

# MUSEUM PIECES

The Newsletter of The Peace Dale Museum of Art and Culture

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## The American Ship *John Jay*: a Prize of War



On Sept. 21, 1804, the merchant ship *John Jay* sailed out of Providence, bound for Amsterdam and the Far East. Her owners, the Providence firm of Brown & Ives, hoped the voyage would be “prosperous and pleasant,” but it was neither.

In January of 1806, on its homeward voyage from the Dutch East Indies, the *John Jay* was captured by the H.M.S. *Driver*, an 18-gun British sloop of war. The *Providence Gazette* reported that “His Majesty’s piratical sloop of war *Driver*” forced the *John Jay* to Bermuda, where she found herself “within the rapacious fangs” of the Bermuda Court of Vice Admiralty.

The H.M.S. *Driver* was one of many British naval vessels patrolling the North Atlantic sea lanes. The newly-independent United States conducted its own trade with foreign nations, but in the first decade of the 19th century, Britain still dominated the Atlantic.

The story of the *John Jay*— her capture and imprisonment, her

condemnation, her owners’ appeal, and her eventual release— illustrates how early 19th century Americans navigated the political, economic, and legal constructs of their world in the midst of the Napoleonic Wars. The tale covers many thousands of nautical miles under sail, and focuses on ordinary and extraordinary people whose fate is intertwined with the ship *John Jay*.

‘Bermuda Prize,’ a research project led by Dr. Catherine DeCesare, an assistant professor of history at URI, uses the maritime records of Brown & Ives, the Admiralty and Prize Papers in the United Kingdom’s National Archives, and documents from the John Carter Brown Library to uncover

the hidden stories of those people. One of them was Elisha Gardiner of South Kingstown. In 1806, he was a 25-year-old able seaman. Bermuda was a dangerous place for Americans. While his ship was incarcerated in St. George’s Harbor, Gardiner was seized by a British “press gang” and forced to serve on the crew of the H.M.S. *Bermuda*. He was one of the fortunate ones. He was released after a month, but some of his shipmates never returned home.

On Thursday, Nov. 30, Professor DeCesare will be in our Museum Gallery to tell us the story of the 1804-1806 voyage of the *John Jay*.

A Rhode Island native, Professor DeCesare is co-director of URI’s Applied History Lab. She earned her Master’s degree at Fordham University and her Bachelor’s degree and Ph.D. at Providence College. Before coming to URI, she was an archivist at Brown University and at the R.I. Supreme Court Judicial Records Center.

**THURSDAY,  
NOVEMBER 30th  
7:00 P.M.**

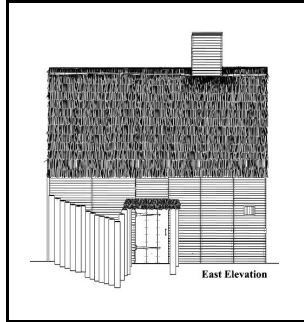
# A 1638 household in Plymouth Colony

In 2013, archaeologists investigating property in Marshfield, Mass. in preparation for an airport runway expansion discovered about two dozen artifacts indicating that a house had once occupied the site, although there was no record that a house had been built there. More testing revealed the buried remains of a 20-by-16-foot building with a corner hearth, cellar and food-storage pit. It turned out to be the buried remains of an entire house—the only 17th century Plymouth Colony house ever to have been completely excavated.

The house, which had belonged to Robert and Elizabeth (Bourne) Waterman, was built about 1638 and burned down sometime in the 1640s. Because no later house ever occupied the site, the contents of the Waterman House were preserved under ash and soil.

The earliest European settlers in New England left historical docu-

**Thursday,  
November 16th  
7:00 P.M.**



ments, but virtually no tangible objects that revealed what their lives were like— how their homes were built, how the space was used, or what foods they ate. Analysis of the

thousands of household artifacts at the Waterman House site, a rich assemblage of 17th-century domestic objects and food remains, is providing exciting new information about the daily lives of the first people to live in the Plymouth Colony.

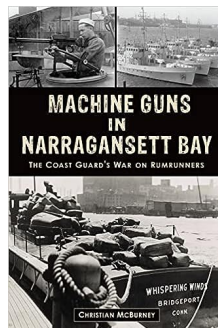
Archaeological & Historical Services, Inc., a cultural resource management firm in Storrs, Conn., recovered the artifacts from the Waterman House site. Katharine Reinhart, an archaeobotanist at AHS, is studying the botanical items recovered at the site. She will be in our Museum Gallery on Thursday, November 16 to talk about the discoveries at the Waterman House site and how the Waterman family's plant consumption practices reflect some of the earliest evidence of how the Puritan colonists began to evolve into the people we call New England "Yankees."

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## Machine Guns in Narragansett Bay: The Coast Guard's War on Rumrunners

The Rhode Island coastline is dotted with armed fortifications. The artillery pieces in those forts never fired at an enemy during World War I or World War II. But in between those two wars a different kind of conflict took place — Prohibition. Between 1929 and 1933, Coast Guard vessels patrolling Narragansett Bay fired thousands of rounds from machine guns and cannons. The enemy they fired at? The "rummies"— rumrunners in power boats delivering illegal alcohol to secret drop-off points on the coast.

Buying and selling alcoholic beverages was illegal in the United States from 1920 to 1933. The profits from a successful voyage could be enormous. Rum-runners picked up



**Thursday, November 2nd  
at 7:00 P.M.**

alcohol from supply ships stationed beyond the twelve-mile zone off the coast, an area known as "Rum Row," and made their deliveries on moonless nights or in thick fog to avoid detection.

The Coast Guard became the lead federal agency battling the "rum war" at sea. Coast Guard cutters would stop suspicious vessels for inspection. If a vessel was ordered to stop but did not, Coast Guardsmen might fire at them with large caliber guns loaded with live ammunition. Sometimes people on shore witnessed these one-sided "battles." In October of 1930, a World War I veteran told a *Providence Journal* reporter about an attack he had seen from his home at Watch Hill. "I could see the flash of the one-pounder and I think they must have fired it 50 times. Searchlights were flashing along the beach and the reports of the one-pounder and the rat-tat-tat

*continued on page 3*

## The Peace Dale Museum of Art and Culture

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

<http://peacedalemuseum.org> [pdmoac@aol.com](mailto:pdmoac@aol.com)

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## Machine Guns in Narragansett Bay: The Coast Guard's War on Rumrunners

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of machine-guns sounded like a battle . . . I told my wife and daughter to get away from the window," he said.

In his latest book, *Machine Guns in Narragansett Bay: The Coast Guard's War on Rumrunners*, Christian McBurney examines incidents between 1929 and 1933 in which Coast Guard vessels fired large caliber weapons—Lewis machine guns and Hotchkiss one-pounder cannon—at

fleeing rumrunners in Rhode Island waters. The source material is primarily the Coast Guard's own records and contemporary newspaper articles.

The book describes incidents in which three crew members on rumrunners were killed by machine-gun fire; one drowned after his boat caught fire and exploded; another drowned in mysterious circumstances after the Coast Guard fired on his boat; two suffered

life-threatening bullet wounds; and eight more received less serious bullet wounds.

Mr. McBurney will be in our Museum Gallery on Thursday, Nov. 2 to talk about his new book. A native of Kingston, he practices law in Washington, D.C., and lives in Kensington, Maryland and West Kingston. He is the author of several books and the editor of the Online Review of Rhode Island History ([www.smallstatebighistory.com](http://www.smallstatebighistory.com)).



These students from Broad Rock Middle School in South Kingstown visited the Museum Gallery on June 12. Their teacher, Jen DeFeo, reports that they had a great time.



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



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## **“Trash or Treasure” Fundraiser**

### **Sunday, September 17, 2023**



**The Dunes Club, Narragansett • Professional appraisals by Tom Tomaszek**  
**Cocktails and open forum appraisals at 4:00 p.m. • Buffet supper at 6:00 p.m.**

*Tickets are \$75 each for Museum members and \$85 each for non-members.*

*To reserve your ticket, contact the Museum Office by phone at (401) 783-5711 or by e-mail at [pdmoac@aol.com](mailto:pdmoac@aol.com).*