



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

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Revolutionary Rhode Island Spies

Metcalf Bowler was one of the richest men in Rhode Island. A merchant, he owned a palatial home in Newport and a farm in Portsmouth. Bowler was a member of the legislature for many years, serving as speaker of the House of Deputies for nine of them. He was also a Superior Court judge.

Bowler was a patriot from the start—he attended a session of the 1754 Albany Congress, and represented Rhode Island at the 1765 Stamp Act Congress. In March of 1767 he celebrated the anniversary of repeal of the Stamp Act with a lavish party for his fellow patriots at his Newport mansion. On May 4, 1776, he was one of the legislators who signed the bill that repealed Rhode Island's act of allegiance to the King.

But Metcalf Bowler had a secret. He was so fond of the property he had accumulated, and so concerned that it would be destroyed by the British Army that arrived to occupy Newport in December 1776, that he offered to spy for the British.

For several years, beginning in 1776, Bowler provided information to the British, reporting directly to Gen. Henry Clinton, British commander in chief in North America beginning in 1778.

Bowler's bid to protect his property was unsuccessful, however. His Portsmouth farm was ruined by the British regiment that camped next to it for 18 months, and he was forced to sell his Newport mansion.



Metcalf Bowler was wealthy enough to hire John Singleton Copley to paint a portrait of his wife, Anne Fairchild Bowler.

The overall value of the information Bowler provided to the enemy is unclear, and the war proved to be his financial ruin. In 1779, no longer able to support himself in Newport, Bowler moved to Providence and opened a modest dry goods store.

Bowler's decision to stay in Newport during the British occupation

aroused the suspicions of his patriot friends in Providence. But his treason was not uncovered until the 1920s, when scholars examining General Clinton's papers discovered Bowler's perfidy.

Few places rivaled Rhode Island for espionage. Many Rhode Islanders, some patriots and some Tories, were spies during the Revolutionary period. Some were bold and daring, regularly risking their lives. Others were more notorious than valorous.

Christian M. McBurney, an independent historian who grew up in Kingston and now practices law in Washington, D.C., is the author of *Spies in Revolutionary Rhode Island*. The book contains the first detailed description of the espionage activities surrounding the British and French occupations of Newport.

On Monday, October 23, Mr. McBurney will visit the Museum to talk about some of the Rhode Islanders who became spies during the Revolutionary War and their fate after the war ended.

The presentation will take place in the Museum Gallery at 7:00 p.m. Refreshments will be served. Admission is free, but a small donation from non-museum members is appreciated.

OCTOBER 19

The Blackstone Canal

As textile mills spread across the Blackstone Valley in the early 1800s, mill owners realized they had a very basic problem. They needed a better way to get raw materials to their mills and their finished goods to market. Their solution was to build a canal that would run from Providence to Worcester.

The canal, which linked the Blackstone Valley communities along its 45-mile route, was considered an engineering marvel when it opened in 1828. Worcester, Providence, and all the towns in between prospered almost immediately.

Only twenty years after it opened, a newer and faster mode of transportation – the railroad – replaced the canal. But the canal changed the Blackstone Valley forever.

On Thursday, October 19, Kevin Klyberg, a National Park Service Ranger at the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park, will talk about why the Blackstone Canal was built, how it changed the Blackstone Valley landscape, and how much of it remains today.



Each program in our Fall 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.

NOVEMBER 2

Native American Plants for Food and Healing



Plants used for food, medicine, arts and crafts, and dye were part of the daily lives and rituals of Native Americans. They used boneset (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*) to break fevers by heavy sweating, and elder (*Sambucus canadensis*) to treat colds. They harvested, cooked, and ate the taproots of burdock (*Arctium*) and the leaves of dandelions (*Taraxacum officinale*). On Thursday, November 2, Lesley Wooler, an experienced herbalist, will explain the many ways these and other native plants were used.

Lesley Wooler, who owns The Herb Wyfe (now at Belmont Market in Wakefield), earned a bachelor's degree in horticulture from URI and served on the Northeast Herbal Association Council for ten years. She has taught herbal, aromatherapy, and gardening classes throughout New England for more than twenty years.

The Museum of Primitive Art and Culture

(Primitive: Belonging to an earlier age in the history of humankind)

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www.primitiveartmuseum.org • www.facebook.com/museumofprimitiveart

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

Celebrating our 125th Anniversary

Unlocking a Treasure Trove of Artifacts

A message from the new President of the Board of Trustees

Growing up in the Oaks, in Peace Dale, provided many educational opportunities for me and for my sisters and brothers. The rich Hazard Family legacy left its imprint on us. We were often at the Neighborhood Guild, taking classes, and practicing tennis, basketball or ballet, or visiting the beautiful Peace Dale Library, especially the history and mythology areas.

One of the most stimulating places of my childhood was the Museum of Primitive Art and Culture. My sisters and I would retrieve the key to the Museum Gallery from the librarian at the Peace Dale Library and wander across the street to unlock this treasure trove of artifacts from around the world. We were truly blessed to have this Museum as a wonderful oasis where we could sit quietly and imagine the many rich cultures and peoples who inhabited our world.

My good fortune, and the Museum's, continued when William Turnbaugh, a Harvard-educated anthropologist and archeologist, joined the URI faculty. In the

1970s, after I received my bachelor of arts degree in anthropology from URI, Bill's wife Sarah Turnbaugh—the person most responsible for the longevity of



Lisa Fiore

this jewel box collection—approached me about serving on the Museum of Primitive Art and Culture Board of Trustees . . . and here I remain. The Museum continues to this day to be a part of my life.

I am fortunate in every way to walk in the footsteps of our past President, Virginia Williams. Sarah summed up Virginia's contributions best when she said, "Under Virginia's leadership as President and prior service as a docent, the Museum established and funded two new endowment

funds at the Rhode Island Foundation, created an enticing gift corner, expanded our outreach through an entertaining and varied series of monthly evening lectures, and helped diversify the membership base, bringing in many younger members."

Equally important, Virginia started our annual autumn Trash or Treasure fundraiser and engaged nationally-known antiques appraiser Stuart Whitehurst, formerly of Skinner, Inc. and a familiar face to the millions of PBS viewers who watch *Antiques Roadshow*, as the fundraiser's main attraction. The annual event Virginia initiated is now one of the Museum's principal sources of income.

As we celebrate the Museum's 125th anniversary, my sincere thanks go out to Virginia, who always lead the board, the docents, and the volunteers with a smile, a relaxed manner, and an unmatched evenhandedness. Without her, we would not be where we are today.

*Lisa Fiore, President,
MPAC Board of Trustees*

Museum of Primitive Art and Culture
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Return Service Requested

Museum Whispers

I am always interested to see what catches the eye of our Museum Gallery visitors. When people walk in, they usually pause— the room is very dramatic and full of visual information. Some people are overwhelmed. To help them explore, I sometimes step in and offer up the history of a few objects. Usually I can find an object that sparks their interest, creating a pathway into exploration of the Museum. But many people find their own pathway —

The archeologist who zoomed in on the ten-thousand-year-old stone point.

The woman whose African ancestors' tribal mask is in the exhibit. She was thrilled to see it.

The teenage girl who found an arrow quiver similar to the one Catniss carried in the Hunger Games movies.

The young boy who had played a lot of Minecraft video games but had never seen a real piece of obsidian. He knew how it is created, but in his video game, it's represented by a black square. He was excited to see the large ceremonial obsidian blades.

The children studying Mesopotamia who came in with their teacher to see the cuneiform tablet, and were amazed that it is so small. (So am I.)

My favorite moment? When I picked up the Australopithecene hand axe and realized that the ancient person who used it was right-handed, just like me. Chills!

– Mary Cocroft Brown, Museum Educator



The Trustees of the Museum of Primitive Art and Culture
proudly invite you to join us for our annual
“Trash or Treasure” Fundraiser
Sunday, October 1, 2017

The Dunes Club, Narragansett

Professional appraisals by Stuart Whitehurst!

Cocktails and open forum appraisals at 5 p.m., buffet supper at 6 p.m.
Cash bar. Business casual attire. Buffet with carving station, pasta & salad.

Your ticket entitles you to one appraisal. Additional items are \$10 each.

No coins, musical instruments, stamps, watches, or jewelry please!

PLEASE RETURN LOWER PORTION WITH YOUR CHECK

I would love to attend the Museum of Primitive Art and Culture fundraiser on Sunday, October 1.
Please reserve _____ tickets in my name at \$75 each. Enclosed is a check for \$ _____.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ E-mail _____

I would like to make a donation of \$ _____ in honor of the Museum's 125th anniversary.

Please make your check payable to the Museum of Primitive Art and Culture and mail it with this form to
Museum of Primitive Art and Culture, 1058 Kingstown Rd., Room 5, Peace Dale, RI 02879.