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this weekend



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Newport's greatest hits

A new exhibit of items from 13 groups has everything from a strand of George Washington's hair to an Andy Warhol portrait of Chris Evert

BY BILL VAN SICLEN JOURNAL ARTS WRITER

NEWPORT — The Smithsonian Institution in Washingtion, D.C., likes to bill itself as "America's attic" in the same spirit, Newport might want to start calling itself "America's fancy front parlor."

From Colonial times, when the city was home to the tamed Townsend Goddard furniture cian, to the late 19th century, when Gilded Age robber barons decorated their Bellevue Avenue mansions with French silks and Italian marble, the City-by-the-Sea has shown a taste for life's finer things.

Now a Who's Who of local arts and cultural institutions, including the Newport Art Museum, Redwood Library, Newport Historical Society and the Preservation Society of Newport County, has teamed up to put some of the city's long-accumulating bounty on display.

The result is Newport's Cultural Treasures: A Passion for the Past, a kind of "Greatest Hits" of Newport history, featuring everything from a cannon forged by Paul Revere to a Townsend-Goddard case clock to a Winslow Homer drawing to a Louis XVI chair from the estate of tobacco heiress Doris Duke.

But the show, which opens Saturday at the Newport Art Museum, isn't just a tribute to the city's rich and famous.

Tucked away in the Newport
Historical Society's section, for example,
is a letter from Occramer Marycoo, a
Newport slave who earned enough
money giving music lessons to buy his
freedom and return to Africa.

From the Redwood Library comes a portrait of Peter Harrison, the library's designer and the man often cited as America's first professional architect. And from the Newport Artillery Company comes a trophy presented "to the best shot at target practice."

Meanwhile, more recent items such as a beer can stamped with the America's Cup logo and a T-shirt advertising the Ben & Jerry's Folk Festival testify to Newport's emergence as a major tourist and recreational center.



JOURNAL PHOTO / SANDOR BODO

NEWPORT HARBOR, an 1888 oil by James Nicholson, on loan from the Newport Historical Society.

Better than The Best

In all, the show features more than 150 objects culled from more than a dozen Newport-area institutions.

"Initially, we wanted to call it The Best of the Best, because it represented the

best stuff in everybody's collections," says museum director Christine Callahan. "But the more we thought about it, the more we realized that it wasn't just the best of everything. It was a portrait of the city."

It also helped that Newporters, regardless of their rung on the social and

A MING DYNASTY wine jar, on loan from the Newport Restoration Foundation.

economic ladder, never seem to throw anything away.

"As a city, Newport has always had a strong sense of its own history," says the Preservation Society's chief executive officer, Trudy Coxe. "Long before you see historical societies springing up elsewhere, Newport had places like the Redwood Library, the Artillery Company and Touro Synagogue, where the city's history was preserved."

As a result, Coxe says, Newport has one of the richest collections of documents, artifacts and other historical materials in the country.

"Newport doesn't have a single big museum that tells the city's history from start to finish. But it does have a lot of smaller institutions, each with their own collections and their own focus. Put them together and you have a real treasure trove of American history."

But bringing them together wasn't easy.

Despite the city's small size, most of its elite cultural institutions had never worked together before. What's more, even the largest museums and historical sites often balk at the thought of lending their star attractions to other venues.

Security concerns, fears of lowered attendance and the threat of damage during transporation all combine to make curators and administrators wary about sharing the wealth.

"It really is unusual for so many organizations to come together like this," says Peter N. Roos, executive director of the Newport Restoration Foundation. "Usually, we're all fighting for attention on our own. Now, for the first time, we're pooling our resources."

Where else but Newport, for example, could you find a painting by Hudson River School artist John Frederick Kensett sharing space with a stained glass window from the schooner yacht Coronet? Or a logbook from a 19th-century warship commanded by Oliver Hazard Perry sitting near a billowy contemporary glass sculpture by ex-RISD professor Dale Chihuly? Or a locket said to contain a strand of George Washington's hair resting near an Andy Warhol portrait of tennis star Chris Evert?

At the same time, the show isn't just a random scavenger hunt through Newport history.

True, it occasionally feels random, with display cases tucked into every nook and cranny of the museum's two Cushing Galleries. But the show's diversity also reflects the history of a city that has been, at various times, a major trading port, a pillar of the slave trade, a hotbed of the American Revolution, a center of American art and design, a playground for the rich and famous, a Navy town, a sailing mecca and a world-class tourist destination.

The show's artifacts are equally diverse, ranging from prints, paintings, sculptures and furniture to everyday items such as knives, glasses, tankards and teapots.

Many of the entries can be enjoyed for their own sake, apart from their historical value.

Among the art works on display are paintings by Gilbert Stuart, Fitz Hugh Lane, William Trost Richards, William Morris Hunt and John La Farge. Many depict Newport scenes — a testament to the city's longstanding popularity with artists. Other highlights include a small

pencil drawing by Winslow Homer, a Saturday Evening Post cover painting by Norman Rockwell and a photograph by Aaron Siskind.

The Rockwell painting is part of cache of works from the fledgling National Museum of American Illustration, which opened last year on Bellevue Avenue. The museum also lent paintings by Maxfield Parrish and N.C. Wyeth.

A TANKARD

Vernon on loan

Newport Histor-

by Samuel

ical Society.

from the

Well furnished

Not surprisingly, some of the show's biggest stars are furniture pieces.

Newport's Townsend-Goddard workshop is represented by a mahogany side chair attributed to John Townsend, as well as a tea table and dressing stand described as from the "school of" Townsend-Goddard. All three are from the Newport Restoration Foundation, the decorative arts collection founded by heiress Doris Duke. (Another Townsend-Goddard piece, a mahogany card table, is on loan from the Redwood Library.)

The foundation also contributed several examples of high-style French furniture, including a Louis XVI armchair covered with yellow silk upholstery and an 18th-century table inlaid with parquetry and ormolu.

Both the armchair and another Louis XVI chair in the exhibit are part of larger sets housed at Rough Point, Duke's



former estate on Bellevue Avenue.

The city's maritime history is reflected in many of the objects, including a decanter case from the yacht Columbia, winner of the America's Cup in 1899 and 1901, and a stained glass panel from the equally legendary schooner yacht, the Coronet.

The Coronet, which is currently being refurbished in Newport as floating museum, is also the focus of one of the

show's most recent entries: an marvelously exact miniature replica created last year by master modelmaker Lloyd McCaffery.

History buffs, meanwhile, will want to steer a course to the sections devoted to the Redwood Library, Newport Historical Society and Touro Synagogue. Among the highlights are paintings by two of America's earliest portrait painters, Gilbert Stuart and Robert Feke, as well as a variety of Colonial-era books and manuscripts.

The show also underscores Newport's reputation as a center for social and religious tolerance. Among the religious artifacts on display are a 15th-century Venetian Bible, a 17th-century illuminated Flemish Book of Hours and a 19th-century parchment Torah.

Sometimes the collision of old and new can bring you up short.

One such pairing occurs in the section devoted to the Artillery Company of Newport, which was founded in 1741, more than 30 years before the American Revolution. There, amid artifacts from the Revolutionary and Civil wars, is a more

A CONCERNED ANGEL holds up the corner of a table on loan from the Preservation Society of Newport County.

JOURNAL PHOTO / SANDOR BODO

recent entry — a NATO camouflage uniform donated by Secretary of State, and former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell.

Just the beginning

There's much more to the show, which runs through Dec. 31. But organizers say they hope that visitors won't stop there—that they'll be motivated to explore Newport's treasure trove of arts and cultural institutions.

"There was a lot of discussion at the beginning about whether we should have the show in one location or all over," says the Preservation Society's Coxe. "In the end, we all agreed that the museum had the best exhibit spaces.

"But we hope that people will be excited enough by what they see to visit the different organizations. In many ways, that's what this show is all about."

Newport's Cultural Treasures: A Passion for the Past opens Saturday at the Newport Art Museum, 76 Bellevue Ave. Hours are Monday-Saturday, 10-5 and Sunday, noon-5, through Oct. 7. Then Monday-Saturday, 10-4 and Sunday, noon-4.

Live's Hot Picks

Hungry? Before or after you enjoy Newport's Cultural Treasures, our restaurant reviewer, Meridith Ford, suggests you try these restaurants in Newport:

Asterix & Obelix Cafe
The Black Pearl (Commodore's Room)
Castle Hill Inn and Resort
Cheeky Monkey Cafe
Restaurant Bouchard

See our Dining Guide, beginning on Page **25**, for brief reviews.

Here are the 13 organizations participating in Newport's Cultural Treasures: A Passion for the Past:

Artillery Company of Newport, 23 Clarke St. 846-8488. Open mid-May to mid-Oct, daily, 10 am-5 pm. Web site: www.newportartillery.org.

International Tennis Hall of Fame, 194 Bellevue Ave. 849-3990. Open daily, 9:30 am-5 pm. Closed Thanksgiving and Christmas. \$8; \$6 for 65+, students and military \$6; \$4 for 16 and under; \$20 per family (two adults, all children). AAA discount. Web site: www.tennisfame.com.

International Yacht Restoration School, 449 Thames St. 848-5777. Open Mon-Sat, 10 am-5 pm. Free. Web site: iyrs.org.

Museum of Yachting, Fort Adams

State Park, off Ocean Drive. 847-1018. Open daily mid-May through Oct, 10 am-5 pm. \$4, \$3 for 62+ and children under 12, free under age 2. Web site: moy.org.

National Museum of American Illustration, 492 Bellevue Ave. 851-8949. Open by appointment. \$25. Web site: www.americanillustration.org.

Newport Art Museum, 76 Bellevue Ave. 848-8200. Open Mon-Sat, 10 am-5 pm and Sun, noon-5 pm, through Oct. 7. Then Mon-Sat, 10 am-4 pm and Sun, noon-4 pm. \$6, \$5 for 60+, \$4 for students, children 5 and under free; admission by donation Saturdays before noon. Web site: www.new-

Newport Historical Society, 82 Touro St. 846-0813. Open Tue-Fri 9:30 am-4:30 pm and Sat, 9:30 am-noon. Web site:

portartmuseum.com.

THE MUSEUMS

newporthistorical.org.

Newport Restoration Foundation, 51 Touro St. 849-7300. Web site: www.newportrestoration.com. Operates historic homes and three museum houses:

■ Prescott Farm, 2009 West Main Rd., Middletown. 847-6230. Tours Tue-Sat 10 am-4 pm. \$2, children \$1.

■ Rough Point. Tours board a courtesy shuttle bus at the Newport Gateway Center at 9:45 & 11:30 am, 1:30 & 3:30 pm Tue-Sat through Nov. 3. Tickets \$25 and \$22 for 65+, available through the Newport Gateway Information Center. Information, 845-9130.

■ Samuel Whitehorne House, 416 Thames St. 847-2448, 849-7300. Guided tours Thu, Fri, Mon 11 am-4 pm; Sat-Sun 10 am-4 pm through Oct. 30; tours by appointment with 24-hour notice year-round. \$8, \$3 for children.

Norman Bird Sanctuary, 583 Third Beach Rd., Middletown. 846-2577. Open daily 9 am-5 pm. Web site: www.normanbirdsanctuary.org.

Preservation Society of Newport County, 424 Bellevue Ave. 847-1000. Web site: www.newportmansions.org. Daily 10 am-5 pm, with last tour at 4 pm. A Gilded Age Experience ticket provides admission to The Breakers, Chateau-sur-Mer, The Elms, Marble House and Rosecliff: Connoisseur's Newport ticket provides admission to Chepstow, Green Animals Topiary Garden, Hunter

House, Isaac Bell House and Kingscote. Combination tickets are \$29, \$10 for children 6-17. Individual tickets \$10, \$4 for children 6-17, with the exception of The Breakers, \$15 for adults. The society's houses are:

■ The Breakers, Ochre Point Avenue. Breakers Plus ticket includes admission to any other single property. \$21, \$6 children 6-17.

■ Chateau-sur-Mer, Bellevue Avenue.

■ Chepstow, Narragansett Avenue. Italian-style villa designed by architect George Champlin Mason and built in 1860.

The Elms, Bellevue Avenue.

Rooftop and Behind-the-Scenes

Tours daily at 10:30 am, noon,

1:30 & 3 pm. \$12, \$4 for children

■ Hunter House, Washington Street. ■ Isaac Bell House, Bellevue

■ Kingscote, Bellevue Avenue. ■ Marble House, Bellevue

Avenue.

Rosecliff, Bellevue Avenue.

Redwood Library, 50 Bellevue Ave. 847-0292. Open Mon, Fri and Sat 9:30 am-5:30 pm; Tue and Thu 9:30 am-8 pm; and Sun, 1-5 pm.

Salve Regina University, 100 Ochre Point Ave. Web site: www.salve.edu.

Touro Synagogue National Historic Site, 85 Touro St. 847-4794. Guided tours every half-hour Sun 11 am-3 pm, Mon-Fri 1-3 pm through Oct. 30, except for Jewish holidays on Sept. 27 and Oct. 2, 3, 9 and 10. After Oct. 30, Sun 11 am-3 pm, Mon-Fri 1 pm only. Web site: www.tourosynagogue.org

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