

A. E. BACKUS MUSEUM & GALLERY

500 North Indian River Drive
Fort Pierce, Florida 34950
info@BackusMuseum.org • www.BackusMuseum.org
772.465.0630



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE BACKUS MUSEUM PRESENTS THE ANNUAL HIGHWAYMEN CELEBRATION WEEKEND

Fort Pierce, FL – January 29, 2020 - The A.E. Backus Museum & Gallery will present the annual **Highwaymen Celebration Weekend** Friday, February 14 through Sunday, February 16, 2020. Visitors to the Museum can enjoy a range of special offerings, as well as the final days of the special exhibition on view, *Driving Force: Alfred Hair and the Florida Highwaymen*. Admission is free during regular hours.

Starting Friday, February 14 and continuing all weekend:

On the Museum's Outdoor Mural Plaza, people seeking to start or build their personal collections of Highwaymen paintings will be able to browse an impressive selection offered for purchase by **professional dealers**, specializing in the vintage works of these artists (please see scheduled hours). This is an excellent opportunity to learn about the current state of the art market and to explore owning an original work of art for your home or office.

People who may be interested in having the paintings in their **personal collections independently appraised** may also do so at the Celebration. Owners of works by the Highwaymen artists, by A.E. Backus, or other examples of Florida Art may bring their paintings for consultation and appraisal (please see scheduled hours). Replacement value appraisals will be \$200 per work of art this weekend only; collectors should bring their physical painting and any documentation (including previous appraisals), and expect each consultation to last approximately 20 minutes. Collectors will receive a formal written appraisal suitable for insurance purposes within 30 days. For this weekend, collectors who wish to have Highwaymen paintings appraised will receive a \$50 discount when pre-registering at www.floridaartappraisal.com.

On Friday Evening

Museum members are invited to join us for the **closing reception** of the exhibition *Driving Force* from 6:00-8:00 pm (Museum members are free; Not-Yet members \$20). The event will begin in conversation with **Doretha Hair Truesdell**, widow of Alfred Hair, from 6:00-7:00 pm, with the reception beginning at 7:00 pm. Seating is limited and will be on a first come, first-served basis.

On Saturday, February 15

The City of Fort Pierce will present the **5th Annual Highwaymen Heritage Trail Festival and Art Fair**, at Moore's Creek Linear Park, 8th Street & Avenue D (please see scheduled hours). Featuring many of the living Original Highwaymen and succeeding generations, as well as live jazz music, local cuisine, and more. Free guided Highwaymen Trail Tours will be available by reservation (772-467-3183). City shuttles will be available from the Museum to the Park, connecting visitors to both the history and the contemporary

On Saturday, February 15 and Sunday, February 16

Gallery Talks of the ***Driving Force*** exhibition will be offered on Saturday and Sunday (please see scheduled times) by Museum director J. Marshall Adams and guest curator Roger Lightle, who will explore different aspects of the origins of the Highwaymen, the story of their success, and the enduring impact their art continues to have regionally and nationally.

SCHEDULE AND ACTIVITIES FOR THE HIGHWAYMEN WEEKEND CELEBRATION INCLUDE:

Friday, February 14

- Vintage Highwaymen paintings for sale by dealers on the Outdoor Mural Plaza (10:00 am - 4:00 pm)
- Independent art appraisals for insurance replacement values on the Outdoor Mural Plaza (10:00 am – 3:00 pm)
- ***Driving Force*** Closing Reception (Members Free, Not-Yet Members \$20); Conversation with Doretha Hair Truesdell, widow of Alfred Hair (6:00-7:00 pm), Reception (7:00-8:00 pm)

Saturday, February 15

- 5th Annual City of Fort Pierce Highwaymen Heritage Trail Festival and Art Fair, Moore's Creek Linear Park, 8th Street & Avenue D (10:00 am - 4:00 pm) – city shuttles available from Museum to Park
- Vintage Highwaymen paintings for sale by dealers continue on the Outdoor Mural Plaza at the Museum (10:00 am - 4:00 pm)
- Independent art appraisals for insurance replacement values on the Outdoor Mural Plaza (10:00 am – 3:00 pm)
- Gallery Talks of ***Driving Force*** exhibition (11:00 am, 1:00 pm & 3:00 pm)

Sunday, February 16

- Vintage Highwaymen paintings for sale by dealers on the Outdoor Mural Plaza continue at Museum (12:00-4:00 pm)
- Independent art appraisals for insurance replacement values on the Outdoor Mural Plaza (12:00 – 3:00 pm)
- Gallery Talks of ***Driving Force*** exhibition (1:00 pm & 3:00 pm)
- Final day of ***Driving Force: Alfred Hair and the Florida Highwaymen*** exhibition

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Driving Force: Alfred Hair and the Florida Highwaymen is the latest exhibition in the museum's annual series recognizing the artistic accomplishments of the original Highwaymen. The year, 2020 marks the 50th anniversary of Alfred Hair's passing at the age of 29. In his lifetime, Alfred Hair (1941-1970) was a man with a vision. Intelligent, talented, charismatic, and ambitious, as a high school student in the racially segregated Fort Pierce of the late 1950s, he was painfully aware of the obstacles to success, but was looking for his own path.

His art teacher at Lincoln Park Academy, Zanobia Bracy Jefferson (1926-2016), recognized something special in her student, and introduced Hair to her friend, white artist A.E. Backus (1906-1990) for special art instruction. Renowned for his acceptance of others regardless of race, "Bean" Backus defied the prevailing social norms and mentored Hair, teaching him about technique, materials, and the art world. And Hair was also aware of Harold Newton (1934-1994), the only African American artist he knew, whom Backus had also advised and who was known to make his sales door-to-door. The experiences kindled within the younger artist a way to design his own success, enlisting his friends to share and support this new path.

"In 21st century terms, he hacked the system," says Backus Museum director J. Marshall Adams. "There were real, long-standing barriers for African Americans who wanted to pursue the arts as a career. Hair saw how Backus worked in that system, and he saw how Newton worked outside that system. Hair's work-arounds amounted to a business plan for talented African American artists to survive and thrive as their own bosses. He was literally the driving force in what we think of today as the Highwaymen movement."

These young artists developed their own popular style of energetic painting, streamlining the production to lower material costs and quickly build a daily inventory for sales, pricing their individual paintings modestly but selling them in volume, and instead of a brick-and-mortar storefront they found their customers by taking the art to them, on the highways, in the trunks of their cars. Even selling one painting at \$25 was greater than the daily wage available to African Americans in the fields and groves of the area's agricultural economy – selling ten paintings in a single day was more than two weeks' work. Their formula of success sparked an artistic movement.

When the forerunner of today's Museum, the Fort Pierce Art Gallery, opened its doors in 1961 with its grand opening exhibition, director Backus included a painting by Alfred Hair – a quiet statement of encouragement and very likely the first integrated art exhibition the community had ever seen. While Hair's life was tragically cut short less than ten years later, his friends and associates embraced that characteristic drive in moving forward into legend: in 2004, Alfred Hair and 25 members of the original group were inducted into the Florida Artists Hall of Fame.

Driving Force: Alfred Hair and the Florida Highwaymen features more than 50 works by original Highwaymen Alfred Hair, James Gibson, Willie Daniels, Mary Ann Carroll, Harold Newton, Sam Newton, and more.

Supporting Sponsor of the exhibition is Rennick Real Estate and Auctions.

About the A.E. Backus Museum & Gallery

With a recently added, multi-million dollar expansion, the A.E. Backus Museum & Gallery houses the nation's largest public presentation of artwork by Florida's preeminent painter, A.E. "Bean" Backus (1906-1990), and is home to the state's only permanent multimedia exhibition on the Florida Highwaymen.

With a career spanning more than 70 years, A.E. "Bean" Backus (1906-1990) was the first Florida-born artist to build his professional renown by painting the landscape and scenes from daily life of his native state. He was fortunate to have known great success during his lifetime, with paintings hanging in the businesses and the private collections of many of Florida's most prominent citizens. A renowned humanitarian who abhorred the racist attitudes and segregation that engulfed the region, Backus taught and mentored the group of entrepreneurial African American artists who became known as the Florida Highwaymen. Their inspiring story is part of the A.E. Backus legacy.

In addition to preserving and perpetuating the artistic and humanitarian legacy of Backus, the Museum organizes and hosts changing exhibitions from artists of national and international acclaim.

Regular Hours are: Wednesday – Saturday, 10 AM to 4 PM; Sunday, 12 Noon to 4 PM (closed Monday-Tuesday). Admission is \$5 per person; AARP, AAA, and Veterans with appropriate ID receive a \$2 discount. Students with school ID, children under 18, active duty military, and current members are always free. During the regular season, the first Sunday of the month is Free Admission Day.

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