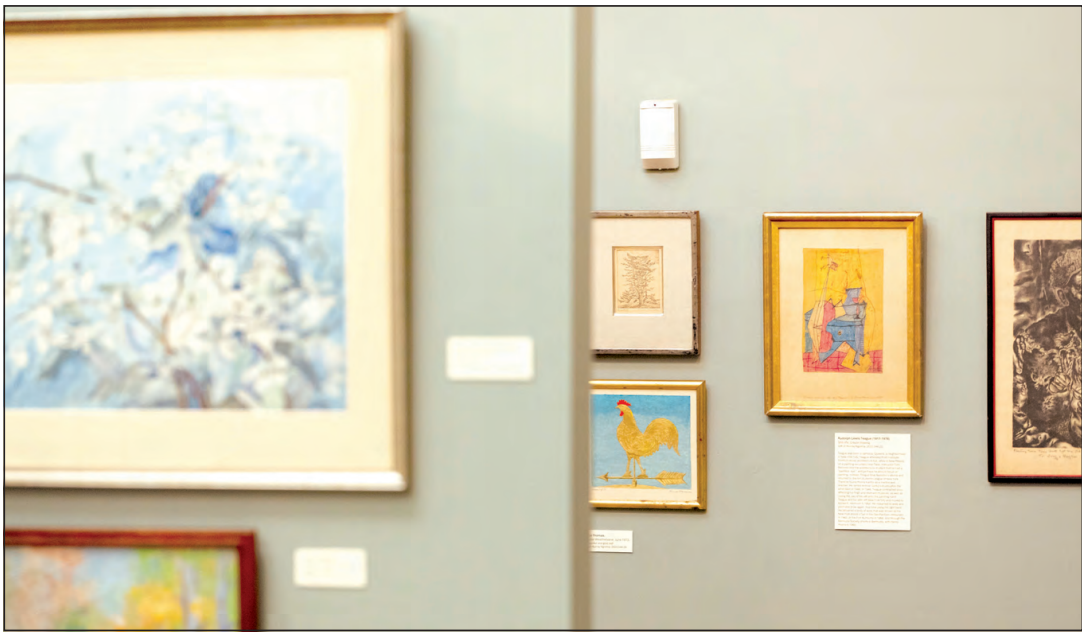
The new Wonder Room Exhibit is now open at the Woodstock History Center

By Aaron Rubin
Standard Correspondent



The History Center's new exhibit displays a wealth of artifacts created or passed down generationally within the Woodstock community.
David Gershman Photo

Visitors to the Woodstock History Center can now enjoy a new exhibit, The Wonder Room, which opened to a warm reception last Friday.

The exhibit, which features a diverse selection of over 150 artifacts spanning over two hundred years, was made by artists and craftspeople with connections to the Woodstock area and includes furniture, glassworks, pottery, sculptures, and textiles.

Matthew Powers, Executive Director, thanked the donors who gave the artifacts to the History Center.

The "Wonder Room" is a contemporary interpretation of the "cabinet of curiosities," showcasing natural and man-made objects of multiple disciplines popular in early America, and often seen as a precursor to the modern museum, said Powers. The intent of the exhibit at the History Center is to make its collection specific to the Woodstock area. "Essentially, the idea is that you're showcasing the highlights of your institution," he said.

The new featured collections showcase the "tremendous" and unique "continuity" of the arts and crafts community in Woodstock over the past two centuries, said Powers.

"I think there's a very unique Woodstock connection and that is something that I think continues, and people are still drawn to the area for that fact," he said. "There's still things continuing here — places like ShackletonThomas and some of these other craft-type establishments are continuing to bring people here. For us, to be able to shed some light on that is certainly our mission."

Powers pointed out how deep the history of painting alone runs in the area, as "you had itinerant painters working in the Woodstock area in the early 1800s."

The first artifact visitors of the exhibit will see is a 1950 oil painting of Mt. Tom behind North Street in Woodstock by Byron Thomas; followed by a colorful quilt created circa 1860 by a local sewer named Mary Ann Williams and a lamp by Nancy Wickham Boyd from the Vermont Workshop



The exhibit includes works in all mediums, including ceramics.
David Gershman Photo

Towards the back of the room is a cylinder music box that plays music of the the Giacomo Meyerbeer-composed "Robert le diable" opera, which Powers said enhances the experience of viewing the artifacts. Videos on featured artists such as Arthur Wilder, John Nelson Marble, and Roswell Bailey, are also a part of the exhibit.

Another music feature is a collection of historical photographs of the Vermont Symphony Orchestra (VSO), which was formed in Woodstock and is currently celebrating its 90th anniversary as one of the longest-running state-supported orchestras in the United States. These "remarkable photos" include snapshots from the VSO's early years, "including a newspaper photo spread with original members," Elise Brunelle, the Executive Director of the orchestra, told the Standard.

Brunelle says the first members of the VSO held ordinary jobs as stonecutters, barbers, farmers, teachers, and state attorneys. As part of the VSO exhibit, viewers will first see an image of VSO musicians who traveled to perform in the 1939 World's Fair in New York, a moment that Brunelle says legitimized the group's standing as New England representatives of classical music.

"We have a timeline with key dates, such as our five different Music Directors' appointments, the founding of VSO's chorus, when the VSO played with artists like Aaron Copland, Yo-Yo Ma, Sharon Isbin and Tony Bennett, and when memorable activities such as Waltz Night, the Summer Festival Tour, and Jukebox began," said Brunelle.

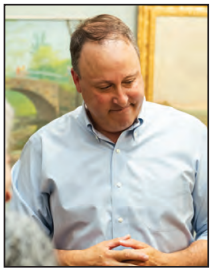


Onlookers explore Woodstock's history through the exhibit.
David Gershman Photo

Along with photographs, the VSO has displayed a gift from painter Rockwell Kent "which inspired VSO's original 'angel logo' that's being used throughout this 90th season," said Brunelle.

A standout artifact in the exhibit is the sculpture "America" by the Woodstock-born Hiram Powers, one of the most critically acclaimed sculptors of the 19th century. The work, created in 1854, shows the integral qualities of "youth, strength, and beauty" of a young United States, according to a video explaining Hiram Powers' work at the exhibit.

The artist behind the work adds greater historical relevance to the exhibit's mission, explains executive director Matthew Powers. While Woodstock was reinventing itself as a tourist destination in the 1890s, Hiram Powers' birthplace in town was "a big draw for people to come to Woodstock" at the time, along with its overall reputation for producing artists of a similar caliber, Matthew Powers said.



"People know our name — Woodstock — and a lot of people attribute that to the artists and craftspeople that lived and worked here."
— Woodstock History Center Executive Director Matthew Powers

"Again, that's what we're trying to show, is the continuity of over 200 years that people know our name — Woodstock — and a lot of people attribute that to the artists and craftspeople that lived and worked here," said Matthew Powers.

While the exhibit is on display, the history center will continue investigating the backgrounds of the artifacts. Powers said the most important works that require further study are the Indigenous American artifacts, many of which have the creators marked as "artist unknown." Attaching names to those artifacts, especially for the ancestors of the artists, is a task requiring greater research.

"Some of these objects deserve more research — they deserve us to keep digging into who made them because those types of crafts were passed down generationally through communities. We find that those are important, if not the most important artifacts within our collection."