

Fall 2018



Message from the President

More than a year has elapsed since the Board of Directors voted to deaccession the Tobias Lear house. That a sale has not yet taken place might suggest that the Board has been derelict in taking action to move the process along. Little could be further from the truth.

In point of fact, a great deal of time and effort has been invested in satisfying all requirements – legal, procedural, and otherwise – to ensure that a sale will take place without unforeseen problems. We have worked closely with the

Charitable Trust Division of the Office of the State Attorney General, and that effort resulted in a long-awaited favorable ruling from the Rockingham County Probate Court that a sale could proceed.

We have, in close coordination with attorney Jack McGee, created a rather detailed letter explaining to potential bidders what our respective roles will be. Perhaps most important, we have, assisted by Historic New England, created a lengthy Preservation Restriction Agreement (PRA). The terms of that agreement will have to be agreed to by our bidders and will govern in perpetuity what can and cannot be done to the house.

It is our hope and expectation that our members, including those few who do not look favorably on a sale, will come to see that the PRA covenants will result in the restoration of the house to a condition not known in the past eighty years, and quite possibly, ever.



We are now on the verge of issuing bid packets to a number of interested, vetted parties and hope to be able to evaluate their bids within a month. Following that the Board will have the difficult task of selecting the bidder who is deemed to rank highest with respect to quality of workmanship, sterling references, and certainty of abiding by the PRA's. The bid price will of course count for a great deal, but so will less tangible and less quantifiable attributes such as the bidders' reuse plans and how they would affect both the Wentworth Gardner house and the neighborhood in general.



Treasurer's Report



Noree Chamber performance held September 2, 2018.

At the close of our fiscal year on September 30, 2018, WLHH continued to be in sound financial condition.

Our Operating Budget ended solidly in the black. Income for the year was \$49,078; expense was \$40,376. The primary reason for the surplus was the receipt of three gifts in the Annual Appeal that boosted the income by \$6,500. These unprecedented donations represented a turnaround from some lean years in the past and enabled us to carry out a full program of

house tours, events, exhibit, and historical activities. Funds, separate from the Operating Budget, have been established to set aside money for special purposes. There are currently five Funds. Three of the Funds, amounting to \$37,000, contain money for capital projects and major maintenance of our buildings and grounds. Another Fund, amounting to \$71,000, sets aside money for anticipated expenses relative to deaccession of the Tobias Lear House. Still another Fund, amounting to \$43,000, provides money

for carrying out special programs and activities that encourage the engagement of Portsmouth area residents in historic preservation. Dr. Jane Nelson, a Gates Street neighbor and erstwhile supporter, has provided significant financial support to each of the Funds. The community is deeply appreciative of her support. As we enter a new fiscal year, we will need to maintain a strong membership base and to encourage generous support in the Annual Appeal as we accomplish our mission.

Programming & Events

It was an exciting year for programs at the Wentworth Lear Historic Houses! The pre-season kicked off with a production of *Hamlet* by the Seven Stages Shakespeare Company, who regaled over 300 people throughout 6 performances in our historic warehouse.

We celebrated the seasonal opening with a reception in the Wentworth Gardner house. We welcomed members and neighbors alike to enjoy refreshments and a first peek at the summer exhibit, *The Evolution of the South End*.

At our first lecture we ran out of seats! Professor Jeffrey Bolster's talk, *a Watery Kingdom Transformed*, explored the rich history of the Piscataqua region and its great

environmental changes, rising sea levels, and the overabundance of disposable plastics.

Our next program took us off campus and over to the old South Cemetery where historian Richard Adams took us on a tour of its *Notable Denizens*. We were joined by over a dozen more people than had signed up, but the afternoon proved very enjoyable despite the heat.

Ramblin' Richard returned to sing *Patriotic Songs through the Ages*, Professor Kimberly Alexander gave us a preview of her book *Treasures Afoot: Shoe Stories from the Georgian Era*, and John Mayer, Executive Director of the Carriage Museum (Amesbury, MA) showed us how to research the history of our homes.

The season ended with lovely performance by the Noree Chamber Soloists. This performance was made possible by generous donors, Charles and Sooky Lassen.

By the end of the 2018 season, we had welcomed over 450 people to free programming! It was a wonderful summer of getting to know new people and welcoming back old friends.

We look forward to sharing our 2019 summer plans in the spring newsletter!

Recent gift of 18th Century Connecticut Chest-on-Chest



The Wentworth Lear Historic Houses Association was delighted to receive the gift of a Connecticut high chest from Sally Horner Smyser.

The chest (c. 1770-1780) resembles those by Samuel Loomis (1748-1814) of Colchester, CT. Similarities include the carved elements on the pediments and side quarter columns. Differences from Loomis's style include the ball and claw feet—not known to have been a feature of Colchester chests.

The chest is a beautiful addition to the south west bedchamber where it shares pride of place with the General Stark bed, also a gift from Sally Horner Smyser and her sister, Nancy Borden.

The chest descended in Sally's family and she hopes to discover which branch that it came from. This will help further determine who might have made it.

Our heartfelt thanks to Sally for this wonderful gift!



Website Update

We are pleased to share that it is now possible to make donations as well as to join or renew your membership online!

By visiting the Wentworth Lear Historic Houses website at (www.wentworthlear.org) and clicking the *Support*

tab, visitors may select their preferred level of membership.

Doing so leads the visitor to a shopping cart where they will review the online order and proceed to make payment with PayPal.

Payment through PayPal is secure and easy; a PayPal account is not required. We hope that you will enjoy this convenience!

Looking for gift ideas this holiday season?

Consider the gift of membership! By visiting our website, we can arrange memberships to be delivered to your loved ones.

House Manager's Report

What a wonderful way to spend the summer! We are grateful to our faithful guides: Khalid Antar, Anne Rehner, Pam Schwotzer, and Jeff Thomson for another year of fascinating tours.

Each with their own style and specialty, our guides welcome hundreds of visitors each summer to a singular experience.

Khalid earned his Master's degree in history from UNH and does historic reenactments as a

red-coat in His Majesty's Tenth Regiment of Foot.

Anne guides at the Warner House, where she portrays Aunt Evie. Her dramatic flair makes all of her house tours engaging and very enjoyable!

Pam is a retired librarian who joined us in 2007, following in her mother's footsteps as one of our excellent guides.

Jeff is our Portsmouth aficionado, leading tours not only at the WLHHA but also at the Warner house and with Discover Portsmouth.

An Interview with Jane Nelson

Thanks to her kindness, generosity, and interest in history, South End resident Jane Nelson has enabled the Board of Directors through her leadership gifts, the ability to show others the importance of Historic Preservation in Portsmouth.

Through her funding various projects and events, the Wentworth Lear Historic Houses has offered hands-on projects such as building rock walls in the 18th century manner; installing lighting in the 18th century Warehouse, so that we can offer concerts, plays, and lectures; and classes in weaving, woodcarving, and house research just to name a few.

In a recent interview with Jane, we asked her the following questions:

As an academic and professor of English, what speaks to you about the need to preserve our history?

The really-real past is impossible to know, but artifacts, practices, and documents from which we construct our histories often remain. When they are preserved, they correct as well as create our understandings of the past. They may also provide important perspectives on present circumstances. Like a visit to a foreign land or encounter with a different culture, they give us new eyes through which to see our immediate world.

What drew you to the Wentworth Gardner House and why do you consider it special?

Both the Wentworth-Gardner and Tobias Lear houses and the warehouse are embedded in a neighborhood in the South End. This context magnifies their subtle impact on those of us who see



Dr. Jane Nelson

them frequently as part of daily life. In addition, inevitable problems of their preservation have drawn persistently on neighborhood interest and participation. Opportunities for such important interaction seldom exist, offering Portsmouth residents encounters with the 'past' as a dimension of experience not otherwise possible.

You have been talking to the Board about offering a financial prize to a local high school student interested in history. Why is this of particular importance to you?

I have enjoyed a life-long involvement in the restoration of houses. My businessman father was interested in restoration and in doing part of the actual work himself. As the oldest child, I became his helper. In later years, my husband and I restored two houses -- one a farmhouse in MA, the other on an island in Maine. We did as much of the work ourselves as we could, and learned from those we hired. I learned to plaster and to clapboard. We shared this interest with other academics who summered on the island, providing me with an important perspective on the present I would not wish to be without.



We thank Jane for her continued support which ensures ongoing preservation and public programming, enabling the Wentworth Lear Historic Houses to continue fulfilling its mission.

Loom Revival: treasure in the attic

The Association has owned the loom formerly in the Wentworth-Gardner attic since 1940 when it was purchased by Charles Dale from Joseph Parsons of South Berwick. I had often wondered why Charles Dale purchased a loom to recreate the Nutting “Spinning Attic” but the sale states that it a weaving and spinning collection with wheels, reels, loom and various accessories. A 1976 inventory reveals that there were four spinning wheels and a reel in the attic at that time—much more like Nutting’s arrangement. It was never possible to weave in the attic as the ceiling is too low for the height of the beater.

Joseph Parsons, who worked at the Portsmouth Navy Yard, lived and had grown up on a farm on Brixham Road in York Maine, known as the Parsons-Preble Farm. His mother, Alice Preble was the last of several generations to live there. How exciting to think that our loom may have come from a farm in York!

Alas, it is not possible to know this as Joseph Parsons and his sister Alice Parsons collected and sold antiques. However, it is still probable that the loom is from York or the immediate area as moving it and the spinning equipment with it would be more difficult in the early 20th century.



Before & After.

Left: the loom was stored in the Wentworth-Gardner attic for 78 years.

Right: the loom reassembled and installed in the historic warehouse in July 2018.

In July 2018, Sandra Rux and Jen King disassembled the loom and moved it to the warehouse. Alan Haesche helped with reassembly and John Schnitzler shaped the new pegs. The loom was essentially complete needing only more pegs and a bolt for the brake along with new heddles and tie-ups. Susan Therriault helped with warping the loom and Sandra did the threading.

It was ready for weaving in time for our September 15th lecture and demonstration. Sandra talked about the minimal hand weaving that took place in Portsmouth but pointed out that there were quite a number of weavers in the more rural towns in both New Hampshire and Maine that surrounded Portsmouth. The event was well attended with a mix of weavers and those interested in the process.



We are weaving brown and blue cotton checked towels on the loom and will have them completed next season when the warehouse is warmer. Like many weavers in the 18th century, our craft is seasonal!



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Return Service Requested

Wentworth-Gardner Tobias Lear Houses Association

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