

**Broadside** is published by the Friends of the Maine State Museum as a benefit of museum membership.

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**Friends of the Maine State Museum**

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The Maine State Museum seeks to share what is meaningful about Maine and its place in the world, in order to inspire people to discover Maine's past, understand its present, and imagine its future. Visit [mainestatemuseum.org](http://mainestatemuseum.org).

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Design by Casady Design



**S**uspended high within a new 4,130 square foot gallery, the whale-size attractions are the real thing – two humpback whale skeletons that will be the star creatures in the first ever exhibit of its kind.

One skeleton comes from a 45-foot long female humpback whale, named Vector by scientists who tracked and researched her for over 35 years. Vector migrated between the Gulf of Maine and the Caribbean (one of the longest animal migrations on earth) and was a five-time known mother. Vector died of unknown causes in the Gulf of Maine in 2019.

The second skeleton is from a juvenile humpback whale, not related to Vector, aged five

to six months. The juvenile, like Vector, died of unknown causes in the Gulf of Maine. The juvenile skeleton will be the only one of its young age on display anywhere. Together, Vector and the juvenile will be the only pair of humpback whale skeletons, displaying the species range and size, in the world.

These two awe-inspiring humpback whale skeletons are currently being cleaned and prepared for exhibit by Whales and Nails, a company located in Seal Cove, Maine. The skill and knowledge behind Whales and Nails is Dan DenDanto. A senior scientist with Allied Whale at the College of the Atlantic, Dan has been cleaning, restoring, and articulating whale skeletons since

*(continued on page 2)*

NORWAY	14 MI.
PARIS	15 MI.
DENMARK	23 MI.
NAPLES	23 MI.
SWEDEN	25 MI.
POLAND	27 MI.
MEXICO	37 MI.
CHINA	94 MI.
PERU	46 MI.

## Online Scavenger Hunt Launches June 14th

**H**ave you always wanted to know what a pung is? Join the Friends of the Maine State Museum beginning June 14 to learn more about pungs (and much more) in an online scavenger hunt that features the museum's online collections database. In the process you will discover some of the museum's most iconic and offbeat objects (like this famous road sign, which happens to be both).

Members of the Friends of the Maine State Museum will automatically receive a new challenge each month. Non-members may also sign up to receive the challenges by emailing a request to friends.museum@maine.gov. Please put "scavenger hunt" in the subject line.

## More About Whales

As the reopening of the Maine State Museum creeps closer, our development of new exhibits is intensifying. It takes about two years to plan and install a major exhibit, and we have entered that time-span with the exhibit that will feature two humpback whale skeletons, an adult and a calf, from the Gulf of Maine. The skeletons themselves are being lovingly cleaned and restored

in Seal Cove by Dan DenDanto of Whales and Nails. As we

plan how we will interpret the skeletons, we must balance information about the history of the individual whales, the history of whaling itself, and the ecological significance of whales in life and in the modern imagination.

One of our whales has a name, Vector, and was known to researchers for 35 years before dying of unknown causes. She had five calves and migrated annually between the Caribbean and the waters of Maine. Beyond her story, there is the large role whaling played in the economic history of the state: Maine's essential

contribution to whaling was to have built over 200 of the 700 whaleships that made up the American whaling fleet in its 1840s-50s heyday. And our attitude towards whaling has dramatically changed even within my own lifetime. As a tyke at my Maine summer camp near Bridgton, I sat around the fire with the other boys, listening to the counselors play such folk songs as *The Greenland Whale Fisheries*. The song stressed the dangers of whaling but was inspirational to young boys

who imagined themselves doing brave and daring things. But few today would agree that 19th century whalers are admirable models of our relationship with nature or guides to solid careers in the modern economy.

Then there are conflicting stories of hope and despair that we will want to tell, using science as our guide. After destroying most of the whales in the world, we finally outlawed commercial whaling in 1986. The Gulf of Maine has since had a rare ecological victory: the humpbacks that were its most abundant

**“We want our visitors to understand why we should cherish and study these fascinating leviathans from the deep.”**

The song stressed the dangers of whaling but was inspirational to young boys



Dan DenDanto of Whales and Nails stands in his shop next to a rack of Vector's vertebrae.

whale species have made a remarkable recovery. Tragically, the right whales transiting the same area continue to decline in numbers and are facing extinction. We will also want to show how evolution gave us air-breathing mammals living entirely in the sea. Most of all, we want our visitors to understand why we should cherish and study these fascinating leviathans from the deep.

## WHALES (continued from page 1)

1990. He has prepared and installed skeletons in museums and science centers around the country.

Opportunities for exploration and discovery in the museum's new exhibition are planned to be as dramatic and inspiring as the skeletons themselves. The exhibition will look at whale biology and evolution, the work of scientists who study whales, and the changes within the Gulf of Maine's ecology. A glimpse at Maine's whaling past will also be included, along with the purposes and products that drove those activities in the 1800s.

The exhibition of the whale skeletons, along with other new presentations planned for the reopened museum, are the most important advance – indeed, a sea change – since the Maine State Museum opened in the Cultural Building in 1971. It promises to be an unforgettable whale of an adventure!

## Students React to Museum Objects



Maine State Museum educators are busy providing virtual programming to schools and homeschools this spring. During the “Statehood and the Wabanaki” virtual workshop, students collaborated online to investigate a museum artifact, a Penobscot powder horn from around 1750. They wrote digital post-it notes to answer the questions “What do you see?” and “What do you wonder?”



## Research Results in Rediscovery

Staff are busy diving into the collections as we develop new exhibitions. In the new welcoming exhibit, *Meet Maine Here*, we will feature the story of Isaac K. Stetson, who ran a variety of businesses in the Bangor area including the Blanchard Slate Mining Company of Piscataquis County. When cleaning out Stetson's Bangor office in 1968, his son found a fan made of slate. He presented it to the Maine State Museum and recorded it as a group of slate samples.

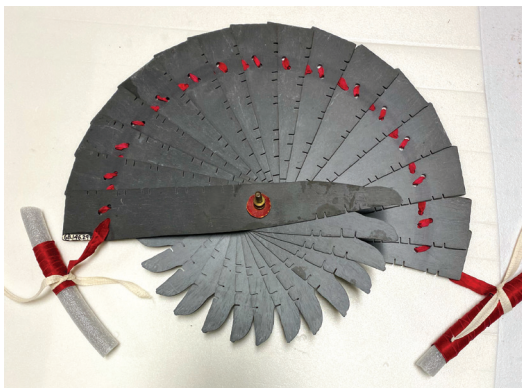
While researching the collection recently, we discovered that these samples were actually a hand-carved fan, made of slate with a delicate red ribbon strung through the stone sticks. Further research revealed that slate fans are a traditional

Welsh folk art form. Men working slate quarries in Wales sometime flaunted their skills by making decorative fans and other whimsies. Since the Middle Ages, slate

has been mined in Wales, where some of the world's largest slate mines have been located.

Workers began extracting slate in Piscataquis County on an industrial scale in the 1870s with work concentrated in the towns of Brownville, Monson, and

Blanchard. Welsh slate workers migrated to Maine and brought their cultural traditions and skills with them. This slate fan is a fine example of cultural traditions crossing the Atlantic and enriching Maine. One of the workers at the Blanchard Slate Mining Company likely gave this fan to Mr. Stetson, the treasurer of the board.



Welsh folk art slate fan quarried and worked in Piscataquis County, Maine, 1886-1905. Gift of Irving Stetson. 68.146.29

## The Results Are In

Last November the museum conducted a survey to inform its exhibit planning. Working with audience consultants People, Places & Design Research, the museum explored the reactions of potential visitors to the new interpretive approach being planned for the main floor exhibition, *Meet Maine Here*, in which larger themes in Maine's history will be introduced through stories about people. An online survey with sample stories was sent to 270 museum members and 1,000 Maine Arts Commission constituents. A decided pattern emerged in the responses: diversity, relevance, and the environment were the themes people most connected with. Museum staff are busy incorporating many of the thoughtful comments coming out of the survey into their exhibit planning.

**Thank you to all the survey participants for helping to shape the future of the Maine State Museum!**

## Maine's Gubernatorial Potato-Picking Champion

The Maine State Museum recently added to its collections two photographs documenting a unique occasion in the state's history: a showdown between Maine Governor Lewis O. Barrows and Idaho Governor Barzilla Clark at the second-annual International Potato Picking Contest, held in Fort Fairfield on September 29, 1938. News agency photographers captured the two governors shaking hands after their head-to-head test of potato picking prowess, which Governor Barrows won, 201 pounds to 197.



Victorious Maine Governor Lewis O. Barrows (left) shakes hands with Idaho Governor Barzilla Clark after besting him at picking potatoes. 2023.8.1

The matchup was the climax of a year-long friendly rivalry between Maine and Idaho. In 1937 the Maine Development Commission began marketing potatoes using the State of Maine brand to boost the industry. Governor Barrows sent a peck of spuds and a promotional message to every other U.S. governor, and Governor Clark responded by proclaiming the superior quality of his state's crop. That December, both states sent carloads of potatoes to Congress for a luncheon and taste-off that ended in a draw (and a lot of full congressional stomachs).

Governor Barrows and Governor Clark used the contest and the national news coverage it generated to promote their states' potato industries to the public. Governor Barrows again upheld Maine's

honor in a 1939 rematch in Idaho by outpicking Governor Clarence Bottolfsen, 382 ½ pounds to 365. To this day he remains undefeated and unsurpassed as Maine's first and only gubernatorial potato-picking champion.

## Welcome Aboard!

Denise Lord was recently elected to serve on the Friends of the Maine State Museum Board of Directors. A longtime resident of Belgrade, Denise has worked in state government for over forty years, holding planning and policy making positions in several state agencies including the State Planning Office, the Department of Corrections, and MaineHousing. Recently retired, she is spending her time traveling and is currently on her second four-month trek across the country. She brings to the board a love of the outdoors, an appreciation for the past, and a deep commitment to Maine, the place she calls home.



**Denise Lord**

## What Ya Got There?

**O**n May 5th the Friends of the Maine State Museum hosted the What Ya Got There? Appraisal Fair at the historic Viles Mansion in Augusta. Kaja Veilleux from Thomaston Place Auction Galleries examined a wide range of items brought in by participants, from trade signs to French fashion dolls, and explained what made each one special (or not so special). Proceeds from the event and the associated silent auction benefited the Friends of the Maine State Museum. We are very grateful to our event sponsors for making this fun and historic afternoon possible: Camden National Bank, Cabot Mill Antiques, Hathaway Mill Antiques, Gulf of Maine Books, and Hannaford Supermarket.

We plan to make this an annual event, so start thinking now about what item in your attic you would like to learn more about!



*Kaja Veilleux of Thomaston Place Auction Galleries, accompanied by his associate Jennifer Langley, examines a Maine-themed chess set brought in by museum member Ron Bancroft.*