The Rufus Porter Museum
& Cultural Heritage Center

The mission of the Rufus Porter Museum is to increase the enjoyment, knowledge, and pride of our communities by bringing to life the world and the inspiring works of Rufus Porter—a remarkable American artist and inventor.

NEWSLETTER ~ Winter 2013

The Rufus Porter Museum has begun the nomination process to place the John & Maria Webb House (the museum’s new Main Street property) on the National Register of Historic Places. The NHR is the official list of the Nation’s historic places worthy of preservation and it will join ten other properties already on the list in greater Bridgton. One of the criteria for nomination is to show how a period of the building’s construction is significant in the development of the community.

John Webb was the son of Revolutionary War veteran Michael Webb and his wife Rebecca Sears Webb who moved to Bridgton from Massachusetts at the end of the 18th century. They had followed Rebecca’s parents William and Elizabeth Sears who were original settlers in Bridgton. When John came of age he went to Massachusetts, where he worked as a blacksmith and married Maria Dillingham, but they soon came back to Bridgton and tried farming for a short time.

In the early 1830s the Webbs sold their farm on Highland Ridge, and John opened a blacksmith shop on Main Street. They purchased land across from his shop on which was (the evidence seems to suggest) an existing Federal-style house. John’s business did well and he and Maria “modernized” their home by adding Greek Revival elements, giving it prominence that reflected the economic health of their proud and bustling town.

The Webb House represents the typical 19th-century community that integrated industry and domesticity to create a robust town center. While the image of the Webb House on the map above looks much as it does today, so many of the factories, mills, tanneries, and other businesses surrounding it are gone. The Webb House is the last remaining house of this era on Main Street. The museum’s goal is to restore it to its former dignity, reflecting the successful revitalization of downtown Bridgton today.
“Thinking big” was the theme of our first Annual Appeal this past winter. It was the motto of those who founded the Rufus Porter Museum in 2005, and it continues to be the guiding principle for the Board of Directors. In 2011 the Board dared to “think big” when they decided to move the museum to the historic John & Maria Webb House on Main Street, Bridgton. This move will preserve a town landmark, allow us more room to grow, make us more visible and welcoming to our year-round and seasonal residents and visitors, and advance the economic renaissance of downtown Bridgton. We want to increase foot traffic and business on Main Street, we want to boost the reputation of the Lakes Region, and we want to make our community proud of its heritage—this is “thinking big!” We managed to pay off the mortgage on the Webb house, and we are writing grants for renovations. We will be in our new museum home in the Webb House next season!

You will notice that we have restructured our membership (see page 7). Membership dues provide you with a variety of member benefits such as free admission, newsletters, discounts in our gift shop, and advance notice of programs and events at the museum. In the past we asked you to join the Rufus Porter Museum as a member at various support levels. A major goal in our new Strategic Plan is to increase our membership by making it affordable and inclusive for as many people in our community as possible, so we now have a flat rolling membership fee of $50.00. This means you will receive your membership renewal letter each year at the time you became a member the previous year.

Thank you, thank you to so many of you who have generously responded to our first Annual Appeal and have renewed your membership—you are “thinking big” with us!

I also want to sincerely thank Bonnie Trafford, David Gompert, and Randy Glickman for their tremendous contributions as members of the museum’s Board of Directors in 2012. They were instrumental in the museum’s growth this past year and visionary in planning for its sustainable future. Join me in welcoming new members and “big thinkers” Brian Cushing, Virginia Eilertson, and Marcia Harris to the 2013 Board of Directors.

Being part of the Maine Civil War Trail will make this a memorable season at the museum, and I can’t wait to see you all!

Sincerely,

Andrea
Have you ever harvested lupine seeds? Made a logging stamp? Canned pickles? This past summer visitors of all ages explored the world of Rufus Porter through a variety of new museum programs. Funded by a grant from the Davis Family Foundation and developed by museum intern Susannah Dowds, children and families participated in “Children’s Culture Day,” “Books Alive,” “All American Games,” and several other community events.

During two Saturdays each month, the Rufus Porter Museum invited families to “Children’s Culture Days.” Each Saturday featured an interactive exhibit tour and creative project related to the life and times of Rufus Porter. Themes ranged from invention and innovation to 19th century interior design. Children experienced firsthand the challenges of designing and testing a wind turbine prototype, creating their own mural and growing their own plants. The museum was also excited to partner with the Bridgton Public Library to promote the library’s summer reading program: “Dream Big, Read!” Every other week museum educators offered “Books Alive,” a Maine-themed story hour with accompanying projects designed to explore the heritage and stories of the state. Featured books included Jamberry, Miss Rumphius, Blueberries for Sal, and Keep the Lights Burning Abbie.

The museum took part in the Naples Blues Festival with a children’s kite workshop. Like many inventors before him, Rufus Porter was intrigued by flight, spending several years of his adult life designing and promoting a vessel very similar to a modern blimp. While his “Aerial Steamer” never caught on, later inventors shared his fascination with flight and young visitors continue to enjoy learning about Rufus Porter’s ideas and inventing new ways of constructing objects that fly.

Kites, giant bubbles, face painting, and putt-putt boats greeted young bystanders during Bridgton’s 4th of July events. To celebrate the nation’s birthday, the Rufus Porter Museum offered outdoor children’s activities on the grounds of the Webb house. “All American Games” introduced children to various scientific and artistic interests of Rufus Porter while establishing a presence in our new Main Street location.

In addition to children’s programming, the Rufus Porter Museum included a special pickling workshop for adults. The museum partnered with University of Maine Cooperative Extension and the Bridgton Community Center to show participants how to make dill pickles with local ingredients. University of Maine Food Preservation Program Aide Kate McCarty also covered canning and freezing techniques for meats, fruits and vegetables, suggesting ways for families to preserve the summer harvest and to save money on food costs.

Artistic visitors stopped at the Rufus Porter booth during “Art in the Park,” a daylong outdoor festival sponsored by Gallery 302, a local art cooperative. The museum sold items from the gift shop and conducted a variety of children’s activities at the festival. Young visitors were able to become part of a Rufus Porter Style mural thanks to a photo-op board depicting the “Man in the Boat” created by the museum’s marketing intern Courtney Lancour. Children created their own stencils and learned about surface tension, gravity and radius while blowing giant bubbles, an activity that has entertained children since the 1600s.

As an eventful summer came to a close, the Rufus Porter Museum hopes to continue to build relationships with the community in 2013, making museum resources relevant and available to residents and visitors alike.
2012 Museum Season Full of Events

In June the 2nd annual Mystery Party fundraiser was held in a beloved historical home in Bridgton that was filled with marvelous antiques. Pictured (L to R) are Andrea Hawkes (Executive Director), Tom Johnson (Museum Advisor), Laureen LaBar (Curator, Maine State Museum), and Earle Shettleworth (Director, Maine Historic Preservation Commission).

In July the museum welcomed Cultural Heritage Series keynote speakers Elizabeth Stillinger and Ruth Wolfe who discussed the history of American folk art collectors in the 20th century. Pictured (L to R) are Courtney Lancour, Andrea Hawkes, Elizabeth Stillinger, Ruth Wolfe, Julie Lindberg, and Samantha Scarf.

In October the museum partnered with the Bridgton Historical Society to sponsor a dinner and silent auction at the Bridgton Town Hall. Pictured (center) is Judy Graham, a member of the museum’s Board of Directors. The date of the next Big Event is scheduled for August 16, 2013.

In July the museum held its annual Cultural Heritage Series. Students participated in a weeklong series of classes that included floor cloth painting, vinegar graining, and painting a game board. Pictured are students Marcia Harris (L) and Polly Forcier (R). The 2013 CHS is scheduled for July 22-July 27.

In September the museum held a mini 2-day Cultural Heritage Series focusing on traditional textile techniques. Funded by the Davis Family Foundation, classes included the art of the penny rug, rigid heddle weaving, and beginner knitting. Judy Kirk (center) demonstrated spinning wool for Deb Fitts (L) and Samantha Scarf (R).

In December the museum joined Deertrees Theater in holding a Christmas concert and reading at the First Congregational Church in Bridgton. Lights were placed in the window of the museum’s Webb house in preparation for the town's Festival of Lights parade.
Update on the Webb House Renovation

We had hoped to be in the Webb House this summer, and even while we have made steady progress these past months, it looks like we will have to wait until next season. But we have been busy!

With funds from the Maine Arts Commission we began to replace the electrical wiring in the house in the fall. Through this past winter we have accomplished important project goals that are not so visible to our members and supporters, like preparing a site plan review application for the Bridgton Planning Board that was successfully accepted, and starting the National Historic Register nomination process.

We are about to begin work this spring on the façade of the Webb House for which we were awarded funds in a 2011 Community Development Block Grant. Working with Maine Historic Preservation Commission, we made the decision to restore the exterior of the house to its 1830-40s appearance. The current windows will be replaced with earlier nine over six paned windows. Rotted sills and clapboards will be replaced, and the original front door will be restored. This winter the Margaret E. Burnham Charitable Trust awarded the museum $2,500.00 towards the Webb House project, and this spring the Town of Bridgton awarded the museum another Community Development Block Grant to help us finish the façade work. We are so grateful that our community has faith in us and believes that we are an asset. We look forward to meeting all expectations.

This past fall Ginny and Don Eilertson put the final stenciling on the repainted kitchen in the Webb House.

In-Kind Donations

In-kind gifts are contributions of services other than cash donations that our community generously gives to the museum. We are fortunate to have had so many volunteer their time, talents, and services towards the Webb House renovations last fall and want to sincerely thank Kyle Warren of Warren Excavations for removing the large tree stump located at the side entrance of the house and filling the hole with good base material, and Eli Hutchins of Hutch Property and Tree, LLC for removing the large diseased maple tree located in the side yard. Thank you to Craig Jud, Don Eilertson, Julie Lindberg, and Greg Marston for cleaning and painting and Ginny Eilertson for stenciling the kitchen destined to be the new museum shop. We are most grateful to John Schuettinger for his donation of electrical work and materials at the Webb House.

Thank you, thank you, too, to our wonderful and faithful docents Carol Davis, Carol Davidson, Bonnie Trafford, Pat Sprackland, Anne Snodgrass, Beth Cossey, Marian Precht, David Strother, and Midge Curry who gave tours in 2012, and to non-Board members Cindy Gompert, Roger Lowell, David Ottinger, Tom Johnson, Greg Marston, and Linda Lefko who volunteered on committees and special projects that helped us meet our mission!

7th Annual Cultural Heritage Series
July 22 - 27

Prices Greatly Reduced!

Classes include: Understanding Antique Homes ● Paper Making ● Unfinished Objects ● Stenciled Floor Cloths ● Painting with Wool ● Theorem Painting ● Trinket Baskets (children’s class) ● Bronze Powder Stenciling ● Tin Piercing ● Painting with Wool, Yarn Sewn and Shirred Rugs ● Rufus Porter Style Painted Stool ● Vinegar Graining ● Brush Stroke Wall Painting ● Penny Rugs ● Rufus Porter Inventions

For full class description and registration information visit: www.rufusportermuseum.org
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- Quimby Family Foundation
- Bonnie Trafford

### Curator's Circle ($10,000-49,000)
- Marcia Harris
- Julie Lindberg
- Lindberg Family Foundation

### Founder's Circle ($50,000+)
- Bill & Judy Graham
2012 Quilt Raffle

“Piecing and Preserving the Art of Rufus Porter” is the title of the beautiful quilted wall hanging that Carol Davidson created and submitted to the annual DAR quilt competition. Her quilt was a recreation of the Porter School mural above the fireplace in the museum. The theme of this year’s DAR competition was “Enhancing the Present: Contemporary Expression of Our Heritage,” and Carol stated that her submission reflected the theme because “the museum enhances the town of Bridgton, and displays the art of an important figure in early American Folk Art.” Her quilted wall hanging won first place in the Maine competition and received honorable mention for New England. Carol generously donated the wall hanging to the museum for its 2012 raffle fundraiser and over 500 chances were sold during the summer. The drawing for the quilt was held on October 13 and was won by Linda Fritts of Virginia.

2013 Membership

Yes! I believe in and want to be a part of forwarding the Rufus Porter Museum’s mission. Enclosed is $50.00 for my 2013 Membership Dues.

Name: _____________________________________________________ Telephone: ________________
Address: ____________________________________ City: ___________ State: _____ Zip:__________
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Make checks payable to: THE RUFUS PORTER MUSEUM, PO Box 544, Bridgton, ME 04009

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No goods or services were provided in exchange for your contribution.
The Rufus Porter Museum
and Cultural Heritage Center
67 North High Street ~ PO Box 544
Bridgton, Maine 04009

Rufus Porter Museum’s 2013 Special Exhibit:
“Folk Art Inspired by the Civil War”

This summer the Rufus Porter Museum will join 26 other museums and historical societies across Maine in a Civil War Trail. Using a wide variety of items like letters, diaries, photographs, maps, art, weapons, clothing, banners, and quilts, these organizations will present exhibits about the personal experiences of Maine people at the battle front and the home front during the war. The Maine Civil War Trail is part of the commemoration of the war’s sesquicentennial (1861–1865~2011–2015).

The Rufus Porter Museum will exhibit folk art inspired by the war, and will include paintings, weathervanes, and the exquisite eagles carved by Maine native John Bellamy that were so popular during the Folk Art Trail exhibit in 2008. Two talks have been scheduled to accompany the exhibit: June 21, Stephen May, “Their Eyes Have Seen the Glory: Art of the Civil War” and July 16, Nick Picerno, “The Lakes Region and Cumberland County Men at Antietam.” For more information about the Maine Civil War Trail and the exhibits see mainecivilwartrail.org/home.