

Museum features historic White Mountain art

By CAROL COSTELLO
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CONWAY — The White Mountain Museum & Gallery in North Conway features the largest exhibition of Benjamin Champney paintings in the country, in addition to over 100 oil paintings of the White Mountains by famous American artists from the 1800s. The White Mountain School of Art was founded by Champney, whose house still stands less than a quarter of a mile from the museum.

In 1838, hiking from Boston to North Conway, Champney painted the romantic American landscapes of the White Mountains.

He was 21 years old. Champney returned every summer for most of his life. In 1853, he and his wife Mary bought the Eastman Summer home at the base of Sunset Hill, a stone's throw from Artist Brook.

It is there that he kept a studio and entertained over 400 artists from the Hudson River School.

Paul Mayer, docent at the museum, said, "I love introducing visitors and



LEFT: Lecturer David Click speaks about early American artists and the American Revolution during a special "Painting at a Revolution" talk at the White Mountain Museum & Gallery in North Conway Village on July 30. RIGHT: Visitors enjoy an exhibit at the White Mountain Museum & Gallery. (RACHEL SHARPLES PHOTO)



locals alike to this art which hangs in the best museums in the country but is not so well-known right here where it originated."

World-famous artists like Albert

Bierstadt, Thomas Doughty, John F. Kensett, Samuel Gerry, George Innis, Anna Freeland, Alfred Bricher, John White Allen Scott, Thomas & James, Sister Julie Hart Beer, Frank Shapleigh, Ralph Blakelock and Herman Herzog are all in the collection.

"All of them painted right here in the White Mountains," Mayer said. "It was these paintings that inspired early tourists to seek out the Mount Washington Valley as an escape from the filth and overcrowding of the cities during the Industrial Revolution and made us a tourist destination," he added. "We can track the art of the White Mountains from 1836 and the beginning of the American Romantic

landscapes period through the post-Civil War Impressionist and finally the turn of the century Tonalist and Luminous periods."

The collection changes throughout the year as new pieces are acquired and added.

The museum also hosts special exhibitions of individual local artists and lecture series focused on American art and history.

The White Mountain Museum & Gallery is located at 2541 White Mountain Highway, North Conway. Open July through March, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Friday-Sunday and by appointment. Call the museum at (603) 387-7737 or go to whmtmn.art for more information.

