

# Meet the Beetle

**Celebrating a century, Adelaide Robineau's Scarab Vase takes center stage at this weekend's Strathmore Festival**

**By Kevin Corbett**



**T**he spirit of famed Syracuse artist Adelaide Alsop Robineau comes to life Friday, June 18, and Saturday, June 19, to highlight the Strathmore Festival. Robineau Road, the avenue named in honor of the renowned ceramist, is the focal point for a celebration of art, history and architecture in the city's prettiest neighborhood.

This year's festival commemorates the centennial anniversary of the creation of Robineau's celebrated Scarab Vase as the Onondaga Park Association partners with the Onondaga Historical Association (OHA), the Everson Museum of Art, the Syracuse Ceram-

ic Guild and the Arts and Crafts Society of Central New York (ACSCNY) for a series of events including a historic homes tour, a pre-tour party, a theatrical ghost walk and a juried carved vase contest and exhibit, featuring a \$1,000 first-place prize.

The venerable Strathmore neighborhood—roughly outlined by Bellevue Avenue to the north, Glenwood Avenue to the south, South Geddes Street to the west and Onondaga Street to the east—encompasses such Syracuse landmarks as Onondaga Park—home to Hiawatha Lake and its gazebo—Most Holy Rosary Church, Woodland Reservoir, Corcoran and Roberts schools and Elmcrest Park.

Many of Syracuse's civic leaders, elected officials, businesspeople and artists have occupied the unique and often spectacular homes that make the tree-lined, rolling terrain of Strathmore one of Syracuse's most charming communities.

Since 1994, homeowners in this Southwest Side neighborhood have welcomed visitors to tour their houses, many featuring brick or stone accents, handsome iron work, beautiful porches and lush landscaping. An estimated six to eight Strathmore houses are among the approximately 200 in New York state designed by noted Syracuse architect Ward Wellington Ward.

While the Historic Homes Tour is an annual event, the 100th birthday of Adelaide Robineau's most famous piece adds a special significance to the 2010 tour and other festival events. Lauded by *Arts and Antiques* magazine in March 2000 as one of the "Top Treasures of the Century," her pale blue porcelain vase features scarab beetles, a sacred symbol to ancient Egyptians, etched into its surface. It was the featured piece in Robineau's collection that was awarded the grand prize at an international exhibition in Italy in 1911 and is on exhibit through Aug. 29 at the Everson Museum, 401 Harrison St.



Adelaide Alsop Robineau's masterwork, the Scarab Vase, continues to influence ceramicists 100 years after it emerged from the kiln. What you may not know is the incredible journey it took from clay to kiln to the lower level of the Everson Museum of Art, 401 Harrison St., where it continues to awe onlookers.

In 1910, when the high-fired porcelain vase was first pulled from the kiln, it came dangerously close to topping Robineau's scrap pile. Base to lid, the 16-inch vase had several cracks that she was told were impossible to repair.

Fueled by those doubts, Robineau filled the cracks with paste, applied a pale turquoise glaze, and fired up the kiln. At the base she inscribed the title, "The Apotheosis of the Toiler," a testimony to the 1,000-plus hours she spent working on the piece, many of which

were dedicated to the intricate stylized beetle design Robineau perfected using a small dental pick.

The scarab beetle, an Egyptian symbol of hard work, patience and immortality, is the perfect motif for Robineau's most excellent vase. The jewel-like vitality of the glaze and lacework pattern of the scarabs earned Robineau a Grand Prize at the International Exposition of Decorative Arts in Turin, Italy in 1911.

Ninety years after Robineau wowed the world with her masterwork, the Scarab Vase was described in Art & Antiques magazine's March 2000 feature, "Top Treasures of the Century," as the most important piece of American ceramics of the last 100 years.

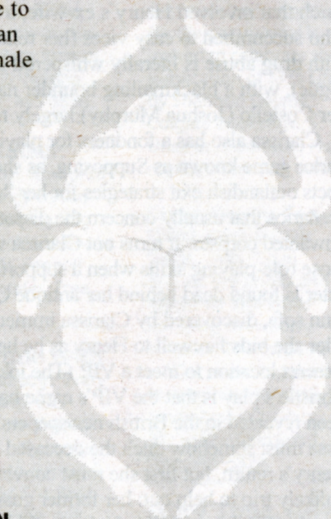
"With the Scarab Vase, Robineau became an American icon in ceramics," says Everson senior curator Debora Ryan.

As one of the few women of her time to create pieces from clay to kiln rather than simply painting a piece of porcelain a male artist had formed, Robineau's vase and technique represented a European concept of ceramics.

The Everson's original purchase of 16 Robineau pieces in 1916, including her early Viking, Crab and Poppy vases, helped establish the nascent Everson and sparked its focus on and passion for ceramics. Scarab Vase was purchased directly from her husband, Samuel Robineau, in 1930, shortly following the artist's death.

"One hundred years later, the vase still has the same importance," Ryan notes. "Artists continue to visit the Everson and learn from the piece."

—GABRIELLE REAGAN





"The Scarab Vase is highlighted in a display of our American Art collection," notes Everson senior curator Debora Ryan, "and will remain here throughout the summer. It is very fitting that we highlight Robineau's masterwork at the museum, while at the same time celebrating with the community at the home and neighborhood where the artist lived and worked."

In honor of the anniversary of the Scarab Vase, Robineau and her namesake road will be the stars of the festival. While Four Winds, the house once occupied by Adelaide Robineau, is, alas, not available for viewing, several other noteworthy Robineau Road structures will be featured.

"I did get the home at 216 Robineau," says Nancy Wolcott, who organized the home tour, "which is the home that Adelaide had built for her sister and her husband when they got married and moved here. So we are showing that. What's very interesting about that home, which is a beautiful little bungalow in the Arts and Crafts style, is that Adelaide commissioned a female architect. Remember, this was way back around 1914. She had a female, Katherine Budd, design this house. How many female architects were there then? Well, Adelaide was very forward-thinking, very self-sufficient."

Among other homes being toured this year are several of the oldest on the street, including 154 Robineau, built in 1918, and 190 Robineau, built in 1910 and once the home of Syracuse Mayor Thomas Corcoran, for whom Corcoran High School is named. "He lived in this house with a huge family," Wolcott recalls, "something like 13 children in a normal-sized house."

Another prominent Syracuse family occupied a nearby house, also being shown. "185 Robineau is very interesting because that was built

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**Raspberry delight:** Nick Rostoff of Gannon's Isle holds a scoop of Robineau Raspberry Ripple, the ice cream the Valley Drive destination created for the Strathmore Festival.

## Lick Quick

Robineau's intricately carved and perfectly painted porcelain have influenced more than just ceramicists. In honor of her unique craftsmanship, Syracuse's homemade ice cream paradise, Gannon's Isle, prepared an original artistic treat for this year's Strathmore Festival.

Robineau Ripple, a raspberry ice cream with thick raspberry swirls weaved throughout, looks as beautiful as it tastes. The delicate swirls sparkle vibrantly against the background of light pink ice cream, recreating the alternation of glazed and unglazed surfaces Robineau's pieces were known for.

"We wanted to create something stunning and original," says Gannon's owner Eileen Gannon.

In honor of Strathmore's rich history, Gannon's is pairing something old with something new. Their classic flavor, Strathmore Almond Bark, a light vanilla ice cream complemented with chocolate shavings and whole almonds, will also be available at the festival. Scoops will be sold at the festival for \$3 and both flavors are available at both of Gannon's locations, 1525 Valley Drive, and 4800 McDonald Road. For more information, call 469-8647 or visit [www.gannonicecream.com](http://www.gannonicecream.com).

—GABRIELLE REAGAN







154 Robineau Road

194 Robineau Road



Inside 185 Robineau Road: Owner Rick Wilson and Nancy Wolcott pause in the dining room.

## Strathmore

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and designed by the homeowner {William Darrone} himself," Wolcott says, "who was the brother-in-law of Donald and Robert Dey of Dey Brothers Department Stores. It is a knock-your-socks-off Arts and Crafts bungalow. Everything in it is original and it's been restored. Just a beautiful home."

The unique house at 225 Robineau, known as the Stowell House, will be the subject of a talk by noted Ward Wellington Ward expert Cleota Reed. "Cleota Reed of ACSCNY is coming back from London to be at this one house," Wolcott notes. "She has researched all of the Ward homes and this is a very large one. It's thought to be the only Ward house that has a stone exterior."

business specializing in materials from the Arts and Crafts movement with a concentration in Gustav Stickley, another Syracusan. "We are producing a poster to commemorate the Adelaide Robineau Scarab Vase because this is its hundredth year. So we're going to have Jan Navales, a local artist, do a hand-pulled silk-screen print to commemorate it."

## You'll See Dead People

Another highlight of the festival will be the OHA's Ghost Walk, with actors dressing in period costumes to portray departed residents of the featured houses. "The title of our ghost walk is 'Here's to You Mrs. Robineau (and the Other Desperate Housewives of Robineau Road),' says Scott Peal, ghost walk coordinator for OHA. "All of the characters in our





185 Robineau Road

With all five homes within about two blocks of each other, tour participants can enjoy a lot of Strathmore's beauty and history with just a little walking. "When visitors come to a home, they'll be given a tour book which has the descriptions of all the homes," Wolcott reports. "When they enter a home, they'll be greeted by someone and told which way to start walking through. And in each room we have volunteers. We have more than 200 volunteers from the Strathmore neighborhood to man the houses. If someone has a question about an article in the room or about the history of the house, most of our volunteers will be able to answer them."

The homes tour holds a special interest for aficionados of the Arts and Crafts movement, a response to how the industrial revolution affected the quality of life, emphasizing an honest use of materials. "The Arts and Crafts Society will have a presence at the events as one of the many participants," notes David Rudd, ACSCNY president and owner of Dalton's American Decorative Arts, a James Street





194 Robineau Road



**Art on the Porches, 2009:** Vincent Fitches participated in last year's art sale, another component to the Strathmore Festival.



ghost walk are female and they are recreations of the original owners of the houses that we're dealing with. It covers probably from the beginning of the 20th century through the 1920s. That's when the people who we're dealing with lived."

The spirits will first appear on festival weekend and return to their old haunts for an encore a week later. "On the 19th we're part of the festival," Peal says. "And then we're going to be holding another walk on Saturday, June 26, from 6 to 8 p.m., and Sunday, June 27, from 2 to 4 p.m." Reservations are required by calling 428-1864, Ext. 312, with tickets priced at \$10 for OHA members, \$12 others. Despite its name, the ghost walk is not a frightening experience, so bring the kids. "It's a historic ghost walk," Peal assures. "It's not scary."

Each 75-minute stroll will allow visitors to

meet several colorful characters from Strathmore history. "Each group of 20 will be led by a tour guide to the different sites where the ladies will be," Peal says. "When you meet them, they will talk a little bit about their lives, the times that they lived, what was going on in Syracuse, perhaps other people who lived at the time, acquaintances of theirs. They'll share a little gossip. We will have five different sites with six ghosts, the most famous, Adelaide Robineau."

Early birds can get a sneak preview of the Ghost Walk on Friday, June 18, at 6 p.m. for those attending a gala pre-tour party at 236 Robineau Road, where returning ghost walkers will be transported back to the Roaring '20s. "After they see all the ghosts, they come back and enter our speakeasy," Wolcott says. "That's our scene this year: a speakeasy. They'll have to know the password and there will be molls and flappers, cigarette girls and gangsters. We'll have old-time music, music of the 1920s. We're encouraging people to dress if they would like. Wouldn't it be a fun evening if everyone dressed the part?"

The 10th anniversary of the Arts on the Porches Festival, an art show and sale which features music, dance, a hands-on art center and food, is also running June 19. Artists will show and sell their work on Strathmore Drive. The street will be closed to traffic for the art-oriented street fair that includes area musicians, dancers, food and a free hands-on kids' art station. "That will be adjoining us so the tours will actually run into each other and make it one big neighborhood event," Wolcott says.

Schedules, locations and directions, prices and reservation information for all events are all available on the Onondaga Park Association website, [strathmorebythepark.org](http://strathmorebythepark.org). □



216 Robineau Road



190 Robineau Road