

PRIMITIVE PIECES

The Newsletter of The Peace Dale Museum of Art and Culture

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Stone heaps, or spiritual symbols?

One of the most polarized debates in the world of archaeology today concerns ceremonial stone landscapes, groups of stone structures built by Native Americans for religious purposes. Are they spiritual places that must be preserved as the cultural heritage of Indigenous people? Or are many actually fields of stone heaps constructed as byproducts of 19th century agricultural activity? Our 2021 Spring Lecture Series will offer two perspectives on this fascinating topic.

The Manitou Hassannash Preserve— Land of a Thousand Cairns

In March of 2014, a Hopkinton resident brought two fellow hikers to see a wooded area off Lawton Foster Road with hundreds of unusual stone cairns crowded together so closely that you could stand next to one and touch another with your walking stick.

She told them that the owners were about to divide the property into two building lots. One of the hikers, a member of the Hopkinton Historical Association, felt strongly that the stone structures were the work of Native Americans who used them for spiritual purposes, and set out to protect them.

THURSDAY, MARCH 25



During the 19th century, the property in this area was owned by three generations of the Foster family. Once the site of subsistence farms, the property has been reclaimed by the forest.

The foundations of houses and barns, stone walls, and the remains of two sawmills are still visible. But the area's most striking feature is the stone structures. To date, more than 1,500 stone structures have been documented, including cairns and stone chambers.

In late 2014, the Hopkinton Land Trust purchased 14 acres of
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A Brief Social History of Stone Heaps Commonly Found in New England's Forested Hills

Our speaker on Thursday, April 15, archaeologist Timothy Ives, will present a 200-year social history of the stone heaps commonly found in New England's forested hills.

He will begin in the 19th century, when stone heaps were a symbol of the resilience of farmers striving to keep their stoniest fields productive

THURSDAY, APRIL 15

as farmland became more scarce and less fertile. As under-productive hill farms were abandoned and overtaken by the forest, stone heaps dropped out of public memory.

As the 20th century progressed, historical revisionists claimed that many of the stone heaps, walls, and other stone structures throughout second-growth forests are not vestiges of abandoned farmsteads but Native American ceremonial constructions that require protection
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The Manitou Hassannash Preserve— Land of a Thousand Cairns

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the property, and in 2017 part of it was dedicated as the Manitou Hassannash Preserve ("Spirit Stone Grouping" in the Algonquin language).

Since 2014, stone structure researchers and local historians have been documenting what is on the property, searching old deeds and vital records, and consulting archaeologists and tribal representatives to discover who built the stone struc-

tures and why they are there.

Their surprising theory about when some of the structures were built and who built them challenges conventional historical and archaeological assumptions about ceremonial stone landscapes.

Mary and James Gage, a mother and son research team who have been studying stonework throughout the Northeast for almost thirty years, are the authors of *Land of a Thousand*

Cairns. The book is a detailed examination of the Hopkinton property. To visit the Gages' website, go to www.stonestructures.org.

On Thursday, March 25, James Gage will open our Spring Lecture Series with a program about the Manitou Hassannash Preserve. Mary Gage will join James to answer your questions.

To watch a brief video about the preserve, go to <https://youtu.be/BLUxXLA9jg>.



Circa 1870 stereo view showing stone heaps on exposed bedrock in Lincoln, Addison County, Vermont.

Photo credit: University of Vermont Consulting Archaeology Program.

A Brief Social History of Stone Heaps Commonly Found in New England's Forested Hills

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from the ongoing ravages of modern development.

Ives will chronicle the evolution of this vision among New England antiquarians during the late 20th century, its appropriation by Native Americans and their allies in the early 21st century, and the political traction it enjoys today in popular culture and in

academia.

The purpose of Ives's program is not to help us interpret the historical origin or cultural significance of any particular stone structure. Ives does not argue that there are no Native American ceremonial stone structures in New England. Instead, he wants to introduce us to related facts, patterns, and ideas that other researchers do

not seem to be willing to openly address.

Ives is principal archaeologist for the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission. He is presenting this program on an independent basis. The views he will express are his own and do not represent the views or opinions of the agency he works for.

HOW TO ATTEND OUR SPRING PROGRAMS

Each of our three Spring programs will take place at the usual day and time, on a Thursday evening at 7:00 p.m. But instead of taking place in our Museum Gallery, they will be broadcast live on Zoom.

To attend a program, you will need to make a reservation by sending an e-mail to the museum office (pdmoac@aol.com). Please include the date of the program in the subject line of your e-mail. We will send you the link to the Zoom program. Please make a separate reservation for each program.

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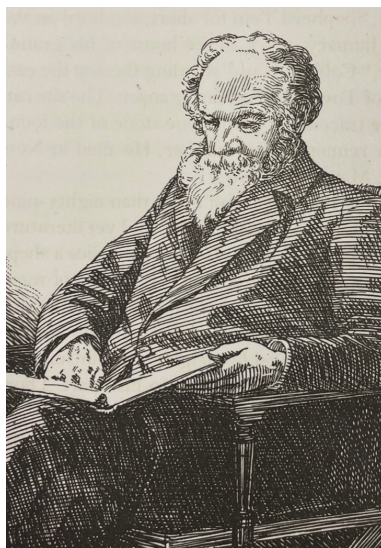
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Industrialist, Social Reformer . . . and Spiritualist

Thomas Robinson Hazard (1797-1886), affectionately known as “Shepherd Tom,” was a South Kingstown-born farmer, industrialist, author, folklorist, social reformer and Spiritualist. He was born on the southeastern slope of Tower Hill in the home of his grandfather, “College Tom” Hazard. He is now best remembered for his folkloric essays, *Recollections of Olden Times* and *The Jonnycake Papers*.

Inseparably linked with the story of Shepherd Tom is the tale of Vaucluse, the beautiful estate in Portsmouth where he lived for fifty years. It was at Vaucluse that he became an ardent practitioner of Modern Spiritualism, the popular 19th century religious movement based on the belief

THURSDAY, MAY 6



Thomas Robinson Hazard

that spirits of the dead can communicate with and provide guidance to the living.

Hazard’s profound grief at the death of his wife in 1854 led to an obsession with Spiritualism. He reserved a room at Vaucluse exclusively for conducting séances, and he documented the many spirit manifestations that took place there. With the untimely deaths between 1868 and 1880 of his four daughters who lived to adulthood, Spiritualism became the main focus of his later life.

John M. Peixinho, of Middletown and Richmond, is a Shepherd Tom Hazard aficionado. On Thursday, May 6, he will tell us about Hazard, his home, and his Spiritualist beliefs.



Vaucluse, front (south) view

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



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Paula's friend Kate Spencer painted this picture of Paula's yard in St. Kitts.

Donations Received in Memory of Paula Ann Fiore

The Trustees of the Museum are pleased to announce that donations in memory of the late Paula Ann Fiore now exceed \$10,000. Paula, an artist and a lifelong friend of the Museum, passed away on November 24, 2020 at her home in Peace Dale after a long and debilitating illness. Paula's childhood visits to the museum influenced her appreciation of other cultures and left a lasting impression on her life and her art. For thirty years, Paula lived on the island of St. Kitts. An avid reader, she loved music, gardens, animals, antiques, and the New England Patriots. At the time of Paula's death, her family requested donations to the Museum in lieu of flowers, and matched the first \$5,000 received. The Trustees have not yet decided the purpose for which the donations in Paula's memory will be designated.