The Rufus Porter Museum

Rufus Porter Museum celebrates the life and times of a remarkably creative American genius.

Spring 2015 Newsletter

Yankee Ingenuity is Here!

We apologize that the Spring Newsletter is a little late this year, but it is with good reason. This off season has been a whirlwind of activity as we have been working hard to reinvigorate the Museum with new exhibits and programs. Our new mission statement, “The Rufus Porter Museum celebrates the life and times of a remarkably creative American genius,” has charged us with bringing the works of Rufus Porter alive!

Through grants from the Tom E. Daley and Davis Family Foundations we have been able to develop an all new museum experience for 2015 that will thrill our audiences. No matter your age or interests, there will be something for you to enjoy at the Rufus Porter Museum! There will be new miniatures, portraits and silhouettes for your viewing pleasure. There will be the new Exploratorium with hands on experiences for all ages. But the most exciting development is the room dedicated to Rufus Porter’s inventions. Yes, the Museum has heard your request. For 2015 we will not only have an exhibit on Rufus Porter’s design for the Broadway Elevated Railroad, but we will have on display Rufus Porter’s Percussion Cap Revolving Rifle. On loan to us, for the season, from the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, this is the actual rifle he sold to Samuel Colt in October 1836 for $100. Last on display in 2006, this rare and influential gun is a true milestone for the museum and the reason we waited to publish the Spring Newsletter. We wanted to share our excitement with you and give you the opportunity to plan your visit to see this rare American artifact.

A year ago when I came to the Rufus Porter Museum as the Interim Executive Director I had no idea that I would still be here, let alone tasked by the Trustees to reinvigorate the Museum. As a team we have made great strides in developing a museum for our 2015 season that will excite a diverse audience. I know you can’t be everything to everyone, but that is not our goal. We want to present Rufus Porter and his life in as many ways as possible in order to spark our visitor’s imagination. And once we have ignited their creativity and inventiveness, we have succeeded.

This past year has also seen a generous increase in giving to the Rufus Porter Museum, an increase that has permitted us to finally start an endowment for the Museum’s future. There are many ways you can be part of the Rufus Porter Museum team. You can help us by giving your time as a volunteer, donating an artifact, attending an event or program, becoming a member, or supporting us through a financial gift. To provide a solid foundation for building our future, the Museum just began the Circle of Friends. These friends have committed to giving a $1,000 or more a year, for the next 3 to 5 years, to support the Museum. Please help us in any way you can so the Rufus Porter Museum can bring our namesake alive.

I hope you have had the opportunity to see the recently started rehabilitation of the Webb House exterior. Through the support of CDBG grants from the Town of Bridgton, along with grants from the Ham Foundation, Daughters of the American Revolution, Maine Historic Preservation Commission, and the Belvedere Fund, plus gifts from other donors, the work is underway. M&S Builders of Maine is our contractor and doing an excellent job. We hope to have this part of the work completed by September and then begin the interior work through an additional grant just received from the Ham Foundation. We are still planning to open our 2016 season in the Webb House.

Museums are established in the public’s trust to collect, conserve and impart valued knowledge. The Rufus Porter Museum wants to meet that obligation by providing you significant experiences that are important to you. As such, my door is always open and I invite you to contact me at any time to discuss the Museum. Together we can build a strong, exciting museum for today and tomorrow.

Sincerely,

John

Yankee Ingenuity Museum Trail

The Rufus Porter Museum started the Yankee Ingenuity Museum Trail for the summer and fall of 2015 with eleven other museums from Kingfield to Kennebunk, Maine. The other museums on the Yankee Ingenuity Museum Trail are the Stanley Museum in Kingfield, the Bethel Historical Society, the Maine State Museum in Augusta, Bridgton Historical Society, Maine Maritime Museum in Bath, the Pejepscot Historical Society in Brunswick, the Maine Narrow Gauge Railroad in Portland, the Maine Historical Society in Portland, the Portland Observatory, the Saco Museum and the Brick Store Museum in Kennebunk. This very diverse group of museums will provide the public a unique and special opportunity to be directly engaged in what has made and continues to make Maine and New England great, Yankee Ingenuity. The collaborative effort will showcase the inventiveness of those tinkerers of bygone years and their struggle to improve their family’s lot in life. This topic is quite relevant to many in our communities today. Their goals of self-reliance and sustainability are aims that many of our neighbors are working toward and the processes our ancestors developed can provide the inspiration and guidance they seek. Paraphrasing an old quote, “Those who are exposed to the details of the past are better prepared to succeed in the future.” For more information about the Trail and the museums, visit www.yankeeingenuitymuseumtrail.org.
Folk art is one important part of the study of folklife, the way of life of a rural or traditional community. Folk life is concerned with the study of a community’s traditional activities, such as its stories, songs, customs, activities, food, objects (including art), and beliefs. These activities are those generally learned through everyday life, rather than from books or formal education. Folklorists, the studiers of folklife, are concerned not only with the end product, but the history behind their creation and use. Understanding the why and how allows us to appreciate the results of folk-life and its practitioners, like Rufus Porter.

The works of Rufus Porter, both art and invention, provide us a way to study not only his life but the culture that surrounded him. By delving into his reasons and ways of accomplishing things we can better understand him and the traditions that influenced him. For Rufus Porter, Yankee ingenuity wasn’t a state of mind, it was learned tradition.

They say art is in the eye of the beholder, so it isn’t a stretch to claim food is an art for some, but undeniably a part of folklife! As with almost everything during the time of Rufus Porter’s life, what you ate was a result of your location and socio-economic standing. In the rural areas where he lived, food was for subsistence rather than visual enjoyment. Unlike those enjoying a lavish life style, Rufus Porter probably never ate a swan shaped pie, or a pig opulently presented with an apple in his mouth. His food was hearty so he could put in a full day’s work or walk the great distances he did. The meatloaf recipe below is from a late 1800’s handwritten family cookbook (Bell’s Seasoning was introduced in 1867). Meatloaf was pretty standard fare during Rufus Porter’s life and probably something he ate quite regularly. Why? As folklorists looking beyond the end product, we can see it was a way to ration meat or utilize scraps to cook a more filling meal.

**Victorian Meat Loaf** *(Comes highly recommended from John and Family!)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredients:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 lb</td>
<td>Lean Ground Beef</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2 cup</td>
<td>Milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Egg – Beaten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/4 tsp</td>
<td>Bells All Natural Salt Free Seasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/4 tsp</td>
<td>Salt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>Red Bell Pepper – Diced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2 cup</td>
<td>Plain Bread Crumbs</td>
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</tbody>
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**Directions:**

- Thoroughly blend all the ingredients together in a mixing bowl.
- Spoon the mixture into a lightly oiled 8 x 4 x 2 metal baking pan into a loaf.
- Pre-heat the oven to 350 degrees.
- Put the baking pan in the center of a roasting pan and surround it with 1-1/2” of cold water.
- Place the pans in the oven on the second rack setting from the bottom and cook until done, approximately 1 hour. Internal temperature should be a minimum of 165 degrees.

4 - Two Piece Servings.

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**We Need Your Help!**

The museum is hosting a membership drive in an effort to bring our membership to 300. Currently we are at 200 and need your help. If you are not a member, please consider joining by filling out the membership form on the back page. If you are already a member, please share the museum with your friends and family and ask them to consider joining. Without the valuable support of our members and donors, we would not be able to preserve and share the works and life of Rufus Porter. Thank you.
The first American manufactured paper doll was Little Henry, by J. Belcher of Boston, in 1812. McLoughlin Brothers, founded in 1828, became the largest producer of paper dolls in the U.S. They printed them using engraved wood blocks. As paper dolls became popular, many companies, including Brook’s Spool Cotton, began using them to promote their products. Antique paper dolls give us a glimpse into the past. Please share the Brook’s Doll with a child and then bring them to the new Exploratorium.
June

**Summer Kickoff Party, 5:00pm.** Join us on Friday June 26th and help us kick off our 11th season and our season’s theme *Yankee Ingenuity.* There will be musical performances, the 2014 Quilt Raffle will be drawn and we will unveil our 2015 raffle item. Tickets are $20.00 for members, $25.00 for non-members and can be purchased online at www.rufusportermuseum.org or by contacting the museum at (207) 647-2828/rufusportermuseum@myfairpoint.net

June 30– **Opening Day, 12:00pm-4:00pm**

July

**Fourth of July Celebrations, 10:00am-1:00pm.** Visit us on the lawn of the Webb House, in downtown Bridgton for family friendly games, facing painting and more. Check out our website for more information.

July 9– **Evening at the Museum, 6:00pm-8:30pm.** Looking for something fun for the whole family? We have the event for you! On Thursday July 9, we are hosting our first Evening at the Museum. There will be food, children’s activities and tours of the museum. Visit our website for more information.

July 11– **Bridgton Day, 12:00pm-4:00pm.** Free admission for Bridgton residents (with valid ID or utilities bill). Members of organizations participating in the Yankee Ingenuity Museum Trail are also free. Visit www.yankeeingenuitymuseumtrail.org for participating organizations.

July 22-25 and August 1- **Curious Arts Series, 9:00am-4:00pm.** Our Cultural Heritage Series is getting a makeover, including a new name and new classes (along with some favorites). Classes include Floorcloth Painting, Growing and Using Herbs: Making Herbal Vinegars, Digital Photography (Theory and Practice), Understanding Antique Homes and more. See our website for schedule and complete course description.

July 31- **Painting Party (Part of Curious Arts Series).** Check out our website for more information

August

**Evening at the Museum, 6:00-8:30pm.** Join us for our second Evening at the Museum. Visit our website for more information.

August 15– **Lake Region Antique Show, 9:00am-3:00pm.** Our second annual Antique Show (renamed the Lake Region Antique Show) will be held at Stevens Brook Elementary School. There will be antique dealers from across Western Maine under one roof, offering a wide range of items. We will also have an antique appraiser and raffles.

August 19-21- **Rufus Porter Style Painting (Part of Curious Arts Series).** Check out our website for more information.

August 28– **Mystery Party, 5:30pm-8:00pm.** Members Exclusive Party at a mystery location with possible mystery guests. For more information or to become a member, contact the museum at (207) 647-2828 or rufusportermuseum@myfairpoint.net.

August 29- **Rufus Porter Day, 9:00am-4:00pm.** Join our celebration of Rufus Porter with activities, games, food and more.
A New Benefit of Membership!

The Rufus Porter Museum has joined Time Travelers. As you become a member (join or renew) you will receive a Rufus Porter Museum membership card which can be shown at over 250 museums nationwide for various discounts. We hope you will enjoy this benefit as you travel or decide to take a day trip in New England. For more information, please visit timetravelers.mohistory.org. If you click on “Institutions” you can search for museums to visit.
In 1807, at the age of 15 and three years removed from his six months at Fryeburg Academy, Rufus Porter was apprenticed to his older brother, a shoemaker in West Boxford, Mass. His parents, according to his Scientific American obituary, felt it was time for him “to settle down to something solid and useful.” Apprenticeship was a common form of higher education in the 1800’s, but many equated it with almost being a form of indentured servitude. For whatever reason, Rufus Porter decided this wasn’t the lifestyle for him and so he walked 84 miles to Portland, his first steps in a itinerant career. And as they say, the rest is history, but what if Rufus Porter had enjoyed being a cordwainer?

**Trivia:**

1) On July 4, 1884, a little over a month before Rufus Porter passed, France gave what to the United States?
2) What is the southernmost recorded place that Porter walked to?
3) Who was the President of the United States when Porter was born? Died?

**Answers:** 1) Statue of Liberty, 2) Harrisonburg, Virginia 3) George Washington and Chester A. Arthur
Membership Form

_____ Yes! I believe in and want to be a part of forwarding the Rufus Porter Museum’s mission. Enclosed is $50.00 for my Membership Dues.

Name: ___________________________________________ Telephone: ______________
Address: ______________________________________ City: __________ State: _____ Zip:________
Email: ______________________________________________________________________________

Make checks payable to: THE RUFUS PORTER MUSEUM, PO Box 544, Bridgton, ME 04009

MasterCard ___ Visa ___ Discover___

Card #________________________________________ Exp. Date___________
CVV #_______

The Rufus Porter Museum is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization.

No goods or services were provided in exchange for your contribution.