

CHEQUAQUET LOG

The Newsletter of the **CENTERVILLE**
HISTORICAL MUSEUM www.centervillehistoricalmuseum.org

NEW EXHIBITS AND EACH ONE IS ABSOLUTELY ENJOYABLE

Since January, the museum's director and volunteers have been as busy as bees putting together, after much research, organizing and choosing the perfect items, four new exhibits. Variety is the name of the game as all are distinct and clear as presented.

We introduced the Victorian Birthday party in the Jan/Feb newsletter. Here we'll introduce three more new exhibits. The Phinney Room has three unrelated yet enticing new displays. Along one wall is a series of all black women's beaded capes and capelets, in fashion from about 1870 to the turn of the century. All are worn by well-to-do women for evening occasions. The era is The Gilded Age, when vast fortunes in oil, timber, mining and other new industries are being made, when opulence is the style, when what one wore defines the rich. It is a woman's elevated financial status that can afford this evening wear for high society events such as the theater, a soiree, a ball, regardless of the time of year.

Black is the preferred color for both gown and evening wrap, though sometimes other colors are chosen. Jet and copper beads are profusely employed. Scrolled and patterned designs such as vines and flowers are embroidered lavishly on capes, those that fall from neck to waist

or hip, or to capelets, shorter coverings which extend from the neck to a little below the shoulder. Both styles are fastened by ribbon or hook and eye at the front of the neck. The back as well as the front of these stunning capes and capelets should be observed. Each item is individual in its ornateness and in its excellent condition.



The second display in the Phinney room, *The Pace Of Change*, is that of fashion at its best from the years 1905 through 1929 when we see dynamic changes to women's fashion. This exhibit explores those changes by displaying the earlier styles of the first two decades next to the same type of garments from the 1920's. In the 1920's skirts are much shorter, hair is shorter; corsets have disappeared and undergarments are much simpler and more comfortable to wear. Several factors contributed to these fast-paced changes. Women get the vote! They are entering college and the work force, especially due to WW1, in large numbers. Each dress is individually gorgeous, whether it is fitted, with the imagined corset under it defining shape and ankle length, or, as in the others that are straight with little or no waist and that fall to just below the knee. The materials are lighter, less complex and exquisitely fashioned. The hair style is no longer pulled back from the face or put into a bun, but shorter, falling free to the jaw line. Hats are still a necessity for the

NEW EXHIBITS continued



fashionable in these years, but they are a bit more casual and appear more comfortable and relaxed than those of a few years before them. The use of makeup also changes. Lipstick and slightly pinked cheekbones, a touch of color to eyelashes and eyebrows all predominate in the 1920s unlike a few years earlier. All in all, a well thought out addition to this wonderful exhibit.

Thirdly, in the Phinney Room, is something altogether different that ensures interest. It is a glimpse at the museum's

photo albums and scrapbook collection. Photos from the second half of the 19th century, in black & white and Sepia are inside the richly tooled and decorated leather or velvet albums. In contrast, the scrapbook typically contains clippings and articles. After the advent of photography in the mid-1800s, and with the invention of chromolithography, people collected newly colorful advertisements, calling cards and greeting cards.

Photography was introduced in the 1840's. It became quite fashionable for every class of people to have a simple photo taken of himself or herself or to have a picture containing family or friends. Note that few people smile in any of the photos. Photography back then was tedious. The subject had to remain motionless for minutes at a time so that the image could emerge clearly. It is also said that the subject did not wish to show decayed or missing teeth in a photograph. Portraits, too, were taken seriously and were on the formal side. For example, the soldier, in his uniform, wanted a remembrance of his duty and his service in the Civil War. Who knew if he would return from the terrible battles being waged across the nation. There are also whimsical images. One is of an elderly woman, as her rocking chair sits sideways to the photographer while she faces a wall. No one is sure why that photo is as it is, but it does bring a smile to the viewer.

Other less formal poses, of children, neighbors or friends, also abound in the museum's collection of photo albums. The albums themselves vary. There are those that are small and square, featuring one photograph on a page. Larger albums accommodate several photos per page. They also featured two photographs on every page, allowing husband and wife to be together - forever. There are always new exhibits on hand at the museum, each one with its own story to tell. With its dozen display rooms, the museum's exhibits are waiting for the viewer to enjoy a trip to the past and how it may relate to the present.

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E V E N T A T T H E M U S E U M

Museum Members Only Event

Just for you



New Exhibits Opening Reception

Thursday, April 20, from 4PM to 6PM.

Free for all members.

Come and help us celebrate our new exhibits with light finger food and libations. Exhibit curators will be on hand to share their expertise.

Not A Member!

Join the membership at this event, get a special rate. Be part of the fun.

Art and Wine Evening



Time to get out the painting smock. Joyce Frederick, our talented in-house professional artist, will be monitoring an evening painting class on:

Sorry Sold Out

We plan on another one in October

Whether a paint brush is the foreign object or whether painting is a hobby or interest, this wine and painting evening will be a delight. No one will judge or critique these two hours of fun with paint, brush and palette.

THOUGHTS FROM OUR WRITER

VOLUNTEERING AT THE MUSEUM TAKES SPECIAL SKILLS AND MORE

When I came to the Centerville Historical Museum five years ago, I gave proof of volunteering at another museum in a village in New Hampshire. I showed photos of exhibits designed and executed during those years. The director asked how many days a week I would be available at CHM. Two days was the answer. We both smiled. I had been “hired.”

Those years have flown by and they have been happy ones here at CHM. It has also been a learning experience, because knowledge of working with a professional director has expanded the horizons and abilities much more than one can imagine.

For instance, writing the museum’s newsletter has been fulfilling. Articles about the goings on, new displays, coming events, past happenings and personal interviews with fellow volunteers and others has opened one’s eyes to the importance of a local museum.

Thinking up ideas for new displays has been rewarding. Of the close to 19,000 items in our collection, there is an ongoing effort not to repeat old exhibits but to create new ones.

Volunteers at the museum often find several, before unknown, abilities within them. One day they may be logging new additions to the collection on a computer. Another day may include guiding visitors through the exhibits on a tour. There may be displays which must be taken down, cleaned, logged and carefully repacked in their acid-free boxes. The number of projects is ongoing, each one necessary and each one allows the volunteer to see what variety there is, what historic story to tell and in what way an item can be shown to full advantage.

You get the picture. Whether designing, putting together, taking apart, talking about, writing about or showing about, the museum hums with activity.

There is always room for new volunteers. Perhaps you would like to spend a few hours a week being a volunteer. You may have hidden skills and new ideas to share. There may be friends or neighbors who have wondered about the museum and what they might enjoy if they volunteered. Maybe you have or know students who like history, fashion and people. Discovering there is a place where all these are combined and that it has its own story to tell may be perfect for students on summer breaks. Think about it! Why not bring some free hours, curiosity and a smile to learn local history while giving back to the community.

There are many events in which to involve yourself: lectures, exhibits, tours, workshops, fundraising events and research. New approaches and fresh ideas are welcomed. Come and find out. We would like to share our love of history and a special museum with all of you.



From the deck of newsletter writer Lois Lane
Volunteer

INTERESTING HISTORY

AND THEN THERE WAS THE GIBSON GIRL



The Gibson Girl was a new type of woman, freer, more open, able to enter the workforce. She is said to have a refined beauty, was calm, independent, confident and feminine. She was invented by illustrator Charles Dana Gibson who drew a pen and ink illustration of her. For about 20 years, from the 1890's to 1910, her "look" captured the public eye. To her inventor, she was the composite of the American young woman.

The Gibson Girl's other attributes included being femininely fragile, yet voluptuous, responsible, mannerly, tall and slender, with a thin neck and her hair carelessly careful in a bouffant style with a top-knot. A swan-billed corset encased her, making her silhouette into its famous "S" shape. She was a product of her inventor's imagination. Charles Dana Gibson, however, knew what and who he wanted to portray, and he did so for two decades, capturing the public's fancy. As the years went by, the qualities of this beauty covered every possible area. She was upper middle-class, dressed fashionably and appropriately for day or evening. She was the symbol of a new woman, one who was athletic and exercised, and who was entering the workforce of America. She might also be a college graduate. She would have the wherewithal to find a good husband. One thing she was forbidden to partake in was the women's suffrage movement.

The Gibson Girl stayed away from politics and remained in the roles of feminism. Men would fall under her spell and follow her anywhere and do anything she desired. She never did anything that was out of the ordinary at that time, though both she and her rival, The New Woman, helped start new fashion trends such as bicycle and tennis wear, with both women dressed in those outfits as they cycled through Central Park or swung a racket. Many famous women posed for Gibson girl illustrations; Charles Dana Gibson's own wife, probably the original model, actresses Mabel Norman and Evelyn Nesbitt are a few. Movie stars Mary Pickford and Camille Clifford became the ideal Gibson Girl when their images became public. This woman's fictional ideal was highly popular. She appeared in daily papers and weekly magazines. Her face was on saucers and ash trays, on tablecloths and pillow covers, on souvenir spoons, screens, fans and umbrella stands.

World War I was the death knell for The Gibson Girl. In the last decades she had been a fashion queen, clad in bustles and tea gowns and elegant eveningwear. As the years passed, narrower skirts prevailed, and skirt length showed the ankle. A less restrictive corset became the new thing and less petticoats were needed. Women, especially those working, adopted the high starched collar of men and paired them with ties to go with their new shirtwaists. The Gibson Girl's narrow waisted S curve was no more. One thing did remain. In World War II, radio transmitters carried on airplanes over water, were dubbed "Gibson Girl" due to their hourglass shape. They were held between the knees of the operator while he turned the machine's generator handle.



D I D Y O U K N O W

ICE CREAM TRUCKS-WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM?

Ice cream is like a gift from heaven. Who does not enjoy the cold, creamy concoction on a hot summer's eve, whether served in a crunchy waffle cone or in a cardboard cup with a little spoon.

Way back when, even Thomas Jefferson was an ice cream fan. His personal chef was known for his frozen desserts and Jefferson built an icehouse at Monticello and sent to France for vanilla bean pods to be used in flavoring his ice cream. He, of course, had his own ice cream recipe of "good cream, vanilla, egg yolks and sugar."

Ice cream gained popularity in the 1920's when a wooden stick was inserted into a vanilla bar covered in chocolate. The stick kept the bar less messy while being consumed. This new idea allowed the inventor, Harry Burt, to earn a patent for what became known as The Good Humor Bar. It fared very well against its biggest rival, the Eskimo Pie.

Burt became famous for his invention. He was the first ice cream vendor to move from pushcarts to white trucks with a refrigerated unit, a much more sanitary idea that changed the way the public got ice cream, especially in the hot months of summer. Although there were ice cream trucks with other brand names, the Good Humor truck is the most famous. Only men were hired as truck drivers. They dressed in white uniforms so that they looked like hospital orderlies. Drivers had to get out of their trucks and move to the rear of their vehicles to a freezer unit in order to distribute their iced treats to street customers.



By the 1930's, the bell, a clever addition to the white trucks, was anticipated each day, as its ring announced the truck's arrival loud and clear. Children heard the bell and rushed with their money to the trucks. The event became a social gathering place. Even sleepovers and birthday parties were planned around the Good Humor truck's stops in the neighborhood.

In the 1950's there were at least 2,000 Good Humor trucks around the country, where the drivers, who worked on commission, had earned very good money from the Depression years onward. Eventually, the Good Humor company was sold to a large conglomerate and by the early 1960's ice cream products began to change. New competitors such as soft ice cream, sold from step vans with an open window on the side of the truck, with the driver never having to get out of the truck, became exceedingly popular.

Then scandal plagued Good Humor. In 1975 it was found that the company had falsified records about excessive bacteria in its products. The company was fined heavily and forced to modernize its plants and improve quality control. By 1980 the Good Humor trucks had mostly disappeared and the company had moved its products to grocery stores.

There are still mobile refrigerated trucks in use. Ice cream is not the product today. Instead, a myriad of food options such as tacos and French fries have gained in popularity. It is hard to believe that all this came from Thomas Jefferson's ice cream recipe.

S U P P O R T E R S

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and ask you, our members, to support these businesses that support us.**

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See what we are doing: On You Tube, and Pinterest under centerville historical museum and on Instagram under centerville_historical_museum.

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