

VARIED



ALIVE

New and Rarely Seen Treasures from the Collection

Object Labels

Varied & Alive: New and Rarely Seen Treasures from the Collection

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Varied & Alive: New and Rarely Seen Treasures from the Collection

When Electra Havemeyer Webb incorporated Shelburne Museum in 1947, she imagined an institution that would become “an educational project, varied and alive.” Her steadfast vision resulted in the creation of a remarkable collection that now encompasses more than 100,000 objects of American and European origin, ranging from paintings and sculptures to trade signs and weathervanes to furniture, ceramics, and much more. Many of the items in this gallery are rarely on public view, while others are recent additions to the museum’s ever-expanding permanent collection.



Five themes, all related to Mrs. Webb’s ambitious goal, guide the exhibition’s organization. **Wildlife** juxtaposes works by such formally trained artists as John James Audubon and Antoine-Louis Barye with carousel figures, decoys, scrimshaw, and portraits of beloved feline companions by folk painters like Vermont’s own Warren Kimble. **Interior Lives** focuses on the domestic sphere, featuring historically significant textiles, furniture, stoves, and even a miniature interior by Narcissa Niblack Thorne. **Signs of Life** highlights the museum’s extensive collection of trade signs, sculptural folk art created to advertise, amuse, and inform in ingenious ways. The objects selected for **Life on the Go** all reference transportation—from weathervanes of locomotives and sleek sailing vessels to models and toys that gesture to the museum’s unique collection of horse-drawn vehicles. Finally, **After Life** leans into the range of visual devices used to commemorate death, remind the living of those who came before, and perhaps even ponder what happens thereafter.

The works on view share an emphasis on color, pattern, whimsy, and scale. In some instances, the items might encourage visitors to reflect on how their meanings have shifted and evolved over generations. We believe Mrs. Webb would have urged us to look closely at these displays with a sense of curiosity, wonder, delight, and appreciation.



The results of a 2017–18 National Pet Owners Survey indicated that nearly 65% of all households in the United States have at least one animal companion. The statistics worldwide are even more staggering. The human love of and need for animals manifests in myriad ways in our domestic lives, including interior decoration.

WILDLIFE

Feathered, furred, and finned creatures are represented in works scattered across Shelburne Museum's campus. Many beloved pets, livestock, and wildlife are captured in fine and folk art painting. Elephants, giraffes, lions, and tigers are just a few of the many beasts that inhabit the circus collection. Designed to fool fish and fowl with their lifelike markings, decoys in Dorset House are both decorative and functional. Whether captured with paint and brush on canvas, printed in ink on paper, or carved from natural materials such as baleen or burl wood, the objects in **Wildlife** explore the creative ways artists have adapted and been inspired by animal forms over time.



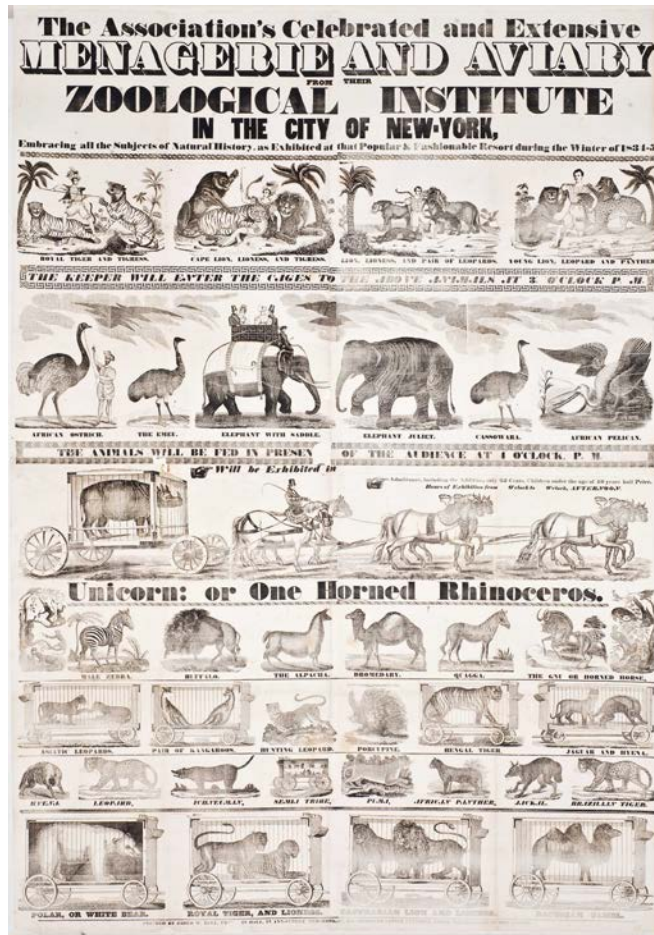
Gustav Dentzel Carousel Company
(Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1867–1909)

- 1 **Shield Panel with Lion Head**, ca. 1902
- 2 **Rounding Board with Rhinoceros**,
ca. 1902
- 3 **Tiger**, ca. 1902
- 4 **Giraffe**, ca. 1902

Carved and painted wood and metal with leather,
and glass

Museum purchase, 1951-392

The giraffe, tiger, rounding boards, and lion's head shields in this gallery were all manufactured by the Gustav Dentzel Carousel Company (1867–1909) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Completed in April 1902 for the Sacandaga Amusement Park in Northville, New York, the original carousel included a variety of painted panels, 14 carved shields, 2 "safety first" signs, 4 chariots, and 40 carved animals. Around 1930, the carousel was relocated to a campground near Speculator, New York. Mrs. Webb purchased the carousel in the early 1950s for the museum, impressed by the menagerie's detail, anatomically correct carving, and exquisite original painted surfaces.



Jared W. Bell (New York, New York, 1798–1870)
 Zoological Institute in the City of New-York
 (Somers, New York, 1835–date unknown)

5 **The Association's Celebrated and Extensive Menagerie and Aviary, 1835**

Woodcut, engraving, and letterpress on paper
 Gift of Harry T. Peters, Jr., Natalie Peters, and Natalie Webster, 1959-67.78

To eliminate competition between one another and drive out rivals, nine independent circuses and menageries merged to form the Zoological Institute in 1834. The largest of the affiliated menageries was the Zoological Institute of New York City, which exhibited during the winter months in a permanent structure located at 37 Bowery Street. Inside its grand hall the animal kingdom was displayed in “spacious airy apartments,” allowing audiences to acquaint themselves with the “gestures, manners, and habits” of a “greater portion” of creation.



6

Robert I. Havell (British, 1769–1832)

After John James Audubon

(American, b. Haiti 1785–1851)

6 **Common American Swan, from *The Birds of America*, 1838**

Hand-colored engraving and aquatint on paper

Museum purchase, 1958, acquired from Harry Shaw

Newman, The Old Print Shop, 1958-311.58

Around 1820, John James Audubon announced he was embarking on an ambitious project to paint every bird species in North America. A subscription service was established to secure funding for the endeavor, charging patrons about \$1,000 for a full set of prints. Skilled engravers Robert Havell and William Lizars cut plates for these images, which were printed in London between 1827 and 1838. Audubon's complete ornithology includes 435 hand-colored, life-size images, each with specific vegetation depicted in the background.



7

Altoon Sultan (American, b. 1948-)

7 **Freshening Cows, Peacham, Vermont, 1990**

Oil on canvas

Gift of PC Construction Company, 2019-3

Contrary to popular belief, cows do not outnumber people in Vermont—but they are a critical part of the state’s economy. **Freshening Cows, Peacham, Vermont** represents Altoon Sultan’s early work and her engagement with Vermont’s agrarian landscape. Living and working in the Northeast Kingdom for decades, she is known for her precise, luminous paintings and her examination of the uneasy balance between pastoral tradition and modern farming. In this painting, Sultan depicts farmers guiding a herd of dairy cows into pasture, thoughtfully capturing rural labor, community, and the quiet complexity of contemporary farm life in Vermont.



Gustaf Hertzberg (Swedish, 1871–1955)

- 8 **The Walrus**, 1900–55
- 9 **Unfinished Eagle**, 1900–55
- 10 **Fox Ladle**, 1900–55
- 11 **Mouse Ladle**, 1900–55
- 12 **Rabbit Bowl**, 1900–55
- 13 **Fish Bowl**, 1900–55
- 14 **Dog and Rabbit Bowl**, 1900–55
- 15 **Noah's Ark**, 1900–55

Carved wood

Gift of Russell and Edith Hertzberg, Janet K. Hertzberg, Gustaf's granddaughter, and Russel Hertzberg and Thyra Nelson, 1986-27, 2024-13, & 2005-5

Gustaf Hertzberg (1871–1955) was a Swedish-born self-taught artist and woodcarver, who immigrated to the United States in the early 20th century, settling in Vermont. His works often depict scenes of daily life, animals, and folk figures, capturing the charm and simplicity of rural New England. Although largely unknown during his lifetime, Hertzberg's distinctive carvings gained recognition after his death for their meticulous craftsmanship and unique blend of Swedish folk art and vernacular American style.



- 16 R. P. Thrall
Minnie from the Outskirts of the Village,
 1876
 Oil on canvas
 Museum purchase, 1960-233

Although the title of this painting suggests an elaborate narrative, the backstory behind this cat portrait is unknown. Using only her imagination, Shelburne Museum founder Electra Havemeyer Webb gave the work its evocative name.

- 17 Antoine-Louis Barye (French, 1795–1875)
Seated Lion, modeled 1836, cast after 1858
 Bronze
 Gift of J. Watson Webb, Jr., 1974-129.43

- 18 Lyman Fenton & Co. (Bennington, Vermont, 1849–52)
Rockingham Lion, 1840
 Glazed earthenware
 Gift of Barbara Chiolino, 1984-70.41

Pottery has been manufactured in Vermont since the late 18th century. Three Bennington firms exemplify this robust industry: the Norton pottery (1785–1911); Lyman Fenton & Co. (1849–52); and the United States Pottery Company (1847–58). Sometimes referred to as “Rockingham Pottery” or “Rockingham Ware,” these objects have a characteristic streaked brown glaze created using manganese. While most of the items manufactured by these firms were functional, sculptures such as this molded ceramic lion were also produced for domestic decoration.



- 19 Warren Kimble (American, b. 1935-)
Cat, 1991
 Paint on wood
 Courtesy of Warren Kimble, 2026-6

Painted by contemporary folk artist Warren Kimble, this portrait of a black cat, shown seated on a scalloped-edged floor rug and flanked by red curtains, was inspired by such sentimental 19th-century images as Shelburne Museum's **Tinkle** (right) and **Minnie from the Outskirts of the Village** (previous page). Its painted frame draws on the exaggerated faux grain-painted surfaces of vernacular furniture and the bold geometry of antique gameboards, both of which are represented in the Museum's holdings.

- 20 Unidentified maker
Carved Whale Baleen Plate,
 date unknown
 Keratin
 Gift of George G. Frelinghuysen, 1969-112.13

Most scrimshaw was carved from whale teeth or bone and decorated by sailors. This rare example is etched on dried baleen, the flexible, fibrous keratin plates that some whale species use to filter small krill from seawater. The stark and violent imagery may be autobiographical, recording the perilous realities of the 19th-century whaling industry. Hunters pursued these immense marine mammals for the oil rendered from their blubber, a valuable source of lighting fuel.



21

Unidentified maker

21 **Tinkle**, 1883

Oil on academy board

Museum purchase, acquired from Maxim Karolik, 1957-690.16

Tinkle has logged more television time than any other object in Shelburne Museum's collection: prints of the painting have been featured in several nationwide cat food commercials. While the identity of the person who commissioned this portrait remains a mystery, we know the sitter's name is Tinkle because it is inscribed on the back of the picture, along with "born February 1881." Presumably, the cat earned its name from the two brass bells dangling from its red ribbon collar, which made a gentle sound as the feline roamed the house.



22

Mark McNair (Craddockville, Virginia, b. 1950–)

22 **American Egret Stick-up Decorative Decoy, 1993**

Carved and painted wood

Gift of an Anonymous Donor, From the Stavis Collection, 2009-19.3

Contemporary carver Mark McNair based this decorative “stick-up” decoy, with its detachable neck and head, on historic working decoys fashioned as cranes, egrets, and herons on view in Dorset House. Known as confidence birds, egret decoys were added to hunting rigs to suggest a tranquil, biodiverse marsh, signaling safety to migrating waterfowl and drawing them within gunning range. Ironically, egrets themselves were not hunted for food but were driven to the brink of extinction for their plumes, prized for fashionable women’s hats. Around 1900, egret feathers commanded as much as \$80 an ounce, reportedly worth more than gold.



23

Unidentified maker (Falmouth, Jamaica)

23 **Sea Turtle Decoy, 20th century**

Carved and painted wood and metal

Gift of Edward Durell, 1963-46.1



24

Black, Starr & Frost (New York, New York, est. 1810)

24 **Camp-Fire Club Chowder Pot, 1911**

Copper, cast in bronze

Gift of Sarah McLean, 1979-21

Commissioned in 1911 by the Camp-Fire Club of America, this chowder pot is a symbol of conviviality and sustenance. Established in 1897, the Club championed adventure, outdoor fellowship, and wildlife preservation. Members included industrialists, politicians, artists, and noted sportsmen, all united by a shared devotion to hunting, fishing, exploration, and conservation. Cast in high relief, the vessel's rounded body is encircled by dancing bears, emblems of power, clasping pine boughs signifying memory. Two wolf heads project from either side, serving as supports for the bail handle and representing strength. The cauldron rests on feet formed as mountain goats, surefooted symbols of sport.



What do we reflect on when we consider the idea of “home”? It can be past, present, or future: the place where we grew up, currently reside, or see ourselves as part of a longer historical trajectory. A home is often populated by things that bring comfort and help us feel safe and secure. Every home has a story, a scent, and a collection of textures.

INTERIOR LIVES

Interior Lives explores a range of objects from Shelburne Museum’s collection as they relate to ideas of place, space, warmth, comfort, fashion, and narrative. These items include bed rugs, quilts, and decorative yet functional parlor stoves. Paintings by Severin Roesen and Edward Lamson Henry remind us that home can be filled with constellations of objects from around the globe, linking us to cultures and traditions far from our places of origin. We also witness exquisite miniature models of domestic rooms and artfully carved and veneered furniture, reminding us that home is often much more than the sum of its parts.



25

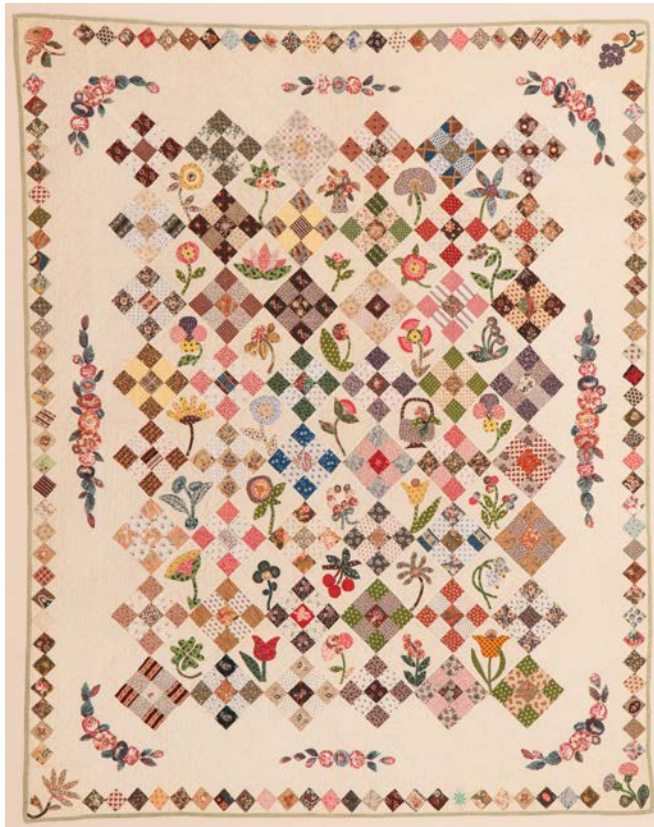
Edward Lamson Henry (American, 1841–1919)

25 **A Lover of Old China**, 1880

Oil on academy board

Museum purchase, 1959-274

While studying at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, American painter Edward Lamson Henry befriended William Kulp, a prominent Philadelphia antiquarian and preservationist. Kulp instilled in Henry an enthusiastic passion for art and antiques. Henry's pictures of interiors, such as **A Lover of Old China**, convey a reverence for the past, embodied in beautiful and delicately rendered domestic furnishings.



26 Florence Peto (Tenafly, New Jersey, 1880–1970)
Calico Garden, 1951

Cotton

Museum purchase, 1952-548

Originally collecting and researching quilts as a hobby, Florence Peto soon developed this interest into a professional pursuit. She helped Shelburne Museum founder Electra Havemeyer Webb acquire and catalogue many quilts in the collection. She lectured to quilt groups, wrote magazine articles, and published two books on the subject. Peto also made bedcovers, including this crib-size quilt. It was created with a variety of historic 18th- and 19th-century fabrics collected by Peto: hand-blocked and copperplate prints, chintzes, and other English and French cottons.



27

Green Mountain Iron Company (Brandon, Vermont, 1810–55)

27 **Parlor Stove, ca. 1840–50**

Cast iron

Gift of David Wells, 1979-37

Vermont's timber industry fostered and fed the development of new technologies, from the steam train to the parlor stove. With the arrival of the railroad in the first half of the century, consumers quickly depleted the state's old growth forests. The Green Mountain Iron Company, formed at Forestdale Ironworks in Brandon, Vermont, was largely devoted to the manufacture of cast iron parlor stoves. More compact than stoves used for cooking, parlor stoves warmed homes using wood or coal more efficiently than traditional open fireplaces.



28

Vose & Company (Albany, New York, 1845–57)

28 **Parlor Stove, 1854**

Cast iron

Museum purchase, 1997-34



Mary Bishop Comstock
(Shelburne, Vermont, 1744–1828)

29 **Hooked Flower Vase Bed Rug, 1810**

Wool

Gift of Mrs. Henry Tracy, 1952-607

Shelburne resident Mary Comstock made this rug when she was 66 years old in 1810. By this time, bed rugs were considered old fashioned. While the neoclassical floral motif of this textile is typical of the early 19th century, its enormous scale is not. Using a hand-woven plaid twill blanket as ground material, she embroidered its surface in a looped running stitch with handspun wool yarns. She boldly identified herself at the top of the work with the words, “Mary Comstock’s Rug, Jan 30 1810.”



30

Unidentified maker (Connecticut)

30 **Hooked Coxcomb Floral Bed Rug, 1807**

Wool

Museum purchase, 1952-588

Found in Hartford, Connecticut, this bed rug has the initials "E L" and the date "1807" worked into the top border design, which may reference a maker and the year this piece was completed. Used as a heavy coverlet on top of a bed during the coldest months of a New England winter, this hooked rug represents a significant investment in materials. The large vase of flowers, along with accompanying floral motifs, might have been found on objects imported for use in colonial homes, including bed hangings, ceramics, curtains, and more.

Attributed to John Clark Dana
(Woodstock, Vermont, 1779–1813) alone or in
partnership with Israel Huntington
(Woodstock, Vermont, 1781–after 1865)

31 **Sideboard, 1804–13**

Birch, mahogany and maple veneers, eastern white
pine, and brass

Courtesy of the Woodstock History Center, Woodstock,
Vermont, 2026-7



Based on period advertisements and three surviving
examples, we believe John Dana specialized in making
sash-cornered, serpentine and ogee sideboards. These
enormous objects offered a variety of storage options,
including vertical drawers for bottles. Despite his short
career, Dana's estate was significant and included a
“dwelling house and shop” valued at \$1,500. The latter
contained a large quantity of mahogany, cherry, and
basswood plank; numerous sets of furniture hardware; and
several pieces of unfinished work, including a sideboard
valued at \$45.



32

Severin Roesen (American, b. Germany 1816–ca.1872)

32 **Ecstatic Fruit**, 1852

Oil on canvas

Museum Purchase, acquired from Richard Gipson, 1958-324

Narcissa Niblack Thorne
(Chicago, Illinois, 1882–1966)

33 **Thorne Room, 1930–66**

Mixed media

Gift of William C. Ellis, 2024-6



33

Narcissa Niblack Thorne designed and handcrafted this miniature room as a gift for her nephew, William “Bill” Corson Ellis (1932–2018), a Vermont resident. Thorne is celebrated for her meticulously detailed period interiors, now housed in major museums across the country. Created during the Great Depression, her rooms were constructed with the assistance of skilled artisans and exhibited to widespread public acclaim.

Painted a soft pastel green, the study contains built-in bookshelves, tall windows, and an ornate fireplace. Appointed with finely crafted miniature furnishings in English styles, it also includes porcelain figures, an ormolu clock, and a convivial cocktail tray.



Human beings inevitably grapple with mortality. How will we know if we have lived a good life? Will those we love remember us when we are gone? What lies on the other side? **After Life** explores these inquiries through a selection of works that commemorate death or perhaps life after death.

AFTER LIFE

Death disrupts social networks, leaving those who remain to process the associated feelings of sadness and loss, sometimes by creating objects, rituals, customs, and traditions. Grief, remembrance, and the afterlife can be expressed in memorials—from the permanence of gravestones to the ephemerality of silk samplers. Paintings often preserve the legacy of a loved one, such as John F. Peto's trompe l'oeil memorial plaque dedicated to his father. Likewise, portraits, including those of George and Martha Washington by William Matthew Prior, document important figures in our history. Others, such as the Millerite banner, imagine realms that are not visible in this world.



Unidentified maker

34 **Father Time**, 19th century

Iron

Museum purchase, 1951, acquired from
the Elie Nadelman Collection, 1961-1.322



35

Unidentified maker

35 **Millerite Banner**, ca. 1840s

Ink and paint on cotton

Museum purchase, 1993-3

William Miller (1782–1849) was the leader of a religious movement that believed in racial and gender equality and considered slavery a sin. Miller's theories also posited that the world would end in 1843, and followers were urged to lead virtuous lives to assure them a prompt ascent into heaven. This banner, filled with ominous portents, was probably used by Millerites or later by Adventists in Maine or New England during the first quarter of the 19th century. These religious groups based their prediction of the world's demise on clues found in the Bible, mainly from Daniel and Revelation.



36



36

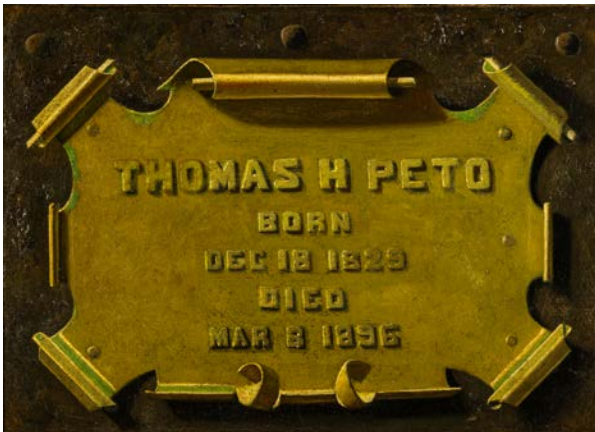
William Matthew Prior (American, 1806–73)
36 **George Washington and Martha Washington,**
1840–60s

Églomisé

Gift of Alexandra Jenkins, In Loving Memory of Mary-Seymour Pynchon Jenkins Wastcoat and Mary Hyde Jenkins Ryan, 2024-11.1 & 2

Three years before his death in 1799, George Washington sat for his last formal portrait with American artist Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828). The painting, now known as “The Athenaeum” portrait, was never completed but this likeness of Washington became extremely popular. Stuart painted 130 copies of the work, each priced at \$100.

William Matthew Prior painted many églomisé pairs of portraits of George and Martha Washington, beginning in the 1840s. Created using a technique where designs are painted and gilded on the back side of glass, these works were frequently sold to middle-class consumers who wanted to decorate their homes with historically significant objects.



37

John Frederick Peto (American 1854–1907)

37 **Memento Mori for Thomas Peto, 1904**

Oil on canvas

Gift of Stuart P. Feld and Sue K. Feld, in memory of John Wilmerding, our devoted friend for more than a half century, 2025-15.1

John Frederick Peto is best remembered for his illusionistic still life paintings, often featuring everyday objects such as bits of paper, keys, books, and more. Inspired by 17th-century Dutch “memento mori” traditions, these pictures often included visual reminders that life is fleeting and death comes for everyone. **Memento Mori for Thomas Peto** is a trompe l’oeil rendering of a brass memorial plaque that commemorates the painter’s father. Interestingly, the composition was executed eight years after Thomas’s death and just three years before the artist’s own passing, perhaps suggesting a longer continuum of generational bereavement and remembrance.



38

Unidentified maker (Vermont)

38 **Memorial Sampler for John Washington and Lydia Fuller**, after 1810

Silk and ink on silk ground

Collection of the Shelburne Museum, 1958-32.1



39

Unidentified maker

39 **Cat's Gravestone**, late 19th century

Carved soapstone

Museum purchase, 1951, acquired from Edith Halpert, The Downtown Gallery, 1961-1.171

While dog collars from the late 19th century survive in some quantity, feline accessories are scarcer, likely because these pets tend to leave home when dying. This rare memorial to a long-haired cat was discovered in Bristol, New Hampshire. While the cat's name has been lost to time, its smooth, silky fur stands in contrasting relief against a rough-hewn background. These textures were likely rendered using simple hand tools like rasps, files, and chisels to carve the soft, grey soapstone base.



- Betty J. Emery (Shelburne, Vermont, 1926–2016)
- 40 **Gravestone for Unidentified Subject, Rockingham, Vermont, 20th century**
- 41 **Gravestone for Unidentified Subject, Woodstock, Vermont, 20th century**
- 42 **Gravestone for Susanna Davis, Rockingham, Vermont, 1720–70, 20th century**
- 43 **Gravestone for John Sevey, Wiscasset, Maine, 1742–96, 1969**
- 44 **Gravestone for Jasper Tucker, Randolph, Vermont, 1785–1801, 20th century**

Graphite on paper

Gift of Betty J. Emery, 1989-13 & 1989-27

These gravestone rubbings were made by Shelburne resident Betty J. Emery (1926–2016). Born and raised in Chittenden country, Mrs. Emery was the Williston Fire Department's first dispatcher and a volunteer at Fletcher Allen Hospital and Meals on Wheels. She had seven children, eight grandchildren, and many great grandchildren and cousins. Her obituary noted that she found joy in gardening, baking, traveling, and spending time with friends and that she was predeceased by two husbands and one of her children. Perhaps these deaths inspired Betty to pursue making rubbings of the gravestones of fellow New Englanders long since passed.



When Electra Havemeyer Webb was laying the foundation for the Museum in 1947, she was offered a remarkable group of historic horse-drawn vehicles assembled by her spouse's family. She jumped at the chance, purchasing acreage in Shelburne and constructing a new building for the storage and display of these objects. The Museum's carriage collection now includes practically every type of horse-drawn vehicle used in New England from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries.

LIFE ON THE GO

Inspired by this formative acquisition, **Life on the Go** features selections that relate to the wide variety of transportation modes that have defined the American experience. From a wind-powered clipper ship weathervane to the steam-powered **Metamora** and **Boston**, we see how waterborne vessels reveal shifts in industrial technologies that reshaped the ways Americans and their belongings traveled over the nation's rivers and coasts. The railroad, so important to the development of New England's industries in the 19th century, is also represented by a locomotive weathervane and a toy train. Together, these objects chart important changes in consumer preferences and technology that continue to shape lives today.



45

Unidentified maker (Rhode Island)

45 **Locomotive Weathervane, 1850–75**

Sheet zinc, brass, iron, and paint

Museum purchase, 1950, acquired from Edith Halpert, The
Downtown Gallery, 1961-1.130

Weathervanes have evolved from early meteorological instruments to representational signage. Today they are commonly found as rooftop decorations. Carved out of wood or fashioned from cast or hammered metals, weathervanes have been made by amateurs, artisans, and manufacturers in an almost infinite variety of shapes and subject matter, ranging from religious symbols and trade tools to mythological creatures and domesticated farm animals. Found in Rhode Island by famed folk art dealer Edith Halpert, this weathervane was purchased by Mrs. Webb for the museum in 1950. Its distinctive design suggests a train rolling across the landscape beneath a stylized sun.



46

Frank Tilton

(North Thetford, Vermont, 1888–1957)

46 **Train Engine, Coal, Passenger Car, and Caboose,**
ca. 1953

Carved and painted wood and metal

Museum purchase, 2024-1.4a-d

Strong enough for a child to climb aboard, this toy train was designed and built by Fred Tilton, founder of Grandad's Toy Shop in North Thetford, Vermont. A retired Ohio paint salesman, Tilton turned to toy making after a heart attack, beginning with simple wooden playthings for his grandchildren. This pastime grew into a successful roadside enterprise and mail order business (1949 to 1955) known for its trains and construction vehicles, advertised as "sturdy as the hills of Vermont." A second heart attack forced Tilton to close the shop; he died in 1957, leaving behind these heartfelt labors of love.



47

L. W. Cushing and Sons
(Waltham, Massachusetts, active 1867–1933)

47 **Clipper Ship Weathervane**, 1870–1920

Copper

Museum purchase, 1990-5

James Bard (American, 1815–97)

48 **Paddle Steamboat Metamora**, 1859

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase, acquired from Harry Shaw Newman,
The Old Print Shop, 1951-391.40

Born in New York City, James Bard and his brother John lived in an era of booming ship construction and made their living by painting portraits of commercial vessels. The brothers completed nearly 4,000 commissions for engine builders, ship captains, merchants, and other maritime entrepreneurs during the 19th century. These delightful canvases were valued for their accurate representations and celebrated as national symbols of progress, achievement, and business acumen. Bard paintings found favor with collectors of American folk art in the 20th century—including Electra Havemeyer Webb, who, at one time, owned seven examples of their work.



48



49

Alonzo A. Pratt, Sr.

(North Scituate, Massachusetts, 1844–1921)

49 **Pratt's Express Children's Wagon, 1890**

Wood, paint, and metal

Gift of Mrs. Carleton Nowell and Orison S. Pratt, 1969-74

Related to the Shelburne's collection of historic carriages, this child-size wagon exemplifies how Mrs. Webb animated her museum by exhibiting similar objects of varying scale. Made by Alonzo A Pratt Sr., a blacksmith from Scituate, Massachusetts, to entertain his son, this pull toy is an exact replica of a full-size buckboard wagon. Pratt not only constructed and painted the wagon's wood body and wheels, but he also hand forged the vehicle's undercarriage, axels, and wheel rims.



Unidentified maker
50 **Paddlewheel Steamer Boston**, late 19th or
early 20th century
Carved and painted wood
Museum purchase, acquired from John Kenneth Byard,
Silvermine Antiques, 1950-291



51

Tiffany & Co. (New York, New York, est. 1837)

51 **Wagner Palace Car Co. Loving Cup, 1899**

Sterling silver with gilded interior

Gift of William Seward Webb, Jr., 1952-300.2

William Seward Webb (1851–1926), father-in-law of museum founder Electa Havemeyer Webb, was the president of the Wagner Palace Car Company. Upon his retirement in December 1899, he was gifted this extraordinary 25-pint, three-handled silver cup by the 4,000 employees of the company. Custom made by Tiffany & Co., the trophy's three sides feature a portrait of Webb; the interior of a Wagner passenger sleeping car; and the parlor lounge from Webb's private car, the Ellsmere. The cup's handles feature winged wheels, the symbol of the Wagner Company. Encircling the base is a train pulled by an engine labeled Ne-Ha-Se-Ne, the name of Webb's 200,000-acre private park in New York's Adirondack Mountains.



Nineteenth-century American trade signs advertised a variety of everyday goods and services provided by craftspeople, merchants, innkeepers, tavern owners, and more. Although some craftspeople made their own signs, the majority were created by trained professionals. These oversized, often three-dimensional signs were designed to be easily recognizable to a broad public, including those with limited reading abilities and non-English speakers. Some signs took the shape of the objects that the businesses made, distributed, or repaired.

SIGNS OF LIFE

The selections on view in **Signs of Life** represent a fraction of Shelburne Museum's robust collection of nearly 175 trade signs. Their subjects run the gamut of popular goods, from upscale jewelry and utilitarian locks and keys to such in-demand services as carpentry, hospitality, and healthcare. Founder Electra Havemeyer Webb appreciated these signs as aesthetically pleasing folk art objects and as compelling precursors of 20th-century American modernism and contemporary design. Additional examples can be seen on display at Stagecoach Inn.



52

- Unidentified maker
52 **C. C. Cady Tavern Sign**, 19th century
Painted wood
Museum purchase, 27.FT-55



53

- Unidentified maker
53 **G. W. Nichols Sign Painter's Trade Sign**, ca. 1892
Painted glass and wood
Acquired from Hobart Erwin, 27.FT-100

Fine art meets advertising in this extraordinary trade sign highlighting the services offered by G. W. Nichols in Rutland, Vermont. Nichols specialized in reverse painting on glass. Known as *églomisé*, this technique involved the application of paint and gilding to the interior of a piece of glass to produce a mirrored finish when viewed from the front. This sign's text employs a range of legible, decorative typefaces. At the center, an illusionistic window features a domestic interior scene with a grain-painted door and an equestrian portrait. The inclusion of a painter's palette and brush cleverly reminds passersby that Nichols was an artist.



54

Unidentified maker (Morrisville, Vermont)

54 **Boston Rocker, 1849**

Wood and paint

Museum purchase, 1957-127

Electra Havemeyer Webb purchased this heroic-sized chair from a Vermont antiques dealer in 1957. It originally graced a glazed cupola on top of a chair factory in Morrisville, Vermont, and served as a trade sign to advertise the firm's wares in the last half of the 19th century. Mrs. Webb was fond of the rocker, often posing family and friends, including the actress and comedienne ZaSu Pitts (1894–1963), in its oversized seat for humorous photographs.



55

Unidentified maker (Connecticut)

55 **Tavern Sign Whirligig, 1870**

Carved and painted wood and metal

Gift in Memory of William & Mildred Granatir, 2018-11

Like weathervanes, whirligigs were designed to move in the wind. Equipped with fans, pinwheels, and turbines, these whimsical kinetic sculptures were animated by gentle breezes, providing bursts of entertainment. Much remains unknown about this small figure, but records indicate it was once used as a decoration at Weisheit's Half Way House, a celebrated restaurant formerly located in Stamford, Connecticut. While it is not known when the inscriptions on the figure's paddles were added, they reflect outdated ideas about gender that were once common in establishments that primarily catered to male clientele.



56

Unidentified maker

56 **Goddard and Pierce Trade Sign**, 19th century

Painted wood

Collection of Shelburne Museum, 27.FT-170

57



58



59



60



61



Dixon Ticonderoga Company
(American, est. ca. 1873)

- 57 **1388-2 Soft Pencil Trade Sign**, late 19th–early 20th century
Carved and painted wood
Gift of John Wilmerding, 2013-20.45

Venus Pen & Pencil Corp. (New Jersey, est. 1860)

- 58 **Ball PEN cil Trade Sign**, after 1956
Carved and painted wood
Gift of John Wilmerding, 2013-20.44

Richard Best Pencil Company
(Irvington, New Jersey, est. 1890)

- 59 **Pencil Trade Sign**, late 19th–early 20th century
Carved and painted wood, metal, and rubber
Gift of John Wilmerding, 2013-20.41

Unidentified maker

- 60 **Pencil Trade Sign**, date unknown
Painted metal
Gift of John Wilmerding, 2013-20.48

Faber-Castwell (German, est. 1761)

- 61 **Pencil Trade Sign**, date unknown
Carved and painted wood
Gift of John Wilmerding, 2013-20.40

Giant pencil trade signs were part of the tradition of using an oversized replica of an everyday object to advertise a business. These outstanding examples, donated to Shelburne Museum in 2013 by distinguished art historian and collector John Wilmerding, were likely created for display at stationary shops, school supply stores, architects' offices, or educational services.



62

Unidentified maker
62 **Shoe Trade Sign, 1870**
Copper
Museum purchase, 27.FT-113



Attributed to Thomas Brooks (American, 1828–95)

63 **Kilted Scotsman**, ca. 1878

Carved and painted wood

Museum purchase, 1956, 1961-1.216

“Cigar-store” or “tobacconist” sculptures were originally known as “show figures” in the 19th century. This Scotsman is attributed to Thomas Brooks, a leading sign carver who worked in New York City and Chicago. While most show figures that advertised tobacco shops usually carry a bundle of cigars or a pipe, this one holds a horn-shaped snuff mull. An aromatic powder made of finely ground tobacco leaves mixed with oils and perfumes, snuff was inhaled through the nostrils. Originally believed to have medicinal benefits, “sneeshin” or taking snuff was popularized in Scotland in the late 16th century.



Unidentified maker

64 **Farm Supply Store Trade Sign**, 19th century

Metal and wood

Museum purchase, 1963-178



65

Unidentified maker

65 **Mortar and Pestle Jeweled Apothecary
Trade Sign**, late 19th century

Copper, glass, and gold

Museum purchase, 1947, 1961-1.40

Trade signs function as both practical and witty sculptural objects. Intended to hang over shop or office doors to advertise the merchandise or professional services offered within, they needed to be legible from a distance and up close. The meaning of this large, electrified mortar and pestle would have been unmistakable to a passerby: a compounding pharmacy is open for business. Multicolored, faceted, jewel-like lights were also used to catch the attention of potential customers.



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