

The
JOURNAL
of Antiques and Collectibles

Vol. IV No. 7 September 2003

www.journalofantiques.com

Sturbridge, Massachusetts

**The National Museum
of American Illustration**



**"Dreams
in the
Antique
Shop"**

**Brimfield
Supplement
Inside**

**National Events Calendar
Thuringian Pottery
ABP Cut Glass
Rare Books**

The National Museum of American Illustration A New Treasure in Newport



*Little Miss Muffet, Jessie Willcox Smith, 1913, oil on board
18" x 25 1/2", signed lower right, Good Housekeeping magazine, January 1913
Pelican Publishing Co., Gretna, LA 1989*

Long shunned by art museums for their mass-produced works, illustrators have earned a home of their own in one of Newport's most beautiful neighborhoods.

The National Museum of American Illustration has the works of more than 75 of the country's best illustrators on permanent display in a lavishly ornate 1898 building called Vernon Court. This museum was founded in 2000 by the collecting team of Judith and Lawrence Cutler, but was open to the public for the first time just this summer.

Combining works from the "Golden Age" of American illustration with the "Gilded Age" of American architecture, the museum has gathered the largest collection of masterpieces of illustrative art. Among the artists represented are Norman Rockwell, Maxfield Parrish, N.C. Wyeth, and Jessie Willcox Smith. All of the works on display are originals, but they were created to be reproduced in books, advertisements, periodicals, and in other media. For that reason, they reflect changing tastes, styles, politics, and values.

"These works are our visual history, indeed they are American civilization illustrated," the Cutlers said in a prepared statement. "In the process, illustrators created iconic images, a mythology of our history, and a virtual catalog of bygone styles and desires."

Although some in the art world snub their noses at illustration as an art form, these artists were forced to work within limits that other artists would consider severe: They worked under assignment, adhered to publishing deadlines, bent to specified subject matter, and worked with predetermined dimensions and formats. They carried a cultural burden, as well. Many of these images were created in a time when there were no televisions, computers, or even radios. People relied on printed material to get information, be entertained, and make sense of their world. While architecture's Golden Age faded with the 1929 Stock Market Crash, the hey-day of illustration continued right up through the 1960s. With the demise of the *Saturday Evening Post*, which some say signaled that technology had transformed new media, the Golden Age in illustration drew to a close.

"Illustration art is a more difficult task to create than paintings purely inspired by wine, a nude model, and a blank canvas," the Cutlers explained. "It is a specific assignment, handicapped by a deadline, and it comprises a message dictated to the artist by the client. Artists such as Michelangelo and Gilbert Stuart, and others suffered too, during their artistic endeavors with similar parameters. Yet, the American illustrators differ from all other artists and illustrators in that they created purely American icons. They are the American Imagists."

These American images have endured. It is thanks to illustrators that we have Uncle Sam, a baby ringing in the New Year, the Gibson Girl, Miss Liberty, and flowers on Mother's Day. These iconic works were collected by the Cutlers over a 30 year period, and have been displayed in exhibitions from New York to Paris to Rome, and Tokyo. The collection includes the largest collection of



Vernon Court's Marble Terrace boasts the beauty of this magnificent Newport mansion owned by the Cutlers and Hastings in 1898 and restored in 1998.



*Griselda, Maxfield Parrish, 1910, oil on canvas mounted to wood panel,
40" x 32", signed lower right, originally painted as
"Seven Green Pools at Cintra."*



View towards the Petit Salon, boasting the beauty of this magnificent Newport mansion owned by the Cutlers and Hastings in 1898 and restored in 1998.

of American Illustration

Newport, Rhode Island



originals by Maxfield Parrish, the largest private collection of Norman Rockwell, the largest J.C. Leyendecker collection, Howard Pyle ("Father of American Illustration"), N.C. Wyeth, Charles Dana Gibson, Henry Hutt, James Montgomery Flagg, Howard Chandler Christy, John Falter, and many others. All in all, the Collection comprises original art works, prints (open and limited editions), as well as significant memorabilia, vintage materials, artifacts (such as Rockwell's first paint box and Parrish's stippling paint brushes), and a plethora of photographic materials. The museum also has on display an exhibit of decorative arts, authentic period furnishings, and sculptures.

The museum has taken preserving the history beyond its walls seriously, too. The Cutlers spent five years restoring the historic grounds and is working to install a large public clock in Olmsted Park, which is adjacent to the museum. The ornate Four Dial Post Clock was custom reproduced by Electric Time to match the Seth Thomas street clocks of 1886 to 1910, the "Gilded Age" when Vernon Court was built. The clock has four glass dials with the street names (Bellevue and Victoria Avenues) and gilt numerals visible during the day and illuminated at night. The new clock was commissioned by the late Giulio Cesare Carani

and western façade show the "cottage," designed by Carrere and Foster and rededicated by Mr. and Mrs. Cutler.

to recognize the Cutlers' efforts to not only improve the historic building but to reclaim the three-acre park.

"We wanted to restore the beautiful landscape Olmsted intended, so we had to tear out the ugly asphalt parking lot that was left after Vernon Court Junior College went bankrupt in the 1970s," Judy Cutler said. "And as some of the 100-plus year-old trees are reaching the ends of their life-spans, we are planting young replacement trees with the help of Scott Wheeler [Tree Warden for Newport] and the City's tree replacement program."

All photos courtesy of the National Museum of American Illustration

The National Museum of American Illustration is the first national museum devoted exclusively to American illustration. It is located at 492 Bellevue Avenue, Newport, Rhode Island. Admission is by reservation only or when the museum's green "open" flag is flying. Visitors are advised to arrive 15 minutes early and expect to spend an hour in the museum. Admission prices are \$15 for a self-guided tour and \$25 for a guided tour. Discounts available for groups of 20 persons or more. For more information, call (410) 851-8949 or visit the website at www.americanillustration.org



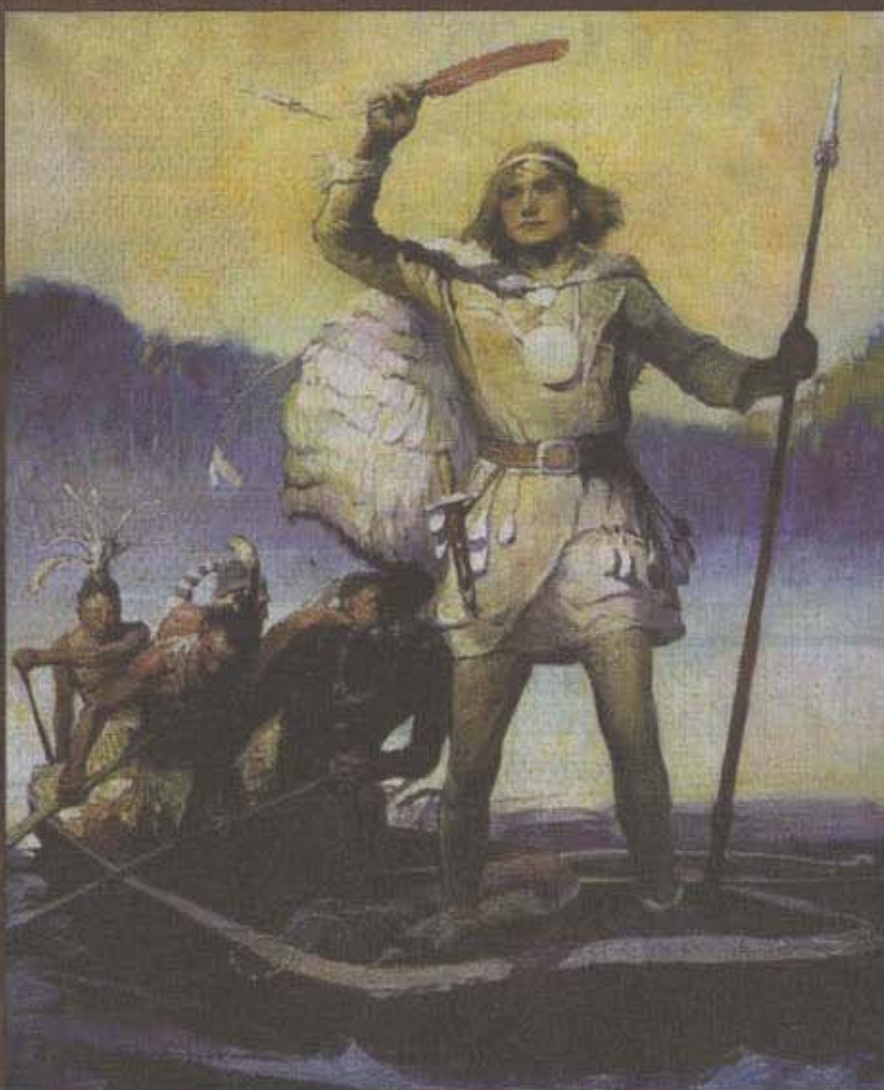
Couple with Milkman, currently on display in the Petit Salon at Vernon Court.



The four-faced gilded clock now in Olmsted Park matches the original street clocks of the "Gilded Age."



walls embellished by fluted pilasters of illustration art.



The Flamingo Feather is by Frank E. Schoonover, currently on display in the Grand Salon.