



Dear friends:

This is an exciting time at the Framingham History Center and we want to tell you about some major steps forward we are taking with our “Smith Collection.”

Mr. William H. Smith (1853-1923), a Framingham resident and owner of the original Wadsworth Funeral Home was a prolific collector during the turn of the 20th century. He was drawn to the aesthetics of objects spanning three popular fields at the time -- the natural world, the colonial revival, and the arts of Japan.

William and his wife, Harriet Wadsworth Smith, had no children and, before his death in 1923, Mr. Smith bequeathed his personal collections to the Town of Framingham, to be in the custody and care of the Trustees of the Town Library. He added that if the Trustees declined, “I then give the same to the Framingham Historical and Natural History Society.”

In 1950, the Framingham Public Library was housed at Edgell Memorial Library where they opened a small exhibit in a second floor room showcasing pieces from the Smith Collection. After the library moved out of the building in 1966, the Library Trustees formally transferred the collection to the Framingham Historical Society. Some of the collection was exhibited until 1989 when it was appraised and 60 pieces were sold at auction. The remaining 626 works were packed up and largely remained in storage for nearly three decades.

Today the FHC has over 15,000 objects including art, artifacts, textiles, furniture, and more. Our goal is not simply to collect and preserve things, but rather to inspire, enlighten and engage our members and the community. We believe some objects support our mission better than others based on the stories they tell and the ideas they illuminate.

The majority of the Smith Collection consists of “high need” Japanese objects that require special storage and proper climate control. We do not have the staff capacity for the research and conservation necessary for exhibit preparation for all of these items without taking away resources needed for other parts of our collection. Artifacts from the Colonial era, the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, Shoppers World, or Dennison Mfg. Co., for example, more broadly reflect Framingham’s history and should receive our financial and human resources.

With input from our Collections Committee, Curator, and Executive Director, the FHC Board has decided to keep a representative sample for future display and deaccession the remainder of the Smith Collection.

“Deaccessioning” is a rigorous process used to determine artifacts that should be let go so others may get needed resources for care and exhibition. With a more manageable collection, we can create a permanent exhibit to tell the story of William Smith.

After diligent research, the FHC Board selected Tremont Auctions to handle the sale of deaccessioned items at public auction. Jim Callahan, a partner at Tremont, is a nationally known Asian art expert, and his tremendous enthusiasm for our collection helped us with this weighty decision. You may have seen Jim over many years appraising Asian artifacts on Antiques Roadshow. The auction is on Saturday, October 14th at the Tremont studio in Newton.

Proceeds from this sale will be used in accordance with accepted museum standards and best practices to help preserve and conserve the FHC collection, including Mr. Smith’s 42 ivory “netsuke” (miniature sculptural carvings) that will need special climate controlled storage cases. Funds will also be used to acquire additional objects for the FHC collection in the future.

The October auction is open to the public and FHC members may bid on these items either in person at the auction house or online. You can see the auction items beginning on September 15th at www.tremontauctions.com and catalogues featuring the collection will be available at the Edgell Library for you to see prior to the auction. A group of FHC Board, staff and members will be at the auction if you would like to join us.

You are invited to learn more about the Asian artifacts in the Smith Collection from Jim Callahan himself at a special luncheon on September 12th.

We are confident that the decision to keep the ivory netsuke as well as other key pieces and auctioning the rest of this collection will free up necessary resources to properly preserve, display and tell not only Mr. Smith’s story, but many other Framingham stories into the future.

Our collections are a powerful way to understand and connect us all to our past, present and future. Your continued trust, support and enthusiasm as a member are what keep history alive at the Framingham History Center. Thank you!

With best regards,

Jeffrey Delvy, Board President

Annie Murphy, Executive Director