

# Authentic art, antique advertising, or a copy

► **TRAIL**  
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Interstate 95, to Waterville, Augusta, Lewiston, Bridgton, and New Gloucester, back to the coast at Portland.

Burden, a retired pediatrician in Richmond, has been fascinated with pieces of the country's past since finding an antique nursing bottle years ago. His passion was nourished by old silver, sea chests, and other nautical pieces. In 1964, he cofounded the Maine Maritime Museum in Bath. Twice a year, with fellow members of the American Folk Art Society he visits private and public collections across the country. Two years ago, Burden enlisted his friend Ray Egan of Boothbay, and the two collectors began contacting museums to arrange access to outstanding pieces for 50 members of the society coming to Maine this fall.

"In the past, our group has had to go into museum storage areas where it's difficult to see the wonderful objects that are usually kept on racks in dim vaults," said Burden, whose idea quickly morphed into a much more ambitious project: the Maine Folk Art Trail, possibly the only route of its kind in the country. He and Egan coordinated not only the 11 public exhibitions, but also spent countless hours working on a companion hardcover book that was published in May and a one-day symposium to be held Sept. 28 in the Olin Arts Center at Bates College in Lewiston.

Through November, exhibits are open to the public at Bates College Museum of Art, Colby College Museum of Art, Farnsworth Art Museum, Maine Historical Society, Maine Maritime Museum, Maine State Museum, Penobscot Marine Museum, the Rufus Porter Museum, Saco Museum, and Museums of Old York. At Sabbathday

Lake Shaker Village Museum, the exhibit will run through next year. Be forewarned: Sometimes smaller venues open later or close earlier than advertised and closing dates vary. Call ahead to be sure they're open. But arrive later in the day, as we did on occasion, and you may meet a volunteer or staff member happy to keep the lights on later and share stories about what you see.

Links to each museum and information on the symposium and book are on the trail website, mainefolkarttrail.org.

"A good piece of folk art makes you smile," says Burden, "because usually they are naive enough that you can see the artist was really trying but missed." Authenticity is part of their appeal, which is why the exhibits end with pieces made around 1925. About that time, Burden says, people began to realize they could make a profit by selling items deliberately made to look like folk art.

In her introduction to the companion book, "Folk Art in Maine: Uncommon Treasures (1750-1925)" (Down East, 2008), Stacy C. Hollander, senior curator of the American Folk Art Museum in New York, notes that many of Maine's vibrant works are typical of folk art forms found elsewhere in the country while others are particular to Maine's maritime culture. "All now offer valuable insights into changing patterns of life even as we marvel at their vitality of expression," says Hollander. "The survival of these artworks outside the families in which they descended attests to a burgeoning movement among early preservationists to hold onto vestiges of American culture that were being lost to history."

Begin the trail at the Museums of Old York not only because it is closest to Boston but also because

this exhibit asks us to question our perceptions of fine art, folk art, and advertising. The exhibit titled "What Is Folk Art?" illustrates how distinctions are often unclear. One sign asks, "If an object was made by a trade artisan or used as advertising, is it folk art?" Others query, "What if the maker was specifically trained, or if his pieces became so popular that he sold them commercially?" Or, as with decoys and samplers, "If the work was produced following a standardized form, is it art?"

This is the inaugural exhibit in the museum's Remick Barn, recently renovated to create dedicated gallery and education space for Old York's nine historic buildings, circa 1719 to 1867. The showstopper here is a four-poster bed wrapped in crewel embroidered fabrics, from canopy to skirts. The beautiful needlework was completed more than 200 years ago by Mary Bulman (1754-92), who lived nearby. A love poem is visible inside the canopy. During the 1920s, the bed hangings arrived at the museum door, folded in two cardboard cases, carried by women who found them while cleaning out a local relative's home. Covering the bed is a richly floral, hooked rug (maker unknown) that has been in the museum's collection since at least 1906.

"Like most of our collection," says Scott Stevens, museum director, "these items are tied to The Yorks [York, York Harbor, York Beach, and Cape Neddick] and were brought to us by York residents. This was once a thriving seaport and these were their family possessions. Many families still here go back to the 17th century. The local historical society began collecting these pieces in the 1800s. It evolved into this museum. We became the town's attic

Continued on next page

## If you go . . .

**Maine Folk Art Trail 2008 Companion book**  
"Folk Art in Maine: Uncommon Treasures (1750-1925)" Kevin D. Murphy, editor; 144 pp., hardcover, illustrated, \$35. Available from [downeast.com](http://downeast.com) and participating museums.  
**Folk Art Symposium**  
Olin Arts Center, Bates College  
75 Russell St., Lewiston  
207-786-6158  
Sept. 28, 8:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.  
**Participating exhibits**  
**Bates College Museum of Art**  
75 Russell St., Lewiston  
207-786-6158  
[bates.edu/museum.xml](http://bates.edu/museum.xml)  
Through Dec. 14 Tuesday-Saturday 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Free.  
**Colby College Museum of Art**  
5600 Mayflower Hill Drive  
Waterville  
207-859-5600  
[colby.edu/museum](http://colby.edu/museum)  
Through Oct. 19 Tuesday-Saturday 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Sunday noon-4:30. Free.  
**Farnsworth Art Museum**  
16 Museum St., Rockland  
207-596-6457  
[farnsworthmuseum.org](http://farnsworthmuseum.org)  
Through Nov. 30. Through Columbus Day 10 a.m.-5 p.m., free Sundays 10-1 and Wednesdays 5-8. Call for off-season and evening hours. Adults \$12, seniors and students \$10, age 16 and under free. Call for off-season and evening hours.  
**Maine Historical Society Museum**  
489 Congress St., Portland

207-774-1822; [mainehistory.org](http://mainehistory.org)  
Through Dec. 30 Monday-Saturday 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sunday noon-5. Adults \$5, seniors and students \$4, children \$2.  
**Maine Maritime Museum**  
243 Washington St., Bath  
207-443-1316  
[mainemaritimemuseum.org](http://mainemaritimemuseum.org)  
Through Oct. 13 daily 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Adults \$10, seniors \$9, ages 7-17 \$7, 16 and under free.  
**Maine State Museum**  
230 State St., Augusta  
207-287-2301  
[maine.gov/museum](http://maine.gov/museum)  
Through Oct. 11 Monday-Friday 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Saturday 10-4. Adults \$2, ages 6-18 \$1.  
**Penobscot Marine Museum**  
5 Church St., Searsport  
207-548-2529  
[penobscotmarinemuseum.org](http://penobscotmarinemuseum.org)  
Through Oct. 19 Monday-Saturday 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sunday noon-5. Adults \$8, ages 7-15 \$3, 6 and under free, families \$18.  
**The Rufus Porter Museum**  
67 North High St., Bridgton  
207-647-2828  
[rufusportermuseum.org](http://rufusportermuseum.org)  
Through Oct. 12 Tuesday-Saturday 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Adults \$5, seniors, students, groups larger than 15 \$4, age 12 and under free.  
**Saco Museum**  
371 Main St., Saco  
207-283-3861  
[sacomuseum.org](http://sacomuseum.org)  
Through Sept. 28. Including items on loan from the Brick Store Museum, Kennebunk, and



DOWN EAST BOOKS

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Portland Fire Museum. Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday-Sunday noon-4, Thursday till 8. Adults \$4, seniors \$3, students and children age 6 and older \$2, 5 and under free.

**Sabbathday Lake Shaker Museum**  
707 Shaker Road, New Gloucester  
207-926-4597; [shaker.lib.me.us](http://shaker.lib.me.us)  
Through Oct. 6 and May 22-Oct. 5, 2009. Including 75-minute guided tour of the village. Monday-Friday 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Adults \$6.50, ages 6-12 \$2, 5 and under free.

**Saco Museum of Old York**  
3 Lindsay Road, York  
207-363-4974; [oldyork.org](http://oldyork.org)  
Through Nov. 28 Monday-Saturday 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Adults \$5, seniors \$4, ages 4-16 \$3, families \$15.

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