

Rufus Porter Museum of Art and Ingenuity



Raise the Rufus!!!

A small museum in the middle of a small Maine town is about to make a big difference in the world of art and ingenuity! — This can only happen with a little help from many. And a lot of help from a few.

The **Rufus Porter Museum of Art and Ingenuity** is ready to expand its cultural complex with construction of a classic post and beam barn that will complement Main Street and the two other historic museum buildings on the site. The new structure will feature the Museum's collection of over thirty wall murals, reconstructed and displayed in the design of the original rooms. The largest collection of wall murals of any kind in the United States, these beautiful murals have never been gathered together in one place or open to public view. Now they will have a home while transforming the Museum into a unique opportunity where visitors can experience the full effects of 360-degree 19th century landscape murals.

These murals represent outstanding examples of the "Rufus Porter School of Landscape Painting." Porter rarely signed his murals, making attribution difficult, though he trained a group of renowned 19th century itinerant painters who used his approach closely, including motifs, styles, and techniques.

The future building's vernacular inspired exterior and its open interior design will enhance the quality of its collection and be a magnet for folk art enthusiasts and visitors from all over the country (world!) for generations to come. Flexible space for public gatherings, educational events, meetings, classes and changing exhibits ensures that the museum complex will be an engaging, lively place and a wonderful community asset and resource.

Why is Rufus Porter important nationally and for Maine?

Born in colonial New England while George Washington was president, nine-year-old Rufus Porter moved with his family to Pleasant Mountain Gore, Maine, now called Bridgton. He later attended Fryeburg Academy, just one town over. The local boy grew up to become the nation's pre-eminent muralist plus an inventor light years ahead of his time, a teacher, a musician, a writer and poet, and the founder/editor of *Scientific American*, the nation's longest running magazine. In short, he is an American Renaissance man.

Several books document his remarkable life, most recently an extensive catalogue by the Bowdoin College Museum of Art featuring their exhibit on Porter, an exhibit which sent many visitors to Bridgton to view more of his works. As interest in Rufus Porter continues to grow, particularly in the world of folk art, new information has been uncovered about his life, as also documented by the respected Center for Painted Wall Preservation.

Porter's contributions to American culture are twofold:

Art: As he travelled about painting wall murals throughout New England and beyond, Porter shared his techniques with other artists who in turn continued to spread the tradition. Wallpaper was hard to obtain so many folks turned instead to muralists such as Rufus Porter and his fellow students. They painted enchanting scenes of near and far, executed in large scale on dry, horsehair plaster walls by a combination of free-hand painting and the use of stenciling. Snow scenes never appear, likely out of artistic respect for the long, cold winters his clients endured. Porter also painted charming miniature

portraits, now among his most treasured works collected by individuals.

Ingenuity: Rufus Porter was also deeply interested in science and technology. The Rufus Porter Museum's growing collection of prototypes features many models of his astounding inventions and designs. Among the inventions which he is most famous for are:

- ~ a prototype of a rotary pump patented in 1855 which famed heart surgeon Dr Michael DeBakey adapted as a component of the heart-lung machine thus beginning the era of open-heart surgery.
- ~ a steam propelled "aeroship" designed before the Wright brothers were born
- ~ an elevated railroad invented 22 years before one was built in New York City
- ~ a revolving cylinder rifle, a design he sold to none other than Samuel Colt

An economic engine for Bridgton and Western Maine:

The expanded Rufus Porter Museum of Art and Ingenuity will join woodland Pondicherry Park with its stunning Bob Dunning Bridge to further define Bridgton as a destination, as museums have done for towns world-wide. We need only to look to the Maine coast to see what a unique, beautifully designed museum can do for a local economy and community. In the colorful words of Bridgton's town manager Bob Peabody who was formerly the mayor of now-booming Rockland, "There was a time you could have tossed a bowling ball down Rockland's main street and it would have hit no one. The Farnsworth Museum transformed Rockland into a thriving business and cultural center. The Rufus Porter Museum can do the same for Bridgton." As outlined in the museum's 2020-2023 Strategic Business Plan, establishing a third building is the most important short-term goal for the organization.

Great news: Design and Funding are well along and moving quickly!

At the Museum's 2021 opening reception in June the Executive Director and the Board of Trustees announced the beginning of the RAISE THE RUFUS!

campaign to fund the custom design and construction of the new exhibition building. The campaign begins on a solid foundation:

~The museum is secure: no debt, a balanced budget, a skilled executive director and staff, and a very committed Board of Trustees and volunteers.

~A visionary donor launched the campaign with a generous donation to conserve, stabilize and install the Museum's collection of premier murals (currently in storage) by Porter's nephew and protégé, Jonathan Poor.

~In a short year, over \$1million has been donated or pledged by supportive local people. Discussions are underway with many friends, philanthropists, and foundations.

~The proposed budget for the construction of the building is \$1,900,000. (It's a challenging time for estimates!) Come see the architectural design as it unfolds, and walk the site with us.

How can you help us RAISE THE RUFUS?

We would value a little of your time to discuss the plans for the upcoming new building. Input from the community is helping the plans develop: what would you like to see happen at the Rufus Porter Museum of Art and Ingenuity? How can we make the Museum and Bridgton an even better place? What would you like to add to this exciting new building? Please reach out to us!