

The Gilbert Stuart

Birthplace and Museum

April 2024

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Embroidered Lives:

South County Samplers and Their Stories

April 28 - July 28, 2024



Until the late 19th century, needlework was an essential part of the American schoolgirl curriculum, as important as learning to read. In addition to plain sewing, most girls were taught fancy needlework stitches and used them to embroider at least one sampler – many made two or three. “Embroidered Lives” explores the social, religious, and historical contexts within which the girls lived, attended school, and stitched their samplers. All the samplers on display are signed and most are dated, so it is possible to identify the schoolgirls responsible for their creation. The girls represent families from all across South County

and are of diverse socio-economic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

Polly Cole, for example, was the daughter of Stephen and Susanna (Browning) Cole of Hopkinton, RI, members of the Religious Society of Friends, more commonly known as Quakers. The sampler Polly embroidered in 1808 at the age of 11 contains floral motifs unique to the Quaker samplers of Hopkinton – motifs that appear on Hopkinton Quaker samplers over a period of more than 25 years but nowhere else. Exhibition curators explore the possible significance of these

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Memberships can also be purchased by mail using the enclosed envelope



Schoolgirl sampler by Polly Cole
Collection of Lynne Anderson

Jonathan and Nancy (Potter) Maxson to create such an appealing and carefully stitched piece of needlework?

These and other questions helped direct the extensive research that accompanies this highly visual and locally grounded exhibition and its accompanying catalog. Curated by Margaret O'Connor, Director Emeritus of the Gilbert Stuart Museum, and Dr. Lynne Anderson, president of the Sampler Consortium, "Embroidered Lives" highlights the role samplers played in the lives of South County girls and young women.

Schoolgirl Sampler by Nancy Maxson
Private Collection



motifs to members of the Quaker religion and why the motifs persisted for such a long period of time.

By contrast, the private school that Nancy Maxson of Westerly, RI attended in 1826 apparently only lasted a few years. Three related samplers are known from this school (dated 1823-1826), all with exuberant lush borders, urns overflowing with flowers, and charming, well-dressed people at the bottom. Who was the skilled teacher who could entice the young, eight-year-old daughter of

With Great Thanks,

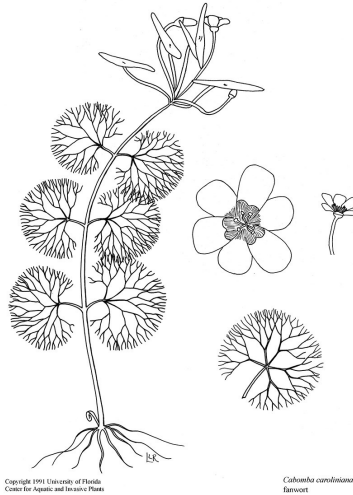
This 2024 season visitors will recognize many improvements and upgrades throughout the Birthplace buildings & grounds. These include roof repairs on both the Hammond Gristmill and Stuart Birthplace, funded by the 1772 Foundation, Preserve RI, the Champlin Foundation, and the Rhode Island Chapter of the Society of the Cincinnati. A generous grant from The Nature Conservancy has allowed us to seamlessly integrate power and video into the herring and eel runs. And the North Kingstown Chamber of Commerce has equipped us with three accessible picnic tables that all visitors can enjoy.



Carr Pond's Fanwort Problem & the "Fan"-tastic 2024 Bay and Watershed Restoration Grant

If you have visited the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace at any point in the last two to three decades, while admiring the bucolic setting of the millpond, you may have found yourself wondering about the bushy green plant growing up through the water. At the height of summer, you may even have seen the small, lily-pad-like leaves lying flat on the millpond's surface and the small white flowers protruding from the surface of the water.

This plant is *Cabomba caroliniana*, or "fanwort" as it is more commonly known, from the two-inch-wide, fan-like shape of its underwater leaves. Fanwort is native to the southeastern United States and parts of South America, and its long stem and delicate fans have made it a popular ornamental aquarium plant. While we don't know for sure, it is likely that fanwort was introduced into Rhode Island's water supply as early as 1936 (when it was first observed in the state) through the casual dumping of aquarium water into lakes and streams.



In addition to the fact that it is non-native, fanwort is also an extremely aggressive plant. It has a root structure and produces seeds, but it primarily reproduces through fragmentation; any piece of the fragile, feathery leaves that breaks off the plant can root and establish a new plant. Moreover, the fragments themselves can remain viable for six to eight weeks.

Once established fanwort grows quickly and densely, easily spreading and displacing native species. While it prefers shallow waters, it has been reported to grow as high as 10 meters, taking up most of the water column from sediment to surface. This aggressive growth outcompetes native plants and reduces biodiversity while also choking off sunlight to other plants and aquatic life. When these dense columns of fanwort die off, they have the capacity to deplete the available oxygen in

the water as well, creating equally dire conditions for the aquatic ecosystem. Finally, and most noticeable to visitors, dead stalks of fanwort quickly clog our many dam gates, fish ladder, and eel ramps.

Fortunately, the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum was recently awarded a grant under the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management's Bay and Waterfront Restoration Program. This 75% matching grant will enable us to eliminate fanwort throughout the entirety of Carr Pond.

The aggressive nature of Fanwort's ability to spread means that it cannot be effectively removed on a limited basis and will need to be removed according to the naturally occurring boundaries of Carr Pond itself. Likewise, its capacity to propagate by fragmentation means that traditional, low-impact removal methods – pulling the plants up by the root – have the capacity to increase the number of plants, and even spread the fanwort further afield. As such, the only safe, DEM approved method of treating the pond is through a herbicidal treatment. We will be working closely with lake management professionals, as well as RIDEM, over the course of the coming year and hopefully we will soon be able to celebrate the return of native aquatic life to our beautiful millpond.

For more information about Fanwort, the threat it poses as an invasive species and how the threat is best remedied, see: www.gilbertstuartmuseum.org/fanwort-fact-sheets



Keeping the Wheels Turning

Our 2024 season opening is fast approaching and I am so excited to share all that this season will bring. The Plum Beach Garden Club is already hard at work getting the Colonial dooryard garden ready for visitors and the herring are just starting to make their appearance.

Our spring exhibition, *Embroidered Lives: South County Samplers and Their Stories*, is quickly coming together as is the substantial and well researched exhibition catalog. We are also looking forward to our late season exhibition of multimedia work by Luke Randall.

Our schedule of programming continues to grow, including:

May 10: 4:30 - 6:30 pm, *Embroidered Lives* exhibition opening celebration

May 18: 10:00 - 4:00 pm, Sampler ID Day

May 18: 5:00 - 6:30 pm, *Embroidered Lives* curator's talk by Lynne Anderson, PhD

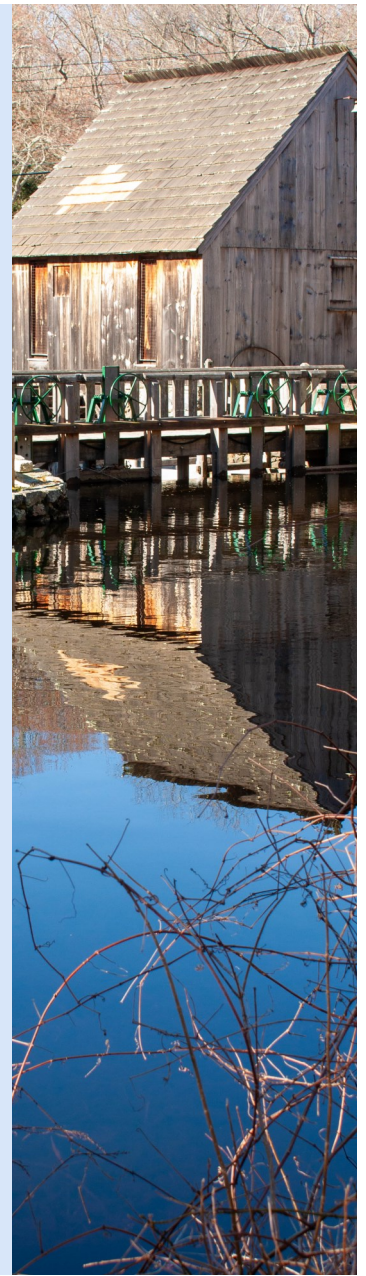
May 26: 4:30 - 6:30 pm will see the return of the popular *Botanical Illustration Workshop* led by Doug Johnson.

Our popular teas in the Birthplace will be returning, along with new lectures by Christian McBurney & Tim Cranston. We will also be adding more nature programming, including a regular "fungi finders" program led by the president of the RI Mycological Society, teaching visitors of all ages to identify mushrooms growing along our nature trails.

Please keep an eye on our website & emails to stay on top of all the exciting events this summer. Active members have early access and reduced or free admission to the museum's programming.

We are eternally grateful for the continuing support our members provide. As always, it is the dedicated support of our community that makes everything we do possible.

~ Michelle Lee Leonard, Executive Director



Gilbert Stuart
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Spring Fair

\$10 Adults
\$5 Children
Free for 2024 Museum Members

Sunday, April 28

2:00 - 4:00pm