

# THE REHOBOTH ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY MAGAZINE

2020



# NOTE FROM THE DIRECTORS

Thank you for making 2019 a great year at Blanding Public Library! We enjoyed another year of events and programs for children and adults, serving the reading, learning and viewing needs of our community, and creating a welcoming meeting and gathering place for local organizations, groups, and individuals. The Library's technology services include free WiFi, public computers and printers, and a digital scanner and photocopier. Through SAILS, our network of library services, we provide access to e-books, available to read online or download, and streaming audio and video collections. Your library card also provides access to 60 databases with information to view, print or download.

The Library has a wide array of discount admission passes to local museums and cultural institutions. Everything from the MassParks pass providing free parking at Massachusetts State Parks to the Providence Children's Museum to Mystic Seaport and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Feel free to ask us about which passes are available and what the discounts are.

In 2020, we're expanding our collections to offer a Library of Things. A Library of Things offers objects other than books to library card holders for a set period of time at no charge. We'll be starting with our library telescope and some jigsaw puzzles, and will build this borrowing collection through modest purchases and donations to include board games, specialty baking pans, a microscope, a coffee urn, yard games, and a mobile hotspot. We'd also love to hear suggestions from you for other objects appropriate for this collection. We think it will be a wonderful new resource for Rehoboth.

We wish everyone a happy new year and hope to see you at the Library soon!

*Whitney Pape, MLIS, is Director of the Blanding Library.*

It has been less than a year since I was asked to join the Carpenter Museum as Director and already I feel so lucky to serve the town of Rehoboth. I've experienced my first Strawberry Festival (the Museum's most attended ever), seen dozens of students' minds expand as they learn about open hearth cooking for the first time during a school field trip, attended my first Artisans Show, and been welcomed by everyone I have encountered. Driving down Bay State Road to work every week there is no doubt Rehoboth is beautiful, but this old farming community is more than natural beauty. It's got personality, pride, and a VERY rich history as one of the nation's earliest settlements.

Big changes we made the Museum this year was to switch our Saturday opening from the third to the first Saturday of every month. We also changed the time we were open from 9:00am-12:00pm to 1:00-4:00pm. These changes allow more non-locals to visit to the Museum and Research Center. We had many visitors from surrounding New England States who drove hours in early morning to reach us in time to take a tour and research their family histories.

Looking forward in the year to come we have a major new exhibit opening this April, "Play Ball! The Rehoboth Milkmaids: Pioneers of Women's Softball" about the 1930-40s Rehoboth women's teams. The exhibit explores the themes of gender equality, sportsmanship, and community pride with artifacts and stories from the team's active years. We will also have a busy summer with our annual Strawberry Festival, a speaker series, and I'm sure, many visitors.

Thank you for making my first year at the Carpenter Museum so great! If I haven't had the pleasure of meeting you yet make sure you stop in to say hello and see what's new. Also keep up with us on our website or social media!

*Danielle DiGiacomo, MA, is Director of the Carpenter Museum.*



# WHY EVERY OLD HOUSE IS IMPORTANT

Thomas Rice

## REHOBOTH HAS A LONG AND STORIED PAST, AND LIKE MANY NEW ENGLAND TOWNS, ITS OLD HOUSES ARE A MAJOR PART OF THIS HISTORY.

Abiah Bliss House built 1666  
[2005-005-029] CM Collection

In Rehoboth, there are thirty-five buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places from various eras of construction, most built before 1900. This article highlights a few Rehoboth examples of particular styles, but will also argue for the importance of the regular or vernacular historic houses in a town.

In the present town of Rehoboth, the Kingsley House and the Abiah Bliss House (shown above) represent the earliest period, while the Nathan Bowen House and the Goff Homestead are examples of the Federal style. The earlier houses are more utilitarian, and were often not entirely symmetrical, while the Federal Houses often have ornate details. Early houses almost always have a large chimney in the center of the house. One notable exception to this rule is the Rhode Island Stone-ender style, which, as its name suggests, involves a chimney at the end of the building. Rehoboth's Kingsley House may have originally been constructed this way, although its chimney is centered today, as is the chimney of the Abiah Bliss house. The Goff Homestead has simple ornamentation around its door and end chimneys, while the Nathan Bowen

House has a central chimney. The Bowen house has more elaborate decoration around its front door including a fanlight window and a pediment. These houses are important, and their styles are well documented both in Rehoboth and throughout New England, but they are representative of the exception in architecture and not the norm.

While there have been many studies of early homes often from the 17th century and of the Georgian, Federal, and Greek Revival styles emerging in the 18th and early 19th centuries, scholars have not written as much on vernacular farmhouse architecture from approximately 1790-1830. Buildings from this period occupy a middle ground between the very early "first period" houses and the more established styles that divided architecture later in the 19th century. These types of houses usually still had a center chimney but they are also distinctly evolved from the homes of the 17th century. They often used less ornamentation than houses with established styles, but were built well and practically for their use. These houses are also abundant, representing the most common type in an agricultural community like Rehoboth.





George Kelton Homestead in South Rehoboth, built circa 1750-1810  
[2004-018-135] CM Collection

The town of Rehoboth originally included parts of several neighboring towns in Bristol County, and county data can help to illustrate trends in the town. In 1800, the population of Bristol County was 33,880. If the average household had six people, then there were likely at least 5,600 houses in Bristol County in 1800. While Rehoboth is only a small portion of the county, it still would have had dozens of houses in that era. Vernacular farmhouses would have made up a large percentage of these buildings in Rehoboth. They likely would have formed the backbone of the town's architecture, more so than either the few early or elaborate stylized homes.

The simple 1790-1830 vernacular farmhouse, like the houses in the image above and opposite, was significant for the early Republic as well. In American history, the Colonial and Revolutionary War periods are well defined, as is the period from Industrialization forward to the present. The gap between those two periods is when the United States began to establish itself internationally, but also domestically for its citizens. The country was expanding into new western territories like Ohio, and farmhouses often resembled their New England counterparts. Because of this, New England vernacular farmhouse architecture from around 1800 onward was not distinctive to New England in the way that houses from the 1600s were. This may explain a lack of focus from researchers.

Some authors have discussed this type of house, but often they are discussing a broader style. In *American Houses: A Field Guide to the Architecture of the Home*, Gerald L. Foster discusses the "New England Large House 1690-1850." Foster characterizes this design as having a large central chimney, a five-bay façade with some classical details. Foster's New England Large House may be similar, but not always identical to a vernacular farmhouse that may be found in Rehoboth. Most notably, many vernacular houses were not nearly as large as the design that Foster describes.

Vernacular farmhouses were distinguished from both earlier and later architectural styles because they were eclectic and hard to classify. In an example of architectural variety, many houses in Connecticut from this period employed a secondary door on the end of a symmetrical house. This feature was often popularly called a "coffin door" because it was supposed that it allowed a coffin to be carried into a house when the hallway in the front entry was too circuitous. Many scholars refute this name and characterization of the door, but its presence or lack there-of is notable. The end gable doors are found in Connecticut and in western Massachusetts, but not in Eastern Massachusetts. Similarly, there may have been features in the houses of Rehoboth which did not appear elsewhere.

In addition to the presence of various features, vernacular farmhouses could have had lean-to or ell additions which dramatically changed their forms. In *The Search for a New Rural Order: Farmhouses in Sutton, Massachusetts, 1790-1830*, Nora Pat Small discusses how urban elite began to dislike farmhouse development at the turn of the 19th century. She writes, "Rural reformers saw the two-story-with-ell house that proliferated in the New England countryside as a symbol of decay." They considered farmers to be hardworking and virtuous people, but that they were losing these traits with their attempts to build bigger and more elaborate houses. Many thought that the new farmhouses were becoming unruly, and often were incomplete. The elite wanted the farmers to maintain neat and orderly houses, "Neatness and uniformity implied an absence of asymmetrical ells and of the multiple roof lines created by those ells, the very qualities of New England dwellings that later came to be romanticized."

From the 1830s onward, many farmers built houses in new and varied styles as the country was industrializing, and building became easier. Houses from this time period often would not have the same symmetrical details of their earlier peers; they might have Gothic or picturesque architectural details. There is significant coverage of house architecture from this time, as it became increasingly complex, it lost many of the characteristics of early 19th century vernacular architecture.

In the Rehoboth area, vernacular farmhouses may be understudied because scholars often focus on the houses in the counties surrounding Boston. It is possible that Rehoboth's position close to the Rhode Island Colony gave it a hybrid of Massachusetts and Rhode Island styles, which would be worthy of further examination. Every old house has a unique history, and can help to tell the story of a town. All are valuable as educational resources and usually as enhancements to quality of life because they are pleasant to view. This is true of the earliest or most ornate house just as it is true for the regular old farmhouse. Each makes an important contribution, and all are worth preserving.

For further reading, see: Abernathy, III, Leslie C. "Kingsley House", "Abiah Bliss House", "Nathan Bowen House", and "Goff Homestead", National Register of Historic Places Form; Foster, Gerald L. *American Houses: A Field Guide to the Architecture of the Home*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004; McMurry, Sally Ann. *Families and Farmhouses in Nineteenth-Century America: Vernacular Design and Social Change*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1988; Small, Nora Pat. "The Search for a New Rural Order: Farmhouses in Sutton, Massachusetts, 1790-1830" *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No. 1, Material Culture in Early America (Jan., 1996): 67-86; Sweeney, Kevin M. "Mansion People: Kinship, Class, and Architecture in Western Massachusetts in the Mid Eighteenth Century" *Winterthur Portfolio* 19, no. 4 (1984): 231-255; and U.S. Census Bureau, 1800, Bristol County, Massachusetts

*Thomas Rice is a MA Candidate in Historic Preservation at Columbia University and the 2019 RAS Scholarship Recipient.*



Ichabod Bosworth House in South Rehoboth, built circa 1780-1820  
[2004-018-137] CM Collection



# SUSPECT: GERMAN! 1917

LENDE MCMULLEN, RESEARCH MANAGER

Some time ago a man from Switzerland with my family name gave my mother a call saying he had hired a genealogist to complete the ancestry of the Ramspotts. He had found our family branch, and asked if we would like to have a copy of his research. We knew the family was of German descent. My grandfather's father immigrated to the U.S. in 1887 and resided in Providence, RI until his death.

The genealogist sent a package which contained the family tree and also a copy of the following report from an FBI Investigator who one day followed my grandfather to Rehoboth. In 1917, a Providence to Taunton trolley came through the Rehoboth village and stopped at the Horton Store across the street from the Rehoboth Congregational Church. It is here the investigator gets his facts about my grandfather. Read his report below:

Agent Howick, Providence, RI, USA, Made April 16, 1917... for April 13, 1917

In Re Robert Ramspott (Moonsocket, RI, USA)  
Neutrality Matter  
At Providence, RI, USA

At 5:45 P.M. Agent was advised over the phone by Inspector Jalbert of [sic] the Moonsocket Police that the above named Ramspott had excited suspicion of his employer, the Tft Pierce Company, by leaving above named Ramspott had excited suspicion of his employer, the Taft Pierce Company, by leaving Moonsocket rather suddenly in response to a telephone call from Providence; that Ramspott was then en route to Providence by way of an electric car due to arrive in Providence at 6 P.M.. Inspector Jalbert suggested the advisability of boarding the electric car on which Ramspott was riding and watch his movements. The description was given as follows; 25 yrs. Old; 135 pounds; 6 ft. 7 inches; dark suit; brown overcoat; tan shoes; army hat; baggage consisting [sic] of black satchel with two handles and box wrapped in yellow paper. Inquiry revealed that neither the Taft Pierce Company nor Inspector Jalbert had any reason for suspecting Ramspott other than that he was a German.

Agent was engaged on other matters at the time and requested Immigration Inspector Sullivan who had just reported at the office in accordance with an appointment, to locate Ramspott, if possible, and ascertain where he was going.

Late in the evening Inspector Sullivan reported that he had no difficulty [sic] in "spotting" that subject of this report on the 6 P.M. Moonsocket car; that suspect upon leaving

that car boarded a Taunton car and got off at the station in front of a grocery store of F.R. Horton, where he was met by a young man who addressed him, the suspect, as "Bob"; that suspect and his companion drove away in a Ford Automobile, bearing Massachusetts No. 52352.

Mr. Sullivan further stated that the Ford Automobile proved to be owned by grocer, F.H. Morton, above mentioned, and that driver proved to be Mr. Morton's son.

In view of the fact that Mr. Sullivan knows Mr. Morton as a reputable citizen of Rehoboth and a thorough American, further attention was not considered. Mr. Sullivan expressed the prediction that both young men were engaged in nothing more serious than a social mission, perhaps to a country dance or a visit to their sweethearts.

Inspector Jalbert was advised as to what had been ascertained and supported Mr. Sullivan's prediction with the information that it was known in Moonsocket that the subject of this report was quite attentive to a young lady living in the vicinity of Rehoboth. This case will be considered closed.

(Investigative Reports of the FBI, Old German Files, Case 8000-9327; published as : Investigative Case Files of the Bureau of Investigation 1908-1922, M1085 (footnote.com))



Lende McMullen's grandparents: Robert Henry Ramspott (1895-1979) and his Rehoboth sweetheart, Ruth Parker (1898-1991)

# REHOBOTH INVENTOR ELIJAH ORMSBEE AND HIS STEAMBOAT

## LESLIE PATTERSON

Robert Fulton has received all the credit as inventor of the first successful steamboat. The Clermont made a 300-mile round trip on the Hudson River from New York City to Albany in 1807. But what if the original plans for such a steamboat were drawn up by a native of Rehoboth, and his own steamboat launched in Providence in 1792? Some credit the inventor Elijah Ormsbee for the design that Fulton used in his successful steamboat. It is believed that Ormsbee's design plans were copied by someone called Daniel French, who passed them along to Fulton.

Elijah Ormsbee was born in Rehoboth in 1763 to a family of carpenters. After finishing his schooling in Rehoboth, the young Ormsbee went to Providence to take up the building trade. Along the way he became an expert on steam power while working for Col. Ephraim Bowen, who was developing a steam plant in Cranston. Ormsbee later worked as a carpenter on the Hudson River where his observations led him to develop plans for using steam power for river boats. Upon returning to Providence, he experimented at Kettle Point, creating a twelve-ton boat with the help of Col. Bowen and David Wilkinson of Pawtucket, another enterprising inventor of that era.

This boat's maiden voyage up the Seekonk River from Providence to Pawtucket is recounted in Vol. 2 of *State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*, edited by Edward Field: Ormsbee and Wilkinson "navigated their steamboat between Providence and Pawtucket and exhibited her capacity to their admiring fellow citizens between the bridges on the Seekonk River. Instead of a side wheel, the boat was propelled by a 'goose-foot' paddle [a large mechanical screw propeller in the water]. The boat was named the Experiment, and the inventors had such faith in its success that they had tickets engraved and printed for passages on her."

So what happened to Ormsbee's original Experiment? The story goes that a man from Connecticut named Daniel French came to talk to Ormsbee about his invention and closely examined all of the boat. No more was then heard from Mr. French. Ormsbee meanwhile dismantled his boat. He wanted to continue his experiment but did not have the money. He built a small replica about four feet long. This model mysteriously disappeared and was never found.

Some years later, Wilkinson said he met a man who was knowledgeable about steam power. This man told Wilkinson that he thought that Fulton wouldn't have succeeded with his steamboat if it weren't for David French, "a Yankee that Fulton kept locked up for six months making drafts for him." This settled the matter in Wilkinson's mind.

It is said that Ormsbee built the first power-driven loom in America, but it was soon supplanted by a superior model designed by British inventor Edmund Cartwright. Nevertheless, Elijah Ormsbee of Old Rehoboth played an important part in the early days of the Industrial Revolution. He continued inventing and his machine shop made him prosperous enough to build a home at the corner of South Main and Wickenden Streets. Over his life he married three times and had 11 children. His wives were Betty Ide, Lydia Mitchell, and Abby Perry. He died in 1820 and is buried in North Burial Ground in Providence.

*Leslie Patterson is a member of the Friends of the Bland Library and a Museum volunteer.*

# PLAY BALL! THE REHOBOTH MILKMAIDS: PIONEERS OF WOMEN'S SOFTBALL

## MIRANDA DICENZO, CARPENTER MUSEUM INTERN

The Rehoboth Milkmaids softball team (formally known as the Tigerettes) was formed in 1938 by a group of young women living in Rehoboth, Massachusetts and surrounding areas. With a desire to play softball and a love for the game, the Milkmaid's set out to raise money and support for their team, eventually raising enough to buy equipment. Uniforms were hand-made by a mother of some of the players.

The team practiced each day, and the Milkmaids dedicated themselves to the softball season. The Milkmaids were a successful team, but without sponsorship, could not afford to attend the national championships in Detroit, Michigan in 1939. In 1940, the team gained sponsorship from the Pawtucket Times newspaper. With financial support from the Times, the Rehoboth Milkmaids changed their name to the Darlington Milkmaids, which expanded their opportunities for leagues and tournaments.

The Milkmaids played at the Boston Garden on Thursday nights, and having continued success, won the Rhode Island State Championship in 1941. Sponsored by the newspaper, the Milkmaids joined teams from all over the country at the championship in Detroit, that year. The Milkmaids made it to the semi-finals in the Tournament. This marked the end of the team's competition, but it was only the beginning of women's roles as successful members of publicized sports teams during WWII and onward.

As men aged 18 and over were drafted into the military, Major League Baseball Parks introduced the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League in 1943. The Milkmaids launched the career of Louise "Lou" Arnold of Pawtucket. Arnold gained national fame, playing in the League that was featured in the 1992 film *A League of Their Own*, for which she was a consultant. Lou received her own baseball card and a spot in the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.

A special exhibit about the Rehoboth Milkmaids and the years they played opens at the Carpenter Museum April 25th of this year. It is made possible by a grant

from the Bristol Savings Charitable Foundation, which provided funding to launch the new exhibit and accompanying digital materials that explore the role that sports has played in the history of greater Rehoboth, specifically pertaining to the history of the Milkmaids. The museum has hosted meetings working on dedicating a Rehoboth field in honor of the Milkmaids. Many descendants of the original players live in the area, and several have expressed interest in loaning materials for the exhibit.

Despite the great American pastime being identified as a male sport, women have played baseball for over 120 years. "Playball! The Rehoboth Milkmaids: Pioneers of Women's Softball," focuses on the early adoption of softball in the Rehoboth area. Many artifacts belonging to the Milkmaids team were saved by family members who have loaned them to the Carpenter Museum for this exhibition. Included are three uniform styles worn by the Milkmaids throughout their team's career.

Women's baseball teams have been documented as early as the 1890s. In the beginning, women's "barnstorming" teams went from town to town all over the country, challenging men's amateur, minor league, or semi-professional teams to games. At this time there were no leagues or uniforms and women wore typical Victorian dress while adorning bats, balls, and gloves in team photos.

Moving into the twentieth century, women's baseball teams were called "Bloomer Girl" teams, named after the dress-reform fashions worn while playing baseball. The term "bloomer" refers to a style of loose-fitting trousers that were worn by women under fashionable dress starting in the mid-nineteenth century, named after suffragist Amelia Bloomer.

On display in "Playball! The Rehoboth Milkmaids: Pioneers of Women's Softball," is a blue Milkmaids uniform, worn between 1939 and 1942. These uniforms are modeled after men's baseball uniforms of the time. By the 1930s, women's baseball teams were being routed into softball teams.



When the Milkmaids originally formed as the Tigerettes in 1938, they wore short-sleeved uniform shirts with their team name across the front with long shorts held up by suspenders. This style of uniform was seen in Rhode Island as well, and it makes sense that teams from Massachusetts and Rhode Island being formed in the late 1930s would have similar uniforms.

As the league grew, and received more attention, the uniforms changed to reflect men's baseball uniforms of the time. This change probably occurred due to the fact that men's uniforms were much more practical than what women had been wearing previously. Synthetic fabrics such as polyester and nylon were used for early softball uniforms around the 1930's, making for rugged, yet lightweight uniforms. Similar to softball uniforms today, game-day attire features team colors, logos, and a variety of insignias. Used to enhance team spirit and pride, these elements have continued in softball uniforms today.

The Milkmaids were young women who played softball because they loved the game, sportsmanship, and time with one another. Women's baseball teams generally faced backlash in the public arena due to it being seen as a "man's sport". Fortunately, it seems that the Milkmaids were generally supported by this area as documented in the many newspaper articles printed about the team.

Women's uniforms may have changed from the 1890s through the 1940s for a number of reasons including, contemporary women's fashions from the time, societal beliefs, and practicality for the sport. This uniform is an example of the changing appearance of women's sportswear of the early-twentieth century in Rehoboth and throughout New England.

*Miranda DiCenzo is the Carpenter Museum's 2019-2020 Special Exhibition Intern. She holds a B.S. and a M.S. in Textiles, Fashion Merchandising and Design from the University of Rhode Island. Miranda specializes in historic textiles, material culture analysis, and women's studies.*



# AKIN

BY EMMA DONOGHUE

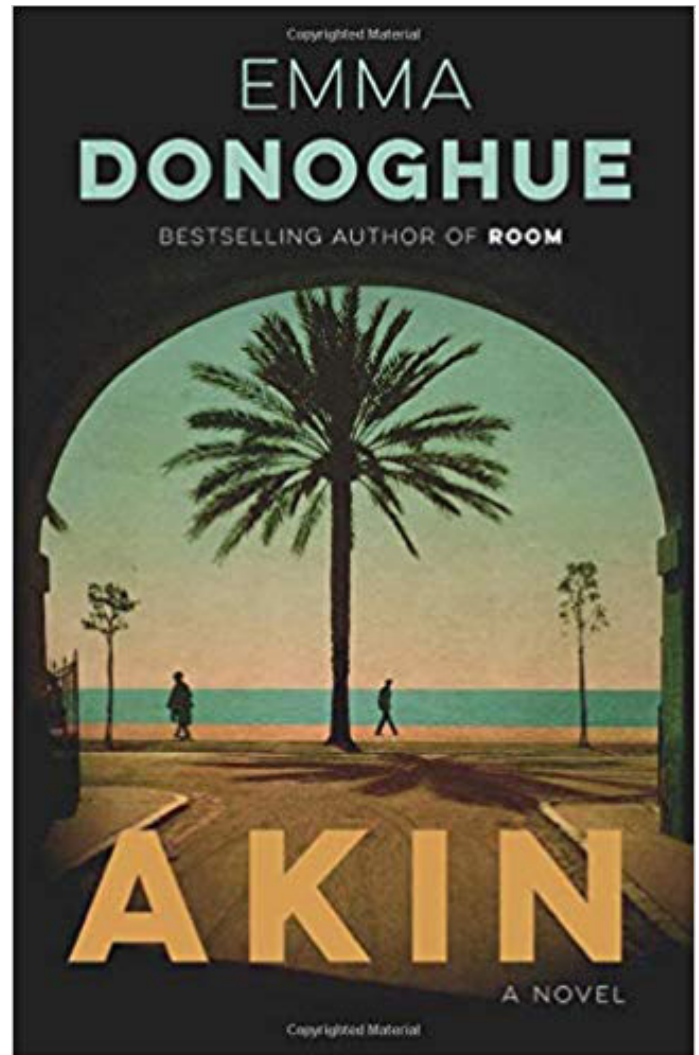
**Susan Robert, Blanding Public Library Head of Circulation**

**A**kin is a novel that explores the questions of what is family and what defines it. Noah is a widowed retired chemistry professor; Michael is a foul-mouthed 11-year-old punk. They are thrown together because of a distant relationship and a series of heartbreaking circumstances.

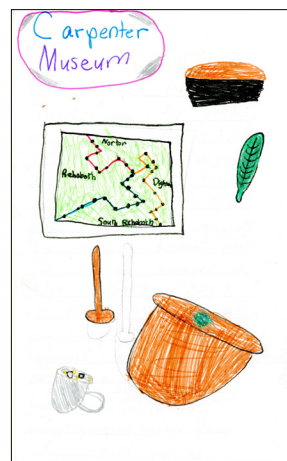
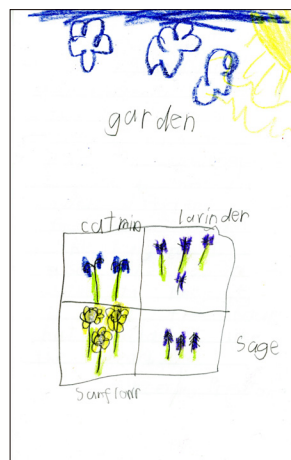
On the verge of turning 80, Noah has planned to celebrate his birthday in Nice, France, where he was born. He had not returned since he was sent to the States by his mother when he was four to avoid World War II. He has a packet of photographs taken by his mother that he plans to research. Days before he is to leave, Child Services contacts him asking him to care for Michael, a great nephew that he has never met. Out of a sense of guilt, Noah agrees to temporarily care for him but is unwilling to postpone his trip to France.

This mismatched pair constantly clash as they explore Nice and try to decipher the photographs taken by Noah's mother. Akin explores their relationship as they discover that they do have some things in common and develop a mutual respect for each other. As their pasts unfold, both learn that they are more "akin" than they thought.

Akin is a novel that leaves you thinking about it long after you've finished.



**THE CARPENTER MUSEUM LOVES HAVING STUDENTS VISIT EVERY SPRING!  
HERE ARE A SAMPLING OF THANK YOU'S FROM PALMER RIVER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**



June 10, 2019  
Dear Carpenter Museum  
Thank you for teaching  
us about Rehoboth  
History. I learned so much!  
Now I know how  
people fear the  
past. Handbags were  
by using Lard's Ear  
as a handbag.  
The best part  
to me was making  
ginger bread. I also  
enjoyed trading and working  
particular birds. Sincerely,  
Thank you for Annie's Room!  
Annie Reed  
making my Carpenter Museum the best  
it could ever be.



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### FRONT COVER:

Newly donated artifacts pertaining to the "Rehoboth, Seekonk, Pawtucket, and East Providence Horse Thief Detecting Society", including: Minutes of Annual Meetings 1897-1920, an Address Book, and Bylaws of the Society.

Donated by John Hass of Rehoboth

Photographs: Right, Frank Horton with Horse in front of house [1800-530-001]; Left, Susan Pierce with son, Horace, and horse in front of their family home [2003-007-222].  
(CM Collection)

### BACK COVER:

Milk Maids uniform patch worn after their 1939 championship win. (On loan from Jean Hudson)



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