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# **EAST Company**

**BEHIND THE SCENES  
AT ASTORS' BEECHWOOD**

## **ART OF APPRECIATION**

Museums pick their  
favorite gifts of 2009

## **KEEN ON THE QUEEN**

'Young Victoria' rules



# Collection 2009

FIVE NEWPORT CULTURAL, HISTORIC AND ARTS INSTITUTIONS PICK THEIR FAVORITE GIFTS RECEIVED THIS YEAR. BY JANINE WEISMAN

## 'SUGARING OFF,' MEAD SCHAEFFER, 1945

To: National Museum of American Illustration

From: Dudley & Michael Del Balso in memory of C. W. Moody

By the time you read this, National Museum of American Illustration Director and Curator Judy Goffman Cutler will have returned from New York with this recently cleaned and framed oil painting and hung it in its new home in the museum's Petit Salon. There Mead Schaeffer's (1898-1980) nostalgic scene of New Englanders harvesting Maple syrup will hang alongside paintings by his friend Norman Rockwell.

"This is in the right era. It will be surrounded by other notable contemporaries of Mead Schaeffer," said Goffman Cutler, who picked the painting as her favorite gift of 2009.

Schaeffer's 28 x 27 inch signed painting illustrated the cover of the Feb. 17, 1945, edition of the Saturday Evening Post. Paintings that were Post covers are rarely given as gifts, Goffman Cutler said.

Last fall, Dudley Del Balso of New York City contacted Goffman Cutler to learn more about the museum.

"She kind of said, 'We inherited this and my family doesn't really appreciate it. I want to make sure it gets a good home and will be seen,'" Goffman Cutler recalled.

Goffman Cutler was overjoyed. While the museum owns several Schaeffer illustrations, "Sugaring Off" is the only Post cover by the artist in its collection.

Schaeffer's career is divided into three distinct phases. He began by illustrating adventure novels for publisher Dodd & Mead, focusing on pirates, knights and other characters. By the 1930s and continuing into the 1940s, he shifted to scenes of contemporary American life for magazine publication. He and Rockwell were neighbors in Arlington, Vt., and Schaeffer and his family sometimes



'Sugaring Off.' Mead Schaeffer portrayed a classic New England scene for the Saturday Evening Post cover, left, published on February 17, 1945. PAINTING COPYRIGHT 2009 NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ILLUSTRATION. PHOTO COURTESY ARCHIVES OF AMERICAN ILLUSTRATORS GALLERY™ NYC

posed for Rockwell's paintings. It may have been through Rockwell's help and influence that Schaeffer started to receive commissions from the Post. In the third period of Schaeffer's career, he focused on portrayals of the American

military. His series of paintings depicting the various U.S. military branches was done at the same time as Rockwell's "Four Freedoms." Both projects were commissioned by the Post.

## LETTERS OF GIDEON WANTON (1766-1786)

To: Redwood Library

From: Mary Brooks Harding

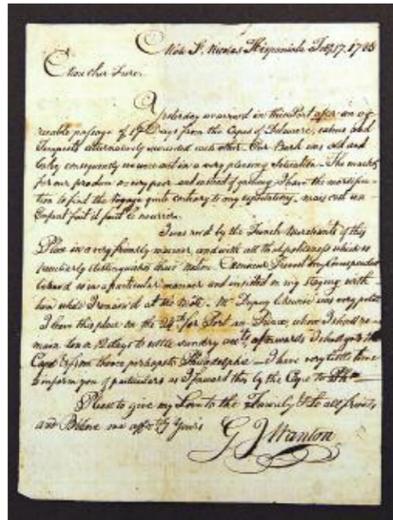
He was the son of a prosperous Quaker merchant and grandson of a governor. He also was a hard worker, who toiled long hours over a desk in the oppressive Philadelphia heat during the long, lonely summer of 1782. "I try all I can to reconcile myself to Philadelphia but c'est impossible, the People as well as their manners and climate are so different from ours that I cannot and was it not for two or three families should spend my time like a Mope," the homesick native Newporter Gideon Wanton wrote to his older sister Polly on July 6, two weeks before his 16th birthday.

A total of 28 letters spanning from April 1782 to December 1786 comprise the collection donated last June to the Redwood Library by Jamestown resident Mary Brooks Harding, Polly's great-great-great-great-granddaughter.

The house where the Wanton family lived still stands on Broadway. Built in 1697, it is the oldest surviving house in the city of Newport. John G. Wanton (1729-1799) purchased the house for his family in 1765, after its previous occupant, a Tory who criticized opponents of the crown, was run out of town after the Stamp Act riots.

Gideon Wanton, named after his paternal grandfather who was governor, discusses his social life and business prospects in his letters to his sister, to whom he wrote in French. The letters have all been translated by the family and are very easy for a scholar to use. Gideon admits he is timid, especially when girls are present. In a September letter Gideon lamented that he found commerce very dull, commenting, "I do nothing but read and write."

"They are a wonderful view of a young man's hopes and frustrations just after the American Revolution,"



Man at work. Gideon Wanton dashes off a quick letter dated February 17, 1785, to his brother-in-law Daniel Lyman in Newport after arriving safely in Haiti where he found his French fluency useful. PHOTO BY JACQUELINE MARQUE

said Lisa C. Long, special collections librarian.

While most of the letters are written from Philadelphia, some are from New York, the Caribbean and at sea. In his last letter in August 1786, Gideon indicates he is about to sail for Marseilles, France, with a load of sugar and coffee. Sadly, the next letter dated Dec. 24, 1786, is from family friend James Bringham in Philadelphia to Gideon's parents, John and Mary Bull Wanton (1729-1821) announcing his death. It is unknown how Gideon died, though it's possible it could be from illness or he could have been lost at sea.

The letters are available to the public and can be seen in the Redwood's Slocum Scholars' Reading Room by appointment.



'Washington Square 1818.' The oil painting on the left now joins its companion, right, already hanging in the Museum of Newport History at the bottom of Washington Square. PHOTO AT LEFT BY JACQUELINE MARQUE, PHOTO AT RIGHT COURTESY OF NEWPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## 'THE OTHER HESSIAN PAINTING'

To: Newport Historical Society

From: Mary Gall

No one knows the name of the artist who created the oil painting depicting Washington Square as seen from the steps of the Colony House in 1818. But local lore has it he was a Hessian soldier said to have done time in debtor's prison. The painting may have even been how he got out. Now it hangs in the Museum of Newport History in the Brick Market, the 1762 building featured very prominently in the painting.

One day last spring, Newport Historical Society Executive Director Ruth Taylor received a phone call from a Pennsylvania woman informing her she had "the other Hessian painting." The woman was Mary Gall, whose maternal grandmother had been an art and antiques collector in Newport. Taylor drove to Gall's Gladwyne, Pa., home to see the 21 x 30.5 inch oil painting and found it looked just like the one the society already owns except for the color palette. The society's painting



depicts a sunny day in 1818 while cloudy skies hovered over the scene in Gall's. But the groupings of townspeople in the scene — including a little boy and his wheelbarrow in the lower left corner and the three ladies in white promenading with others on the lower right — are the same.

Were these two paintings done by the same artist? "You could make a case either way, in my opinion," Taylor said. "You can picture two people sitting side-by-side and looking over each other's shoulder."

That mystery led the historical society's staff to choose Gall's gift as their favorite of the 37 donation lots received in 2009. The painting was restored through the generosity of board member and fine art dealer Roger King and eventually will be hung next to its sunny-day twin.

"This is forcing us to do more research," said Taylor, who has been combing through the 1818 editions of Mercury in the society's collection searching for news of who had been sent to debtor's prison or who had gotten out of it.

"The great thing about Newport is yeah, I think we're going to find the answer."

## FUNDING FOR JOHN SINGER SARGENT PAINTING ACQUISITION

To: Preservation Society of Newport County

From: Three Vanderbilt great-grandchildren

Last May when Sotheby's New York held a sale of American paintings, drawing and sculpture, the Preservation Society of Newport County was there to reclaim a treasure lost when the fine art collections inside Newport's grandest mansion were auctioned off in 1973. That treasure — and piece of history — is an oil on canvas portrait study of Cornelius Vanderbilt II (1843-1899) painted by John Singer Sargent in 1890.

Depicted bust-length in a black day suit against a neutral background, the subject of the 30 x 23 inch painting was the chairman and president of the New York Central Railroad system and the owner of the Vanderbilt family's 70-room Newport summer home, The Breakers. His grandfather Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt (1794-1877) had established the family fortune in steamships and later in the New York Central Railroad, ushering in the nation's industrial growth during

the late 19th century.

Vanderbilt's portrait now hangs in the mansion's Morning Room. Preservation Society Curator Paul Miller said the painting is the first work by Sargent on public display in the city of Newport. The painting previously had been in a private collection in England.

Sargent (1856-1925) was the most successful portrait painter of his era, as well as a gifted landscape painter and watercolorist. Andy Warhol once said Sargent "made everybody look glamorous. Taller. Thinner. They all have mood, every one of them has a different mood." Indeed Sargent created a flattering and youthful portrait of Vanderbilt, then about 47 years old, softening a man known for being serious.

The painting's purchase price of \$230,500 was financed from the Collections Reserve of the Preservation Society, which owns The Breakers, and was supplemented by donations earmarked specifically for the purchase from Vanderbilt family descendants, whose names were not released.

"The painting's purchase for The Breakers signals the continued devotion of Vanderbilt family descendants to the house and to Newport's heritage," Miller said.



Portrait of male power. American portrait painter John Singer Sargent captured the softer side of New York Central Railroad Chairman and President Cornelius Vanderbilt II. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO COURTESY PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF NEWPORT COUNTY