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Historic Deerfield to Host Second Venue of American Folk Art Museum's *Unnamed Figures* Exhibition

Deerfield, Massachusetts (March 27, 2024) – Historic Deerfield is thrilled to announce that it will be the second and only other location for the American Folk Art Museum's exhibition, *Unnamed Figures: Black Presence and Absence in the Early American North*. The exhibition will be on view at Historic Deerfield's Flynt Center of Early American Life from May 1 to August 4, 2024.

As a corrective to histories that define slavery and anti-Black racism as a largely Southern issue, *Unnamed Figures* offers a new window onto Black representation in a region that is often overlooked in narratives of early African American history.

Through 97 remarkable works including paintings, needlework, ceramics, and photographs, this exhibition invites visitors to focus on figures who appear in—or are omitted from—early American images and will challenge conventional narratives that have minimized early Black histories in the North, revealing the complexities and contradictions of the region's history between the late 1600s and early 1800s.

Despite their vital importance, the experiences and contributions of Black figures in the Northeast have often been ignored or minimized. While the exhibition features a rich collection of artwork, it also delves deeper by considering what's missing. Historical records show Black people lived and worked in the North during this period. Yet, many images from that time exclude them. By also including works without Black figures, the exhibit prompts us to think about how these omissions continue to affect our understanding of history.

The exhibition comes to Historic Deerfield by way of the [American Folk Art Museum](#) in New York City, where it was initially presented from November 15, 2023 to March 24, 2024.

“*Unnamed Figures* will significantly expand the conversation around Historic Deerfield's collection and regional history,” says Amanda Lange, Curatorial Department Director. “This exhibition will offer a truly transformative lens through which visitors can experience the show's works, and may also change the way visitors view our museum's permanent collections for years to come. Several objects from Historic Deerfield were added to the exhibition for this venue, including a cornice plane made by Black craftsman Cesar Chelor of Wrentham, Massachusetts, a 1793 copy of *Phillis Wheatley's Poems on Various Subjects*,

Religious and Moral, and a recent acquisition of an 1818 “Bobolition” broadside with a Greenfield, Massachusetts, imprint, among others.”

[Historic Deerfield's exhibition of Unnamed Figures](#) is part of a larger initiative at the institution to share histories that have been ignored or unacknowledged in the past. In 2022, Historic Deerfield partnered with the [Witness Stones Project](#), to install 19 memorials at properties along Old Main Street, sharing names and information about the presence and lives of Deerfield’s enslaved residents. Three Witness Stones for Town, Coffee, and Onesimus, all enslaved by Elijah Williams, a wealthy Deerfield merchant, will be incorporated into the exhibition and featured in conjunction with Williams’ scroll pedimented doorway from his ca. 1760 house. Historic Deerfield’s efforts to learn and share as much as possible about the lives and stories of these and other unnamed individuals is ongoing.

“We are thrilled to be hosting this important exhibition,” said John Davis, Historic Deerfield President. “We are grateful to the American Folk Art Museum for entrusting us with *Unnamed Figures*, and we look forward to sharing it with our visitors and providing a glimpse into a previously unexplored facet of visual culture in early New England.”

A 300-page scholarly book with contributions from the exhibition’s co-curators—Emelie Gevalt, RL Waston, and Sadé Ayorinde—as well as several other authors, is available for purchase at the [Historic Deerfield Museum Gift Shop and Bookstore](#).

Major support for this exhibition was provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art. Major support for the Deerfield installation of *Unnamed Figures* was provided by the Americana Foundation.

About Historic Deerfield, Inc.

Historic Deerfield is a museum of early American life situated in an authentic 18th-century New England village in the Connecticut River Valley of Massachusetts. Its historic houses and world-famous collection of early American decorative arts open doors to new perspectives that inspire people to seek a deeper understanding of themselves, their communities, and the world.