

# The Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum

Spring 2011

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## Gilbert Stuart Day?

The Board of Trustees of the Gilbert Stuart Museum will ask Governor Chafee and the Rhode Island General Assembly to declare Gilbert Stuart's birthday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, Rhode Island Gilbert Stuart Day in commemoration of the foremost painter in our history. We will offer the following reasons for our request:

- Gilbert Stuart is still pertinent. Over one billion one-dollar bills are in circulation today, all with a copy of Gilbert Stuart's famous portrait of General and President George Washington printed on the front. Over 16, 650,000 bills are printed daily.
- Copies of Gilbert Stuart's portraits of Washington have also graced US Postage stamps; the last issue was in 1954. Stuart was himself honored on a US stamp in 1940.
- George Washington University in Washington DC continues to commemorate Stuart. It has a building named for him
- Gilbert painted over 1000 portraits of famous, wealthy and not-so-wealthy contemporaries including, in Europe, King George III of England, and many Irish and English notables, as well as, in the United States, our first six presidents, George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, and John Quincy Adams. He also painted Martha Washington, Abigail Adams wife of John, Louisa Adams wife of John Quincy, and Dolley Madison, wife of James. He left us a heritage that should be honored today.
- The Rhode Island State House features an original full-length Stuart portrait of Washington in the State House Reception Room.
- Many Rhode Island private citizens own and revere Stuart portraits.
- Stuart obviously felt that his birth and early life in North Kingstown, RI, was, for him, a treasured memory. As an elderly man, he made a specific trip from Boston to Newport then by boat to Saunderstown in order to ask the then occupants of the Birthplace (Miller Benjamin Hammond and his family), to let him look at the room where he was born.
- The Gilbert Stuart Middle School in Providence is named for Stuart; streets are also named for him in Warwick and East Greenwich beside our own Gilbert Stuart Road in Saunderstown, and streets are named for him in New Jersey and Maryland.
- Stuart lived in Philadelphia while the United States Government was headquartered there before moving to Washington DC. His house was across from the then US Government building so it was not much of a chore for the famous men associated with our early government to make arrangements for their portraits to be painted. George Washington had his portrait painted in Philadelphia and his note to Stuart still exists. It reads, "Sir, I am under promise to Mrs. Bingham, to sit for you tomorrow at 9 o'clock and wishing to know if it be convenient to you that I should do so, and shall be at your house," signed, General George Washington, 1795. Not a missive exactly brimming with enthusiasm, but notable enough to have been saved so that we, today, can read it and imagine what their sittings might have been like (there is documentation that relations were chilly).
- Perhaps excerpted quotes from the National Gallery of Art website about Stuart and his talent will illuminate why he should be celebrated in his home state every year on the anniversary of his birth. "Stuart...created the most lasting images of George Washington and he also invented definitive images of the next four presidents. This legacy alone would be enough to secure Stuart's lasting fame. ...In addition, he introduced a new level of sophistication to the American portrait, achieving convincing likenesses and successful representations of characters through his choice of poise and expression. ...He was the most sought-after American portraitist of his era and today is counted among the greatest early American artists"
- And he is one of Rhode Island's own!

***It is easy to make a case that Gilbert Stuart is still pertinent today. We hope to convince the powers that be that it is time to recognize this artistic giant.***

**Harriet Powell**

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## President's Message Spring 2011

Dear Members,

Welcome to spring and our **80th Anniversary** as the Museum established to honor the life of Gilbert Charles Stuart. A heartfelt thank you to the Vareika family and the staff at William Vareika Fine Arts Ltd for their over the top Exhibition and sale "Gilbert Stuart and His Times" and for the proceeds which benefited the Gilbert Stuart Museum. It was a great way to celebrate Stuart's birthday, which was December 3, 1755. Thanks to Bill, the Museum and show were written up in both the New York Times and the Boston Globe along with a two-page article in the Providence Journal.

Things are very different now than they were when the Museum first opened in 1931, and at the same time much is the same. We have been extremely fortunate to have many loyal members and friends from near and far who love this place and its independence as a true non-profit organization. Our mission is simple - to promote and preserve Gilbert Stuarts memory, birthplace, art, and colonial history, all in our beautiful 22 acre natural setting. The millpond and the dam help us to display Colonial industry and add much to the charm and serenity of the grounds. As in 1931, the dam and the Gristmill are in need of an overhaul. In addition, we would very much like to modernize the Welcome Center and Gallery to better accommodate handicapped visitors, preserve artifacts that are in need of climate control, and improve security in order to display these artifacts. We are fortunate to have an ambitious, forward thinking, and lively Board of Trustees that supports these initiatives; their hard work along with our dedicated group of volunteers will no doubt help us to achieve our goals.

We recognize that we need to sustain and continue to grow our membership and offerings to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The number of visitors coming to our Museum has been declining and remains a focal point of our future plans. Fortunately, we were able to get a commitment from RIDOT to install several brown historic signs on the highways to increase our visibility and guide our visitors to a memorable experience. In addition, Harriet Powell, our Secretary and Chairperson for Marketing, is working to have the State declare December 3<sup>rd</sup> Gilbert Stuart Day, to honor one of RI's most notable citizens and help our cause to promote all that we have to offer here at the Museum.

As you can see, we have some aggressive objectives in the years ahead. But we know that with your continued support, we, like the founders in 1931, can achieve these objectives and keep our Museum thriving for many years to come.

I hope to see you at one of the 2011 Museum events. I also encourage you to bring a friend or prospective new member, and spread the word about our hidden treasure- The Gilbert Stuart Museum and Birthplace.

Sincerely,

*Dan Bell*  
*President of the Board of Trustees*

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## Save the Date:

**Friday, August 12, 2011**

**5:30 - 7:30 pm**

Join us for our Fundraising Gala

## **“Moonlight Magic”**

**To celebrate our 80th year**

and help raise funds for vital repairs to the dam and continued restoration efforts at the Museum.

**Enjoy a rocking evening**

**Music by The Elderly Brothers**

**Wine ~ Light Supper ~ Desserts**

**Auction ~ Raffle**

**Artists-in-Residence Art Sale**

**Honorary Chair David Schock**

[www.davidschock.com](http://www.davidschock.com)

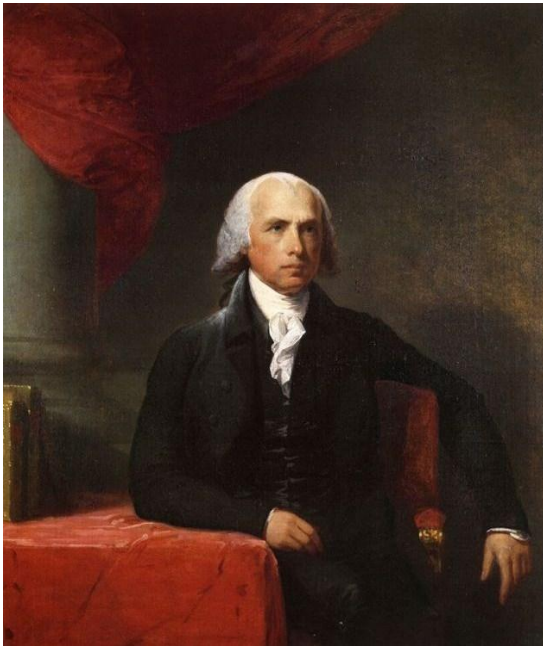
**An exciting evening is planned for your enjoyment!**

Don't miss **“Moonlight Magic”!**

**Needed: Donations for the Auction and Raffle**

Are you a gourmet cook? Do you have a vacation home?  
Can you donate an item, gift certificate, or tickets?  
We are looking for volunteers to offer goods or services for unique auction items to raise funds for the restoration effort.

Please contact the office for information: 401-294-3001  
or email [info@gilbertstuartmuseum.org](mailto:info@gilbertstuartmuseum.org)



**James Madison** by Gilbert Stuart



**Dolley Madison** by Gilbert Stuart

### **Dolley Madison**

Gilbert Stuart's finances were in a hopeless tangle late in 1803. He sent his family to live in Bordentown, NJ and he left Philadelphia for Washington, DC in December. He, once again, had a plan to become rich and pay off his debts. Now that the Federal Government had moved to the new capitol, he knew he would find many opportunities to paint the portraits of the country's leaders. He planned to make many copies of the portraits and sell them at a good price. In the crowded unfinished city, Stuart found a room in which to live and paint and began to take commissions for portraits.

Thomas Jefferson became president in 1801 and chose James Madison as his Secretary of State. James' wife Dolley soon became a Washington hostess of note. When the widow, Dolley Payne Todd, married James Madison in 1794 she put aside her Quaker upbringing and enjoyed the life of the well-to-do; including wearing the finest Parisian gowns.

It was only fitting that she should commission portraits of both her husband and herself from the great Gilbert Stuart in the spring of 1804. Both were shown seated in the same gold painted chair with red upholstery and the same red draperies are in each painting. In Dolley's they are pulled back to reveal a blue sky while in James', they remain closed as a backdrop to law books. The Madisons are turned slightly toward each other but they look out at the viewer.

Mrs. Madison is dressed in the height of fashion in a low-necked, high-waisted Empire styled gown. A loosely painted shawl emerges from behind her and her hands also look casually painted. However it is Dolly's face that draws in the viewer. Here Stuart shows why he was so in demand for his portraits of women. Her dark ringlets frame a winning face with pink cheeks and lips. Her smile catches the sparkle of her personality, exhibiting the liveliness and humor, which made her so beloved.

In 1808, the critic, John Neal, characterized Stuart's portraits of women, and Dolley's portrait in particular, as lacking grace and tenderness. Gilbert Stuart portrayed the women he painted more as individuals than as an idealized beauty of womanhood, which Neal must have felt was proper.

It is interesting to note that in the year and a half he spent painting in Washington, Gilbert Stuart painted four other couples in almost identical settings. The chairs and draperies were the same and the women all wore Empire-style dresses. However, the personality of each individual comes shining through. Dolley wrote to her sister, Anna Payne Cutts, "he (Stuart) is a man of genius and therefore does everything differently from other people."

Dolley Madison, as the first lady, is perhaps best known for rescuing Gilbert Stuart's Lansdowne portrait of George Washington from the White House as the British were burning the Capitol City in August 1814. At the same time, the portraits of James and Dolley Madison were also saved from a similar fate. Over the years, her portrait found its way back to the White House while his is many miles away in Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia.

**Gail Shields**

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## Gilbert Stuart and His Times

William Vareika Fine Arts Ltd, Bellevue Avenue in Newport, was the scene of a stunning exhibition of over 75 works of art by Gilbert Stuart and some of his contemporaries. Ten magnificent Stuart originals along with paintings by Benjamin West, John Singleton Copley, Charles Wilson Peale, and other notables made for an awe-inspiring show. Also on exhibit were four paintings by Stuart's youngest daughter Jane, including "Portrait of Gilbert Stuart", a portrait of her father.

Over 150 guests attended the gala opening reception held on December 3rd, Gilbert Stuart's 255th birthday. All proceeds from the reception and a portion of the sales benefitted the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum. The exhibition ran through March 2011.

We extend a very special thank you to Bill Vareika for this spectacular exhibition and for his generosity and support of the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum.



Portrait of Gilbert Stuart by Jane Stuart

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### FISH ON THE RUN / SPRING FAIR AT THE BIRTHPLACE

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Sunday, May 1, 2011 ~ 1:00 – 4:00

#### RAISE FUNDS VITAL REPAIRS TO THE FISH LADDER DAM

*Come and join us for our exciting opening day event!*

- \* Fish on the Run presentation by DEM / underwater camera
- \* Corn grinding in the Hammond Mill
- \* Jonnycakes by Bob and Diane Smith
  - \* Book signing by Tim Cranston
- \* Robin Hollow Farm flowers and plants
- \* 18<sup>th</sup> century reproduction furniture
- \* Wooden furniture, bowls, burl, and gift items
- \* RI Spinners Guild spinning and weaving
  - \* Narrow River Land Trust exhibit
  - \* Nature Trail self-guided tours
  - \* Birthplace Open House
  - \* Rhody Warm Exhibit

Adults \$5 Children (ages 6-12) \$2  
2011 Members Free

### December 3rd Benefit Opening Reception



Pat Bell, Cathy & Bob DiColo



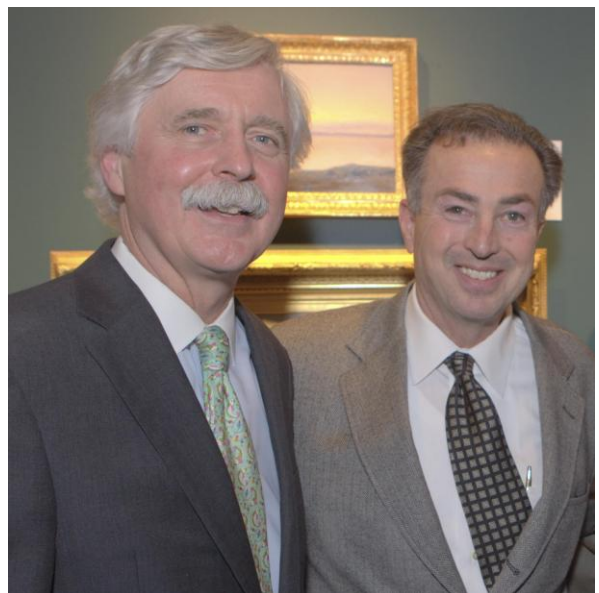
Christine Post, Peggy Todd, Dr. Alan Post



Peggy and Kathleen O'Connor



Skip Healy and Mark Bachand



Bill Vareika and Museum President Dan Bell

## *Milling Around at the Museum*

**Happy Anniversary Gilbert Stuart Museum ~ 80 years!** The Museum was incorporated on January 31, 1931. This is our EIGHTIETH YEAR of operation as a private non-profit organization. We are supported solely by admission fees, yearly membership dues, and donations to cover our daily operating expenses.

**Membership Renewal:** Don't forget to renew your membership. Our website is being modified to accept membership payments and donations. We hope to have this payment option up and running by May 1st.

**Computer Network:** Many thanks to Peter Linden and Mandy of CPU Solutions for generously donating their time and expertise to set up a network system for our office computers!



March 2011 Restoration of the Hammond Gristmill

**Gristmill Restoration:** Our gristmill has a brand new outer coat! Aged pine boards have been grooved and fitted together to form a new outer covering for the mill's original post and beam 1750-frame - making the gristmill look shockingly new! The project also included the replacement of several posts and beams and door and window casings. All of the Birthplace windows have been reglazed, painted, and replaced. Thank you to Sam and Ray Clidence for their fine restoration work.

**Narrow River Land Trust Hosts Open Event at Former Camp Nokewa:** The Camp Nokewa property, 80 scenic acres bordering Carr Pond, was recently purchased by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management. The Narrow River Land Trust invites you to a special afternoon of guided walks, talks, and refreshments on **Sunday, May 22<sup>nd</sup> at 2:00** at the former Camp Nokewa Girl Scout Camp.

Guest speaker, DEM Director Janet Coit, Associate DEM Director Larry Mouradjian, and Cathy Sparks, Chief of the Division of Forest Environment and the Division of Fish and Wildlife, will be on hand to answer questions regarding the management plan for the area. This is an opportunity to get to know how the State and the Narrow River Land Trust are working to preserve the Narrow River Watershed. Come walk this beautiful property, meet the neighbors and strengthen relationships with all.

This is an outdoor event. Entrance to the camp is ¼ mile west of the Gilbert Stuart Museum at 855 Gilbert Stuart Road.

**Now you see it... Now you don't:** It has been a long time goal to relocate the electrical wires to the Birthplace to an underground conduit. Thanks to a donation from the Harmony Lodge #5, a donation by Ferguson Perforating and Wire Co, and special consideration by Trident Fence Company, R. K. Electric, L.L.C., and volunteers ready to do some shoveling and lawn work, we were able to achieve this goal in December. National Grid removed the wires from the pole and voila! No more need to Photoshop the electrical wire out of your photographs of the Birthplace.



December 2010 trench for burying electrical service in conduit



March 2011 electrical service no longer visible!

**Stuart Reproduction Portraits for the Museum:**

**River Herring:** On March 18<sup>th</sup> the first of the river herring arrived at the museum's fish ladder. The herring run will continue until mid-may.

**Facebook:** Become a fan of the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum on Facebook! Updates and new photos are posted regularly.

## GRANTS

We greatly appreciate the generosity of the following donors and grantors for their very generous support of the Museum.

- \* William Vareika Fine Arts Ltd.
- \* Harmony Lodge #5
- \* RI Turnpike and Bridge Authority
- \* Society of the Cincinnati: \$1000 (2011) for reproduction portraits for museum interpretation
- \* Society of the Cincinnati: \$1000 (2010) for reproduction portraits for museum interpretation
- \* Legislative Grant / Senator Lenihan \$2000 (2010) for development and production of our new brochure
- \* Robertson Foundation: \$2500 (2009) for structural repairs and a new roof for the Birthplace
- \* We wish to thank three private donors for their generous \$1000 donations.

*Thank you*

## Gilbert Stuart Museum Calendar 2011

- April 1 – April 22     Grounds open by donation for viewing of the river herring run
- April 30 (Saturday) "Chestnut Trees in Rhode Island: Restoring a Native Keystone Species" a talk by Yvonne Federowicz 10:00am \*seating limited, call for reservation
- May 1 (Sunday)     Spring Fair/ Fish on the Run 1-4 P.M.
- May 2 (Monday)     Museum and Gallery open for the season
- May 7 (Saturday)     Bird Walk (Reservations please) Rain date May 8
- May 19 - 23     Artists-in-Residence Week
- July 14 - 18     Artists-in-Residence Week
- August 12 (Friday) "Moonlight Magic" Gala Fundraiser and Art Sale 5:30-7:30p.m.
- October 2009     Limited Museum hours ~ Call for days and times
- October 10     Museum closes for the 2010 season.
- December 3 (Saturday) Gilbert's Birthday

For more information (401) 294-3001

Web site: [www.gilbertstuartmuseum.org](http://www.gilbertstuartmuseum.org)

Email: [info@gilbertstuartmuseum.org](mailto:info@gilbertstuartmuseum.org)

## Joseph H. Bullock

By 1927, the birthplace, occupied by a succession of families, had fallen into decay. Nathaniel Vose, lover of art and owner of an art gallery, seeing that the house was in imminent danger, sent out an appeal to raise funds to preserve the birthplace of Gilbert Charles Stuart and to "ensure that this shrine of art lovers shall no longer be neglected." By September of 1930, the sum needed was at hand and negotiations were complete for the purchase of the homestead, the gristmill and shed, and about 3 acres; the sale was finalized on October 4, 1930. Articles of Incorporation for the GILBERT STUART MEMORIAL INC were drawn up and signed on January 31, 1931.

The first order was to secure the safety of the birthplace. Under the direction of Norman Isham, architect and renowned authority on early American architecture, restoration work was begun. Isham hired Joseph H. Bullock, a specialist in early building methods, to oversee the process. Bullock and his crew immediately began work on the restoration. Restoration of the homestead was completed and a house warming celebration was held on August 29th, 1931. The museum has a 5-minute video of this celebration.

The next step was the re-establishment of the snuff mill. In excavations, the mud sill of the original snuff mill was discovered. This aided in the determination of the size of the waterwheel. Joseph Bullock and his son William made a new wheel exactly like the old one: eighteen inches wide with a diameter of fifteen feet. It was placed on the east side of the house where the original wheel stood and connected to the 1730 snuff mill itself which had been donated from England. The now operational snuff mill was dedicated at a gala on June 11, 1932 with these words: "this running water flowing from the past into the future may again turn the mill."



1931 Restoration in progress



The family photo depicts Joseph H. Bullock top left and Randolph Bullock (top right). Randolph later went on to become the Curate of Medieval Arms at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Bottom row left to right: Joseph's daughters Anne and Natalie Bullock, his wife Nettie Estelle Goddard Bullock, and his son William, who continued work with Isham after Joseph's death.



Reynard Bullock, Sr., Joseph's grandson, (standing) working with a stone mason on the sluiceway below the waterwheel. He was 19 years old at the time. The main house can be seen with the water wheel in place. The Bullocks also did restoration work with Norman Isham on the Clemence-Irons House in Johnston, RI.

Many thanks to Reynard L. (Skee) Bullock, Jr. for the donation of the card, photos, and Bullock family information to the Gilbert Stuart Museum archives.

M. O'Connor

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