

Decorative Arts Classes Taught in an Historic Nantucket Property

Dedicated to reviving Nantucket's rich tradition of historic decorative arts and crafts, the Nantucket Historical Assoc. has a Decorative Arts program.

NANTUCKET, MA, USA, May 8, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Dedicated to celebrating and reviving island's rich tradition of historic decorative arts and crafts, the [Nantucket Historical Association](#)'s Decorative Arts program, now in its 18th year, offers classes and workshops at [Greater Light](#), 8 Howard Street. This historic NHA property has a long history of creativity, beginning in the 1930s, when the Monaghan sisters converted a barn into their summer residence, creating an art colony of their own.



The Monaghan sisters converted this barn into their home and studio in the 1930s.

Designed and run by Mary Emery Lacoursiere, the Peter M. & Bonnie J. Sacerdote Chair of Education and Community Relations, dozens of classes and workshops are taught, including needlework, pen work, ceramic transfer ware, sailors valentines, scrimshaw, lightship basket bracelets, shell art, letterpress, fraktur, and more. A full list of the classes, their times, and the instructors can be found at the Nantucket Historical Association website.

“

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Mary Emery Lacoursiere

A graduate of Pratt Institute with an M.F.A. in printmaking

and painting, Lacoursiere is a member of the Historical Society of Early American Decoration. “I’ve always taught,” she explained, adding that at this NHA program, “we hold to the traditions of the past and make them current. The key is that many of our classes are for all levels: you can come in never having touched these materials and have success. If you have experience, you can take your skills to the next level... because the prep work is done, people can experience the joy of creating and finishing their projects.”

She describes the classes as “Nantucket artisanal crafts made modern to be more applicable to today”—function and beauty brought together. “There are not many places where you can come to learn early American techniques and create something new,” she added.

The program offers single-session and multi-session classes, and some evening programs. Lacoursiere teaches classes along with other guest instructors, many of whom are well-known in their fields. With the affiliation between the two island

organizations, expert weavers who previously taught youth basketweaving classes at the Nantucket Lightship Basket Museum are now teaching at this NHA program. Class size is small, and private classes popular with families and groups of friends can be arranged. Looking for something different for a wedding party activity? Arrange for a class to make an island craft.

Holding the Decorative Arts program at Greater Light “carries on the tradition of the Monaghans: they created a space that suited their artistic endeavors, and they drew in like-minded people,” Lacoursiere explained.

Originally built around 1790 as a livestock barn, sisters Gertrude and Hanna Monaghan discovered Greater Light in 1929, when they followed a herd of cattle up Nantucket's Main Street... The garden, once a barren barnyard, was a key to the sisters’ vision for Greater Light.

Independent, highly educated Quakers from Philadelphia, the Monaghans first came to Nantucket in 1923. Gertrude was a well-established and award-winning muralist; Hanna, the younger sister, was an author and amateur actress. The two devoted their lives to art as an expression of their faith. Hanna wrote: “I truly believe that art captures the Eternal in the everyday.”

They converted this barn into their home and studio in the 1930s. Combining art and whimsy with unique handcrafts, they incorporated many cast-off architectural elements they had collected: iron gates, gilded columns, stained glass and unusual windows, and various bits of trim and embellishment. According to the NHA, “Every element of every room in the house was designed by them, with carefully selected handcrafted pieces — from door latch es to windows and iron balconies...What the sisters created was an intensely personal environment made up of widely disparate parts that came together with harmony in the three-dimensional collage that



NHA's Decorative Arts program is dedicated to reviving Nantucket's rich tradition of historic decorative arts and crafts.

was their home.”

The garden was another massive endeavor for the Monaghans. Hanna wrote in her diaries “As we sat in our patio and surveyed its surroundings, I said ‘A patio must have a garden, a green grassy room under the sky.’” With assistance from a local gardener, “renowned for her talent in garden design and her knowledge of flowers,” a garden was added that became integral to the property.

Part of the Nantucket's Art Colony that thrived on the island in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, the Monaghans enjoyed decades of artistic exploration at the property, hosting gatherings of artists of all disciplines.

Bequeathed to the NHA in 1972 by Hanna Monaghan, the property was open to visitors for a number of years until it was deemed structurally unsound. After a complete restoration of the house and the garden, Greater Light was reopened for public visits in 2011.

“The vibe here is good,” Lacoursiere commented. “It’s key to have an outdoor space as well as indoor...it lets us have two classes at once—we can open the spaces up. Nature here is so beautiful, we want to be in it!” The house and grounds are the perfect setting to continue artistic pursuits that are in keeping with the Monaghan tradition.

“Now the creative pursuits are happening here. Instead of just honoring [the Monaghans’ inspiration], we are participating.”

To sign up for the NHA’s Decorative Arts Classes and Workshops, visit nha.org. Greater Light is also open to the public during daylight hours, closing occasionally due to special events, weather, or maintenance.

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