

VICTORIA MANSION

Annual Report
2019-2021



JOIN US FOR A TOUR ON MEMBER WEEK

JUNE 24-30, 2021



We've missed you!

After over a year of closure, Victoria Mansion staff and volunteers have been working hard to ready the house for our grand public reopening on July 1. As a special thank you to our membership, we have decided to open a week early for a series of special, member-only tours beginning on June 24. Members will receive a special access code via email which will allow them to reserve space through our website, victoriamansion.org.

Some things will be a little different this year. To allow for distancing, we are limiting tours to 6 visitors. We have also rearranged the rooms to allow for expanded access. In addition to having some extra room to spread out, you will be able to walk further into many spaces and see things from entirely new perspectives.

As you will see in the following pages, we have been busy with interior projects over the last year. The Parlor has undergone an amazing transformation, with a century's worth of soot lifted away to reveal the original, brilliantly-colored painted decorations on the walls and ceilings. We hope you will join us during Member Week and be among the first to lay eyes on the results of our most ambitious conservation project to date.

Not yet a member? Please visit victoriamansion.org/get-involved/membership to learn more.

FROM THE ACTING DIRECTOR

The Annual Report offers this organization a chance to reach out and connect with you, the members, supporters, and friends of Victoria Mansion. This year's report is unlike any we have produced in the past. Most notably, it provides a two year look back, an effort to make up for our silence in 2020. During that difficult year we turned our energies inward to grapple with the challenges posed by the pandemic and focused on caring for the building and its collections. We remained closed to the public for the entire 2020 regular and Christmas seasons, marking in January 2021 the first full year the house has gone without visitors since 1939. As you can well imagine, we are eager to reconnect with our friends.

The two-year report offered here provides a study in contrasts. April 2019 – March 2020 was a “normal” year, reflective of the highly active and professional organization Victoria Mansion has become. The following year was difficult the world over, at every scale and along every dimension of human experience. At the Mansion, we lost our ability to engage directly with the public, an act which sits at the very heart of our educational mission. Lost revenue from ticket and museum shop sales led to financial difficulties and, sadly, furloughs for several valued members of the staff. Yet, determined not to allow 2020 to become an entirely lost year, we poured our energies into the conservation and restoration of the house, advancing and completing projects both inside and out that will be highlighted in the following pages.

The Annual Report provides an opportunity to take stock of our work, to reflect on what we have accomplished and acknowledge all those who helped us along the way. So what jumps out at me after placing two such different years side by side? It is comforting to consider that the intrinsic importance of Victoria Mansion, flowing from the quality and completeness of its architecture and interiors, the near-miracle of its survival, and the triumph of its collaborative artistry, remains undiminished by events in the outside world. It is an artistic storehouse for the ages. But whatever the Mansion's intrinsic value, it draws its life in the present from people: people who take inspiration from the craftsmanship it embodies, people who use it as a jumping off point to reflect on the past, people who experience the visceral delight that great works of art provide. Without visitors, Victoria Mansion is all unrealized potential.

As challenging as 2020 was, there were heartening signs along the way, and I think this Annual Report is, above all else, hopeful in its tone and spirit. I had many worries as the decision was made to close to the public for a full year, most of them revolving around the idea that the Victoria Mansion family -our staff, volunteers, members, and supporters- would slowly disconnect and drift



away. The organization was truly firing on all cylinders before the pandemic, with so much of the success we were experiencing flowing from the knowledge, experience, and passion of the people making things work. Thanks to all of you for putting those fears to rest. As you will see, our support in 2020 was as strong as ever, with members and donors pitching in despite the closure and volunteers reaching out to think creatively about projects to advance our mission in ways large and small.

2021 will be a year of rebuilding, but our work has already begun. In February, furloughed staff began returning and laying the groundwork for a summer opening. Initial outreach to volunteer docents revealed an overwhelming desire to return. I field calls daily from prospective visitors planning trips to Maine in the summer and fall. I can't help but think that when we finally open our doors to the public this July, there is going to be an overwhelming desire for the sort of authentic, real-life experiences that a trip to a museum can provide. We'll be waiting, doors open, ready to welcome the human spark that unlocks Victoria Mansion's potential once more.

-Tim Brosnihan



VICTORIA MANSION STAFF

Timothy Brosnihan, *Acting Director*
 Stacia Hanscom, *Director of Education*
 Victoria Levesque, *Development & Communications Coordinator*
 Molly Kingsbury, *Museum Shop Manager*
 Sue Flaherty, *Visitor Services Coordinator*
 Siobhan Lindsay, *Staff Conservator*
 Harper Batsford, *Conservation Technician*
 Elena Popov Savchenko, *Museum Housekeeper*
 Gina Platt, *Graphic Designer*
 Brittany Cook, Michelle Josephson, Margaret Puza, *Site Managers*

Alicia Harding, Anastasia Azenaro-Moore, Bob Parker,
 Carina Walter, Charisse Gendron, Erich Chase, Hannah Marcel,
 Jim Colby, John Babin, Johnny Speckman, Judy Scott,
 Kimberly Niles, Lisa Schinhofen, Margaret Slocumb,
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 Nate Hanscom, Pat Thatcher, Peg Puza, Sarah Coughlin,
 Solange Carpenter, Sue Flaherty, Brittany Cook, *Museum Guides*

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DOCENTS

Victoria Mansion has a dedicated corps of over 70 docents whom we rely upon to share this magnificent house with the visiting public. They gave over 2,700 hours of their time in 2019. We look forward to welcoming them back next month!

Alison Martino	Hillary Cantwell	Matthew Barker
Alessa Wylie	Jim Hiltonsmith	Michelle Kew
Angie LaChance	Joan Austin	Pamela Lemieux
Anita Chandler	Jodi Berlucchi	Pat Allen
Anne Ryan	Joe McKenna	Patti Lacombe
Annemarie Loffeld	John Aden	Penny Webster
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Breda White	John Rozos	Robin Webber
Brenda Chandler	Judy Johnstone	Sandy Pablo
Bruce Wood	Julie Bartage	Sheila McGarr
Caroline Stevens	Julie Tselikis	Star Pelsue
Ceiba Crow	Kathie Propp	Sue Ellen Kelso
Celia Visteca	Karen Pride	Susan Braziel
Charlie Osgood	Kristine Perkins	Susan Lyons
Cynthia Macdonald	Kristen Redpath	Susan Vayda
David White	Larry Perkins	Susan White
Denise Martin	Linda Boentgen	Susan Woodman
Diane Wilbur	Linda Levesque	Suzannah Raber
Dianne Kidder	Lisa Joyce	Suzanne Bruno
Elena Lippolis	Mark Ferrence	Tom Lafavore
Elisha Aldrich	Mary Anne Wallace	Trudy Brown
Eric Grimes	Mary Doughty	Vesta Rand
Eunice Wilcox	Mary Lunt	Victoria Chanani
Eva Holmes	Mary Spugnardi	
Heather Shannon	Mary Williams	

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THE PARLOR TRANSFORMED:

A TWO-YEAR CONSERVATION EFFORT DRAWS TO A CLOSE

by Tim Brosnihan



Last November, in the quiet of a near-empty house, conservators put the finishing touches on a two-year effort to restore Victoria Mansion's Parlor to its former glory. At the heart of the project was the careful conservation cleaning of the room's painted decoration, originally executed in 1860 by Italian-born artist Giuseppe Guidicini and a small troupe of assistants. While the Parlor's painted plaster walls, ceiling, decorative moldings, and architectural woodwork survived largely intact and untouched over the last 160 years, they suffered over the decades from relentless deposits of soot and grime, the unwanted effects of coal heat and gas lighting. Partially hidden beneath a gray veil, the Parlor was at once remarkably intact and greatly diminished.

And yet, compromised as it was, no one could argue the room's importance. In a house sheltering the last fully-intact interiors by Gustave Herter, one of nineteenth-century America's visionary creatives, the Parlor stands out as a particularly pure expression of integrated design, the art of conducting a space's aesthetic relationships to produce a visual symphony. Like instruments in an orchestra, the decorative elements in the parlor speak both individually and together, producing their highest effect through the whole experience of their combined "music". Consequently, when one element is dirty or damaged, the room's overall impact suffers. Reverse this damage, and harmonies vibrate back to life.

While Herter provided the controlling hand throughout the house, nowhere were the contributions of his principal collaborator, Giuseppe Guidicini, more important than in the Parlor. Having chosen for the room the fashionable French Second Empire style, Herter leaned heavily on Guidicini to express it through painted decoration. Combining illusionistic *trompe l'oeil* paneling with vivid punches of color and gilding, Guidicini brought the flavor of eighteenth-century French salons to this Maine palace (Figure 1). Together, Guidicini and Herter set up a deliberate conversation between furnishings and painted decoration, with silk flowers draped across curtain panels echoed in colorfully-painted floral swags on the plaster walls and shell motifs picked out in gilt unifying painted panels, lighting fixtures, and architectural woodwork. Indeed, it is in Guidicini's painted decoration that we see the fullest development of the room's theme, a somewhat racy take on romantic love clearly conveyed in two ceiling rondels depicting the seduction of Zeus by Hera from Homer's *Iliad*.

The complete restoration of the Parlor has long been an institutional goal, though even five years ago the vast amount of surface area requiring inch-by-inch treatment made the project seem almost beyond reach. In 2014 we made the decision to remove the *Iliad* canvases to safe storage after flaking paint began detaching and falling to the carpet below (Figure 2). In the



fig. 2

fig. 1

meantime, we took on increasingly complex and large-scale paint conservation projects in other areas of the house, building in the process a better understanding of the methods and materials used by Guidicini and his crew in 1860 and of the techniques best adapted to the conservation of these masterworks. In 2018, we received word that Victoria Mansion was among 16 institutions from across the country awarded a prestigious Save America's Treasure collections grant. With this stroke of good fortune a substantial portion of the funding necessary to tackle the Parlor was in-hand, and the project was off and running.

Once the room was cleared and protection put in place, conservators from Gianfranco Pocobene Studio arrived to set scaffolding and begin cleaning. Most of the room's painted decoration was executed in water-based emulsion paints which dissolve at the slightest exposure to moisture. Conservators therefore used small, handheld erasers to gently lift soot and grime, a tedious, inch-by-inch process requiring as many as five or six passes to achieve satisfactory results. Oil-based finishes, such as those found on the wainscoting and door and window

fig. 3



Just as the room's original creation required the joint efforts of skilled artisans and artists, the recent Parlor conservation project unfolded over the course of two years as a series of collaborations between Victoria Mansion staff and outside contractors with the particular expertise required to bring the room safely through the process. Staff Conservator Siobhan Lindsay worked with Wilson Moving Company to shift the Parlor furniture to other rooms throughout the house. Caleb Hemphill of Caleb Hemphill Preservation Woodworking constructed custom foam protection barriers for the room's priceless mirrors and worked with the staff to relocate two large, hanging paintings to the second floor. Caleb also helped remove a series of delicate wooden interior blinds to his shop for conservation. Retired electrical engineer and rigger extraordinaire John Wilcox helped carefully drop the 200-plus pound gilt bronze gasolier to allow for its disassembly and cleaning (*Figure 3*).

fig. 4



fig. 5





fig. 6

surrounds, were cleaned with gentle solvents (*Figure 4*). This too was a painstaking process, conducted with an endless series of small swabs. Testing revealed that several plain-painted fields had been permanently damaged through overpainting and overly aggressive cleaning decades ago. Conservators repainted these with modern latex paints, carefully matching the original cool gray tones selected by Guidicini (*Figure 5*).

By project's end, this painstaking cleaning and restoration process produced two striking results. Passages of trompe l'oeil decoration, painted on flat plaster to give the illusion of three-dimensional moldings and carvings, came to life as soot disappeared. With highlights standing in stark contrast to shadows once more, realistically rendered ornaments popped from the ceiling and walls. Colors revived as well. Surface grime had muddied vividly-painted flowers, foliage, and figures, altering as well as dulling the hues. It was often breathtaking to return to the room after a day or two of slow progress and find new flashes of color awaiting (*Figure 6*).

Perhaps the most dramatic transformation of the project came near the end, with the restoration of the two badly-deteriorated ceiling rondels. In contrast to similar paintings found throughout the house, these had not aged gracefully. Over the decades the paint surfaces cracked and curled free from the canvas below, rendering the images illegible and putting them in danger of



fig. 7

permanent loss. These were treated in a studio setting, with heat-activated adhesives flowed behind curling paint (*Figure 7*), allowing conservators to flatten and reattach each individual flake with small tacking irons. After surface grime and adhesive residues were cleaned away, conservators in-painted losses over a protective barrier, ensuring all new additions would be reversible. The results were startling, with 160 years of deterioration reversed in a matter of months. When they returned home to their blank white footprints on the Parlor ceiling, something seemed to “click” in the room. Guidicini's vision was whole one more (*Figure 8*).



fig. 8

Work is now underway to put the Parlor back together. The elaborate gilt bronze gasolier has been completely disassembled and each of its 130+ parts individually cleaned. The window cornices, resplendent with gleaming rosewood and carved and gilt ornamentation, have been cleaned and returned to their perches. Soon the original woolen carpet will be reset over a modern, breathable pad and the furnishings returned. This will be an electric moment, when all the elements of the room's decoration resume their conversation. The newly revealed colors will once again rhyme with those of the textiles and ceramics, and Herter's overarching vision will hum to life once more. By the middle of this summer, when the Mansion's doors open once more, we invite you to come and see for yourself.

RAVENSCRAG

We often speak of Victoria Mansion as the last fully-intact house of its type, but what was that type, exactly? Unique as it seems today, the Mansion did have peers among antebellum houses, situated mostly in wealthy enclaves in larger cities. The finest of these houses were furnished by professional designers, many of them European immigrants, who infused new life into American interiors by casting an ever widening net for inspiration. Consider the artistic journey presented by Victoria Mansion's rooms, which take the visitor from Pompeii in Ancient Rome to the palaces of Moorish Spain to the courts of France's 18th-century kings. While most visitors are initially struck by the lavishness of the Mansion's furnishings and decoration, it is the wild eclecticism of its interiors that truly set Victoria Mansion apart and place it in an elite class of mid-nineteenth century houses.

Most such houses have vanished. With very few exceptions, the only way to compare Victoria Mansion with its peers is through photographs taken inside buildings that have long since been demolished or altered beyond recognition. *Ravenscrag* in Montreal is such a place. Built for Canadian shipping magnate Hugh Allen between 1860 and 1863, it is almost perfectly contemporary with Victoria Mansion. It still stands today on the campus of McGill University, though sadly it was gutted in 1940 during its conversion to a medical facility.

Photographs taken in 1911 of *Ravenscrag*'s drawing room (Figure 1) reveal startling similarities with Victoria Mansion's Parlor. The painted decoration, in particular, is so similar that we must wonder if Giuseppe Guidicini made a foray into Canada in the midst of the American Civil War. Both the drawing room at *Ravenscrag* and the Parlor at Victoria Mansion begin with a basic framework of trompe l'oeil paneling, a common enough convention in French Second Empire interiors. But similarities continue to



fig. 1

mount in the painted embellishments. Both rooms contain swags of brightly-painted flowers, which appear to cling to -and thread through- illusionistically-painted moldings and ornaments. Putti, the winged attendants of Cupid found throughout the Mansion Parlor, show up in the rondel canvases on the walls at *Ravenscrag*. Even the leafy consoles (brackets) in the cove where the walls and ceiling meet seem to have been cast from the same molds as those in Victoria Mansion (Figure 2).

We tend to think of Victoria Mansion as wholly unique. And it is, in many ways, one of a kind. But photographs like those taken in *Ravenscrag* remind us that the Mansion did have its peers, creatures of a wildly creative moment in American decorative arts history. Remarkable from the day it was completed, Victoria Mansion only grew in importance as similar buildings vanished from the landscape.



fig. 2

Detail of fig. 1. Credit: "II-185093 | Photograph | Living room, Lady Allan's house, "Ravenscrag", Montreal, QC, 1911 | Wm. Notman & Son © McCord Museum"

2020 CLOSURE PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY TO DIG DEEP INTO THE LIV



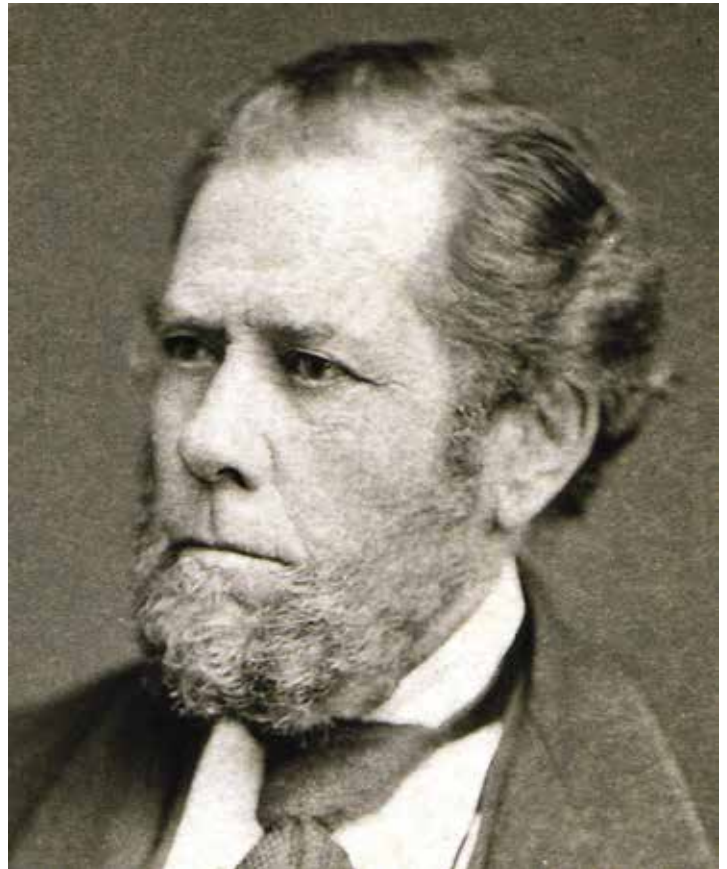
In July 2020, Victoria Mansion's Docent Committee surveyed the organization's volunteers about how they would like to remain useful and connected while the house was closed due to the pandemic. A number of people responded that they were interested in conducting research about the house and its inhabitants. A research group was duly formed under the guidance of former Executive Director Tom Johnson. Docent Committee member Mary Doughty acted as scribe for the group and Mansion guide Charisse Gendron facilitated meetings.

For the next eight months, group members attended first Wednesday Zoom meetings to select topics, define questions, identify sources, gather materials, share findings, and submit reports. Research travel was out of the question, and even communication with local archives was difficult with staff people on furlough. The group made the most of internet sources, however, and were able to enrich the pictures of Ruggles and Olive Morse with fresh and telling details.

The original group members were John Aden, Holly Doggett, Angie LaChance, Linda Levesque, Debra Moon, Judy Scott, and Mary Spugnardi. John explored the functions of major hotels and the amenities they provided for businesspeople, tourists, and locals seeking meeting venues and entertainment in 19th-century America; Holly, Linda, and Mary investigated the place of the Mansion and the Morses in the context of the pre-Civil War slave economy; and Angie set out to discover the activities of Olive Merrill and Ruggles Morse in New York before their marriage, a journey that took Angie to Boston, Albany, and New Orleans, but not the Big Apple itself. Debra and Judy were unable to complete their projects due to competing obligations, but were valuable participants while they were able to attend. Julie Bartage

followed the group's progress and contributed gleanings of her own research on the Morses' life in New Orleans.

John's findings confirm the importance of hotels to the nineteenth-century development of American urban life and travel—a development in which Ruggles Morse played a role. The hotel as a site of luxury and convenience began with the Tremont House in Boston, where the teenaged Ruggles started his career. So much we knew—but John's report provides fascinating details of the Tremont experience. The hotel was the first to provide a lobby, for example, allowing women to enter the building without passing through the bar. The lobby was staffed with “rotunda men,” the original bellhops, who could be fetched from throughout the building via a call system. And guests stayed in their own rooms with locking doors, rather than in the sleeping quarters offered at lesser establishments. Over time, luxury hotels incorporated such features as running water, electric lights, smoking rooms, and elevators before they were adopted for domestic use. Exposed to these technologies, Ruggles introduced them into the hotels he helped build as well as his own summer home.



As Holly, Linda, and Mary write, New Orleans, due to its proximity to cotton plantations, became one of the most prosperous slave-

trading centers in the United States before the Civil War. Hoteliers, including Ruggles Morse, benefitted from this trade by extending their hospitality to slave buyers and sellers, utilizing slave labor at their hotels, and holding slave auctions on the premises. We have long known that Morse participated directly in the slave economy through the purchase and sale of slaves. This recent research has shed more light on this troubling side of his economic dealings, as well as on some of the ancillary business ventures he undertook as his wealth grew. A highly talented businessman, he not only managed and co-owned hotels, but also invested in insurance companies, a major pharmaceutical firm, and sugar plantations. He was popular and respected among people of his class, whose views he shared. In addition to his well-known admiration for Robert E. Lee, he supported Louisiana secession prior to the Civil War and joined the elite Pickwick Club.

“It was my purpose in this project to shed light on Olive’s existence,” writes Angie. Records of Olive’s early life in Cumberland County were destroyed by fire and later accounts are scarce, since she was far less a public figure than her husband. Nevertheless, beginning with what is known—the death of Olive’s mother within a year of giving birth to Olive—Angie found a through line in Olive’s later kindness to orphans and women in desperate straits. For instance, she and Ruggles served on the Supper Committee of a benefit for Saint Anna’s Asylum, an institution for the “relief of destitute females and their helpless children of all religious denominations.” And it is very possible that she knew Margaret Haughery, once a laundress at the Saint Charles hotel under Ruggles’ management, who later rose to prominence as a philanthropist and founder of orphanages. One of these was the Camp Street Orphanage, located three blocks from the Morses’ home in the Garden District. Olive became involved with this organization, although in what capacity is unknown.

The research group members generously contributed their time and talent to this effort. While providing useful historical contexts, they unearthed fascinating episodes and intriguing connections in the story of the Morses and the Mansion. Their reports are sure to enhance the telling of the story today and inspire future research.

-Charisse Gendron
Docent Research Group Chair

Volunteering at Victoria Mansion



Simply put, we could not do all that we do without the help of our dedicated corps of over 70 volunteers. In 2019, our volunteers gave thousands of hours of their time leading tours, serving on committees, and generally helping out wherever the staff needed a hand. They also came together as a group to socialize and expand their knowledge base, organizing fun and educational outings to the Baxter Library and the Kotzschmar organ and hosting lectures on topics ranging from the Mansion’s carpet design to its indoor plumbing system. Over the years, our volunteers have grown into a true community of support.

When we announced our temporary closure in 2020, dozens of volunteers reached out with a common question: “What can we do to help?” Good as their word, they stayed connected, largely through Zoom meetings, and came up with a plan for pitching in. They gave time to the office, helping us sort through a backlog of filing, in the archives, labelling and filing our newly-organized curatorial records, and on the grounds, planting flowers and keeping the courtyard swept and weeded. They organized our first ever Docent Research Group, which uncovered new details about the lives of Ruggles and Olive Morse (see report page 10), and organized a book group focused on Victorian literature. They even decorated the grounds during the holiday season in the hopes of providing a little note of cheer for the community.

Interested in joining in on all the fun? In 2021 our volunteers will turn their energies back towards the public, providing guided tours of the Mansion during the regular and Christmas seasons. If you are interested in history and art and enjoy interacting with people from all over the country and world, we would love to welcome you into our volunteer corps. Full training is provided. For more information please reach out to Education Director Stacia Hanscom at shanscom@victoriamansion.org.

Thank You!

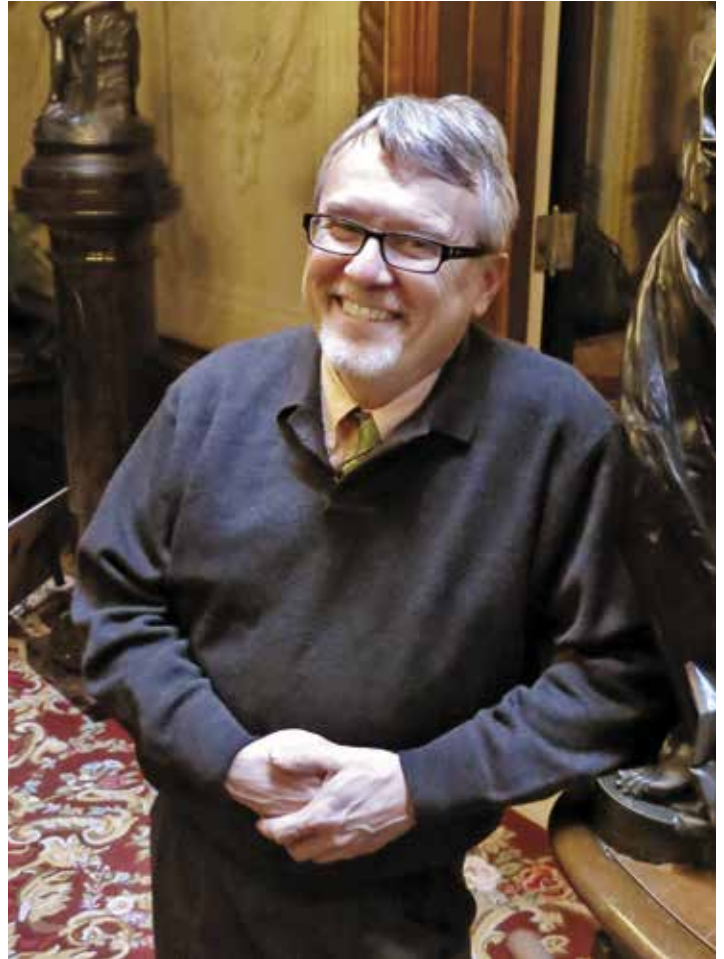
TOM JOHNSON RETIRES AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This fall, Executive Director Tom Johnson announced his retirement after a decade of service to Victoria Mansion, finishing his term on December 31st. Tom took the helm in the fall of 2010, bringing to the job just the right mix of skills for a small museum poised for rapid growth. A consummate museum professional with over two decades of experience at the Museums of Old York and Canterbury Shaker Village, Tom helped guide Victoria Mansion through the doubling of its attendance in seven years, gracefully balancing visitor experience with care of the building and its collections. Drawing on his deep well of preservation and curatorial expertise, he oversaw fundraising and logistics for an unprecedented series of interior projects, bringing a comprehensive, whole-room approach to restorations in the bath and water closet (2010-2011), vestibule (2012-2013), Reception Room (2017-2018) and Parlor (2019-2020). He also nearly doubled the staff, adding new positions in development and conservation to help shoulder the growing work of an organization serving 35,000 annual visitors.

Tom brought a great openness to collaboration to his role as Director, a generous posture that ultimately paid dividends for the organization. Over the last decade, Victoria Mansion hosted musical performances by singers from Port Opera, theatrical productions by actors from 90-Acre Theatre and Portland Stage, contemporary art installations through two special exhibitions, Victoria's Wonderama (2012) and Mansion as Muse (2014), and joint exhibits and programs with the Saco Museum, Maine Irish Heritage Center, and Mount Vernon. Victoria Mansion's growth during these years stemmed in no small part from Tom's willingness to expand our tent and think creatively about new ways to entice people in.

In a final gift to the institution, Tom has spent the spring organizing Victoria Mansion's collections files, which have been consolidated into special storage in the third-floor billiard room. This project will pave the way for the digitization of our collections records, a process that will lead to easy access for scholars around the world.

We hope Tom finds time for some relaxation in his retirement, but know him too well to believe he will sit still for long. So until the reports of his latest adventures pour in, we wish him a fond farewell and a hearty thanks for all he has done for Victoria Mansion.



A LUCKY SPOON

Victoria Mansion rarely accepts gifts of objects. We are not a collecting institution, per se, and mostly acquire objects original to the house. At this point we have over 90% of the items found in an 1894 inventory of the house's contents, so there is not much floating out there in the world that we are seeking.

But there are exceptions that prove the rule. This winter, we received an email from David Maxwell, a relative by marriage of the Lothrop's, who were themselves connected by marriage to the Morses (sorry, stay with me here). Mr. Maxwell offered us a spoon that once belonged to Caroline Lothrop Carlée, great niece of Ruggles and Olive Morse, Victoria Mansion's original occupants. While this spoon never crossed the Mansion's threshold, Caroline herself visited in the 1890s as a young girl who travelled from Louisiana to Maine to meet relatives. The Morses had no children of their own, but they were particularly close with their nieces and nephews, choosing to build their summer home in Maine in part to be closer to family. The spoon seemed emblematic of those special relationships. We happily accepted the gift.

Photos of the spoon preceded its arrival, and a little research showed that it was in fact a souvenir of the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Millions of people traveled from all over the country and world to visit the famed exposition, including, presumably, Caroline Lothrop Carlée's parents. The spoon passed out of Caroline's hands and wound up in an estate auction in Leeds, Maine along with a number of objects original to the Mansion. Caroline reacquired the spoon and gave it as a token of her affection to David Maxwell's mother, Dianne M. Maxwell. When Mrs. Maxwell passed away this past year, David decided the spoon belonged at Victoria Mansion.

It very nearly didn't make it. In the mail the spoon worked its way free of its packaging, dropping into the snow as the mailman climbed the Mansion driveway. Frantic searching and calls to the Postal Service bore no fruit. The Director and the donor were heartbroken. But the spring weather eventually melted the spoon free, providing a happy ending worth sharing in our Annual Report.

The spoon is sterling silver and bears an image of Columbus' flagship and the date 1492 in the bowl. It is a gift of the estate of Dianne M. Maxwell of Winthrop, Maine.



SPRING 2019 - SPRING 2021 by Education Director Stacia Hanscom

From our current perspective, it is hard to look back on 2019 and not be shocked at how unknowing we all were of the COVID-19 changes coming soon. I look forward to seeing us begin to return to our previous model, although adjusting and changing for the times - hopefully for the better!

In the spring of 2019, the Education Department was busy. Spring is school-tour season, and in April and May we saw familiar schools attending our Century of Change programs: Reiche, Ocean Ave. and East End from Portland Public Schools, and Manchester, Pond Cove, Hancock Grammar, Brunswick Middle, and Nute High School from outside the city. We also partnered with Casco Bay High School to offer an Intensive: a full-time, week-long course designed to expose the students to new experiences, and to provide the Mansion with new program ideas and materials for middle schoolers. In spring 2020 we saw more of our favorite schools - Lyseth, Longfellow, and Windham Middle - before the pandemic closed us down.

Spring is also the time we often see the arrival of a new group of docents, courtesy of the Portland History Docent (PHD) program. We had a wonderful group join us that spring, and were also looking toward a great group in spring 2020. Hopefully the PHD partner sites will have a chance to talk soon and make a plan for offering the next recruiting program. Training for our returning docents is also part of our spring ritual, to remind everyone of old information, and share what is new since Christmas.

In addition to recruiting new docents, we are always trying to keep our wonderful returning docents and guides entertained

and educated. We continued our Brown Bag lunch lecture series, which ran through the winter and spring months, offering talks ranging from the woods used at the Mansion, immigration in Portland, the reproduction of the Hall carpet, and the mythology used in the Mansion designs. We also hosted the docents in two thank-you events; one in late November, to see the decorated rooms, and one in the summer. The summer event was held at Merrill Auditorium, thanks to Elsa Geskus and Sandy Riley, and included a private concert by municipal organist James Kennerley. Our wonderful Docent Committee, chaired by Mary Doughty, also organized outings for the docent corps, including a tour of the building that formerly housed the Baxter Library.

The Education Committee, chaired by Carlene Magno, put together a variety of programs through 2019. The first was a celebration of Queen Victoria's 200th birthday. With the volunteer assistance of Kristin Redpath as the Queen (*Figure 1*), Logan Andrick and Nate Hanscom on music, and Director Tom Johnson, the program was both educational and entertaining. Blue Elephant Catering provided a wonderful repast for the program, and a birthday cake was provided by the parents of our own Torie Levesque. Brittany Cook also worked with our friends at Lyric Theater to provide the royal costume for the event.

Education programs continued through the summer of 2019 with our Tea Event in July (*Figure 2*), thanks to generous assistance from Dobra Tea, Nellie's Teas, The Tea Space, Foulmouthed Brewery, Urban Farm Fermentory, Jacqueline's Teas, and Clipper Merchant Tea House. In October we hosted both Chilling Celtic Tales (*Figure 4*) on the 4th and 5th, and Victorian Murder &



Mayhem on the 11th and 12th, in partnership with Portland Ballet. Storyteller Janet Lynch did a wonderful job bringing some slightly-spooky Irish tales to life in the Mansion's basement. For Murder & Mayhem, Portland Ballet dancers performed excerpts from their Ballets by Poe, actors told tales of true life Victorian Murder, and author Edith Maxwell read from her mystery books, set in Victorian Massachusetts. A chilling time was had by all!

Finally, in December, the Education Committee put together the Night at the Nutcracker (*Figure 3*), our annual partnership with Portland Ballet. As always, the event sold out almost as soon as it was posted, and the dancers did an amazing job. We also hosted Stories on the Staircase, where staff and volunteers read to preschool-aged children in the Mansion's front hall. The Docent Committee took charge of this event in 2019, and did a wonderful job running it.

Beginning in early 2020, the Education Committee began working on programming for the year. In the plans were some of our returning events, but additionally partnering with Midcoast High Winds Flute Choir, Renaissance Voices, and putting together an event or two to celebrate both the Maine Bicentennial and the Suffrage Centennial. We hope to revisit these ideas in 2021. In addition to continuing the Brown Bag lectures the Docent Committee planted daffodils in our planters for the spring, in honor of the Suffrage Centennial.

On a personal note, much of 2020, and into very early 2021, I was furloughed from the Mansion. However, I want to acknowledge all of the work that went on here among the docents and guides during that time. Guide Charisse Gendron began a docent book club dedicated to Victorian-era writings. She also coordinated a research group for docents who wanted to explore Mansion-related topics. (Their work is discussed further in this report.) Breda White, with the assistance of the Docent Committee and former guide Johnny Speckman, put together videos looking at the Reception Room, Dining Room, and Turkish Smoking Room in great depth. The Education Committee organized talks featuring Marianne Russo from Nellie's Teas and Melinda Thomas from Clipper Merchant Tea House. All of these videos were produced and posted on our website thanks to volunteers, including Board member Holly Doggett. The Docent Committee also worked on reaching out and checking in on docents during these isolating times. Upon returning in late February, I was blown away by all that was done while I was gone.

Looking ahead, we are in the process of designing and teaching virtual lessons to schools. So far, five local schools plan to take advantage of our virtual lessons this year, which will allow us to test them out, and stay engaged with our school partners. While we hope to get local students back in the Mansion soon, a virtual menu of lessons will allow us to also reach out to schools from further away. Our lessons on Technology, Immigration, Etiquette, and Symbolism will be able to stand alone, without a visit



component. Based on a recent survey, most of our docents and guides do want to return to the Mansion this summer, which is wonderful! We are also looking at revising the Docent Manual, since it has seemed at times to overwhelm potential docents. A fundraiser at Moe's Bar B Que in South Portland was held at the end of March to help offset expenses for these and other programs.

We look forward to rebuilding and restarting our programs in the next months. There are still many questions, but I think it is clear from the above statements that we have an amazing group of docents, guides, and volunteers, ready and able to help move Victoria Mansion back into prominence once again.

THE PARLOR BLINDS

Outdoors, moisture can wreak havoc with historic woodwork: let protective coatings fail and decay will soon set in. But sunlight is no joke either. Ultraviolet radiation in particular degrades paint and varnish over time and breaks down bare wood. Even in completely dry and protected environments, like the Mansion's parlor, UV radiation takes its slow, relentless toll.

One of the first steps in preparing the parlor for two years of paint conservation was to remove the interior blinds from each of the windows. Made from American chestnut, a wood that came close to extinction in the 20th century, the blinds were built to protect, to take the brunt of the sun's energy and prevent the fading of painted decoration and textiles. But after 160 years of heavy lifting, the blinds had paid a heavy price.

We enlisted the help of preservation carpenter Caleb Hemphill to undertake structural repairs and to mend and replace broken and missing slats. He even drew on his own precious stock of American chestnut, replicating the slats in-kind with wood that can't be found in any lumberyard. Then the real fun began, the critical but oh-so-tedious work of gently sanding the deteriorated varnish from all surfaces, including every one of 3,260 (!) slats. Painter Peter de Paolo pitched in for this part of the process. By November, when the parlor project was nearing completion, the blinds were once again whole, sturdy, and ready to be hung. Peter varnished them in place, restoring the luster that was part of the room's overall aesthetic.

These days we have special protective coatings on each of the Mansion's windows to absorb and block damaging UV radiation. The modern varnishes used on the blinds also contain some UV blocking additives. After this round of comprehensive care, the blinds should provide decades of service before they need attention again.



TWO-YEAR FINANCIAL COMPARISON

It would be hard to imagine two more strikingly different years set side-by-side. Fiscal year 2019/2020 was representative of the financial plateau we had attained over the last decade. Healthy visitation created healthy admissions revenue, our stoutest pillar of support. This, combined with revenue from shop sales and special events, provided over three-quarters of our operating income. In short, the visitors passing through our gates provided the organization's financial lifeblood.

On the expense side, staff compensation comprised an equally large share of our outlays. As a mission-based non-profit, the good we created came mostly through the work of our staff and volunteers. Tours, educational programming, and restoration initiatives all came to life as a result of the planning and actions of a skilled and passionate cast of people.

During fiscal year 2020/2021, these stable patterns were upended. Closure during the pandemic erased all of our admissions and events revenue. Online sales and very limited open hours allowed us to derive a small amount income from the museum shop, but without a steady stream of visitors, this could not amount to much. To compensate, expenses were cut to bare bones, including, unfortunately, the payroll. In July 2020, most of the Victoria Mansion staff was placed on furlough, an exigency reluctantly undertaken by our Board of Trustees to reduce projected deficits.

As you will see in the charts above, last fiscal year was not as disastrous as we initially forecast. Beyond the deep cuts to expenses, which proved proportional to the magnitude of the financial challenges that lay ahead, two things kept the organization afloat.

One was federal aid, channeled through the many programs of the CARES Act. Victoria Mansion received two Payroll Protection Plan Loans, the first of which allowed us to delay furloughs until the summer of 2020, the second of which allowed us to begin bringing furloughed employees back in the spring of 2021. We also received a major (\$100,000) Maine Economic Recovery Grant, federal dollars sub-granted through a state-managed program to prop up small businesses.

Victoria Mansion's generous supporters also rallied to help keep us above water during difficult times. While membership declined – an issue we anticipated during a year when we could not offer tours and in-person programming- over three-quarters of our members stuck with us and continued to pay dues. Donations to the Annual Fund, our major drive for unrestricted funds, actually grew more than 11% from 2019 to 2020. Several corporate donors continued to give despite the cancellation of the programs and events that they typically sponsor. Grants from private foundations continued as well, with an uptick in operating support, the type of unrestricted dollars we desperately needed to keep the lights burning and the building heated. The staff and trustees were both moved and relieved by this outpouring of support.

The next year will be one of transition, not so devoid of opportunities for earned income as the last, but not yet fully normal. There will be more financial challenges ahead. But we enter into it heartened by the knowledge that Victoria Mansion still commands a great deal of affection and loyalty, and that you, our friends and supporters, have helped pull us through a challenging past year.

Operating Income/Expenses		4/20-3/21	4/19-3/20	\$ Change	% Change
TWO-YEAR FINANCIAL COMPARISON April 2020 through March 2021	Income				
	Admissions	\$20	\$364,743	-\$364,723	-100.00%
	Contributions	\$59,825	\$56,882	\$2,942	5.17%
	Endowment	\$50,440	\$47,941	\$2,499	5.21%
	Grants	\$214,425	\$20,000	\$194,425	972.13%
	Membership	\$30,294	\$37,692	-\$7,397	-19.63%
	Programs	\$0	\$6,809	-\$6,809	-100.00%
	Rental Fees Carriage House	-\$575	\$1,595	-\$2,170	-136.05%
	Sales	\$10,254	\$112,139	-\$101,885	-90.86%
	Special Events	\$16,500	\$32,286	-\$15,786	-48.89%
	Total Income	\$381,183	\$680,087	-\$298,904	-43.95%
	Cost of Goods Sold (Museum Shop)	\$8,462	\$64,949	-\$56,487	-86.97%
	Gross Profit	\$372,721	\$615,138	-\$242,417	-39.41%
	Expense				
	Admin	\$61,495	\$84,218	-\$22,723	-26.98%
	Program	\$46,207	\$46,647	-\$440	-0.94%
	Development	\$6,033	\$16,468	-\$10,435	-63.36%
	Salaries/Benefits	\$253,728	\$427,585	-\$173,857	-40.66%
	Capital Purchases	\$0	\$6,519	-\$6,519	-100.00%
	Total Expense	\$367,463	\$581,437	-\$213,974	-36.80%
	Net Ordinary Income	\$5,258	\$33,701	-\$28,443	-84.40%

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**2019 Christmas Designers:
Ghosts of Christmas Pasts**

Catherine Morrill Day Nursery
(with artwork from the children!)

Clipper Merchant Tea House
(Melinda Thomas, Natasha Titus, & Christopher Grant)

Dodge the Florist
(Gail Diamon, Aaron Bowden, & Shannon Hanley)

Emerald City
(Danny R. Hatt, Don Chouinard, Marcedas Hatt-O'Toole,
Dan Svenson, Timothy Piekart, & Christopher Gale)

Dan Gifford

Harmon's Floral Company
(Dan Kennedy, Jennifer Miller, & Sharon Eblacker)

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(Karen & David Cole)

Maine Irish Heritage Center
(Pat McBride & Karen Nadeau)

Mimi & Mum
(Meredith & Caroline Davis)

Saco Festival of Trees Design Committee
(Denise Blanchard, Patti Sangillo, Theresa Ruel, Elsa
Geskas, Sandra Gilley, Katie Boucher, Sandy Riley, & Betty
Mandeville)

Gifts Received in Memory

James Haney
in memory of Jack Evans

Dianne Dickson
in memory of Dorothy May Bartlett Stone

**2020 Exterior Decorations:
The Night Before Christmas**

Last year, in the depths of our closure, our Christmas designers reached out with an offer to decorate the grounds as a gesture of goodwill for the community. Our thanks to each and every person who gathered on the Mansion lawn in late November to transform the property with trees, garlands, and ribbons. You provided a little glimmer of light during a dark time!

Partners

Portland Ballet
Janet Lynch, storyteller
Edith Maxwell, author (Murder & Mayhem)
Portland Press Herald
Portland Radio Group
Town Square Media Group
TravelMAINE

Note: While we aspire to perfection, errors do happen. If any name was inadvertently omitted from this listing, we apologize, and ask that you contact us at information@victoriamansion.org or (207)772-4841, so that we can correct our records.



Photograph by Gianfranco Pacobene

VICTORIA MANSION
A National Historic Landmark
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www.victoriamansion.org
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