by non-members is appreciated.**

## The Museum of Primitive Art and Culture

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

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

*Beth Hogan, Museum Administrator*

*Louise Weaver, Administrative Assistant*

*Mary Brown, Educator*

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

## From the Curator's Desk

By Sarah Peabody Turnbaugh

A small, unassuming object, a one-and-one-half-inch-square pillow of pale-colored clay, rests quietly in a display case in our Museum Gallery. It gets minimal attention because it is surrounded by bigger, showier, flashier objects that scream “Look at Me,” “Over Here,” and “Aren’t I cool?” But the tiny clay pillow packs a pretty big message. Despite our long, cold winter, the cuneiform tablet serves to remind us that spring is coming, and along with it will arrive tax season.

The cuneiform tablet comes from ancient Sumer, Mesopotamia and is about 4,000 years old. It is a very early example of human writing. But that’s not all— it has a lot to say. The tablet is from the site of Drehem (ancient Puzrish-Dagan), and it is an ancient tax document. It records the receipt of various animals— especially lambs and goats— at Puzrish-Dagan, which was the Ur III period tax-collecting depot near ancient Nippur in what today is south-central Iraq.

This early example of writing was given to the museum more than one hundred years ago, shortly after our community and its mill-owner R. G. Hazard II began our public collection. Accession records do not reveal its actual donor, but the tablet likely came to the museum through R. G. Hazard II.

Caroline Hazard, his sister, traveled to the Near East and Egypt at different times including in 1907,



at which time Mr. Hazard wrote her: “I wish you would get me (at my own charges, of course) a real seal cylinder, Babylonian, by choice.”

While the museum also owns a Babylonian cylinder seal— as does the archives and Special Collections department of the Robert Carothers Library at the University of Rhode Island— this little tablet probably was obtained at the same time. It reminds us that the inevitable taxes have been with us for a very long time.

Save the date!

Our annual Trash or Treasure gala is Sunday, September 14th at the Dunes Club.

Hope to see you there!

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Return Service Requested

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**Our Fall 2013 childrens' programs**