

# This year marks the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment

Look for the gold and blue signs throughout the museum to discover creators, laborers, collectors, venerated icons, and keepers—and how women have shaped our contemporary ideas of culture, history, and heritage.

The amendment guaranteed U.S. women citizens the right to vote. To commemorate this event, we are telling stories of women through objects in the collection. Some of these women had power and privilege while the contributions of many have largely gone unnoticed.

**Doris Duke** (1912-1993) was born before women had the right to vote in the United States, but thanks to the work of generations of women before her, she grew up with the expectation that she could vote once she came of age. While Doris was not a political activist, she used her wealth and privilege to shape the world. As a philanthropist, she supported organizations and causes including medical research, environmental advocacy, child well-being, and the celebration of the performing arts. And as a “keeper” she continued a long tradition of women stewarding heritage and shaping our understanding of our past for future generations. At Whitehorne House Museum, you will see furniture and decorative art objects that were part of Doris’s original vision for a museum celebrating Newport artistry and craftsmanship.

For more information, check out XIX Shall Not Be Denied—a digital project across the state of Rhode Island that celebrates Rhode Island women and civic engagement past and present. #XIXShallNotBeDenied

# Unknown Makers

While recent scholarship has led to many fascinating discoveries about the interconnections of Newport furniture makers, there is still much that is unknown about the workshop system and the craftspeople who worked in the larger workshops. The pieces of furniture in the collection each reveal the masterful hand of the maker—but there are a number unknown hands who helped create and shape the masterpieces on display. The role of many of the men, and perhaps women, that worked in the Newport workshops may never be fully known.

# Domain Over the Domestic

Women commissioned furniture and women inherited furniture.

Understanding the correct arrangement, display, and usage of specialized furniture (like the tea tables in this room) was an important part of the role of “middling” and upper class women in a colonial household. A woman was supposed to be as polished in manners and decorum as the surface of her mahogany furniture.

Women were also arbitrators of taste, meaning that they often made decisions about what household furnishings and decorative objects would be purchased for their homes and made decisions about how the furnishings would be arranged and displayed.



# Guanyin Sculpture

Doris displayed Guanyin figures in all her houses and at the Whitehorne House Museum. She seems to have felt a special infinity for **Guaynin**, who among other things, is the goddess of compassion and mercy.

She is a figure connected to Doris's spirituality and her interest in Eastern philosophy, as well as her deep sense of philanthropic responsibility. Doris gave away over \$400 million in her lifetime, and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation continues this legacy today.

Guaynin  
Amber  
China, possibly from Qing Dynasty (1644-1912)



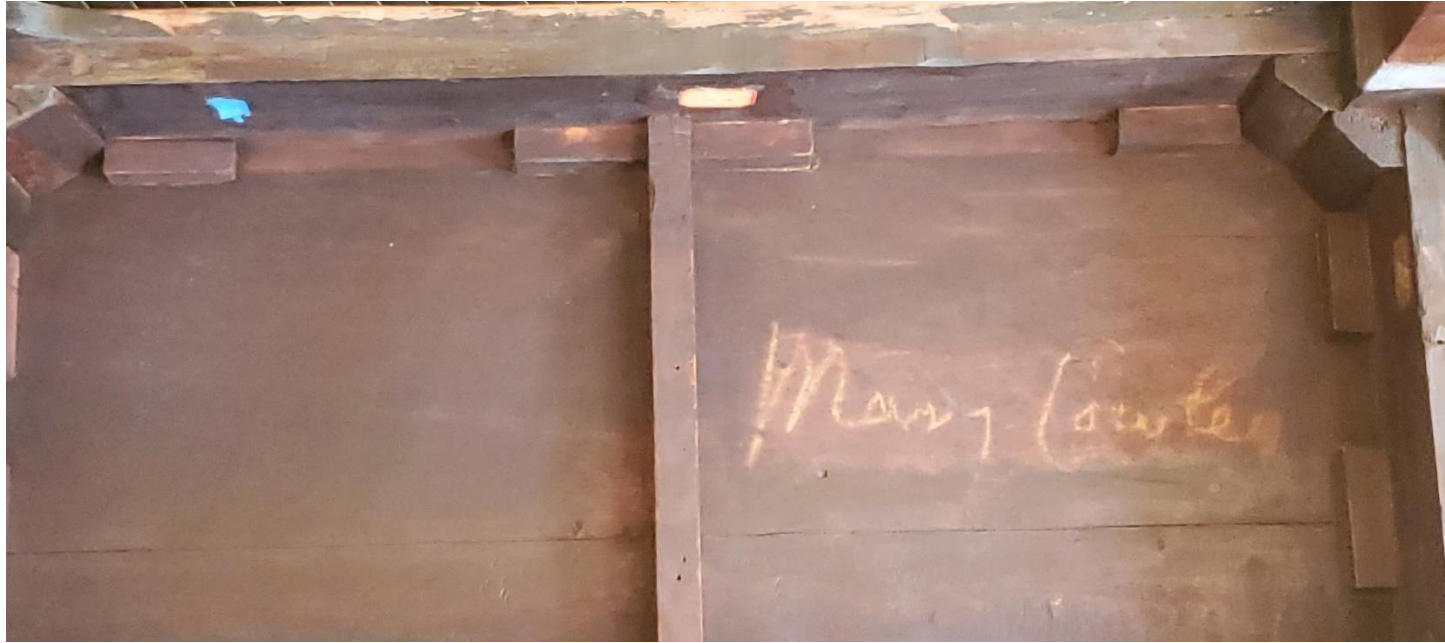
# Signatures of Mary Cowley and Abby Liscombe

Certain objects in the collection point to their connection to the maker through printed labels by John Townsend and Job E. Townsend—or through signatures scrawled in chalk like those of Joseph Sanford or Benjamin Baker. These labels and signatures pointed to a pride of craftsmanship and were likely meant to inform contemporary purchasers about the quality of the product. Today, they are evidence of the process of craftsmanship.

Women's names inscribed on the back of chests, underneath tables, and inside of bureau drawers similarly are a claim of ownership (especially important when most women legally could not own property or businesses) and are important clues for us today about the usage and possession of domestic objects by women.

unknown dates







# Abbey Whitehornes Sampler Work in Her Tenth Year of Age

Most U.S. women in the period before the 1860s are often left out of the document record, with the exception of marriages, births, and deaths—or rare cases involving legal disputes. They often did not have a legal status separate from their male family members and did not have control over their own finances.

This sampler, completed by **Abigail Whitehorne** (about 1794-1875) in 1804 allowed her to sew her way into the historical record. Samplers like these were kept and displayed—and sometimes have found their way into archives and museum collections where they are studied to gain a better understanding of domestic life, the role of girls in the household, and education practices of the time.

Abigail Whitehorne  
([about 1794-1875] sister of Samuel Whitehorne, the original owner of Whitehorne House)  
American, 1804  
Linen, cotton, glass, wood, gilt



# Wielding a Needle

One of the most striking and distinctive aspects of furniture meant for sitting or lounging is the upholstery work. Upholstery brings color and texture in contrast to the brown framework of the piece of furniture, and allows for the personal taste of the buyer to be on display. The upholstered part of the chair or sofa also contributes to the sense of comfort (think of the last time you sat on a hard, un-cushioned chair!) and general pleasure of sitting.

**Mary Alsop** (1740-1829) is one woman that we know who had a hand in the textile production of Newport furniture, and there are as yet-unnamed women as yet-unnamed women who designed and created needlepoint covers for high-end Newport pieces of furniture. The wood construction of a chair is likely to last far longer than its upholstered seat. Whether due to a change in taste or the gradually wearing-out from many sittings, it is rare to find a surviving original upholstered chair or sofa from the 18th century.



Armchair  
William A. Smith, Ltd.  
Ca. 1740  
American, Boston  
Walnut, cotton



# Julia Ward Howe Bust

Doris Duke purchased this bust of writer and social activist **Julia Ward Howe** (1819-1910) in 1968 after it had been re-discovered in a Newport garage. Doris displayed the bust on the second floor of Whitehorne, although it has been loaned to other Newport museums over the years. While we do not know why Doris was drawn to this object, it is likely that she recognized Julia Ward Howe as an important Newporter whose depiction belonged in Newport. Besides penning the “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” Julia Ward Howe was a co-founder of the American Woman Suffrage Association and was an abolitionist, suffragist, and peace advocate.

Julia Ward Howe is one of many, many women who actively championed the cause of women’s right to vote without ever enjoying the privilege—but whose work helped pave the way for eventual suffrage, and reminds us that the fight for equal rights for all is one that is ongoing.

Hendrik Christian Andersen, 1872-1940  
Late-19th century  
Carrara marble

