A Passion for the Past

Museum Featuring Pair of Exhibits Through Spring

By Heather Dutcher
Staff Writer

The 1996 Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art begins with a bang this season with two new collections. “A Passion for the Past: The Collection of Bertram K. and Nina Fletcher Little at Cogswell’s Grant” features more than 80 classic pieces of 18th and 19th-century American folk and decorative art. The Littles amassed the collection in their home in Essex, Massachusetts.

Painted furniture, including a blanket chest with floral designs and a maple high chest grainpainted as burled walnut, display a broad range of decoration.

Some of the more interesting pieces in the collection are individual portraits by New England painters. The faces of each person seem to stare out from history.

Many examples of redware pottery and hand-made boxes represent early New England crafts. A grainer’s miniatures table with two benches could fit in a china doll’s house. These pieces and a sample gravestone are examples craftsman used to advertise their skill.

Documentary photographs and interpretive panels will trace the Littles during their pioneering research into the lives and art of early New Englanders. The exhibit is funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts and Sotheby’s.

A second exhibit, “Collaboration/Transformation: Lithographs” from the Hamilton Press, is a collection of lithographs and “case study” installations that takes the viewer through the process of transforming and artist’s idea into a lithographic print.

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the invention of this process. It requires that the artist draw on a smooth, limestone slab using a special lithographic crayon that attracts ink. The blank areas repel the ink. Paper is then placed on the stone and run through a lithopress. Color lithos require a new plate or stone for each color.

Some of the prints are broken down from a work of art and the colors were changed or shaded. This gave each individual print a different mood and certain aspects of the art were magnified.

The two exhibitions open with a reception from 7 to 9 p.m. Friday and run through March 29. Edward Hamilton, co-founder of the Hamilton Press, will talk about his experiences with the process before the opening. For more information, call 229-3272.