

# UNDER THE GABLES

Volume XXV, Number 4

Summer 2024



## TREASURES FROM THE ATTIC

*A new exhibit on display June 22 to September 28, 2024*

JACK MASON MUSEUM OF WEST MARIN HISTORY

Inverness Way at Park Avenue, Inverness Phone 415-669-1099 [www.jackmasonmuseum.org](http://www.jackmasonmuseum.org)

## NEW EXHIBIT: TREASURES FROM THE ATTIC

AS RENOVATIONS ARE ACCOMPLISHED at The Gables, some of the artifacts and display items long stored in the attic (and also in the secure archives building) will be on display for the first time in almost 40 years. Have your tooth fixed with a foot-powered dental drill? Get the keys to your summer house? See a three-dimensional map of Point Reyes and Tomales Bay as it appeared in 1918? These and much more for your delight.

In this edition of *Under The Gables*, we show some highlights of the exhibit. We also present another fine article by Courtney Linn, this about noted poet Robert Bly's stay in Inverness, and get an update from our archivist, Carol Acquaviva. And, I'll throw in some text excerpted from my book to be published in the fall.

—Dewey Livingston, exhibit curator

**Professional archivist Carol Acquaviva** has been contracted to advise the museum committee on organization and protection of our unique and precious collection of photographs, documents, ledgers, maps, and books. Carol, who for 21 years worked at the Anne T. Kent California Room at the Marin County Civic Center, has already been a whirlwind of activity, with the steady help of volunteers Barbara Shapiro and Heather Arnold. Bay Whitney, who grew up in Inverness, and Sean Rowe are organizing two important collections while juggling full time local jobs.

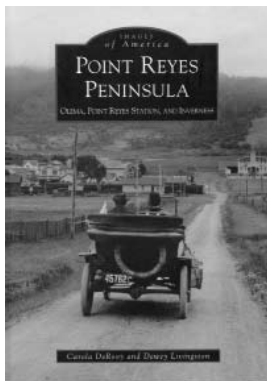
Do you have old pictures or documents to share with the Jack Mason Museum of West Marin History? All subjects and periods are welcome, especially those from the 1960s on. Your photos will be carefully preserved and you will receive nice sharp copies in exchange. As an alternative, we would be happy to scan your photos and return them safely.

### RESEARCH IN THE MUSEUM ARCHIVES

Email research questions to [research@jackmasonmuseum.org](mailto:research@jackmasonmuseum.org).

### IS YOUR MEMBERSHIP UP TO DATE?

If you are not sure whether you are up to date, please leave a message on the Archives phone 415-669-1099. You can renew on our website or by mailing your check to Box 94 Inverness, CA 94937.



### "POINT REYES PENINSULA"

Copies signed by the authors, Carola DeRooy and Dewey Livingston are available at Museum Open Houses and from the Archives for only \$20.00. The proceeds benefit the Museum.

### ON THE COVER:

*The key rack kept by an Inverness merchant. When families arrived to Inverness for the summer, they would pick up the keys to their cabins and houses.*

### JACK MASON MUSEUM COMMITTEE OF THE INVERNESS FOUNDATION

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Courtney Linn

Mike O'Shea

### THE JACK MASON MUSEUM OF WEST MARIN HISTORY IS AN AFFILIATE OF THE INVERNESS ASSOCIATION

This edition of  
*Under the Gables*  
is written by Dewey Livingston,  
Courtney Linn, Carol Acquaviva  
and Andrea Freedman,  
and designed  
by Dewey Livingston.

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# TREASURES FROM THE ATTIC

*A new exhibit on display June 22 to September 28, 2024*



Come visit the museum and see a wide variety of “old things” from our collection, including artifacts, maps, photographs, vintage signage, the calendar beauty seen above, and more. Most of these items have not been seen by the public for decades, and it’s time to show them the light of day.

# Robert Bly's Cow-Sea Sabbatical

By Courtney Linn

Lord help me  
because  
my boat is so small  
and your sea  
is so immense

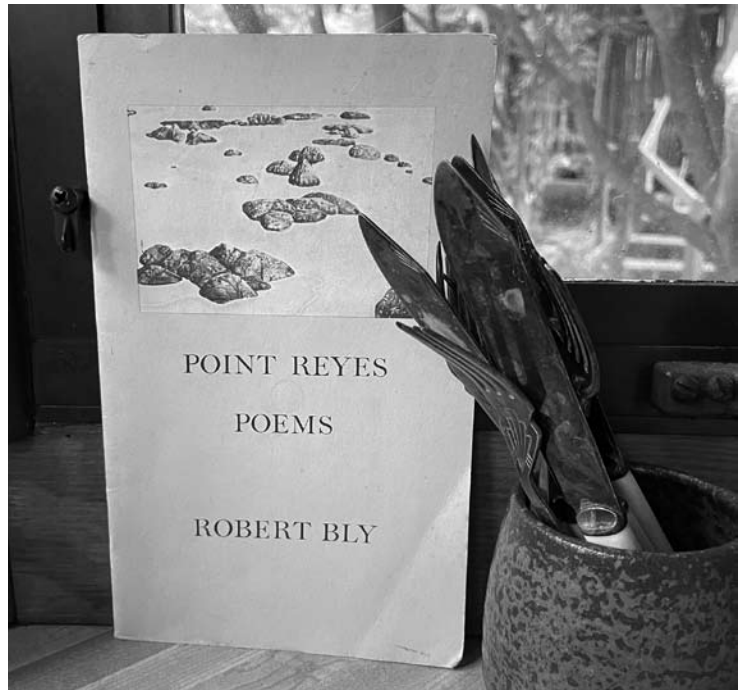
—From a medieval French prayer recited by Robert Bly at the beginning of his 1991 reading at the Dance Palace

IN 1968, ROBERT BLY won the National Book Award for his poetry collection, "The Light Around the Body." The award catapulted him to the top echelon of national literary figures. Just two years later, he and his wife, Carol, and their three children drove an old Plymouth from Minnesota to California for what would turn out to be a nine-month sabbatical.

At the suggestion of a relative, they rented a house in Inverness. In the back northwest corner of the property was a small shed that Bly converted into a writing studio. He wrote in the morning, took a break in the middle of the day for hikes and other activities, and returned to the studio in the late afternoon. In this makeshift space, he would translate Pablo Neruda and write poems that made their way into several later collections, including "Point Reyes Poems."

Soon after settling, Bly wrote a letter to his friend, the poet Donald Hall, describing his new surroundings: "The house is fine, the climate weird, the growth jungular, the mood vein-like, not artery like, the beaches magnificent, full of cruising sea lions." A month or so later, he wrote again to Hall: "Inverness is marvelous! It's on this wild peninsula, which has basically only 8 ranches and the rest are hills full of cowpies looking over the ocean!"

The nine months that the family spent in West Marin were a kind of retreat. Leading up to the trip west, Bly had been consumed by anti-Vietnam activities. His biographer, Mark Gustafson, wrote an essay in 2016 titled "A Hole In the World:



Robert Bly's Point Reyes Chronicle," in which he reconstructed the family's time in West Marin. Gustafson described the West Marin stay as a "revitalizing and transformative experience."

Sometime in 1971, Bly walked into Michael Sykes's bookstore in Point Reyes Station, which was in the storefront now occupied by Zuma. "Robert came into the store often after that, and we struck up a friendship," Sykes recalled.

Barbara and Dr. Michael Whitt also befriended the Blys. Margaret Marshall, Dr. Whitt's nurse, was married to Bly's cousin and arranged for the two families to meet. "We came to know Robert and Carol well during their sabbatical year here," Dr. Whitt said. Dr. Whitt practiced medicine in West Marin and was emerging as a poet in his own right. The Whitts accompanied the Blys to his poetry readings, took them boating on Tomales Bay and hiked with them on the Point Reyes Peninsula.

By 1972, Bly had returned to Minnesota but came back to the Bay Area for a reading tour. Dr. Whitt took Bly to the Farallon Islands to see birds, an excursion described in Dr. Whitt's 1998 book, "Logbook of the Farallones." Returning to Min-

nesota, Bly wrote to Dr. Whitt that “he was still high from the trip.”

Bly’s friendship with Dr. Whitt was a give and take. Both could be unsparing in their criticism of each other’s work. About Bly’s prose poem, “Looking at a Dead Wren in My Hand,” Dr. Whitt told Bly: “there is no such thing as a ‘yellow wren.’” A month or two later, Bly read the poem at Sonoma State University and drew laughs from the audience when he shared the critique. “Dr. Whitt had failed to grasp the concept of ‘poetic license,’” Bly said.

Whitt and Bly shared a misadventure at Tom’s Point near the mouth of Tomales Bay. The tide had left their rented motorboat high and dry. At home

follow him there.”

Sykes continued to correspond with Bly and would later publish him. The poems that made up the “Point Reyes Poems” initially appeared in the *Point Reyes Light* in 1970 and 1971. “Here was someone who just two years earlier had won the National Book Award, and he was giving early drafts of his new Point Reyes poems to the *Point Reyes Light* for publication,” Dr. Whitt said. Those poems were later published by the Mudra Press in 1974, but when the edition went out of print, Sykes asked Bly if he could reprint it under his imprint, Floating Island Publications. Bly agreed. Dr. Whitt wrote the foreword for the 1989 edition of “Point Reyes Poems.”



*Robert Bly’s writing studio in Inverness as photographed by Owen Gump in May 2019, not long before it was removed.*

In 1991, not long after the release of Bly’s best-selling book, “Iron John,” Bly returned to Point Reyes Station for a poetry reading at the Dance Palace. Sykes extended the invitation and made the arrangements. An overflow crowd that included people with counterfeit tickets filled the hall and spilled outside. Bly took the stage, thanked Sykes for his introduction, and said: “So, I’m very pleased to be back in Point Reyes, and is Michael Whitt here?” Dr. Whitt identified himself. After the reading, when Dr. Whitt went up to the stage to greet him, Bly asked him to write

that evening, Dr. Whitt and Bly argued in front of Carol over who could take credit for the solution (using the oars as “ways” or skids to slide the boat back toward the water). The Whitts and Blys had many outings on Tomales Bay. Bly later dedicated his poem “Sunday Morning on Tomales Bay” to Michael and Barbara Whitt; in turn, Dr. Whitt remembered his friend in several poems, including one entitled “In Praise of Robert Bly.”

The Whitt and Bly families corresponded for a time, but then fell out of touch. “It was largely my fault we lost contact,” Dr. Whitt confided. “Not many years after Robert left Inverness, he became invested in the men’s movement, and I could not

down his telephone number so he could reach him later. Not having a piece of paper handy, Dr. Whitt reached into his wallet and said all he had was a \$20 bill. Bly leaned over and said: “Can you make it a \$50?” “That was Robert’s sense of humor,” Dr. Whitt said.

Bly stayed for about three days after the reading. He did not have a car, so Sykes lent him his for a day. He remembered: “Bly told me later that he had driven my car out to Kehoe Beach, sat on a turned-over bucket, and wrote a poem.”

*Courtney Linn is an executive with a Sacramento-based credit union who lives part time in Inverness.*

# *The sunniest spot in Inverness* **FOR SALE**

Above is a sign advertising an unidentified building lot, with us all wondering, "where is the sunniest spot in Inverness?"

At left is the certificate awarded to Point Reyes Station's Quinto Codoni, honoring his work as Chief Ranger of the local branch of Foresters of America.



At right is the pedal-driven dentist drill used by Dr. Arch Guthrie, whose office was upstairs in the Grandi Building. We are quite sure that his patients dreaded a visit to Dr. Guthrie, despite that fact he was a nice man. Jack Mason married his daughter, Jean; Mason's father was also a local dentist.





### *AND, speaking of the attic....*

THE GABLES WAS BUILT by Alexander Baily in the early 1890s. He was an old man by then, and he did it by hand, without power tools,

using excellent quality old-growth lumber and square-cut nails. The house is a fine example of the carpenters' skills, and one of the best places to see that is in the attic.

Some time in the future it is likely that the attic will be insulated, which will make the building greener and also provide work and storage spaces that aren't subject to the current extreme temperature fluctuations. In doing so, the old woodwork will be covered.

With this in mind, we asked talented Inverness photographer Carmen Violich-Goodin to photograph the attic, and here are some examples of her good work.



# Amelio Giambastiani's Story

By Dewey Livingston

WE ARE FORTUNATE that museum volunteer Sue Baty interviewed Amelio Giambastiani back in 1988. His memories were sharp and interesting, and he provided a comprehensive view into the life of an immigrant Italian family in Inverness Park. His parents Romualdo and Rosie moved separately from Italy, where "things were bad, no work, so they came here to better themselves." His uncles came first, then his father, then the wives came; brothers married sisters of nearby families. Soon Inverness Park was "Little Italy," largely the families Giambastiani, Alberigi, and Lucchesi.

The family first lived in a grove of oak trees; they were there when the 1906 earthquake hit. Amelio was born in 1915 after they had settled into a small house overlooking the marshes; he joined four older siblings, Harry, Julia, Louis, and Peter.

For a quarter of a century his father worked for Julia Shafter Hamilton, cleaning water tanks and dams, fixing broken pipes at her Inverness water works; he didn't read meters because he didn't know how to read or write. He was the gardener at Julia's estate on the Inverness road. He rode a bicycle to work, retired around 80, and kept riding a bike until he was 85 years old.

Amelio spent his entire life working for people, harvesting and hauling hay for Charlie McConnell, cutting wood in the hills for peoples' fireplaces, doing odd jobs. But he also joined in the family enterprises, which involved collecting and processing the bounty of the Inverness Ridge woods: mushrooms, nuts, berries, small animals, and the like.

The family raised vegetables and "all kinds of flowers"; his mother made a living selling flowers and greens. She served spaghetti, homemade ravioli, and chicken dinners to certain guests at

the Giambastiani house. It was not a restaurant, but people could make arrangements for a good Italian meal. For a number of years, the family had a cow, so she made her own cheese, ricotta, and butter, and made homemade bread in round loaves.

In the 1920s and 1930s the hills above Bear Valley Road "used to be all hazelnuts, just solid hazelnuts," Amelio recalled.

"We used to go there when we were kids with my mother and gather them. I had a little four-wheel wagon and we'd get a whole sack of them. Then we'd take them home and spread them out on the cement and let them dry, and then we'd ship them to the city."

Later landowner Gene Compton "dozed them all out for pasture."

Amelio and his mother picked huckleberries on the ridge in great quantities. "She was a good picker, a gallon to my quart," he said.

"My dad made 40 gallons of huckleberry wine one year; that was a lot of huckleberries!" He would ferment the huckleberries in little barrels, and make blackberry wine, and mulberry wine from Mrs. Hamilton's big trees. "Friends used to come there and he'd give them a sample of this and a sample of that, and they walked out of there a little tipsy!"

Family members collected boletus mushrooms out on Pierce Point, which would be dried and shipped to the city. They traded these for provisions like pasta and olive oil. A family friend would bring wealthy city people to the house so that the Giambastianis could take them out for mushrooms; they were well paid for that service.

Animals living in the woods: beware of Amelio Giambastiani! As a boy, Amelio hunted squirrels and pigeons ("my mother'd make soup with them"). He

*(Continued on page 10)*



*Amelio at the wheel in 1974 (Marin I-J).*

# The Marin County Master Recreation Plan of 1943

By Dewey Livingston

AS EARLY AS THE 1880s Bay Area residents appreciated the need for recreational areas, and made do with private lands whose owners welcomed that use. By the 1930s barely any land in Marin County was public, and with the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge and Marin's subsequent unofficial designation as "San Francisco's Bedroom," there was an urgency to act before the unique landscape of the county was developed into neighborhoods and industrial areas. Indeed, speculators bought former ranches with an eye to suburban development.

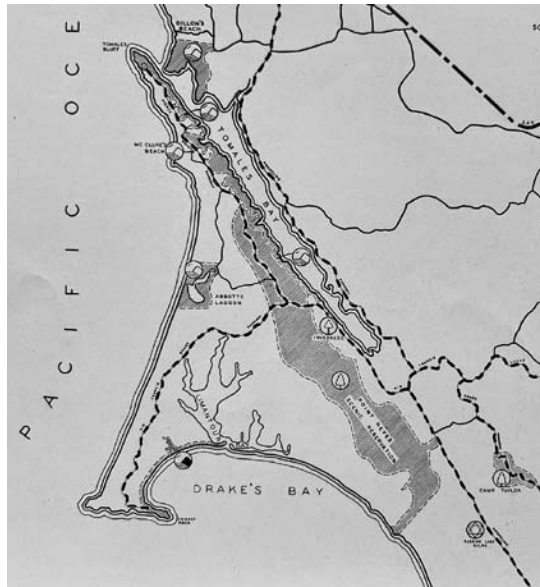
In the late 1930s county government and some concerned citizens organized efforts to plan and create parks and permanent open spaces. In the early part of the Second World War, the newly organized Marin County Planning Commission prepared and released a key document called the Master Recreation Plan.

While the plan focused on the entire county, much of its subject was on West Marin. The document proposed recreational development in three main areas: roadways, shoreline projects, and scenic parks, as well as other, less intensive categories. Curiously, most of these ideas were implemented within the following decades, but not by Marin County government.

Among the proposed roads, termed "parkways," was improvement by widening of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and Lucas Valley Road. It also recommended construction of an entirely new 12-mile parkway from Ottinger's Hill to the tip of Tomales Point, "to make the entire shoreline accessible."

The plan noted three West Marin beaches for visitor enjoyment. McClure's Beach, which had recently been donated to the county by Margaret

McClure, would be reached by the new parkway. Abbott's Lagoon, described as "a placid sheet of sky blue water whose surface is untroubled and calm in striking contrast to the pounding white foamed surf beating on the beach a few hundred feet away," was



The plan included park land on Inverness Ridge.

proposed as a public place for "swimming, picnicking, hiking, and horseback riding."

Drakes Beach, already a county park, would be ready for easier public access once a right-of-way dispute with the owners of D Ranch was resolved. The plan hoped for a 1,000-foot-wide strip of land stretching from Drakes Beach to Chimney Rock. They also encouraged creating a "picnic park" by filling five acres of the wetland behind Drakes

Beach, and also building a parking lot.

These plans came to be, but not as a county effort; Point Reyes National Seashore absorbed McClure's and Drake's beaches, and Abbott's Lagoon. And 20 years later, much to the horror of naturalists and hunters, the wetland behind Drakes Beach was filled for a parking lot and picnic area.

The Recreation Plan took special note of the Tomales Bay beaches north of Inverness, calling them "highly desirable for public park purposes." At the time, real estate speculator Leonard David was making plans for a massive resort development there. But the planners did not want to see much change on these beaches, saying, "To attract great crowds to the beaches would be to lose much of the present quiet and seclusion which is one of its greatest charms." Ten years later, as a well-publicized Tomales Bay State Park, those crowds would come, and still do.

In addition to recommending public access to the Olema Lime Kilns, the planners proposed a

*(Continued on page 10)*

## UPDATE FROM ARCHIVIST CONSULTANT CAROL ACQUAVIVA

I've been busy in the archives with several ongoing projects. We continue to process donations and acquisitions collected during COVID. In the past few months we've accessioned books, bottles, banners, brochures, and so much more. Each new addition is uniquely representative of the culture of West Marin's history. For example, we've recently cataloged:

- Newspaper articles about the social and environmental impact of the October 1995 Vision Fire;
- A glass apothecary bottle which once held glycerin and was dispensed by the West Marin Pharmacy;
- A national anthology of poetry featuring students from West Marin; and
- Photographs of parades, family gatherings, and holidays.

Another project has been to assess Jack Mason Museum items being stored in the attic. Huge progress has been made to declutter, re-house and preserve one-of-a-kind artifacts, more efficiently store archival and display supplies, and label museum assets for easier access.

I'm happy to say that we increased the amount of workspace in the archives themselves. With the invaluable help of volunteers, I've created

a cleaner area for researchers and volunteers to safely and more comfortably handle and view the precious historic archival material in the collections. Although space is still quite snug, our volunteers and research visitors seem appreciative of this extra "table real estate."

I've used my many years' experience as a digital archivist and metadata specialist to suggest ways for Jack Mason Museum to more efficiently use PastPerfect. "Standardized vocabulary" is the fancy answer to the puzzlers: Is that a photo of a train or a railroad? Is it a map of Pt. Reyes or Point Reyes? Will we be able to find a brochure from the Inverness Yacht Club if we note it as the IYC? Establishing standardized descriptive search terms allows us to later locate the material we catalog.

Lastly, I want to emphasize that every week I spend in the archive it becomes more evident that it is impossible to understate the contributions of the accomplishments Jack Mason Museum Volunteers over the years. The work they have done is hugely significant to the preservation of West Marin's deep history. Our communities continue to benefit from the outstanding contributions the volunteers make every week: organizing, preserving, cataloging, and recording the history of West Marin. My hat's off to them!

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### **Amelio Giambastiani** *from page 8*

claimed that squirrels were good eating, better than rabbits. When his sister wanted a squirrel coat, he killed 85 squirrels for her; she cut the white part out and used the gray part, and had them tanned in San Francisco. Amelio hunted in Bear Valley, and trapped raccoons and minks along the marsh in Inverness, selling the furs for eight or nine dollars each. In the estuary creek behind his house he hunted ducks, fished for salmon, and dug clams.

The Giambastianis were well loved in West Marin. Amelio worked for 24 years driving the school bus starting in 1953. Every school day he started around 7 am, drove to where the bus was kept in a barn on the Nunes ranch out by the lighthouse, and pick up students all the way to Point Reyes Station. He retired at 65, proud that he "never had a child hurt on my bus, no accidents."

### **1943 Master Plan** *from page 9*

Point Reyes Scenic Reservation, comprised of much of Inverness Ridge from the tip of Tomales Point to Bear Valley. Again being prescient, the writers of the plan warned against overdevelopment and its subsequent breaking of the peace, instead promoting its "unspoiled wilderness character" and proposing hike-in camping opportunities. And again, these plans would largely be realized in the form of Point Reyes National Seashore.

Whether they were aware of this 1943 plan or not, later park planners met the older goals, and more, in the creation of the state and national parks at Point Reyes between 1947 and 1972. We can be glad of the foresight shown by Mary Robinson Gilkey and her assistants Margery Madsen and Jacqueline Mello for creating the groundbreaking plan.

# The Architecture Archive

DID YOU KNOW the Jack Mason Museum has an architecture archive in its room behind the Inverness Library? We'd like your help expanding it!

The Jack Mason Museum of West Marin History's archives contain binders of information on Inverness homes with details about their architectural and ownership history. The project was initiated by volunteer Mary Cardwell but it ended about 7 years ago. She started in First Valley and documented everything she could, ending her work near Rannoch Way.

Courtney Linn has continued Mary's work, deeply researching the Berkeley connection and preparing a book on the subject.

A few of us got interested in continuing to build the archive, with a particular focus on the history of Pine Hill, Seahaven, and "Seahaven adjacent" neighborhoods. We've started with homes of regional importance due to the architect or builder



involved but hope to capture stories of as many homes as we can.

We are collecting information for the historical record to continue to enrich local resources for past/present/future Inverness residents— participation is optional and homeowners can decide what information to share for the archive, which is public.

Most interesting are histories of the families who own(ed) the homes, architectural and design choices, and photos past and present showing the evolution of the property.

If you would like to have your home in the Pine Hill, Seahaven, and "Seahaven adjacent" neighborhoods included in the museum archive please send an email to:

Freedmanandrea1@gmail.com

We'll respond with a one-page survey and look forward to hearing your stories and seeing your photos!

— Andrea Freedman, Gray Brechin, Dewey Livingston, Courtney Linn, Burr Heneman, and Marianne Recher.

## Dewey's Book News

The long-awaited book, tentatively titled, *Point Reyes and Tomales Bay: A History of the Land and Its People*, is being readied for the printer. A select group is reviewing the edited manuscript, photos and maps are being prepared and designed, and the whole thing should be on its way to the printer by the end of August (I know, last time I said spring; that's the life of a distracted writer). Yes, it will be in two volumes!

Now we have a final round of fundraising, to insure that the printing costs are paid, resulting in a fine book. The new goal is \$10,000, and if you can give any amount from \$50 to \$5,000 your investment will be returned with the most significant local history book since Jack Mason's fine series published in the 1970s. Can you help? A check to the Book Fund, Jack Mason Museum can be sent to PO Box 94, Inverness 94937, or use our website link.

Thank you for your support!

—Dewey

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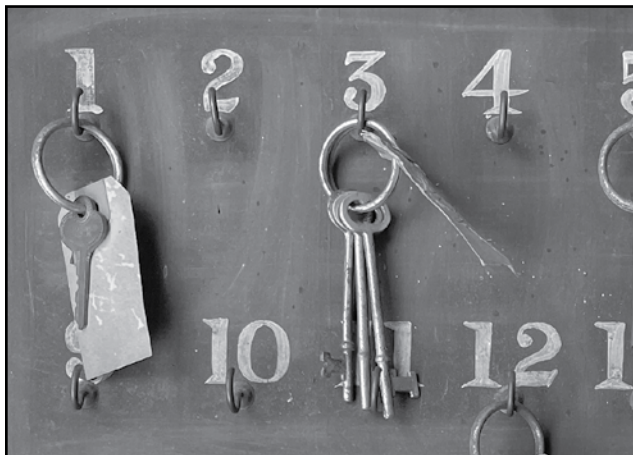
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Also see the Inverness Association's website, and be sure to join if you are not a member! The IA is the Jack Mason Museum's parent organization.  
[www.invernessassociation.org](http://www.invernessassociation.org)

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**The exhibit can be enjoyed  
during Inverness Library hours.**