

AMERICAN FOLK ART

An Enduring Legacy

A present for good behaviour in School Dec 15th



AMERICAN FOLK♥ART

An Enduring Legacy

Self-Guided Tour and Supplemental Teaching Materials for K-12 Teachers

Thank you for visiting our exhibition, *American Folk Art: An Enduring Legacy*.

This PDF provides you with a guide to tour students through the exhibition or to use as a teaching guide in the classroom.

From the late 1700s through the early 1900s, American folk art flourished. Unlike academic or fine art, folk art typically comes from deeply-rooted community traditions, with master craftspeople developing a local style copied by others and passed from one generation to the next. Folk art commonly serves both useful and decorative purposes and historically tends to thrive in rural communities. For example, in the agricultural South, small family-run pottery workshops, which made sturdy stoneware vessels with distinctive glazes, continued in production well into the 1900s.

In southeastern Pennsylvania, German-speaking European immigrants, referred to as Pennsylvania Germans, produced some of the country's liveliest folk art. People took time to embellish and beautify their homes and furnishings. Pennsylvania German folk art is easily recognized by its elaborate decoration, with bright colors and motifs, such as birds, hearts, and flowers. Some of the most notable forms include fraktur

or illuminated writing, hand-painted wood and tin utensils, lead-glazed earthenware, and painted or carved furniture.

American folk art often reflects a deep sense of patriotism. The majestic North American bald eagle, an emblem of freedom, became a favored image of artists in the new nation, as did the stars and stripes of the American flag. Abraham Lincoln and other beloved presidents were memorialized in a variety of mediums, including stone carvings.

Sailors made scrimshaw, one of the earliest forms of American folk art, by chiseling designs into the surface of polished whale teeth and bones, and then filling them in with black ink. Meanwhile on land, craftsmen developed new versions of one of the few distinctly American types of folk craft, used for centuries by Native Americans, in the form of hand-painted, wooden decoys intended to lure wildfowl.

American artisans combined long-held traditions and regional influences with ingenuity and creativity to create a variety of folk art. This exhibition presents weathervanes, fraktur, southern stoneware, and wooden canes, alongside more unusual items, such as carved stone books and fraternal-order plaques.

Pennsylvanian German Furnishings

European immigrants from Germanic-speaking parts of Europe began settling in southeastern Pennsylvania in the late seventeenth century. In Europe, most of these industrious immigrants were peasants, artisans, and small farmers. Although agriculture served as the major industry, many people worked as farmer-craftsmen in the new world. Because Pennsylvania Germans lived in isolated, rural communities, they maintained strong cultural traditions for over two hundred years. During this time, Pennsylvania German folk art flourished.

Woodworking, carving, and whittling were commonly practiced by males prior to the Industrial Revolution. Men often made items of furniture for their homes, such as this chair, which is embellished with a heart—a beloved Pennsylvania German motif. The smaller wooden box on display is carved with pinwheels, stars, and diamonds.

Brettstuhl (board-back stool) c 1800s
Pennsylvania
black walnut
Collection of the Landis Valley Village and Farm Museum, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
FM2014.14.3
L2017.0801.011



This chair style was brought to Pennsylvania from the Rhine Valley in Germany.

Pennsylvania Pottery

From the late 1600s to the mid-1800s, Pennsylvania German ceramics traditions thrived. Taking advantage of the abundance of rich clay deposits in southeastern Pennsylvania, potters crafted both useful and decorative display pieces using molds or a pottery wheel. Referred to as redware, this earthenware pottery was made using clay with a high iron content, which turns reddish-brown when fired (iron is a metallic element that naturally occurs in nature). By the 1700s, most towns in the region had some sort of local pottery. A potter worked several weeks to prepare enough wares to fill a kiln, a type of pottery oven used to fire the clay.

Decorative shapes, patterns, figurative designs, and writing were applied using contrasting colors of glaze and slip, a liquid clay. Potters often enhanced redware using a technique referred to as *sgraffito*, in which a pattern is incised or cut into a thin layer of slip, revealing the colored clay underneath. Redware is brittle and easily broken, but because the finest colorful slip- and sgraffito-decorated objects commonly served as special presentation pieces, a fair amount exists today.

Sgraffito-decorated plate c 1930
probably from the pottery shop of Jacob Medinger
Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
redware, glaze
Collection of the Landis Valley Village and Farm Museum
FM76.18.3
L2017.0801.012

Sgraffito-decorated plate 1815
possibly Berks County, Pennsylvania
redware, glaze
Collection of the Landis Valley Village and Farm Museum
FM76.14.1
L2017.0801.013



Fraktur

Fraktur employs a combination of ink and watercolor and can be easily recognized by its elaborate decoration. These illuminated Germanic documents typically display bright colors with intricate lines and flourishes, such as birds, hearts, flowers, and figures. One of the birds depicted in fraktur is the Carolina parakeet, North America's only parrot species, which became extinct in 1939.

Fraktur appears in the form of birth, marriage, and baptismal certificates, in addition to house blessings, awards of merit, and school writing

samples. Oftentimes, a schoolmaster, clergyman, or itinerant specialist crafted these important family documents, which were handed down from one generation to the next. Because these were special documents, their owners typically adhered them to the inside of a chest or tucked them inside of a Bible; as a result, many survive today. Highly illustrative, fraktur influenced many other forms of Pennsylvania German folk art.

Fraktur reward of merit for Jacob Landis 1830
Pennsylvania
paper, pigments
Collection of the Landis Valley Village and Farm Museum
F5.67
L2017.0801.021



Pennsylvania German teachers presented colorful fraktur documents as awards of merit to schoolchildren.

Samplers and Pictorial Needlework

Girls learned needlework at an early age to prepare for their future household duties of sewing clothing and mending linens for their families. Samplers display hand-embroidered designs using thread made of silk, wool, or cotton on cloth, typically linen. Samplers served two purposes—they improved a young girl's embroidery skills while teaching her the letters of the alphabet and numerals. Girls learned to make samplers at home or at school. Designs might be adapted from embroidery pattern books or school primers. Girls often embroidered their

names, ages, and the dates they completed the samplers. The finished work was often hung at home in the parlor to showcase the girl's skill and kept in the family for generations. More advanced embroideries contained pictorial imagery and a variety of verses, such as words commemorating a deceased loved one. Many of these were made in schools or academies for young ladies.

Embroidered pastoral scene late 1700s
Boston
silk thread, linen, silk, watercolor
Formerly part of the Garbisch Collection
Collection of Mattie and Allen Alperton
L2017.0810.001



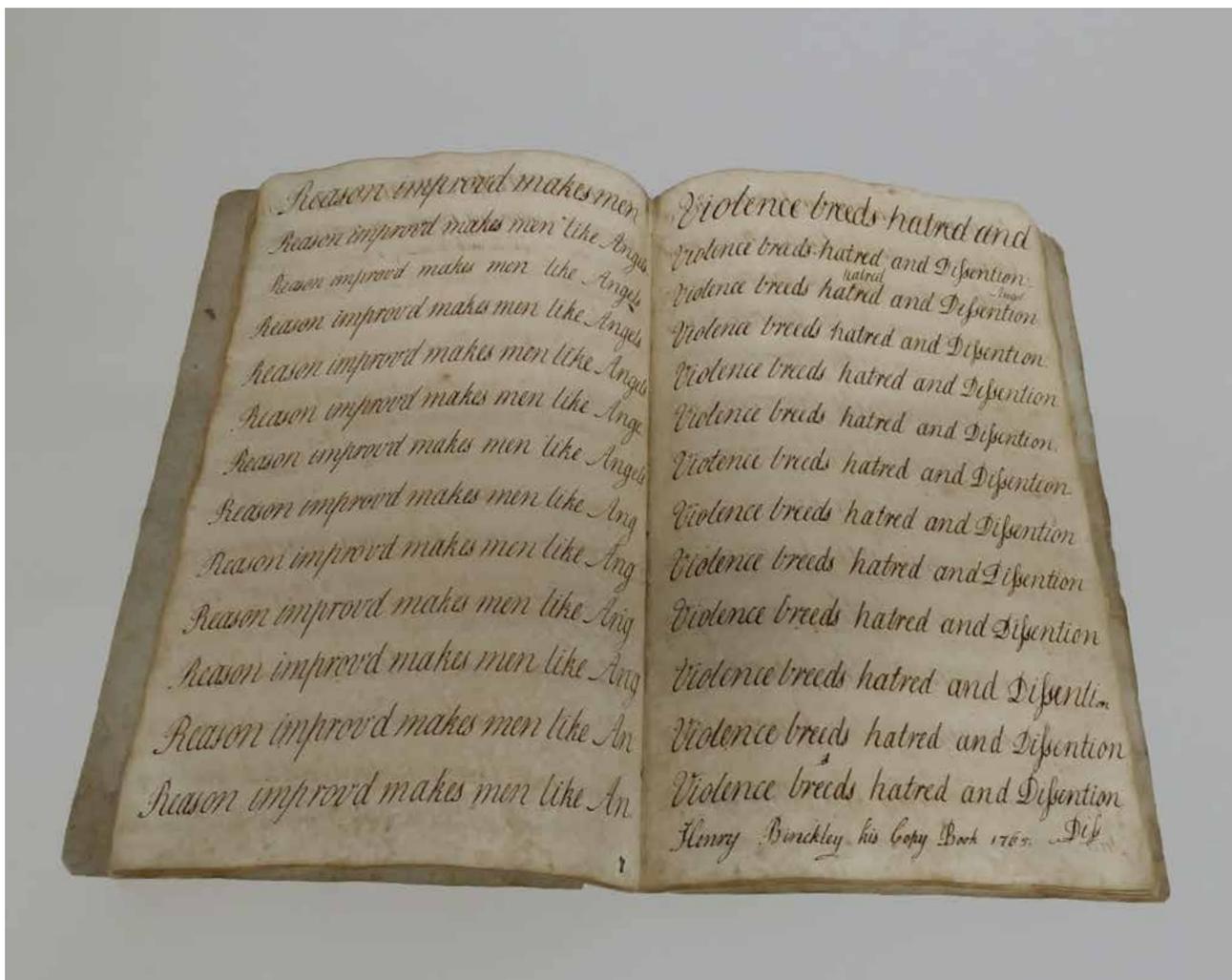
The imaginative piece features a charming, pastoral scene, with a woman sitting under a tree surrounded by animals. Rather than stitched, the woman's face was painted on silk with watercolor.

Schoolchildren's Copybooks

In an era where cursive handwriting is rarely practiced, it is difficult for many to imagine how highly regarded penmanship was in early America. Children, who were fortunate enough to attend school and learn to write, worked diligently to perfect their cursive handwriting skills. Pupils copied different styles of writing, penning letters, numerals, phrases, poems, and paragraphs of texts. Students practiced writing the same sentence, typically proverbial advice—for instance, “he that will not work shall not eat”—repeatedly down the length of the page. Before being supplanted by metal pens during

the nineteenth century, students completed these exercises using quill pens, made from goose and other large bird feathers. The two copybooks on display, one for penmanship and one for arithmetic, both exhibit artfully written letters, phrases, and numerals.

Copy book 1765–71
Henry M. Binckley
Germantown Union School
Lampeter Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania
paper, ink
Collection of the Landis Valley Village and Farm Museum
652.28
L2017.0801.019



A few of the proverbial sentences Henry M. Binckley wrote in his copy book displayed here include, “In friendship endeavor to avoid flattery;” “Our vice is only our disgrace;” and “Your tongue and your heart ought to agree.”

The American Bald Eagle

In 1782, Congress designated the bald eagle, unique to North America, as the national emblem. The majestic bird, a symbol of freedom admired for its speed and strength, became a favored image of artists in the fledgling nation. This imposing creature takes form in a variety of folk art, including wood carvings.

In southeastern Pennsylvania, where wood was especially abundant, Wilhelm Schimmel (1817–90), a German immigrant who came to the United States in the 1860s, became the most famous

carver in Cumberland County. A traveling craftsman allegedly known for his fiery temperament, Schimmel is particularly noted for his carved, painted eagles such as this large, outspread example. He carved the wings separately before attaching them to the creatures' bodies.

Carved wooden eagle c. 1870s
Wilhelm Schimmel (1817–90)
Pennsylvania
wood, paint
Collection of the Landis Valley Village and Farm Museum, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
FM76.24
L2017.0801.025

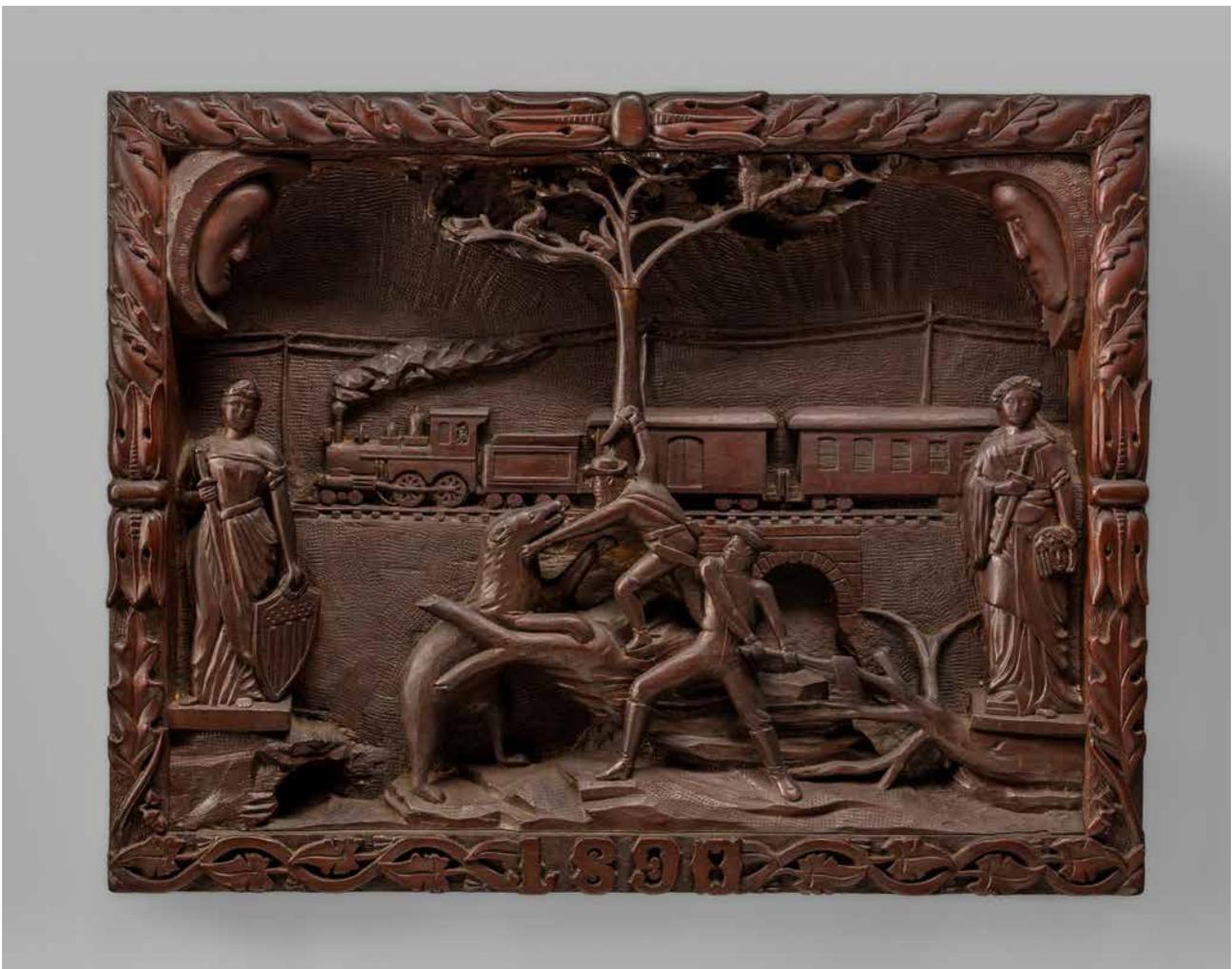


Pictorial Wood Carving

As with so much American folk art, the maker of this pictorial carving and its origins are unknown. It features a statue of Lady Liberty to the left, armed with a sword in one hand and a stars-and-stripes shield in the other. Another unidentified female statue appears on the right in a similar flowing gown, carrying a sword in her left hand and the head of a female in her right hand. In the midst of these feminine creatures, prospectors attack a bear who seems to have just leapt from his cave. A tree grows above the figures, while an owl, accompanied by playful squirrels, perches on one of its branches. In the background, a train chugs past, heading West. Two half-moons

with human faces frame the top corners of the carving. The piece is enclosed by a frame adorned with oak leaves and acorns. A date of 1890 appears on the bottom of the piece. As the carving references the West, and westward expansion, the piece was probably made in California.

Carved wooden picture 1890
possibly California
wood
Collection of Ian Berke
L2017.0802.003



Weathervanes

People have used devices to measure the wind since ancient times. A sudden change in the direction of the wind, combined with prevailing weather conditions, could help determine the forecast. American colonists, using technological skills brought with them from Europe, began crafting weathervanes during the seventeenth century. Eventually, each village, town, and city displayed a weathervane atop its highest building. Early weathervanes were carved from wood or fabricated from various metals. As greater numbers of farmers and settlers moved to rural areas, weathervanes appeared more

frequently on the tops of individual homes and barns. Regardless of the pictorial theme, a weathervane was adhered to a cross-shaped, hollow-metal rod with the vertical section serving as its pivot point. Directional arrows marked with the letters N, S, E, W, were then added. During the 1920s, the use of weathervanes declined with the advent of the radio and commercial weather forecasts.

Pig weathervane c. late 1800–early 1900s
Pennsylvania
sheet iron, paint
Collection of the Landis Valley Village and Farm Museum, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
F0.394 (1)
L2017.0801.030



Many farmers depicted domestic animals from cows, pigs, and roosters, to horses and dogs on their weathervanes.

Southern Folk Pottery

Small-scale, family-run pottery workshops in the American South continued into the 1900s. Similar operations in New England, the mid-Atlantic, and Midwest gave way to mass-produced ceramics by 1900. Folk pottery is still made today in North Carolina and Georgia. The southern tradition has emphasized high-fired stoneware vessels that could withstand rough usage on the farm. Wares were fired in wood-fueled, rectangular kilns called “tunnel” kilns when built above ground and “groundhog” when enclosed by earth.

Alkaline stoneware glazes are distinctly regional, with wood ashes or lime mixed in a solution to help melt the other ingredients—usually sand and clay. These glazes turn green or brown

depending on the firing conditions and can have a runny texture. They were developed in South Carolina around 1815, perhaps inspired by published accounts of similar high-firing Chinese glazes.

The small selection here illustrates a variety of glazes and shapes from several southern states with production dates ranging from the mid-nineteenth through the twentieth centuries. The two examples by Georgia’s Lanier Meaders represent a later-twentieth-century shift in emphasis from utilitarian farm wares to more decorative pieces for collectors, a trend that continues today.

Face jug 1969
Q. Lanier Meaders (1917–98)
Mossy Creek, White County, Georgia
ash glaze, clay
Atlanta History Center, courtesy of John Burrison
ML.1981.41.M188
L2017.0808.001

Fruit preserve jar c. 1870s
McPherson or Belcher family
Sand Mountain, DeKalb County, Alabama
alkaline glaze, clay
Atlanta History Center, courtesy of John Burrison
ML.1981.42.M105
L2017.0808.003



Some of Alabama’s most beautiful folk pottery comes from Sand Mountain, where functional vessels were often decorated by combing (tooling) in the damp clay while still on the potter’s wheel, as on this piece, and by applying a two-tone glaze, the darker half colored by an iron-bearing source.

Maritime Folk Art

For centuries, people have traveled the seas exploring new territories, engaging in trade, fishing, and whaling. Mariners spent long periods of time confined to a ship surrounded by the sea. In the days of sailing ships, a stint aboard might last weeks, months, or years. A seaman had to be a jack-of-all-trades in order to perform his duties. To pass the time during slow periods and calm seas, sailors adapted their varied skill sets to a number of handicrafts. Using their imagination, men transformed wood, bone, and rope into a variety of folk art.

Whalers made scrimshaw, one of the earliest forms of American folk art, by smoothing and polishing whale ivory, whalebone, or baleen and then engraving a design into the surface with

jackknives and other sharp tools. Ink, charcoal, and other bottled or solid pigments brought on the voyage were rubbed into the etched surface with a brush or finger. Mariners carefully embellished both ornamental and utilitarian items, which they etched with ships, women, patriotic symbols, whaling scenes, historical figures, foreign ports, and other imaginative imagery. Scrimshaw served as tokens of the sailor's travels and were given as gifts to family members.

Scrimshaw c. 1850–1900
orca jawbone, ink
Collection of the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park
SAFR 8915
L2017.0809.003



Carved Stone Books

American carved stone books first appeared around 1860, but seem to have reached their peak in popularity during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Stonecutters, many of whom worked in gravestone shops, created these intriguing items in their leisure hours along with other small carvings. Amateur craftsmen, civil prisoners, and prisoners of war also carved stone books. Stone books, usually carved in a closed position, are small, typically three- to six-inches in height. Marble, especially white, was used most often because it was readily available and easily

carved. Given to loved ones as gifts, stone books typically served as objects of remembrance. Makers embellished books with a variety of religious and secular inscriptions and imagery—both incised or carved in relief. Some recurring motifs include crosses, clasped hands, hearts, horseshoes, and lambs. A number of stone books that serve as memorials have covers set with tintype portraits. Women's first names appear often; full names on carved stone books are rare.

**Tintype portrait of a young man
stone carved book** c. 1900
United States
Marble
Collection of Ian Berke
SB-271
L2017.0802.037

"Clara Slather" stone carved book c. 1900
United States
marble
Collection of Ian Berke
SB-173
L2017.0802.018

Hand on heart stone carved book c. 1900
United States
marble
Collection of Ian Berke
SB-118
L2017.0802.035



The American Flag

Patriotic folk artists have long depicted the American flag on a variety of objects. In 1777, Congress passed an act establishing an official flag for the new nation. The flag contained thirteen alternating red and white stripes, which represented the original colonies, with thirteen stars representing the Union in a circular pattern behind a field of blue representing a new constellation. In 1794, when Kentucky and Vermont were admitted into the Union, Congress passed a second act allowing a star and stripe to be added for each new state. During the War of 1812, this new fifteen-star and fifteen-stripe flag inspired Francis Scott Key to write

“The Star-Spangled Banner,” which eventually became the country’s national anthem. With the admission of more states into the Union, in 1818, Congress passed a third act, declaring that the flag must return to the original thirteen stripes, with stars added for new states. They provided no further specifications as to how the stars should be arranged. Twenty-eight stars were added to the flag between 1818 and 1912. With no regulations, flags appeared with stars positioned in all manner of variations. Finally, in 1912, President William Howard Taft established the standard pattern of stars that remains today.

Children’s shape sorter c. 1900–40s
United States
wood, paint, metal, glass
Courtesy of Kit Hinrichs and the Stars and Stripes Collection
688.2: 1
L2017.0807.001



Canes

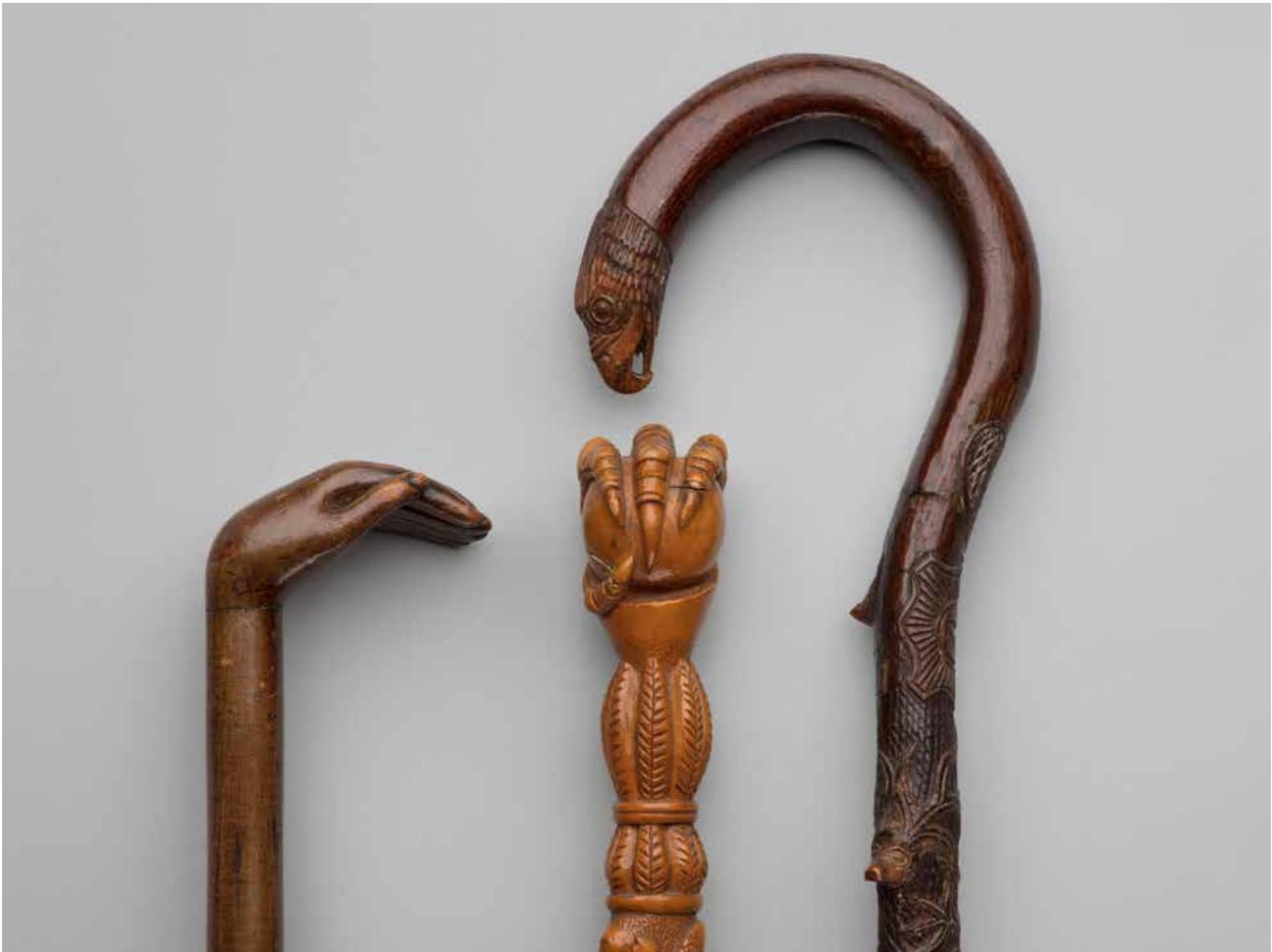
Today, we think of canes as tools to assist the elderly or infirm. However, for centuries, canes served as fashion accessories, similar to hats. Both practical and visually interesting, carved, wooden canes or walking sticks display a rich diversity of sculptural forms. Raised imagery, in the forms of people and animals, embellish handles; the snake—one of the more popular motifs—may encircle the entire length of a cane. Incised drawings and messages commemorating dates or events also adorn canes. Canes may be

religious or political in nature or delineate a person's occupation, fraternal ties, or express patriotism. Canes were carved from various woods including walnut, cherry, or ash, and might be crafted from limbs, or large roots, shrubs, and vines. Men carved a variety of imaginative canes throughout the nineteenth century, and the tradition continued to thrive until around World War I.

Cane with hand and snake c. 1880
United States
wood
Courtesy of Bonnie Grossman, The Ames Gallery
2355/07199
L2017.0805.011

Cane with ball and claw c. 1850–1900
United States
wood
235/7808
L2017.0805.013

Cane with bird in hand c. 1900–25
United States
wood
Courtesy of Bonnie Grossman, The Ames Gallery
235A/4508
L2017.0805.016



Duck Decoys

The decoy, a hunting tool intended to lure wild birds, has a long history in North America. Native Americans first fashioned them from reeds and other natural materials over one thousand years ago. Sometime in the late 1700s, European-Americans followed their lead and began carving decoys from wood. From coast to coast, various regions of North America developed distinctive types of decoys. Salty, rough waters typically required sturdy, solid-bodied decoys that needed frequent repainting. Freshwater decoys, on the other hand, allowed for hollow bodies and

detailed paint patterns, which lasted through many seasons. Master craftsmen created local styles that were passed on through generations of carvers. Artisans also brought their own individual creativity to the birds they crafted, making each one unique. Carvers made some decoys to appear sleeping, preening, or with their heads tucked low into their bodies as if resting. Craftsmen also made flyers to add realism to decoy rigs. Ropes were attached to two poles so the flyer hung over the water or along the shoreline to simulate a duck about to land.

Canvasback drake decoy (preener) early 1900s

Auro Henry
Napa, California
redwood, paint
Courtesy of Paul A. Mazzilli
L2017.0804.003



Wildfowl populations were so great in the early days of California's settlement that few decoys were needed. By late 1800s, as the state's population grew, carvers began to craft decoys. Even so, many wildfowl hunters did not use duck decoys until around World War I.

Folk Houses

Many amateur craftsmen created unique folk houses and other architectural buildings from the mid-1800s to the early-1900s. The one displayed here evokes something from a fairy tale. This fanciful house has decorative wooden shingles with an elaborate rooftop and entryway finials. The house's wooden front and back façades mimic bricks, while a small side addition appears to be a chapel attached to the house.

Artisans made a diverse range of structures that reflect the architecture of the period in which they were made. Churches, bridges, castles, barns, and civic places are some of the many other types of models that artisans created. While many of these were based on real designs, others served as inventive structures fueled by the maker's imagination.

Folk house c. late 1800s
United States
wood, paint
Collection of Ian Berke
L2017.0802.015



Wildfowl populations were so great in the early days of California's settlement that few decoys were needed. By late 1800s, as the state's population grew, carvers began to craft decoys. Even so, many wildfowl hunters did not use duck decoys until around World War I.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe some of the types of American folk art that you saw or read about today.
2. What are some of the materials that folk art is made from?
3. What was your favorite object and why?
4. Folk art is learned from passed-down traditions.
Can you think of any type of folk art traditions that you have learned?
For example, are there certain items you make around a holiday?

Recommended Children's book with activities:

Panchyk, Richard. *American Folk Art for Kids: With 21 Activities*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2004.

Check www.flysfo.com/museum/programs/education-programs for future programs.

1. Painting of boy c. 1830–45
Prior-Hamblin School
New England
wood, canvas, paint
anonymous lender
L2017.0806.001



2. Fraktur birth certificate for Elizabeth Bucher February 16, 1811
Pennsylvania
paper, pigments
Collection of the Landis Valley Village and Farm Museum
F5.459
L2017.0801.022



3. Snake and grape vase 1978
Q. Lanier Meaders (1917–98)
Mossy Creek, White County, Georgia
lime glaze over white clay
Atlanta History Center, courtesy of John Burrison
ML.1981.41.M725
L2017.0808.002



Your visit to SFO Museum

SFO is a great destination for your class

- Museum and library admission, educational programs, and tours are all free.
- Educational programs and tours can be customized for higher grades, mixed ages, and special needs students.

You can extend your visit

- Bring your lunch and sit in the public dining areas adjacent to the aviation museum, or select from the many restaurants at SFO.
- Take a tour of the airport and ride the AirTrain (by prior arrangement and availability).
- Meet the trained service dogs of the SFPD Airport K-9 Unit and see them in action (by prior arrangement and availability).
- Visit other museum exhibitions at SFO. (Schedules are subject to change, please check www.flysfo.com/museum/exhibitions for updated information).

Transportation

- Take Public Transportation:

Take BART directly into SFO International Terminal, where the aviation museum and library are located. Take SamTrans Routes KX and 292 directly to SFO. Take Caltrain to BART for service to SFO.

- By School Bus/Charter Bus:

Parking for buses is available at no charge by prior arrangement only.

- By Car:

Groups booked for educational programs can park in Airport garages and Airport parking tickets can be validated at the aviation museum at no charge.

For more information on transportation to SFO go to: www.flysfo.com

