



## Stoneware At Portsmouth's Warner House



Warner House.

PORTSMOUTH, N.H. — This summer, the Warner House presents a European stoneware exhibition, "From the Mundane to the Sublime: Stoneware 1600-1775." Displayed throughout the house and curated by Robert Barth, the exhibition includes more than 250 pieces of stoneware from regional museums as well as private collections. These objects were produced primarily in Germany and England in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.

The importation of European stoneware to the colonies for practical use and private enjoyment was an ongoing necessity, as there was little or no stoneware production in the colonies prior to 1775. Attribution to specific makers is difficult as these wares were rarely signed or dated and sometimes even the location of production cannot be determined.

This exhibition contains most of the different types of stoneware imported to the colonies. The Seventeenth Century was dominated by German salt-glazed wares; designated as Frechen brown and Westerswald blue-gray. The German wares consisted largely of rugged bottles, jugs and mugs for the shipment, storage, service and consumption of liquids. The Dutch dominated shipping of these German wares for the first three quarters of the Seventeenth Century.

Around 1675 England began to assume control of the North Atlantic trade routes and, at the same time, began to produce their own brown stonewares in imitation of the Frechen type. It is important to note that during the Eighteenth Century, the English glass bottle industry made significant inroads into the use of ceramic containers. Around 1720, potters in Staffordshire began to produce a much finer, lighter white salt-glazed stoneware that was initially used to produce tea wares

and, by 1740, dinner wares. White salt-glazed stoneware appealed to the rising Georgian middle class on both sides of the Atlantic, who benefited from an increase in earning power and the desire for better commodities. As these new, fashionable wares reached the colonies, they began to replace the more common dining materials of wood, earthenware and pewter.

Not all English wares made their way to the colonies. Carved Nottingham mugs attributed to James Morley, the slip-cast unglazed red stonewares of Elers and the London or Bristol hunt tankards have not been found in the archaeological record but are included in the exhibition to show the variety of wares produced.

### The Warner House

Scots-Irish merchant-captain, Archibald Macphaedris, arrived in Portsmouth in 1714, and in 1715, hired John Drew, a recently arrived London mason/joiner to construct a house for him and his new bride, Sarah Wentworth. Drew created an English baroque brick mansion on the banks of the Piscataqua River with carved decorations surrounding the front door, an "M" shaped roof, eight dormers and a cupola. Sarah and Archibald's daughter, Mary, would marry widower Jonathan Warner in 1760 and after her death in 1776, Warner would remain in the house until his death in 1814. During his lifetime, Warner altered the exterior to the popular Palladian style by replacing the baroque raked entrance roof and its carvings with a demilune roof and classical pilasters. Warner left his estate to his niece, Elizabeth, and her husband, John Nathaniel Sherburne. They inherited the house passing to their son and his six children, one of whom was Evelyn Sherburne.

After the Civil War, the Warner house became a summer resi-



Stoneware blue and white teapot.



Setting room, Warner House.

dence, with the last residents, Evelyn Sherburne and her nephew Thomas Penhallow, sharing the house in the summers and wintering in Boston. The sparse alterations to the house became an asset, and it became known in preservation and antiquarian circles for its architectural importance and furnishings.

When Penhallow died in 1930, the house was offered for sale. Standard Oil wanted to buy it in order to tear it down and replace it with a gas station. Alarmed at the idea of the loss of the building, Edith Wendell, a descendant of Portsmouth's wealthy merchant, Jacob Wendell, and a group of friends, raised \$10,000 and bought the house in 1931. Known initially as the Macphaedris-Warner house, it opened as a historic house museum in 1932 but over time has become known more simply as the Warner House.

### Front Setting Room

The Front Setting Room reflects the early occupancy of Jonathan Warner. Portsmouth was flourishing in 1760 when Jonathan Warner, Mary and his daughter, Polly, moved into the house. Artisans were drawn to the port town; encouraged by the economic prosperity. Warner commissioned Robert Harrold, a newly arrived English cabinet-maker, to make a bookcase with butler's drawer for his setting room. Several layers of Eighteenth Century wallpaper were found behind the secretary and beneath that wallpaper was the original 1718 wall decoration of marbled painted panels with the arabesque borders. The rest of the room had been stripped of wallpaper and painted white in the Nineteenth Century. However, in the 1940s with this new information, the museum restored that treatment to the entire room. The original marbling is still intact behind the Harrold secretary and beneath the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century layers of paint.



Reception room, Warner House.

### Front Parlor

The Front Parlor is interpreted for the period between 1824 and 1929. The parlor was updated around 1820, when the weddings of several Sherburne children took place here. The furnishings, from the 1820s and earlier, reflect the taste of the Sherburnes and Penhallows. The objects in the room are based on interior photographs from the early part of the Twentieth Century. Five Joseph Blackburn paintings fill the walls of the room. These were painted in the summers of 1760-61 and include Sarah Macphaedris; Mary Macphaedris Warner; Polly Warner, his daughter; Daniel Warner, his father; and Samuel Warner, his brother. These paintings were produced at the beginning of Portsmouth's "golden decade" just before the Revolution.

### Murals

The murals on the second floor are important. They date from around 1720, making them the earliest in this country in their original location. The sidewalls were covered with wallpaper between 1760 and 1853, when the paper was removed, and the murals were rediscovered. Interestingly, the images of the two Mohawk chiefs on the landing were based on engravings of paintings of the four Mohawk representatives who traveled to London in 1710 seeking aid from the Crown against the French incursions from Canada.

The artist of the murals may be Nehemiah Partridge, a Portsmouth-born painter whose father, Col William Partridge, was a friend of Macphaedris. Partridge trained in Boston and then spent most of his career as a portrait painter in New York City and the Hudson River Valley. His work dates from 1714 to about 1735.

### Reception Room

The large chamber on the second floor is the reception room. The room has a unique paint treatment, the only one of its kind in America and possibly the world. Repeated testing of paint layers revealed a consistent early layer of smalt — ground cobalt blue glass — over a pink paint, a technique that had its heyday in the first half of the Eighteenth Century. This use of glass provided a modulating reflective surface that shimmers rather than

mirrors light. Paint testing has shown it was used in two Newburyport houses, the extent of which is not known. Smalt has been found in some buildings in England, but only as an accent. It had been used as a blue on iron-work stair railings, or as part of the coloring of a plaster frieze or on ceiling beams. Macphaedris had it applied from cornice to baseboards. This is the first time smalt has been identified in such copious quantities. The texture is somewhat like sandpaper.

In addition to the importance of its decoration, the room is equally important, as it was constructed as a performance chamber. It retains its original 1717-18 floating floorboards, which are not nailed to the joists but instead connect to each other by dowels, float over the joists and are held in place by the walls. This construction provides shock absorption for dancers and acts as a soundboard for musicians. The construction of the rest of the house aids the amplification of musical performances in this room filling the house with music. The room as completed would have worked well for entertaining by both Macphaedris and Governor Benning Wentworth, who lived in the house from 1741 to 1753.

### Main Bedchamber

The main bedchamber has recently been decorated to the Warner period and was based upon analysis of the walls, woodwork and paint history of the chamber. Testing indicated that the initial paint layer for this room's woodwork and most of the house was a layer of red paint. Prussian blue, which was popular in the mid-Eighteenth Century, is the next painting layer that was found. The walls were covered with an Eighteenth Century reproduction wallpaper in a Prussian blue and burnt sienna color scheme, made by Adelphi Papers. The choice of damask wallpaper was based on known examples of Eighteenth Century damask wallpaper found in the city.

The house includes several more bedchambers, a fully finished third floor and an intact cupola that has provided a clear view of the harbor for three centuries.

The Warner House is at 150 Daniel Street. For information, [www.warnerhouse.org](http://www.warnerhouse.org) or 603-436-5909.