

The Rockport Art Association & Museum

Christmas Pageant 2020

**A Timeless Tradition turns Seventy-Five
Years Old!**

The Beginning

It all began back in 1945 with artist Jackie Hibbard, wife to famed artist Aldro Hibbard. It was she who first suggested that the **Rockport Art Association & Museum** produce a Christmas pageant. Unlike anything ever seen on Cape Ann before, this pageant would not take place on a theatre stage with actors but rather, would be a living, breathing procession composed of local neighbors and friends moving through the streets of downtown Rockport as they reenacted the story of Mary, Joseph and the birth of the Baby Jesus.

The Procession

Each year hundreds of spectators gather to watch this live re-enactment of the Nativity. The pageant begins in the **Rockport Art Association & Museum's** Hibbard and Maddocks galleries, where a cast of 100 people of all ages playing various roles of Roman soldiers, townspeople of Bethlehem, shepherds, and more gather to don costumes and makeup. Then, with torches in hand, they file out of the **Art Association** and head down Stone Barn Lane to Dock Square, where the pageant begins in earnest.

From Dock Square Torch Bearers and three Roman Soldiers escort Mary and Joseph along Main Street, followed by dozens of townspeople dressed as Ladies of Bethlehem, Children of Bethlehem and Shepherds. (Customarily, a donkey follows to assist Mary on her journey.) Desperate for shelter, Mary and Joseph stop at the Inn (played—fittingly enough—by the **Rockport Art Association & Museum**) only to be informed by the Innkeeper and his daughter that there is no room at the Inn and turned away.



Yet good fortune smiles down upon the Holy Family when the Innkeeper's daughter takes pity on the couple in the cold winter night and suggests they stay in the stable where the sheep and goats rest. Before the couple leaves, the Innkeeper offers Mary and Joseph a drink of water from their well. Then the Innkeeper's daughter escorts Mary and Joseph up to the stable (situated on the lawn of the First Congregational Church) where Mary proceeds to give birth to her son, Jesus of Nazareth.

After the birth, the Three Kings proceed to offer homage with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh while children, too, offer gifts, including two white doves. The celebration concludes with a moving rendition of "Silent Night" sung by all in attendance.

Featured Role: Mary

Determining who shall play the coveted role of Mary requires a selection process that is a tradition in itself. Choosing Mary is always a difficult task for the pageant director. The decision must meet a number of criteria: Historically candidates are between the ages of 17-20. The chosen Mary must have participated in the pageant for a number of years. (Many girls have been in the pageant for six or seven years.) The person who plays the role of Mary changes every year.

The identity of the person portraying Mary is kept secret until she appears the night of the pageant.



Baby Jesus

Given the seasonably-cold temperatures that come with holding a live outdoor pageant in December, the role of the Baby Jesus understandably calls for a stand-in. The Baby Jesus is a newborn doll larger-than-average, specifically so the crowd can see him. Especially the children.



Costumes

From Mary, Joseph, the Three Kings, and Roman Soldiers, to Torch Bearers, Shepherds, Ladies' of Bethlehem, Children of Bethlehem, Innkeeper, Innkeeper's Daughter, Children at the Well, and Dove Children, the Rockport Art Association & Museum literally has hundreds of costumes for every role and in every size for everyone who wishes to participate. Generations of families who participated as children now bring their own children and continue to participate themselves.

Rockport's 75th Annual Live Christmas Pageant

In the spirit of the holidays, every year, the **Rockport Art Association and Museum** begins preparations in October to present the Annual Live Christmas Pageant to the community. This year, the pageant **was** to be held Saturday, December 19, 2020 at 5PM

COVID-19

With the wellbeing of our community coming first and strict safety protocol in place town wide, the Pageant takes on a new and exciting presentation this year.

Together with Willoughby's on Main street, we have created for you a still life of the stable scene and the birth of Jesus along with a display of the magnificent costumes of the Three Kings. This Willoughby's window scene will be available for you, your family, friends, and the entire Cape Ann community to enjoy through the month of December. We sincerely hope you enjoy, and look forward to joining you in a return to a live Christmas Pageant in 2021!

Season's Greetings!

Your Friends and Neighbors at:

