



## **The Clifford Ashley Mural Turns 100**

*By Jeffrey Miller*

The Ashley Mural – a 16-foot-long painting by New Bedford artist Clifford Warren Ashley – is one of the highlights of the museum's collection, and recently turned 100 years old. Painted in 1919, the mural was commissioned by F. Gilbert Hinsdale for the sloped ceiling of the sunroom in his house on Water Street. The work, oil on canvas, is entitled *A Chart of the Whale Coast of New England c. 1810*, and depicts the coast of Massachusetts and Connecticut as Ashley envisioned it would have been in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Since it was installed in 2011, the mural has become one of the most talked about items among visitors, and has generated considerable interest. Over time, some objects become characters in their own right, and I certainly think the mural has its own unique personality. It greets me, and each and every visitor, when we walk through the doors, and the museum would not be the same without it.

We hope you join us in wishing the mural a happy 100<sup>th</sup> birthday!

*Ed. Note: The following excerpt is from the viewbook published by the historical society in 2011.*

### The Story Behind the Restoration of Clifford Ashley's *A Chart of the Whale Coast of New England c. 1810*

The Mattapoisett Historical Society welcomes an exquisite, new addition to its Museum with Clifford Ashley's mural, *A Chart of the Whale Coast of New England c. 1810*. This mural carries with it more than just the history of what it portrays. It encapsulates the history of who we are. It carries the story of Ashley and Gilbert Hinsdale's friendship and of the 90 years spent in the home at 20 Water Street in Mattapoisett. It is the story of Polly Duff Phipps' devotion to seeing it preserved. It chronicles the



**The Ashley Mural in its entirety**



## The Clifford Ashley Mural Turns 100 (continued from cover)

story of Seth Mendell ensuring the Mattapoisett Historical Society preserved it, and of the long and delicate process Gianfranco Pocobene took in carefully cleaning and restoring it. The Chart is a Mattapoisett treasure that will be preserved as well as admired, appreciated, and cherished at the Mattapoisett Historical Society's Museum.

Clifford Ashley was born in 1881 in New Bedford, MA where he spent his youth on the waterfront, amidst what remained of the once flourishing whaling industry. After graduating from New Bedford High School, he attended the Eric Pape Art School in Boston. A talented seascape artist, Ashley became well known for his marine paintings. In 1904, he boarded the bark *Sunbeam* on a 6-week whaling trip in order to gain experience for an article he was writing. There he witnessed the hunting and harpooning of several sperm whales, as well as the flensing and trying out processes. His article, *The Blubber Hunters*, was published in *Harper's Monthly*. In 1926, he used his article as the first two chapters of his premier book, *The Yankee Whaler*, considered by many to be one of the most accurate and definitive portrayals of New England Whaling.

Few people had both the practical knowledge of whaling and professional artistic training as Ashley, and he used these assets to produce works of literature and illustration that were respected and appreciated by old sea dogs and historians alike. In 1929, he published *The Whaleships of New Bedford* and in 1944, *The Ashley Book of Knots*, to this day renowned as the essential bible of knot tying, with descriptions and illustrations of over 3,000 knots.

In addition to his career as an author, Ashley was also a renowned marine artist and produced hundreds of nautical oil paintings during his life. None however, are known to be of the size or scope of the 16 by 6 foot mural, *A Chart of The Whale Coast of New England c. 1810*. Ashley died at home in Westport, MA in 1947.

Gilbert Hinsdale, a collector and designer of harpoons and harpoon guns, was fascinated by whaling. He was also a close friend of Clifford Ashley. In 1919, he commissioned Ashley to paint the mural. Hinsdale had it placed on the sloped ceiling of the office/sunroom in his harbor-front home in Mattapoisett.

The house at 20 Water Street, which housed the mural for 90 years, was built in 1901 for Mr. William Means and his wife Sophia. The Means had two daughters; Mary who married Horace C. Field and Martha who married Gilbert Hinsdale.



The Ashley Mural in Hinsdale's sunroom. [MM ID 2014.9.38]

When Martha and Gilbert were married, they moved into the house on Water Street, which then became known as the Hinsdale House.

Possession of the house remained in the family, and the mural was to stay in that spot weathering four hurricanes; those of 1938 and 1944, *Carol* in 1954 and *Bob* in 1991. In 1938, the hurricane completely knocked off the side of the building and gutted the sunroom, submerging it in five feet of water. But the mural, mounted to the ceiling, was miraculously unharmed.

Mrs. Polly Field Duff Phipps is the granddaughter of Horace and Mary Means Field and the great-grandniece of Gilbert Hinsdale. A few years ago Mrs. Phipps decided to sell the family home at 20 Water Street. She knew the mural was special and





worthy of preservation and she was concerned a new owner of the house might not feel the same way. She began the search for an organization that would recognize the mural for the historic gem it was.

Mrs. Phipps first approached the Whaling Museum of New Bedford. Her first husband, Peter Duff had been involved with the museum during his life and it seemed a fitting choice. Unfortunately, the Whaling Museum was undergoing restoration of the large Bourne Room and the 1/2 scale whaling ship, *The Lagoda* and was unable to accept the mural. During



A close up of a whaling scene in the mural

this time, it was also briefly held as a possibility that it might go to the museum at Mystic, CT, but it was soon decided that the mural belonged in Mattapoissett.

Mrs. Phipps called her cousin Seth Mendell, President of the Mattapoissett Historical Society, and asked him if he would be interested in taking the chart for the museum. When Mr. Mendell agreed, she invited him to come down and look at it. She had to go out on some errands, but left the door unlocked for him. He had never been in that room before, and on entering could not find the chart. It was not on any of the walls. Finally he looked up and realized that this "chart" his cousin had been referring to, was in fact a 16 x 6 foot mural on the ceiling!

The moment Mr. Mendell saw it he knew it was a one of a kind and needed to be preserved at all costs. He immediately went down to Rogers Gallery in Mattapoissett to see his friends, Nate Bekemeier and Ben Rogers, stating "I've got a project and I need help!" At first, they didn't actually believe that it was a Clifford Ashley mural. No one knew of its existence. Mr. Mendell took the two skeptics back to the house to show them and when they saw the mural, they were as excited as he was. In accepting this gift however, the Historical Society was faced with two immediate questions. "Where in the museum are we going to put this?" and, "How do we get it off the ceiling?"

Mr. Mendell knew that the only place in the museum it might fit was in the church building over the pulpit. So he and Mr. Bekemeier rushed back with a tape measure and climbed into the balconies to find out. The space above the pulpit measured 16' 6" across. The mural was 16' 2.5". Not much room for framing, but they knew it would work!

Next, they discovered that the mural's canvas was adhered to its own platform made of match boarding and held together by 10 iron straps, each six and a half feet long. A crew of ten men loosened the straps from the ceiling and the mural was released. With the platform and iron straps, the mural weighed 500 pounds. The team picked it up with great care, took it out of the building, and loaded it into a panel truck. It was so long that it hung out the back of the truck as they drove it the half mile to the museum on Church Street, where they carried it through the door and laid it flat on top of the pews on the west side of the church.

There were some portions of the chart that were in disrepair. Water leakage from the roof had loosened the canvas from its backing in some places, and 90 years of dust, grime and salt air in an unheated room had left it very dirty.

Now, two more challenges arose. The Historical Society needed funds to get the mural restored. They also needed to find a conservator who would undertake a project of this magnitude. After talking to five or six conservators who came to the museum to see the mural, they finally found Gianfranco Pocobene, a Boston area restorer who had worked on the murals of Boston's Trinity Church and Public Library. They liked him immediately — he said there was no challenge too great, no mural too large! He took paint



## The Clifford Ashley Mural Turns 100 (continued from page 3)

samples to be analyzed and gave the museum a reasonable price quote and timetable.

In the meantime, Mr. Mendell had been speaking to a number of potential donors and was able to find the benefactors needed to undertake the project. This whole process of fundraising and finding the right conservator took fourteen months, but finally on January 10, 2011, the mural left the museum with Mr. Pocobene. It was a relief to know that in six months time the mural would be ready to hang and not still lying on top of the pews!

In February 2011, Mr. Mendell and Mr. Bekemeier went up to Boston to review the progress. The surface of the mural had been cleaned and the difference was already unbelievable. All the vignettes and images stood out on the canvas and could be seen quite clearly. After this initial cleaning, Mr. Pocobene had to separate the canvas from its platform. It had been attached with a paste, common to the early 20th century, made mostly of flour and water. The painstaking removal process was done very gently with plastic spatulas, lifting up a little bit at a time and actually rolling the canvas as it came off the backing.

Once removed, the chart was laid out facedown on a soft surface so that the back could be washed and stabilized. Next, the canvas was adhered to a piece of linen cloth and then a second, so closely that all together they appeared to be just one piece of material. Finally, these layers were stretched over a wooden frame or stretcher with the same measurements as the chart.

Over three to four weeks, the mural was slowly stretched using nearly a thousand pushpins around the edges. Every two or three days, the conservator would pull the canvas to the edge, further and further, tighter and tighter each time to remove any wrinkles. Using an unheated flatiron (over a protective layer of paper) to help smooth out the surface, the fabric was stretched until it was ready to be attached permanently to the frame.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of June, just six months after it left, the mural arrived back in Mattapoisett. With its new frame it weighed just 120 pounds; 380 pounds less than when it left! The museum had seen a few changes in those 6 months as well. The wall on which the mural was to be hung was repainted and fitted out with a long vertical cleat that corresponded to one on the back of the stretcher. The air conditioning system in the museum was also replaced in order to control the humidity and temperature for preservation purposes.

Gianfranco Pocobene personally oversaw the trucking of the restored Ashley chart from his studio at Fine Arts Enterprises in Boston to the Mattapoisett Museum. Once again, the mural was carried very carefully into the church building of the museum, down the center aisle, turned to face the entrance, and lifted up onto the scaffolding that had been prepared for its arrival. It was raised up and slipped down onto its cleat, fitting perfectly.

The Mattapoisett Historical Society is thrilled to be the recipients of this wonderful gift. We are deeply grateful to Polly Duff Phipps and her family, whose generosity and desire for others to know and appreciate the cultural history of this area are responsible for the centerpiece of the Mattapoisett Historical Society Museum.



Buzzard's Bay as shown in the mural.





## The Next Generation of Historians

*By Kyle DeCicco-Carey*

On Sunday, November 3, students from the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth came to the Mattapoissett Museum to talk about various historical topics in the museum's Next Generation of History Symposium. Guests were treated to some fascinating history presented by a young generation of history fans.

**Jacob Hunsinger** presented "Switchback and the Nine-Fingered Kids: Pennsylvania Coal Mines and Labor." Focusing on eastern Pennsylvania, Jacob detailed the history of mining anthracite, a type of coal with a high carbon content. Anthracite was discovered in eastern Pennsylvania in the 1790s and by the 1820s the Lehigh Canal was constructed off of the Lehigh River to transport the coal. Later the coal was transported via rail. The coal industry employed immigrants as well as children who often lost fingers while operating equipment. The industry was plagued with safety issues including an incident that led to miners being trapped in a mine where they burned to death. Such incidents led to violent protests and later to child safety and other laws to protect workers.

The only non-history student to present was **Jared Fredette**. Jared is a biology major and presented "Sticking it to Bomber Command: Britain's Irregular Warfare Unit." Jared discussed Section D which was part of the United Kingdom's foreign intelligence service. During World War II, Section D conducted irregular warfare activities such as organized local resistance, sabotage against the Axis powers and weapon development, including the sticky bomb.

Section D was involved in several raids during the war. While Spain was officially neutral, they did have ties to the Axis powers. It was believed that Italian and German merchant ships were smuggling weapons through the Spanish Island of Fernando Po in 1941. Section D carried out a successful raid on Fernando Po to seize the ships despite Spanish neutrality. The raid highlighted the special operations reputation to carry out such missions. Other operations carried out with Section D's involvement include the Raid On St. Nazaire, the largest Axis dry dock in the Atlantic and the sabotage on the Peugeot factory, a car factory in occupied France that was seized by the Germans to produce tanks and planes.

**Sarah Murphy** focused on religion on her talk, "Calvinism, Predestination and Why it Worked." Sarah discussed the history and development of Calvinism, a belief doctrine developed by John Calvin in the sixteenth century, involving the idea that only a select few were predestined to be chosen by God to be saved. Unlike other religious doctrines that said everyone had a chance to be saved, Calvinism said that everyone does have a chance to be saved but God has already decided.

Sarah explained the how the doctrine was able to avoid its inherent contradiction. If one is predestined to be saved, why does one have to practice being a good

Christian? Calvinism suggests that people who are deeply religious are most likely saved. Further, she explained, the belief stated that people do not have the capacity to understand God's will. However, if one listens to scripture, it should move you. That is a sign that God is within one. One has to practice



Pictured left to right Jared Fredette, Sarah Murphy, Zack Wedge, Jacob Hunsinger, Abigail Field



### The Next Generation of Historians (continued from page 3)

Christianity to find out if you are to be saved.

“The Refinery of the Vikings” was the title of the presentation by **Zack Wedge**. Despite the Vikings reputation for being brutal plunderers during Medieval times, Zack talked about a side of Viking culture that often gets overlooked. In particular, their art and design. Zack showed several examples of Viking art in his PowerPoint presentation which included artistic weapons and other iron and bronze tools. Art styles depicted were often based on animals and had a Celtic influence in Middle Ages. In addition to their artistic work, Vikings were also known for their looks and well-groomed styles. Some of this evidence includes archeological finds of grooming tools such as combs made from deer antlers.

Vikings were also known for the designs of their ships. Viking ships were clinker built, meaning the planks would overlap. The ships were built working from the outside and adding the frame later. Because of the overlapping, the frame could be lighter making the ship faster. The Vikings used square sails which were good for long travel. In addition, their vessels were shallow built which was good for getting close to land to invade. The shallowness of the ships lessened the chances that they would get stuck in shallow waters. The Vikings could remove the sails and use oars for traveling on rivers to get in and out of places they were invading. This made them effective plunderers with artistically designed weapons looking good during their raids.

Lastly, **Abigail Field** presented “No, Not Everyone Was a Flapper: What We Actually Wore in the 1920s.” The image of the flapper, as Abigail explained, was popularized in films from the 1960s. Films often portrayed the flapper style as being common during the 1920s time period when in fact most women did not wear the style in everyday activities. She discussed this and other misconceptions of women’s clothing of the time.

The flapper dress could be heavy and was not easy to dance in. Dresses were often made with lamé, a woven fabric with metal and silk. These dresses were difficult and time consuming to assemble making them unaffordable for many people. Abigail detailed the economic and social history of 1920s women’s clothing and style, and displayed several vintage, flapper era dresses as well as dresses that were commonly worn at the time.

## WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR Feedback

As part of our ongoing efforts to broaden our offerings and better serve the Mattapoisett community, we are conducting a survey to get some feedback from the community. If you haven’t already, please take a moment to follow click on the link below to a short survey about our programs and events and let us know what you think. Thanks! To access survey please [click here](#).

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## Curator's Corner

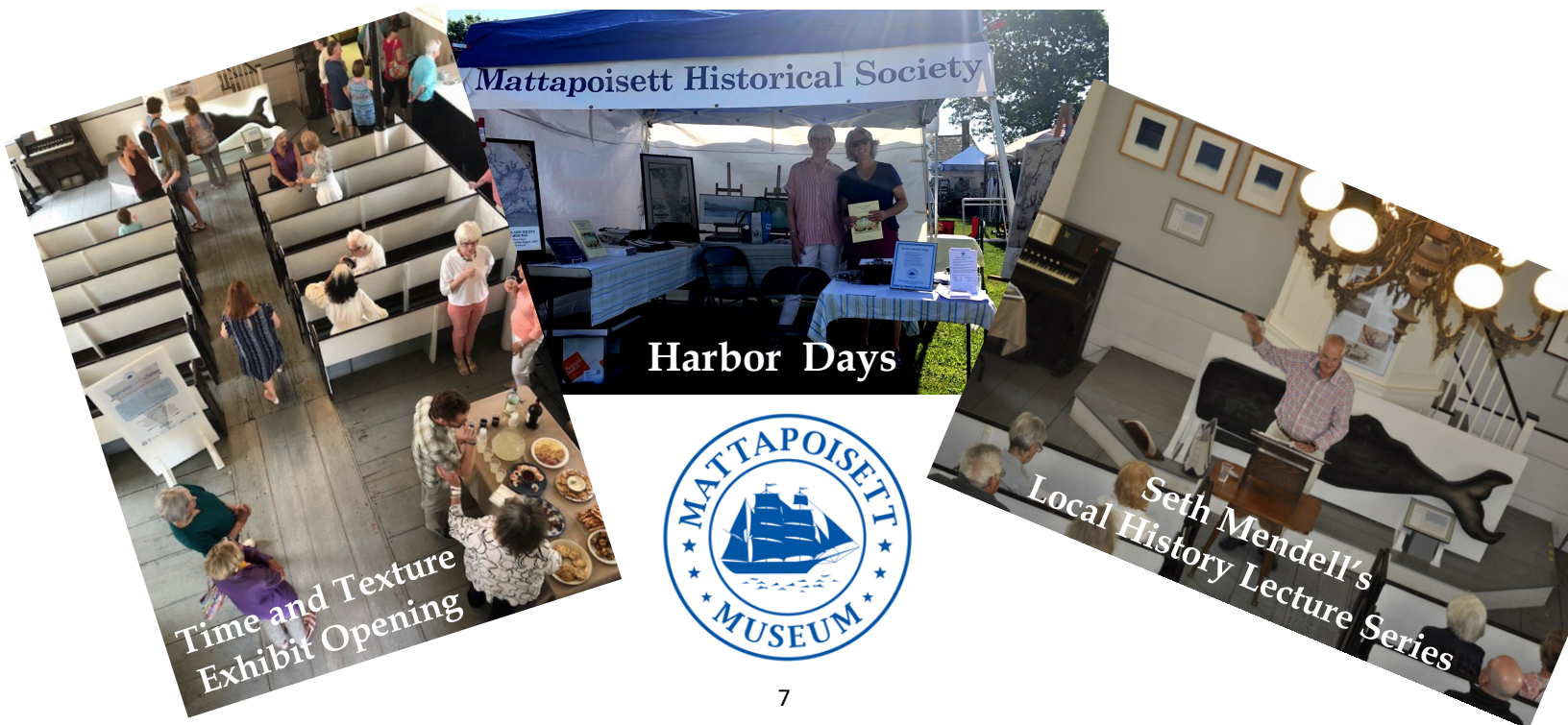
*By Jeffrey Miller*

As you may have noticed, over the past couple of years we have been slowly, but persistently, working to update some areas of the museum displays, trying out some new event ideas, and becoming a more active community center. What you may not be aware of, is that we have also been making changes behind the scenes to streamline and structure the way we do things. We are always asking ourselves “Why do we do it this way, and can we do it better or more efficiently?” So far, I think these initiatives have been quite successful, and the feedback has been positive.

There is always more work however, and in 2020 we will be starting to chip away at a couple of new projects. With the church and Mendell Gallery displays finished, we will move on to the Carriage House. This will be a major challenge, due to the sheer size of the space, the number and variety of objects, the large/unwieldy nature of some of those objects and the lack of climate control in the building. So we are making sure to keep the scope of our plans limited – we won't be emptying it out and starting fresh like we did in the Mendell Gallery! Instead, we are focusing on two areas: improving labeling and narrative, and reducing clutter and visual overload. We've already begun with the first steps, which involved clearing out a significant amount of extraneous non-collection materials (wood, hardware, old frames, posters, cleaning supplies, etc.) that had accumulated over the years.

The other main initiative will be to improve our event planning. To this end, I sent out an email survey for feedback from the membership – if you haven't responded yet, please take a moment to fill it out. If you'd like to take the survey and you did not receive the email, you can use the link in this newsletter. We may be following up with further questions, but for now we are really just looking for basic info – what kinds of events are you interested in? When are good times to hold them? We are also in the process of convening an official Events/Programs Committee, helmed by our vice president Darcy Lee. If you are an organizer and looking to get involved, please get in touch!

## Recent Events at the Museum



Time and Texture  
Exhibit Opening

Harbor Days



Seth Mendell's  
Local History Lecture Series





## A Message from the President

*By Kyle DeCicco-Carey*

Hi folks! I'd like to take a moment to introduce myself as the incoming president of the Mattapoissett Museum. Having been a lifelong fan of local history, it is an exciting opportunity.

I've lived in Mattapoissett for nearly 20 years with my wife, Jessica. We have two children: Alice, a sophomore at ORR, and Archer, in kindergarten at Center School. Both of whom have been coming to the museum since they were babies and they often accompany me when I'm there now.

If you have children or grandchildren feel free to bring them along with you. They are our future. Introducing them now to art, history, and culture will support this museum and more in the future.

In my day job I work as a reference librarian/archivist at Harvard University. I graduated from UMASS Dartmouth with a B.A. in History and attended Simmons University receiving an M.S. in Library Science. I'm also a Certified Archivist in the Academy of Certified Archivists. Additionally, my certifications include a Digital Archives Specialist from the Society of American Archivists and a Certificate of Librarianship from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners. Recently, I have been taking coursework in museum studies and nonprofit management at the Harvard Extension School.

I'm very passionate about this museum and grateful that Jennifer McIntire asked me to be on the board a few years ago. Jennifer, as well as Seth Mendell, have been a great inspiration. It's exciting to have such a committed board as well as a wonderful director to move the museum forward. I'm dedicated to public service and to my responsibilities as a steward of the museum's collections held in the public's trust.

We have had a lot of great events this past year including historical lectures and walking tours with Seth, art programming for children, a young historian symposium and educational talks on bees and oyster cultivation, historical and modern art, historical clothing, and the architectural design of One World Trade Center. We also participated in the Smithsonian Magazine's Museum Day and had a wonderful turn out for our annual Great Community Picnic. Our unique exhibit this past year brought you very talented local artists and their interpretations of historical objects in our collections.

With another exciting exhibit in the planning process, we are looking to line up more exciting and educational programs and events in the coming year.

The museum would not exist today without the support of all of you. On behalf of the director and board, I want to express how much your financial contributions mean to the Mattapoissett Museum as well as the time many of you have donated to support our programs and activities. If you would like to donate time to the museum, there are always opportunities to get involved. It doesn't have to be a full-time commitment. An hour here or there goes a long way. It's a great way to support the community and contribute to an amazing organization. We are always looking for more help and new ideas. Just give us a call at 508-758-2844 or drop us an email at [director@mattapoissettmuseum.org](mailto:director@mattapoissettmuseum.org).

Looking forward to seeing you at the museum!

Kyle DeCicco-Carey  
President, Mattapoissett Museum





## Moby Dick

By Lisa Hill

R	L	P	E	Q	U	O	D	A	R	U	M	P	MELVILLE
L	P	N	W	M	E	S	A	A	M	R	I	S	CHAPEL
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S	B	K	L	E	A	A	E	P	S	E	H	B	CHOWDER
C	I	A	N	L	K	L	S	S	E	N	C	U	KRAKEN
H	B	R	H	P	I	C	E	Q	R	E	A	T	PEQUOD
O	P	K	G	A	S	V	U	N	M	L	P	S	AHAB
W	R	R	T	R	L	E	L	T	O	P	T	E	QUEEQUEG
D	R	O	F	D	E	B	W	E	N	P	A	N	AMBERGRIS
E	G	R	Q	Q	I	B	T	L	M	A	I	B	WHALE
R	E	R	U	I	G	E	M	S	E	M	N	O	TASHTEGO
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													SHIP
													CETOLOGY
													CLASSIC
													CAPTAIN
													SERMON

### Planned Giving

Planned giving is a way to leave a lasting impact on the Mattapoissett Museum. A planned gift is a charitable contribution that is arranged in the present and allocated at a future date. Commonly donated through a will or trust, planned gifts are most often granted once the donor has passed away.

A planned gift can:

- Ensure your assets support a cause that is important to you,
- Allow you to make a major impact without affecting your finances today,
- Reduce the federal tax burden on your heirs, and
- Preserve your ability to make changes in the future.

Please consider including a charitable contribution to the Mattapoissett Museum in your will or estate plans, a thoughtful and proactive measure to help the museum realize its mission. For over sixty years, donors have entrusted historical documents, photographs, and other artifacts to the museum. Going forward, it is our job to share them, teach others about them, and preserve them for future generations. Your planned gift will provide the resources for our success.

To learn more about making a planned gift, please consult your estate planner. If you have already included the Mattapoissett Museum in your will or estate plans, please let us know. We would be pleased to recognize you in our donor roster.

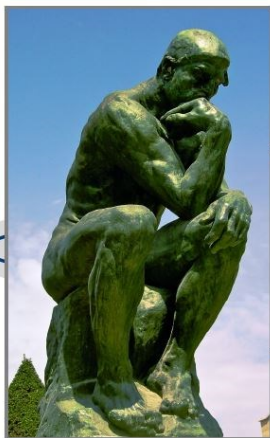


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