

**Extracting the Exhibited Interior:
Historic Preservation and the American Period Room**

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	i
Introduction	1
Introduction Images	13
Chapter One Collecting American Things.....	17
Chapter One Images	40
Chapter Two Preserving America’s Heritage.....	43
Chapter Three The Cupola House.....	61
Chapter Three Images	76
Chapter Four The Powel House.....	80
Chapter Four Images	104
Chapter Five The Wentworth-Gardner House.....	110
Chapter Five Images	128
Chapter Six The Alexandria Ballroom.....	133
Chapter Six Images	149
Chapter Seven Examining the American Period Room.....	151
Chapter Seven Images	172
Works Cited	173

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Introduction

During the first decades of the twentieth century art museums in the United States began collecting American decorative arts. Due to shifts in museological practices, these collections were not displayed in traditional gallery settings. Instead, museums acquired seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and early-nineteenth-century interiors to install as period rooms, in which collected furniture, paintings, and small decorative objects were exhibited as unified compositions. Museum period rooms were critiqued by preservation groups, which were determined to keep historic buildings in-situ rather than as fragments placed within galleries. Responding to critics, museum directors and curators defended their collecting efforts, arguing that period rooms provided the public with accessibility to aesthetically important interiors. Museums also noted that American period rooms were largely responsible for the shifting public interest in colonial architecture, which had previously been discounted as provincial. Preservationists, however, were disturbed by the practice of dismantling interiors from important buildings, which were often not in danger of demolition, to produce backdrops for furniture and decorative objects. In working to promote public awareness of early-American architecture, museums valued accessibility while preservationists argued for the importance of maintaining buildings on their original sites resulting in a contentious discussion regarding the cultural management of architectural heritage.

The institutional collecting of American interiors was part of a larger progressive effort to redefine the influence art museums had on public taste and industrial production. Linking aesthetics to morality, progressive reformers viewed the decline in public taste, which was seen in the conspicuously excessive styles of the late nineteenth century, as directly contributing to the social turmoil plaguing American cities (Figure 1.1). Believing that exposure to beauty could

improve citizenship, American museums turned to London's Victoria and Albert Museum, which was pioneering the practice of teaching good taste through public exposure to art and design. Organized to combat anxieties concerning the status of English exports, the Victoria and Albert Museum specifically sought to allow "all classes...to investigate those common principles of taste which may be traced in the works of excellence of all ages."¹ Beginning in the early twentieth century, reformers in the United States worked to implement the museological model promulgated by the Victoria and Albert Museum in American institutions. American art museums, however, looked beyond the historic European decorative styles that had traditionally been associated with refinement and urbanity. Instead the material culture of the thirteen original American colonies was deemed most important in the redefinition of a domestic taste. In displaying the preindustrial products of colonial America, art museums found a way to combat Victorian excess while simultaneously assimilating the thousands of eastern and southern European immigrants who had come to the United States, beginning in the 1880s, to a fixed set of American values. The period room, a curatorial tool that had been developed in Northern Europe in the mid nineteenth century and adopted by the Victoria and Albert Museum in the 1890s, was seen as crucial in creating sympathetic contexts for the colonial furniture and objects that were being exhibited.² The wide scale institutional collecting of American interiors that

¹ *First Report of the Department of Practical Art*, (VRP.1853.001), 2, as seen in *The Victoria and Albert Museum: A Bibliography and Exhibition Chronology, 1852-1996*, ed. Elizabeth James, London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998, xiv.

² R.T.H. Halsey, a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, explained in 1922 that, "Museum galleries, as a rule, are absolutely unfitted for the proper installation of much of that early American industrial art, which, if shown in sympathetic surroundings, reflects a peculiar atmosphere of delightful simplicity not found in the furnishings of the baronial homes of the old world." R.T.H. Halsey, "Early American Rooms in the Museum," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 17 (1922): 9.

resulted from this directly conflicted with a rising interest in the preservation of early American architectural heritage.

During the early twentieth century the field of historic preservation was growing and professionalizing. While some interest had been paid to the saving of historical buildings in the previous century, most pre-twentieth-century preservation efforts, like the restoration of George Washington's Mount Vernon, were purely patriotic exercises. Founded in 1910, nearly simultaneous with the Metropolitan's first American period room acquisition, the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA) represented an early effort in the professionalization of preservation. SPNEA advocated for the preservation of "noteworthy buildings and historic sites" and, like many other early preservation organizations, purchased endangered properties with the intent of opening them as museums. In collecting American interiors, museums particularly valued rooms from New England. Despite the primacy of the Jamestown Settlement in Virginia, public histories written in the early twentieth century favored the puritan mythos of New England as the south had effectively been tainted by the Civil War. While American museums would acquire interiors from the south, the majority of art museums centered their period room collecting efforts in New England.

Attempting to collect examples of early interiors, museum professionals came into conflict with preservation groups that were determined to keep culturally significant buildings in New England. SPNEA was particularly committed to the policy of keeping important historic sites intact and William Sumner Appleton, Jr., the founder and acting secretary of SPNEA, was not afraid to publicly chastise powerful museum figures. Contrary to Appleton's beliefs, museums looked upon period rooms as a way to insure the preservation and availability of important interiors to the public, whether the rooms came from a building about to be

demolished or a willing seller, was immaterial. R.T.H. Halsey, a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was steadfast in defending the Metropolitan's acquisitions stating, "The Museum has studiously refrained from the purchase of any room or building which local pride and interest were attempting to preserve for the advantage of the public."³ Appleton, however, believed that as enlightened institutions, museums should allow historic properties to remain on their original sites and only salvage interiors from buildings facing impending demolition.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art competed with the Brooklyn Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Philadelphia Museum of Art and numerous prominent private collectors in acquiring important interiors for period room displays. Henry Francis Du Pont was a particularly prolific collector of American furniture and woodwork during the early twentieth century. In 1927 when Du Pont inherited his family's estate, called Winterthur, his considerable collection of interiors was installed in the house to provide appropriate settings for groups of antique furnishings.⁵ The Metropolitan, however, was the most powerful collector of American interiors due its considerable financial resources and its staff of avid historians, collectors and scouts. The market for American antiquities became particularly competitive during the fifteen years after 1910, with this period representing the height of institutional collecting of American decorative arts. Especially in regard to paneling and architectural elements destined for period room installation, museum staff often feared that their discoveries would be poached by other institutions. In 1918 Andre Reuff, the Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts at the Brooklyn Museum, wrote to William Henry Fox, the museum's director, recommending that the Brooklyn Museum act quickly in its purchase and removal of the interior from the Cupola House in

³ R.T.H. Halsey, "Early American Rooms in the Museum," 6-7.

⁵ Du Pont would eventually open Winterthur as a public museum in 1951.

Edenton, North Carolina. Reuff, who had been critical in finding the house, stated that, “if we do not take the woodwork for the Brooklyn Museum...it will go to the Metropolitan Museum.”⁶

As the market for New England interiors expanded, the Metropolitan turned its collecting efforts to the Chesapeake Bay region. Unlike in New England where SPNEA represented an obstacle to museums attempting to acquire interiors, the south presented museum officials with a largely uncontentious market. Hoping to gain rooms from early plantation houses, museums benefitted from the economic depression that had fallen upon the region with the breakdown of the antebellum slave-based economy after the Civil War. Descendants of planters often saw selling paneling and a few antiques as a way to prevent the foreclosure on an ancestral estate.⁷ Working for the Metropolitan as a scout, Durr Friedley was responsible for obtaining the remarkable painted drawing room of Marmion, a plantation in Virginia (Figure 1.2). In a 1916 letter to R.T.H. Halsey, Freidley alluded to the possibility of the museum convincing the home’s owner, Rebecca Irwin, to sell the drawing room, describing her as a “gentlewoman in reduced circumstances.”⁸ The Museum’s purchase and removal of the room was widely discussed, warranting an article written by Frank Connger Baldwin in the *Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, in which the author describes the room as:

[without] a counterpart anywhere in America...All the walls of the room are paneled to the ceiling. Fluted pilasters of the ionic order frame each door and window opening and the mantel, and separate the nicely proportioned panels of the walls...The most remarkable feature of the room, and that which gives it its greatest distinction, has not yet, however, been mentioned. All the woodwork, pilasters, and panels are elaborately decorated with paintings.⁹

⁶ Andre Reuff to William Henry Fox, April 29, 1918, Francis Corbin House File, Brooklyn Museum

⁷ Jeffrey, Task, *Things American: Art Museums and Civic Culture in the Progressive Era*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, 164.

⁸ Durr Friedley to R.T.H. Halsey, November 1916, Durr Friedley Records, Box 3, Folder 7, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

⁹ Frank Conger Baldwin, “Early Architecture of the Rappahannock Valley: IV. Marmion,” *Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, 4 (1916): 89-90.

In other circumstances museums were able to merely take paneling from southern buildings that had been abandoned. The Brooklyn Museum was given the paneling from the dining room of the Cane Acres Plantation, located in Summerville, South Carolina, by the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company, which owned the land the house sat on (Figure 1.3).¹⁰ In the south preservation advocacy efforts often occurred after an important interior was taken by a museum. While it may have been too late to reclaim interior paneling from museum galleries, local advocacy groups like the Cupola House Association, which formed in 1918 as a response to the removal of the interior paneling from the Cupola House by the Brooklyn Museum, could attempt to further protect and restore landmarks.¹¹

The taking of an historic interior by a museum was often effective in motivating a community toward the preservation of an endangered landmark; however, in other cases public interest in a site was slower to develop. In 1917 the indebted owner of the Trippe House, then called Sewall Manor, sold paneling from the house's "living room," "ground floor bedroom," and "stair hall," along with the all the outside doors and window casings to the Brooklyn Museum (Figure 1.4).¹² Seventeen years later, James Donnell Tilgham of the *Baltimore Sun*

¹⁰ William Henry Fox to West Virginia Pulp & Paper Company, November 13th 1924, Cane Acres Plantation File, Brooklyn Museum. When the Brooklyn Museum went to survey the Cane Acres Plantation it encountered a family living in the house. In a letter to William Henry Fox, Andre Reuff describes the situation, "The house...is leased till the end of the current year to a colored family of six-who lived in one room so far as sleeping accommodations went-and who used another room, furnished with a single table, as a 'fire room'. The news that I was going to take away some of the old house brought tears to the older members, one of whom was born and brought up on the plantation. However as they were willing to remove their meager belongings to the upstairs bedroom, and the statements of my carpenter that 'the road is good yet but wait 'til the rain comes, and then you won't take anything', I lost no time in measuring, photographing all I had to remove."

¹¹ The Cupola House will be discussed in chapter three.

¹² The Trippe house was built by Henry Sewall, a military surgeon who, in 1661, was granted 2,000 acres in the American colony by Cecil Calvert, the second Lord Baltimore. Upon his arrival in the colony, Sewall was elevated to "Secretary of the Province" and virtual ruler of the colony, as Lord Baltimore remained in England. Sewall died in 1665, four years after coming to the Colony and was survived by his

reported that while “the best of all possible places, of course, to study paneled walls is in their original setting...by a curious paradox, it actually is easier to discover in greater New York two outstanding examples of [Maryland’s] Colonial walls than it is to ferret them out on their native heath.”¹³ Tilgham lamented further that:

Those who have seen his home on Secretary Creek, from which the paneling was taken, know that it is a little, tumble-down farmhouse of whitewashed brick. But in its day it was one of the finest dwellings of the province. To the sadness of decay there has been added a bleak vacancy, for nothing is so empty and dreary as an old house stripped of its paneling.¹⁴

Despite Tilgham’s concerns over the Trippe House’s deteriorated state, public awareness of the home seems to have been dormant until 1934, when Lowell E. Sunderland, also of the *Baltimore Sun*, wrote an article titled “In Dorchester County, an Old House Rediscovered.” By the 1930s, the Trippe House had been purchased by Our Lady of Good Counsel, the county’s only Catholic church. In 1932 Reverend Robert H. Baid, the parish priest, announced plans that the house would be restored and used for church functions. Despite the removal of the paneling from the four first-floor rooms by the Brooklyn Museum, the original paneling remained intact on the second floor. Baid, determined to restore the house, formed a committee and elected Governor

wife Jane Sewall. Upon a return trip from England to Maryland, Jane met Charles Calvert. They married, and in 1675 he became the third Lord Baltimore and the first to live in the colony. When the museum purchased the interior, the house was dated to 1665 with the interior paneling dating to 1720. The paneling was based off of Renaissance cut-stone panels, and would have been surprisingly old fashioned at its date of completion. The “living room” featured the most elaborate paneling with beveled panels set in stiles and rails, and including a chair rail and cornice. The room included a long fireplace, with heavy bolection molding over it. To either side of the fireplace were low, arched doors leading to closets. The tops of both the doors and the frames were scalloped. Accession Document, Sewall House File, March 5th 1917, Brooklyn Museum of Art. Lowell E. Sunderson, “In Dorchester County An Old House Rediscovered,” *Baltimore Sun*, 1964, 1.

¹³ James Donnell Tilgham, “A Transplanted Bit of Old Maryland: The My Lady Sewall Paneling at The Brooklyn Museum,” *Baltimore Sun*, Jan 3 1932, 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

John Millard Tawes as its honorary chairmen. Tawes, presumably taken by the house's pedigree, promised, "all the State aid he could muster" to assist in the project.¹⁵

The acquisition of American interiors by art museums in the United States was set against larger European period room collecting campaigns. In 1903 the Metropolitan became the first American art museum to acquire a European period room when it purchased a bedroom from the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, informally called the Pompeii Bedroom, which dates to 30 BC (Figure 1.5). This interior was followed in 1906 by an ornately paneled chamber from Films, a town in Switzerland, featuring a remarkable stove dated to seventeenth century (Figure 1.6). That same year the Metropolitan also purchased an ornately decorated, eighteenth-century bedroom from the Sagredo Palace in Venice (Figure 1.7). These early period rooms were each remarkable in artistic treatment and origin and set the tone for the other European rooms that the Metropolitan would collect during the first half of the twentieth century. The fifteen American period rooms the Metropolitan debuted when its American Wing opened in 1924 were primarily sourced from elite buildings as well. Four of the rooms, however, were vernacular in nature. The two sixteenth-century New England rooms, which were modern fabrications based on two well-known interiors, were vernacular adaptations of English medieval houses. The other two vernacular rooms were the Hewlett Room, which was built in 1740 in Woodbury, New York, and the Newington Room, which was built in 1750 in Newington, Connecticut. The Hewlett Room was a gift to the Metropolitan from Emily de Forest, an avid and early collector of Americana, and the Newington Room had been previously used as a furniture display by the Metropolitan in its 1909 Hudson-Fulton Exhibition.

¹⁵ "Restoration of Manor: Committee Formed," *Baltimore Sun*, Aug 5 1934, B2.

The display of provincial rooms and objects helps differentiate the impetus behind the collecting efforts of European and American rooms at art museums in the United States. Christopher Will, Keeper of the Collection of Furniture, Fashion and Textiles at the Victoria and Albert Museum, has recently suggested that the acquisition of period rooms by museums has been largely informed by a number of impulses. Broadly, these fall into four non mutually exclusive categories; first are those rooms that demonstrate histories of style, or conform to collecting trends in the decorative arts. Second, are those rooms museum have acquired to save from demolition or harmful alteration. The third category Will outlined are those rooms that tell national stories. The fourth category of rooms are those that illustrate particular decorative techniques, such as gilding or paneling, which are of special interest to decorative arts specialists.¹⁶ In collecting American interiors, art museums tended to acquire rooms that fit into the first and third categories. Especially at the Metropolitan's American Wing, a national narrative guided the collection and curation of the period rooms, which allowed visitors to walk through a linear progression of seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and early-nineteenth-century interior styles. This narrative, which placed the origin of American material culture in Massachusetts, drove museum officials to actively search for purchasable seventeenth-century New England interiors. When the Metropolitan was unable to acquire anything from the seventeenth century it produced recreations of a chamber from the Hart House, which was built in 1680 in Ipswich, Massachusetts, and the kitchen from the Parson Capen House, which was built in Topsfield, Massachusetts in 1683.

¹⁶ Jeremy Aynsley, "The Modern Period Room: A Contradiction in Terms?" In *The Modern Period Room: The Construction of the Exhibited Interior 1870 to 1950*, edited by Penny Sparke, Brenda Martin and Trevor Keeble, London: Routledge, 2006, 11.

The American period room is an understudied subject. A symposium held at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 2005, entitled “The American Period Room: Past, Present and Future,” addressed the lack of scholarship surrounding these rooms. The papers given at the symposium were subsequently published as articles in 2012 by the *Winterthur Portfolio* and represent the bulk of the available literature on the topic.¹⁷ These articles primarily place the American period rooms of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art in the broader context of institutional collecting programs of the early twentieth century. Very little is written, however, about how museums selected the interiors they acquired and what happened to the buildings after the selected interior was removed. In Jeffrey Trask’s 2012 text, *Things American: Art Museums and Civic Culture in the Progressive Era*, the Metropolitan’s collecting efforts in connection to its American Wing are analyzed. As part of this discussion, Task briefly discusses the Metropolitan’s acquisition and subsequent sale of the Wentworth-Gardner House, which was built in 1760 in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The Metropolitan’s purchase of the Wentworth-Gardner house was contested by William Sumner Appleton, Jr. who petitioned the Metropolitan to allow SPNEA to buy the property and operate it as a local house museum. This conflict is covered, in part, by Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., in his 1965 book *Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States Before Williamsburg*. In reviewing the influence art museums had on the preservation movement Hosmer concludes that despite their acquisition and removal of important interiors, art museums “were an educative force in the battle for scholarly restorations,

¹⁷ These papers include, Morrison H. Heckscher, “The American Wing Rooms in the Metropolitan Museum of Art,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 46 (2012): 161-178. Gerald W.R. Ward, “Period Rooms and the New Art of the Americas Wing of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,” *Winterthur. Portfolio* 46 (2012): 161-178. David L. Barquist, “The Interior Will Be as Interesting as the Exterior Is Magnificent,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 46 (2012): 139-160.

and their period rooms set an example for those seeking information on authentic furnishings or accurate details.”¹⁸ Hosmer’s conclusions have largely been discredited and modern scholarship has proved that the installation and curation of early American period rooms was marked by twentieth-century aesthetic preconceptions. Often over furnished and poorly researched, these installations presented very little accurate information to museum visitors.

Building upon the recent scholarship that has examined the institutional collecting of American works in the early twentieth century, this thesis investigates the history of local preservation advocacy in connection to the extraction of early-American interiors by art museums. Art museums thought of collecting paneling and architectural elements destined for period room installations as a way to insure the preservation and public accessibility of historically and stylistically important interiors. Conflicting views on the appropriateness of removing architectural fittings, however, often led to the founding of advocacy groups centered around a threatened building and occasionally to a petition requesting that a museum donate or sell back material. While museums did take interiors from buildings destined for demolition, their collecting efforts were especially contested when rooms were merely bought from a willing seller and the house remained standing.

Chapter One, “The Collecting of American Things,” examines the web of circumstances in the early twentieth century that led to the institutional collecting and public regard for colonial and early-American architecture and art objects. Interest in the cultural artifacts of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth century was set against a background of dramatic social and economic change as well as highly nationalistic changes in immigration policy in the United States.

Furthermore the sense that the United States was falling woefully behind in the production of

¹⁸ Charles B. Hosmer, Jr. *Presence of the Past: A history of the preservation movement in the United States Before Williamsburg*. New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1965, 236.

artistically valuable decorative arts led many museums to promote a policy of education. Based on the work being done at London's Victoria and Albert Museum, American museums attempted to educate the public on how to make enlightened decision as consumers when it came to buying and decorating their homes.

Chapter Two, "Preserving America's Heritage," investigates the history of historic preservation efforts in New England and the southern states. In searching for appropriate interiors to install as period rooms, museums sent scouts throughout all of the thirteen original colonies. In understanding why groups rallied to save some interiors and not others it is crucial to establish the role preservation played in that community. In analyzing preservation advocacy in connection to period rooms a series of case studies has been established, in which the removal of interior fitting by museums directly led to the preservation of a site. These case studies will be examined in individual chapters, and include the Cupola House, built in Edenton, North Carolina in 1758 (Chapter Three), the Powel House, built in 1765 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Chapter Four), the Wentworth-Gardner House, built in Portsmouth, New Hampshire in 1760 (Chapter Five), and the Alexandria Ballroom, built in 1770 in Alexandria, Virginia (Chapter Six).

Chapter Seven, "Examining the American Period Room," explores the relationship between historic preservation and American period rooms and analyzes the place these rooms retain in modern collections. Arguing that they were rescuing the nation's great interiors from dilapidated obscurity, art museums insisted that the rooms they purchased were not valued locally. However, in acquiring interiors museums acted covertly using systems of scouts and third party dealers, as they understood that with the growing interest in the preservation of architectural heritage they were subject to criticism. In analyzing the four case studies presented in this thesis, it is clear that controversy often existed over the removal of interiors by museums.

American period room installations existed somewhere between a department store display and a museum exhibition. Created to help inform consumer taste, American period rooms often relayed very little factual information about historic styles or authentic room arrangements. Separated from their original purpose, American period rooms are being reevaluated by curators and museum professionals who are working to make them more relevant to modern audiences.

Images for the Introduction



Figure 1.1: An example of late-nineteenth century interior decoration.

Source: Byron Company, "Residence, Mrs. Paran Stevens, NE 57th & 5th Avenue," Ca. 1893, Image Collection, Museum of the City of New York.

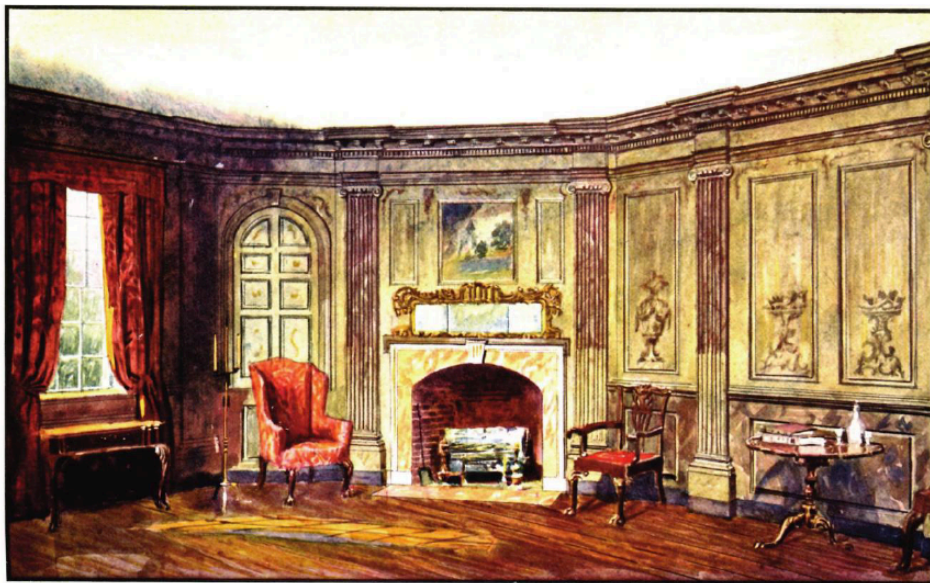


Figure 1.2: The painted drawing room of Marmion plantation in Virginia.

Source: R.T.H. Halsey and Elizabeth Tower, *The Homes of Our Ancestors As Shown in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York: Garden City Publishing Co., 1937, 109.



Figure 1.3: Cane Acres Plantation continued to deteriorate after the Brooklyn Museum removed woodwork from its dining room. Taken in 1946, this photograph shows the house just before it collapsed.

Source: D.Y. Lenhart for the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company, Cane Acres Plantation File, the Brooklyn Museums.



Figure 1.4: The Henry Trippe House as it appeared in 1917 when the Brooklyn Museum extracted its woodwork.

Source: Trippe House File, Period Room Binders, the Brooklyn Museum.



Figure 1.5: The bedroom from the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, dated to 30 BC.
Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art photographs.



Figure 1.6: The Metropolitan's Swiss Room (1682-84).
Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art photographs.



Figure 1.7: The bedroom from the Sagredo Palace in Venice.
Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art photographs.

Chapter One Collecting American Things

On September 20th, 1925 H.I Brock, of the *New York Times*, reported a particular craze sweeping consumer taste:

And now, all of a sudden, American furniture is the thing. Any American furniture, just because it is American, is in such demand that the dealers cannot find nearly enough of it to go around...The exclusive shops up and down Madison and Lexington Avenues, the little shops in side streets and the antique places all through the country are forced to make a specialty of the product of the native cabinetmakers' art.³⁶

Brock is quick to cite the recently opened American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art as a defining influence upon this trend stating:

The point here is the general diffusion and still gathering momentum of the idea that the proper sort of furniture to have in your house or apartment in this country is American furniture. That was an idea, which used to be confined to a select few. The number was growing slowly up to the time of the opening in November last year of the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, with its display of American furniture in the American settings for which such furniture had been made...The newspapers and magazines spread knowledge of it to millions where only thousands saw it with their own eyes. The public was prepared, the incorrigible furniture fanciers were set going on a new fad-and the dealers went to work to reap the harvest.³⁷

With the American Wing open to the public for merely a year, it would appear that its role in informing consumer taste was significant. While a regard for early-American arts was exponentially growing within numerous cultural institutions at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Metropolitan's role in defining national taste cannot be overstated.

To properly understand the cultural significance of the American Wing, it must be examined in the context of the development of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the

³⁶ H.I. Brock, "The Hunt for the Old Widens: All of a Sudden American Furniture is the Thing-Pressed on by Public Demands Dealers Vie With One Another in Ferreting Out Early Examples of the Cabinet Makers," *New York Times*, September 20th 1925, 1.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 2.

development of museology within the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The concept of establishing a public art museum in the United States traces back to the summer of 1866 when a group of socially prominent New Yorkers vacationing in Paris, France agreed to lend their support in the creation of “a national institute and gallery of art.”³⁸ The idea was proposed by the lawyer John Jay, who swiftly moved forward with the project upon his return to the United States. President of the Union League Club, Jay drew support for the museum from other wealthy and powerful New Yorkers. Jay argued that despite its increasing population and expanding importance within the world’s economy, New York City lagged behind European capitals in providing its citizens access to art. The task of developing a public museum was sanctioned by the Union League’s newly formed Art Committee with William Cullen Bryant, the committee’s president, arguing in 1869 that:

The influence of works of art is wholesome, ennobling, and instructive. Besides the cultivation of the sense of beauty—in other words, the perception of order, symmetry, proportion of parts, which is of near kindred to moral sentiments—the intelligent contemplation of a great gallery of works of art is a lesson in history, a lesson in biography, a lesson in the antiquities of different countries.³⁹

The following year, the New York State Legislature granted the Metropolitan Museum of Art an Act of Incorporation. Politically, the men at the center of the new institution wished to remain separate from the Democratic Tammany Hall political machine that had just swept the 1869 election, seeing the new museum as an act of Republican stewardship. Fearing municipal interference, the trustees of the new museum negotiated how the museum would operate with city officials. It was determined that the museum would retain sovereignty and ownership over its collection, but would receive funds from the city to procure a site and construct a museum

³⁸ Eva Winifred Howe, *The History of the Metropolitan Museum of Art with a Chapter on the Early History of Art in New York*, New York: Gilliss Press, 1913, 111.

³⁹ Ibid.

building. After a series of negotiations in 1871 with the city, a site in Central Park near 82nd Street was selected for the new museum and the park's architect, Calvert Vaux, was chosen to design the building.

While the museum would not move to its Central Park site until 1880, it first opened to the public on February 20th, 1872 in a rented space located at 681 Fifth Avenue. Working to secure funds to purchase art, John Taylor Johnston, the museum's first president, also established an endowment that would further assure the museum's autonomy from the city. The collection grew gradually, with its first major purchase occurring in 1873 when General Luigi Palma de Cesnola, who would later become the museum's first director, sold 6,000 Cypriot antiquities to the museum. The Cesnola collection drastically increased the museum's holdings and prompted the Metropolitan Museum of Art to temporarily move to the Douglas Mansion located at 128th West 14th Street, which would also prove inadequate in the coming years with the growing collection requiring more space. On March 30th, 1880, the Metropolitan moved a final time to its permanent home.

The trustees of the Metropolitan hoped that exposure to its collection would reform the taste of the postbellum middle class and the clumsiness of the industrial products being manufactured domestically. The fear that the United States was falling behind Europe in the production of furniture and decorative arts was strikingly affirmed at the 1876 Centennial Exposition held in Philadelphia where domestic goods were criticized. In drawing comparisons between the British and American furniture, the judges stated that, whereas the British furniture boasted "solidity and honest contraction," American furniture was distinguished by "machine-

work.”⁴⁰ Commenting on the most artistic furniture display shown by American makers, the Modern Gothic Drawing Room by Kimbel & Cabus, the *British Art Journal* found that the work did not “differ very considerably from what is turned out at our own factories” (Figure 2.1).⁴¹ Critics argued that the industrial might of the United States, which was prominently showcased in 1876, was precisely the reason its domestic crafts were so poorly regarded. With the advent of mechanized jigs and lathes, ornament no longer was the product of stylistic development and careful thought. Instead the minor adjustment of a blade determined whether a chair was Gothic, Elizabethan, Renaissance or Rococo in style. As early as 1872, the trustees of the museum were determined to put their collection to work in reforming domestic taste, stating:

The Officers of the Museum desire especially to begin at an early day the formation of a collection of industrial art, of objects of utility to which decorative art has been applied, ornamental metalwork, carving in wood, ivory, and stone, painted glass, glass vessels, pottery, enamel and all other material. The time is particularly favorable for purchases in this department, and the need of forming such a collection for the use of our mechanics and students is most obvious and pressing.⁴²

Despite the cultural cache of France, the trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art looked toward English museums as precedents to inform their decision-making.⁴³ In England, no institution was more influential than London’s Victoria and Albert Museum. Founded in 1852 as “the first fruit of the effort to meet the problems of the industrial age,” the Victoria and Albert Museum exhibited pre-industrial decorative arts and craft objects in an attempt to educate

⁴⁰ Francis A. Walker, ed., *United States Centennial Commission International Exhibition, 1876 Reports and Awards*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880), 728.

⁴¹ “Furniture Gazette,” 6 (1876): 216.

⁴² “To The Members of the Metropolitan Museum of Art,” *Annual Report of the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 1 (1871): 21.

⁴³ In the 1872 *Annual Report of the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, The Trustees of the museum expressed their interest in English museums stating, “The Trustees of the Museum purpose to establish an institution which, at some distant day shall combine the functions of the British National Gallery and the Art Departments of the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum.”

modern craftsmen in the appropriate design of manufactured products. While the Metropolitan aimed at using its collection in a similar manner, the need to develop a specific educational curriculum was beyond the comprehension of the trustees. Instead, in the early years of the museum, it was presumed that by offering free admission days, the working poor would be sufficiently enlightened by merely existing in proximity to the art works displayed.⁴⁴ When the museum moved to its Central Park site, programs in woodwork and metalwork aimed at improving the skills of the city's laborers were inaugurated. Offered two nights a week, the classes were housed in an offsite location, in a move that separated the students from the benefit of learning from the museum's collection.⁴⁵ By 1892, the museum only offered classes in drawing and by 1894 the entire enterprise was shut down.⁴⁶ In failing to realize that employers were not looking for skilled labor, the museum had rendered its educational programs useless. Furthermore, despite offering free admission days, the old guard of strict Protestant trustees demanded that the museum be closed on Sundays, which was often the only day a laborer would have off of work and therefore be able to visit the museum.

On December 18th, 1888 the Metropolitan Museum of Art hosted an "Inauguration Ceremony" to celebrate the completion of a new wing. Designed by Richard Morris Hunt, the new wing effectively doubled the museum's gallery space while obscuring the original Vaux commission, a decidedly old-fashioned brick Gothic Revival building, from Fifth Avenue. More importantly, however, by erecting the new Beaux-Arts wing, the museum effectively ceded

⁴⁴ "To the Members of: The Metropolitan Museum of Art," *Annual Report of the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 4 (1874): 52.

⁴⁵ L.P. de Cesnola, "Notice Free Industrial Art-School," *Annual Report of the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 10 (1880): 168.

⁴⁶ D.O. Mills, "Report on the Committee on Schools," *Annual Report of the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 23 (1892): 547.

bargaining power over policy to city officials. As with the original building, the museum utilized municipal funds to build the new wing that, upon completion, doubled the amount of public parkland the museum occupied. The speeches given at the ceremony reflected the tense atmosphere existing between museum trustees and public officials. Speaking on behalf of the city, J. Hampden Robb, President of Public Parks, used the occasion to comment on the museum's policy of being closed on Sundays stating, "I believe I am voicing the sentiment of a great majority of people of this city, that the day is not far distant when the Museum will be kept opened on Sundays as well as all other holidays."⁴⁷ Countering Robb's remarks, William Cowper Prim (1821-1905), the First Vice-President of the Museum, reminded the 8,000 men and women at the ceremony that:

We proposed to found and conduct a Museum of Art, enlarging it from year to year without limit of design, and with our possible end of expense. The city, by its officers, said to us if you will bring your museum into Central Park and carry its work on there, we will provide and equip a building for you... This Museum is our property, bought with our money, managed by our Trustees, its current expenses paid by us out of our private treasury, its purchases all private purchases by ourselves. The City is chargeable with no responsibility for our work in the installation. It has not paid and does not pay a dollar toward the formation and never ending increase of the Museum, nor does it pay the current expenses of keeping it open free to the public...⁴⁸

Public accessibility became a contestable issue in the 1880s and 1890s for the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Conflict with the city dissolved into conflict between trustee members. Despite a petition that collected 10,000 signatures in 1881, it took until 1891 for the Metropolitan's Board of Trustees to finally agree to open the museum on Sundays. The issue lay in the inherent ideological differences between the older and younger trustees. A paternalistic conservatism characterized the older members who, like William Cowper Prim, saw the

⁴⁷ "Opening of the New Building: December 18, 1888," *Annual Report of the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 19 (1888): 413.

⁴⁸ "Opening of the New Building: December 18, 1888," 416.

Metropolitan as a largely private enterprise. The younger Trustees grouped around Robert W. de Forest, son-in-law of the Metropolitan's first President John Taylor Johnston, who was elected as a trustee in 1889. Along with the Metropolitan's new President, Henry Marquand, de Forest represented a progressive force at the Metropolitan. Arguing for a democratic transparency, de Forest insisted on professionalizing the institution.

Despite a failed attempt at removing the aged Cesnola from the position of Museum Director and President of the Board of Trustees in 1895, de Forest's progressive faction was eventually able to seize power, when in the five years between 1899 and 1904 nine of the older board members, including Cesnola, died.⁴⁹ Marquand's tenure as President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art was short. After his death in 1904, New York financier and multimillionaire, J. Pierpont Morgan accepted the title of President.⁵⁰ That same year de Forest was elected as Secretary and First Vice President.⁵¹ Under Morgan and de Forest, the Metropolitan Museum of Art began a series of sweeping changes. The museum's three departments were expanded to nine, each staffed by a director and an assistant director with backgrounds in art history. Most symbolically, however, Morgan hired Sir Casper Purdon Clarke, formally the Art Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, to be the Metropolitan Museum of Art's second director.⁵²

⁴⁹ "The Death Roll of Trustees," *Annual Report of the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 35 (1905): 118.

⁵⁰ J. Pierpont Morgan became a patron of the museum in 1871, a trustee in 1889 and had been a generous donor of art since 1897. Eva Winifred Howe, *A History of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, With a Chapter on the Early Institutions of Art in New York*, 289.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Contrasting Clark to Cesnola, the *Bulletin* described him as "thoroughly democratic and approachable...and in appearance of manner, more American than English."

Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art 1 (November 1905): 4.

Robert W. de Forest and J. Pierpont Morgan, "The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Trustees: 1905," *Annual Report of the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 35 (1905): 9.

Despite the shift in leadership, the Metropolitan Museum of Art was still overtly concerned with the state of domestic taste. This interest, combined with the progressive belief in the uplifting power of education, led to the establishment of ambitious museum policies that aimed at teaching Americans how to appreciate aesthetics outside of popular trends. Cultivating good taste was believed to be paramount in fostering good citizenship and therefore a noble institutional goal. In 1918, writing for *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Winifred Howe expressed the Museum's "educational credo":

We believe that every human being is born with a potential love of beauty, and whether this capacity lies dormant or springs into activity depends largely upon his education... We believe that whether the cultivation of this faculty adds to the earning capacity of its possessor or not, it does unquestionably increase his happiness, and this in turn reacts upon his health of mind and body. Thus eyes that know how to see beauty and a mind that can appreciate its spirit are genuine assets to the individual, of greater value now than ever before, and through the individual to the community, the state, and the nation.⁵³

The Metropolitan Museum of Art saw its taste improvement mission as having national repercussions. In her article, Howe explains that one of the most positive consequences of the museum's role as an educator was in its power to assimilate recent immigrants. Howe articulates this further, noting that due to its location, the Metropolitan was in a unique position to aid in the promotion of American taste values, "Its location, also, in the largest city in America with thousands of people of foreign birth within easy walking distance of its galleries presents to it the opportunity of striving to be 'the melting pot of the artistic ideals of many people' and a great 'Americanizing force in the artistic development, of this country.'" ⁵⁴ De Forest was also particularly interested in the educational value of the Metropolitan, arguing, "knowledge and

⁵³ Winifred E. Howe, "The Museum's Educational Credo," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 9 (September 1918): 193.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

appreciation of art is by no means all that our Museum teaches...It illuminates history. It inspires patriotism.”⁵⁵

The push toward public accessibility at the Metropolitan was partly focused on justifying the institution’s municipal funding and partly due to a progressive agenda held by a growing number of the museum’s trustees. Nineteenth and early twentieth century progressives concerned themselves with countering the less desirable consequences of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration in American cities. Responding to these critical societal issues with a quasi-noblesse oblige approach, progressives often regarded recent immigrants and the urban poor as groups needing to be assimilated to the decidedly Protestant values of American society. Xenophobia was particularly rampant during this time period with many believing that the United States had effectively reached its immigration absorption point. Dr. Henry Fairfield Osborn, an anthropologist and director of the American Museum of Natural History, believed that the damage caused by immigration to American society was nearing catastrophic levels. In an article published in the *New York Times*, Osborn stated that, “In cold-blooded, scientific language our best stock is threatened with extinction.” Favoring birth selection and selective immigration, Osborn, “thought the first duty of [the United States] was to protect itself against any preponderance of unassimilable immigrants.”⁵⁶ The unassimilable immigrants Dr. Osborn refers to were the large waves of southern and eastern Europeans who had come to the United States during the 1880s. These people were among the first real concentration of non-northern Europeans to immigrate to the United States and their seemingly foreign customs and values were negatively regarded by many Anglo-Americans. Public concern over national immigration

⁵⁵ Robert W. de Forest, “Children’s Use of the Metropolitan Museum of Art,” *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 6 (March 1911): 60.

⁵⁶ “Favors Selective Immigration Law: Old American Stock is Dying Out, Dr. Osborn Tells National Conference,” *New York Times*, December 14th 1923, 20.

policy can be measured by studying the letters to the editor published in the *New York Times* during the early twentieth century. One letter, written by Walter W. Hoffman in 1924, puts the issue in terms of race, “It is no doubt true that probably Colonists at the time of the Revolution were not Anglo-Saxon by descent...The great majority of the Colonists were from Northwestern Europe, and, therefore, however much they differed in language and in religion, they did not appreciably differ in racial type.”⁵⁷

By defining America as an inheritance from seventeenth and eighteenth century Protestants settlers, the cultural meaning of colonial artifacts became significant. Their value to art museums, however, was more than this. The paneled interiors of seventeenth-and eighteenth-century houses and the hand-crafted, and largely unupholstered furniture of the William and Mary, Queen Ann, and Chippendale styles were the antithesis of the mechanically produced, overstuffed furniture and cluttered rooms of the nineteenth century that museum taste reformers so despised.

In 1905, Robert W. de Forest questioned the role American art should have in the collections of American museums. Writing in the *Annual Report of the Trustees*, de Forest argued that “among the many directions in which extensions of our collections is desirable there is one which has peculiar claims upon our interest and patriotism, that is the art of our own country.”⁵⁸ An occasion presented itself in the 1909 Hudson-Fulton Celebration to test the merit of exhibiting American art. A statewide commemoration of “the tercentenary of the discovery of the ‘Hudson River,’ and the centennial of the first use of steam on that river,” the Hudson-Fulton Celebration manifested itself at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in a large exhibit divided into

⁵⁷ Walter W. Hoffman, “Need to Select Immigrants,” *New York Times*, January 27th 1929, 8.

⁵⁸ Robert W. de Forest, “The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Trustees: 1905,” *Annual Report of the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 35 (1905): 13.

two distinct sections.⁵⁹ The first section of the exhibit showcased 148 paintings by Dutch contemporaries of Henry Hudson, while the second section was a collection of paintings and industrial arts dating from sixteenth century up until the death of Fulton in 1815.⁶⁰ The exhibition was the initiative of de Forrest, chairman of the Committee on Arts Exhibits for the Hudson-Fulton Commission, Henry Watson Kent, de Forest's assistant secretary, and R. T. H. Halsey, and avid collector of early-American decorative arts.⁶¹ Luke Vincent Lockwood, considered the foremost authority on American furniture, aided in the curatorial selection, arrangement of the exhibit, and wrote its catalogue.⁶²

The Hudson-Fulton exhibit was installed in three second-floor galleries of the new McKim Mead and White wing located just north of the museum's Great Hall. The objects were crowded together on large platforms in a chronological display, as was the customary technique for American museum exhibitions of that time (Figure 2.2). On one platform, however, a paneled fireplace wall from an eighteenth-century Connecticut farmhouse was utilized as a display alcove for a few chairs and a seventeenth-century couch (Figure 2.3). The utilization of architectural elements in displaying suites of furniture and decorative arts, however, was not an entirely new technique by the time it was being used at the museum's Hudson-Fulton exhibition. European museums, which continued to guide American museum policy throughout the beginning of the twentieth century, had been utilizing staged architectural elements from period room settings since the 1870s.

⁵⁹ Florence N. Levy, "The Hudson Fulton Exhibition," *Art and Progress* 1 (November 1909): 4.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Morrison H. Heckscher, "the American Wing Rooms in the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *Winterthur Portfolio* 46 (2012): 162.

⁶² Luke Vincent Lockwood, *The Hudson-Fulton Celebration: Catalogue of an Exhibition Held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1909, x.

Owing its development to northern European institutions, the period room grew from a technique largely used to display ethnographic tableaux to a curatorial tool concerned with the exhibition of decorative arts during the nineteenth century. The 1880s and 1890s were particularly important in regard to the development of the period room with the Nordic Museum in Stockholm exhibiting a selection of cultural objects relevant to traditional peasant life in a series of vernacular buildings that had been collected and moved by the institution in 1888. The buildings represented a great variety of types of houses and other buildings that were completely furnished and occupied by families wearing the traditional dress of the province from which they came. The families practiced preindustrial crafts and during the summer season gave public demonstrations of folk dances and songs in an attempt to visually preserve a national heritage that was rapidly disappearing.⁶³ Also in 1888 the German National Museum in Nuremberg acquired two early Renaissance rooms from Tyrol, which were the first furnished period rooms in a museum.⁶⁴ In 1890 the Victoria and Albert Museum acquired the wood facade and a ceiling of the Sir Paul Pindar's house that had been built in London, England between 1599 and 1600. This façade was followed by the Jacobean Bromley-by-Bow room from London in 1894 and paneling from the early-sixteenth century Tudor style Waltham Abbey from Essex in 1899. Four years earlier, in 1895, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam opened, presenting seven historical rooms possessing their original ceilings and wall coverings.⁶⁵ The two institutions that had the most influence on American museum professionals, however, were the Swiss National Museum at Zurich, which opened in 1898 and the National Museum at Munich, which opened in 1900.

⁶³ George Francis Dow, "Museums and the Preservation of Early Houses," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 17(November 1922): 17.

⁶⁴ Henry Watson Kent, "The American Wing in its Relation to the history of Museum Development" 15

⁶⁵ For a complete history of European period rooms see John Harris' *Moving Rooms: The Trade in Architectural Salvages*.

The Swiss National Museum presented sixty-two period rooms to the public that exhibited the development of arts and crafts in Switzerland during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while the National Museum at Munich contained seventy-six period rooms all of Bavarian origins.

American curators and museum directors saw the period room as an exciting advance in museology. Edwin AtLee Barber, Director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, wrote in 1916 about the merits of Northern European museums in their presentation of “the domestic life and customs of the peoples...of provincial localities.” Barber believed that the techniques he observed in European museums would be particularly applicable in exhibiting the products of the early settlers of Eastern Pennsylvania.⁶⁶ Henry Watson Kent, Secretary of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, saw the work being done in Germany and the Scandinavian Peninsula as “a system so obviously reasonable, so well calculated to facilitate the intelligent use of the material shown, by students and visitors alike, that only a ponderous regard for convention and precedent could have prevented its earlier inception.”⁶⁷

Even in the United States, the furnished alcoves at the Hudson-Fulton exhibition were not the first display of American furniture within a period room type environment. In 1907, the Essex Institute in Salem, Massachusetts, enlarged its galleries and installed a series of period rooms illustrating typical interiors of a New England house. The rooms consisted of a kitchen (1750), a bedroom (1800), and a parlor (1800) (Figure 2.4). Taken from homes within New England facing demolition, the installed period rooms at the Essex Institute were the work of curator George Francis Dow who undertook painstaking efforts in accurately furnishing them.

⁶⁶ Edwin AtLee Barber, “Furniture Exhibition,” *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum* 14 (October 1916): 53.

⁶⁷ Henry Watson Kent, “The American Wing in its Relation to the history of Museum Development” 14.

Dow's efforts expanded beyond the collection of important interior woodwork, and, like museums in Northern Europe, he acquired entire buildings when he was able. Writing an article for the *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* in 1922, Dow described the recent collage of architectural specimens he had assembled in the unoccupied land behind the Institute:

In the rear of this museum was unoccupied land large enough to permit an experiment in exhibiting architectural specimens too large to be placed in a museum hall. A two-story house with lean-to, built in 1684 and about to be destroyed, was removed to this location and carefully restored. The rooms were furnished as though occupied, and caretakers wearing costumes of the seventeenth century were placed in attendance...not far away was placed a fully equipped shoemakers' shop...A fine semicircular porch, designed by McIntire in 1807, was removed to the rear wall of the museum and nearby was placed the porch of the "Grimshawe House...beside the driveway was set a milestone still bearing the date of its former erection in 1711, and at a turn in a path was placed a cupola taken from the roof of a Salem merchant's house.⁶⁸

Dow's work at the Essex Institute exemplifies the intellectual issues in collecting architecture. Period rooms essentially are fictional tableaux as the furniture and other objects are not original to the space being displayed. Collecting entire buildings, however, dislocates structures from their original sites and fosters a fictional context.

Three years before Dow transformed the Essex Institute with his period rooms, the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design constructed a replica of Pendleton House to display a bequeathed collection of eighteenth-century American furniture. The collection represented a particularly fine selection of furniture from the third quarter of the eighteenth century, highlighted by examples of the Chippendale and Hepplewhite styles. When the collection became available to the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design in 1904 the question of how to appropriately display it occupied the museum's director and curators. Reporting about the collection for *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, L. Earl Rowe, the

⁶⁸ George Francis Dow, "Museums and the Preservation of Early Houses," 18-19.

Director of the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design, recognized that “the possession of such specialized collections...creates a definite problem for the museum where they are shown. It is not sufficient to place individual pieces on low pedestals against the walls, but some sympathetic setting must be devised. English and American mahogany calls for a Georgian setting...”⁶⁹ Fortunately for the Museum, that same year, Stephen O. Metcalf provided funds to construct a modern, fire-proof building, in the Georgian Style to house the collection. Designed by Stone, Carpenter and Wilson of Providence, the house was a Colonial Revival confection complete with “Oriental rugs, bronze chandeliers, Chinese garnitures for mantels and ornament over doorways...” It was reported that upon the opening of Pendleton House visitors frequently remarked, “How I should like to live here with all these beautiful things!”⁷⁰

To prepare for the Hudson-Fulton exhibition, the Metropolitan had to embark upon a massive borrowing campaign, as the museum did not own any American works. At the beginning of the twentieth century, four collections of early-American furniture were particularly well regarded due to their breadth and quality by antiquarians. The first two, the collection of Dr. Irving P. Lyon, the scholarly author of the first authoritative work on American furniture, and the collection of Albert Hosmer had been posthumously dispersed by 1909. The third collection, that of Charles L. Pendleton, having been bequeathed to the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design in 1904, was also inaccessible to the Museum. The final, and arguably most significant, collection had been assembled by H. Eugene Bolles (1838-1910) of Boston. It included many important pieces purchased from both the Lyon and Hosmer collections.⁷¹ In

⁶⁹ L. Earle Rowe, “The Pendleton Collection and Its Setting,” *the Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 17 (November 1922): 22.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 23.

⁷¹ Mary-Alice Rogers, ed., *American Furniture in the Metropolitan Museum of Art 2* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1985): 28.

securing select pieces of furniture as loans for the Hudson-Fulton exhibition, de Forest and Kent learned that the elderly Bolles was considering selling his entire collection. Understanding its tremendous monetary and artistic value, but also the limited interest many members of the museum's Board of Trustees had in purchasing American works, de Forest arranged for Mrs. Russell Sage, widow of the well-known financier, to purchase all 600 items for the Museum.⁷² Sage's purchase warranted an article in the *New York Times*, where it was revealed that the collection was valued at over \$100,000 and that it would form the base of an American decorative arts department within the Metropolitan.⁷³

The Bolles collection was temporarily exhibited among European furniture at the Metropolitan, but it was soon determined that the collection would be better displayed in domestic settings held within a new wing. In a letter dated October 29th, 1909, Kent told Luke Vincent Lockwood that he was proposing to display the Bolles collection in a series of eight rooms "according to the German method of 'room' arrangement."⁷⁴ The "German method" likely referred to the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum of Munich, of which Kent would write:

It caused the rearrangement of their collections from galleries of serried objects related to each other by material out of which they were made to galleries wherein these objects were grouped by centuries or periods, to show in all their applications and characteristics the style to which they belonged...this system expressed itself in two ways: by the exhibition in sequence of rooms, taken from historic houses architecturally expressive of given periods, and arranged to the least detail with objects belonging to them-furniture, ceramics metalwork, etc.; and by the bringing together in galleries introductory to these rooms, and

⁷² The collection represented over 600 pieces of seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century furniture largely of New England origin. Three pieces are particularly of interest, largely considered masterpieces of eighteenth century American craft. These are a Newport block-and-shell bureau table; a Massachusetts walnut high chest with carved and gilded shells, and a Salem block-front desk and bookcase. *Ibid.*

⁷³ "Bolles Collection for Metropolitan: Mrs. Sage Gives the \$100,000 Group of Colonial Furniture to the Museum," *New York Times*, December 20th 1909, 8.

⁷⁴ Henry Watson Kent to Luke Vincent Lockwood, New York City, October 29, 1909, H. Eugen Bolles correspondence, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

harmonious architecturally with them, of the bulk of the museum material of the periods.⁷⁵

Here, already fully articulated, was the basic paradigm by which the Metropolitan Museum of Art would acquire and install its American period rooms. In 1914, Halsey was appointed chairman of the newly formed Committee on American Decorative Arts and Durr Friedley was named Acting Curator of Decorative Arts.⁷⁶ The Metropolitan's first selection of architectural paneling would come as a donation in 1910 from Emily Johnston de Forest. De Forest's gift was comprised of a fully paneled fireplace wall from a mid-eighteenth-century house in Hewlett, Long Island.

Professionally snubbed by the appointment of Halsey as chairman of the Committee on American Decorative Arts, Luke Vincent Lockwood severed his ties to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, devoting the remainder of his career to the Museum of the City of New York and the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences. Lockwood's influence would be particularly felt at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, now called the Brooklyn Museum, where he would be elected to the Board of Governors in 1914. Tracing its history back to 1823, the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences transformed throughout the nineteenth century from a library in Brooklyn Heights to a major civic institution offering public lectures on subjects varying from abolition to geology and exhibiting painting and sculpture. The establishment of a formal and permanent art museum, however, grew out of an effort in the late 1880s to professionalize and centralize the Institute.⁷⁷ In 1889 it was proposed to move the Institute to a single building located in the vicinity of Prospect Park where an art and science museum could

⁷⁵ Henry Watson Kent, "The American Wing in Its Relation to the History of Museums Development," 14.

⁷⁶ Mary-Alice Rogers, ed., *American Furniture in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Volume 2*, 29.

⁷⁷ "An Art Museum for Brooklyn," *New York Tribune*, February 6 1889, 6.

be combined with lecture halls. In 1895, the city of Brooklyn issued \$295,000 in municipal bonds to pay for the first portion of the new museum building that had been designed in 1893 by McKim, Mead & White.⁷⁸

With construction starting in 1895, the officials and trustees of the Brooklyn Museum of Arts and Sciences turned their attention to how their collection was to be exhibited in their new building. Like their colleagues at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Victoria and Albert Museum was selected as the institutional model. In an article published in the *New York Tribune* in 1899, Professor Franklin W. Hooper, the director of the Institute stated, “The original plan of the Museum of Arts and Sciences, as adopted by the city, on recommendation of the Board of Trustees of the institute, included suites of galleries designed to exhibit the industrial arts.”⁷⁹ Cesnola approved the idea of centering the Brooklyn Museum of Arts and Science’s collection around industrial arts, perhaps to keep it from competing with the fine arts galleries of the Metropolitan, arguing, “It would undoubtedly be of the greatest benefit to this city and country to have a museum of industrial arts here. We are a great commercial people, and an educational institute like that, placing before our eyes the best and most desirable achievements of other times and other nations in the various industrial crafts would be of inestimable value.”⁸⁰

While never becoming an American reproduction of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Brooklyn Museum of Arts and Sciences would collect and exhibit decorative arts. Under the auspices of Lockwood, the Brooklyn Museum’s collection of early-American arts would become particularly well defined. Understanding the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s plan to install the

⁷⁸ “Brooklyn’s Art Museum: The City Prepared to Issue Bonds for the first Section,” *New York Times*, January 27th 1895, 14.

⁷⁹ “Brooklyn’s Opportunity: Value of an Industrial Arts Museum,” *New York Tribune* June 19th 1889, 7.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

Bolles Collection in a series of period rooms, Lockwood organized the Brooklyn Museum's first American period room purchase in 1914.⁸¹

Simultaneous with the Hudson-Fulton Celebration in New York, the Philadelphia Museum of Art began organizing an "educational exhibit of furniture."⁸² Installed in a series of rooms created from mostly modern architectural elements, the long-term exhibit opened in 1910 displaying furniture from the Spanish Renaissance, seventeenth and-eighteenth century England, Louis XV and XVI France, and the American Colonial period.⁸³ As at Pendleton House, the "American Colonial Room" was not a particularly accurate display of life in colonial America and instead reflected the aesthetic tastes of the early twentieth century. Furniture dating from the third quarter of the eighteenth century was displayed with a mantelpiece, clocks, looking glass, and Argand lamps in the style of at least two decades later.⁸⁴

The incompleteness and inaccuracies of the period alcoves displayed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art were recognized shortly after their installation in 1909. Sara Yorke Stevenson, a curator, commented in 1911 that the alcoves were merely a "recent effort to exhibit furniture in proper settings" and that they represented "only a beginning, which however incomplete and tentative, is a forerunner for better things."⁸⁵ Curators argued that the interior of Memorial Hall, built in 1876 as part of the Centennial Exposition, was a particularly unsympathetic environment for the installation of early-American interiors (Figure 2.5). The building's lofty ceilings and

⁸¹ Hillary Murtha, "The Reuben Bliss Bedchamber at the Brooklyn Museum of Art," *Winterthur Portfolio* 40 (2006): 208.

⁸² In the late 1930s the Pennsylvania Museum officially changed its name to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which it had informally been called for nearly two decades. This thesis only uses its contemporary name for the sake of consistency.

⁸³ "Antique Furniture Wanted," *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum*, 7 (April 1909): 31.

⁸⁴ David L. Barquist, "'The Interior Will Be as Interesting as the Exterior is Magnificent' American Period Rooms at the Philadelphia Museum of Art" *Winterthur Portfolio* 46 (2012): 143.

⁸⁵ Sara York Stevenson, "Furniture Exhibit," *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum* 9 (January 1911): 1-9.

ornate interior were instead more appropriate to the type of scientific display associated with nineteenth-century institutions. The Philadelphia Museum of Art's first attempt at purchasing an entire interior, however, ended in failure when in 1916 the Metropolitan Museum of Art was able to acquire and remove the painted drawing room from Marmion Plantation, in Virginia before Edwin Barber could manage to raise funds for it.⁸⁶ The knowledge that both the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum of Art and Sciences were planning American wings complete with suites of period rooms, led the Philadelphia Museum of Art to develop a similar scheme when laying out the interior for its new building. In discussing the installation of the English Tower Hill Room, curator Hoarce H.F. Jayne clearly articulates the museum's dedication to the period room, stating:

Overlooking, for the moment, the significance of the architectural details from the point of view of woodcarving and designing, emphasis should be laid upon the fact that the room forms the first of a series, which, when complete, will be the ideal way to exhibit the paintings and furniture, the rugs and textiles, and the silver, china and glass of each particular period.⁸⁷

Construction on the Philadelphia Museum of Art's new building had begun in 1919. Its interior layout, however, would be continually altered throughout the 1920s by Fiske Kimball, who was hired as the museum's director in 1925.⁸⁸ Kimball greatly expanded the importance of the period room in the museum's exhibition scheme, envisioning an "unbroken historical chain of thirty-seven period interiors..." that would "give a visual dramatization of artistic history."⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Edwin AtLee Barber to Henry Watson Kent, July 19 1916, Metropolitan Museum Art Archives.

⁸⁷ Horace H. F. Jayne, "The Georgian Room," *Pennsylvania Museum Bulletin* 17 (May 1922): 9.

⁸⁸ Kimball was trained as an architect at Harvard and as an architectural historian at the University of Michigan. Working both as an academic and a practicing architect, Kimball published nearly two hundred books and articles and designed over twenty residential and academic projects. Kimball also is widely responsible for the documentation of Thomas Jefferson's architectural works and for the restoration of Monticello.

⁸⁹ Fiske Kimball, "A Room in the New Museum Building," *Pennsylvania Museum Bulletin*, 23 (November 1927): 3.

This strikingly Beaux-Arts plan placed artistic developments of many cultures into single chronological enfilade that enforced the artistic connections between European states and colonial America.⁹⁰ To provide the architectural settings required to execute this plan, Kimball purchased thirty-five historic interiors between 1925 and 1931, ten of which were installed when the Museum opened in 1928 with four of these being American in origin.⁹¹

In 1922, the Metropolitan Museum of Art reported that Robert and Emily de Forest had donated the funds to construct an entire new wing devoted to the display of American art. The wing was designed by Grosvenor Atterbury and included a three-story, freestanding building in a large courtyard. In announcing the news, the *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* stated that the new wing, “will teach the present and future generations of our people that the men to whose struggles they owe the foundations of the American Commonwealth were refined in their taste and by no means indifferent to beauty.”⁹² The American Wing would open two years later, in 1924.

A product of progressive museum theory, the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s American Wing had far reaching cultural implications. While not the earliest public art museum in the United States, the Metropolitan was certainly the richest and most powerful and its development is mirrored in the development of other institutions. In following the precedent set by London’s Victoria and Albert Museum, the Metropolitan attempted to shift domestic taste away from foreign revival styles being mechanically churned out. Considered a noble objective, due to the

⁹⁰ David L. Barquist, “‘The Interior will Be as Interesting as the Exterior is Magnificent’ American Period Rooms at the Philadelphia Museum of Art,” 146.

⁹¹ Carl Greenleaf Beede, “Period Rooms of the Philadelphia Museum: Houses are Exhibits. Too” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 12th 1928, 9.

⁹² Edward Robinson, “A Wing Devoted to American Art,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 17 (1922): 3.

progressive notion that aesthetics and citizenship were inherently connected, the Metropolitan Museum was joined by other major cultural institutions in its reformist mission.

In guiding public consumption, museums saw value in pre-industrial American cultural artifacts for many reasons. Symbolically, they represented an era before immigration, labor strikes, political polarization, shifting gender roles, and an ever-expanding industrial economy threatened the perceived societal norm. To the elites running the nation's major cultural institutions, America was defined by the ideals and strivings of its earliest settlers. This elite group was worried that these value systems were being polluted by "the tremendous changes in the character of our nation and the influx of foreign ideas utterly at variance with those held by the men who gave us the Republic."⁹³ Another reason early-American decorative arts were being collected and exhibited by museums was aesthetic. Writing for the *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum*, J. F. Copeland argued that the "colonial style" was a "good and individual style suited to our needs and our limitations, a style based on democratic ideals with as much simplicity as our affluence will permit, a style based upon the principles of good taste and common sense."⁹⁴ In presenting these ideals to patrons, curators exhibited the colonial interior as hygienic assemblies of minimally upholstered furniture set within neutrally painted paneled rooms with hardwood floors.

Developed to create a native taste, the American period room promoted nostalgia for an ideologically romanticized past. When utilized as a curatorial tool, the period room allowed visitors to project the objects held within a museum's collections into their own homes. By

⁹³ R.T.H. Halsey and Elizabeth Tower, *The Homes of Our Ancestors As Shown in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York: Garden City Publishing Co., 1937, xxiii.

⁹⁴ J.F. Copeland, "A Plea for the Colonial Style in Modern House Decoration and Furnishings," *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum*, 20 (February 1925): 88.

placing furniture pieces into a context, it became very easy to understand how to assemble a tasteful interior.

Images for Chapter One

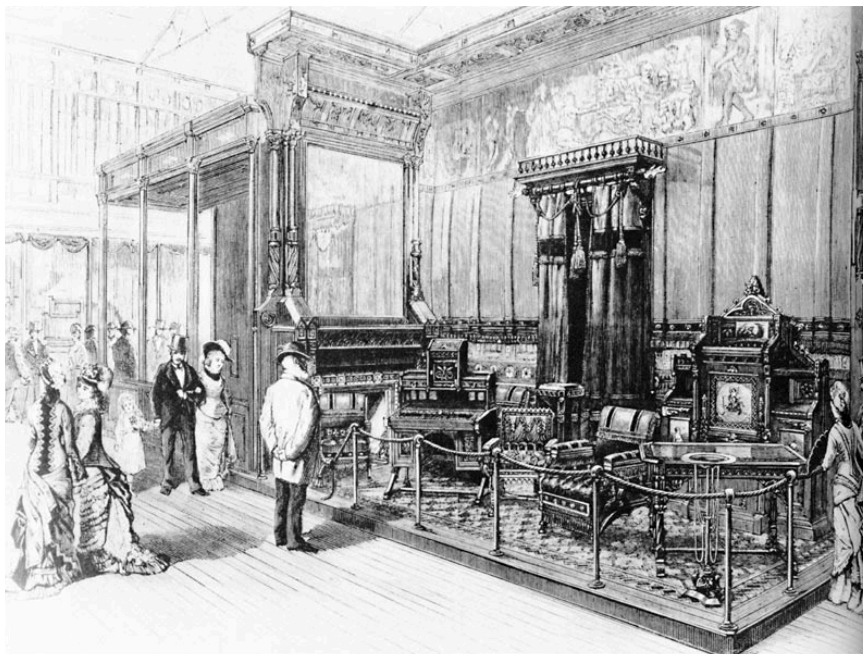


Figure 2.1: Kimbel & Cabus display at the 1876 Centennial Exposition.

Source: *Harper's Weekly Magazine*, December 2nd, 1876, 33.



Figure 2.2: A gallery of eighteenth-century furniture at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art [MMA] photographs.

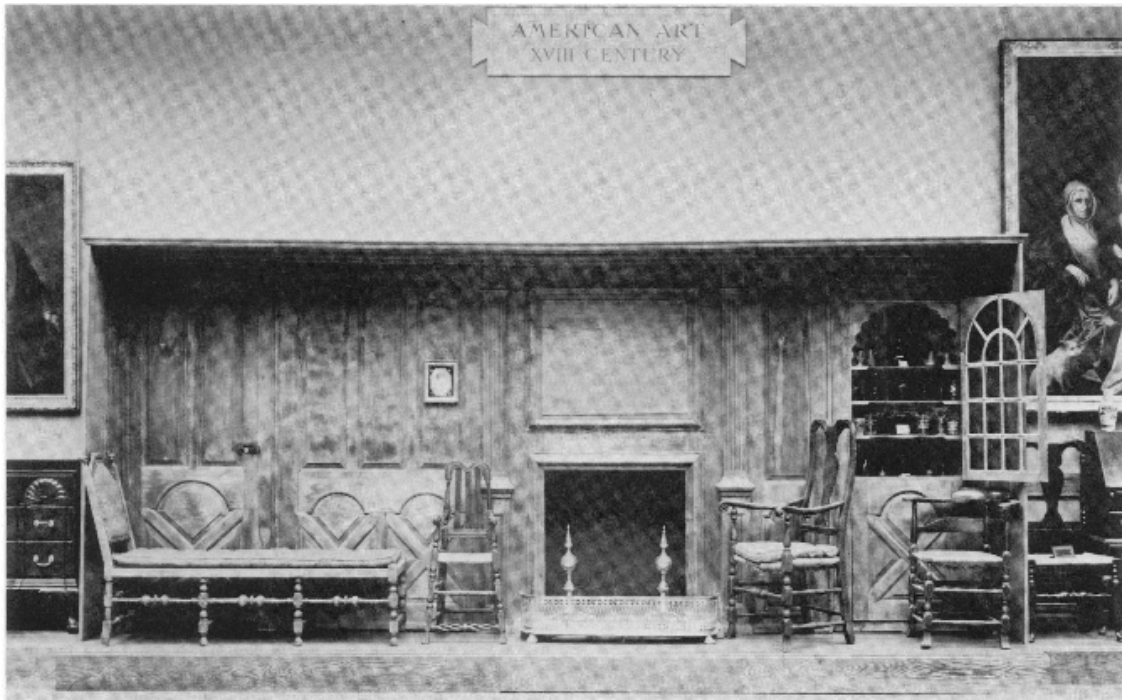


Figure 2.3: Fireplace wall from Newington Connecticut. This woodwork would later be installed in the American Wing as the Newington Room.

Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art as seen in Dianne H. Pilgrim, "Inherited from the Past-The American Period Room" *The American Art Journal*, 10 (May 1978): 9.



Figure 2.4: Parlor (1800) as installed by George Francis Dow in 1907 at the Essex Institute.

Source: The Essex Institute in Dianne H. Pilgrim, "Inherited from the Past: The American Period Room," *The American Art Journal*, 10 (1978): 8.



Figure 2.5: An installation of American furniture at Memorial Hall, Philadelphia in 1924.
Source: Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Chapter Two: Preserving America's Heritage

The Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired its first American period room in 1910, the same year William Sumner Appleton, Jr. founded the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA).⁹⁵ The collecting of American artifacts by museums occurred simultaneous to numerous large preservation efforts in the United States. Competing for historic resources, museums and preservation organizations valued historic buildings for different reasons. In collecting early-American interiors, museums hoped to redefine public taste and used the rooms they purchased as aesthetic backdrops for suites of furniture. Early preservation organizations often valued built heritage for its associational value with historical figures and events or for their connection to a deified past.

The symbolic value of colonial cultural objects was potent in the south where the Civil War had violently disrupted a way of life that had been in place since the early-seventeenth century. Constructed on the foundations of slavery, the built heritage of the south provided an identity for many white southerners who viewed the Civil War and Reconstruction as culturally destructive. In venerating antebellum monuments, white southerners attempted to assert the racist cultural values that had defined southern society before the Civil War. The economic and social repercussions of Reconstruction, however, made locally financed preservation work difficult.

The Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA) was the first, and one of the few, large private preservation group to appear in the south after the Civil War. The organization was founded in 1888 by Mary Jeffery Galt, of Norfolk, but was officially chartered in February 1889 by Cynthia Beverley Tucker Coleman of Williamsburg. Its purpose, as stated

⁹⁵ The Metropolitan's first American period room was the Hewlett Room. Dating to 1747, the room was a house in Woodbury, New York and was donated to the Metropolitan by Emily de Forest.

in its charter, was to “restore and preserve the ancient historic buildings and tombs of the State of Virginia and to acquire by purchase or gift the sites of such buildings and tombs with a view to their perpetuation and preservation.”⁹⁶ Modeled after the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, a private antebellum women’s historical agency chartered to foster patriotism and traditionalism through the protection of Washington’s home and gravesite, the APVA consisted of a largely female constituency with a Gentlemen’s Advisory Board.⁹⁷ Due to the social conservatism of southern society that regulated women to domestic matters, the Advisory Board represented the group publicly.

In the tradition of the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, the APVA promoted the preservation and appreciation of historic buildings not for their architectural or aesthetic merit but for their associational ties and ability to convey traditional sentiment. In doing its work the APVA played a prominent part in reprising the role of the south in the origin narrative of the United States. Southerners believed that the Civil War had effectively tainted the south’s image and that this was reflected in published histories of the United States. Instead of acknowledging the primacy of the Jamestown Settlement, northern historians centered the story of the American colonies in New England largely ignoring Virginia’s legislative assembly of 1619 in favor of the Mayflower Compact of 1620. While cultural reverence for the Anglo-Saxon Puritans was established, Virginia’s early settlers were characterized as convict laborers and economic profiteers. John Lesslie Hall, a professor of English at the College of William and Mary, thus advised the APVA in 1895 to “encourage those who are writing the true history of Virginia, and weed out of your libraries those nauseous volumes filled with lying abominations which, under

⁹⁶ “Jamestown and the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities”, *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 3 (January 1904): 323.

⁹⁷ James Michael Lindgren, *Preserving the old Dominion*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993, 44.

the name of history, are teaching the youth of Virginia that they are sprung from conflicts and felons rather than from the flower of the Anglo-Saxon race.”⁹⁸

In affirming Virginia’s place within the national narrative, the APVA turned its attention to the preservation and promotion of Jamestown. Serving as the president from 1890 until 1910 Isobel Bryan declared the importance of this site in the 1903 *Year Book of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities* stating:

From the first moment of our legal existence, as an Association, and more especially during the past year, the hopes and plans, labors and responsibilities of the Association might be well summed up in one word Jamestown. This sacred charge has at once been our inspiration and our goal. I think I may say that in a measure we have succeeded. It has been, at last rescued from oblivion, and our constant endeavor is to keep it and its pathetic history before our people. Our annual pilgrimage to the shrine of patriotism appeals in an especial way to the young, and educates them in lessons of loyalty.⁹⁹

Considered hallowed ground, the archeological ruins at Jamestown provided the physical evidence to Virginia’s claim of early American importance. The APVA saw the tidal island as symbol of their Protestant, Anglo-Saxon heritage and of Virginia’s precedence over Plymouth. Yet, by the end of the nineteenth century the privately owned archeological remains at Jamestown were severely threatened by erosion. In 1893 Edward E. Barney conveyed twenty-two and one half acres of the island, which included the site of the Jamestown Settlement as well as a Confederate fort built on the island during the Civil War, to the APVA as a gift.¹⁰⁰ As their first act of legal ownership the APVA built a fence around the parcel of land and installed a

⁹⁸ John Lesslie Hall, *Introductory Address Delivered by John Lesslie Hall, Ph.D., at the Jamestown Celebration Held May 13th, 1895*. as seen in James M. Lindergren, “For the Sake of Our Future: The Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities and the Regeneration of Traditionalism.” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 97 (January 1989): 47-74.

⁹⁹ Isobel Bryan, “Report of the President for 1903,” *Year Book of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities*, 1905, 6.

¹⁰⁰ “Jamestown and the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 3 (January 1904): 323.

caretaker who was granted, by an act of the State Legislature, the powers of a constable. The most pressing issue that faced the APVA, however, was the “angry waves” which were “washing Jamestown away.”¹⁰¹ Chiefly through the efforts of Mrs. J.L.M. Curry of Washington D.C, an appropriation for building a breakwater was obtained from Congress, by an act approved on August 17, 1894. Unfortunately, the appropriation was insufficient to engineer and construct an effective solution, and shortly after the breakwater was finished in June of 1895, it was consumed by the sea. A year later the Association again appealed to Congress and was granted another appropriation. The new breakwater was completed on November 16, 1901.¹⁰²

With the island secure from the encroachment of the James River, the APVA began to stabilize the ruins of the Jamestown Settlement in 1901.¹⁰³ Galt was insistent that Jamestown would not be rebuilt and that the “real true patriotic...and artistic ideas” for the restoration were “to alter as little as possible, to avoid all artificial appearance ...[and] to keep all attractiveness subordinate to the main features.” She wanted to carry out these precepts “as they take care of

¹⁰¹ “Report of the President for 1898 and 1899,” *Year Book of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities* 1 (1899): 3.

¹⁰² *The Virginia Historical Magazine* in 1904 described the new breakwater as “a splendid example of engineering skill, protecting fully the part of the shore along which it extends, and giving promise that it will do so for a long time to come. The United States government never did a better piece of work than this.”

¹⁰³ One of the most exciting archeological discoveries at Jamestown in the early twentieth century was the excavation of the “knight’s tomb.” The burial was noteworthy, as it was the only tomb ever found in the United States with indications of inlaid brasses such as seen on ancient monuments in England. While the brasses had disappeared, the channels in the stone into which they would have been fitted were “plainly visible.” The stone was carved with the figure of a knight with a pointed helmet and a scroll hanging from his mouth. Partly under the tomb lay a skeleton with spurs near the heels, and fragments of gold lace at the shoulders. After investigation, it was determined that the unknown knight was most likely Sir George Yeardley, one of the earliest governors of Virginia who died in 1627. The discovery was particularly of interest as it furthered the aristocratic association of the settlement and thus those who descended from early Virginians. J.K. Collins, “Jamestown and Vicinity,” *The Taylor-Trotwood Magazine* 3 (1906): 272.

old building in Italy,” because she intended to “preserve and not make new.”¹⁰⁴ Galt’s remarkably modern preservation strategy, likely influenced by her artistic training, was met with hostility by other Association members who wanted to commercialize their venture by reconstructing some of the ruin. It was the hope of many of the association members to “have Jamestown in perfect order...in 1907, when its Third Centennial will be celebrated.”

Jamestown’s tercentennial culminated when almost 8,000 white visitors descended on the island for a series of extravagant, celebratory events on Jamestown Day.¹⁰⁵ Despite Galt’s desire for the seventeenth-century ruins at Jamestown to retain a romantic “dignity and solemnity,” major beautification efforts had taken place in preparation for the festivities. Out of the work being done, the reconstruction of the 1639 Jamestown Church, of which only the masonry tower remained, was arguably the most important. To aid in the work, a hypothetical Gothic design was developed which was largely based on St. Luke’s Church in Isle of Wight County.¹⁰⁶ In rebuilding the nave, two eighteenth-century houses, deemed outside of the period of significance determined for the site, were demolished for their salt-glazed brick. While the APVA sanctioned the work, the actual reconstruction was overseen and financed by the Colonial Dames, a women’s patriotic organization that often contributed to preservation campaigns, that presented

¹⁰⁴ Mary J. Galt to Lucy Parke Chamberlayne Bagby, 23 March 1896, Bagby Family Papers as seen in James Michael Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993, 62.

¹⁰⁵ African Americans were not allowed to visit the Jamestown site. “The Day at Jamestown: Address by Mr. Bryce Parade of American and Foreign Soldiers, Sailors and Marines,” *New York Tribune*, May 17th, 1907, 7. The celebrations included state officials, foreign dignitaries, a “spectacular water carnival” of floats of rare beauty” and a flotilla of war ships.

¹⁰⁶ St. Luke’s Church is the oldest surviving brick church located in one of the original thirteen colonies. The church has historically been dated to 1632, but modern scholars argue that it was likely built in the early 1680s.

the restored church back to the APVA during the Jamestown Day festivities.¹⁰⁷ Upon its dedication, the church became a strong symbol of the Jamestown Settlement's Protestant precedence in colonial America.

Simultaneous to their work at Jamestown, the APVA engaged in a series of other preservation related projects. In 1889 the Association purchased the Williamsburg Powder Magazine. Williamsburg, which had taken Jamestown's place as the capital of the Virginia Colony in 1699, had been ravaged by the Civil War and by the 1880s was experiencing a population exodus and an economic depression. Built in 1715, the Powder Magazine had deteriorated significantly since its use in the Revolutionary War, and at the time of its purchase by the APVA, it was being used as a stable. After the APVA stabilization the octagonal building they transformed into a public museum for the display of colonial artifacts. Two years before the purchase of the Powder Magazine, the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway donated the land upon which the House of Burgesses had once sat to the APVA. While the reconstruction of the House of Burgesses was the result of later efforts made by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the APVA drew local attention to the site by the erection of a commemorative plaque and a public ceremony steeped in patriotic sentiments. The APVA also helped restore Burton Parish Church. Williamsburg, like Jamestown, was important to the APVA for its associational values. Coleman herself stated "The houses [in Williamsburg] themselves possess no special architectural attraction, other than the softened lines or neutral tint of age, not even amounting always to

¹⁰⁷ "Bryce Will be Orator: Jamestown Day to be celebrated on Old Island, Dazzling Water Carnival," *Special to the Washington Post*, May 12th 1907, 2.

picturesqueness.”¹⁰⁸ Instead the APVA was interested in Williamsburg for its ability to teach public history through object lessons.

The APVA was the first large private preservation group to appear in the south after the Civil War. It also funded and advocated for the bulk of the preservation activities that occurred during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the south. Elsewhere, the post-Reconstruction economic climate made privately financed preservation largely unrealistic. Instead, preservationists often had to rely on funds garnered from the federal, state, or municipal government. Contemporary to the APVA’s efforts in Jamestown, the Ladies’ Hermitage Association was established in Nashville, Tennessee in order to “save” the ancestral estate of Andrew Jackson, known as the Hermitage, from being turned into a home for aged Confederate veterans. Governor Benton McMillian conditionally conveyed the house and twenty-five surrounding acres to the Ladies’ Hermitage Association on April 6th, 1889.¹⁰⁹ With control of the house and land gained by an act of legislation, the major task that confronted the Ladies’ Hermitage Association was acquiring Jackson’s furnishings. Despite the fact that they were still in the house, the possessions of the seventh president remained the property of his descendants, who offered them to the Ladies’ Hermitage Association at a price \$17,500 with the ability to finance the purchase over a four year period at a three percent interest rate. By the time the offer expired in 1896, the Ladies’ Hermitage Association had failed to raise enough money to purchase the furnishings. This failure was symbolic of larger issues the Association was

¹⁰⁸ Coleman, misc. papers, “The Annals of Williamsburg, Virginia,” as seen in James Michael Lindgren, *Preserving the old Dominion*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993, 78.

¹⁰⁹ Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., *Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States Before Williamsburg*, New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1965, 71.

facing.¹¹⁰ While public interest existed around the Hermitage, its rural location was so isolated that it seemed almost economically impossible to run as a historic site in an era before automobile tourism. The financial issues faced by the Association were somewhat alleviated when its vice-regent Novella Davis Marks appeared before the state legislator and secured an appropriation of fifty dollars a month for the care and upkeep of the property. This monthly sum doubled in 1911 and the Ladies' Hermitage Association was also granted an additional \$1,000 for improvements and repairs to the property. Through these efforts and a series of smaller fund raising campaigns. The association was eventually able to purchase the bulk of Jackson's furniture. The association was also able to gain Federal funding through the advocacy of Theodore Roosevelt, who visited the Hermitage in 1907.¹¹¹ Upon his return to Washington, Roosevelt appealed to the Senate to grant \$25,000 to the Ladies' Hermitage Association, one-fifth of which would be paid immediately and the balance put into United States Bonds as a fund.¹¹²

Early preservation efforts in the south attempted to promote southern predominance in the colonial history of the United States while also regenerating a traditional ethic of white supremacy. In New England, where the physical scars of the Civil War were less defined, preservation efforts largely attempted to protect Anglo-American cultural artifacts from the waves of southern and eastern European immigrants who had begun pouring into northern cities

¹¹⁰“Old Hickory's' Historic Homestead: Ladies of the Hermitage Association Taking Steps Toward Putting the Place in Thorough Repair,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 28th, 1897, 25.

¹¹¹“Old Hickory's Home: Bill Presented to Congress for Its Preservation,” *The Washington Post*, January 8th, 1908, 4. “Nation to Save Old Jackson Home: Bill Introduced in the House in Accordance with President's Message,” *New York Tribune*, January 8th, 1908, 6.

¹¹² Only the \$5,000 cash payment passed, the \$20,000 reserve fund never came into being. Hosmer, *Presence of the Past*, 72.

in the 1880s.¹¹³ As public histories of the United States in the early twentieth century already favored New England, preservation efforts tended to focus on sites of local importance instead of those with national significance, as was the case in the south.

The 1905 fight to save the Paul Revere House in Boston served as a catalyst for the forming of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (now Historic New England). While SPNEA was New England's foremost preservation agency, local activism surrounding the saving of historical buildings had existed in Boston since the 1863 public campaign to save the Hancock House. The Hancock House was built between 1734 and 1737 for Thomas Hancock, a wealthy merchant. After Thomas Hancock's death, his nephew, John Hancock, inherited the property.¹¹⁴ During the Revolutionary War, the house was known to have played host to a roster of important American heroes including the French admiral Charles Hector, the comte d'Estaing, Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, and President George Washington.¹¹⁵ By the mid-nineteenth century the storied house had fallen in disrepair, and Hancock's descendants were looking to sell it. In 1859 Massachusetts Governor Nathaniel Prentice Banks suggested that the state should buy the house, a proposition that was favorably received by the Legislature but that was ultimately defeated by opposition from citizens living in rural parts of the state. In 1863 the City of Boston attempted to secure the house for itself, ultimately failing and in 1863 the house was sold at public auction to a real-estate developer who

¹¹³ By 1910 seventy percent of Boston's population was either foreign born or first generation Americans. Whitney A. Martinko, "Progress and Preservation: Representing History in Boston's Landscape of Urban, 1820-1860," *The New England Quarterly* 2 (June 2009): 305.

¹¹⁴ Drake S. Adams, *Old Landmarks and Historic Personages of Boston, Profusely Illustrated*, Boston: J. R. Osgood, 338.

¹¹⁵ Drake S. Adams, *Old Landmarks and Historic Personages of Boston, Profusely Illustrated*, 342.

demolished it to build modern townhouses.¹¹⁶ Before the impending demolition took place, a small group of Bostonians, led by the noted historian T.O.H.P. Burnham, posted large signs throughout the city calling for their fellow citizens to buy the Hancock house back from the developer. While the efforts to save the Hancock house from demolition ultimately failed, the lingering regret and anger over its destruction helped rouse popular support for the rehabilitation of the Old South Meeting House, a site associated with the organization of the Boston Tea Party, which was slated for demolition in 1871.

Public disapproval over the government's inability to save the Hancock house caused most New England preservationists to believe that the private sector was more adept at dealing with such matters. Furthermore, by the early twentieth century, municipal governments in New England were increasingly controlled by Democrats who largely represented immigrants, the working class, and trade unions. In Boston, the Irish had come into power through the political skills of John Fitzgerald Martin Lomasney and James Michael Curley. Denouncing wealthy Anglo-Americans for exploiting immigrant labor, Fitzgerald, who served as Boston's mayor from 1906 to 1908 and then again from 1910 until 1914, proposed numerous construction projects that would symbolically erase parts of the city connected with Boston's Republican elite.¹¹⁷ A mutual distrust was established between the democratic political machine and a growing faction of Bostonians that included cultural traditionalists, preservationists, antiquarians, and those who viewed trade-union politics as dangerously socialist. Preservationists were concerned with the state of Boston's historical buildings, many of which were located in the North End of the city, which had deteriorated into an immigrant slum. Writing about the city in

¹¹⁶ Whitney A. Martinko, "Progress and Preservation: Representing History in Boston's Landscape of Urban, 1820-1860," *The New England Quarterly* 2 (June 2009): 305.

¹¹⁷ James M. Lindgren, "A Constant Incentive to Patriotic Citizenship: Historic Preservation in Progressive -Era Massachusetts," *The New England Quarterly*, 4 (December 1991): 596.

1894, Samuel Adams Drake, author of such books as *The Making of New England* (1886), and *Our Great Benefactors* (1885), described the North End:

In all the older parts of Boston...the atmosphere is actually thick with the vile odors of garlic and onions-of macaroni and lazzaroni. The dirty tenements swarm with greasy, voluble Italians and bear signs as Banca Italiane, Grocery Italiane, Hotel Italiane, constantly repeated from door to door. One can scarce hear the sound of his own English mother-tongue...here is good Father Taylor's old brick Bethel turned into a Catholic chapel! What would Father Taylor have to say to that. Has it come to this, that a mass-house should stand within the very pale of the thrice consecrated old Puritan sanctuary.¹¹⁸

Those interested in the preservation of Boston's Protestant heritage were worried that the Democrats were more interested in politicizing the immigrant vote and removing wood-framed fire hazards from densely populated neighborhoods than in protecting cultural heritage.

The Revere House, located in Boston's North End, was a critical preservation battle in New England. Symbolically, the house memorialized an important figure within the myths of American history. It also happened to be the oldest surviving building in Boston. Furthermore, cultural traditionalist in New England felt that Paul Revere's story could be translated into an important assimilation lesson. Revere, they argued, had been an independent, patriotic artisan whose French immigrant family had lived humbly and had willingly Anglicized their name from Rivoire in 1729. By 1905 the Paul Revere Memorial Association (PRMA) had been founded to raise the required \$30,000 to save the historic site slated for demolition, succeeding in its purchase of the house in 1907.¹¹⁹ Serving as the president of the PRMA, Curtis Guild, Jr., the lieutenant governor of Massachusetts, predicted that the restored home would "serve as a daily lesson to the youth of that district in Massachusetts' ideals of loyalty, simplicity, and civic

¹¹⁸ Samuel Adams Drake, *Our Colonial Homes*, Boston: Lee and Shepard Publisher, 1894, 19.

¹¹⁹ "Real Estate: Historic North End House Sold. Paul Revere's Home Conveyed to Memorial Association," *Boston Daily Globe* June 29th, 1907, 2.

pride.” Moreover, the site would become “a reminder to new citizens of the service due from them and their children to the Commonwealth.”¹²⁰

Central to the success of the PRMA was the work of William Sumner Appleton Jr., the association’s secretary. Appleton was a member of a wealthy family and grew up in the materially and culturally privileged world of Boston’s Beacon Hill. Passing his childhood among the social elite of New England, Appleton was educated at Harvard University where he was particularly influenced by Charles Eliot Norton and Denman Ross. Norton served as a professor of fine arts and stressed the interrelationship between aesthetics and morality, both of which were considered to be in a free fall during the latter part of the nineteenth century in the United States by many cultural leaders and intellectuals. Ross, an instructor in the Graduate School of Architecture, was a leading figure in the Boston arts-and-crafts movement, which was based on the work being done in England by John Ruskin and William Morris of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

In 1910 Appleton’s growing dismay over the rapid disappearance of New England’s cultural heritage as well as his outrage over the alterations to the Jonathan Harrington House in Lexington, Massachusetts, led him to found the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. Envisioning a strong and aggressive private society, Appleton hoped that SPNEA eventually would be able to act intently and efficiently whenever a historic site was in need of protection. In an article published in *Art & Archaeology*, Appleton stated the goals for SPNEA as “to own for purposes of preservation, appropriate old houses throughout New England, or else take such steps, by means of advice or financial assistance, as may lead other societies to

¹²⁰ Curtis Guild, Jr., Circular Letter, 27 November 1907, Revere House Scrapbook as seen in Lindgren, “A Constant Incentive to Patriotic Citizenship,” 597.

undertake the work of such ownership and preservation.”¹²¹ Believing in the power of private ownership, Appleton was convinced that preservation could be most effective if it operated outside of the highly volatile political environment of the early twentieth century. Appleton, however, was by no means reticent in his political convictions and constantly supported plans to “bring in a ‘higher class of elected officials’” than the steadfastly Irish politicians in control of Boston.¹²²

In its actions, SPNEA operated differently than other early preservation associations. As Appleton had a scholarly background in architectural history, his interest in historic buildings was more from the point of view of an antiquarian than a patriot. While SPNEA definitely attached associational values to the buildings it preserved, it also concentrated on aesthetic values. Appleton found that the most interesting buildings were those with intrinsic architectural and aesthetic merit as well as historical significance, describing the Bowler-Vernon House in Newport, Rhode Island as, “worth preserving on account of its own artistic merits alone...”¹²³

While SPNEA represented the most professional preservation group in New England, the region was particularly rich in historical associations that often saved old houses as part of their work. In Portsmouth, New Hampshire a committee “with members from all parts of the country...formed the Thomas Aldridge Association” in 1907.¹²⁴ The association venerated Aldrich (1836-1907) and in 1908 purchased the eighteenth-century house where he spent his

¹²¹ William Sumner Appleton Jr., “Destruction and Preservation of Old Buildings in New England,” *Art & Archeology* 8 (1919): 144.

¹²² Appleton to Mrs. Martin W. Littleton, 28 October 1912, Monticello file, Historic New England as quoted in Lindgren, “A Constant Incentive to Patriotic Citizenship,” 599.

¹²³ Lorna Condon, “Appleton, William Sumner Jr.,” in *American National Biography*, ed. Mark C. Carnes and John A. Garraty, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 566. Appleton, “Destruction and Preservation of Old Buildings in New England,” 160.

¹²⁴ “Memorial to T.B. Aldrich: Friends Propose to Buy House in Portsmouth for a Museum,” *New York Times*, August 26th 1907, 7.

childhood, which also had the advantage of being the setting of his highly acclaimed autobiographical work, *The Story of a Bad Boy*.¹²⁵ With the assistance of the author's son, the Association furnished the rooms in the house utilizing descriptions found in the *Story of a Bad Boy*. When opened to the public, the house became a museum documenting an affluent 1840s Portsmouth home. Elsewhere in New England, houses were saved by familial groups who would join together to rescue their ancestral homesteads. The Aldens and the Howlands, who both claimed Mayflower ancestry, were particularly active during the early twentieth century. The Pilgrim John Howland Society, organized in 1897, held annual reunions in Plymouth, Massachusetts where, in 1912, they purchased the home of their shared ancestor to open as a museum.¹²⁶ The Alden family was successful in saving its homestead in Duxbury, Massachusetts, and at a 1905 family reunion, set up a fund with annual donations to provide money for preservation efforts.¹²⁷

New England represented an amiable environment for preservation work to take place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A wealth of historic sites combined with a vocal and powerful community interested in local history and the largely urban character of much of the region's population gave preservation work the support it lacked elsewhere on the East Coast. While cities in the middle Atlantic states were experiencing similar urban conditions to those in New England, the preservation efforts that were taking place in Philadelphia and in New York resembled the work being done in the south more than the work being done in and

¹²⁵ Hosmer, *Presence of the Past*, 115. "The Aldrich Memorial: Author's Boyhood Home as 'A Bad Boy' Saw It," *New York Tribune* June 28th 1908, 19.

¹²⁶ "Howland House to be Preserved," *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 21st 1915, 9. "Discuss Howland House: Descendants Consider Restoring Pilgrim's Plymouth House," *New York Times*, August 29th 1937, 5.

¹²⁷ Hosmer, *Presence of the Past*, 118.

around Boston. Most of the preservation work in the middle Atlantic states during this period was carried out by patriotic groups that hoped to save sites associated with the Revolutionary War.¹²⁸ In New York, this manifested itself through a mania for the houses that served as temporary residences for George Washington and his generals. New York, however, would foster the growth of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society (ASHPS), which formed in 1895 under the leadership of Andre H. Green, president of the Commissioners of the State Reservation at Niagara Falls.¹²⁹ The ASHPS served as a network of advocates and its chief method was to act as custodian for scenic areas and historic sites by acquiring them, maintaining them, and keeping them open to the public free of charge.

The ASHPS was more active in the protection of natural landscapes than built heritage, but it did aid in the preservation of two important buildings in New York. The first, Philipse Manor Hall, a house dating to 1693, had been purchased by the city of Yonkers in 1868 for use as a city hall.¹³⁰ By the 1890s, the city considered the house inadequate and was considering demolishing it to construct a new building on its site.¹³¹ In 1895 the newly formed ASHPS joined other groups protesting Philipse Manor Hall's impending demolition. Despite numerous appeals to the state, the matter was not resolved until 1908 when Mrs. William F. Cochran purchased the house for \$50,00, stipulating that the state would hold the title to the house but ASHPS would act as its custodian.¹³² The second house the ASHPS became involved with was Hamilton Grange, the countryseat of Alexander Hamilton, which is located in northern Manhattan. By 1889, The

¹²⁸ Hosmer, *Presence of the Past*, 78.

¹²⁹ "To Preserve Historic Places," *New York Times*, March 27th, 1895, 2.

¹³⁰ "The Old Philipse Manor: Yonkers City Hall A Relic of the Feudal System in America," *New York Tribune*, September 9th, 1900, 31.

¹³¹ "Old Manor House In Danger: The Yonkers Common Council Threatens to Remove It," *New York Tribune*, October 6th, 1895, 17.

¹³² "Philipse Manor Preservation," *New York Tribune*, January 8th, 1908, 2.

Grange was in foreclosure and had been condemned for destruction in order to allow for the implementation of the Manhattan street grid, then just reaching that area of Harlem. The owner of the house presented it to St. Luke's Episcopal Church, located a block away, which spent \$10,000 moving the house several hundred yards so that it was adjacent to the church building.¹³³ By the early twentieth century, St. Luke's was looking to dispose of Hamilton Grange and despite public interest in the home, two bills to allocate funds to purchase the building failed in the state legislature. The issue was that the \$30,000 price the church had placed on Hamilton Grange was deemed too high, and although the ASHPS had petitioned the church numerous times to lower the price, it remained steadfast.¹³⁴ A 1924 offer by a Chicago-based Hamilton Association to purchase the house and re-erect it Illinois sufficiently motivated the ASHPS to take action. President of the Association, George F. Kunz, petitioned influential New Yorkers for funds to preserve the house within New York City.¹³⁵ He secured \$100,000 for the society, half of which was for the purchase of the house and land; the other half went into a trust to fund future maintenance.

In Philadelphia, historic preservation efforts revolved around the city's collection of eighteenth century buildings that related to the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the forming of the United States of America. At the center of these efforts stood the restoration of Independence Hall, which by 1896 had been abandoned by the City Council for a new city hall and turned over to the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR).¹³⁶ Under the control of

¹³³ Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., *Presence of the Past*, 99.

¹³⁴ "Alexander Hamilton's Home Here to be a Museum," *New York Times*, March 7th, 1912, 11.

¹³⁵ "A Hamilton Memorial," *New York Tribune*, November 19, 1924, 18. "Hamilton's Country Home to Become Historical Museum," *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 29th, 1924, 4.

¹³⁶ The building was originally to be shared between the Pennsylvania Society of the Sons of the Revolution and the Philadelphia chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, however, a series

the DAR, Independence Hall underwent a series of sweeping restoration projects. While the first floor of the building had been open to the public during the 1876 Centennial Exposition, the second floor of Independence Hall had never been publicly exhibited. As their first action, the DAR consulted T. Mellon Rogers, a young Philadelphia architect who offered his services for free, and together they planned a restoration of the second floor.¹³⁷ The work on Independence Hall did not stop there. At the end of 1896, the city agreed to pay for a complete restoration of the building at an estimated cost of \$50,000.¹³⁸

Early twentieth century preservation efforts varied by locality on the East Coast of the United States. Private associations formed throughout New England, the middle Atlantic, and the south. However, it was only in New England that government interference was actively avoided. Preservation efforts in the south and the middle Atlantic focused primarily upon the saving of historic sites for their associational ties to either pivotal figures or events in early American history. As these sites were of national significance and valuable for their object lessons in patriotism and citizenship, it was argued that they should receive public funding. In New England, sites were deemed worthy of preservation for a multitude of reason including associational value but architectural and aesthetic reasons were also considered. While the preservation of the Revere House may be analogous to the type of work taking place in the south, many buildings saved in New England for associational reasons were tied not a specific historical figure but rather to a larger romanticized Anglo-American past. The pre-industrial past was glorified by New England preservationists who saw cultural artifacts from the seventeenth,

of quarrels and misunderstands between the two organization led to the Sons withdrawing from the site in 1896. "Withdrew From Independence Hall: Result of the Quarrel of the Sons and Daughters of the Revolution," *New York Times*, March 18th, 1896, 1.

¹³⁷ "Restored Independence Hall," *New York Times*, July 3rd, 1898, 3.

¹³⁸ Hosmer, *Presence of the Past*, 86.

eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as honest in their construction and noble in their simple detailing. This view was ultimately shared by museum directors and curators who collected American objects for their aesthetic value and symbolic tie to a time before mechanical production and assembly lines. As the institutions collecting American interiors were primarily art museums they evaluated design and architecture according to received standards usually applied to painting, sculpture, and other fine arts.

Chapter Three: The Cupola House

Due to the rising interest in the preservation of architectural heritage in the early twentieth century, museums acted discretely in their purchase of interiors so as not to expose themselves to public criticism. Despite facing disapproval from numerous early preservation organizations, including the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA) and the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society (ASHPS), museums believed that their period rooms delivered important interiors from private hands into the public realm. Especially in era before widespread automobile ownership made private domestic travel feasible, centralizing important rooms from varying regions in a single urban institution did increase the public accessibility of architectural heritage. However, architectural fragments represented a departure from the normal art objects that American museums had traditionally collected and thus posed numerous curatorial issues. The following four case studies detail the conflict between preservation organizations and American art museums over the acquisition of interiors from the Cupola House (Chapter Three), the Powel House (Chapter Four), the Wentworth-Gardner House (Chapter Five), and the City Tavern and Hotel (Chapter Five).

The Brooklyn Museum was one of the earliest institutions to purchase American woodwork with the intention of developing a series of period rooms. The museum purchased its first room, the Danbury Alcove, in 1915. Unlike the subsequent rooms the museum acquired,

which were bought directly from their owners, the Danbury Alcove was purchased from an antiques dealer in Danbury, Connecticut. The Danbury woodwork came to the museum with no known provenance, and consisting of only a fireplace wall, two walls of wainscoting and a corner cupboard. Demonstrating the many intellectual issues in purchasing undocumented woodwork, it was quickly discovered that the Danbury Alcove was an assemblage of elements from many different sources. In response to this first purchase, the Brooklyn Museum spent the next fourteen years carefully assembling a series of eighteen interiors that when opened to the public in 1929, were considered the most complete and accurate assemblage of American rooms in any museum. The Brooklyn Museum's period rooms were distinctive from those displayed at other institutions as numerous rooms from a single house were exhibited together. Commenting on this curatorial decision, Luke Vincent Lockwood, a member of the Museum's Board of Governors, stated:

This method of arranging differs from that employed by other museums in that in most cases the ground floor, with entrance, exterior and complete group of rooms is shown, thus giving the impression to the visitor that he is in a house and not in a room isolated from its original position. In such instances where it was impossible to obtain more than a single room, the illusion was obtained by hallways having the same height of ceiling as the room shown.¹³⁹

Additionally, the American period rooms at the Brooklyn Museum were arranged regionally “thus enabling the student to study and compare the architectural differences of New England, New York and the Southern State homes.”¹⁴⁰ Acquired for their ornamental paneling, four rooms and the central hallway of the Cupola House, also known as the Francis Corbin House, were installed at the Brooklyn Museum between 1927 and 1929 (Figure 3.1). Purchased from an elderly resident of Edenton, North Carolina, the removal of the Cupola House woodwork by the

¹³⁹ Luke Vincent Lockwood, “The New Section of Early American Rooms,” *The Brooklyn Museum Quarterly* 17(January 1930): 1.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

museums in 1918 caused public revolt. The residents of Edenton organized into the Cupola House Association and petitioned the museum to return the house's paneling, initiating an argument over the museum's responsibility in managing cultural heritage.

Edenton was an important port in colonial North Carolina. While an initial settlement was established in close proximity to the present-day city in the 1650s, the formal planning of what was to become Edenton did not occur until the 1720s. This plan imposed a grid of streets that divided the city into salable lots. In 1722 a lot located on Broad Street, the city's major thoroughfare, near the bay was granted to John Lovick with the provision that he construct a dwelling there within two years. In the ensuing four years, the property changed hands numerous times without any of the subsequent owners electing to build a house. The earliest reference to a house on this lot is in the 1726 deed of sale from Richard Sanderson to John Dunston. Dunston's death later that year prompted his widow to sell the property back to Sanderson in 1727. Over the next thirty years the property was sold several more times.¹⁴¹ In 1756 the lot was purchased by Francis Corbin, who had moved to Edenton in 1747 from England to serve as the Earl of Granville's land agent.¹⁴² Wielding considerable influence, Corbin was apparently a corrupt land agent. An early-twentieth-century booklet detailing the history of North Carolina notes that he "set out to extort and impose in every way upon the people. Excessive fees were charged, and

¹⁴¹Dianne H. Pilgrim, "Reopening the Period Rooms at the Brooklyn Museum," *Antiques* 126 (October 1984): 41.

¹⁴² Due to its vast size and regional differences, in 1691 the proprietors of the Carolina colony appointed a governor for the entire colony and a deputy governor for its northern half. This arrangement proved so beneficial in the administration of the colony that in 1712, North and South Carolina were officially divided. While North Carolina remained a proprietary colony, ruled by eight proprietors, South Carolina was made a royal colony in 1719. By 1729, seven of the eight Lords Proprietors had agreed to sell their shares of North Carolina to King George II, transforming it to a royal colony. The eighth proprietor, George Cateret, refused to sell his interest in the colony. Descended from one of the original Lords Proprietors, Cateret continued to own one-eighth of the colony's land, naming the territory the Granville District after he inherited the title the Earldom of Granville in 1744.

surveys and grants to those who had previously purchased land were declared void in order that more fees might be exerted from them.”¹⁴³ While proving extremely unpopular with colonists, Corbin effectively bolstered his personal fortune.¹⁴⁴

The house is quite similar to the type of residential architecture built in New England in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This similarity had long caused historians to speculate that the house originally had been constructed in the 1720s when Richard Sanderson, who had migrated to North Carolina from New England, owned the land the house sits on.¹⁴⁵ This theory was laid to rest in 1991 when a series of key-year dendrochronology tests were employed on the timber frame. Results from the tests confirmed that the southern yellow pine structural members of the Francis Corbin house were felled after the growing season of 1757 and immediately hewed and sawn into structural timbers. Thus, the house was constructed for Corbin after his purchase of the lot in 1756.¹⁴⁶

A curious blend of post-medieval and Palladian influences, the Cupola House is a two-and-a-half story wood building with a steep roof and a central cross gable. The house is dominated by a striking octagonal cupola that provides a view of Edenton Bay, while also ventilating the house below utilizing the stack effect. Fronted by a deep garden, the house is anchored by massive brick exterior end chimneys. Marked by an overhanging second story that is visually supported by a series of equally spaced, carved brackets, the main facade is five-bays long. Recent research has confirmed that the house was originally clad with wood siding that was

¹⁴³ Martha H. Haywood et. al, *The North Carolina Booklet*, Raleigh: North Carolina Society of the Daughters of the Revolution, 1926, 185.

¹⁴⁴ Corbin was accused of the unlawful levy of exorbitant fees, and in 1759 he was forced to resign his office. His reputation was redeemed in later life, when he aided in the completion of St. Paul’s Church. Before his death in 1767, he was made colonel of a local militia and became a prominent voice in the local affairs of Edenton.

¹⁴⁵ Christopher Cittenden, “Historic House’s Original woodwork in Brooklyn Museum,” High Point Enterprise, March 11, 1964, 12.

¹⁴⁶ Thomas R. Butchko, *Edenton: An Architectural Portrait*, Edenton: Edenton Woman’s Club, 1992, 115.

carved to imitate ashlar blocks. The existing lap and beaded siding on the first and second floors has been determined to date from an 1819 renovation when the owner, Nathaniel Bond, also added the striking Greek Revival front porch. Other alterations to the exterior of the house include the removal of an octagonal veranda that originally wrapped around the base of the cupola.¹⁴⁷

The interior of the house is defined by a naive attempt at classical symmetry. Divided by a central hall, the first floor contains four rooms all of differing sizes. Defined by bold carving, the hallway woodwork includes elaborately pedimented door surrounds and paneled wainscoting. At the rear of the hall is a compact stair rising from a spiral newel (Figure 3.2). The dramatically ramped and molded railing is carried by turned balusters, while floral carved brackets accent the treads. The east parlor, the largest room in the house, is fully paneled with a dentil cornice and egg-and-dart molded window surrounds. The chimneypiece has a pedimented overmantel embellished with a wealth of classical motifs including foliated modillions and floral medallions (Figure 3.3). The north wall of this room contains a massive arched buffet flanked by thin pilasters (Figure 3.4). Smaller in size, the west parlor also has an elaborate mantelpiece, but the walls are plastered rather than paneled (Figure 3.5). The two rear rooms, a bedroom and a pantry, are plainly finished and are entered through simple doorways. The second story shows a similar arrangement, with the large rooms paneled and the smaller one plastered; both are treated more simply although each has a pedimented chimneypiece with flat acanthus consoles.¹⁴⁸

Though the house is rich in ornament, its paneling and carving are somewhat provincial. The paneling is poorly proportioned to the house's interior and much of the carved elements are

¹⁴⁷ Reid Thomas, "Cupola House Recent Discoveries," Edenton Historical Commission, February 11th, 2013.

¹⁴⁸ Purchase blank, 1918, Cupola House, period room binder, Records of the Department of Decorative Arts, Brooklyn Museum of Art Archives.

simple. As a composition the house displays a seemingly disparate collection of styles, lying well outside of the defined architectural traditions of North Carolina.¹⁴⁹

It is not known how long Corbin occupied the Cupola House. Results from the dendrochronology tests taken in 1991 detail that the house was likely completed in 1761, the same year Corbin married Jean Innes of New Hanover County. Jean Corbin remained at her plantation, Point Pleasant, throughout the couple's marriage and Francis Corbin likely only occupied the Cupola House when business brought him into Edenton. After 1765, Francis Corbin very rarely left Point Pleasant and he died there in 1767.¹⁵⁰ Corbin's heirs sold the property in 1777 to Dr. Samuel Dickinson and upon his death the house transferred to his youngest daughter, Penelope Barker Bond, née Dickinson, whose descendants continued to occupy the house up through the early twentieth century.

By the time of the Civil War, the Cupola House had been inherited by four unmarried daughters; Elizabeth Mary Bond (1819-1892), Sarah Penelope Bond (1821-1879), Annie D. Bond (1823-1893), and Margaret E. Bond (1821-1910). After the death of Sarah Bond, the three remaining sisters were joined by a niece, Matilda Penelope Bond (____-1925). The four women lived on a meager income earned from renting an investment property in Edenton that was supplemented by the periodic sale of family antiques. Despite their apparent poverty, the sisters did open their house to the public and an article in the *Raleigh News and Observer*, published in 1892, described the Bond Sisters as "old landmarks of Edenton, of a historic lineage that goes back to the early history of the town, venerable in years and greatly esteemed and honored."¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Catherine W. Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture* Raleigh: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990, 25.

¹⁵⁰ Butchko, *Edenton: An Architectural Portrait*, 117.

¹⁵¹ "Cupola House to Open its Doors," *Raleigh News and Observer*, February 6th, 1892, 3.

As the only remaining members of the Bond family left in Edenton by 1900, Margret and Matilda Bond became fixtures of local society. Remaining at the Cupola House, the two women lived in rooms that had reportedly not been altered since their construction. Owing to the growing interest in the property, an unnamed staff member from the *Charlotte Daily Observer* went to Edenton to tour the house and interview its elderly owner in 1906. Describing the Cupola House as the town's "curiosity of curiosities," the reporter noted the house's peculiar exterior architectural treatment and its incredibly intact paneled interior, mentioned as being "black with age." The interior was described as being filled with a remarkable collection of early-American furniture including a "collection of china and silverware, belonging to the very earliest life of the old house." Serving as a guide, Dr. Richard Dillard, a prominent Edenton antiquarian, introduced the reporter to Margaret Bond and pointed out some of the finer pieces in the house. Dillard, concerned by the owner's advanced age and meager income, told the reporter that he was worried that the paneling and furnishings of the house "would be removed at someday in the near future." Appalled at this prospect, the reporter declared that the house was "unparalleled as an interesting provincial type" and expressed that "the Colonial Dames must see that no such fate befalls this historic place."¹⁵² One year after the reporter and Dr. Richard Dillard toured the Cupola House, it was featured in a second article in the *Charlotte Daily Observer*. Written by Jos Hewes, the house was presented as an important landmark in Edenton and was shown to readers in a large photograph printed at the center of the article (Figure 3.6).¹⁵³

Public interest in the Cupola House continued to increase in 1908. In May, an article titled, "In the Realm of North Carolina Society," appeared in the *Charlotte Daily Observer*.

¹⁵² "Improver's Hand Stayed: Edenton a Link with the Past," *Charlotte Daily Observer*, February 1st, 1906, 9.

¹⁵³ Jos Hewes, "The Romance of Old Edenton," *Charlotte Daily Observer*, December 15th, 1907, 42.

Reporting on “an event of unusual interest in Edenton Social Life,” the article detailed a tea Margaret Bond had held in honor of the Cupola House’s 150th anniversary. The tea was open to the citizens of Edenton and Bond reportedly “received her guests with the stately courtesy of the olden times and display[ed] with pride the many relics of the past which she had preserved with reverent care.”¹⁵⁴ The article paid particular attention to a portrait of Mrs. Penelope Barker that hung in the house’s dining room. Described as “the most prized object,” the portrait sitter was the great-aunt of Bond who “had made herself and Edenton famous for presiding over the Edenton Tea Party.”¹⁵⁵ In June, a second article was published about the Cupola House that stated the most “delightful” thing to do in Edenton was to pay, “a visit to Miss Margaret Bond at the ‘House with the Cupola.’”¹⁵⁶ Apparently that year Bond had granted permission to the Edenton Chapter of the Sons of the Revolution and the Penelope Barker Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution to hold their meetings in the dining room of the house amidst numerous fine antiques including, “a very striking Chippendale sideboard and Sheraton table,” and chairs that were reportedly two hundred years old.¹⁵⁷

Matilda Bond inherited the Cupola House upon her aunt’s death in 1910. In order to pay a series of outstanding debts, Bond began systematically selling many of the finer pieces of furniture and silver she had been left. Furthermore, all but ten feet of the land at the front and rear of the house were sold. The notoriety of the Cupola House and its alarming state of disrepair prompted a group of Edenton citizens to write to the North Carolina Historical Commission, forerunner of the Division of Archives and History, in 1910. Inquiring if the Commission could not save the Cupola House from a rumored auction sale, the group did not

¹⁵⁴ “In the Realm of North Carolina Society,” *Charlotte Daily Observer* May 31st, 1908, 13.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ “A Jaunt Through Eastern North Carolina Society,” *Charlotte Daily Observer* June 7th, 1908, 2

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

receive a response.¹⁵⁸ Two years later, J. Bryan Grimes, the chairman of the commission, responded to a similar letter, stating that while no state funds were available for such a purpose, “the people of Edenton and of the whole of northeastern North Carolina might club together and make an effort to save the house.”¹⁵⁹ Despite its apparent condition, Matilda Bond continued to allow the public to tour the house, maintaining a guest book that details the names of each visitor. The two last entries in the book are from February 11th, 1918 and are Andre Reuff, from the Brooklyn Museum, and Albert J. Collings, who was an antiques dealer from New York City.¹⁶⁰

Luke Vincent Lockwood, who had joined the Brooklyn Museum’s Board of Governors in 1914, the year the museum created a department of Colonial and Early American Furniture, oversaw the collecting of American interiors at the Brooklyn Museum. Under the direction of Lockwood, interiors were scouted throughout the thirteen original colonies by Andre Reuff, who acted as the museum’s assistant curator from 1912 until 1933. Writing to Lockwood from Edenton, North Carolina on February 13th, 1918, Reuff detailed a meeting he had recently had with “Miss Tilly Bond” in her home. Mentioning that Bond was “not very enthusiastic about having photographs taken as she was afraid that they might be given to architects and the house copied,” Reuff described in detail each room of the house noting their dimensions and ceiling height. Paying special attention to the east parlor on the first floor, Reuff wrote to Lockwood that:

¹⁵⁸ Mary Ann Coffey and Murphy Moss, *Deliverance of a Treasure: The Cupola House Association and its Mission*, Fuquay-Varina, NC: Research Triangle Pub, 1995, 6.

¹⁵⁹ Letter from J. Bryan Grimes to Dr. Richard Dillard, February 12th, 1912, Cupola House, period room binder, Records of the Department of Decorative Arts, Brooklyn Museum of Art Archives.

¹⁶⁰ Coffey and Moss, *Deliverance of a Treasure*, 7.

This room is entirely paneled, 19 ft. 7 in., x 15 ft. 6in., which must be added 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. on all sides (thickness of the washboard.) The ceiling is also 109 $\frac{1}{2}$ in., and has also been dropped. It has four windows, two facing the front of the house; two facing the street on either side of the mantelpiece. The back of this room taken up by a handsome central cupboard with dome top and cut shelves in the upper part; the owner did not wish to open the lower part. On either side of this cupboard there are two doors, which the owner said were also cupboards, but she did not want to open these. One was undoubtedly the entrance to the kitchen, and the other may have been a closet. The mantelpiece is of a very different type from the one in the opposite room, and the decoration of the door-casing opening on the hall is slightly different from the one in the opposite room.¹⁶¹

Believing that it would be advantageous for the museum to take the house's woodwork quickly, Reuff also mentioned Bond's portrait of Penelope Barker to Lockwood stating that the painting was "by the same artist who painted the Portrait of France Peyton Tabb which belongs to Mrs. John Hill Morgan." Noting the picture's merits, Reuff wrote "Miss Tillie Bond explained to us that she did not believe in selling family portraits, and that she considered it sacrilegious."

Understanding Bond's financial circumstances, Reuff believed that "should the Museum take the paneling of one of the rooms I believe it would be comparatively easy to convince Miss Bond that the proper place for the portrait is in the very interior in which they have always hung."¹⁶²

By the end of February, Bond had sold all of the Cupola House woodwork to Albert Collings, who in turn transferred possession of the material to the Brooklyn Museum. While it is unknown how much Collings paid for the woodwork, the Brooklyn Museum was charged \$4,500 for the paneling in the four first floor rooms and central hallway including, "All the interior windows, or trim containing mantels, all doors with their casings, all window sashes and their casings, full paneling, wainscot, moldings, etc."¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Letter from Andre Reuff to Luke Vincent Lockwood, February 13th, 1918, Cupola House, period room binder, Records of the Department of Decorative Arts, Brooklyn Museum of Art Archives.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Purchase Document, February 26th, 1918, Cupola House, period room binder, Records of the Department of Decorative Arts, Brooklyn Museum of Art Archives.

Supervising the removal of the woodwork, Reuff wrote to Lockwood from Edenton on March 4th inquiring about the possibility of the museum purchasing more of the Cupola House woodwork. Lockwood agreed on its value and on March 4th, 1918 wrote to Reuff that it would be “wise to buy the balance of the woodwork and the stairs.”¹⁶⁴ Reuff subsequently wrote to William Henry Fox, the Brooklyn Museum’s Director, on March 5th, noting the quick progress being made in the removal of the Cupola House’s woodwork. Taking an entire day to dismantle, the east parlor was the first room that was made ready for shipment to New York.¹⁶⁵ On March 11th, Reuff wrote to Fox again, to tell him of a car trip he had taken to look “at other interiors in the vicinity.” Despite running across numerous “interesting houses,” Reuff acknowledge that there was “nothing that could compare with what the Museum was getting.”¹⁶⁶

The citizens of Edenton, many of whom had been concerned over the state of the Cupola House for nearly twenty years, only learned of the sale of the house’s woodwork as material was being packed for shipment to New York. On March 6th, 1918, a group of Edentonians organized under the Cupola House Association, and began quickly soliciting funds in an attempt to purchase back anything they could from the Museum or Albert Collings. On March 10th, ten prominent citizens met in the law offices of W.D. Pruden, who had been the Bond family’s lawyer, to discuss ways in which they could potentially save the house. The next day, Frank Wood, acting as a trustee of the association, met with Collings and purchased back the second-floor woodwork and the stairway, neither of which had yet been removed.¹⁶⁷ Despite understanding that the second-floor woodwork had been sold, as evidenced by a letter written to

¹⁶⁴ Letter from Luke Vincent Lockwood to Andre Reuff, March 6th 1918, Cupola House, period room binder Records of the Department of Decorative Arts, Brooklyn Museum of Art Archives.

¹⁶⁵ Letter from Andre Reuff to William Henry Fox, March 5th, 1918, Cupola House, period room binder, Records of the Department of Decorative Arts, Brooklyn Museum of Art Archives.

¹⁶⁶ Letter from Andre Reuff to William Henry Fox, March 11th, 1918, Cupola House, period room binder, Records of the Department of Decorative Arts, Brooklyn Museum of Art Archives.

¹⁶⁷ Coffey and Moss, *Deliverance of a Treasure*, 9.

Fox stating “The upper section of the house, which Collings had for sale has been purchased by wealthy citizens of the town...” Reuff supervised the removal of all of the woodwork along the stairway. This material, along with what had been removed from the first floor, was placed in a boxcar acquired from the Norfolk Southern Railroad, and transported to New York on August 30th, 1918.¹⁶⁸

Matilda Bond sold the Cupola House to the Cupola House Association shortly after the Brooklyn Museum had finished removing the paneling from the first floor. Discovering the missing staircase woodwork upon purchase, Frank Wood wrote to Collings on behalf of the Association. After receiving Wood’s complaint, Collings wrote to Reuff. Advising the museum to return the woodwork in question, which was technically the property of the Association, Wood noted that, “I cannot see how you can use the small part of which he complains in your scheme, and as he makes a formal demand for the paneling...perhaps you can see your way clear to ship it to them, as it is best to save any possible legal unpleasantness.”¹⁶⁹ Claiming that the museum had removed the woodwork to duplicate it, Reuff shipped the material in question back to Edenton.

The Cupola House Association was the first organization in North Carolina chartered to save and preserve a specific building. Between 1918 and 1921 the association had the house extensively repaired by a Frank Fred Muth, a local contractor. Without the funding or documentation to accurately replace the missing woodwork, the first floor rooms were given simplified versions of the original material that was being installed at the Brooklyn Museum. As a memorial to William D. Pruden, Sr. and William Blour Shepard, funds were collected in 1919

¹⁶⁸ Letter from Andre Reuff to William Henry Fox, August 30th, 1918, Cupola House, period room binder, Records of the Department of Decorative Arts, Brooklyn Museum of Art Archives.

¹⁶⁹ Letter from Albert J. Collings to Andre Reuff, September 26th, 1918, Cupola House, period room binder, Records of the Department of Decorative Arts, Brooklyn Museum of Art Archives.

that established a public library in the building.¹⁷⁰ To provide space for bookshelves, the wall that divided the east parlor and the small pantry behind it was demolished and the two rooms were combined as one. On February 2nd, 1921 Senator C.V. Vann ceremoniously opened the library with a speech, stating:

This library is presented to the white citizens of Edenton and Chowan County by Mrs. Anne Sheaprd Garahm and widow and children of Mr. W. D. Pruden. The sum of ten thousand dollars was given to this memorial. The use of the room is given by the stockholders of the Cupola House. After restoring and furnishing the room, paying one-third of the cost of putting the heating plant in the building, buying the books and supplies for the library, and having the library organized by a trained librarian, \$ 7,500 is left to be invested as a perpetual endowment.¹⁷¹

Maintaining its original paneling, the second floor of the Cupola House served as a local museum containing objects associated with the house and its occupants.

The Shepard-Pruden Memorial Library remained in the Cupola House until 1963, when it was moved to a modern facility. No longer inhibited by the programmatic needs of the library, the Cupola House Association made the decision to restore the first floor of the house back to its original appearance. Aware of the tremendous expense of such an undertaking, the association appealed for funding from the North Carolina General Assembly. The association asked Thomas T. Waterman, a noted architectural historian, to aid in their petition for funds. Waterman wrote to the General Assembly arguing that, “No more important example of Jacobean design exists south of Connecticut, except Bacon’s Castle in Surry County Virginia...”¹⁷² The North Carolina General Assembly apparently saw value in the Cupola House and appropriated \$22,500 for the restoration in 1963.¹⁷³ Partnering with the Edenton and Chowan Historical Commission, the

¹⁷⁰ Butchko, *Edenton: An Architectural Portrait*, 120.

¹⁷¹ Mrs. Charles P. Wales, “The Shepard-Pruden Memorial Library of Edenton,” *The North Carolina Booklet: Great Events in North Carolina History* 20 (1921): 82.

¹⁷² Christopher Cittenden, “Historic House’s Original woodwork in Brooklyn Museum,” *High Point Enterprise*, March 11, 1964, 12.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

Cupola Association planned to utilize the \$22,500 to buy back the house's original woodwork from the Brooklyn Museum.¹⁷⁴ On March 25th, 1964 David Warren, president of the Cupola House Association, wrote to Thomas S. Buechner, who had been made the director of the Brooklyn Museum in 1960, stating the associations desire to purchase back the woodwork the museum had removed from the house in 1918. Two days later, Warren received a letter from the museum. As Buechner was on vacation, the letter was written by Ian M. White, the museum's Assistant Director, who informed Warren that while the "matter had been given much thought," he "regret[ed]" that the museum had to "decline the Cupola House Association's request to acquire the installed paneling."¹⁷⁵ White argued that, "Since the acquisition [of the paneling] was made many years ago the rooms from Edenton have served an important purpose here at the Museum where close to a million people a year are given the opportunity of seeing them."¹⁷⁶ While the annual visitorship of the Brooklyn Museum may have been nearly a million people, it is doubtful that "much thought" was given to the prospect of selling back the Cupola House rooms. No museum employee could make such a decision as the matter would have had to been taken up at a meeting of the museum's board of trustees. The two days that lapsed between Warren writing his letter to White and White's reply, almost certainly rules this possibility out.

Without the ability to regain the original woodwork, the Cupola House Association commenced a substantial reconstruction campaign that aimed at replicating all the material that had been lost to the Brooklyn Museum. Reporting on the association's progress for the *Danville Bee*, Dr. Christopher Cittenden noted that, "before restoring one of North Carolina's most

¹⁷⁴ "Division of Historic Sites," the North Carolina Historical Review, 61 (Winter 1964): 158.

¹⁷⁵ Letter from Ian M. White to David M. Warren, March 25th, 1964, Cupola House, period room binder, Records of the Department of Decorative Arts, Brooklyn Museum of Art Archives.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

historic houses it will be necessary to go to Brooklyn.”¹⁷⁷ While the Brooklyn Museum had refused to sell back the Cupola House’s original woodwork, they allowed the association to take detailed measurements and photographs of the installed paneling. Owing to the fact that the museum had carefully surveyed the Edenton house before they removed its paneling, the museum’s rooms were composed exactly as they were originally built at the Cupola House. On May 20th 1964 Finlay F. Ferguson, Jr., a member of Cupola House Association, wrote to Marvin Schwartz, the Curator of the museum’s Decorative Arts department, thanking him for allowing a Mr. Hopping to “measure and record the rooms and hallways from the Cupola House.” Mentioning the beauty and unusualness of the rooms, Ferguson wrote, “I am not at all sure they can find the craftsmen and mill to make a worthy reproduction, but they are going to try.”¹⁷⁸ In Edenton, the association hired Wilbur Kempe, a local craftsmen, to oversee the reconstruction and to execute some of the more complicated carved elements. Other work, however, was completed by untrained volunteers who were directed in the carving of rosettes, escutcheons, and egg and dart molding by Kempe.¹⁷⁹

In 1967 the Cupola House Association purchased the lots immediately in front of and behind the house, which had been sold by Matilda Bond in the early twentieth century. The tire store, which stood in front of the house, and the firehouse, which sat behind it, were both demolished. Donald Parker, the noted landscape designer who worked extensively at Colonial Williamsburg, designed a front and back garden for the house based on a 1769 atlas of Edenton drawn by C.J. Sautier. Today the Cupola House and its gardens are still owned by the Cupola House Association, which operates public tours of the property while the house’s original first floor woodwork retains its position in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum (Figure 3.7).

¹⁷⁷ Dr. Christopher Cittenden, “In the Light of N.C. History,” *Danville Bee*, March 11th, 1964, 5.

¹⁷⁸ Letter from Finlay F. Ferguson to Marvin Schwartz, May 20th, 1964, Cupola House, period room binder, Records of the Department of Decorative Arts, Brooklyn Museum of Art Archives.

¹⁷⁹ “Frances Inglis: Keeper of Memories,” Web Interview, Edenton: UNC-TV.

Images for Chapter Three



Figure 3.1: Woodwork from the Cupola House installed in the Brooklyn Museum in 1929.
Source: Cupola House File, Period Room Binders, the Brooklyn Museum.



Figure 3.2: The hall of the Cupola House as installed in the Brooklyn Museum in 1970.
Source: Cupola House File, Period Room Binders, the Brooklyn Museum.



Figure 3.3: The east parlor's elaborate mantelpiece as installed in the Brooklyn Museum.
Source: Cupola House File, Period Room Binders, the Brooklyn Museum.



Figure 3.4: The arched buffet in the east parlor installed in The Brooklyn Museum.
Source: Cupola House File, Period Room Binders, the Brooklyn Museum.



Figure 3.5: The west parlor installed in The Brooklyn Museum.
Source: Cupola House File, Period Room Binders, the Brooklyn Museum.

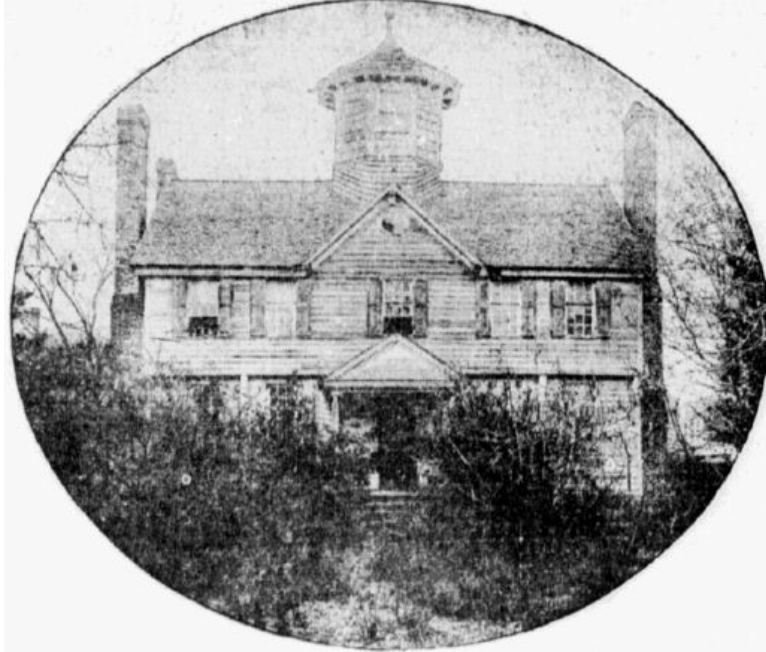


Figure 3.6: The Cupola House as it appeared in 1907.
Source: Jos Hewes, "The Romance of Old Edenton," *Charlotte Daily Observer*, December 15th, 1907, 42.



Figure 3.7: The Cupola House as it appears today.
Source: The Cupola House Association.

Chapter Four: The Powel House

On June 6th, 1931 the *New York Times* announced that the Powel House, an eighteenth century Philadelphia residence facing demolition, had been purchased by the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks with the intent of restoring it and opening it to the public.¹⁸³ Academically, the house was considered one of the best remaining urban example of mid-Georgian architecture in the United states.¹⁸⁴ By 1931, however, the Powel House had been reduced to a shell and was missing almost the entirety of its ornately decorated interior (Figure 4.1). The two most important rooms of the house, the second floor front and rear rooms, had been removed earlier in the twentieth century with the rear room sold to the Metropolitan Museum of Art for installation in its American Wing and the front parlor being sold to the Philadelphia Museum of Art to be installed as a period room as well. In 1926 the Philadelphia Museum of Art, under the direction of Fiske Kimball, purchased and removed any remaining paneling and applied ornament it considered of value.¹⁸⁵ Despite its association with many important historical figures, George and Martha Washington danced at a ball to celebrate their twentieth wedding anniversary in the room now at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Powel House had been allowed to decay throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the neighborhood surrounding it became increasingly impoverished. While mentioned in many period guide books as a point of interest, concern over the preservation of the Powel seems to have been given little thought during a period of time when dramatic restoration efforts were

¹⁸³ “Philadelphia to Preserve House Washington Occupied,” *New York Times*, June 6th, 1931, 4.

¹⁸⁴ “The Sources of the ‘Philadelphia Chippendale’,” *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum* 104 (June 1926): 189.

¹⁸⁵ “Interior From the Powel House,” *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum* 99 (January 1926) 68.

being undertaken at nearby Independence Hall.¹⁸⁶ It was through the efforts of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, both of which exhibited their respective Powel rooms as preeminent examples of an American rococo interior, that public attitudes toward the house shifted.

While named for Samuel Powel, arguably its most prominent owner, the Powel House was originally commissioned by Charles Stedman as an investment property in 1765.¹⁸⁷ Stedman was a Scottish ship's master who had parleyed a successful term in the navy into a career in Philadelphia as a merchant and real estate speculator. In choosing a site to build the house, a large plot of land was selected on the highly fashionable west side of Third Street in Society Hill. Completed in 1766, the house was listed for sale in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* that year and was described as a "Large well finished commodious house, three stories high, 31 feet front, and 46 feet deep, with large convenient back building, 76 feet deep, and two stores high...the lot runs into Fourth Street, 396 feet deep..."¹⁸⁸ Despite Philadelphia's status as the largest, and richest, city in the American colonies by the mid eighteenth century, Stedman had trouble finding a buyer for the Third Street house.

The Third Street house was certainly not indicative of the average Philadelphia residence. It was, however, not particularly unusual either. Largely an American interpretation of the type

¹⁸⁶ The Powel House is mentioned as being "rich in historic interest" in George Erasmus Nitzsche's 1920 guide to Philadelphia and is allocated an entire chapter in *The Colonial Homes of Philadelphia and its Neighborhood*, published in 1912. Harold Donaldson Eberlein and Horace Mather Lippincott, *The Colonial Homes of Philadelphia and its Neighborhood*, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1912, 52-60. George Erasmus Nitzsche, *The Colonial Homes of Philadelphia and its Neighborhood*, Philadelphia: The Rotary Club of Philadelphia, 31.

¹⁸⁷ A complete history of the house can be found in George B Tatum's book: *Philadelphia Georgian: The City House of Samuel Powel and Some of its Neighbors*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1976.

¹⁸⁸ "To Be Sold Or Let by the Subscriber," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 16, 1766, 1.

of terraced housing being built in England thirty years earlier, its Flemish bonded exterior, string courses and controlled use of classical ornament were all common in Philadelphia residential architecture of the period. The house's floor plan is representative of other large urban houses and its layout was one that had proved efficient and practical for three bay residences (Figure 4.2). The front door, which was placed at one side of the house, led to a passage that gave access to the service wing at the back of the house while affording a means of entry to the two principle rooms on the ground floor and provided a place for an impressive staircase. Rooms on the second and third levels of the house largely mirrored the first, except the front room at the second level, which was able to extend the full width of the house.

On August second 1769 Samuel Powel purchased the house from Stedmen for £3,150. Powel was a third generation Philadelphian and member of locally prominent Quaker family. As the only male of his familial generation, Powel was the sole heir of his father's fortune at the age of nine and a principle beneficiary under the will of his grandfather at eighteen, placing him in a very advantageous position. A graduate of the College of Philadelphia, which would later develop into the University of Pennsylvania, Powel followed the precedent set by other wealthy young men in colonial America and left Philadelphia for Europe in October of 1760. Powel's trip differed from others undertaking the Grand Tour due its unusual length of seven years. Returning to America as a member of the Anglican Church, Powel's wealth and newly developed continental sophistication placed him at the pinnacle of Philadelphia society. He was married two years later to Elizabeth Willing (1742-1830), and only five days after the wedding

he purchased the Third Street house.¹⁸⁹ This marriage joined the real estate holdings of two important Philadelphia families.¹⁹⁰

The large size and commanding position of the Third Street house was a conspicuous sign of the Powel's wealth and power. Its interior, which was finished in a restrained uniformity including Palladian wainscoting, a dentil-cut cornice and pediments over the doors, must have seemed provincial to Powel as he quickly engaged in a wide scale redecoration effort.¹⁹¹ Powel hired Robert Smith (c. 1722-1777), a carpenter and builder of some local notoriety, to conduct the interior renovations. The £268, which Smith was paid, denotes that a substantial amount of work must have been undertaken. In addition to Smith, Powel also hired numerous other craftsmen to aid in the alterations. Next to Smith, the largest payment went to Hercules Courtenay, who is described in a 1769 advertisement in the *Pennsylvania Chronicle* as "Caver and Gilder, from London, [who] is determined to be as reasonable as possible in his Charge, and to execute all Commands with the utmost Diligence."¹⁹² Courtenay was paid £60 for executing ornately carved mantel brackets and a mantel plaque depicting a scene from Aesop's fable of "The Dog and His Shadow." James Clow was paid £31 for "stuccoing the ceiling" of the front room of the second floor. Clow's ceiling, which can now be seen at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, features foliated scrolls at each of the four corners of the ceiling from which arabesques

¹⁸⁹ Elizabeth Willing was the daughter of Charles Willing (1710-1754), a successful merchant who had served as mayor of Philadelphia in 1748 and again in 1754, and Anne Shippen (1710-1791) who was the granddaughter of Edward Shippen (1639-1712), the first mayor of Philadelphia.

¹⁹⁰ Alexandra Alevizatos Kirtley, "Front Parlor from the Powel House, Philadelphia, 1769-1770," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 46 (2012): E 14.

¹⁹¹ A description of the house can be found in an insurance survey conducted by the Pennsylvania Contributionship in 1769 on behalf of Samuel Powel. The document is policy number 1342; http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/contributionship/ho_display.cfm?RecordId=CONTRIB-S01342#ImageGallery.

¹⁹² Alfred C. Prime, "Colonial Craftsmen of Pennsylvania," *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum*, 67 (February 1921): 4.

stretch around the perimeter of the room and frame a large central medallion of floral festoons punctuated by the trophies of music and theater (Figure 4.3). Other alterations were provided by Timothy Berett, to whom Powel paid £22, 8s. 11d “for painting & boarding a room” which likely refers to the fashionable trend of applying papier mâché decorative motifs below the cornice of a room.¹⁹³

While some of the money Powel paid to redecorate his home went to enhancements to the entry passage, the introduction of cased windows on the first floor and the replacement of the second floor staircase with one made of mahogany, the majority of funds went to the front and rear rooms on the second floor. These two rooms transformed the conservative Palladian nature of the house into an elaborate adaptation of the rococo language Powel must have observed during his seven year Grand Tour. The front room was especially transformed during this period. A 1785 insurance survey describes it as the only room in the house to be “wainscoted to the ceiling with fluted pilasters and highly ornamented.”¹⁹⁴ As the largest and most ornate room in the house, it was likely reserved for formal entertaining and was intended to convey the Powel’s fortune and cultural savvy. It is in this room that Hercules Courtenay’s elaborately carved mantel is placed and where Clow’s rococo ceiling is located. The placement of the Powel staterooms on the second floor of the house was not necessarily uncommon in eighteenth-century urban residences in America but it does denote a European influence. Due to the absence of an exterior door, second floor rooms were able to span the entire width of a house and were removed from the smells and noise of the street below.

¹⁹³ Samuel Powel’s ledger book as seen in Tatum, *Philadelphia Georgian*, 54.

¹⁹⁴ 1785 Survey of the Powel House by the Mutual Assurance Company (no. 39-42; January 11, 1785) as seen in Tatum, *Philadelphia Georgian*, 88.

Modern scholarship largely agrees that the second story front room of the Powel house was used as a formal entertaining space, the purpose of the smaller room behind it, however, remains more conjectural. This room is simpler than its counterpart. The fireplace wall is the only fully paneled wall in the room and the other three only exhibit wainscoting. A 1785 survey of the house describes this room as identical to the rear room on the first floor, however; instead of a cornice with dentils, the second floor rear room has a cornice with an intricately carved fret design. Also unlike the first floor room, the doorframes in the second floor rear room lack knees, perhaps suggesting that Stedman had originally intended this room to be less important than the room in front of it and the two below it. The carved brackets supporting the mantel and the fretwork and arabesques that ornament the broken pediment of the chimneypiece echo the design on the new mantel added to the front chamber. This work, and the decorative carving on the tablet beneath the mantelshelf, are undoubtedly additions made during Powel's redecoration of the house.

As an inventory of Powel's possessions, a routine procedure undertaken upon the death of a property owner, has never been found, it is impossible to know how the Third Street house would have been furnished. By utilizing the inventories of other prominent Philadelphians of the period, it can be surmised that the Powel's likely owned a variety of tables and chairs, a desk, several sofas, and a number of chests of drawers. Looking glasses, a principle adornment in a fashionable Georgian interior, would likely have been hung in between symmetrically placed windows. George B. Tatum's analysis of Powel's account books detail other furnishings that were purchased for the house. Powel paid James Fisher £ 13, 14s for forty-yards of carpeting, William Adcock £4, 10s for two rugs and William Turner £1, 15s for a green rug. Due to the

small amount paid to Fisher, he likely provided the Powels with Scotch carpeting as the Wilton carpeting popular during this period in Philadelphia would have been more expensive.

In decorating their home, the Powels spent a considerable amount of money on textiles and upholstery. On September 30, 1769, Susannah Bond received £2, 15s. 10d for “upholsterer’s work” and throughout the early 1770s John Webster periodically received money for “sundry upholstery.”¹⁹⁵ It is also evident from period correspondence that Powel purchased a considerable amount of furniture from England. On May 18th, 1765 Powel’s uncle Samuel Morris, a prosperous Quaker, warned him against his European buying habits, “Household goods may be had as cheap and as well made from English patterns. In the humor people are in here, a man is in danger of becoming invidiously distinguished, who buys anything in England which our Tradesmen can furnish.”¹⁹⁶ Despite the missing inventory, it is obvious when consulting period accounts of the house that the Powel’s lived amongst luxurious furnishings that were comparable to those of a wealthy Englishman. The elegance of the Powel homestead can be confirmed by a letter from Frederick Howard, the Fifth Earl of Carlisle, who was stationed in the house by George III during the Revolutionary War:

I have one of the best homes for my quarters. The gentleman to whom it belongs has still an apartment in it; he is perfectly civil, though I feel distressed at coming into his house without asking...But if I was not to inhabit it, some other person would take possession and not take so much care of his furniture, which is very expensive.¹⁹⁷

In 1803, five years after Samuel Powel’s death, Elizabeth Powel sold the Third Street house to William Bingham who in turn sold the house in 1805 to William Rawle. In 1825

¹⁹⁵ Tatum, *Philadelphia Georgian*, 116.

¹⁹⁶ Charles O. Cornelius and R.T.H. Halsey, *A Handbook of the American Wing Opening Exhibition*, 185

¹⁹⁷ Edgar de Noailles Mayhew, *A Documentary History of American Interiors: From the Colonial Era to 1915*, New York: Scribner, 1980, 160.

William Rawle sold off the southern part of the property on which Samuel Powel's garden stood. Thus, when Charles Wilkes bought the house in 1828 the lot was reduced to 30 by 100 feet. From Wilkes, the Powel House was passed to Isaiah Hacker in 1829 then to L. Theodore Salignac in 1886.¹⁹⁸ Wolf Klebansky purchased the property on December 29 1904, and it is from him that the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks bought the house in 1931. By the time Klebansky purchased the Powel House, Society Hill was no longer a fashionable residential neighborhood. The change in character of Society Hill was characteristic of the alterations in Philadelphia's urban fabric due to the industrial growth of the nineteenth century. The old city, which developed in close proximity of the Delaware River, had been encompassed by William Penn's grid reaching west to the banks of the Schuylkill River. By the 1860s the old city's eighteenth-century row homes were intermixed with larger modern buildings. The considerable wealth the Industrial Revolution had brought to Philadelphia was mostly concentrated in the new commercial district surrounding Broad Street as well as the manufacturing hubs in North Philadelphia, thus causing the prosperous of the old city to relocate. The newly developed Rittenhouse district became home to many of the city's wealthiest citizens until eventually they began to move to the railroad suburbs of Chestnut Hill and to the residential towns along the Main Line in Lower Merion County. From the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century the old city and its neighboring Society Hill district fell into disrepair with many of colonial era houses becoming crowded boarding houses or small factories.

Under Klebansky's ownership, the Powel House had ceased being used as a residence and instead had been converted into a factory and storage facility. Perhaps most succinctly described by his business letterhead, Klebansky was an:

¹⁹⁸ Tatum, *Philadelphia Georgian*, 25.

Importer, Exporter and Jobber of all kinds of Russian and Siberian Horse Hair and Bristles-Manes and all Kinds of Animal hair Supplied to the Curled Hair Trade- Also manufacturer of drawn Hair for the Supply of Brush Manufacturers and Hair Cloth Weavers.¹⁹⁹

Conducting his business in the Powel House, Klebansky and his wife resided in a small house that had been constructed on what in the eighteenth century had been a Samuel Powel's ornamental garden.

In writing about his career for the *Harvard College Class of 1911: Fiftieth Anniversary Report*, Durr Friedley personally took credit for “finding” the second floor rear room in the Powel House, “then a storage for hides” for the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Working as the Curator of Decorative Arts, Friedley spent the winter of 1916 “hunting through the thirteen original colonies for Colonial woodwork and paneled rooms, which were afterwards installed in the American Wing.”²⁰⁰ By time Friedley visited the Powel House, its interior was in poor condition. While the second floor front room boasted the remarkable Clow ceiling and paneling that was decidedly the finest in the house, the room was also severely damaged. Large portions of the paneling, including the overmantel, and much of the delicate papier mâché work that acted as a frieze to the room's cornice were missing. The chair rail was mostly gone and some of the broken pediments that had surmounted the doorframes were also missing. The second floor rear room was noted as having “woodwork...in pretty good shape except [for] the paint which has cracked and scaled” with the only major loss occurring on the craved tablet underneath the mantel where “a little decoration [had] broken off”, but it was noted that “as the outline [was]

¹⁹⁹ Letter from Wolf Klebansky to the Pennsylvania Museum, Philadelphia, June 5th, 1927, box 178, folder 22, Fiske Kimball Records, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

²⁰⁰ *Harvard College Class of 1911: Fiftieth Anniversary Report*, Cambridge: Cosmos Press, 1961, 252-253.

there it [could] easily be restored.”²⁰¹ In purchasing the room, the Metropolitan hired William Spies, who worked in Philadelphia real estate, as an agent to represent the museum in the negotiation of the sale. Rampant anti-Semitism is prevalent throughout Spies’ correspondence with Friedley and other members of the Metropolitan, with both parties referring to Klebansky and his wife disparagingly as “the Hebrews.”²⁰² By late November in 1917, Spies had reportedly purchased the room’s woodwork, mantel and fireplace for the museum as well as securing permission to “take casts of the decorations on the ceiling of the 2nd floor front room, all for the sum of One thousand dollars (\$1,000).”²⁰³

At the insistence of Alfred C. Prime, a Philadelphia antiquarian, the Metropolitan was quick to remove the paneling from the second floor rear room of the Powel House. Prime wrote to the museum noting that while, “agreements [had] of course been signed covering the sale of this old woodwork,” he felt that “when dealing with Hebrews of this Class” it was “always better when the material is removed and there is no question as to your ownership.”²⁰⁴ Prime further advised that the Metropolitan should not appear as the purchaser until the material is removed from the premise.²⁰⁵ He argued that “the owner of the property is very wealthy and while he has a good reputation he is very grasping.”²⁰⁶ The museum seemed to have little interest in the ceiling of the front room, with Edward Robinson, the Assistant Director of the museum, writing

²⁰¹ Letter from Lewis A. Taulane to Durr Friedley, November 26th, 1917, Office of the Secretary Subject Files 1870-1950, Woodwork Purchased, Prime Alfred C. (Powel House), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

²⁰² Letter from Edward Robinson to Alfred C. Prime, November 26th, 1917, Woodwork Purchased, Prime Alfred C. (Powel House), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

²⁰³ Letter from Lewis A. Taulane to Durr Friedley, November 26th, 1917.

²⁰⁴ Letter from Alfred C. Prime to Edward Robinson, November 30th, 1917, Office of the Secretary Subject Files 1870-1950, Woodwork Purchased, Prime Alfred C. (Powel House), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

on November 28th, “The ceiling of the adding room which Mr. Spies writes that he has secured the privilege of copying for us, we have decided not to reproduce.”²⁰⁷ Five years later, Prime revisited the Powel House and persuaded the museum that creating a cast of the ceiling was in their best interest. Writing to Charles O. Cornelius, who had been appointed an Assistant Curator in 1918, Prime advised the museum to retain anonymity in the proceeding, stating, “If you should want anything from these people you must not mention the museum, for being orthodox Hebrews a museum means wealth and a chance to obtain some money.”²⁰⁸ Taking Prime’s advice, the museum again hired Spies to act on their behalf, and in 1923 casts were made from the James Clow ceiling.²⁰⁹ At the museum, the casts had to be repositioned to compensate for the fact that the rear room was much smaller than the front room.

With paneling and a cast of a ceiling from the Powel House now in New York, the room needed to be reconstructed and curated as part of the American Wing. Documents surrounding the installation of the Powel Room, dubbed the Philadelphia Room by its curators, detail that in 1923 the museum was not in possession of the hearth, window frames or window sashes from the house. Other issues also presented themselves, particularly how to fit the room into the pre-existing space of the American Wing. When installing the woodwork, it was discovered that if the mantelpiece was set on the established floor level and the cornice carried along toward the main entrance of the room, the ceiling would be so low that it would cut across the tops of the

²⁰⁷ Letter from Edward Robinson to Alfred C. Prime, November 28th, 1917, Office of the Secretary Subject Files 1870-1950, Woodwork Purchased, Prime Alfred C. (Powel House), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

²⁰⁸ Letter from Alfred C. Prime to Mr. Charles Cornelius, May 20th, 1922 Office of the Secretary Subject Files 1870-1950, Woodwork Purchased, Prime Alfred C. (Powel House), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

²⁰⁹ Letter from William Spies to Mr. Charles Cornelius, March 20th, 1923, Office of the Secretary Subject Files 1870-1950, Woodwork Purchased, Prime Alfred C. (Powel House), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

outside windows. Proportionally, the room was not cohesive with the scale of the museum building. Thus, the entire room had to be raised above the established floor level so its windows would match the height and scale of the pre-established fenestration pattern of the museum.²¹⁰ The completeness of the Powel Room's woodwork made it unnecessary for the Metropolitan to fabricate new elements. Other than moving the location of the room's side door to allow for public circulation, the woodwork was installed very closely to how it had been constructed in Philadelphia. By 1923 the museum had not yet settled on how the room was to be furnished and it was argued "there should [not] be a bed in the room" as "the mantelpiece [would] be obscured by the hangings of the bed."²¹¹ Eventually it was decided to interpret the room as a parlor.

The press coverage surrounding the opening of the American Wing was unprecedented. Countless articles appearing in newspapers throughout the East Coast lavished praise on the undertaking. On November 9th, 1924 the *New York Tribune* published a very lengthy article written by Royal Cortissoz giving the public a preview of the wing's period rooms that were to be unveiled later that month. A large staged photograph of the Powel Room, complete with a woman in eighteenth century dress, was placed in the center of the article. Two days after the American Wing opened to the public, the *New York Times* published an article titled "Home Life in Early America Recreated for Eyes of Today," in which the Powel Room is described as having "a paneled fireplace wall of great distinction, flanked by two doorways surrounded by carved panels. There are low wainscots for the other three walls and a splendid cornice."²¹²

²¹⁰ Installation Record, 1923, Subject Files 1870-1950, Building 1923 American Wing. Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² "Home Life In Early America Recreated For Eyes of Today: Old Rooms Evoke the Past," *New York Times*, November 26th, 1922, 112.

All of the American interiors installed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art were selected for their aesthetic quality. However, the Powel Room, which today retains its original 1924 interpretation, proved particularly pleasing and was often highlighted in literature surrounding the American Wing (Figure 4.4). Upon installation, the Powel woodwork was stripped and coated with a dull putty colored paint. The carved ornament on the brackets and tablet under the mantel and the arabesques that decorate the mantelpiece's four mitered corners were painted green. This decision was predicated on the discovery of a verdigris-glazed rosette on one of the doorframes.²¹³ A period Chinese painted wallpaper featuring red-roofed pagodas, blossoming trees, mountains and mandarins was applied to the three unpaneled walls. There is no evidence or record that this room was ever wallpapered, but in the *Handbook of the American Wing Opening Exhibition*, written by R.T.H. Halsey and Charles O. Cornelius, the wall paper is defended as being similar "to a set imported for Samuel Powel's cousin, Robert Morris, in 1770."²¹⁴ In *The Homes of Our Ancestors*, written by R.T.H. Halsey and Elizabeth Tower, the lack of evidence supporting the use of wallpaper in the Powel Room is not mention at all and instead it is merely remarked that the paper exemplifies the popularity of oriental motifs in mid-eighteenth-century design. While orientalism was certainly in vogue during the mid-eighteenth-century, the pagoda-like lambrequins over the windows are distinctly twentieth century.

The curators furnished the room with a large amount of Philadelphia-made furniture in the ornate Chippendale style. Halsey argued that "Fine Furniture was much a requirement in a gentleman's house in Samuel Powel's day as it is today" and that Powel "likely patronized the

²¹³ Amelia Peck, *Period Rooms in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art H.N. Abrams, 1996,193.

²¹⁴ Charles O. Cornelius and R.T.H. Halsey, *A Handbook of the American Wing Opening Exhibition*,

best cabinetmakers the city afforded...”²¹⁵ The room’s furnishings, all dating to the third quarter of the eighteenth century, included an ornately carved, marble-top mahogany pier table; an elaborate chest-on-chest, or “highboy,” featuring the head of a woman in the middle of its broken pediment; three tea-tables; four Chippendale style chairs; a walnut tall case clock with an etched brass dial contemporaneous to the pieces in the room; a camel back sofa with carved Marlborough legs upholstered in a flowered stain; a large walnut and gilt mirror; a variety of engravings of Reynolds’s portrait; numerous small porcelain statuettes; and a selection of silver pieces made by prominent Philadelphia silversmiths including Philip Syng, Jr., Francis Richardson, Joseph Richardson, and Thomas Shields.²¹⁶ This interpretation fails to acknowledge that Powel likely furnished his house with a combination of both English and American furniture. The decisions made by the Metropolitan in curating its Powel room demonstrate the difficulties raised in collecting architectural fragments. At the Metropolitan, American period rooms were acquired to provide aesthetic contexts for small decorative objects and furniture. Therefore the installation of the room was deferential to the collection of objects that were to be housed in the space.

Fiske Kimball, who had become the Director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1925, praised the Powel House, stating that its interiors were of “great importance,” and that it demonstrated that “carvers in Philadelphia had thoroughly mastered the vocabulary of the [rococo] style.”²¹⁷ Understanding its aesthetic values and increasing endangerment, the Board of Trustees of the Philadelphia Museum of Art approved the purchase and removal of a large amount of woodwork from the second floor front room, or ballroom as the museum called it, of

²¹⁵ Ibid, 124.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 123-136.

²¹⁷ Fiske Kimball, “The Sources of the ‘Philadelphia Chippendale,’” *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum*, 25 (April, 1930): 185.

the Powel House in 1925. At the same time a cast of Clow's ceiling was taken. The cast pieces, however, were subsequently stored leaning against a wall at a forty-five degree angle causing them to crack and warp. Believing the ceiling to be a critical element of the room's composition, the museum searched for funds to pay for its removal and relocation. In 1926, the *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum* announced that "by the generosity of Mr. George D. Widener the remaining paneling of the ballroom, including a finely carved wood mantel and ornamental plaster ceiling, from the Powel House...have recently come to the Museum."²¹⁸ While Widener's gift to the museum paid for the purchase of a variety of features from the rooms, most of the money went toward the removal of the ceiling. On December 23rd, 1925, the museum hired J.W. & C.H. Reeves, a local contracting and plastering firm, to remove "the ornamental work on the ceiling of the second floor front of 244 South Third Street."²¹⁹ In removing Clow's ceiling for the museum, workers separated the ornamental cast plaster pieces, attempting to keep the fragile pieces in large portions. The mortar adhering to the pieces was removed on-site, and each piece was then glued to cheesecloth that in turn was attached to plasterboard. Each board was then placed in a substantial frame and shipped to the museum. The entire process was completed for the approximate sum of \$465.00.²²⁰ In September of 1926 a selection of original paneling from the second floor front room was found in the basement of Powel House and transported to the museum.²²¹ That same year a pair of mahogany doors, the wood cornice and interior arch from the entrance hall, as well as woodwork from two first floor rooms including a paneled fireplace

²¹⁸ "Interior From the Powel House," *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum*, 99 (January, 1926): 68.

²¹⁹ Letter from Erling H. Pedersen to J.W. & C.H. Reeves, February 3rd, 1926, box 178, folder 22, Fiske Kimball Records, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

²²⁰ Ibid. Letter from Charles Reeves to Mr. Downs, December 23rd, 1925, box 178, folder 22 Fiske Kimball Records, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

²²¹ Letter from George D. Widener to S.W. Woodhouse, Jr., September 15th, 1926, box 178, folder 22, Fiske Kimball Records, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

walls, base and chair rail molding and cornices were also removed from the house and sent to the Museum.²²² In 1927 the museum removed more material from the Powel House, including the marble fireplace surround from the second floor front room.²²³ The museum anticipated using some of this material in the creation of other period rooms that would aid in the display of the museum's considerable holdings of mid-eighteenth century American furniture. In removing material from the Powel House, the Philadelphia Museum of Art dealt directly with Klebansky and their relationship seems to have been amiable. In 1927, Kimball wrote to Klebansky, apologizing for the museum stating, "My dear Mr. Klebansky, I am very sorry we have bothered you so much with the removal of the woodwork...."²²⁴

Despite its best collecting efforts, there was still a significant amount of material missing when the Philadelphia Museum of Art began planning for the installation of its Powel Room. The overmantel, which surely would have served as a focal point, was not in the basement of the Powel House along with the other miscellaneous pieces of the room's paneling that had been found there in 1926. Kimball believed that it had been disposed of when the room had been wallpapered in the late nineteenth century. Other important woodwork that was also lost included all of the carved window casings and a series of ornamental lintels.²²⁵ This absence might not have troubled other American institutions, as it was common practice in the early twentieth to create period rooms with woodwork from numerous sources. Kimball, however, formulated high

²²² The woodwork from the first floor of the house was donated to the museum by "Mr. and Mrs. Wolf Klebansky" "Interior From the Powel House," *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum*, 68.

²²³ Letter from Erling H. Pedersen to Mr. W. Copley, December 5th, 1927, box 178, folder 23, Fiske Kimball Records, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

²²⁴ Letter from Fiske Kimball to Wolf Klebansky, June 3rd, 1927, box 178, folder 22, Fiske Kimball Records, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

²²⁵ Letter from Fiske Kimball to Louis Duhring, March 11th, 1926, box 178, folder 22, Fiske Kimball Records, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

standards regarding the Philadelphia Museum of Art's responsibility for the authenticity of the rooms it was displaying, arguing in a 1929 article published in *Architectural Record* that:

Even the room deceptively made up of antique elements from various sources is a makeshift for which European museums now apologize. Antique architectural elements, doorways, balconies, or ceilings may indeed be installed in their natural positions in galleries, like any other single exhibits. It would seem to be a wise rule throughout the display collection that anything having a period character should actually be antique, within the limits permitted by reasonable restoration. To employ some old rooms with other of modern workmanship "in the style of the time" is to leave the visitor in uncertainty and cast doubt even on what is real.²²⁶

The Powel Room's aesthetic significance must have superseded Kimball's intellectual qualms with displaying interiors made of modern elements, as he personally oversaw the reconstruction of the room's missing paneling and ornament. In designing the overmantel, door pediments, and chair rail fretwork, Kimball consulted Abraham Swan's *The British Architect; or, The Builder's Treasury of Staircases* (1745) as well as Swan's well-known pattern book *A collection of Designs in Architecture* (1757), which Kimball believed to be the source for much of Powel House's interior.²²⁷ Luckily at the Powel House clear markings existed where the paneling had been removed, from which the museum could establish the exact sizes of the missing pieces it needed to reproduce. Furthermore, Kimball was aided by the knowledge that the design of the drawing room at the Corbit House in Odessa, Delaware had been modeled after the Powel Ballroom (Figure 4.5). While the room's wide chimney breast flanked by fluted pilasters and panels is indeed almost identical to the one the museum had extracted from the Powel House, its mantel and overmantel is more closely related to the chimneypiece the Metropolitan Museum of Art had taken from the second floor back room.²²⁸ Without a known precedent, Kimball designed a conjectural overmantel that combined elements found in Swan's

²²⁶ Fiske Kimball, "The Modern Museum of Art," *Architectural Record* 66 (December 1929): 574.

²²⁷ Fiske Kimball, "The Sources of the 'Philadelphia Chippendale,'" 186.

²²⁸ *Ibid*, 187.

texts as well details that are unique for the period. Kimball's overmantel duplicates the brackets from the surround below producing a stacked effect. Double tiers of brackets, i.e. one pair of brackets above the mantel board and one pair below, are unrecorded in surviving eighteenth-century chimney walls in Philadelphia and abroad, nor are they found in any period design book.²²⁹ Furthermore, the low relief of the carving in the 1920s reconstructions reflects a superficial understanding of how to replicate eighteenth-century woodworking techniques.

Elsewhere in the Powel Room, elements that had disappeared were merely omitted from the museum installation. A series of photographs of the Powel House taken in 1908 by Franklin D. Edmonds, detail that the fluted pilasters on the fireplace wall had been topped by wood rectangles with diamonds carved in their fields, which were not reproduced by the museum (Figure 4.6). Vertical moldings intended to frame the fireplace opening were also not reconstructed. The lintels above the doors were left plain, despite the knowledge that they were once either carved or had applied ornament similar to the room's frieze. During the installation of the room, it was reduced in width by six inches and in length by three inches. Despite this relatively small change in dimension, the Philadelphia Museum of Art's Powel House room appears to be considerably smaller than the original. This is largely an illusion that can be attributed to the omission of the two south windows in the museum's reconstruction and by the change in direction of the floorboards. Kimball's enfilade of period rooms at the Philadelphia Museum of Art also demanded that the doors that originally flanked the fireplace be moved to a sidewall for ease of visitor circulation. When completed, the Philadelphia Museum of Art's Powel Room was markedly altered. Despite Kimball's appeal for museums to present authentic interiors to the public, when it came his own institution it appears that the integrity of the

²²⁹ Kirtley, "Front Parlor from the Powel House, E 20.

installed period rooms was less important than the ability to fit them into a neat series. Despite his intellectual arguments against the manipulation of woodwork in period rooms, Kimball's work in the Powel Room confirms that architectural fragments were viewed as secondary to the objects that were displayed within them.

In furnishing the Powel Room, Kimball selected numerous fine pieces of Chippendale inspired Philadelphia furniture (Figure 4.7). In a 1929 letter to Mabel Baird, the administrator of the Germantown Tribute Fund, a fund that permitted the Philadelphia Museum of Art to purchase approved works, Kimball detailed that the museum had recently spent \$1,700 on a pair of "carved Philadelphia Chippendale side chairs...[that] belong to what has been called the finest known set of Philadelphia chairs," for installation in the Powel Room.²³⁰ In choosing an appropriate fabric to create window hangings, the museum spent nearly two years searching throughout Europe and the East Coast of the United States for an adequate quantity of eighteenth-century brocade. In describing the brocade, which was finally selected and bought for a reported \$2,794.10, Kimball let Baird know that "This kind of material is most difficult of all the eighteenth century fabrics to secure in quantity, and we are extremely fortunate to find enough, even leaving over few small pieces, which have been used in upholstering the room."²³¹

As an inventory of Samuel Powel's possessions has never been found, tracking down Powel furnishings with solid provenances is nearly impossible. Thus, out of necessity, in furnishing the Powel Room, Kimball chose a selection of furniture and paintings that derive from

²³⁰ Mabel Baird, née Rogers, was descended on her mother's side from Dr, Thomas Wynne, the first Speaker of the Colonial Assembly of Pennsylvania, as well as Owen Jones and William Wynne Wister, both signers of Continental currency. Both Mabel and her husband Edgar were active within antiquarian circle. Edgar was a member of the Sons of the Revolution. John Woolf Jordan, *Colonial Families of Philadelphia, Volume 2*, Philadelphia: Lewis Publishing Company, 1911, 1544. Letter from Fiske Kimball to Mabel Baird, February 21st, 1929, box 178, folder 23, Fiske Kimball Records, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

²³¹ Ibid.

the town house of the Cadwaladers.²³² Contemporaries of the Powels, the Cadwaladers were an equally distinguished family within the society of eighteenth-century Philadelphia. Undertaking a redecoration campaign of their townhouse in 1770, the Cadwaladers hired numerous artisans who had recently completed work on the Powel House.²³³ The furnishings commissioned for the newly decorated interior of the Cadwalder house are unrivaled for the quality of carving and richness. Among the distinguished pieces of Cadwalder furniture displayed in the Powel room are a remarkable easy chair dating to 1770 and a heavily ornamented gaming table both attributed to Thomas Affleck.²³⁴ Other Cadwalder furniture in the room includes two Chippendale style side chairs and a second gaming table attributed to Benjamin Randolph.²³⁵ The five paintings hung on the walls of the Powel Room were commissioned by John Cadwalader in 1770 from Charles Willson Peale, a Maryland born artist.

The Philadelphia Museum of Art opened in its new location at the base of Fairmount Park on March 26th 1928. Kimball's striking Beaux-Arts plan allowed visitors to systematically experience "the entire history of art, from its beginnings in the Orient...in a pictorial form." The museum's ten period rooms were critically lauded, with the Rockefeller General Education

²³² The Cadwalader house, which was located on Second Street, was demolished in 1816.

²³³ Powel Room Museum Label, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2014.

²³⁴ Thomas Affleck was an American cabinetmaker of Scottish birth. He trained as a cabinetmaker in London. In 1763 John Penn, Governor of Pennsylvania, invited Affleck to Philadelphia, where he would later open a shop on Second Street in the Society Hill area. Affleck was known for his stylish mahogany furniture that he produced for the governor's mansion at Lansdowne, PA, and for many of the most prominent families in the city, including the Mifflins, the Whartons and the Chew family at Cliveden. Oscar P. Fitzgerald. "Affleck, Thomas." *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed March 13, 2014,

²³⁵ Benjamin Randolph was an American joiner and cabinetmaker who owned a shop on Chestnut Street, Philadelphia. He employed several journeymen joiners and two skilled, London-trained carvers, Hercules Courtenay (1744–84) and John Pollard (1748–87), who were well-equipped to provide customers with furnishings in the current London style. In 1775 Thomas Jefferson commissioned him to make the portable writing desk on which the Declaration of Independence was drafted. Beatrice B. Garvan. "Randolph, Benjamin." *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed March 13, 2014.

Board so impressed that they offered the institution a \$350,000 grant to aid in the creation of more rooms.²³⁶ As with the Powel Room at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Philadelphia Museum's Powel Room was frequently highlighted by the press. Writing about the museum for the *Christian Science Monitor*, Carl Greenleaf Beede noted the difficulty in choosing an "illustration which would fairly represent the character of the period rooms...since each one is of interest." He argued, however, that the Powel Room had "the most striking individuality" of all of the rooms displayed. Beede further promoted the Powel Room, stating "So in general and in detail we find this room not only of exceptional interest because of its American character but in an even more striking manner because of its unique reliance on the resources of former Philadelphia citizens."²³⁷

In 1931 a developer interested in demolishing the Powel House to make room for a surface parking lot approached Wolf Klebansky. Despite being "stripped of anything which might possibly be considered of value from an antiquarian point of view, with the exception possibly of the front doorway...", the house's recent stint in the press due the opening of Philadelphia Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art's American Wing had placed it in the public eye.²³⁸ On June 6th, 1931 it was announced that the nascent Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks had acquired the property with the intent of opening it to the public.²³⁹ Formed around the fundraising efforts to buy the Powel House, the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks was organized by Frances Anne Wister, a prominent

²³⁶ "Quaker City to See its New Museum: Completed Section of \$15,000,000 Building to Be Ready March 26th," *New York Times*, March 11, 1928, 32.

²³⁷ Carl Greenleaf Beede, "Period Rooms of the Philadelphia Museum: Houses are Exhibits Too," *Christian Science Monitor* May 12th, 1928, 9.

²³⁸ Letter from Joseph Downs to Mrs. Harford Powel, Jr., February 13th, 1931, box 178, folder 24, Fiske Kimball Records, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

²³⁹ "Philadelphians to Preserve House Washington Occupied," *New York Times* June 6th, 1931, 4.

Philadelphian who traced her ancestry back to Caspar Wüster who immigrated to Philadelphia from the Palatinate region of Germany in 1717.²⁴⁰

Wister's work as president of the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks likely derived from an interest in the storied history of her own family. The second house the society purchased to open to the public was Grumblethorpe, her family's historic summer residence.²⁴¹ In regards to the Powel House, however, the influence of both the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art seem to have presented a convincing case for its preservation. Wister noted that it was the period rooms, that had "called such marked attention to the house," which caused the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks to acquire the Powel House.²⁴²

While the Powel House may have been safe from demolition, its largely missing interior represented an overwhelming obstacle for an organization that hoped to open the house as a period museum like those administered by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. Understanding that the Philadelphia Museum of Art had taken a large selection of woodwork from the house in 1926 that was not being used, Eleanore Willing Patterson, the Chairman of the Powel House Committee, contacted Fiske Kimball in 1932. In her letter, Patterson noted that society had managed to raise "enough money to have the house on the adjoining site torn down." This house was to be replaced by a reconstruction of Samuel Powel's ornamental gardens. Furthermore with the aid of H.L. Duhring, Jr., the architect hired to oversee

²⁴⁰ John W. Jordan, ed., *Colonial and Revolutionary Families of Pennsylvania*, New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1911, 257.

²⁴¹ Grumblethorpe was built in 1744 for John Wister, a prominent Philadelphia merchant and wine importer. The house became the family's primary residence after they withdrew from the city during the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793, which claimed Samuel Powel as one of its many casualties. Herbert Pullinger, *Old Germantown*, Philadelphia: David McKay Company, 1926, 19.

²⁴² Frances Anne Wister, "The Powel House," Undated, box 178, folder 26, Fiske Kimball Records, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

the Powel reconstruction, the society was in the process of “securing estimates on the cost of restoring the front room on the ground floor and the front part of the hall,” which was all the organization felt it could undertake at the moment. Patterson was curious if the “Trustees of the Museum [would] be willing to give [the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks] the woodwork of the hall” to aid in the restoration efforts. The woodwork taken from the other parts of the house by the museum in 1926 were of interest to Patterson as well. She requested that the museum make this material available to the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks when the organization could afford to reinstall it in the house.²⁴³ The trustees of the museum proved amenable to Patterson’s request and in the summer of 1935, the museum deaccessioned the woodwork from the front hall of the Powel House to turn over to the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks.²⁴⁴ Kimball was likely influential in this decision as he had only advised taking the woodwork from the house as “commercial interests were threatening to place it out of reach forever.”²⁴⁵ In writing to Patterson, Kimball detailed that he “was delighted to cooperate with the Society in restoring [the woodwork] to its original position.”²⁴⁶

Reconstructing the interior of the Powel House was a lengthy and expensive process. While the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks had a wealthy constituency that occasionally funded restoration work, it still had to actively fundraise to pay for improvements within the house. Throughout the 1930s the society held annual exhibitions of

²⁴³ Letter from Eleanor Willing Patterson to Fiske Kimball, April 20th, 1932, box 178, folder 24, Fiske Kimball Records, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

²⁴⁴ Letter from Fiske Kimball to Eleanor Willing Patterson, June 27th, 1935, box 35, folder 5, Fiske Kimball Records, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

²⁴⁵ Letter from Fiske Kimball to Eleanor Willing Patterson, May 29th, 1934, 1935, box 35, folder 5, Fiske Kimball Records, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

antiques at Wanamaker's department store to benefit the Powel house restoration.²⁴⁷ When able, the Philadelphia Museum of Art would loan objects from its collection to aid in the exhibitions.²⁴⁸ In 1937 the program for the Fourth Annual Exhibition details the work that had been undertaken at the Powel House up until then. The program notes that:

The house next door was demolished in 1932, and a Colonial garden has been made, which blooms constantly during Spring and Summer months. It is further embellished by a sun-dial, which is an original English antique, the gift of the Soroptomist Club of Philadelphia. In the Summer of 1933 the exterior of the back building was restored and a new roof put on. During the spring of 1934 the exterior of the main house on Third Street was cleaned, new windows and shutters placed and all the woodwork painted. The roof of the main building, chimney and cornices were restored during the summer of 1935. The Keasbey & Masttison Company made a gift of Old Colony gray asbestos shingles for the roof, which is now almost indestructible. The next important step, the installation of a furnace, has just been completed. This has been made possible throughout the proceeds of the "Bridge and Tea" in March, 1936 and through the gifts of interested friends. The halls and staircases up to and including the third floor are in progress of restoration through the gifts of three friends, who have each given a hall and staircase. The front room on the first floor is being resorted as a memorial to Mrs. Cyrus H.K. Curtis.²⁴⁹

Through a continual blend of donations and fundraising events the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks was able to open the Powel House to the public in 1940.

In its work at the Powel House, the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks never attempted to acquire the woodwork that had been installed as period rooms at the Metropolitan and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Thus, when it opened to the public, the two most important interiors in the Powel House were modern fabrications. These two interiors were recreated by carefully measuring and documenting the woodwork that had been installed at

²⁴⁷ "Needle Work to be Seen: Philadelphia Landmark Society to Open Benefit Oct. 28th," *New York Times* September 26th, 1935, 2.

²⁴⁸ Letter from Fiske Kimball to Mrs. Harrold E. Gillingham, September 1st, 1936, 1935, box 35, folder 14, Fiske Kimball Records, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

²⁴⁹ Program for Fourth Annual Exhibition of "Neddlework Today," 1937, box 35, folder 14, Fiske Kimball Records, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

both the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In recreating the front room, Kimball's Colonial Revival interjections were ignored and the photographs taken of the house in 1908 by Franklin D. Edmonds were used to design lost elements. Kimball's overmantel was also disregarded and more period appropriate design was created. Lacking the aesthetic manipulation that had rearranged the placement of ceilings, windows and doors at both the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the recreated Powel House rooms presented a faithful interpretation of the paneling and architectural ornament that had been executed in the 1770s.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art has consciously maintained the original interpretation of its Powel Room "in order to illustrate the impact of the Colonial Revival on the way Americans view the past."²⁵⁰ The Powel Room at the Philadelphia Museum was reinterpreted in the mid-1970s and during this effort, the doors were moved back to their original position flanking the fireplace. Today this room sits somewhere between period room and gallery. While maintaining the same collection of objects that were originally placed in it, the furniture in the Philadelphia Museum of Art's Powel Room is no longer arranged into groupings and instead placed against the wall. Smaller objects have been removed from tabletops and the room's mantel and have been placed in vitrines.

Taken at a point in time when the outlook for the house was grim, the two Powel period rooms increased the cultural value of the Powel House to the public. So enhanced was its image, that despite the professional opinion of Joseph Downs, the Curator of Decorative Arts at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, that the house had "very little to justify its preservation," the Powel

²⁵⁰ Amelia Peck et. al, *Period Rooms in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1996, 192.

House was purchased and restoration began during the worst part of the Great Depression.²⁵¹ The entire composition of the reconstructed woodwork at the Powel House and its two museum period rooms represent an important narrative regarding the history of preservation and the development of the twentieth-century art museum.

²⁵¹ Letter from Joseph Downs to Mrs. Powel, February 13th, 1931, box 178, folder 24, Fiske Kimball Records, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

Images for Chapter Four

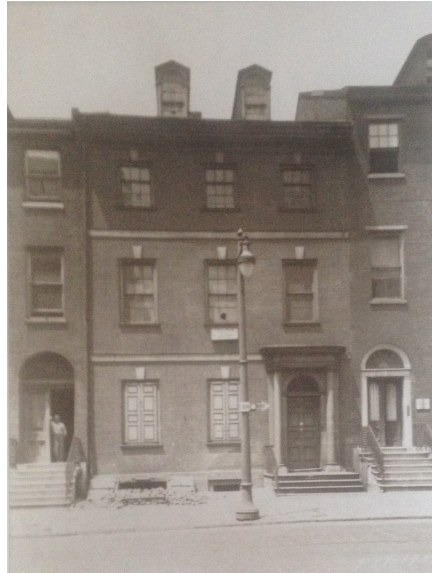


Figure 4.1: The Powel House circa 1920.

Source: Edward Arthur Mauger, *Philadelphia Then and Now*, San Diego: Thunder Map Press, 2002, 82.

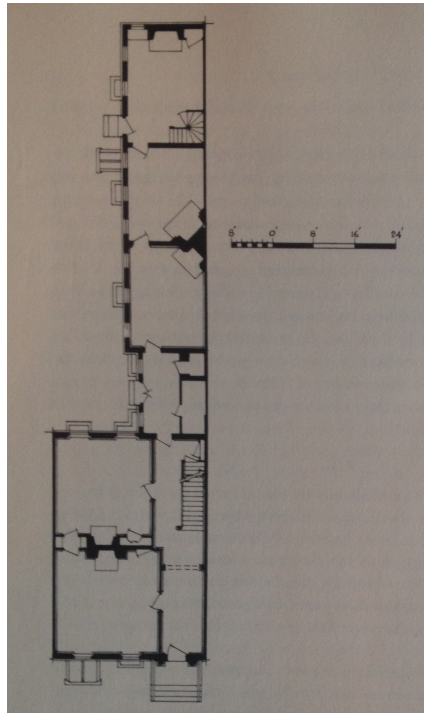


Figure 4.2: The plan of the first floor of the Powel House.

Source: George B Tatum, *Philadelphia Georgian: The City House of Samuel Powel and Some of its Neighbors*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1976, 56.



Figure 4.3: Detail of the reproduction of the “ballroom” ceiling at the Powel House.
Source: Historic American Building Survey, 1967.



Figure 4.4: The Powel Room as installed in the American Wing in 1924.
Source: Max Jaffe, "Room from Powel House in the American Wing of The Metropolitan Museum of Art," Ca. 1930, Image Collection, Museum of the City of New York.

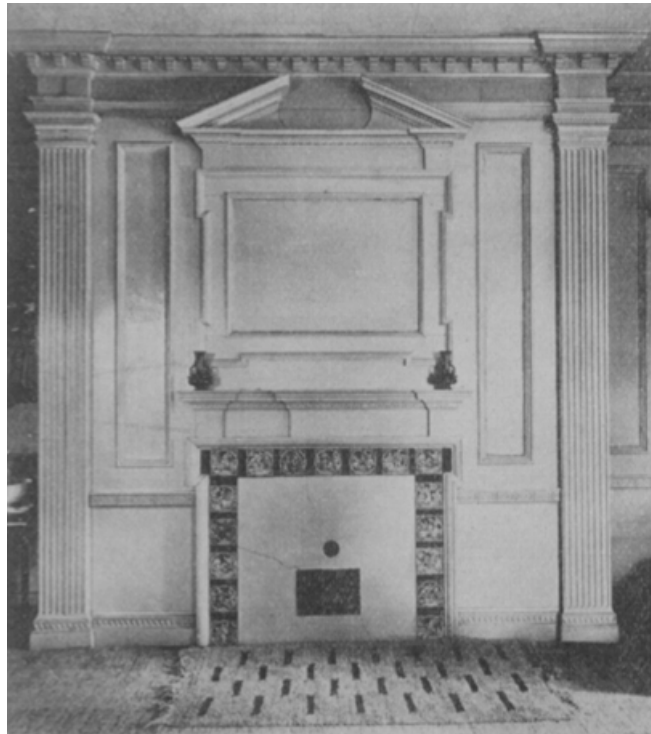


Figure 4.5: Drawing Room of the Corbit House, Odessa, Delaware.

Source: Fiske Kimball, "Philadelphia Chippendale," *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum*, 21 (1926): 189.

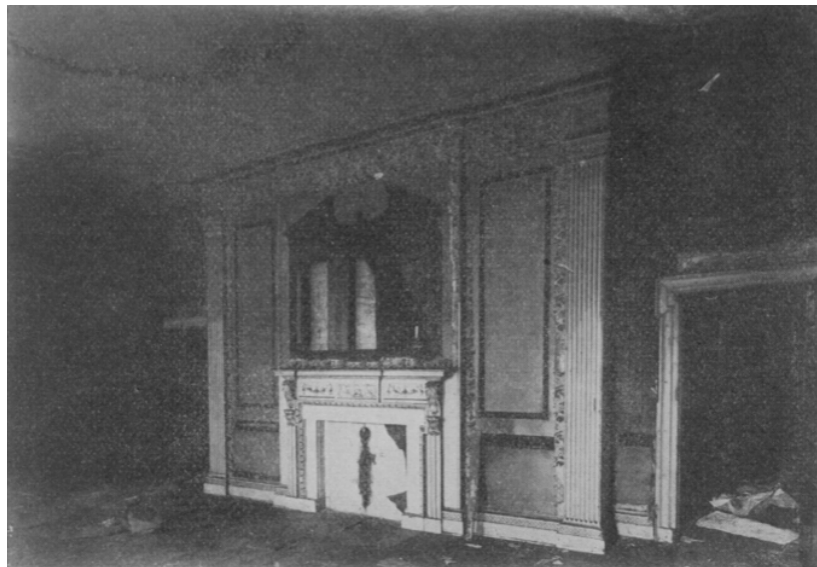


Figure 4.6: The Powel Ballroom taken by Franklin D. Edmonds, 1908.

Source: Fiske Kimball, "Philadelphia Chippendale," *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum*, 21 (1926): 187.



Figure 4-5: The Philadelphia Museum of Art's Powel Room in 1928.

Source: American Decorative Arts, Fiske Kimball Records, Box 178, Folder 26, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

Chapter Five: The Wentworth-Gardner House

By the third quarter of the eighteenth century Philadelphia was the second-largest English speaking city in the world. As a cosmopolitan center, the city's cabinetmakers and joiners produced some of the most sophisticated furniture and interiors in Colonial America. Despite this, paneling and decorative arts from New England were consistently placed at a premium by the Metropolitan Museum of Art when it was searching for interiors for its American Wing. In the fall of 1916, Henry Watson Kent wrote to William Sumner Appleton, Jr., the acting secretary and founder of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA), on behalf of the Metropolitan Museum of Art asking for help in locating New England rooms worthy of being installed at the museum.²⁵² Appleton's work with SPNEA centered around keeping historic buildings intact and in New England. In writing back to Kent, Appleton declared that the only way SPNEA would aid the Metropolitan in its hunt was if material was found that was of no value to it, a local history museum, or the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Appleton stated that despite his dislike of local antiquities relocating to New York he "prefer[ed] that things should go to the Metropolitan rather than be destroyed..."²⁵³

Appleton never aided the Metropolitan Museum of Art in locating interiors from New England and the relationship between the museum and SPNEA retained a skeptical civility throughout the first part of the twentieth century. Preservationists throughout New England believed that their cultural patrimony had no business being transported to New York, while museum officials believed that there was a significant benefit in placing important interiors in the

²⁵² Letter from William Sumner Appleton, Jr. to Henry Watson Kent, September 29th, 1916, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, General Correspondence, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

²⁵³ Letter from Henry Watson Kent to William Sumner Appleton, Jr., September 26, 1916, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, General Correspondence, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

care of public institutions. Commenting on the issue, Robert W. de Forest stated, “I think there is a question about the relative public good accomplished between preservation in a small, sparsely visited, local historical society or museum and such institutions as the Metropolitan Museum of Art.”²⁵⁴ The conflict between in-situ preservationists in New England and the curators of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s American Wing escalated beginning in 1915 over the fate of the Wentworth-Gardner House.

The Wentworth-Gardner House was commissioned by Mark Hunking Wentworth (1709-1785), who was a prosperous New England merchant, in the third quarter of the eighteenth century for his son Thomas. Completed in 1761, the house is fairly typical of the wood Georgian residential architecture being produced in New England at that time. Its first floor contains four rooms divided symmetrically into two sets by a central hall. The rectilinear plan of the house is reflected in its wood exterior. The symmetrical, pedimented fenestration, large doorway flanked by Corinthian pilasters, simulated ashlar cladding, decorative wood quoins and dentil cornice are all typical of the period and are predictably handled (Figure 5.1). The house’s aesthetic significance is largely due to the treatment of its interior. Writing about the Wentworth-Gardner House for the *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* in 1919, Charles O. Cornelius described the interior of the house in detail, stating:

The front door opens directly into the entrance hallway, which is marked off from the stair hall by an elliptical arch spanning its width and springing from a group of three fluted Doric pilasters. A wainscot of thirty-eight inches high runs around this entrance shall as well as the stair hall, where it follows the easy rise of the stairs to the second floor....The ceiling cornice in the downstairs hall has dentil and egg and dart moldings below the carved medallions and above the usual cyma recta and fascia....The stairway has many points of interest, The newel post is made

²⁵⁴ Letter from Robert de Forest to Henry Kent, October 6th, 1916, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, General Correspondence, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

up of turned base and a cap upon which rests the termination of the hand-rail, while the shaft between is formed of five pieces, a central spirally turned spindle and four carved ribs. The spindles are three types, three to the tread, and take in succession the form of a thin Doric colonnette, a spirally turned column, and a graceful gourd-shaped baluster...In the eight rooms of the first and second floor the interest is concentrated upon the fire placed walls, which are paneled in wood from floor to ceiling. In all but two of these rooms, the fireplace is flanked by Corinthian pilasters, supporting the cornice, and the remainder of the wall to the right or left is occupied by simple paneling or doorways as the exigencies of the plan demand.²⁵⁵

The house exemplifies in plan and decorative treatment the conservatism that characterized architecture and the decorative arts in New England during the third quarter of the eighteenth century (Figures 5.2, 5.3, 5.4).

When Thomas Wentworth died in 1768, he had only lived in the house his father had built for him for eight years. The next owner was William Gardner, who lived in the house until 1834. After Gardner, the property passed through a series of owners and in 1915 it was purchased by Wallace Nutting. By the time of Nutting's purchase, both the house and the neighborhood around it had severely deteriorated. Restoring the house, Nutting redefined the Wentworth-Gardner House as symbol of colonial domesticity. Using the property as a stage set, Nutting would compose intimate tableaux of women in period dress surrounded by colonial furniture that were photographed, hand colored and sold. An amateur photographer, Nutting began his career as a Congregational minister and attended Harvard University, and both Hartford and Union Theological Seminaries. After suffering a nervous breakdown in 1904, Nutting's physician instructed him leave the ministry and to take up cycling as a therapeutic exercise. It was on these rides that Nutting began taking photographs of the idyllic New England countryside to sell in New York galleries. Divided into three general categories: birch pictures,

²⁵⁵ Charles O. Cornelius, "The Wentworth-Gardner House," *The Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 2 (February, 1919): 25-28.

apple blossom pictures, and colonial pictures, Nutting's photographs were widely popular and within a year he had sold so many that "a few people accused [him] of leaving the ministry in order to make money."²⁵⁶

In 1906 Nutting and his wife purchased a historic farm, which they named Nuttinghame, in Southbury, Massachusetts. Along with reseeded the fallowed fields, the farmhouse was restored to Nutting's colonial aesthetic and the barn was transformed into a photography production studio. Lying somewhere between a utopian village and a factory town, Nuttinghame housed teams of employees, boarded onsite in dormitories, who aided in Nutting's growing photography business. Among the most crucial of these employees was a team of female colorists who were responsible for tinting Nutting's platinum prints with watercolors. Working in the farmhouse's expansive second story hall, the colorists painted in teams of six and were supervised by a head colorist Nutting had brought from New York City. Given little creative leeway, the colorists would tint each print systematically. For example, a single blue would be mixed for the entire team who would then proceed to color the skies of numerous prints before a green would be mixed for the trees and so on.²⁵⁷ The entire enterprise proved highly successful and by 1910, Nutting had incorporated the business as Wallace Nutting, Inc.

Nutting's images of colonial domestic life were by no means academic and they often combined furniture and objects from varying centuries into one composition. Sentimental and nostalgic, the photographs celebrated the traditional roles of women and female subjects were often depicted in the kitchen or at the spinning wheel (Figure 5.5). The popularity of these images was precisely in their staid conservatism, and they provided purchasers an aesthetically

²⁵⁶ Marion T. Colley, "I Never Learned to Live Until I was Fifty," *American Magazine* 103 (January 1927): 41.

²⁵⁷ Thomas Andrew Denenberg, *Wallace Nutting and the Invention of Old America*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003, 42.

pleasing, if not fictitious, rendering of the past. The success Nutting experienced with his photographs led him to established “The Wallace Nutting Chain of Colonial Picture Houses.” Utilized foremost as backdrops for his photographs, the five New England houses that comprised the chain were the Wentworth-Gardner House of Portsmouth, New Hampshire; the Iron Works at Saugus, Massachusetts; the Webb-Willes-Washington House in Wethersfield, Connecticut; the Hazen Garrison House in Haverhill, Massachusetts; and the Cutler-Bartlet House in Newbury, Massachusetts. When not in use as photographic sets, the houses were open to the public who, for a small fee, could inhabit the world Nutting had created within his photographs

Wallace Nutting’s Chain of Colonial Picture Houses might have succeeded if it had not opened to the public just as the United States entered World War I. Due to a halt in the domestic tourism market, Nutting’s houses were producing debts instead of profits and in 1918 he put all five historic houses on the market along with their furnishings. He had first offered the five houses to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities for \$125,000. The prospect of quickly raising that amount of money, plus a \$25,000 endowment to fund the houses’ operating costs, was a daunting task and the trustees of the society determined that “it was inexpedient to make the attempt.”²⁵⁸

News of the sale reached Henry Watson Kent at the Metropolitan Museum of Art through the Brooks Reed Gallery, which represented Wallace Nutting in New York City.²⁵⁹ Kent saw the sale as an opportunity for the museum to purchase an American seventeenth-century interior, which it was having trouble acquiring due to the protective efforts of SPNEA. Only interested in the Iron Works House in Saugus, Massachusetts (1646-1668), Kent approached the

²⁵⁸ William Sumner Appeltton Jr., “The Wallace Nutting Houses,” *Bulletin of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities*, 10 (1919): 15.

²⁵⁹ Letter from Joseph Breck to Henry Watson Kent, June 5th, 1918, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Wentworth-Gardner House), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

Brooks Reed Gallery to attempt to negotiate a deal (Figure 5.6). He was informed, however, that the five houses and their furniture were being sold as a lot. Subsequently contacting Nutting, Kent learned that this was indeed true and that furthermore, much of the Saugus house was a modern reconstruction. Uninterested in purchasing all five houses, and understanding that Nutting's furniture was not up to the museum's standards, Kent withdrew from the sale.

In July, Nutting contacted Kent, offering to sell the Wentworth-Gardner House, which he described as "one of the most beautiful in America" to the museum. Along with the letter, Nutting had the New York City Wanamaker's department store, which was interested in purchasing some of the Nutting furniture, forward a book of "beautiful photographs of the house" to the museum.²⁶⁰ The house was apparently of interest to Kent, who quickly contacted Robert de Forest about the matter. Not understanding the immediacy of the situation, Kent requested a three-week refusal period in order to work on a proposal for the purchase. After two weeks, however, Nutting contacted the Metropolitan, stating that a private party was interested in the Wentworth-Gardner House. Fearing the loss of an aesthetically important interior, de Forest placed the matter before the Purchasing Committee, which allocated funds for the house.²⁶¹ On July 31st, 1918 Kent wrote to Nutting confirming the museum's purchase of "all of the interior woodwork and trim of the Wentworth-Gardner House...including all paneling, mopboards, cornices, window frames and shushes in the 8 rooms and halls of the first and second floors" for \$13,000.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Letter from R.T.H. Halsey to Edward Robinson, September 7th, 1918, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Wentworth-Gardner House), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Letter from Henry Watson Kent to Wallace Nutting, July 31st, 1918, Office of the Secretary Subject Files woodwork purchased (Wentworth-Gardner House), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

Before its purchase of the Wentworth-Gardner House, the Metropolitan Museum of Art had “not been able to acquire anything which represented New England at its best....”²⁶³ Several times the museum had withdrawn from prospective purchases at the request of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, including in 1917 when the museum was in the final steps of acquiring the John Paul Jones House.²⁶⁴ The Metropolitan was particularly interested in purchasing seventeenth-century interiors from New England, but the scarcity of these made this a difficult prospect. When the American Wing opened, it presented modern fabrications of both the Thomas Hart House, which was dated to the mid -seventeenth century, and the Parson Capen House, dated to 1683, as their perspective owners had refused to sell interior woodwork to the museum (Figures 5.7, 5.8).²⁶⁵ Owing to the Wentworth-Gardner House’s location in an “unfavorable” quarter in Portsmouth, Kent was determined that moving its interior to the American Wing would expose the house to a “vast audience.” Furthermore, he was assured that Appleton would be happy to see New England prominently represented in the American Wing, stating “I believe that nothing could do so much to revive the traditions of those splendid New England days as to have a worthy specimen of New England household architecture where it could be seen by the thousands who visit our metropolis every year.” Kent argued further that when “the house became part of [the museum’s] plan it would assist Dr. Appleton in his splendid undertaking in seeing that the treasures of New England architecture are preserved for the benefit of the descendants of the people who built them.”²⁶⁶

²⁶³Letter from R.T.H. Halsey to Edward Robinson, September 7th, 1918, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Wentworth-Gardner House), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Jeffery Trask, *Things American: Art Museums and Civic Culture in the Progressive Era*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012 177.

²⁶⁶Letter from R.T.H. Halsey to Edward Robinson, September 7th, 1918, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Wentworth-Gardner House), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

Appleton did not share Kent's opinion regarding the Metropolitan's purchase of the Wentworth-Gardner House. On September 3rd, 1918 he appealed to Edward Robinson, the director of the museum:

A rumor reaches me that the Wentworth-Gardner House in Portsmouth, N.H., lately owned by Mr. Wallace Nutting, has been bought by a museum-probably to be dismantled and its best features used for period rooms. This is very sad news to me and I hope you will excuse me if I write to ask whether or not the Metropolitan museum is the buyer....²⁶⁷

Disliking the prospect of a house noted for its "extreme beauty and elegant detail..." being dismantled and shipped to New York City to be used as museum installations Appleton attempted to strike a deal with Robinson:

Doubtless you and I are agreed that it would be vastly better to have the museum take these rooms out of the house for preservation as period rooms than to have the building pulled down by a house wrecker and the wood trim scattered among a score of buyers for re-creation regardless of anything except individual needs. But the best of all is always the preservation of the house in its entirety....would it be possible to give [SPNEA] a chance to redeem the house by paying what the museum paid for it if we can raise the money within a reasonable length of time? This would be an excessively large undertaking at the best in times like these but it might turn out to be a possible one in view of the well-known excellence of this house.²⁶⁸

Robinson, who had very little to do with the purchase of the Wentworth-Gardner House, responded to Appleton's letter curtly. Like Kent, he believed that the museum had done the public a great favor in purchasing the house. Coincidentally Kent had met the prospective purchaser of the Wentworth-Gardner House Nutting had alluded to in his correspondence. The man revealed to Kent that he and his wife had planned to put the house on "a larger barge and

²⁶⁷ Letter from Wallace Nutting to Edward Robinson, September 3rd, 1918, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Wentworth-Gardner House), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

float it down to their place on the Long Island Sound.”²⁶⁹ Understanding that if it were not for the museum, the house would have effectively disappeared, Robinson furthermore did not believe the museum had any responsibilities to SPNEA in this matter as there was no “bona fide effort begin made to preserve” the house “in situ for the benefit of posterity....”²⁷⁰ Robinson closed his letter stating:

I doubt whether our Trustees would consider favorably your proposition that they should agree to convert the property to your Society for the price paid if you can raise the money within a reasonable length of time. Nevertheless I am quite ready to submit the proposition if you wish me to do so.²⁷¹

Understanding the momentous task of raising funds during wartime, Robinson politely let Appleton know that “According to present arrangements the woodwork will not be removed for some time although the title has been passed.”²⁷²

Appleton turned to the board of trustees of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities to make a final decision in regard to their interest in the Wentworth-Gardner House. The trustees had previously turned down a chance to buy the house from Wallace Nutting. It was argued, however, that this original reluctance was due to the assumption that a local Portsmouth group would form to protect the house. The house’s high price and the exigencies of the sale largely had prevented this from happening.²⁷³ Despite a prevailing attitude among the trustees that the house should remain in Portsmouth, it was decided, “not to pursue the

²⁶⁹ Letter from R.T.H. Halsey to Edward Robinson, September 7th, 1918, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Wentworth-Gardner House), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

²⁷⁰ Letter from Edward Robinson to William Sumner Appleton, Jr., September 9th, 1918, SPNEA Files

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Letter from Edward Robinson to William Sumner Appleton, Jr., September 9th, 1918, SPNEA Files

²⁷³ William Sumner Appleton, Jr., “The Wallace Nutting Houses,” 15.

matter further.”²⁷⁴ Appleton relayed this consensus to Robinson stating, “Of course we all regret greatly, as you must yourself, the fact that the house is not to be preserved intact where it stands, but the situation seems to be simply another one of the war casualties in the field of fine arts.”²⁷⁵

As a last resort, Appleton pleaded that the museum “set the entire house in a large covered court in the museum, thereby preserving it as nearly as possible as it now stands in Portsmouth.”²⁷⁶

Clearly upset over the matter, Appleton wrote in the 1919 *Bulletin of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities* that it was only appropriate for museums to take interiors when “a house is certainly doomed to destruction and about to be pulled down” and “not merely ‘For Sale’ as in the case of the Wentworth Gardner house.”²⁷⁷ Appleton worried that SPNEA’s inability to save the Wentworth-Gardner House established a dangerous precedent where “houses still standing in perfect condition...may nevertheless become the objects of envy of some rich individual or institution amply able to tempt the owners to part with them.”²⁷⁸

The *New York Times* broke the news of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s purchase of the Wentworth-Gardner House to the general public on February 12th, 1919. The article details that the Metropolitan Museum of Art would, at some point in the near future, begin dismantling the house’s eight most important rooms, which would then be shipped to the museum where they would be installed to house “large quantities of beautiful furniture of which [the museum] has

²⁷⁴ Letter from William Sumner Appleton, Jr., to Edward Robinson, October 18th, 1918, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Wentworth-Gardner House), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ William Sumner Appleton, Jr., “The Wallace Nutting Houses,” 15.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

notable collections.”²⁷⁹ Eleven days later, an article published in the *Boston Daily Globe* verified the museum’s plan to remove the eight principle rooms of the Wentworth-Gardner House.

By the time the Metropolitan Museum of Art was in possession of the Wentworth-Gardner House, R.T.H. Halsey and Durr Friedley had already arranged the purchase of thirteen other interiors.²⁸⁰ It was De Forest’s intention that along with a vastly accumulating collection of American paintings and decorative arts, these rooms would be installed in a new wing to be erected in the northwest corner of the museum’s site. The wing was to be a freestanding building, linked by a single corridor to the existing European decorative arts galleries. Conceptually, de Forest believed this arrangement would demonstrate to visitors that American arts were a manifestation of European traditions.²⁸¹ The first plan for the wing was drawn in 1916 by Friedley, who designed a nine-bay-wide, four-bay-deep, and three-story-high brick Georgian-style structure with a hipped roof and cupola. This plan was quickly abandoned though, as in 1917 Friedley was replaced by Charles O. Cornelius. Acting as assistant curator, Cornelius was quickly immersed in the American Wing project.

In 1919, Cornelius attempted to produce a design for the American Wing that was defined by a chronological circuit through the Metropolitan’s newly collected period rooms. To

²⁷⁹ “Buys Old Colonial House: Art Museum to Show Eight Decorated Rooms of Period 1761,” *New York Times*, February 12th, 1919, 11.

²⁸⁰ These thirteen interiors were: the Hewlett Room fireplace wall (1740-1760) from Woodbury, New York, which was acquired in 1910; the Hampton Room (ca. 1750) from Hampton, New Hampshire, acquired in 1911; Haverhill Room I (ca. 1805) from Haverhill, Massachusetts, which was acquired in 1912; Haverhill Room II (ca. 1805) from Haverhill, Massachusetts, which was acquired in 1912; the Marmion Room (1756; painted ca. 1770) from King George County, Virginia, which was acquired in 1916; the Bowler Room fireplace wall (ca. 1750) from Portsmouth, Rhode Island, which was acquired in 1916; the Petersburg Room (1811) from Petersburg, Virginia, which was acquired in 1917; the Powel Room (1765-1771) from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which was acquired in 1918; the Almodington Room (1750) from Somerset County, Maryland, which was acquired 1918; The Baltimore Room (1810-1811) from Baltimore, Maryland, which was acquired in 1918; and the Newington Room and Stairs (ca. 1750) from Newington, Connecticut, which was acquired in 1918.

²⁸¹ Charles O. Cornelius, “The New Wing of Early American Art: Plan and Arrangement,” *The Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 11 (November 1922): 5.

accommodate the thirteen collected rooms as well as the first and second floors of the Wentworth-Gardner House, Cornelius expanded Friedley's original design, producing a building eleven bays wide and six bays deep. The prescribed circuit would begin on the new building's first floor where four large exhibition galleries and a cluster of three mid-eighteenth-century period rooms stood. Visitors would then proceed to the second floor where the entire first floor of the Wentworth-Gardner House was installed, flanked by a series of other period rooms dating to the third quarter of the eighteenth century. On the third floor, period rooms dating to the Federal period were interrupted by the second floor of the Wentworth-Gardner House, producing an awkward effect (Figure 5.9). To Cornelius' credit, the prospect of assembling the period rooms in such a way to fit with the new building's symmetrical fenestration pattern was no small task.

Unhappy with Cornelius' plans, de Forest hired, at his own expense, Grosvenor Atterbury (1869-1956) to design the new wing. With this decision, de Forest also announced that the marble facade of the Branch Bank of the United States, built on Wall Street in 1822 and designed by Martin E Thompson, would be incorporated into the new building's facade.²⁸² The basic part of Atterbury's new design was similar to Cornelius'. The museum's collection of American works would be divided into three distinctive periods (1630-1725, 1721-1790, 1790-1825), and each period would be allocated to a floor where the appropriate rooms would be assembled. Visitors would be allowed to walk through the period rooms, experiencing the three established epochs visually and spatially. The seven-bay facade of the Branch Bank restricted the width of the new wing and Atterbury was unable to fit the eight rooms from the Wentworth-Gardner House to his plans. Instead, he proposed moving the entire house from Portsmouth to

²⁸² "Assay Office Facade," Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives as discussed in Morrison H. Heckscher, "the American Wing Rooms in the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 46 (2012): 165.

the museum and placing it opposite the new wing, forming the south side of a quadrangle. The east and west sides of the quadrangle would be formed by one-story hyphens that would display Colonial doorways and the quadrangle itself would be “treated as a Colonial garden.”²⁸³ While, the Wentworth-Gardner House was still to be moved from its site, at least it was to be moved in total as Appleton had suggested in 1919 (Figure 5.10).

Atterbury’s plans for the Metropolitan’s new wing were published in *The Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* in November of 1922.²⁸⁴ That same month, the future of the Wentworth-Gardner House became questionable yet again. On the 14th, F. Kingsbury Curtis, a New York attorney and acquaintance of de Forest, contacted the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. According to Curtis, “the Museums had communicated to the people in Portsmouth its willingness to preserve the [Wentworth-Gardner House] in-situ if a sufficient guarantee fund could be raised to care for it and preserve it in perpetuity.”²⁸⁵ Having “New England Ancestry,” Curtis wished to see the Wentworth-Gardner House remain in Portsmouth and urged the society to “consider the matter.” Responding to this letter, Appleton insisted that SPNEA “desire[d] to see the Wentworth-Gardner House preserved in Portsmouth...” and that in order to act, needed “all details price, terms.”²⁸⁶ Curtis, who had apparently overstepped his authority on the matter, responded to Appleton’s request for details, stating that:

My letter of November 14th, 1922, was based wholly on a personal and informal conversation with the President of the Metropolitan Museum, Mr. de Forest. He states to me today that the matter has never been taken up officially with the Trustees of the Museum, and that he would prefer not to be quoted as having reached any conclusion as to the availability of the transfer.²⁸⁷

²⁸³ Charles Over Cornelius, “The New Wing of Early American Art: Plan and Arrangement,” 4.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Letter from F. Kingsbury Curtis to SPNEA, November 14th, 1922, SPNEA files.

²⁸⁶ Letter from William Sumner Appleton, Jr. to F. Kingsbury Curtis, November 20th, 1922, SPNEA files.

²⁸⁷ Letter from F. Kingsbury Curtis to SPNEA, November 21st, 1922, SPNEA files.

Nevertheless, Appleton contacted Kent about the matter, who asserted that the museum still intended to move the house to New York, aloofly stating, “The removal will depend upon many things, appropriations, etc., etc.,-you will understand the multitude of details which attend the doing of it.”

Between 1922 and 1923, the Metropolitan Museum of Art decided, for unknown reasons, that it was not interested in moving the Wentworth-Gardner House to New York nor was it interested in removing any of its rooms. This news reached Appleton from Charles Walker, a resident of Portsmouth. Walker detailed that the museum had offered the house to the city for \$9,000, however, Portsmouth was “experiencing a wave of economy in civic expenditure,” and declined the offer.²⁸⁸ Despite this, the house remained unaltered in Portsmouth throughout the 1920s, with Kent steadfastly refusing to acknowledge to Appleton that the museum intended on disposing of the property.²⁸⁹

In 1932, Appleton received a letter from Herbert Eustis Winlock, who had been made the Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art earlier that year. Winlock detailed that while the museum was continuing to collect interiors for future installations in the American Wing, it had no interest in anything from the Wentworth-Gardner House. Attempting to find a reputable buyer for the house, Winlock reported that he had made “some very tentative informal inquiries of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, of the Essex Institute in Salem, and in Portsmouth itself...” Apparently, “the result of those inquiries were rather discouraging” and Winlock reported that he was at a loss of what to do with the house.²⁹⁰ Appleton was, of course, very interested in the prospect SPNEA acquiring the Wentworth-Gardner House. However, the economic climate of

²⁸⁸ Letter from Charles Walker to William Sumner Appleton, Jr., April 16th, 1923, SPNEA files.

²⁸⁹ Letter from Henry Watson Kent to William Sumner Appleton, Jr., December 17th, 1928, SPNEA files.

²⁹⁰ Letter from Herbert Eustis Winlock to William Sumner Appleton, Jr., October 10th, 1932, SPNEA files.

the early 1930s ensured it would be difficult to convince the society's board of trustees of the merits of the purchase. In the course of a year, it appears that Appleton had successfully persuaded the trustees of SPNEA to pursue the house. At a meeting of the Board of Trustees in May of 1933 a vote was passed that:

The President of the Society is hereby given authority to sign an agreement with the Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York City, by virtue of which this Society shall take over the management of the Wentworth-Gardner House in Portsmouth, N.H., that this be made on the basis of an annual option existing for five years, giving this Society the privilege of purchasing that houses for a sum to be mutually agreed upon at future time, but not to exceed \$15,000.²⁹¹

Formal papers were signed between the two groups on July 1st, 1933.

The story of the Wentworth-Gardner House illustrates the conflicting positions held by museums and preservation societies regarding best practices in managing built heritage. Those in charge with locating interiors for the American Wing understood that the Metropolitan Museum of Art drew far more visitors annually than any historic site could possibly hope to have. Their resources, both academic and financial, were far beyond that of any existing preservation society. These claims, however, were often unnecessary when purchasing paneling, as the type of material art museums were interested in had very little to do with the historical sites around which many early preservation organizations had formed. While early preservationists and art museums were both interested in architecture for its associational value, museums saw Colonial interiors as aesthetic tools that could be used to administer design reform. Like Wallace Nutting, the Metropolitan Museum of Art purchased the Wentworth-Gardner House for its aesthetic beauty and for its ability to foster an atmosphere of domesticity as a backdrop for a furniture collection and not because it was associated with an important historical figure or event.

Unfortunately for the museum, the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities was

²⁹¹ Letter from William Sumner Appleton, Jr., to Barrett Wendell, May 18th, 1933, SPNEA files.

unlike other early preservation organizations as, like art museums, it valued architectural heritage for its aesthetic beauty. As the secretary for SPNEA, Appleton was very vocal in the society's efforts to keep New England's historic architecture from being purchased and moved outside of the region. New England preservationists were particularly wary of the Metropolitan due to its affluence at a time when early-American buildings could be purchased relatively inexpensively. In his book *Presence of The Past*, Charles Hosmer describes a rapid preservation effort that was organized by SPNEA surrounding the Touro Synagogue located in Newport, Rhode Island. Interested in Newport's Colonial architecture, Kent had apparently taken a personal trip to the city in 1913, visiting the synagogue as well as a number of other sites. The trip was misconstrued as an effort on behalf of the Metropolitan to purchase the interior of the synagogue and remove it to New York City. This rumor spread throughout the region, uniting a number of influential preservationists in protest of the museum's purchasing power.²⁹²

Understanding its negative reputation, the Metropolitan acted very carefully when attempting to acquire paneling for period rooms in New England. Backing out of any sale where a party invested in preservation existed, the museum effectively allowed SPNEA to dictate what was appropriate and inappropriate to buy and remove to New York. This deferential practice essentially provided Appleton with a tremendous amount of power over private property exchanges that he otherwise would have had little to do with. When the Metropolitan purchased the Wentworth-Gardner House, there was little local interest in the sale. Whether this was do the sale's immediacy or an actual indifference towards the fate of the house is hard to know as Appleton and both Robinson and Kent provide different interpretations of the circumstances in their perspective correspondences on the matter. Upon acquiring the house, the Metropolitan was

²⁹²Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., *Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States Before Williamsburg*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 218.

petitioned by Appleton, to merely hold the property until a local group could finance buying it back. Apparently, this request was not warmly received by Robinson or the museum's board of trustees who saw the matter, frankly as, none of Appleton's business. Worried of the possible precedent set in removing woodwork from a house not faced by demolition Appleton was joined by Fiske Kimball, who five years later at the annual AIA convention complained that:

The recent effort of museums to house their collections of Americana in rooms with woodwork of the corresponding period, has led to widespread imitation on the part of private collectors, not content with rescuing material from houses already doomed to destruction or in process of demolition. They have not hesitated to purchase and demolish houses in no way threatened, which might otherwise have been preserved indefinitely. It cannot be urged too strongly that the architects should oppose such vandalism to the extent of their powers....²⁹³

If the Metropolitan Museum of Art had not purchased the Wentworth-Gardner House with the intention of removing its interior, the entire house would probably have been relocated to the garden of an estate in Long Island. While neither circumstance is really a best-case scenario, at least the later would have kept the house intact as a whole. Arguing that the Wentworth-Gardner rooms would be available to a much larger audience at the Metropolitan, Kent saw the museum's actions as effectively preserving the house for the public. Throughout the 1920s as plans for the American Wing evolved, the fate of the Wentworth-Gardner House became uncertain until it was decided in 1933 to keep the house in Portsmouth. SPNEA was given charge of administering the house and allowed five years to raise the necessary funds to buy the house outright. The house's \$10,000 price proved to be an insurmountable undertaking during the depths of the Great Depression and by 1939, SPNEA had only managed to raise

²⁹³ Proceedings of the 56th Convention. A.I.A., 1923, 105 as seen in Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., *Presence of the Past*, 233.

\$2,000.²⁹⁴ Fearing another potential sale, a prominent group of citizens in Portsmouth organized as the Wentworth-Gardner and Tobias Lear House Association, and purchased the house in 1940 to permanently open it to the public.

²⁹⁴ "Portsmouth to Seek Funds to Preserve Famous Old House," *Special to the Christian Science Monitor*, July 26th, 1939, 11.

Images for Chapter Five



Figure 5.1: The Wentworth-Gardner House after it had been restored by Wallace Nutting.
Source: Thomas Andrew Denenberg, *Wallace Nutting and the Invention of Old America*, Hartford: Wadsworths Athenaeum, 2003, 190.

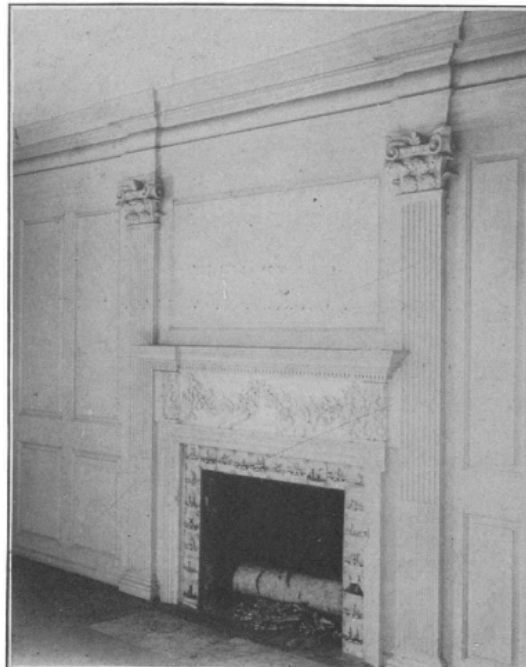


Figure 5.2: The fireplace wall of the south parlor.
Source: Charles O. Cornelius, "The Wentworth-Gardner House," *The Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 2 (February, 1919): 28.

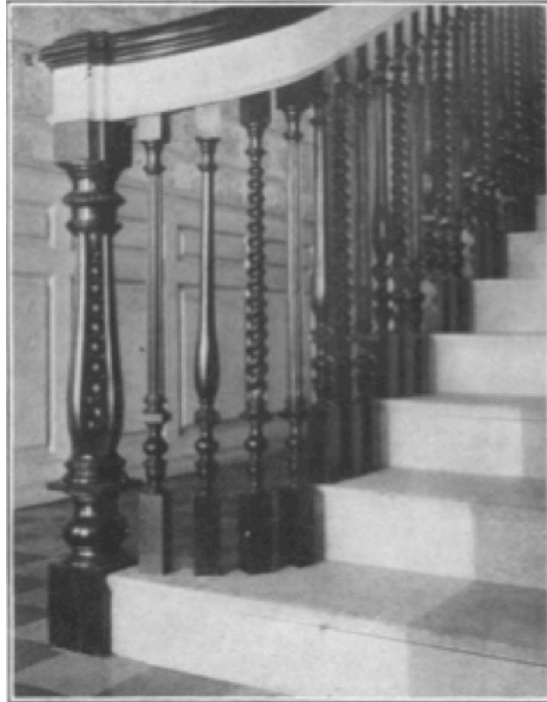


Figure 5.3: The balustrade and spindles of the Wentworth-Gardner House's main staircase.
Source: Charles O. Cornelius, "The Wentworth-Gardner House," *The Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 2 (February, 1919): 26.



Figure 5.4: The upper hall of Wentworth-Gardner House.
Source: Charles O. Cornelius, "The Wentworth-Gardner House," *The Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 2 (February, 1919): 27.



Figure 5.5: An example of one of Nutting's colored photographs taken at the Wentworth-Gardner House.

Source: "Descending the Gardner Stair," Wallace Nutting photographic collection, 1910s-1930s, 1915, Historic New England.



Figure 5.6: The Iron Works House in Saugus, Massachusetts.

Source: The National Park Service.



Figure 5.7: The recreated Hart House parlor at the American Wing.
Source: Image courtesy of ebay.



Figure 5.8: The recreated Parson Capen House Kitchen at the American Wing.
Source: Image courtesy of ebay.



Figure 5.9: Charles O. Cornelius' 1919 plan for the third floor of the American Wing. The Wentworth-Gardner House is highlighted in red.
Source: Architectural Drawings Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

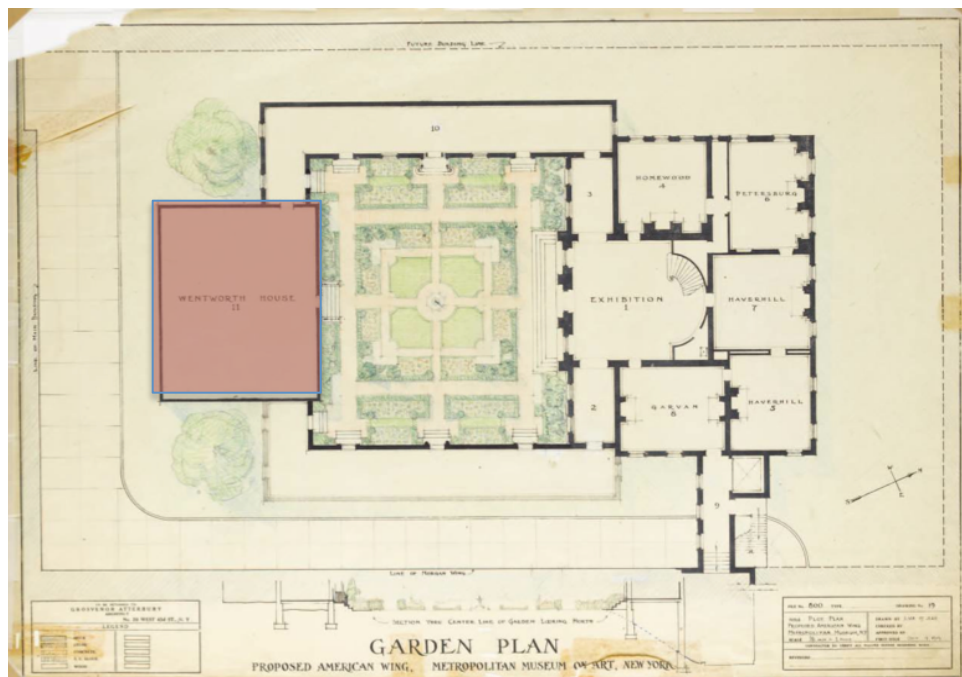


Figure 5.10: Grosvenor Atterbury's 1919 design for the American Wing. The Wentworth-Gardner House is highlighted in red.
Source: Architectural Drawings Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

Chapter Six: Alexandria Ballroom

Outside of New England the Metropolitan Museum of Art rarely ran into obstacles when purchasing desired interiors. Conflicts occasionally arose, however, after the American Wing opened. The Metropolitan effectively increased the cultural value of American works by displaying them in the museum. Granting visitors a chance to examine the homes of some of Colonial America's wealthy citizens, the American Wing challenged the prevailing belief that the United States had a history of provinciality in decorative arts. Taking advantage of the growing patriotism and nationalism that had emerged at the outset of World War I, the Metropolitan framed the works displayed in the American Wing within the context of a historic narrative featuring the heroes of the American Revolution. In reality, the mission of the American Wing had little to do with Washington, Adams, or Jefferson and most of the interiors were only very tangentially related to important historical figures or events. The Alexandria Ballroom, which was taken from the City Tavern and Hotel, also known as Gadsby's Tavern, in Alexandria, Virginia, is the exception to this. Standing out from the other interiors that were chosen by the museum for their aesthetic merits, the Alexandria Ballroom is quite simple and uninventive in its use of ornament. However, it is rich in associational value and lists among its many distinguished patrons George and Martha Washington. Purchased in 1917, when the City Tavern and Hotel had been reduced to a junk shop, the museum used the Alexandria Ballroom to display a wide selection of Queen Anne chairs and tables. Shortly after the American Wing opened, numerous groups, including the Colonial Dames, the American Legion, and the Daughters of the American Revolution, joined to save the hotel and restore its interior. Arguing that the people of Alexandria felt "they [had] lost something of great importance" and that they "ardently desire[d] its return," these groups believed it was the museum's responsibility to return

numerous important pieces of woodwork to the City Tavern and Hotel as there existed a local interest in preserving the building in situ.²⁹⁵ In taking a Virginia interior so associated with Washington, the Metropolitan exposed itself to criticism from the many patriotic associations that defined the state's preservation efforts. Raising questions over the ownership of heritage, the Alexandria Ballroom illustrates the conflicts that often existed between museums and local preservation authorities, while detailing the contentious relationship between wealthy northern museums and southern advocacy groups.

The Metropolitan viewed Virginia as one of its best sources for elite interiors. Throughout the seventeenth century, the Colony of Virginia consisted primarily of small tobacco plantations clustered along the rivers tributaries and creeks worked by families and perhaps a few indentured servants. This landscape was drastically transformed in the early eighteenth century with the large-scale commodification of tobacco and the introduction of enslaved Africans. By the mid eighteenth century not only was the societal gap between white planters and their enslaved labor force great, but there was a widening economic gap between poor and middling planters and the gentry elite.²⁹⁶ While many smaller-scale planters struggled to make a living, owners of vast estates amassed enormous wealth from their large-scale tobacco operations and privileged connections to the government and merchant houses of London. These planters also established control over provincial politics and exerted enormous influence on imperial commercial relations and the tobacco trade.²⁹⁷ It was from this class, that the Metropolitan drew its southern period rooms.

²⁹⁵Letter from Wilbur C Hall to H.E. Winlock, October 21st, 1935, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Gadsby's Tavern), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

²⁹⁶ James Horn, "Transformations of Virginia: Tobacco, and Empire," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3 (July 2011): 327.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 328.

Under the direction of R.T.H. Halsey, Durr Friedley spent the winter of 1916-1917 traveling through Virginia looking for appropriate eighteenth-century interiors. In New York, Halsey would pass on tips to Friedley from local architects and antiquarians who knew the Metropolitan was looking for woodwork. In November of 1916, Halsey instructed Friedley to contact Ruth Irwin, the owner of what was once the City Tavern and Hotel in Alexandria (Figure 6.1). Halsey had been made aware of a large room in the City Tavern and Hotel that he believed would “make a stunning big exhibition room for portraits, furniture, etc.”²⁹⁸ Sure that Friedley could directly proposition Irwin, Halsey noted that while she was “a gentlewoman in every sense of the word,” she was “in much reduced circumstances.”²⁹⁹ Understanding that the poor economic conditions in the south made the prospect of selling architectural heritage appealing, Halsey noted that Irwin would likely be “in a very receptive condition” to part with the desired woodwork.

The interior that Halsey was particularly interested in from the City Tavern and Hotel was the second floor “ballroom.” Halsey wrote of the room’s merits in its purchase blank stating that:

No other room similar to his is known to exist in the United States, and the chances of discovering another specimen are remote...The design ranks with the best, the size is unique, and the historical connection with Washington and Lafayette adds to its interest as a museum Specimen.³⁰⁰

Dating to 1793, it is curious that Halsey would rank the design of the ballroom “with the best” as its ornament is rather unremarkable and plain. While tavern ballrooms were often the most

²⁹⁸ Letter from R.T.H. Halsey to Durr Friedley, November 29th, 1916, Halsey Letter Book, vol. 2, Halsey Papers, New York Stock Exchange as seen in Jeffrey, Trask, *Things American: Art Museums and Civic Culture in the Progressive Era*, 165.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Purchase Blank, May 16th, 1917, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Gadsby’s Tavern), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

elegant public rooms available for large functions, their decoration was utilitarian, as they had to withstand a significant amount of wear. An inventory taken in 1802 reflects the room's multifunctional nature. It lists almost no pieces of furniture, as chairs and tables would be moved in and out of the space as needed. Instead, the inventory lists mainly chandeliers, looking glasses and fireplace implements.³⁰¹ A large rectangular space, the Alexandria Ballroom is defined by a pair of chimneybreasts with carved overmantels. Halsey described the room in more detail in *The Homes of Our Ancestors*, stating that:

The woodwork is of the style used here for sixty years preceding the planning of this room-not be fine and yet suited to its purpose and place. The consistency of the architectural detail, makes its charm. The bottoms of the pediments over the doorways and overmantels repeat the dentils of the major cornice, and those on the base of the suspended musicians' gallery. This gallery is hung from the ceiling-an unusual and delightful construction. The same simple scrolls, which tie the pediments over the three doorways to the doorframes, serve a similar purpose enjoining the mantelpieces to the framing of the fireplaces. The broad moldings of the doorframes have the same strong character as those of the overmantel and the window frames. The simple uncarved volutes of the interrupted arches of the doorways are repeated in the overmantels of the fireplaces. This type of interrupted arch or broken pediment is much more frequent in American architecture than in English. Both the base and the top of the chair-rail protrude to an unusual degree from the wall, the former having three distinct moldings in place of the single molding of ordinary paneling. A fretwork border of the design used in the latter part of the century carved in wood decorates the top of the chair rail.³⁰²

Fearing that details of important sales would be leaked to the press, the Metropolitan Museum of Art would often not interact with sellers directly. In the case of the Alexandria Ballroom, the museum hired John P. Ryan, a resident of Washington DC and acquaintance of Halsey, to act on its behalf. In the spring of 1917 John P. Ryan approached Irwin regarding the sale of the second floor ballroom. While much of its original woodwork was in place, the room

³⁰¹"Woodwork from the Ballroom at Gadsby's Tavern [Alexandria, Virginia]"In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

³⁰² Halsey and Tower, *The Homes of Our Ancestors*, 103-105.

itself had been subdivided to create four smaller rooms, which Irwin was renting out. Due to this unique situation, Irwin demanded that Ryan pay for the modern replacement of whatever he purchased so that the removal did not damage her ability to rent the rooms. In a letter dated May 9th, 1917, Irwin detailed the costs of the endeavor to Ryan:

I have at last succeeded in getting the estimate for the repair in the Alexandria room, which amounts to \$357.50 without the papering which they tell me will cost about \$12.00, and the tenant says he is not willing to be disturbed in having to move his things and he is demanding \$50.00 for inconvenience of the repairs. That is the best I could do with him. It will amount altogether to \$419.50. Now, we will be willing to sell the contents of the room, which there are two mantels, and the other mantel you speak of, and one of the doorways for \$3,500.³⁰³

Agreeing to the terms, the museum's Purchasing Committee sanctioned the funds for the room and it was removed from Alexandria that June.

Prior to the ballroom's removal from Virginia, the *Alexandria Gazette* published an article titled "Relics to be Removed." The article was copied by the Washington papers and forwarded to Halsey by Ryan. While conveying some accurate information, by and large the article presented readers conjecture written as truth. Lamenting the room's removal from Alexandria, the article announced to its readers that:

The old City Hotel structure, long an interesting Alexandria landmark from the fact that George Washington often visited the hostelry, is to be denuded of its relics of bygone days. Thomas Fortune Ryan, of New York, formerly of Virginia, has purchased the mantelpieces and panels in the first and second stories of the building and they will be removed and taken to New York where they will enter a handsome residence shortly to be built. Mr. Ryan it is said paid \$5,000 for the mantels and panels...The City Hotel property is owned by the Misses Irwin of Washington.... But these relics will soon be far away in another section of the country.³⁰⁴

³⁰³ Letter from Ruth Irwin to John P. Ryan, May 9th, 1917, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Gadsby's Tavern), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

³⁰⁴ "Relics to be Removed," *Alexandria Gazette*, June 12th, 1917.

Thomas Fortune Ryan, who was a powerful tobacco, insurance, and railroad magnate, had absolutely nothing to do with the sale of woodwork from the City Tavern and Hotel building to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In a letter to Halsey, Ryan noted that the mistake could likely be traced to “the insurance man” who presumably “leaked to the local paper that a man named Ryan was the purchaser of the woodwork, and it was an easy step to deduce that Thomas Fortune Ryan was the purchaser.”³⁰⁵ Noting that the sloppy reporting of the article just proved on how “slight a foundation many newspaper articles are built,” Ryan told Halsey that he should be pleased as the article “eliminate[d] the real purchaser from the minds of those in the neighborhood.”³⁰⁶ Ryan’s statement suggests that both he and the Metropolitan were aware of local interest in the property. The discretion that the Metropolitan insisted on in its period room transactions connotes that the museum feared public criticism.

The Alexandria Ballroom was particularly valued by the Metropolitan Museum of Art due to its large size. When installed in the museum, the room allowed the curators of the American Wing to display a substantial collection of furniture and objects (Figure 6.2). Halsey wrote in *The Homes of Our Ancestors* that the considerable wall space of the room provided space to display a large selection of “chairs, which demonstrate a hither unknown excellence of our chair-makers’ work in the period between 1720-1750. They are known in popular parlance as ‘Queen Anne chairs,’ as this style was in great vogue during the reign of that affable lady.”³⁰⁷ These chairs were arranged in a manner that traced the development of the style “from the simplest form of an early cabriole leg and solid splat back throughout the variety of full

³⁰⁵ Letter from John P. Ryan to R.T.H. Halsey, June 15th, 1917, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Gadsby’s Tavern), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Halsey and Tower, *The Homes of Our Ancestors*, 105.

Chippendale models, richly ornamented.”³⁰⁸ Elsewhere in the room chairs were placed around gaming tables (Figure 6.3). Other items in the room included a remarkable looking-glass of unusual size that was “an example of the finest sort of American-made looking glass,” two brass chandeliers of English workmanship dating to the third quarter of the eighteenth century, and a selection of portraits by Gilbert Stuart, America’s most influential native-born portrait painter of the eighteenth century.³⁰⁹

Modern scholars have often discredited the original interpretation of the American Wing’s period rooms, declaring that they relayed much more information about the Colonial Revival style than any of the decorative styles of the seventeenth, eighteenth, or early-nineteenth centuries. Nowhere is this truer than in the Alexandria Ballroom. While the other American period rooms may have been over-furnished, with inaccurate floor coverings and incongruous window treatments, they all at least contained furniture from of the appropriate locality and period. The Alexandria Ballroom displayed furniture that antedated the interior fixtures by forty years. Placed against the perimeter of the room, the Queen Anne side chairs were almost all made in either Philadelphia or New England, which was where the style most fully developed in Colonial America. Furthermore the staged gaming tables were an odd curatorial choice, as it was known by the museum from period documents that “the genial proprietor of the Tavern especially forbade all kinds of gambling.”³¹⁰ Despite its reputation for attracting an affluent clientele, no tavern could possibly have owned such an array of expensive furniture nor could it ever have afforded the Gilbert Stuart portraits that were hung at the museum. More than any

³⁰⁸ Charles O. Cornelius and R.T.H. Halsey, *A Handbook of the American Wing Opening Exhibition*, New York: the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 178.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 178-179.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 178.

other period room in the American Wing, the objects placed in the Alexandria Ballroom were divorced from the context of their corresponding woodwork.

Four years after the American Wing opened to the public, the *Washington Post* ran an article announcing that the citizens of Alexandria were raising money with the intention to purchase the City Tavern and Hotel. This effort could be traced back to 1919, when a committee of Alexandria citizens was formed to raise funds and arrange a program to welcome home veterans of World War I. Their work was either well executed or the people of Alexandria were generous, as a surplus existed after the festivities commenced. Deciding to use the money to seed a fund to provide a permanent memorial to those who had died in the war, the committee promised the money to the local post of the American Legion.³¹¹ As a testament to their proven ability to raise money, the post asked if the committee could appeal to the citizens of Alexandria once again to contribute funds towards the purchase and restoration of the City Tavern and Hotel which would be utilized as a memorial museum and headquarters. Comprising three buildings, the City Tavern and Hotel had, by the 1920s, passed from Irwin to the heirs of her estate who agreed to sell the property to the committee for \$18,000.

At the time of purchase, the plans for a memorial museum were undeveloped but expansive. It was decided to use the former guest rooms as office suites for the legion post and other patriotic organizations, such as the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Colonial Dames and the Boy Scouts. The larger public rooms in the tavern were noted as having “possibilities that are almost endless.”³¹² The curator of the National Museum promised, “that he will have made four rooms in which will be displayed specimens of all bird and reptile life

³¹¹ “Citizens Tomorrow to Plan Purchase of Gadsby’s Tavern: Callahan, Mrs. Rathbone and White, of American Legion, to Address Meeting,” *The Washington Post*, March 18th, 1928, 10.

³¹² Charles M. Shepperson, “Gadsby’s Tavern to Be War Memorial,” *The Washington Post*, April 15th, 1928, 2.

known in this country.” It was suggested that to compliment this display, the Botanical Society should display in other rooms specimens of all plant life indigenous to the United States. The members of the Legion post also intended to loan “every conceivable manner of souvenirs of the World War brought from France in their packs, trunk locker, or in whatever way their ingenuity had devised to circumvent the order that no such souvenirs would be permitted to be brought to this country.”³¹³

No matter what the contents of the museum were to be, it was decided that the first order of business was to restore the tavern’s interior. In April of 1929 an article in the *Washington Post* announced that work was to begin shortly on the first phase of the restoration, which included the first floor rooms of the tavern. While the project was officially a tribute to those who fought in World War I, it appears that the momentum behind the tavern restoration corresponded more with the worship of George Washington that prevailed during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The author of the *Washington Post* article noted that when open to the public, the City Tavern and Hotel would likely be visited by many thousands of persons each year as:

Probably no other buildings in this section are more intimately connected with George Washington than this hotel and tavern. It was in Gadsby’s that George Washington established his headquarters when, as a colonel of the Colonial militia, he organized and drilled troops to accompany the British General Braddock on the expedition in which Braddock lost his life and in which Washington first proved his genius as a leader. It was from the steps of the City Hotel that he reviewed the troops for the last time, delivered his farewell address to his soldiers and issued his last military command. It was here that the first public celebration of Washington’s Birthday, in which the general took part, was held.

On February 5th, 1932, the Alexandria Post, No. 24, of the American Legion formed a corporation known as Gadsby’s Tavern and City Hotel, Inc. to take over the management of both

³¹³ Ibid.

properties and oversee the complex nature of the restoration work.³¹⁴ The board of directors of the proposed corporation was divided between members of the American Legion post and members of the Citizen's Committee, three out of four of whom were women. It was noted in an article published about the nascent corporation that the women directors were particularly unfailing in their work to restore the tavern's interior.³¹⁵

The first phase of the restoration of the tavern was completed in the late fall of 1932, and the building was almost immediately put to use accommodating various community events. Along with housing numerous teas, plant shows, and exhibits of antique furniture and dolls, the restoration of the tavern appears to have had a remarkable effect on other historic properties within Alexandria.³¹⁶ Interest in the tavern's restoration had spread from Alexandria to Washington D.C., and the various committees organized under the board of directors of Gadsby's Tavern and City Hotel, Inc. were increasingly staffed by women from the capital who, according to the *Washington Post*, had begun to purchase and restore many of the city's old houses.³¹⁷

Of these socially prominent women, none were more vocal than Mrs. Robert Reese, who by 1935 had been elected the Vice President of Gadsby's Tavern & City Hotel Inc., and Chairman of the Restoration Committee, while also serving as a member of the Mount Vernon Chapter of the DAR. When the Metropolitan had extracted the second floor ballroom from the tavern in 1917, it had also taken other architectural elements including a third fireplace surround

³¹⁴ "Legion Plans Firm on Gadsby's Tavern," *the Washington Post*, February 7th, 1932, 2.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

³¹⁶ Evelyn Peyton Gordon, "Tea Will Flow Again in Old Gadsby's Tavern," *the Washington Post*, October 18th, 1934, 11. Dolly Peyton Shepperson, "Dolls of many Ages Shown in Gadsby's Tavern Display," *the Washington Post*, October 30th, 1932, 14. "Flower Show Opens at Gadsby's Tavern: Annual Narcissus Exhibit of Virginia Garden Club Starts Today," *the Washington Post* April 19th, 1933, 12.

³¹⁷ Evelyn Peyton Gordon, "Tea Will Flow Again in Old Gadsby's Tavern," 12.

and the building's front door. Reese, who could not see the restoration of the building as complete without gaining back at least the tavern's original front door, contacted Wilbur C. Hall who was the chairman of the State Commission on Conservation and Development. Created in 1926 to consolidate and coordinate a number of conservation agencies, a Division of History and Archeology had been added under the State Commission on Conservation and Development in 1927. This division was focused primarily on publicizing Virginia's historical sites to out of state travelers in an attempt to bolster tourism. Believing that Hall's position within the State Commission on Conservation and Development could add weight to her request, Reese asked Hall to contact the museum on her behalf.

On August 30th, 1935, Hall dutifully wrote to Joseph Downs, who had moved from the Philadelphia Museum of Art to be the curator of the American Wing in 1932. Acknowledging the museum's role in preserving woodwork that was "apparently on the verge of destruction," Hall revealed that, "A great revival of interest in historical matters in Virginia...[had] radically changed the public attitudes towards such structures as Gadsby's Tavern." In describing the efforts being undertaken in Alexandria, Hall noted that the restoration of the tavern had been the result "of much effort and a good deal of money..." and that the tavern was "now a beautiful work of restoration, fit to be ranked with the work going on at Williamsburg and elsewhere."

Closing his letter, Hall wrote:

If the Museum would see fit to restore the doorway to Gadsby's Tavern, thereby making possible the completion of the restoration of that notable building, not only would the Daughters of the American Revolution and the American Legion, who have done so much in behalf of the restoration be gratified, but the city of Alexandria and the State of Virginia as well.³¹⁸

³¹⁸ Letter from Wilbur C Hall to Joseph Downs, August 30th, 1935, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Gadsby's Tavern), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

The reason that Gadsby's Tavern & City Hotel, Inc. believed the Metropolitan Museum of Art might return the tavern's front doorway was that it was not part of the Alexandria Ballroom installation. Instead, as Hall stated in his letter to Downs, it was a "minor furnishing in the setting of the great hall from the Van Renselaer Manor House."³¹⁹ Unlike Hall and Reese, who viewed the removal of the door from the museum as "making no important difference," Winlock, who was forwarded Hall's letter as Downs was on vacation, thought the request impertinent. Explaining to Hall that the matter had really nothing to do with him or Downs, Winlock stated:

I should, however, like to remark that whatever course of action is taken by the, museum, it should not be forgotten that the recent interest in the Gadsby Tavern is the direct result of the action of this museum. The latter preserved the woodwork of the tavern and made it well known to the lovers of things early American through its exhibition in the American Wing.³²⁰

Winlock did agree to put the matter before the museum's Board of Trustees, who were in charge of such decisions.

Winlock wrote to Hall again on September 13th, 1935 noting that while the Board of Trustees had yet to reach a decision on the matter, it was unlikely that they would agree to deaccession the doorway. Fearing the establishment of a precedent where any group could demand woodwork back from the museum, Hall also argued that the mere expense of the task would be daunting. Hall wrote that:

I find that the cost of the doorway to the museum was \$1,200. The cost of taking it down from its present location and its packing, if the trustees decided to part with it, would be \$175. The cost of erecting another doorway in its place and making necessary alterations in our building would be \$295. Add to this the cost

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Letter from H.E. Winlock to Wilbur C. Hall, September 6th, 1935, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Gadsby's Tavern), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

of freight, and the doorway would come to about \$1,700 delivered in Alexandria, always supposing the Trustees were willing to part with it.³²¹

Hall suggested that as Gadsby's Tavern & City Hotel Inc. had already sanctioned the recreation of much of the paneling on the first floor, it would be more appropriate if the one of the museum's "shops" made a copy of the doorway for the tavern, leaving the original at the museum. This apparently could be done for as little as \$450.00.

Reese was discontented with the news that the Metropolitan would likely not return the original doorway to Gadsby's Tavern. Apparently annoyed at Winlock's claim that Alexandria was responsible for the deterioration of the tavern, Reese wrote to Hall, arguing that:

I should like to exonerate the citizens of Alexandria of the responsibility for the neglect to Gadsby's tavern. The tavern was owned by the children of William H. Irwin, non-residents, who were unwilling to sell it at any responsible price; as soon as it was inherited by next generation (Flemming by names) the citizens of Alexandria purchased the building and are gradually restoring it.³²²

Reese also did not believe that returning the doorway would set a precedent that had not already been established when the museum:

Advertised one of the Gadsby's tavern mantels for sale in a New York Newspaper. Unfortunately, I did not know about this at the time, and, in 1931-1932, as Chairman of the Restoration Committee of the Colonial Dames of Virginia, I could get no information concerning its whereabouts of this mantel and was forced, much against my will, to put in a reproduction.³²³

Hall appealed to Winlock a second time on September 10th. Agreeing that the doorway was taken by the Metropolitan when the tavern was in a dilapidated condition, Hall wrote that, the museum "had a good deal to do with calling public attention to the value of Gadsby's

³²¹ Letter from H.E. Winlock to Wilbur C. Hall, September 13th, 1935, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Gadsby's Tavern), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

³²² Letter from Mrs. Robert Reese to Wilbur C. Hall, October 16th, 1935, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Gadsby's Tavern), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

³²³ Ibid.

Tavern.”³²⁴ In closing his letter, Hall maintained that “we should not think of asking the return of the doorway...if such interest had not been aroused in the building...that the people of Alexandria feel that they have lost something of great moment to them and ardently desire its return.”³²⁵ When the Metropolitan’s Board of Trustees met to decide the fate of the tavern doorway on October 21st, 1935 they resolved to keep the doorway at the Metropolitan. Winlock wrote to Wilbur with this news, stating that the board of trustees “did not feel it would be possible to return the doorway which was acquired by the Museum in a perfectly proper manner at a time when the Tavern was in a dilapidated state and in a very real danger of being completely demolished.”³²⁸ Upon hearing this, Reese wrote to Hall herself regarding the Metropolitan’s previous sale of the mantelpiece from the tavern (Figure 6.4). This sale was confirmed by the Metropolitan, which had sold the mantelpiece for \$650.00 in 1929 at an auction held at the American Art Galleries, a prominent gallery and auction house located at Madison Avenue and 56th Street³²⁹

Understanding that the Metropolitan Museum of Art had no intention of deaccessioning any of the material purchased from the tavern in 1917, the Gadsby’s Tavern & City Hotel Inc. went ahead with reconstructing the missing original woodwork. In 1938, it was announced that the Daughters of the American Revolution had pledged the \$3,500 needed to reconstruct the second floor ballroom. Mourning the loss of the original interior, the DAR planned to duplicate the “original walls, ceiling, the orchestra, doorways, frescoes and ancient woodwork, and to

³²⁴ Letter from Wilbur C. Hall to H.E. Winlock, September 10th, 1935, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Gadsby’s Tavern), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁸ Letter from H.E. Winlock to Wilbur C. Hall, October 22nd, 1935, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Gadsby’s Tavern), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

³²⁹ Memorandum dated October 28th, 1935, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Gadsby’s Tavern), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

refurnish it in actual Colonial furniture of the period.”³³³ The National and Alexandria Chapters of the Children of the American Revolution were funding other work at the tavern. The room in the City Hotel that Washington occupied had been restored and furnished under the auspices of the Alexandria and Virginia societies of the Children of the American Revolution, while the work conducted in the first floor rooms of the tavern was funded by the Alexandria chapter of the DAR.³³⁴

The American preservation movement effectively began in Virginia, when under the leadership of Ann Pamela Cunningham, the Mount Vernon Ladies Association of the Union purchased Mount Vernon in 1858. Patriotism continued to mark preservation work in the state throughout the nineteenth century and sites associated with Washington were held sacred. Regard for Revolutionary War heroes was particularly potent in the early twentieth century, as the United States attempted to remain isolated from the imperial conflicts in Europe that would eventually escalate into World War I. Promoting Jeffersonian notions of an agrarian republic, the decedents of African slaves and recent southern and eastern European immigrants were excluded from the national narrative that was constructed through the preservation work being conducted in the tidewater region of Virginia.

When the Metropolitan Museum of Art purchased the second floor ballroom from the City Tavern and Hotel in 1917, Mount Vernon had been open to the public for nearly fifty years, the Society for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities had been involved with the restoration of Jamestown for twenty-five years, and preservation efforts had been going on in Williamsburg for almost twenty-eight years. Understanding the tremendous value placed on sites associated with

³³³ Vylla Poe Wilson, “D.A.R. Vote \$3,500 Fund for Gadsby’s: Old Ballroom in Tavern Will be Restored by Virginia Chapters,” *Washington Herald*, September 11th, 1938.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

Washington and other early southern statesmen, the Metropolitan conducted collecting efforts in the south very discretely and was pleased when the acquisition of the second floor ballroom at the City Tavern and Hotel was misattributed to Thomas Fortune Ryan. While the City Tavern and Hotel was decrepit when the Metropolitan purchased the interior of the ballroom, the museum might have broken its pledged to “studiously refrain from the purchase of any room or building which local pride and interest were attempting to preserve for the advantage of the public.”³³⁵ According to Reese, who maintained that Irwin had repeatedly refused to sell the building to local groups, the tavern had long “been an interesting spot to visitors to Alexandria, who inspect the room, the mantels, the panels for their old-time associations.”³³⁷ If these claims are factual, the Metropolitan likely desired anonymity in the sale to shield itself from comment by preservation-minded Virginians who had decades earlier managed to stop the home of Mary Ball, George Washington’s mother, from being dismantled and moved from Fredericksburg, Virginia, to Chicago for the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition the home of Mary Ball,

³³⁵ R.T.H Halsey, “Early American Rooms in the Museum,” 6.

³³⁷ Letter from Mrs. Robert Resse to Wilbur C. Hall, October 16th, 1935, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Gadsby’s Tavern), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

Images for Chapter Six



Figure 6.1: At left, the circa 1785 City Tavern. At right, the larger 1792 Hotel. The ballroom was originally located on the right half of the second-floor of the City Tavern.
Source: Library of Congress.



Figure 6.2: The Alexandria Ballroom as it was installed in The American Wing in 1937.
Source: R.T.H. Halsey and Elizabeth Tower, *The Homes of Our Ancestors As Shown in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York: Garden City Publishing Co., 1937, 96.



Figure 6.3: The original curation of the Gadsby's Tavern interior.
Source: Image courtesy of ebay.



Figure 6.4: The mantelpiece from the City Tavern and Hotel that the Metropolitan sold in 1929.
Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art [MMA] photographs.

Chapter Seven: Examining the American Period Room

During the 1920s and 1930s, period rooms proved incredibly popular with museum audiences. In 1929 Fiske Kimball surveyed visitors at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, asking what their favorite part of the museum was, and overwhelmingly the American period rooms were chosen as the best of all the exhibits.³³⁹ When analyzing these results, the museum announced that, “In general we found that people like best what they know.”³⁴⁰ Through the development of museology in the twentieth century, antiquated notions of the general population’s ability to absorb lessons in aesthetics through simple proximity were dispelled. Instead, museums understood that education would have to be a seriously considered component in their reformist mission. Fine art, which requires a level of intellectualism and education to decipher and appreciate, proved difficult. Using the period room as a tool, the decorative arts were easier to explain and teach to the public. R.T.H. Halsey argued that, “Art in craftsmanship,” was “in reality much more important in the cultivation of the love for the beautiful among our people than the great gallery paintings and pieces of statuary.”³⁴¹ In the production of their American period rooms, museums searched throughout the thirteen original colonies for appropriate interiors to dismantle. Stripping woodwork from old houses hardly seems in keeping with the general institutional mission to preserve cultural patrimony that art museums are entrusted with. Museums, however, argued that their American period rooms were acts of preservation. By rescuing the nation’s great interiors from dilapidated obscurity, museums contended that they were saving the country’s cultural heritage in perpetuity for the

³³⁹“Visitors to Pennsylvania Museum Express Preference for Period Rooms,” *Art News*, 28 (December 1929): 9.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ R.T.H. Halsey and Elizabeth Tower, *The Homes of Our Ancestors As Shown in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York: Garden City Publishing Co., 1937, 287.

public's benefit. Often purchasing interiors from deteriorated buildings and impoverished or disinterested owners, museums noted that they only took rooms when in situ preservation efforts were not in place. In responding to the institutional collecting of American interiors, preservation efforts were often slow to develop, but museums were not always as altruistic as they claimed and their foremost concern was always in acquiring the highest quality of material.

Writing for the *American Art Journal* in 1978, Dianne Pilgrim, the curator of the Department of Decorative Arts at the Brooklyn Museum, questioned the relevance of American period rooms to modern audiences. Describing the interpretational issues that period rooms present to museums, Pilgrim stated:

Their greatest weakness stems from confusion of intent: in fact, the rooms serve two purposes. On the one hand, they are galleries because of lack of space elsewhere; and on the other hand they do attempt to portray an accurate historical and stylistic impression of the past. These two purposes work against one another: great furniture is lost hiding in ill-lit period rooms and rooms used for display tend to have too much furniture, of too high a quality to be historically correct.³⁴²

Attempting to mitigate some of these issues, the staff at the Brooklyn Museum undertook a major reinterpretation effort of the American period rooms in the 1970s. Under Pilgrim, the work being done specifically related to the rooms taken from the Henry Trippe House, the Cupola House, and the Cane Acres Plantation. The interiors taken from these three southern houses had been among the original collection of American period rooms the museum had opened to the public in 1929 and had been left unchanged for nearly fifty years. In her discussion over each room's reinterpretation, Pilgrim noted that, "all three houses dramatically illustrated the problem of historic preservation and the role of the museum." Questioning whether any of the woodwork would have survived if the museum had not intervened, Pilgrim stated that, "in

³⁴²Dianne Pilgrim, "Inherited from the Past: The American Period Room," *American Art Journal* 10 (May 1978): 17

the case of all three, they were in terrible condition at the time of purchase. No local interest was expressed. Only after the fact did the town of Edenton become concerned.”³⁴³

Pilgrim’s claim that the Brooklyn Museum was justified in taking the interiors from the Trippe House, the Cupola House, and the Cane Acres Plantation, as there was no preexisting local interest in the properties was a common defense of museum period rooms. In the case of the Brooklyn Museum, it is inaccurate. While the Trippe house was abandoned and the Cane Acres Plantation was dilapidated and occupied by a family renting the house from the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company, the Cupola House was owned and inhabited with no threat of impending demolition. In her economic condition, Matilda Bond may not have been able to lavish care on her house but she was certainly invested in it. The community of Edenton, and to some extent the entire state of North Carolina, viewed the Cupola House as a cultural landmark and their preservation efforts were delayed merely due to the fact that the Brooklyn Museum conducted the sale covertly.

In searching for woodwork, museums often benefited from the economic misfortune of others. The extraordinary pride in the Cupola House exhibited by Matilda Bond is documented in the fact that she refused to let Andre Reuff, the assistant curator of the Brooklyn Museum from 1912 until 1933, take photographs lest “they be given to architects and the house copied,” and that she regularly gave tours of the house to interested parties.³⁴⁴ Bond’s regard for her ancestral home is detailed in the series of stories she published in the 1910s about the history of her family’s life at the Cupola House. Viewing the sale of family portraits as “sacrilegious,” it is unlikely that Bond parted with the woodwork of her house easily and only did so as her

³⁴³ Dianne Pilgrim, “Inherited from the Past: The American Period Room,” 18.

³⁴⁴ Letter from Andre Reuff to Luke Vincent Lockwood, February 13th, 1918, Cupola House, period room binder, Records of the Department of Decorative Arts, Brooklyn Museum of Art Archives.

economic situation was dire. In Virginia, where the Metropolitan Museum of Art extracted all of its original southern rooms, interiors were particularly sought after when their owner was known to be in an amenable economic position. Writing to Durr Friedley in November of 1916, R.T.H. Halsey was sure that the Metropolitan Museum of Art would be able to acquire the paneled drawing room from Marmion plantation as the owner, Miss Rebecca Irwin was “in much reduced circumstances.”³⁴⁵ In the spring of 1917, Halsey instructed Friedley to contact Ruth Irwin, who owned the City Tavern and Hotel in Alexandria Virginia, as he had recently heard that she too was “in a very receptive condition,” and was likely “willing to sell.”³⁴⁶

Equating an inability to purchase a property with disinterest, museums discounted the difficult prospect that raising funds for preservation represented. Locked out of the European art market, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum conducted the majority of their period room acquisitions during World War I. Before selling the Wentworth-Gardner House to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in July of 1918, Wallace Nutting offered it, along with the other four houses he had purchased earlier that decade, to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. While Nutting’s offer was turned down it was not because the society’s board of trustees was disinterested in the properties. Instead the prospect of raising the considerable sale price seemed an insurmountable obstacle during wartime.³⁴⁷ The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s considerable wealth allowed it to act swiftly and offer sellers more than its competitors. Luke Vincent Lockwood, a member of the Brooklyn Museum’s board of governors and a major force behind its collection of American decorative arts, and Halsey competed in

³⁴⁵ Letter from R.T.H. Halsey to Durr Friedley, November 29th, 1916, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Marmion Plantation), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

³⁴⁶ Letter from R.T.H. Halsey to Durr Friedley, March 10th, 1917 Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Gadsby’s Tavern), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

³⁴⁷ William Sumner Appleton Jr., “The Wallace Nutting Houses,” *Bulletin of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities*, 10 (1919): 15.

1917 over a house both wanted for their respective museums. They ultimately agreed to split the rooms, but Lockwood went away with the upstairs rooms while Halsey acquired the better paneling from the parlor-floor rooms. After agreeing to these terms, Halsey wrote Lockwood that he was pleased, as the Metropolitan had been “after this house for ten years.”³⁴⁸ Throughout the early twentieth century it became clear to collectors, dealers and, preservationists, that the Metropolitan usually was able to acquire what it wanted for the American Wing. In Alexandria, the Metropolitan’s financial resources allowed it to purchase the second floor ballroom from the City Tavern and Hotel from Ruth Irwin, who according to Mrs. Robert Reese had refused to the sell the property numerous times to interested citizens for, “any reasonable price.”³⁴⁹

The case studies presented in this thesis detail the interaction between museums and historic houses. While museums frequently took interiors from houses that were not facing impending demolition, occasionally the extraction of a historic interior by a museum was critical in a house’s preservation. The Powel House, in Philadelphia, presents just such a case. Seeking a mid-eighteenth-century Philadelphia interior, the Metropolitan Museum of Art extracted the second floor rear room from the Powel House in 1918. The room was installed at the museum in the ensuing years and displayed to the public when the American Wing opened in 1924. Under the direction of Fiske Kimball, the director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art from 1925-1955, the front room on the second floor of the Powel house was dismantled and removed to the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1925. In 1926, Kimball supervised the removal of any remaining architectural elements in the Powel House that he deemed important. Little public attention was

³⁴⁸ Letter from R.T.H. Halsey to Luke Vincent Lockwood, January 19th, 1917, R.T.H. Halsey Letter book, vol. 2, Halsey Papers, NYSE as seen in Jeffrey, Task, *Things American: Art Museums and Civic Culture in the Progressive Era*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, 166.

³⁴⁹ Letter from Mrs. Robert Reese to Wilbur C. Hall, October 16th, 1935, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Gadsby’s Tavern), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

paid throughout the eight years that material was being removed from the Powel House and an article published on November 29th, 1925 by the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, appears to be the only press coverage of the removal efforts conducted by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Philadelphian Museum of Art. The Article does not note any public reaction to the removal of woodwork from the house and only conveys that the Powel House was “standing in decay” and that the removal of its interiors would effectively preserve the important aspects of the house for the future.³⁵⁰

It is unsurprising that little public attention was paid to the removal of the Powel House’s interior as in the early twentieth century Philadelphians were notoriously uninterested in the historic fabric of their city. In the early twentieth century Society Hill, the neighborhood in which the Powel House stands, represented the highest density of eighteenth century buildings in the United States, yet by 1930 it had existed as depressed slum for nearly seventy years. Writing about the sale of the Wentworth-Gardner House to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the *Philadelphia Record*, an unnamed reporter commented that he hoped the removal of the house’s interior from Portsmouth to New York would galvanize Philadelphians into taking better care of their own architectural treasures.³⁵¹ Dr. James Hosmer Penniman, a historian and brother of the Provost of the University of Pennsylvania, “deplored” the indifference Philadelphians had toward their city’s landmarks and stated in an article published in the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, that the city had already “lost, or nearly lost, too many of [its] historic shrines.”³⁵² Noting, “at one time it was touch and go whether Independence Hall would be demolished,”

³⁵⁰ “Powel House Art Will be Preserved,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, November 29th, 1925, George D. McDowell Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Clippings, Urban Archive, Temple University (hereafter abbreviated to Urban Archive TU.)

³⁵¹ “Preserve the Landmarks,” *Philadelphia Records*, March 9th, 1919. Urban Archive TU.

³⁵² “Deplores Razing of Powel House,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, October 15th, 1930. Urban Archive TU.

Penniman thought that it was a “crime” that the city had allowed the demolition of the house Thomas Jefferson had drafted the Declaration of Independence in.³⁵³ Furthermore, Penniman was appalled by complacency at which Philadelphians had allowed the interior of the Powel House to be transported to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Questioning the ethics surrounding period room installations in general, Penniman stated that he “[couldn’t] understand how the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Metropolitan Art Museums could have rationalized taking rooms from that beautiful place.”³⁵⁶ Commenting on the news that Wolf Klebansky, the owner of the Powel House, was planning to sell the property to a parking lot developer, Penniman argued, “to tear down that house to make way for an open air garage was an outrage.” Alluding to the fact that Klebansky was Jewish and had immigrated to the United States from Kovno, Russia in 1886, Penniman blamed the loss of the city’s landmarks on the proliferation of foreigners in Philadelphia arguing that, “persons who have lived here but as short time...are unappreciative of our traditions.”³⁵⁷

Penniman was not alone in his regard for the Powel House but before 1930 the majority of Philadelphians remained uninterested in preserving the property. In 1907 the Philadelphia branch of the Colonial Dames became incensed over Wolf Klebansky’s display of a sign reading “Wolf Klebansky Importer and Dealer in Horsehair and Hog Bristles” on the house’s front door. Declaring that such a sign would “desecrate” the house, the Dames questioned if the readers of the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* thought such a sign was appropriate “when displayed over the front door of the house in which George Washington, as the guest of Samuel power, Mayor of Philadelphia in the years 1775 and 1789, more than once stepped gracefully to the music of a

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ “Deploras Razing of Powel House,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, October 15th, 1930. Urban Archive TU.

minuet.”³⁶⁰ Attempting to stir interest in the property, the article notes that despite the house’s pedigree, in 1904 it had fallen into the hands of “a Russian Hebrew” who was using it as office and storage space for the factory he had built behind it. With their appeal to the public the Colonial Dames hoped to raise \$25,000, the price Klebansky paid for the property in 1904, in order to deliver the house into the hands of protective society. While the Colonial Dames believed that it was the duty of “all true Philadelphians to aid in saving the Powel House,” apparently the general public did not agree.³⁶¹ Ultimately failing to rouse public support of the project, the Colonial Dames were unable to raise the required funds to purchase the house from Klebansky.

It was not until the Powel House was threatened with demolition in 1930, that the nascent Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks purchased the house and began restoring its interior. By 1932 when the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks had successfully purchased the house, the Powel House room at the Philadelphia museum of Art had been open to the public for three years and the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Powel room had been open to the public for eight years. In writing of the museum rooms, Frances Wister, the founder of the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks, noted that the popularity of the period rooms were a defining influence in her decision to fight to save the Powel House.³⁶² By exhibiting their respective Powel rooms as preeminent examples of an American rococo interior, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Philadelphia Museum of Art effectively increased the cultural value of the Powel House.

³⁶⁰ “Colonial Dames Endeavoring to Prevent Desecration of House Wherein Washington Once Danced,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, January 12th, 1907, Urban Archive TU.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

³⁶² Frances Anne Wister, “The Powel House,” Undated, box 178, folder 26, Fiske Kimball Records, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

The interest in the Powel House preceded a general reassessment of the value of Society Hill. Headed by Frances Wister, a prominent force in Philadelphia society, work at the Powel House attracted a group of wealthy women who venerated their colonial ancestry through the restoration efforts. The Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks funded the work being done at the Powel House through numerous fashion shows, bridge tournaments, teas, garden parties, galas, and antique exhibits. Seizing the opportunity to cover both the preservation efforts at the Powel House and the parties that funded them, the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks was a mainstay in the society columns of the Philadelphia newspapers throughout the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Understanding the tremendous interest in the eighteen-century buildings that neighbored the Powel House, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission officially certified Society Hill as the Old City Redevelopment Area in 1948. Utilizing eminent domain, blighted eighteenth-and-early nineteenth-century properties were acquired from their owners and sold to interested buyers who were charged with restoring the houses to their original appearances. An article detailing this process published in the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* describes that in order “to meet the Old City Redevelopment Authority’s restoration specifications, co-operating property owners faced financial outlays running anywhere from a few hundred dollars to as much as \$30,000.”³⁶³ Typical alterations property owners faced included replacement of windows, exterior shutters and turnbuckles, the replacement of solid wood doors, removal of paint to restore brick fronts to their original appearance, and the repair or replacement of iron-work fences and front-step handrails. Along with these cosmetic alterations, the Old City Redevelopment Authority also purchased the industrial and “nondescript” buildings in the area. These structures were

³⁶³“More Than 100 Society Hill Properties Slated for Paint-Up, Fix-Up Rejuvenation,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, February 14th, 1960, Urban Archive TU.

demolished and the vacant land was sold to developers who were charged with constructing modern townhouses that were deferential to the neighborhood's historical appearance and scale. The Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks, which could not afford to demolish the factory Klebansky had constructed behind the Powel House, sold the house to the Old City Redevelopment Authority for \$78,000. Under the ownership of the Authority, the factory was demolished along with the late-nineteenth-century townhouse directly adjacent to the Powel House. Both the Powel House and the adjacent lot, which would be planted as a recreation of Samuel Powel's garden, were then sold back to the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks for \$79,800.³⁶⁴

The Powel House focused the attention of many prominent Philadelphians on the poor state of most of the historic buildings in Society Hill. Edmund Bacon, the Executive Director of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission from 1949 to 1970, manipulated the momentum behind the preservation of the Powel House toward the Commission's revitalization plan for the neighborhood. Pursuing old-money families living on the Main Line and in Chestnut Hill, Bacon believed that if a social cachet could be set in the neighborhood he could successfully market the smaller houses and modern buildings to the middle class. In an attempt to raise the profile of the neighborhood, Bacon took groups of wealthy women for walking tours through Society Hill, pointing out important houses, like the Powel House, that had already begun to be restored. While Frances Wister had essentially begun this effort with the founding of the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks, which included descendants of the Biddle, Baird, Cadwalader, Drexel, Morris, and Norris families amongst its founders, Bacon convinced the patricians of Philadelphia to personally invest in the historic neighborhoods by

³⁶⁴ "Private Developer to Buy Nine Society Hill Houses," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, April 4th, 1962, January 12th, 1907, Urban Archive TU.

purchasing and restoring a townhouse. Ultimately the plan was a success and by the mid-1950s the mayor of Philadelphia, Richardson Dilworth, and his wife, Ann Elizabeth nee Kaufman, were installed in the neighborhood.

It can be argued that the Metropolitan Museum of Art's purchase of the Wentworth-Gardner House was critical in its preservation. Unlike the Powel House, which had been deteriorating since the later part of the nineteenth century, at the time of the Metropolitan's purchase of the Wentworth-Gardner House it had very recently been restored by Wallace Nutting. Understanding that Nutting's ownership of the house represented a purely commercial interest, the Metropolitan hired Norman Morrison Isham, a noted antiquarian, to evaluate the integrity of Nutting's restoration work. Pronouncing the restoration "a *very good one*," Isham advised the Metropolitan to purchase the Wentworth-Gardner House, which it did on August 30th, 1918.³⁶⁵ Learning of the sale, William Sumner Appleton Jr., the founder and acting secretary of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, petitioned the museum to allow time for a local group to raise funds to purchase the house. SPNEA, was not the only preservation society to remark on the Metropolitan's plan to remove the eight principal rooms and two hallways of the Wentworth-Gardner House. The American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society commented on the sale in its 1919 *Annual Report*, explaining that it was "reluctant about dismantling or removing buildings which can be preserved on their original sites."³⁶⁶ Explaining that the society's views on this matter had already been made clear, readers were referenced to an article written for the 1914 *Annual Report*, in which the influx of interiors and objects from English country houses was discussed. The American Scenic and Historic

³⁶⁵ Letter from Henry Kent to M.H. Warren, July 25th, 1918, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, woodwork purchased (Wentworth-Gardner House), Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

³⁶⁶ "Wentworth-Gardner House: Interior for Metropolitan Museum of Art," *Annual Report of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society*, 24 (1919): 194.

Preservation Society felt that Americans should view the international trade in elite English interiors “not only with keen regret but also with an instinctive revulsion of feeling.” They argued that the “wholesale separation of old family furniture, paneling, decoration, etc. from places in which they normally belong and in which they have a natural historic setting” was distasteful and culturally backwards.³⁶⁷ The Metropolitan Museum of Art defended its acquisition of the Wentworth-Gardner House by making it public knowledge that they did not “approve of dismantling old houses which might remain as historic memorials, but that this house if not taken by the museum would have been purchased by a private buyer who would have transported it to another State for his own use.”³⁶⁸ The museum eventually sold the Wentworth-Gardner House to a preservation group in Portsmouth in 1940, but this sale had little to do with the museum’s desire to see the house preserved in situ. In fact, before the house was purchased by the Wentworth-Gardner and Tobias Lear Houses Association it was offered to both the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and the Essex Institute. The fate of the Wentworth-Gardner House was largely decided by the Metropolitan’s indecisiveness in its plans for the property and the economic depression of the 1930s which made the prospect of moving the house from Portsmouth to New York seem like an unnecessary expense.

While adamantly opposed to the removal of woodwork from houses for the creation of period rooms, Appleton had no inherent qualms with a museum purchasing a property with the intent of operating it as a historic site. When the sale of the Wentworth-Gardner House was announced, Appleton stated:

³⁶⁷ “In Great Britain: Stripping the Manor House,” *Annual Report of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society*, 19 (1914): 411.

³⁶⁸ “Buys Old Colonial House: Art Museum to show Eight Decorated Rooms of the Period 1761,” *New York Times*, February 12th, 1919, 11.

The suggestion has been made that instead of removing interiors to their own home towns and buildings, museum should treat their purchase as Mr. Nutting did his—that is maintain them in situ, as period houses open to the public, the houses becoming thereby outside exhibits detached from but controlled by the owning institution.³⁶⁹

Agreeing with Appleton's concern for the dangerous precedent set for private collectors in the consumption of American interiors by museums, Fiske Kimball became an active voice in the promotion of in-situ preservation. Despite his active role in the collecting of the Philadelphia Museum of Art's period rooms, Kimball felt that other museums were not as strategic in their purchases and did "not hesitate to purchase and demolish houses in no way threatened, which might otherwise have been preserved indefinitely."³⁷⁰ Under Kimball, the Philadelphia Museum of Art became the first museum to operate a group of buildings that remained on their original sites. Sitting at the base of Fairmount Park, the Philadelphia Museum of Art was in close proximity to a series of eighteenth-century country houses that had been built when the park was still countryside, far away from the city center along the Delaware River. While the houses had technically been city property since the middle of the nineteenth century, it was not until the 1920s that the city realized their potential. Under Edwin AtLee Barber, Kimball's predecessor, the restoration of Mount Pleasant, arguably the park's finest house, began through the aid of the commissioners of Fairmount Park.³⁷¹ Kimball continued this effort and was able to complete the work and fully furnish the house due to a large private donation the museum received in 1926

³⁶⁹ William Sumner Appleton Jr., "The Wallace Nutting Houses," *Bulletin of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities*, 10 (1919): 15.

³⁷⁰ Fiske Kimball, *Proceedings of the 56th Convention of the A.I.A.*, 1923, 105.

³⁷¹ Mount Pleasant was built for John McPherson between 1761 and 1762. According to Kimball the house came "from the most famous period of Philadelphia craftsmanship, when the city was the metropolis of America, and its art under the inspiration of the Chippendale period in England reached its highest luxury and brilliance." Fiske Kimball et. al, "Mount Pleasant: A Branch Museum of American Art on the Eve of the Revolution," *The Pennsylvania Museum Bulletin*, 22 (1926): 197.

(Figure 7.1).³⁷² A few years later, after Cedar Hill, Strawberry Mansion, Lemon Hill, and Woodford, had been restored and furnished by the museum, Kimball remarked on the undertaking:

The Metropolitan Museum of Art has brought together, in its American Wing, a series of single rooms from successive periods, with their appropriate furnishings, which admirably illustrate the history and beauty of American art in the days of the early Republic.

Philadelphia's opportunity is still greater. It has a series of whole houses...conveniently located a few hundred yards apart, near its Museum...By the time the great new Museum at Fairmount is finished, there will be, to supplement its own suite of American rooms, a chain of fine old houses, appropriately furnished from every period of the Colonies and the Republic.³⁷³

Giving thousands of visitors their first chance to experience seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth-century interiors, museums were profoundly influential on the manner in which the history of the United States was taught during the twentieth century. By condensing and flattening history, period rooms simplified the social structure of colonial America, producing an aesthetically pleasing utopian past. This fabricated history is especially evident in R.T.H. Halsey's *The Homes of Our Ancestors*, where each of the Metropolitan's American period rooms was given a context. Writing about the Metropolitan's Powel Room, Halsey explained the societal structure of Philadelphia stating that its colonial inhabitants "were divided into three distinct classes-'worldly folk,' one of whom owned the room illustrated; the common people, among whom we find the famous cabinet makers; and the Quakers, founder of the city, whose quaint habits and religious customs are very well known."³⁷⁴ Jeffery Trask,

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Fiske Kimball, "Philadelphia's 'Colonial Chain,'" *Art and Archeology*, 21 (April, 1926): 198, 199, 203 as seen in Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., *Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States Before Williamsburg*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965, 243

³⁷⁴ R.T.H. Halsey and Elizabeth Tower, *The Homes of Our Ancestors As Shown in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York: Garden City Publishing Co., 1937, 118.

author of *Things American: Art Museums and Civic Culture in the Progressive Era*, explains that by “distinguishing Quakers, definitely members of Philadelphia’s colonial elite, from the ‘worldly sort’ and reducing their religious practices to quaint habits,” the American Wing emphasized “Calvinist values, and favored New England’s civic traditions over others.”³⁷⁵ In describing the societal structure of colonial Philadelphia, Halsey purposefully leaves out the laboring classes, and the urban poor, denoting that the “common people” were represented by the city’s famous cabinetmakers. Moreover, the issue of slavery was altogether ignored.

Like Wallace Nutting who used his staged photographs to portray ideal images of feminine domesticity, Halsey promoted preindustrial gender roles through the American Wing’s period rooms. In the introduction of *The Homes of Our Ancestors*, Halsey writes, “While boys were sent to an American college to complete their education,” colonial women “were never idle....Girls were taught mostly at home by American or foreign tutors.”³⁷⁶ When their education was complete, Halsey wrote, “They married at an early age and never dreamt of higher education,” spending the remainder of their days “beautifying their homes.”³⁷⁷ Halsey’s portrayal of women in colonial America bluntly ignores regional, economic and circumstantial conditions that would have dictated the roles of men and women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By espousing conservative gender roles through the American Wing’s period rooms, Halsey was making a powerful statement at a time when women were just beginning to enter the professional workforce and women’s suffrage was still a controversial topic.

Despite their influence on public history, the American period rooms at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Brooklyn Museum, were primarily

³⁷⁵ Jeffrey, Trask, *Things American: Art Museums and Civic Culture in the Progressive Era*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, 179.

³⁷⁶ R.T.H. Halsey and Elizabeth Tower, *The Homes of Our Ancestors*, 114

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

tools to influence public taste and improve the industrial production of American decorative arts. While encouraging of modern interiors and furnishings, museum educators argued that the decorative styles of the colonial period were particularly appropriate to Americans as they “were good and individual style[s] suited to our needs and our limitations,” that were “based upon democratic ideals,” and demonstrated the “principles of good taste and common sense.”³⁷⁸

Utilized almost like furniture displays at department stores, the period room provided a particularly effective method of manipulating popular taste. Critiqued by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities for using historically important interiors as mere backdrops, museums defended their period rooms, arguing that they were preserving important private interiors for the public. Museums also often cited a lack of local interest in preserving the interiors they were removing. While the case studies presented in this thesis only represent a small percentage of the total rooms acquired by American art museums in the early twentieth century, they demonstrate that in many cases local groups were very interested in the properties that museums purchased and dismantled. The Powel House, the City Tavern and Hotel, and the Wentworth-Gardner House, were each so valued by local groups that enormous preservation campaigns were launched to save them during the worst years of the Great Depression.

American period rooms present numerous contentious issues to the modern museums that have inherited them. Bulky and expensive to maintain, their relevance to contemporary audiences is questionable. Originally installed as tools to redefine domestic taste, their interpretations of eighteenth and early nineteenth century decorative styles are often inhibited by the use of twentieth century interior design conventions. Thus in their original interpretations many American period rooms present very little accurate information to the public except those

³⁷⁸ J.F. Copeland, “A Plea for the Colonial Style in Modern House Decorations and Furnishings,” *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum*, 20 (February 1925): 88.

studying decorative movements of the early twentieth century. Furthermore these rooms mainly allow audiences to view exemplary interiors rather than the vernacular variations, which would have been far more common in colonial America. Even Joseph Downs, who served as the curator of the American Wing for several decades, commented in 1946 on the display of elite interiors, stating:

The American Wing presents an aspect that is disappointing to certain visitors who believe that the everyday life of the average early American should be represented....We can rightly judge a cultural period by its greatest achievement rather than its mean average. The American Wing is not ethnographical, concerned with the habits and customs of man, but is the aesthetic expression of artisans even before painting, sculpture, and other graphic arts found a foothold.³⁷⁹

There are a few exceptions to the high-style interiors exhibited at the American Wing including two rooms from western Pennsylvania that were installed to house the collection of Pennsylvania Dutch domestic arts that Emily de Forest donated to the Metropolitan in 1933.

Stripped of their original purpose, American period rooms have recently been used to portray the evolution of decorative styles in the United States. While the spatial limitations of galleries unintentionally flatten regional and stylistic variations, period rooms are still seen as effective tools by some curators. Ameila Peck, the Marica F. Vilcek Curator in the Department of American Decorative Arts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, confirmed the Metropolitan's commitment to its American period rooms in an interview in 2009 with the *New England Antiques Journal*. Peck argues that:

There are two main ways that you can learn about a culture through its decorative arts and architecture. You can study an object's construction, its materials, its methods of manufacture and design. Or you can consider the object's use by observing its placement within a period room. When you balance the study of an

³⁷⁹ Joseph Downs, "The History of the American Wing," *Antiques* (October, 1946): 235.

artifact with its context of use, you get an entire picture of the decorative arts through the centuries.³⁸⁰

Peck's interview in the *New England Antiques Journal* largely discusses the renovations to the American Wing that had been debuted in the spring of 2009 to mark the 100th year anniversary of the Hudson-Fulton Celebration. One of the most important changes to the Wing was the introduction of touch-screen labels in the period rooms. Replacing the small paper labels that described the contents of each room, the new touch-screen system accommodates the numerous layers of information that each period room presents to viewers. In discussing the touch-screen technology, Peck notes that her goal was to make "the unique history and architectural relevance, the interesting family associations, and the information about each object within the room" easily accessible to visitors.³⁸¹ The new touch-screen labels successfully digest an expansive amount of information into an intuitive format that is unobtrusive. Content-wise the new touch-screen labels allow visitors to slide through pages offering short didactic text illustrating the history of the house from which the period room was taken, the stylistic context of the room, the history of the family who commissioned the room, and information on each of the objects that are placed in the room. Other information is also included, for instance the touch-screen label for the Powel Room, which has intentionally not been reinterpreted since its installation in 1924, has a page devoted to discussing the Colonial Revival and its impact on our contemporary understanding of history.

The touch-screen labels debuted at the American Wing offer an opportunity for a preservation narrative to be added to the layers of information already presented to viewers. Historic preservation is intrinsically intertwined in the history and development of the American

³⁸⁰ Randall Decoteau, "America's 'New' Period Rooms: The Renovation of the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *New England Antiques Journal*, 10 (June 2009): 32.

³⁸¹ Amelia Peck, "New Touch-Screen Labels for the American Wing Period Rooms," June 22, 2010, metmuseum.org.

period rooms at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Brooklyn Museum. William Sumner Appleton, Jr. had a defining influence on which rooms the Metropolitan was able to acquire from New England and a discussion of the relationship between the Metropolitan and the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities could be set up at the Hart Room, which begins the period room tour at the American Wing. When the American Wing opened in 1924 it presented two seventeenth-century rooms to the public, the Hart House Parlor and the Parson Capen Kitchen. These two rooms were pastiches constructed at the museum as SPNEA was largely successful in preventing Halsey and Kent from removing rare seventeenth-century interiors from New England. In 1937 the Metropolitan was able to remove these two pastiches and install two authentic seventeenth century rooms in their places. In 1926 the Metropolitan acquired its first authentic seventeenth century interior when it purchased a second-floor room and staircase from the John Wentworth House, which was built in Portsmouth, New Hampshire and dated to 1695. The Metropolitan was only able to remove interiors from the John Wentworth House as its owner at the time, Charles M. Stewart, had little interest in preservation and had purchased the house with the intention of selling its paneling and architectural ornament for profit.³⁸³ The second seventeenth century interior the Metropolitan purchased was the authentic Hart House parlor from Ipswich, Massachusetts. Described by Joseph Downs as “without question one of the foremost American rooms extant,” the Hart House parlor was highly valued by antiquarians for its age and intactness.³⁸⁴ The Metropolitan had attempted to purchase this room during its initial hunt for interiors but its owner Ralph W. Burnham, who ran an antiques business from the house and understood the room’s value, had

³⁸³ Locally detested, Charles M. Stewart had entered into the antique business only after the city of Portsmouth had shut down a series of brothels he owned in 1912.

³⁸⁴ Joseph Downs, “Recent Changes in the American Wing,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 33 (January 1938): 17

refused to sell it to the museum. In the 1920s Burnham sold the Hart House to Martha Murray who transformed it into a hotel. Murray, who was not an antiquarian, agreed to sell the parlor to the Metropolitan in 1935, and quickly replaced the original room with an “excellent copy.”³⁸⁵ Each of the period rooms at the American Wing has an interesting origin and the histories of the preservation efforts at the Powel House, the City Tavern and Hotel, and the Wentworth-Gardner House should also be available to the public as they aid in the understanding of how the Metropolitan acquired the interiors that are displayed in the American Wing.

The American period rooms at the Brooklyn Museum and the Philadelphia Museum of Art would benefit from the introduction of a new label system that would allow the layers of information contained in their rooms to be accessed by the general public. Historic preservation is particularly relevant topic at the Philadelphia Museum of Art as Fiske Kimball’s adamant disapproval of the collecting of interiors by museum stands in direct contrast to the period rooms on display. It would also be advantageous to reinforce the connection between the Philadelphia Museum of Art’s American period rooms and Mount Pleasant and Cedar Grove, the two houses in Fairmount Park the museum still administers today

In the history of historic preservation, American period rooms represent a time when architectural history and aesthetics were just beginning to be valued by preservationists. In the early twentieth century while museums were hunting for American interiors, preservation was still a highly selective movement that valued architecture for its associational value to historical figures and events. Even in New England, where the SPNEA pioneered the practice of preserving buildings for their inherent values, examples of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century architecture were still thought of as tools in the fight to assimilate non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants to life in the United States. In many cases museums were able to save significant interiors from

³⁸⁵ Ibid, 20

demolition and neglect. These rooms, however, presented museum curators with the issue of exhibiting an interior within the larger indoor context of a gallery. As American period rooms were frequently installed to provide backdrops for collections of furniture and artifacts, curators felt free to rearrange woodwork and interject modern elements to make a room fit in its predefined gallery space. Representing a history of public taste reform, museology, and shifting values towards the preservation and promotion of non-patriotic cultural heritage, American period rooms are complex assemblages. In interpreting these rooms it is critical that modern museum visitors understand their development and original intent, as well as how and why they were acquired and installed.

Images for Chapter Seven



Figure 7.1: The furnished drawing room at Mount Pleasant.

Source: Fiske Kimball, "Drawing room at Mount Pleasant" *Art and Archeology*, 21 (April, 1926): 198.

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