

## BETSY JAMES WYETH

Betsy James was born in 1922 in East Aurora New York to Elizabeth "Maga" Browning and Merle James. Betsy grew up as the youngest of three girls; her older sisters are Louise James Rockwell and Gwendolyn James Cook. Betsy's father Merle, known as "Jim", was the director of rotogravure for the *Buffalo Courier-Express*. He had been trained as an artist and in 1946 he decided to take an early retirement to devote more time to his own work. At that time the family moved to Cushing, Maine to an old farm on Broad Cove.

The family was familiar with Cushing since they had been spending their summers there since 1931 with the Rockwell family on Bird Point. The Rockwells' neighbors were Christina and Alvaro Olson, and at the age of ten Betsy described her first sighting of the Olson House as, "looming up like a weathered ship stranded on a hilltop." As a young girl Betsy naturally gravitated to Christina. She loved helping Christina around the house, combing and braiding her hair and listening to Christina's stories about her Hathorn ancestors.

When Betsy was 17 years old a young painter named Andrew Wyeth came to pay a visit to the James' home in Cushing. Betsy brought the young artist to visit with her friends the Olsons. Andrew was immediately taken with the Olsons, their farm and with Betsy. The couple dated that summer of 1939 and when Betsy entered Colby Junior College in New Hampshire that fall they wrote to each other faithfully. They decided to marry the following year and moved into an old schoolhouse on the Wyeth property in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania. Betsy was very involved in Andrew's work as an artist; Andrew sought her comments on his work and trusted her judgment. Betsy soon began to take care of the business end of Andrew's art world – a facet of the artist's life that Andy did not take much interest in. In 1943, Andrew and Betsy started a family with the arrival of their first child Nicholas; James followed in 1946.

In 1958, Andrew and Betsy purchased an 18th century gristmill on the banks of the Brandywine River in Pennsylvania. Betsy devoted her time and energy into restoring the old mill into a home and studio. She has a deep love and an artist's touch when it comes to restoring old buildings. Betsy has restored the old James farm on Broad Cove in Cushing, Maine, a lighthouse on Southern Island in Maine (presently the home of her son James), and several buildings on Allen and Benner Islands in Maine – two of which are a former fish house and an octagonal glassed structure to house Betsy's collection of old oceanographic charts.

In the year 2000 Andrew and Betsy Wyeth celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. They continued to divide their time between summers in Maine and winters in Pennsylvania until Andrew's passing in 2009.