

Explore New England

BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE, AUGUST 17, 2008

BRIDGTON
Rufus Porter Museum
Attributed to John H. Bellamy of Kittery, circa 1890, carved from pine wood.

WATERVILLE
Colby College Museum of Art

SEARSPORT
Penobscot Marine Museum
Figurehead from pinewood, circa 1875, its maker unknown.

AUGUSTA
Maine State Museum

BATH
Maine Maritime Museum
Scrimshawed sperm whale tooth with a young woman, its 19th-century maker unknown.

ROCKLAND
Farnsworth Art Museum
"Sailor's Dream," its 19th-century maker unknown, of painted wood, canvas, lead, and plaster.

LEWISTON
Bates College Museum of Art

NEW GLOUCESTER
Sabbathday Lake Shaker Museum

PORTLAND
Maine Historical Society Museum

SACO
Saco Museum

YORK
Museums of Old York
Fiddle head carved by Eliphalet Grover in 1821, of pine, maple, walnut, with bone, horn, catgut strings, polychrome paint.

Out of the attic

Museums collaborate to show off naive and primitive collections

By Janet Mendelsohn
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

YORK — Eliphalet Grover, a lighthouse keeper on Boon Island, Maine, in 1821 made a fiddle from wood roof shingles. At the instrument's scroll end, he carved the shape of a human head. Maybe it was an antidote to the keeper's lonely life on that small rocky outcropping. Or perhaps his artistry was inspired by the same "entrepreneurial spirit" and use of available materials that got him in trouble with the government. Soon after, Grover was dismissed for allegedly selling whale oil intended to operate the light, among other ventures.

At the Museums of Old York, Grover's fiddle is among several engaging samples of his craftsmanship, including a document box in the style of the period's expensive furniture, and a cane on which he carved a man's head, a snake, and a fox and grapes — all proverbial symbols of temptation and betrayal.

Among folk art collectors, Maine is known for its abundance of handcrafted works made between 1750 and 1925.

Mariners, lumbermen, farmers, and schoolgirls were among the many largely untrained artists who produced functional or decorative pieces to chronicle or brighten their lives. They carved intricate scrimshaw pictures on whalebone; built whimsical weather vanes and ships in bottles; wove sturdy baskets; and painted furniture and portraits. Embroidered family heirlooms and illustrated sea chests preserved chapters in their personal stories and recorded US history.

Much of this bounty has rarely been seen by the public, until now. Through fall, 11 of the state's art and history museums are displaying more than 500 of their most interesting pieces in concurrent exhibitions. It's called the Maine Folk Art Trail.

If you're ambitious, you can visit all 11 stops in three days, says Charles Burden, a native Mainer who conceived of the trail and coordinated the project. But don't rush a road trip with many enticing detours as it stretches from York to Searsport along coastal Route 1 and loops around, roughly along

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A gardener's legacy



The McLaughlin Garden has thrived through generations of admirers

By Jane Roy Brown
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

SOUTH PARIS, Maine — For the better part of 60 years, the gate, left ajar, signaled that Bernard McLaughlin welcomed visitors into his backyard garden. On average, about 2,000 people a year took him up on the unspoken invitation, wandering in to see what magic this bank teller and grocery clerk had worked since their last visit.

It must have seemed like magic indeed to watch this two-acre garden grow over the decades, from a

few flower beds and ornamental trees into a series of outdoor rooms linked by ribbons of mown grass. Though it is horticulturally sophisticated, it also evokes a sense of place and a Victorian sensibility that lingered in rural Maine throughout the 20th century. The plants should be familiar to New Englanders, even if they don't know them by name. Lilacs and azaleas, irises and peonies, roses and daylilies, sedums, asters, and dozens of other species of flowering plants bloom in sequence. Not only did the seasons provide changing scenes, the gardens themselves

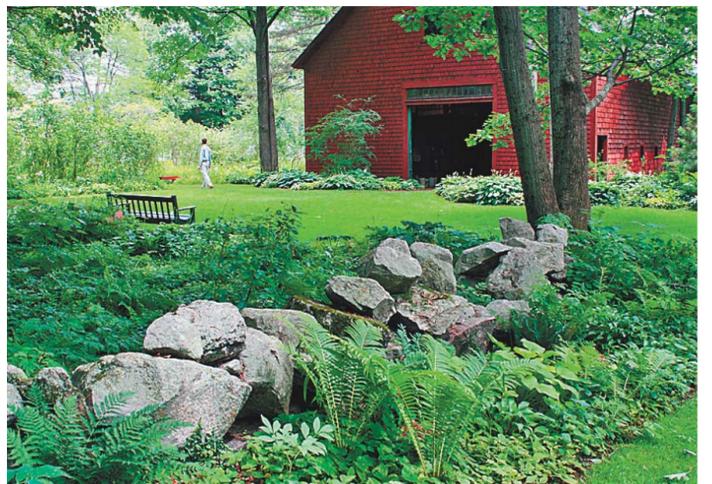
changed over the years as the landscape matured, and the gardener's knowledge and tastes expanded.

When the pines, oaks, and maples behind the barn grew tall and shaded the ground beneath them, for instance, McLaughlin created a shade garden where foliage of many colors and textures took center stage: hostas and ferns, sweet woodruff, native ginger, violets, lady's mantle, astilbe. In a sunnier spot, he planted more than 200 lilac cultivars and an even greater number of lilac bushes, the state's largest private collection. When he died, at 98, McLaughlin was

known locally as the Dean of Maine Gardeners.

Today his garden draws 10,000 visitors a year, making it one of the largest cultural heritage attractions in western Maine, according to Michael Desplaines, executive director of the McLaughlin Foundation, which operates the property as a public garden. After McLaughlin's death in 1995, neighbors who could not bear to see the property sold formed this nonprofit charitable organization to rescue it. Ten years after opening to the public, the foundation

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PHOTOS BY BILL REGAN/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

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