

The Gilbert Stuart

Birthplace and Museum

April 2022

815 Gilbert Stuart Road
Saunderstown, RI 02874
Phone 401-294-3001
Fax 401-294-3869
www.gilbertstuartmuseum.org

Hap-Harlots & Coverlids: The Legacy of Weaver Rose

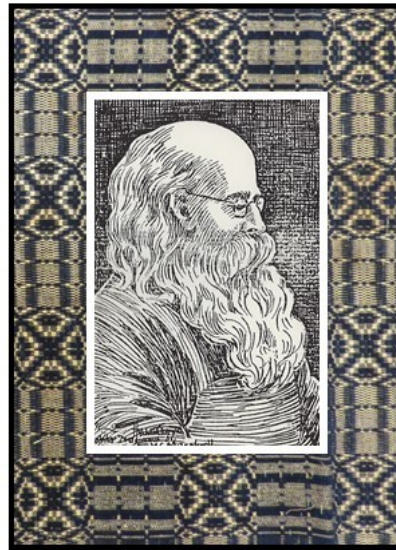
Six miles west of the birthplace of Gilbert Stuart, at the crossroads where the three towns of North Kingstown, South Kingstown, and Exeter meet, was the home of the last of the Narragansett weavers, William Henry Harrison Rose, better known as Weaver Rose.

The Roses

The Rose family homestead was built in 1816, halfway between Slocum and Kingston on Slocumville Road. Two of the Rose children, William (1839–1913) and his sister Elsie Maria Babcock Rose (1837–1926,) never married and lived in the family homestead for their entire lives, farming and continuing the family heritage of handweaving.

Weaving in “Old Narragansett”

Power looms had appeared in Southern Rhode Island by 1812, but handweaving lingered as an industry in the region. William Henry Harrison “Weaver” Rose was born into a family with a multigenerational tradition of handweaving. He learned to weave from



*Pencil sketch of Weaver Rose
by an unnamed relative*

his maternal grandfather, Robert Northrup. Northrup and his wife Mary, both weavers and weaving teachers, lived in Stuart Vale (near Gilbert Stuart’s birthplace.) Rose’s mother Anstis Northrup Rose, also a handweaver, followed in the footsteps of her mother and grandmother Austin. His aunt, Hannah Northrup, also a weaver, lived in Stuartsville, “right where Gilbert Stuart was born, and never heard of him” according to Weaver Rose. The Austins were Quakers, a religion that was honored through the family. Weaver Rose himself was also known as “Quaker Billy.”

The Homestead and Weaving Room

A visit to the Rose homestead was a step back in time. It was described as a

Continued on page 2

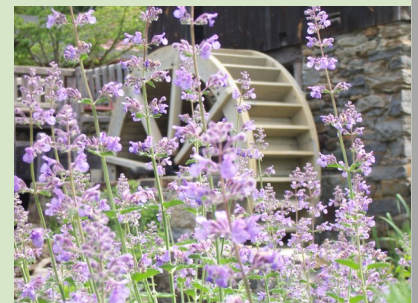
Birthplace in Bloom

The Spring Fair returns for 2022

Join us on Sunday, April 24, 2022 from 1–4pm to celebrate the start of our 91st season, the opening of our spring exhibition *Hap-Harlots and Coverlids: The Life and Legacy of Weaver Rose*, and the annual Narrow River herring run.

- * Live Music by Farm Dog
- * Nature Walks
- * Johnny Cakes
- * DEM Fish Cam
- * Gilbert Stuart Appearance
- * Corn Grinding by Master Miller
- * RI Spinning Guild

Special Event Admission: \$10 Adults, \$5 Children (ages 6-12), 2022 Members admitted FREE



Annual Membership Drive ~ Help preserve this Rhode Island treasure

Renew your membership online via PayPal: www.gilbertstuartmuseum.org/membership

Renew your membership via mail: Gilbert Stuart Museum, 815 Gilbert Stuart Road, Saunderstown, RI, 02874

picturesque, weather-beaten, Cape Cod style house set in a stone-walled garden, surrounded by cedar trees, lilacs, and roses.

A climb up the narrow stairway to the second floor brought you to the weaving loft. Three large, rather primitive looms were set up in separate rooms. One of the looms was made by Weaver Rose, himself, of cherry and sassafras wood grown on the property.

Those who visited enjoyed a tour of the homestead and weaving loft, and a hefty dose of Rose's folksy descriptions of his treasured family artifacts. Visitors came just as much to experience the charming and quaint surroundings and the celebrity of Rose himself as well as to see his work. If he was out in the fields when a visitor arrived, Elsie would call Rose in by blowing into an old conch shell.

Hap-Harlots and Coverlids

William H. H. Rose's lifelong occupation and only means of livelihood was handweaving. His reputation as a master handweaver became widely known and his weaving business was brisk despite the availability of machine woven goods.

Customers learned of his work by word of mouth and advertisements. His business cards cited: "W. H. H. Rose. Dealer in Rag Carpets, Portieres, Chenille Mats, Hap-Harlots and Coverlids." By 1898, "hap-harlot" was already considered an archaic word for a coarse coverlet. Although he was mainly a coverlet ("coverlid") weaver, he also wove portieres (door coverings,) rugs, draperies, couch covers, and pillows.

Visitors included friends, customers, weavers, authors, politicians, and even the wife of President Teddy Roosevelt, who stopped to visit and order carpets.



1899 advertisement for Weaver Rose's wares originally appeared in 'The Weaver's Herald'

A Unique Character

Weaver Rose was an interesting character, easily identified by his unique appearance and habits. His obituary in The Beacon, Kingston College (URI) told of his walking through campus on his way to town (Kingston) and giving a pleasant wave good morning. "He walked at the head of his horse, he always made an impression that remains deeply fixed in our minds, with his long walking staff, his flowing white beard, and his sun-browned straw hat." He was a gaunt figure, with pale skin, blue eyes, and long white hair. He wore a collarless white shirt and blue overalls—sometimes tied at the waist with a rope. Rose was camera shy and refused to have his picture taken.

Rose walked barefoot except when the ground was frozen. It was noted that he would carry his shoes over his shoulder on his two-mile walk to town, sit across the street from the

Kingston general store, put his shoes on to enter the store and shop, then remove them for the walk home.

Weaver Rose indulged liberally in snuff, and would regularly offer a pinch of his snuff to those he met. (His ancestors lived near Gilbert Stuart Snuff Mill!) His round tin snuff box, a small baking powder can, was his constant companion, and it rested beside him when he was weaving.

He was known to be a naturalist, and his ideas on health included taking a cold-water bath every morning, year-round. Rose was also a poet, writing verses with a droll sense of humor. He made his own coffin and used to try it out from time to time. A young visitor was terrified to hear a greeting from Rose and then see him sit up in the coffin.

The Drafts

Weaver Rose's pattern book was over one hundred years old and contained drafts or patterns that had been passed down through his family. Rose also corresponded with and collected drafts from other weavers, and shared his drafts with anyone who requested them. The 245 drafts he left behind were written on anything that Rose had available: odd scraps of paper or cardboard, on the backs of advertisements, a circus poster, and even on a three-foot long pine board.

Rose's fame lives on in the coverlets that are treasured by museums and private owners. Weavers of today can still weave pieces following the same patterns woven by W. H. H. Rose and his ancestors.

Excerpt from an article by Margaret O'Connor



A rare photograph of Weaver Rose at the Rose homestead

Courtesy of the South County History Center

Hap-Harlots and Coverlids:

The Life and Legacy of Weaver Rose

On View April 24— June 5, 2022

Expert's Talk:

Weaver Rose and his Weaving by Norma Smayda,
Internationally renowned weaver and fiber artist
Sunday, May 15, 3:00pm

Tickets required for Curator's Talk

\$5 for Non-Members, 2022 Members FREE

Tickets available gilbertstuartmuseum.org/events

Chasing the Summer's Day

The Art of Mabel Woodward

On view June 12-October 9, 2022

Mabel May Woodward belonged to a circle of strong independent women artists, teachers, writers and humanitarians in early twentieth century Providence. She has emerged as a painter of great technical virtuosity whose subject matter ranged from pretty women in gardens to bustling scenes of workers to sun-drenched beaches and beachgoers. Her paintings reflect her extensive studies with American masters such as William Merritt Chase, Charles Hawthorne and Charles Woodbury, and as art critic Frederick Sisson wrote, were concerned with outdoor color and light. But ultimately it was the human encounter that distinguished her lively, exuberant oils and watercolors.



Woodward with painting supplies, c.1930s

“Chasing the Summer’s Day,” the title of this exhibition, was a line from one of the artist’s own poems. Though she taught at the Rhode Island School of Design Woodward rarely spent a summer in Providence, opting for the art colonies of Provincetown, Rockport and Ogunquit. Woodward’s correspondence from her three European sojourns in 1912-1913, 1925 and 1927, showed that she was continually in search of warmth and sunshine and disliked gloomy, rainy days.

Woodward’s earliest series of paintings, “old-fashioned girls in gardens,” was clearly influenced by her study with Joseph DeCamp and Kenyon Cox at the Art Students League and William Merritt Chase at his New York school. She had an

immersion in plein-air painting in Provincetown with Charles Hawthorne in 1903 and Lyme, Connecticut with Frank Dumond in 1904. It seems only natural in her earlier works that Woodward gravitated to subjects that she knew: her friends and her flowers, as she was to love gardens all her life.

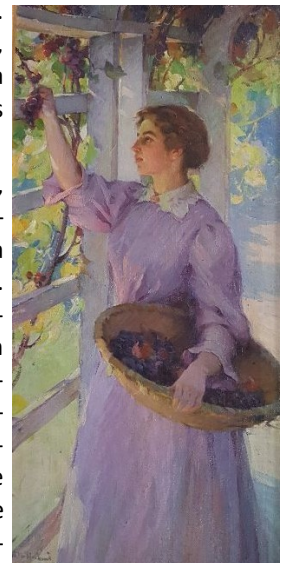
Woodward’s search for the summer sun quite naturally inclined her to seek out the beaches—and paint them. As much as it was about the sand, the sun and the sea, it was more about the interaction between beachgoers, usually women drawn together



Sunny Afternoon on the Beach, 1930s
Oil on panel
Providence Art Club

to compare notes on children, local events, politics or just gossip! These animated, broadly painted works, with their abstracted figures and riotous color, reflect work by the art group known as The Eight: especially beach paintings by William Glackens and John Sloan. Woodward’s long association with the Ogunquit, Maine art colony, where she had a summer studio, produced a multitude of paintings of beaches filled with figures in motion, whether playing ball, running, leaning in, or just engaging in lively conversation. And always there were the umbrellas, a compositional device that offered a rainbow of patterned colors as well as a sense of *joie de vivre*.

Woodward retired from RISD in 1924, after a career that began with teaching children and culminated with a position as an advanced instructor. She returned to Europe in 1925, concentrating in Brittany, and again in 1927, following those trips with exhibitions at the Providence Art Club. During the 1930s Woodward and her sister traveled further afield in the United States, painting throughout the coastal South and American Southwest. She exhibited her work in Providence at various venues and at the Ogunquit Art Association in Maine, of which she was a co-founder.



Girl with Grapes, c. 1905
Watercolor on paper
Mechnig Collection

In 1945 Mabel Woodward died, leaving an estate with hundreds of paintings. In the 1970s her paintings were “rediscovered” as part of American Impressionism, which technically they are not. But since that time Woodward has received attention and acclaim such as she never sought or imagined during her lifetime. “Chasing the Summer’s Day” offers a glimpse of the work of this important Rhode Island artist.

Excerpt from an article by Nancy Whipple Grinnell



Marketplace, c. 1913
Watercolor on paper
Private collection



Keeping the Wheels Turning

Spring is nearly here and I am overwhelmed with excitement about our upcoming, 91st season. In less than a month we will see the return of the Spring Fair, the return of the river herring, and the return of visitors to this beautiful, historic and majestic site.

This season will also see the return of our innovative exhibition program, highlighting the work of two distinctive Rhode Island Masters— Weaver Rose, whose vibrant woven work and outsize personality drew national acclaim, and Mabel May Woodward, whose loose, luscious brushstrokes and sun-drenched color capture the joy and freedom of summer. We also have an exciting range of programs on offer this season, which emphasize the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum’s dedication to history, art and nature.

All of this is only possible because of the continued support of this amazing community. It is the support of an enthusiastic community of members and donors that enabled the purchase and founding of the Gilbert Stuart Memorial during the depths of the Great Depression. Likewise, it is the dedicated support of this community that has brought us safely through these trying times. Your membership is what has made this possible, and which will enable us to continue to grow and flourish.

Michelle Lee Leonard
Assistant Director

Thanks and Gratitude

In the past year, we have been the grateful recipients of the following grants:

- **The Society of the Cincinnati for 2022 grant of \$1,500** towards new and upgraded security
- **Champlain Foundation Grant of \$59,000** for maintenance and repair of the dam
- **Rhode Island Council for the Humanities/RI Culture, Humanities and Arts Recovery Grant (RI CHARG) of \$8,000** for general operating support

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

RISCA



NATIONAL HISTORICAL LANDMARK SOCIETY



Milling Around at the Museum

- April 24 Birthplace in Bloom Spring Fair
- April 24 Opening of *Hap-Harlots and Coverlids: The Life and Legacy of Weaver Rose*
- May 15 *Weaver Rose of North Kingstown*, lecture by Norma Smayda
- June 12 Opening Reception: “*Chasing the Summer’s Day*”: *The Art of Mabel May Woodward*
- July 24 *High Tea in Elizabeth Stuart’s Herb Garden*, traditional ‘high tea’ and talk by Peggy O’Connor
- Aug 5 *Down by the Old Mill Stream Gala*
- Sept 4 *18th Century Beauty Practices and Trades*, presentation by Reneé Walker-Tuttle

The Spring Fair, Exhibition openings and Sundays at the Museum programming are all free for 2022 members
Schedule subject to change, consult the website for up-to-date information