

# CHEQUAQUET LOG

The Newsletter of the **CENTERVILLE**  
**HISTORICAL MUSEUM** [www.centervillehistoricalmuseum.org](http://www.centervillehistoricalmuseum.org)

## Here we are - 2023 - a New Year.

Another New Year brings a host of promising outcomes for the coming year. Each year in January we start out the year with the preliminary planning of the exhibits. We consider what has been popular, interesting and relevant to our visitors. We also consider parts of our collection that we've not focused on in the last decade or so. We consider the commonality of these groups of objects; date range, for example, which will determine an historical context. These and other criteria determine our choices of what to exhibit next. Lastly, we consider how the content of objects and the historical context can be creatively intergrated, resulting in a visually pleasing setting. This tells the story of not only the objects, but the times from which they came.

Simple enough, right! We try to change out at least one third to a half of the fourteen exhibit rooms in this museum per year.

This January we started with the changing of the dining room exhibit in the Mary Lincoln house portion of the museum. For those who came to visit last year you'll remember that room focused on Staffordshire Transferware china made from the 1820's to 1860's. Around this content we supplemented with other objects from the same time periods.

This year the context in this room is a late Victorian girls' birthday party. We've assembled five girls' party dresses, three women's costumes, photographs, birthday cards, dolls, and Mary Gregory child illustrated glass all, from 1875 to the 1880's. The room has been transformed into a traditional 1880's party decor with a cake, ribbon streamers, and flower bouquets which were popular in the late Victorian Period.



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

## COMING EVENTS AT THE MUSEUM



### Art and Wine Evening

Get out your painting smock everyone. Joyce Frederick, our talented in-house professional artist, will be monitoring an evening painting class on Thursday, April 13, from 6:30 to 8:30PM.

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. So reserve a place as there is limited seating.

A former Art and Wine Evening participant said, "It was great to learn that you could actually paint even though you had never painted before - we were all artists."

## N E W   T O   T H E   C O L L E C T I O N

### circa 1863 to 1868 **Mourning / Wedding Dress?**

This dress came to us from a family in Maine. Before it reached us, the family had it analyzed and researched by the Maine State Museum and the Lynn Museum and Historical Society. The results were the dress was very likely used as a wedding gown by the donors' great-great grandmother for her 2nd marriage in 1868. The dress could also very likely been first used as a mourning dress worn after the death of her first husband in 1863. The gown has evidence showing it was constructed no earlier than about 1863 and has elements that were used up until about 1868. When matching these dates to the death and wedding records it seems likely this dress was used for those purposes.

C. 1863 - 1868 Lavender silk gown with bell sleeves, collarless bodice with lavender trim. Interior is lined, bodice has internal stays and 12 twine woven covered buttons. Gown is pleated.



# THOUGHTS FROM OUR WRITER

## BIRDS AND FEATHERS; FASHIONABLE UNTIL THEY WEREN'T

It took the mission of a few people and one war to end the decimation of birds for the latest fashion in headwear. While feathers have been used throughout history, in plumed capes in Hawaii, feathered headdresses in North and South America and Marie Antoinette's feathers in her wigs, the rage for plumage began in the 1880's and lasted for decades across Europe and America, almost destroying at least 40 species of birds.

At one point, five million birds a year were killed in the US for the sole purpose of adorning women's hats, from feathers to stuffed bird bodies with glass eyes. A few protests about disappearing birds began about 1880 and by 1896, two women, Boston's Harriet Hemenway and her cousin, Minnie Hall, spoke to groups and with help from the Audubon Society. Both urged women to boycott feathers and birds in fashion. Some of their efforts were successful and a few laws were passed to stop the sale and transfer of these items across state lines.

However, enforcement of the new laws went largely unheeded until the passing of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the start of World War I, both of which interrupted the prosperous business which used the feathers of birds such as egrets. By 1922, three women, Florence Merriam Bailey, along with European actress Lili Lehman and socialite Rosalie Edge, separately and together, called attention to the still declining avian numbers and wondered why. Edge, a New Yorker, with undeveloped property on Long Island Sound, began keeping a diary of the birds in that area and on her daily walks in Central Park when she was in New York City. She even convinced one of her children to help her keep track of bird populations.

In 1929, Rosalie Edge received an alarming pamphlet about the need for bird protection from gun and ammunition makers and private gun parties on bird shooting forays. Birds such as the bald eagle and the northern harrier were becoming rarer. Taking her notebooks and pamphlet to an Audubon Society meeting, of which she was a member, she presented her case to the society's committee. She was appalled when the society chose to do nothing, so she joined forces with a scientist and zoologist, Willard Van Name, to help protect the newly decimated bird species shot for sport.

Luckily, the efforts of Edge and Van Name, through their constant questioning of the Audubon Society's lack of interest, convinced the Society to publish information pamphlets and raise monies to embrace bird protection, to the point that the society eventually established two national parks in the name of public conservatism. Edge later worked with Rachel Carson who authored "Silent Spring" which, among other things, called for the elimination of dangerous pesticides which were considered a large factor in declining bird populations.

Hawk Mountain, in eastern Pennsylvania, was the first and is the most famous of conserved land for bird watchers. It was purchased by Rosalie Edge. Today about 200 similar sites are located in North and South America, Europe and Asia, a tribute to the efforts of a few to save the beautiful avian world from human destruction.

From the deck of newsletter writer Lois Lane



# V O L U N T E E R   P R O F I L E

## LINDA HORN IS A VOLUNTEER WHO HELPS KEEP OUR CLOTHING COLLECTION IN TIP-TOP SHAPE

On the top floor of the museum, Tuesday's group of antique clothing restorers carefully strengthens nineteenth-century silk clothing with pieces of tulle to further prevent splits in the fabric due to chemicals used to stiffen silk at the time. On this day they are repairing tiny baby items or fixing lace tears in a wedding outfit. The work goes slowly, yet the conversation is open and relaxed while the painstaking work progresses.

These volunteers are followed on Wednesdays with another set of restorers and both groups are refurbishing our museum's beautiful clothing piece by piece. The women are greatly appreciated for their skills and for their time. Linda Horn belongs to Tuesday's set of sewists. She is the one who recently repaired an elegant ecru silk 19th century wedding gown's splitting fabric, a task that had taken weeks to finish.

Today, in front of her is a new project, a bodice, or what was known in the 1800's as a waist, the top of a two-piece dress of dark brown open-work with a green silk underlay. It is unusual and lovely. How long this project will take she does not know, but Linda Horn knows patience is a sewist's skill. The dress will be beautifully restored.

Linda does not consider herself a professional antique gown restorer, but she is confident in what she can do and knows she can consult the group's conservator if in doubt. Her life and vocations so far have been varied and each has come with training and obtaining the qualifications required. A gracious, confident woman, Linda tends to her task. She is friendly, interested, smart and entirely capable of accomplishing what is needed.

Born in Pennsylvania, Linda graduated from Lehigh University with a degree in journalism. On she went to law school in New York City, passed the bar and found all sorts of professional work with an impressive client list of well-known companies such as General Foods, CitiGroup and Smith Barney. After a move to Florida, she began her own practice with emphasis on wills, trusts, probate and bankruptcy. All of this was accomplished within a twenty year time frame. She also

married and raised a daughter who is now grown and works in the financial world.

After a move to Boston, Linda turned to an ongoing interest in health care. She first chose Occupational Therapy. Later, hearing of a training course in Home Health on Cape Cod, a move to this area allowed her to complete the course, use her training in home-care situations and continue using her Occupational Therapy skills. "These jobs," she says, "are very rewarding."

Besides her professional skills and volunteer work, Linda sews and knits. She also enjoys playing the oboe and spending time in the garden. She and her British husband both like to travel and visit friends and family in England.

A fellow clothing repairer encouraged Linda to volunteer at the museum. She is amazed with the museum's clothing collection, especially its extensive scope and variety. That collection

will be even more spectacular now with Linda Horn's talents in lovingly maintaining it. At the museum, Linda has found the atmosphere very suitable. "I have found the people here warm and welcoming. The people here are my kind of people."



# I N T E R E S T I N G   H I S T O R Y

## HOW THE INDIGO PLANT INFLUENCED FASHION

Sometimes a nugget of information gets interesting. Did you know that indigo, an ancient blue dye extracted from leaves of a bushy plant and which has a putrid stench, but, oddly, once it is used to dye fabric, only turns blue after being exposed to the air for some minutes?

The odd color process was discovered in 16th century Europe when the plant was shipped there from Java and India. It caused an uproar to the continent's textile merchants who had huge investments in a home-grown blue dye called woad. Huge smear campaigns tried to discourage the use of indigo. Weavers were told indigo would destroy cloth or if touched by a man he would become impotent. Governments banned indigo and decreed that anyone using it would be executed.

The dye's ability to keep its bright blue color from bleeding or fading finally won out over time. By the 18th century indigo was all the rage in Europe. Eventually a German chemist would invent a synthetic coloring and he won a Nobel Prize for that find in 1905.

Indigo is the highly popular color of denim and denim pants have been around since at least the 1600's. Denim comes from the French "serge de Nimes," (city of Nimes), where denim was produced. The word jeans springs from the Italian word "Genes, or the city of Genoa. Both cities manufactured the cloth.

Slaves in 19th century America wore sturdy denim-type pants, as did miners and other laborers, until they discovered a tailor, Jacob Davis, who made blue and brown duck cloth trousers. This rugged canvas-like material was sold by San Francisco businessman Levi Strauss. A patent was granted to Strauss and Jacob Davis, in 1873 for the copper-riveted pants. By 1890 Levi's 501 jeans were a bestseller across the country.

Cowboys wore denim. Cowboy actors such as John Wayne and Hopalong Cassidy and Roy Rogers wore blue jeans. President Ronald Reagan sported Levis on his ranch and country singers used jeans as part of their costumes. Civil rights activists such as Martin Luther King, Jr. outfitted themselves in jeans in honor of their slave and sharecropper forebearers, to point out inequality.

In the 1960's the dress of choice for male and female civil rights workers were Levis.

One of the items of clothing that was the most popular with those who lived behind the Iron Curtin was, you guessed it, blue jeans. Impossible to come by, denim jeans were the most sought after item by those who were permitted to travel to the West. Levi Strauss & Company and others saw an opportunity and were able to sell their products in East Germany by 1978. In later years, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, denim products became hugely popular status symbols in Russia.



Today, blue jeans and baseball caps are among the most desirable clothing items sold around the world. From Asia in the 1500's to today, Indigo and its synthetic replacements, have changed the fashion world, with its innovative yet highly recognizable clothing and expanded styles. The bet is almost every household has at least one duck cloth denim piece in a closet.

# D I D Y O U K N O W

## THE MYSTERIES OF THE AMBER ROOM - THE EIGHTH WONDER OF THE WORLD

Time has not solved the question of where or if the original Amber Room still exists. Amber is a substance made from tree resin, most often found in the Baltic region of Europe. There are several colors of amber, but the famous Amber Room was constructed with what was known as the Gold of the North for the various golden shades of amber.

Designed by German artist Andreas Schluter, the room was assembled beginning in 1701 in the Berlin City Palace. When Russia's Peter the Great made a state visit to the city in 1716 and admired this wonder, his host, Frederick Wilhelm I, gifted him the room in a gesture to forge good relations between Germany and Russia.

Ten years later the amber, altogether weighing six tons, had been installed in St. Petersburg's Catherine Palace. There were amber panels, gilding, gold leaf, gems, statues and mirrors to reflect the room in candlelight. Its effect was breathtaking in its singular beauty. The room survived through the 18th and 19th centuries, even the Russian Revolution of 1917.

While WWII devastated Europe, one of the prime missions of Adolf Hitler was to collect as much art from his conquered lands as possible. He sent the German Army to the Soviet Union. Art experts were told to take away its art and dismantle the Amber Room. The panels were deemed too brittle to move and the room was covered in wallpaper to conceal it from thieves.



Hitler, knowing the Amber Room was a German masterpiece, persisted. His experts returned to dismantle the room and it was moved to Königsberg Castle on the Baltic coast. In 1944-45, as Germany faced defeat, Königsberg Castle was heavily damaged by both sides of the war effort.

Recovered Russian National Archives concluded that the Amber Room had most likely been destroyed when the castle was heavily bombed. A few panels

of amber, damaged and burned, were recovered in the castle's basement. Soviet propaganda blamed the Nazis for the room's loss. However, several witnesses swore they saw The Amber Room's pieces loaded onto a ship in 1945. As fate would have it, the ship was sunk by the Russians and divers have never found remnants of amber in the wreckage.

In 1997, pieces of an Amber Room panel were discovered in the home of a WWII German soldier's son. So far, nothing more of the original Amber Room has been discovered. Various theories suggested German trucks moved the amber pieces to caves in the country's Harz mountains or that a locked vault filled with amber existed in the basement of Königsberg Castle. Further searches proved fruitless and Russia's leader, Leonid Brezhnev, in 1968, ordered the castle remains leveled, thus preventing any further searches.

Using photographs and architectural drawings known from the original, a new Amber Room was reconstructed in the Catherine Palace, beginning in 1979. The effort took 24 years to complete. The room was dedicated by Russian President Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Gerhart Schröder at the 300th anniversary of the founding of Saint Petersburg. No matter, the rumors continue that the "Eighth Wonder of the World" is somewhere and that this lost treasure can be found. The hunt goes on.

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