

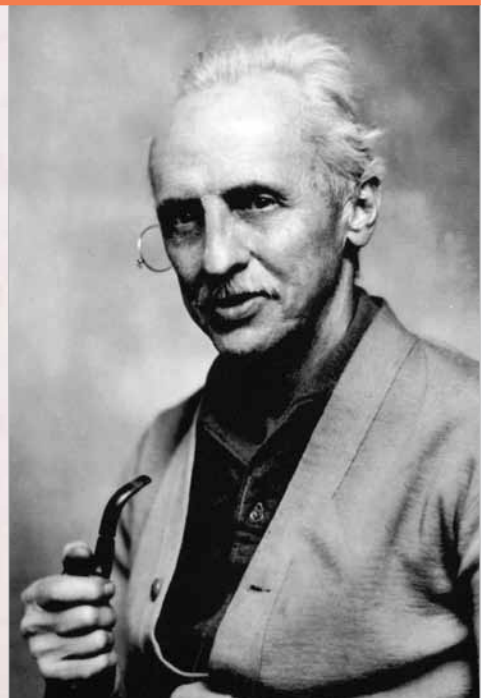


News from the

CONNECTICUT STATE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY & CONNECTICUT ARCHAEOLOGY CENTER

University of Connecticut • College of Liberal Arts & Sciences • Spring 2012

Vesper Sparrows, *Pooecetes gramineus*



TO PAINT EVERY BIRD

In 1988 the University of Connecticut became home to an impressive collection of paintings of birds by the Connecticut artist, Rex Brasher. The State of Connecticut originally purchased his entire body of work for \$74,000 in 1941. For years the paintings were displayed in Harkness Manor at the Harkness Memorial State Park, until funding decreases made that continued practice impractical. Through the efforts of the Museum of Natural History's founding director, Carl Rettenmeyer, ownership of the paintings was transferred from the Department of Environmental Protection to the University of Connecticut. Here, in a partnership between the Museum and the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, Archives and Special Collections, the collection has been inventoried and housed in an environment designed to preserve this unique body of work for generations to come.

In an effort to bring Brasher's work to a broader audience, the Museum of Natural History and the Dodd Center, in collaboration with The Rex Brasher Association, Inc. of Kent, CT, recently selected 14 works for reproduction and inclusion in an exhibit that is currently on display in the Museum's gallery. Our goal is to eventually assemble these prints into a traveling exhibit that will be available to venues around the State.

We encourage you to come to the Museum to see examples of Rex Brasher's unique vision for yourself. His lifelong goal, one that had never been accomplished before, was to paint every bird in North America from a living specimen. His obsession became a lifelong adventure.

The Life's Work of Rex Brasher

Rex Brasher was born in 1869 in Brooklyn, New York, into an old Huguenot family. His grandfather Philip was a member of the New York State Legislature and was reputed to have helped obtain a city charter for Brooklyn. Rex became passionate about birds at an early age, due to the influence of his father, an avid naturalist and bird taxidermist. In his youth he had heard

many times how disappointed his father had been after an unsuccessful attempt to visit John James Audubon to discuss birds. In 1878, at the age of eight,

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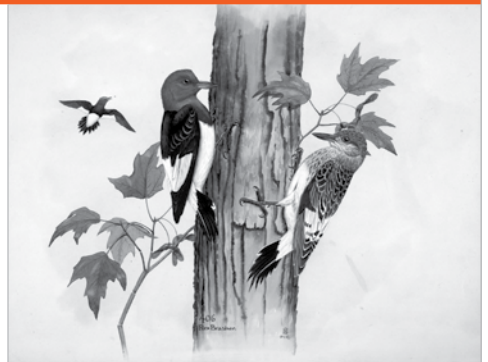
Faculty Profile: Virge Kask

News from the State Archaeologist

Brasher determined to paint all the birds of North America from life—and better than Audubon. He started painting birds seriously around age 16, but none of his early paintings survived.

His determination to study birds in their natural surroundings took Brasher to all corners of North

walked the countryside for months at a time, stopping along the way to mail home his sketches and notes. Between trips he painted in an apartment in New York. His determination to make his bird paintings as lifelike as possible led him twice to destroy all of the paintings he had done, a total of at least 700 works. In 1907, while



Come visit the Museum to see examples of Rex Brasher's unique vision for yourself.

Prints from the Rex Brasher Collection

April 2 through July 31, 2012

Connecticut State
Museum of Natural History
University of Connecticut
2019 Hillside Rd.
Storrs, CT 06269

The Museum is open Monday through Friday, 10AM to 4PM. Free to the public.

For more information call 860-684-4460.

Barn Owls, *Tyto alba*



America. He financed his first trip, down the east coast from Maine to Florida, by working as a photoengraver. Most of his other trips were financed by betting on horse races. One of his most successful bets netted \$10,000 and financed an extensive trip to the Midwest. At one point, after losing most of his money on a bad bet, he took a job on a fishing boat sailing out of Boston and Portland. He was then able to earn a living while studying and sketching sea birds. During his years of artistic work he often found it necessary to make financial ends meet by doing farm work, work with the town road crew, carpentry and house building, including one fine stone house in Kent which is still used as a residence.

On his trips to the West, Midwest and Gulf Coast, Brasher traveled by train and on foot. Sometimes he

studying the bird skin collection of the American Museum of Natural History, Brasher met the famous bird painter, Louis Agassiz Fuertes, who became his good friend and a major influence on his artistic techniques. It was during this time that he learned new techniques for painting feathers that satisfied his artistic standards.

In 1911, Rex spent a \$700 commission received for illustrating a book to purchase a small farmhouse on 150-acres near Kent, Connecticut. He called his homestead Chickadee Valley. It was there in 1924, after 47 years of work, that he finished his task. His paintings included 1,200 species and sub-species of birds listed on the American Ornithologists Union (AOU) Checklist of North American Birds. The numbers on many of the paintings are the AOU numbers assigned to the

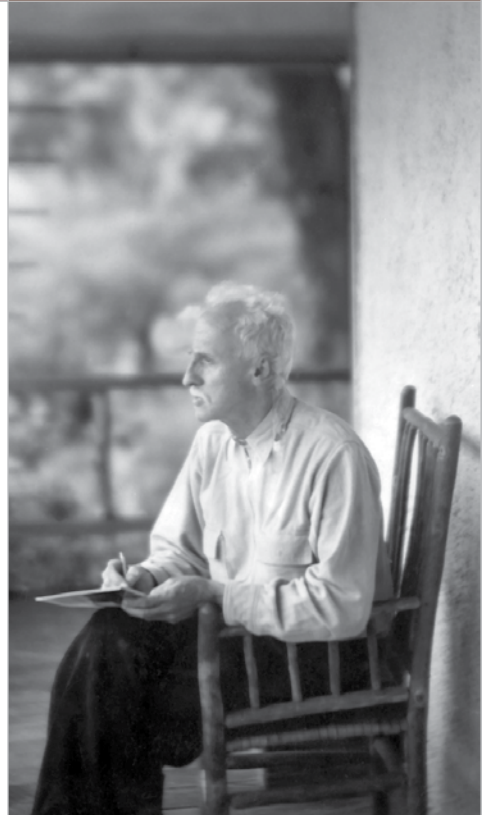


Photo courtesy of the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center.

birds. Brasher's paintings included more than twice as many birds as Audubon's, who painted 489. Brasher worked from direct observation and portrayed the birds in natural activities and habitats, including associated plants whenever possible. He considered that his 874 paintings, which were placed on exhibition

hand-colored using stencils and an airbrush. The text was written by his niece Marie and printed by the New Milford Times. The covers were made by a bookbinder on Long Island, and the volumes were assembled in a renovated barn in Chickadee Valley. In all, 100 sets of 12 volumes of *Birds and Trees of North America* were



in 1932 at the English Book Shop in New York City, represented a completion of the work begun by John James Audubon.

In 1935, Brasher offered his paintings to the State of Connecticut, providing that a suitable repository could be found for them. Three years later he took the pictures back after various attempts to raise funds for a museum in which to display them had failed. The paintings were then sent to Washington, D. C. to be exhibited as *Birds and Trees of North America* in the Explorers Hall of the National Geographic Society.

Brasher wanted to see his paintings published but discovered that it would be far too expensive to print all 874 of his paintings in color. To solve this problem he had the Meriden Gravure Company make black and white reproductions, which he then

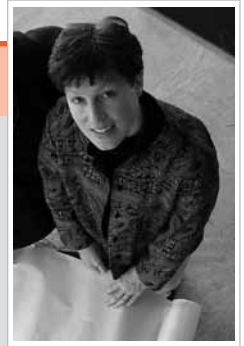
produced, including almost 90,000 hand colored reproductions.

Rex Brasher worked until two years before his death, when his eyesight failed him. He died in 1960, in Gaylordsville, CT, at the age of 91. His monumental achievement has earned him a permanent place among noted American wildlife illustrators. It is unlikely that anyone will ever again attempt to repeat such a comprehensive series of paintings.

This article was written by and reprinted with permission of staff of the Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center.

FROM OUR

DIRECTOR



Dear Friends,

It seems fitting that the Rex Brasher collection should be connected to the Connecticut State Museum of Natural History. Rex

was a man of life-long obsessions. He worked tirelessly, through thick and thin, to paint every bird in North America from a living specimen, a feat that had never been accomplished before. Along the way he had both great luck and difficult setbacks, but never did he relent on his all-consuming passion to understand, appreciate and preserve the natural world through his art. We get that.

Throughout the Museum's lifespan we too have worked through both green pastures and dry spells. We've overseen two major renovations to our building, expanded our exhibit and programming space, mourned the loss of our Founding Director, Carl Rettenmeyer, and are now struggling through staffing setbacks. And like Rex Brasher, one of the lessons we've learned along the way is that when the goal is important enough you just keep moving ahead, doing what you can with what you have.

So this may not be the year we finally build the long-awaited collections facility or expand our permanent exhibits, but it will be a year when we do as much as we can with the resources available. The exhibit of fourteen Rex Brasher prints we've assembled at the Museum is just one example. By using existing funds, and partnering with the Dodd Center and the Rex Brasher Association in Kent, we are able to bring the work of this fascinating man to a broader public. Our long-term goal is to package the prints into a traveling exhibit that will make Rex's work available to communities across the state. But for now we invite you to simply visit us in the coming months as we celebrate the work of Rex Brasher and the power of persistence.

Leanne Harty, Director

THE Art OF SCIENCE



Archaeopteryx
A fine example of how the artist is able to interpret scientific information in order to envision species never directly observed by humans.

Humans have always tried to capture and understand the aesthetic and spiritual pull of the natural world through art. From the Chauvet cave paintings to Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony, this effort courses through the human experience. But with the dawn of the scientific age, the disciplines of the artist began to offer new potential as tools for observing, recording and communicating the physical world around us. Both scientists and artists recognized that the human imagination was capable of capturing realities beyond the scope of even our most powerful microscopes and telescopes. From that time on the skills of the artist have been integral to the progress of science. In the relatively short history of Southern New England, we have produced many such creative people whose work straddles the line between these two disciplines. This article introduces you to three.

Roger Tory Peterson (1908-1996)

Roger Tory Peterson was trained as a fine artist and self-taught as an ornithologist. His passion for birds was sparked as an eleven-year-old exploring the fields and forests near his childhood home in Jamestown, New York. He came upon a flicker asleep in a tree, and thinking it dead, he poked the bird, which suddenly burst to life and flew off. The experience captivated him, proving both powerful and mysterious, and awakened in him a lifelong fascination for birds and nature. Years later he recalled the moment: "I poked it and it bust into color, with the red on the back of its head and the gold on its wings. It was the contrast, you see, between something I thought was dead and something so alive. Like a resurrection. I came to believe birds are the most vivid reflection of life."

At the time ornithology was almost exclusively the domain of academics. Identification guides were largely technical and drawn from study skins in museums. As he continued to explore the natural world, Roger Tory Peterson began to envision a new kind of guide, one oriented towards identification in the field. Combining his developing expertise as an illustrator and his field experience, this guide would focus on broader patterns, such as a bird's shape, silhouette in flight, and other primary identifying characteristics that could be recognized from a distance or while the bird was on the move.

At the age of 25, while teaching at a private boys school outside of Boston, he wrote and illustrated just such a book, titled *A Field Guide to the Birds*. Four publishers rejected it until 1934 when Houghton Mifflin took a chance and printed a mere 2,000 copies. They sold out within a week. Since that original run, subsequent editions have been continuously in print, and have now sold over seven million copies.

What Roger Tory Peterson's guide unleashed was a fascination and curiosity about nature that had been largely untapped within the general public. He gave tools that once belonged only to academics to ordinary people. "My main contribution has been along the lines of putting things in people's hands so they could learn of the natural world," Mr. Peterson said. Growing awareness of the environment transformed into citizen action. Today there are 53 volumes in the Peterson Field Guide Series, and Roger Tory Peterson is recognized as one of the founders of the modern environmental movement.

But there was always a tension between Roger Tory Peterson's desire to create fine art and the more technical illustrations required of his field guides. He claimed the field guide illustrations had become a "drudgery" that he had been forced into "because I am known for the field guides and everybody wants more and more." Towards the end of his life his real passion had become his large paintings of birds in their natural settings, which were filled with rich details and placed in evocative settings.

He died at the age of 88 at his home in Old Lyme, Connecticut.



Edwin Way Teale (1899-1980)

Edwin Way Teale is one of most influential nature writers in America. He published 32 books, including his popular, *A Naturalist Buys an Old Farm*, which gently chronicles life on his 130-acre wooded estate in Hampton, Connecticut. Lesser known is that Edwin Way Teale was also a highly accomplished photographer. The pen and the camera worked together as his chosen tools for exploring and recording the uniquely interconnected world he observed around him.

Much of his early nature writing focused on insects. His writings and close-up photographs opened up this world for his readers. "Even the commonest of insects," he wrote, "once we enter the Alice-in-Wonderland realm they inhabit, become engrossingly interesting. Their ways, their surroundings, their food, their abilities are so foreign to our own that imagining ourselves in their places becomes an exciting adventure of the mind."

Over his lifetime he amassed a collection of over 25,000 negatives, and was a pioneer in many aspects of nature photography. He developed new techniques for creating close-up images of insects and other small creatures, and is believed to be the first photographer to chill live insects in order to slow them down for the camera.

Teale kept an unusually detailed record of his life and work. His papers are now housed at UConn's *Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, Archives and Special Collections*. They include field notes and drafts of his books, early childhood writings, professional writings, personal and professional correspondence, personal and family documents, scrapbooks, and memorabilia, as well as his photographs (prints, negatives, and transparencies). These materials represent an important primary source for understanding America's growing interest in natural history and the environment during a period of rapid urbanization.

"Photographs of nature may be many things," he wrote. "Some may be primarily artistic; some may be primarily scientific. In their simplest, most matter-of-fact form, they are merely 'catalogue' pictures of objects or creatures. The best in nature photography, however, records both the object and its setting. It arrests, in its normal surroundings, some form of life, portraying it in a characteristic moment of its existence. Such pictures possess emotional as well as intellectual impact... such pictures carry us on an adventure of discovery."



Photos courtesy of the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center.

Chlorion digger wasp sheltered by an iris leaf.

David Allen Sibley (1962 to Present)

David Allen Sibley is best known for writing and illustrating the Sibley Guides to Birds and Trees of North America. The son of Yale University ornithologist Fred Sibley, David Sibley spent many of his teenage years birding along the Connecticut coast. He is a largely self-taught illustrator, and was motivated to create his own series of field guides after finding that existing guides did not generally illustrate or describe the alternate or juvenile plumages of birds he was seeing in the field.

For David Sibley, illustration and ornithology go hand-in-hand. "Science and art have always gone together for me. The process of drawing is the best way to learn what something looks like, and drawing was an essential tool in my study of birds, as well as the best means of recording and conveying what I learned."

The long hours spent watching and recording birds have offered him their own unique rewards. "My greatest satisfaction in bird-watching comes from forming this network of knowledge, understanding the relationships of the species to each other and to all the different aspects of their environment. Ultimately, this understanding allows me to put observations into a context of larger patterns. And there's a strong sense of reassurance in all of the repeating patterns of nature."

Working primarily in opaque watercolors, he creates each painting by consulting an extensive collection of file folders, each filled with magazine clippings, photographs, ornithological research articles, and his own notes and sketches from many years in the field. Such attention to detail has not only produced some of the most beautiful and accurate paintings of North American birds, but also led to the discovery of many small details that now help birders distinguish one bird from another.

"I have learned to resist the temptation to 'overwork' a painting, and I think that a few rough edges and a mere suggestion of details does a better job of capturing the experience of seeing the bird in the wild."

"I write (and paint) with the simple goal of teaching people how to identify birds and trees, so that people can know the names of the species they are seeing. On a deeper level, I'm trying to represent, in a book, some of the larger patterns of the natural world, and to help readers see the big picture so that they might experience the same satisfaction that I feel in knowing more about the living things around us."



Boreal Owl, *Aegolius funereus*

VIRGE KASK

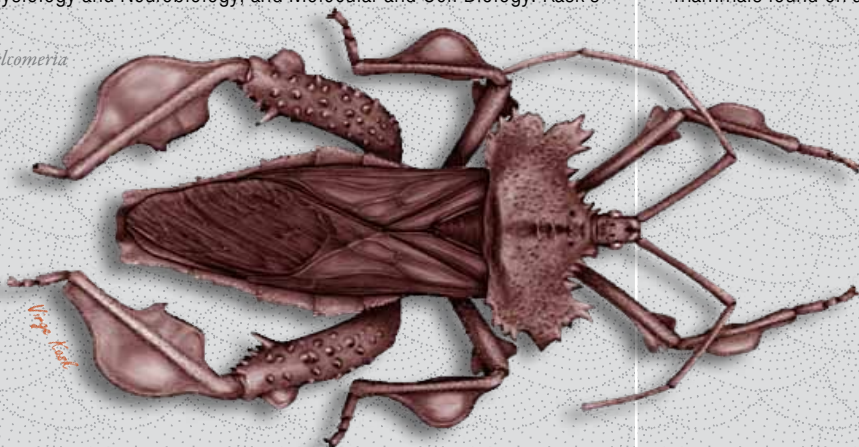
Virge Kask draws what she sees. Always an artist, her work has mapped and illustrated the natural world in Connecticut and beyond. As an undergraduate at UConn, she was an art major fascinated by earthworms and beetles until she saw an exhibit of biological illustrations and found her calling. She went to the Illustration office and met Molly Hubbard, then Scientific Illustrator, who became her advisor and mentor. Kask earned her degree in biology, as well as a degree in geography with an emphasis on cartography, a field she worked in for many years after graduation. She drew maps for the USDA, oceanographic maps, and civil engineering maps until she moved to North Carolina as an artist at Duke University's Medical Center. There she also developed a business as a freelance illustrator for scientific journals, children's books, and textbooks. In 1999 she got the chance to return to UConn as Scientific Illustrator, where she works out of Biology Central Services with research scientists in the biology departments to illustrate manuscripts and presentations. Her graphics clarify and enhance publications from Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Physiology and Neurobiology, and Molecular and Cell Biology. Kask's



images are precise, with clear, distinct lines and delicate shading, as they have to be. The work of a Scientific Illustrator depends on accuracy, readability, and the beauty of the rendering to communicate the details of specimens, such as tiny bryophytes, in various mediums such as pen and ink or colored pencil. The illustration must be scientifically accurate; a good drawing can enrich further understanding of the subject. Often, she works directly from specimens, such as the New Zealand Grass Cicada, which she drew for the cover of *Systematic Biology* using a box of specimens and a few photographs. Kask's work is idealized, rendering the flight of an arctic tern or a

feeding hummingbird with a clarity that a photograph can rarely match, paired with strong, vibrant colors. She often relies on her travel experiences to inform her representations, ranging from Central America to the Arctic, from which she drew inspiration for her work on interactive critical habitat posters. She is currently working on several projects including two children's science books: one focusing on marine species and another focusing on mammals found on a farm.

Helcomeria



Sculpture by Martha Walker

WHERE ART MEETS NATURE WHERE ART MEETS NATURE WHERE ART MEETS NATURE

Thread City Bridge, Willimantic- Late one night in 1754, when Willimantic was part of Windham, the town was filled with a strange noise described as "unearthly screams." As the area was isolated, people panicked, fearing an attack of Native Americans, Judgment Day, or worse. The Windham Historical Society recounts that in the morning, townspeople found thousands of dead and dying frogs strewn about a nearly dry pond nearby. The incident became known as The Windham Frog Fight of 1754, and the story spread throughout Connecticut. In 2001, Willimantic opened the Thread City Bridge, spanning the Willimantic River. Four spools of thread flank the bridge to commemorate the town's history as a thread manufacturer, and perched atop each spool are frog statues 11 feet tall, made by sculptor Leo Jensen of Connecticut.



Japanese Garden, Middletown- The Japanese Garden in Middletown is located at Wesleyan University's Mansfield Freeman Center for East Asian Studies. The garden is known as Shōyōan Teien, which translates to Shōyōan Garden. Designed by Steven Morrell, it was built in 1995 as a complement to nearby Shōyōan, a traditional style Japanese room used for teaching, tea ceremonies, and formal receptions. The garden is intended as a viewing garden, a uniquely Japanese concept, which encourages the visitor to sit, meditate, and contemplate the garden's elements. It is a "karesanui" garden, meaning dry landscape, with stone from local brownstone quarries. The features are meant to evoke the local landscape, including the Connecticut River and nearby hills, which are formed by raked gravel and carefully pruned foliage.

STATE ARCHAEOLOGIST

Many years ago we were involved in an archaeological excavation of a Pre-Contact Native American site when we encountered two large stone scrapers used to work hide. Of the two, the light brownish colored stone was jasper, quarried from eastern Pennsylvania and traded into the area through aboriginal networks along the Atlantic seaboard to Connecticut. As part of our work we took photographs during the excavation and in the laboratory. While the photographs were very helpful showing size and basic stone tool manufacturing techniques, neither the black and white nor color images clearly portrayed the detailed craftsmanship and skill that went into the work of sculpting out the tool. So we went to an archaeological illustrator who was tasked with bringing out details in the artifact that photographs could not achieve.

Photographs can bring out structures that have a single focal point, however when multiple focal points need highlighting, scientific illustration is the way to go. An obstacle



in archaeology is that most of our materials are broken, fragmented, and uneven. Photographs lack the focal depth needed when we share the comprehensive details of an artifact with our colleagues (and the public), details that can only be achieved through meticulous

illustration of the artifacts many surfaces. As one observer has remarked, “Scientific illustrators look differently at the world”. Their emphasis is on accuracy and utility—they may not be artists as we think of them—though their work can be exceedingly beautiful. They are not deliberately creating art, or something aesthetically pleasing. They are recording and communicating the aspects of the natural and cultural world, picking out details and sometimes seeing things we may not detect in our observations.

In archaeology, illustration is used in a variety of ways. In surveying, it is used to produce records of site layout and structures in the landscape. In artifact analyses, illustration is used to record objects allowing for further study and for publication. In each case, our interpretations and reconstructions are advanced by the use of illustration.

I distinctly remember watching the archaeological illustrator in the lab working on our stone scraper. With one eye he looked through the microscope, and with the other eye he followed his right hand as it recorded the details of wear patterns on the edge of the stone scraper. The completed illustration detailed minute scars, chips, and serrations of countless hides being scraped down before they became clothing. You could say that illustrator was telling the story of the artifact by bringing out the details important to its history. But more importantly, the illustration enhanced the story of the people who made and used the stone tool. Beautiful.

Nick Bellantoni, State Archaeologist

Kouros Sculpture Center, Ridgefield- The Kouros Sculpture Center is named after the Greek sculptures called kouros, depictions of the freestanding human body that indicate a developing interest with natural and lifelike design in archaic art. The Center is an outdoor gallery with both classical and contemporary sculptures intended to highlight art among nature. “Sculpture is everywhere – resplendent on open fields, tucked into intimate corners, under the boughs of nearby trees – and utilizes the space, the hourly changes of light and shadow, and the topography to interact with nature.” The Center is located in Ridgefield and open during the weekend, or by appointment.

through meticulous

WHERE ART MEETS NATURE WHERE ART MEETS NATURE WHERE ART MEETS NATURE



Connecticut Woodcarving, Bristol- This summer will be a busy one for Connecticut woodcarvers. The Connecticut Wood Carvers Annual Wood Carving Show & Sale will be on June 2nd, at the New England Carousel Museum in Bristol. The show will include woodcarving demonstrations, carving competitions at all skill levels, and a chance to buy supplies and tools both for beginners and the experienced. And on July 7th at the Olde Mistick Apple Orchard is the Olde Mistick Village Woodcarvers Day. Experienced woodcarvers from all over New England will display and sell their work, as well as compete in competitions open to all. Carvings will include an assortment of animals, chip carvings, relief carvings, folk art, and more.



Carving by Iva Frost

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VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are a vital part of the Museum's effort to provide innovative programming and enrich the museum experience. We wish to thank the following individuals for their service: Rebecca Brown, Meghan Connolly, and Kathleen Lynch.

Congratulations EMILY!

Emily Matthews joined us as the Museum's part time Membership Coordinator in 2006, as she completed her associate degree and welcomed her first child. Five short years later, with Sylvia preparing to start school, Emily is beginning a new chapter—pursuing her degree in nursing and launching a new career in health care. Please join us as we thank Emily for her many contributions to the Museum and wish her success in all her new endeavors!



MEMBERSHIP

Standard membership benefits:

- Free admission to special events
- Reduced rates for workshops
- 15% discount at the UConn Co-op
- Early notification of programs
- Museum Newsletter

Regular Memberships	1 Year	2 Year
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___ Couple.....	\$40	\$70
___ Senior Couple.....	\$35	\$60
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Consider upgrading to an Owl Membership. These memberships provide special support for Museum programs. In addition to standard membership benefits, Owl Members receive guest passes, gifts, and more.

Owl Memberships	
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