

VICTORIA MANSION

A National Historic Landmark



ANNUAL REPORT
2015-2016

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Letter from the Director

Keeping House

Visitation to and interest in Victoria Mansion reached a new “high water” level this past year. For the first time ever, we had more than 30,000 people tour the house, breaking a previous record set in 2014 by over 5,000. In July the British newspaper *The Independent* declared that Victoria Mansion was Portland’s “prize attraction,” and encouraged its readership to visit when they travel to America. Increasing publicity and knowledge of the Mansion have brought growing attention: in January we were named as Maine’s most beautiful building on the travel site Thrillist, in the company of other notable landmarks such as Biltmore Estate in North Carolina, and San Simeon in California. Heady stuff! These and other recognitions all contributed to the upswing in attendance. We’re thrilled to be sharing this treasure with an ever-increasing audience.

But there’s another side to our popularity. What happens annually to historic interiors when the feet of 30,000 people pass over floors and carpets, when the opening and closing of entrance doors permits dust and small insects to enter, and even the breath of visitors adds heat and condensation to elaborately decorated interiors? As people inadvertently brush against friable painted wall surfaces and hand-grained door surrounds? How do we continue to make the house accessible to a wide variety of visitors, scholars, and students and still preserve the magnificence of the original interiors? As those in charge of such an important cultural artifact as Victoria Mansion, we have a duty to hand it down to successive generations in as good, if not better condition than we inherited it. For seventy-five years now (yes, we have been a museum open to the public for a full seventy-five years – see the article in this report) scores of trustees, volunteers, staff, members, caretakers, engineers, scholars, specialists, and qualified restoration contractors have worked to preserve the house to the highest contemporary standards. During that period, continuing restoration and conservation work, along with the professionalization of our administrative and curatorial efforts, have ensured the ongoing preservation of the house. In 2016 a new air handling system will help us control temperature and humidity levels throughout the Mansion. A baseline study of all current physical conditions in the Mansion is being undertaken, and will allow us to track effects of wear and tear on the building’s fabric as we move forward. In September we will complete the Institute of Museum and Library Services funded re-housing of our internationally significant fabric and *passementerie* collection to professionally recognized standards and begin the reorganization of our other stored collections, making them more accessible for study in the future. We are proceeding into year two of our project to fully restore the Reception Room interior and the exterior of its bay window. Through all of these efforts one can get a sense of how much goes on behind the scenes to ensure that the Mansion can accommodate increased usage and visitation while being preserved for future generations.



It’s all in a day’s work, and all of us here take these responsibilities very seriously. As a member, you help make all of this possible. In that, I thank you for your interest and support, and look forward to keeping this house in the best condition we can achieve for the enjoyment of all.

Thank you for being a part of this!

Tom Johnson

Victoria Mansion: 75 Years as a Museum 1941-2016

Thomas B. Johnson, Executive Director

Preface

Much has been researched and written about the creation of Victoria Mansion and the Morse and Libby families who lived in the house from the 1860s through the 1920s. The story of its brush with demolition in 1939-1940 has become legendary in any discussion of the Mansion's history. What is perhaps less well known are the details of its rescue and growth as a museum. They are as important to understanding the present state of the Mansion as any events that came previously. The property did not glide effortlessly from a virtually empty house to a fully-furnished museum.

The Mansion owes its incarnation as a museum to the foresight of Dr. William Holmes. Born in Augusta, he spent the greater part of his educational career as superintendent of schools in Mount Vernon, New York. Passing through Portland in the summer of 1940, he learned of the house, made immediate arrangements to see it, and acting on his own initiative purchased it to save it from a fate of only being remembered through photographs.

Holmes clearly considered the structure a masterpiece of Victorian design. It was truly visionary in that period to consider Victorian decorative arts and architecture as worthy of preservation, and its purchase must have been something of a financial sacrifice for him. Even so, he flatly turned down the subsequent interest of a local businessman who approached him to acquire the house for "cabaret purposes." Holmes approached William Sumner Appleton of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA, now Historic New England) asking for ideas to ensure the Mansion's future. He and Appleton evidently worked out a plan through which SPNEA would acquire the building through purchase which, probably because of the exigencies of World War II, never came to be.

Dr. Holmes contacted his sister Clara, a teacher of interior design in New York City, early on. Together, they purchased the mirrors, sculptures, and some of the furnishings that had been removed and returned them to the rooms. Additionally, Clara purchased Victorian furniture and decorative arts to fully furnish the house. In April 1941, Holmes wrote Appleton at SPNEA that "we have no idea of getting any profit out of the house, and I would like to try to have it taken over by your Society on the plan you worked out last fall." In July, perhaps as a good faith move to demonstrate to SPNEA that it could be successful as a public attraction, he and Clara opened the house as a museum.

It opened to the public in July 1941 as "Victoria Mansion," named in honor of Queen Victoria, whom Holmes described as a "noble woman, loving mother, and the greatest woman ruler." He believed that "the women of Maine should have this house as a shrine to Maine womanhood," and Portland socialite Mae Ford Haviland actively began working to achieve that end. Two years later she founded a membership organization named the Society of Maine Women of Achievement (the parent of the organization known today simply as Victoria Mansion) "to foster the cultural arts; to recognize worthy achievements of Maine mothers and daughters; [and] to preserve Victoria Mansion as an historic landmark and as the best standing example of Early Victorian Art, Architecture, and Decoration." Holmes had turned the property over to his sister and on September 15, 1943, Clara Holmes gifted it to the Society and arranged to sell the organization the contents of the Mansion. Just three days previous to the transfer, Senator Margaret Chase Smith visited and "expressed enthusiastic interest in the restoration." Local luminaries who supported the Society at the beginning included Mrs. Horace Hildreth (wife of Maine's Governor), founding president of the organization, Mrs. Guy Patterson Gannett



Fig. 1

Fig. 1. Dr. William Holmes (1874 - 1948) is credited with saving the Mansion from certain demolition in 1940. He and his sister Clara furnished the house and opened it to the public in the summer of 1941.



Fig. 2

As significant work progressed on the Mansion, the trustees turned their attention to the deteriorating carriage house. An innovative solution was undertaken by entering a thirty-year lease agreement with the architectural firm Portland Design Team to house their offices in the building in exchange for restoring the structure.

By 1982 federal funding had become severely curtailed, and to continue its restoration momentum the Society embarked on its first capital campaign. A major interior conservation project, the painted ceiling of the Dining Room, was undertaken in 1988, partly funded by a grant from the Institute of Museum Services. The next year a comprehensive survey of all interior paintings on canvas in the Mansion was completed. In 1989 the Board commissioned a Historic Structures Report which still continues to guide the focus of present-day restoration initiatives.

While work to secure the structure continued, the Society set its sights on identifying and bringing back the Mansion's original furnishings. Much of what had been removed in the 1930s was still in the hands of Libby descendants, but through the efforts of Arlene Palmer Schwind many original objects were located and returned by gift and purchase, so that by 2010 the Mansion could

boast that it contained over 95% of the furniture and decorative arts chosen by the Morses before 1860. Research work in the 1980s also led to the realization that the Mansion furniture and carved interior woodwork were created in the workshops of celebrated German-American designer Gustave Herter (1830-1898), and that Herter was responsible for the fully integrated interior plan. Victoria Mansion emerged as the earliest known, and sole surviving Herter commission in America, and it also contains the largest concentration of Gustave Herter furniture in the country.

(Gannet newspapers), Mrs. Ralph O. Brewster (wife of Maine Senator Ralph Owen Brewster), and 155 other charter members.*

Ever since then, a constant focus has been a commitment to the preservation and restoration of this unique and complex structure. Through the 1970s the Society worked to maintain the structure but had to cope with increasing erosion of the brownstone exterior, rotting soffits at the roofline due to missing or damaged gutters, and a rapidly-changing neighborhood with rising vandalism.

With the help of Senator Margaret Chase Smith the house was named a National Historic Landmark in 1971, making it eligible for Federal restoration funds. In 1972 the Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) persuaded the Society's board to take advantage of the availability of federal matching. Over the next ten years, critical repairs to the Mansion were commenced at a cost of nearly \$263,000, half of that in federal grants administered through the MHPC.



Fig. 3

Fig. 2. Mae Ford Haviland (1874 - 1948) spearheaded the drive to establish the Victoria Society of Maine Women, a non-profit organization formed to preserve the house as a memorial to Maine's famous mothers and as a location for "...card parties, club meetings, recital and general community usefulness, and to make it a home-like center for out-of-town members to enjoy." The deed to the Mansion was given to them by Clara Holmes in 1943.

Fig. 3. Perhaps it is appropriate that one of the most poignant images of the Mansion's condition at its nadir in the early 1970s is a grainy photograph and caption that ran in the *Portland Evening Express*, capturing a truly depressing scene. Vandalism was a constant problem as the neighborhood around the house also reached a low point, and the Mansion's exterior deterioration was accelerated by it. The image shows damage to the front iron and granite (erroneously identified as concrete in the caption) fence. Behind, the deterioration of the brownstone is visible in eroded pillars supporting the porches and missing balusters from their railings. By 1979 the crumbling stone had become a safety hazard and the front porch and portico were removed in their entirety, later to be replaced by sand painted wood replicas.



Fig. 4

What had functioned as an all-volunteer organization started to change by the 1980s. Recognizing the national significance of the Mansion's interiors, the Board in 1985 created a Professional Advisory Council, comprised of leading architectural historians, social historians, and museum curators and directors. The next year the Society hired its first professional director, Glenn Uminowicz.

Under Uminowicz a number of new initiatives, including annual exhibits and a substantive newsletter, were begun. One of the first articles was by member and collections committee chair Charlotte F. Brown, who shared her groundbreaking research of the iconography of the wall and ceiling paintings in the Mansion.

Bruce T. Sherwood succeeded Uminowicz as Director. In 1994-95 seven pieces of Herter furniture from the Mansion were featured in a traveling exhibition shown at the Houston Museum of Art, the High Museum in Atlanta, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. The Herter connection led to a feature article on the Mansion in the September 1995 issue of *Architectural Digest*.

Donna Ridewood became Director in May 1995. Two years later the Portland Design Team left the carriage house for larger quarters. The Society negotiated the cessation of the lease, and the building became available for expansion of Mansion needs and functions.

Work on the interior continued with conservation of the dining room woodwork. Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) occurred through regrading the rear courtyard and installation of a handicapped lift under the rear ell porch. Following that was the conservation project that many never expected to see in their lifetimes: the huge stained glass skylight above the stair hall, a project managed by stained glass conservator Robin Neely. In 2000 the Mansion received a prestigious Getty Grant for a full study of its brownstone, crucial to future restoration efforts. Much of what the international restoration field knows about brownstone composition and technology today resulted from this seminal study.

Ridewood left Victoria Mansion in 1998, and the organization welcomed Robert Wolterstorff to the director's position. Robert arrived as the Campaign for Victoria Mansion was raising \$1.5 million under the leadership of Board President Madeleine G. Corson. His tenure saw the undertaking and completion of the most complicated and costly restoration project to be undertaken to date: the disassembly and re-cladding of the seriously deteriorated tower. With the envelope of the building secured, a full restoration of the Turkish Smoking Room followed. Between 2006 and 2010 the Mansion succeeded in fully restoring the grand sweep of the front entry steps and railings, a project capped with the installation of elaborately carved replicas of the foliate decorative finials at the railing terminals, missing for most of the twentieth century.



Fig. 5

In 2004 Arlene Palmer Schwind was named Curator. Over the previous twenty years she had served the Mansion in the successive capacities of trustee, volunteer curator, and Senior Research Fellow. She has played an important role in securing the solid reputation and international recognition the Mansion has today.

Fig. 4. The Dining Room ceiling is a widely-acknowledged masterpiece of tromp le'oeil painting in the Mansion. Its paint decoration convincingly portrays a surface inlaid with precious figured woods. After sustaining water damage from a leak in a bathroom installed on the second floor in the early 1900s, it was the first major interior project chosen for restoration, which was undertaken in 1988.

Fig. 5. The Professional Advisory Council has advised on Mansion policies and collections since 1985. At this 2008 meeting, Curator Arlene Palmer Schwind discusses original Turkish Smoking Room textiles and *passementerie* with (left to right) Charles T. Lyle of the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum in Wethersfield, Connecticut; Christopher Monkhouse, Curator of European Decorative Arts at the Art Institute of Chicago; Laura F. Sprague, Curatorial Consultant at Bowdoin College; Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen, Curator of American Decorative Arts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; and Tom Johnson, then Chief Curator at the Museums of Old York and Executive Director of Victoria Mansion since 2010.



Fig. 6

Tom Johnson was appointed fifth Director of Victoria Mansion in 2010. He arrived just as Portland began its rapid ascendancy as a lifestyle, restaurant, and cultural mecca. Regular cruise ship dockings at the waterfront opened new sources for visitation growth, and tourism soared. Over the next three years Mansion staff by necessity grew to include four full-time, seven year-round part-time, seven seasonal part-time positions, and over sixty docents and volunteers. In 2015, visitation passed 30,000 annually.

Concurrently, major interior conservation efforts advanced, through the generous support of foundations, government grants, and individuals. In 2010-2011 the Pompeian Bathroom Suite was conserved to its spectacular c. 1860 appearance. Conservation of the vestibule was successfully undertaken in 2012-2013.

Today, plans and preparatory work for the restoration of the deteriorated brownstone exterior of the Reception Room bay are underway along with the conservation of the elaborate interior of the Reception Suite itself. Groundwork for the launching of a capital campaign to fund these and other projects has been completed. With a talented Board of Trustees, a staff dedicated to the advancement of projects and effective administration of the site, and a growing roster of members, friends, and supporters - all of them focused on this singular survival of the highest expression that art and architecture had to offer in Civil-war era America - the days ahead appear bright.



Fig. 7

*Names of early officers of the organization who were married are listed as they were recorded in the early records and publications.

I wish to thank Arlene Palmer Schwind and Timothy Brosnihan for invaluable assistance in the preparation of this essay. Any errors or omissions are the sole responsibility of the author.

Fig. 6. The most extensive exterior restoration undertaken to date is the front tower. A \$1.4 million project undertaken in 2002-2004 removed all of the severely deteriorated stone from its exterior, most of it being replaced with exact replicas carved from Portland, Connecticut brownstone from the quarry that had provided the original stone for the Mansion in 1858-1860. Grants from the Save America's Treasures program and the Getty Foundation, along with generous gifts from members, were instrumental in its funding.

Fig. 7. Entering our seventy-fifth year as a museum open to the public, visitation topped 30,000 in 2015, an all-time record, with forecasts for growth to continue as Portland becomes a destination for cruise ships, coach tours and day-trips. Our challenge is how we adapt and manage this increase in use and visitation while preserving our world-class interiors for future generations.

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 J. Peter Spang
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Blue Elephant Events & Catering
Broadway Gardens
Christmas Light Pros
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Festoon
Harmon's & Barton's
Danny R. Hatt, Don Chouinard, &
Marcedas Hatt
Village Florist & Company

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Morse Associates

Morse Associates are members who have chosen to support the Mansion at the highest levels of \$1000 and above.

Nancy Armitage
Elizabeth Astor
Stephen Barton
Charlotte F. Brown
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Mr. and Mrs. John J. Evans, III
John Hatcher and Dan Kennedy
Thomas L. Hinkle and Gary Duford
Doug and Sharyn Howell
Lynne F. Jackson
Thomas B. Johnson
Harry W. Konkel
Candice Thornton Lee
Carol and Rick Malone
Nancy and Mike Marino
Marian Hoyt Morgan and Chris Corbett
Aaron Morris
Sarah Newick
Jean K. Nishiyama
Drew and Alexa Oestreicher
Tim and Kathie Propp
Sally W. Rand
Carla Rigby
Sandy and Bob Riley
Hannah L. Russell
Mary Howe Stewart
Ruth Townsend Story
Katharine Watson

We apologize if any name was inadvertently left out of these listings. If you note any errors or omissions, please contact Director of Development, Sam Heck, so that we may correct our records. sheck@victoriamansion.org or 207-772-4841 ext 102.



Christmas Gala

Each year Victoria Mansion heralds the opening of the holiday season in Portland with its annual Christmas Gala. Always held on the Wednesday following Thanksgiving, this past year the evening of December 2nd was a convivial opportunity for guests to experience the elegantly decorated rooms in the Mansion while sipping on wine and signature cocktails and enjoying gourmet delicacies and hors d'oeuvres. Mark your calendars now - 2016's Gala will be Wednesday November 30th and will feature the creative expressions of some of the Portland area's most talented designers who will decorate to the theme *A Currier and Ives Christmas*.

Development Report

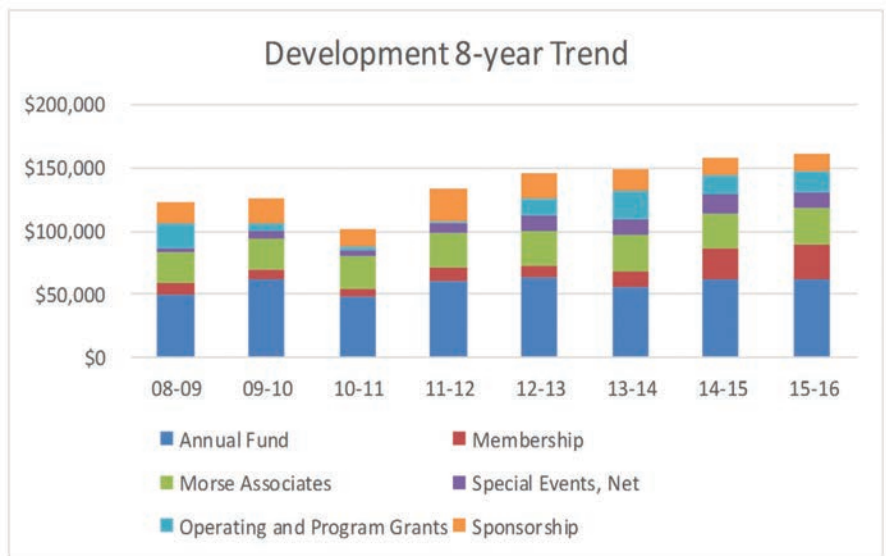
This year, Victoria Mansion continued to build on its strong increases in raised funds over the last several years, with an increase of 2.85% over last year's record-high donations. In particular, efforts to increase and broaden membership led the way this year, with an overall increase in general (non-Morse-Associates) membership of 12.63% in the current year, following a nearly 100% increase in the prior year. This strong organic growth is attributable to a number of factors.

The first is a concerted campaign over the last several years of free members' events designed to increase members' ongoing engagement with the Mansion, thus encouraging renewals. Events in recent years have included a talk by Curator Arlene Palmer Schwind on the career of Giuseppe Guidicini, who painted the Mansion's interiors, basement-to-tower tours, and special looks at collections objects not usually on public display.

The second factor contributing to the Mansion's broadening membership base is the success of our young donor group, the Gaslight League. Founded in June of 2014, the Gaslight League now has 65 members raising more than \$12,000 in dues annually for the Mansion. For more information on the Gaslight League and other levels of Mansion membership, visit the Support section of victoriamansion.org.

Other areas of fundraising continued steady positive growth; annual fund revenues increased by 1.38% and operating and program grant revenues were up by 7.29%. As restoration and conservation of the Reception Room progresses, grants for restoration and capital projects (not reflected on the above chart because of year-to-year variability) were similarly strong, up 19.83% from the prior year. Sponsorship revenues rebounded 11.51% after an off-year last year. Special events revenues, while falling short of last year's all-time high, were nevertheless up 19.15% compared to the year before that.

All in all, raised revenues increased 2.85% over the prior year, indicating steady growth. In order to ensure the sustainability of this growth, the board approved expanding the capacity of the development department with the creation of a new position, Development and Communications Coordinator, and in November Rachael Jeffers joined the Mansion staff. With her help and expanding community support, we are optimistic for even more fundraising potential in the coming years.



Victorian Fair

In September the Mansion held its second biennial Victorian Fair. Despite the gloomy weather over 200 people came out to see the array of exhibitors set up on the Mansion lawn. Demonstrations ranged from blacksmithing to knitting, lace-making to calligraphy. Exhibits about traditional bamboo fly rods and proper tea etiquette were seen alongside historical games and interactive activities. Fortune tellers and a strolling musician rounded out the day's event, providing entertainment for everyone in attendance. We're already looking ahead to 2017 and another fantastic fair!

Education Report

The last year brought some big changes to the Mansion's educational offerings. In addition to holding the second biennial Victorian Fair in September, we had a season-long exhibit in the carriage house, which was accompanied by an event and lecture series, and we added new educational tours around Halloween. These tours, undertaken as an experiment, proved popular and have inspired a series of themed tours that will run throughout the coming regular season. These tours will engage visitors with the Mansion in a new way, either by focusing on one particular aspect of the house or with a broader historical topic.

An exhibit, *The Way We Wear: Fashion & Industry in the Nineteenth Century*, was made possible by a generous grant by the Maine Humanities Council as well as the collaboration of numerous historical and cultural institutions around the state of Maine. Panels explored the progression of the industries that made nineteenth-century fashion what it was, and display cases housed artifacts ranging from elaborately detailed accessories to printing blocks used in the production of fabric. A dress made using a 1870s pattern was designed in such a way that it could be peeled away by visitors, showing the layers of clothing underneath. A close partnership with Maine College of Art Textile and Fashion Design department produced fabulous fabrics and garments inspired by the Mansion. Lectures and presentations were given on topics related to fashion and industry throughout the year in a number of locations.



This year, Ocean Avenue Elementary, one of the schools involved in helping us to design Victorian Portland, our interdisciplinary school program, asked for a different kind of tour. They were looking for something that would provide both a focus on technology and time for the students to do sketches in each room, allowing them to incorporate their lessons on the Mansion into a Side x Side grant they had received from the Department of Education. The resulting tour was a six-stop obstacle course through the house, where students got to learn in depth about some of the Mansion's most important technologies, handle props, and use their creativity to draw their own interpretations of the house. The model worked so well that it has been offered to another school that opted for the technology lesson, and a symbolism-focused version was developed for another school.

Due to record setting visitation in the 2015 season, as well as the many group tours already booked for 2016, we were able to offer school tours free of charge in the offseason. Thanks to this, we have had teachers bring classes to the Mansion who have not been able to afford the field trip in the past. As an educational institution it is wonderful to be able to open our doors to a broader population than ever before and ensure that we are sharing our resources with as much of the local community as possible.



Mourning in the Mansion

This year we introduced a new Halloween program that combined historical content and performance. The event, *Mourning in the Mansion*, consisted of two parts: a tour focused on Victorian funeral and mourning customs and a performance of an original play, *A Vigil for Aunt Eleanor*, in which an irreverent young woman sits coffin-side with her parents. The event proved very popular and visitors enjoyed having educational content alongside entertainment. The program will continue in 2016 with a slightly modified tour and a different performance.

Restoration Report



The pace of restoration work often quickens in the spring, as carpenters, painters, and conservators scramble to take advantage of the narrow window of warm weather before the house opens for visitation. The spring of 2015 was consumed by an interior restoration project, the structural rebuilding of the floor system beneath the Reception Room bay. Bob and Sebastian Cariddi spent months dismantling the floor, flagging elements in need of replacement, and sourcing and machining new materials to effect a seamless repair. Structural engineer Alfred Hodsen of Resurgence Engineering consulted to ensure the rebuilt floor would meet modern loading requirements. By the end of May, decades of deterioration was reversed. The bay floor is now level, sound, and ready to support the original 1860 carpet and other collections objects once again.

Efforts shifted outdoors during the summer and fall. Peter de Paolo continued his annual program of sand painting, tackling both the upper balustrade on the rear entry porch and the north side of the library bay. Caleb Hemphill completed conservation treatments to the front parlor porch corner column base, adding ventilation ports to help keep the column interior dry. Bob and Sebastian Cariddi replaced a broken pane in one of the cellar windows facing the driveway, painting and puttying the exterior of the sash in the process.

In the fall we welcomed preservation carpenter Jack Crane of Sheepscot River Joinery. Jack and his partner Wade removed a section of balustrade from the roof of the rear entry porch. While several campaigns of conservation had allowed this section of 1860 woodwork to remain in place for over 160 years, the time had finally come to replace the most deteriorated elements. Jack and Wade returned over half the balustrade to service, filling gaps with epoxy and new wood. They replaced the lower rail with utile, a rot-resistant wood distantly related to mahogany. Mansion staff carefully labeled and stored all of the replaced elements to ensure the originals would be available for future study and replication.

Caleb Hemphill returned in the fall to fabricate a new wooden frame to more securely hold a beautiful etched glass window in one of the main hall doors. The original frame didn't quite overlap one corner of the glass, allowing the glass to move in and out as the wind blew. The new frame is slightly thicker than the original, but thanks to Caleb's masterful woodworking and Kevin Tacka's skill at reproducing original finishes, the difference is barely perceptible.

Each year, the elements take their toll on Victoria Mansion and a dedicated team of craftspeople go about the work slowing and even reversing the damage. We would like to thank all those who take part in the very dynamic process of preserving this great house.

Above: Bob and Sebastian Cariddi lay new floor joist in the Reception Room Bay.



Victorian Doll Tea

2015 was the 10th anniversary, and last, of the extremely popular Victorian Doll Tea. The event sold out and the volunteer organizers outdid themselves with truly amazing decorations, gift bags, and raffle prizes. Following the tea, attendees visited the Mansion where a stunning display of vintage dolls made by noted designers from all over the world was installed. All good things must come to an end, however, and the Doll Tea went out on a particularly high note. The volunteer committee responsible for putting on this remarkable event, ably led over the years by Trustee Sandy Riley and former Trustee Sandra Harris Gilley, has largely moved on to other ventures and places. Everyone at the Mansion thanks them so much for their time and effort over the last ten years!

Curatorial Report

Accessions

- Red Bedroom Bureau, Gustave Herter, New York. 1858-1860. Museum purchase, with funds provided by an anonymous donor.

Victoria Mansion was blessed again over the past year with the acquisition of several objects original to the Mansion. Through the generous support of an anonymous donor, one of the last “missing” major pieces of Herter furniture returned: the carved rosewood bureau from the Red Bedroom (fig. 1). J.R. Libby’s son Ralph had the bureau in his West End home, and although many critical Herter furnishings were given to the Mansion when Ralph’s widow died in 1976, this bureau was not. Efforts to retrieve it over the years were not successful; Arlene Schwind last wrote the owner in 2009 and, receiving no response, feared it had slipped away. In the summer of 2015, however, local antiques dealer Chris Considine was called by a family who had some things to sell, including this bureau. When Chris found Arlene’s letter in the drawer he contacted the Mansion. Thanks to Chris and a generous donor, we were able to purchase this critical original Morse object and install it in the room for which it was made. An added bonus was a blue silk handkerchief found in the bureau’s “secret” drawer. The bureau needs to be conserved because its finish is in poor condition and a number of moldings are missing. Some of those moldings fell off before 1935 while the bureau was still in the Mansion, because—amazingly—we found three of them in our “furniture parts” collection!

- Nine-piece silver-plated coffee and tea service by Reed & Barton, design patented 1871, originally owned by J.R. and Louisa Libby, who wed in 1870. Also a silver-plated butter dish of c. 1870.
- Twenty-five photographs, including ones of the Mansion interior and exterior and images of members of the extended Libby family.
- Three paper items, including Alice Cutter’s scrapbook of her years at Bradford Seminary.
- A silk dress from 1850s; a silk handkerchief and a pair of 19th-century ladies shoes, from the Larrabee or Libby family.

All gifts of Emma F. Willman and Deborah Willman Pierce

Longtime generous donors Emma F. Willman and Deborah Willman Pierce, who inherited many Morse and Libby objects from their stepmother Alice Cutter Willman, the eldest Libby grandchild, have made yet another important gift of Mansion objects. It includes the nine-piece silver plated coffee and tea service that Mr. and Mrs. J.R. Libby acquired shortly after their marriage and continued to use during their life in the Mansion (fig. 2). In an 1895 photograph of the Dining Room, this handsome Reed & Barton set, which includes a rare table bell to call servants, is seen on the sideboard to the right of the hearth (fig. 3). The Willman-Pierce gift also includes that photograph, and six other early photographs of the Mansion exterior and interior. Alice Willman had allowed us to copy these many years ago, but we are very pleased to have the originals.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Fig. 1 Red Bedroom bureau, Gustave Herter, 1858-1860. *Photo by Gail Dodge.*

Fig. 2 Silver plated Teapot, Reed and Barton, 1871, from Libby service. *Photo by Gail Dodge.*

Fig. 3. Detail, 1895 photograph of the dining room showing the Libby silver service on the sideboard.

Besides the Mansion views, the gift includes charming photographs of Alice and her brother Philip as children, another Libby silver piece, several paper items, and clothing from the Libby or Larrabee family. The installation of the silver service in the Dining Room will enhance the already sumptuous display in that room, while the photographs and ephemera are important additions to our collection and enhance our understanding of life in the Mansion. The clothing items associated with the Libby family fill gaps in our small costume collection.

- Souvenir German porcelain cream jug with view of Longfellow house and the retail mark of J.R. Libby Co.

Gift of Betty Crane

Dedicated docent and supporter Betty Crane surprised us with this fascinating souvenir jug bearing the retail mark of the J.R. Libby Co., the Portland department store that J.R. Libby established in Portland. Betty has collected souvenir china with Maine views for many years but this is the only example she has seen with this mark. It is a wonderful addition to our collection of items relating to the Libby family business.

- Carpet sweeper. “Gold Medal” by Bissell; retailed W.A. Kilborn, Portland *Gift of Jennifer Cartmell*

Keeping carpets clean in the era before electricity and vacuum cleaners was a chore made easier with carpet sweepers such as this. This “Gold Medal” version of Bissell’s invention is in remarkable condition and retains delightful decorative painting. It is all the more interesting to the Mansion because the retailer of the device, W.A. Kilborn, also supplied goods to the Libby family while they resided in the Mansion. We are grateful to Ms. Cartmell for thinking that such a fascinating artifact of Victorian technology belonged in Victoria Mansion!

Conservation and Care of Collections



Fig. 4

In the fall, Curator Arlene Palmer Schwind, Conservator Siobhan Lindsay, and Assistant Director Timothy Brosnihan prepared a complex grant application to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) seeking funding for the conservation of the painted decoration in the Reception Suite. We will know if the grant was successful this summer.

Museum professionals attending the NEMA conference in Portland in November had a session at the Mansion to view and discuss recent conservation projects, especially the Turkish room and the Bathroom Suite. They also visited the newly created textiles storage room on the third floor.

In 2014 IMLS awarded the Mansion a grant to clean and re-house our unique collection of nearly 1,000 textiles and trimmings from the original 1860 window treatments, items that range from ten-yard pieces of silk edging to six-inch tassels. We expect to complete this challenging project this September. Siobhan has been meticulously cleaning the delicate items and recording their condition. She has developed low-tech but imaginative and highly effective methods of storing them. Arlene is renumbering the items and studying them carefully with an eye to future replication. We have been enormously helped in this project by Gail Dodge, a professional photographer who has most generously volunteered her time to photograph each example with numerous details. (fig. 4) Her work gives us a critical visual record of this extraordinary collection. Gail came to us fresh from a four-year project photographing the great textile collection at the H.F. du Pont Winterthur Museum in Delaware and we are extremely grateful to her for volunteering her expertise. We also very much appreciate the skilled volunteer assistance of John Sundling who is helping Siobhan with her tasks.

Harper Batsford is working with the curatorial team as Collections Conservation Technician. Under Siobhan’s supervision, he is working part-time to clean each museum room top to bottom. He is documenting condition issues and providing a critical baseline of information for each space.

Fig. 4. Original tieback from the Green Bedroom. *Photo by Gail Dodge.*

Lectures

In late April 2015, Arlene presented “Victoria Mansion: The 1860 Maine Summer Home of a New Orleans Hotelier,” at the annual Newport Symposium, hosted by The Preservation Society of Newport County, in Newport, RI. The theme of the conference was “north and south,” so the tale of the Morses and their summer home was particularly appropriate.

In June 2015 she traveled to San Francisco to speak to the American Decorative Arts Forum of Northern California and presented “Victoria Mansion: A Herter Masterpiece on the Maine Coast.” A large group of Victoriana enthusiasts attended her talk that was held at the Legion of Honor. During her visit, Arlene saw several impressive private collections of nineteenth-century furniture that included examples of Gustave Herter furniture from the Mansion era.

As part of their September 2015 trip to see the architecture and decorative arts of southern Maine, the Decorative Arts Trust hosted a symposium at the Portland Museum of Art in which Arlene was a featured speaker. Her talk, “Gustave Herter’s Opulent Interiors for Victoria Mansion, 1858-1860,” prepared the group for their memorable visit to the Mansion.

Research

Arlene has been working with Charlotte Brown and Gianfranco Pocobene to complete their manuscript, *From Italian Opera to an Italian Villa: Giuseppe Guidicini and Decorative Painting at Victoria Mansion*. The Mansion hopes to collaborate with a university press in the publication process.



A Dinner with George Washington’s Mount Vernon

On the evening of September 10, 30 members and friends of Victoria Mansion dined in splendor at a limited seating dinner co-hosted by Victoria Mansion and George Washington’s Mount Vernon, both recognized National Historic Landmarks. The dinner was held in the specially decorated nave of Portland’s Irish Heritage Center on State Street, formerly St. Dominic’s Church. A varied menu featuring eighteenth and nineteenth century fare and selected wines was accompanied by commentary by Layne Witherell, author of the book *Wine Maniacs*, who teaches wine appreciation classes and currently is the chief wine buyer for Trader Joe’s in Portland. Dinner was eaten with a background of classical cello music.

Special toasts and comments were made by Curt Viebranz, President, George Washington’s Mount Vernon, Drew Oestreicher, President of the Board of Trustees of Victoria Mansion, Mrs. David E. Nichols, Vice Regent for the State of Maine, Mount Vernon Ladies Association, and Tom Johnson, Executive Director, Victoria Mansion.

As a follow-up to the dinner, a number attending travelled to Mount Vernon on October 11 to attend The Maine Event, a special day of free admission and complimentary lunch for Maine residents.

By the Numbers

April 1, 2015 – March 31, 2016

Victoria Mansion had **30,340** visitors. They came from all **50** States. Foreign visitors came from **108** countries. There are **66** Mansion docents. **568** school students toured the house. Victoria Mansion has **354** members.

2016 Victoria Mansion Calendar

April

- 27 **Annual Meeting** at the Cumberland Club
- 30 *Broadway on the Stairway*, 75th Anniversary Celebration Gala

May

- 1 Museum opens for 75th season

June

- 14 Members only event-Curator's Choice
- 17 **Allagash Victoria Ale Premiere Celebration**

July

- 11 **Opera at the Mansion**
- 18-22 **Education History Camp**

September

- 10 Annual Morse Associates Late Summer Outing

October

- 31 Mansion closes for the season

November

- 25 33rd Annual **Christmas at Victoria Mansion** opens
- 30 **Christmas at Victoria Mansion Gala**

December

- 2 First Friday at Victoria Mansion

January

- 8 Last day of **Christmas at Victoria Mansion**

Watch your mail and e-mail for announcements and invitations to other events throughout the year and follow us on Facebook for the latest news!



Opera at the Mansion

On July 27 opera stars from PORTopera's 2015 productions of *Tosca* and *Trouble in Tahiti* delighted a capacity crowd of Mansion supporters and opera fans in the fifth annual Opera at the Mansion. Eliza Bonet, Adam Diegel, Carina DiGianfillipo, Lucas Levy, Robert Mellon, and Josh Quinn, accompanied by Timothy Steele, presented selections from opera and musical theater and proved once again that the Mansion stair hall was meant for magnificent music! The next Opera at the Mansion will be July 11, 2016 — save the date!

Above: Mezzo-soprano Eliza Bonet sings to an appreciative audience.

Financial Report

Victoria Mansion experienced record growth in income during the 2015-2016 fiscal year. Admissions revenue grew a startling 24 percent, due largely to an unprecedented number of motorcoach visits. Membership contributions were up over 9 percent, continuing an impressive trajectory of growth over the last six years. Shop sales topped \$100,000 for only the second time in the Mansion's history. Overall, it was a banner year.

Growing expenses consumed most of this additional income. Some of the higher expenses flowed inevitably from the increased business: higher staffing costs, increased credit card processing fees, and a higher cost of goods sold. Other unbudgeted expenses represent a calculated decision to reinvest some of the year's "found" income in desperately needed improvements. This winter and spring we remodeled our Carriage House Museum Shop and Visitors Center to better accommodate the higher numbers of visitors passing through. We also signed a contract for the installation of an air handling system in the Mansion which will make the Mansion's interiors much more comfortable for visitors and much gentler on our precious collections.

	FY 15-16 Budget	FY 15-16 Estimated Actual
<u>SUPPORT AND REVENUE</u>		
ADMISSIONS/TOURS	\$232,000	\$305,941
CONTRIBUTIONS	\$57,000	\$67,452
ENDOWMENT	\$58,775	\$58,775
GRANT INCOME (Operations)	\$9,000	\$16,000
MEMBERSHIP	\$55,000	\$54,507
PROGRAMS	\$8,100	\$7,722
MANSION RENTAL (net of expenses)	\$1,900	\$4,878
SHOP SALES	\$89,500	\$107,743
SPECIAL EVENTS	\$27,535	\$29,049
Total Income	\$538,810	\$652,067
Cost of Goods Sold	\$50,000	\$62,487
Gross Profit	\$488,810	\$589,580
<u>EXPENSES</u>		
TOTAL ADMINISTRATION	\$72,814	\$77,330
TOTAL PROGRAMS	\$39,474	\$66,756
TOTAL DEVELOPMENT	\$17,600	\$18,418
TOTAL SALARIES/BENEFITS	\$353,973	\$379,436
CAPITAL PURCHASES	\$4,000	\$41,427
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$487,861	\$583,367
Surplus (Deficit)	\$949	\$6,213

After several years of solid growth, the value of our endowment dropped over the last year. Recognizing the difficulty of preserving the value of our endowment over the long term in an environment where fixed income instruments are providing very low returns, Victoria Mansion's Finance Committee voted to lower our annual draw on the endowment from 5% to 4% beginning April 1st.



Allagash Victoria Ale Premiere

The warm, sunny early evening of June 26 helped provide a spectacular setting on the Mansion's west lawn for our annual Allagash Ale Tasting party. A record crowd of 325 people sampled the latest brewing of Victoria Ale, one of a limited output Tribute Series of ale Allagash Brewing Company does to help support non-profit causes in the Portland area. Victoria Mansion was one of the first to be recognized in the series, and for ten years has hosted an annual spring tasting event. Brewery founder and owner Rob Tod presented an annual donation to the Mansion of a percentage of sales of Victoria Ale, this year totaling \$10,996. These proceeds go toward the educational and restoration programs of Victoria Mansion.

Also providing tastings at the event were Maine Mead Works with a variety of their locally brewed meads, Green Bee Craft Beverages also provided tasty non-alcoholic alternatives. Food donated by Blue Elephant Events and Catering completed the offerings. It all made for a festive party that raised a total of \$17,188 for our ongoing work.



109 Danforth Street
Portland, Maine 04101



Photo by Andrew Davis

www.victoriamansion.org