

VICTORIA MANSION

A National Historic Landmark



Illustration & Photograph by Justine Dutil

PRESS KIT

www.VICTORIAMANSION.ORG

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History. Exploration. Wonder.

To people who are curious about art and history, Victoria Mansion is a triumph of 19th-century architecture and design with a wealth of stories to tell. Surviving intact with over 90% of its original interiors more than 160 years after its construction, Victoria Mansion is an historic house museum welcoming guests of all ages and backgrounds for a unique opportunity to explore and connect with the past.

Our mission is to conserve, maintain, and restore the Victoria Mansion property and collections to the highest standards and to interpret them in their social and historical context to a broad local, state, and national audience.

Also known as the Morse-Libby House, Victoria Mansion began as a sumptuous private residence for two prominent families. Nearly lost in the early 20th century, the house was rescued from an uncertain fate and opened to the public as a museum in 1941. Today, the Mansion has become an irreplaceable resource for the Greater Portland community, inspiring great loyalty and affection and serving that community as a center for art and culture, for education about the past, and for fostering connections in the present.

Victoria Mansion is open to the public from May 1–October 31 for the regular season, and from the day after Thanksgiving through the first week of January for the holiday season.



Photograph by Andrew Davis

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HISTORY & DESIGN

Located in Portland, Maine, Victoria Mansion is one of the most important historic house museums of its period in the nation. It was constructed to be the summer home of Ruggles Morse, a highly successful New Orleans hotelier, and his wife, Olive. Completed in 1860, the house is the crowning achievement of architect Henry Austin, a master of the Italianate style, and is one of the greatest examples of American residential architecture prior to the Civil War.

The interiors of the house and their lavish furnishings are the sole commission by Gustave Herter, founder of Herter Brothers of New York, to survive intact within their original context. The decoratively painted walls and ceilings throughout the house represent the legacy of Giuseppe Guidicini, decorator of many grand 19th-century theaters and opera houses, whose comparable commissions no longer survive. As an example of the finest design created in America at the middle of the 19th century, the building and its interiors are without parallel and are therefore of national and even international importance.



*Left to right, photos by J. David Bohl:
Cabinet, Gustave Herter, ca. 1860
Pier Table, Gustave Herter, ca. 1860
Bacchus wall panel, Giuseppe Guidicini,
ca. 1860*



CONSERVATION & RESTORATION

Far from being a static museum, Victoria Mansion is a center of cutting-edge preservation and conservation work, where some of the world's foremost preservation experts pioneer techniques that advance the field. It is an ever-evolving, dynamic study in historic preservation and art conservation. Ongoing efforts to clean and restore paint, woodwork, and furniture allow visitors to see the Mansion interiors in all of their 19th-century splendor.

As with any old house, exterior deterioration is inevitable, but careful monitoring and maintenance help to ensure that the elements never get the upper hand.

For more information, visit

www.victoriamansion.org/learn/preservation-conservation-and-restoration/



Photographs by Gianfranco Pocobene

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RESEARCH & INTERPRETATION

Victoria Mansion is actively working to augment our interpretation of the house to include the broader social historical context of the time. Our ongoing research initiatives are uncovering fresh and vital perspectives that we are incorporating into both daily and special programming.

The *Unwilling Architects Initiative* has begun to bring the lives of the Black individuals enslaved by the Morses in New Orleans back into the story of Victoria Mansion. Though these individuals never came to Maine, their labor contributed to the fortune amassed by the Morses, allowing them to commission and construct this palatial summer home.

Through the Mansion's *Backstairs Lives Initiative*, we are uncovering and sharing the stories of the domestic servants, most of them immigrants, who worked for the Morse and Libby families at Victoria Mansion from the 1860s-1920s. Efforts from this initiative have led to the first objects accessioned into the collections that were owned by a member of the domestic staff.



Domestic servant Nora Steed with Victoria Mansion domestic servants Hannah Shine and Katie Steed, all Irish immigrants, ca. 1913. Courtesy Teresa Keahon.

For more information, visit victoriamansion.org/learn/the-unwilling-architects
victoriamansion.org/learn/backstairs-lives

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MEMBERSHIP

Victoria Mansion is a membership-based nonprofit organization. Our members are partners in our ongoing work to conserve this unique landmark and share it with others.

Our vibrant membership program plays a vital role in the organization's success. Membership is open to all with an interest in Victoria Mansion, and benefits are tailored to members' interests and level of giving.

For more information, visit

www.victoriamansion.org/get-involved/membership



Photograph by Courtney Vamvakias

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PROGRAMS & EVENTS

Victoria Mansion hosts educational events for adults and children alike throughout the year. School programs are offered to Maine classrooms at no charge to the school from January through April. Special holiday-thematic events are offered in October and December.

For more information, visit

www.victoriamansion.org/learn/education



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PRESS INQUIRIES

For commercial photography requests or other press inquiries, please contact us at (207) 772-4841 ext. 111 or information@victoriamansion.org.

To request a press visit or interview, **please contact with at least 48 hours notice**, Monday through Friday, 9am-4pm. *Victoria Mansion is not available for weddings.*

All use of photos owned by Victoria Mansion must be approved by museum staff and include proper photo credit.



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