

Spring 2019



Message from the President

By the time you, our valued supporters, receive this newsletter the Board of Directors has high hopes that we will be on the threshold of success in the eighty-year-old effort to craft a solution to the problem of how best to restore and maintain the Lear house.

Last month we entered into a purchase and sale agreement with a buyer who has both the vision and the financial capability to turn the house into a superbly-restored structure that will satisfy almost every aspiration we have ever entertained: public access will be maintained (though somewhat limited); the house will be lovingly restored in strict compliance with Secretary of Interior Standards; its footprint will be substantially unchanged (the ell may be slightly enlarged); and interior modifications will be carefully limited to those necessary to make it fully livable.

The buyer, whose desire is to convert it into a small, two-bedroom inn, has proven credentials, as manifested by his restoration of a much larger historic estate in rural Virginia. For a full understanding of his capabilities and plans, I strongly recommend that you look at this website: <http://wiltonhousevirginia.com>.

The only thing standing in the way of our bringing this deal to fruition is the need to get a variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals to repurpose the house as an inn. A hearing on the matter will take place on April 16. We are quite optimistic that the proposal will be enthusiastically received, as it will mark the restoration of what is now a neighborhood eyesore into a superbly restored addition to the city tax rolls.

Assuming a successful response to our appeal, we envision restoration work beginning almost immediately.

Programs & Events

- **May 3, 4, 5 and 9, 10, 11** at 7 p.m. - Seven Stages Shakespeare Company: *Othello*
- **Friday, June 14th** at 6 p.m. – “Preaching Confidence: Portsmouth’s Panic in 1837” by Professor Jessica Lepler
- **Saturday, June 22th** at 2 p.m. – Notable Denizens Cemetery Tour with Richard Adams
- **Saturday, June 29th** at 2 p.m. – History of Tea followed by an afternoon tea in the garden or at the house
- **Thursday, July 11th** at 6 p.m. – Historic Gardens talk with John Forti
- **Friday, August 9th** from 4:30-8 p.m. – Twilight Tour
- **Saturday, August 10th** at 2 p.m. – “Pint” of Graves Tour
- **Saturday, August 31th** at 3 p.m. – Noree Chamber Group
- **Friday, September 27th** at 5:30 p.m.— Old Time American Songs with Ramblin Richard





Treasurer's Report

Our fiscal year began October 1, 2019 with an Operating Budget of \$48,130. At the mid-point of the year we have operating income of \$21,528 and operating expense of \$19,469. Income and expense are on track for this time of year with one exception. That exception is Annual Appeal. As the Annual Appeal is coming to a close, we are \$3,200

short of the budgeted amount. We are searching for ways to offset the shortfall but find it to be a challenging situation because our budgeting process is quite rigorous and provides no cushion. However, we are making every effort to finish the year within budget.

As many Newsletter readers know, we account for our routine day-to-day income and expense in the Operating Budget as reported above. When it

comes to other items such as capital projects, major maintenance and repair of our buildings, and special specific programs, we account for the income and expense in one of several funds created for the specific purpose. Currently there are four funds. In the first half of the fiscal year there was a limited amount of financial activity in these funds. The year started with \$147,618. At mid-point there is \$144,877.

Portsmouth High School Internship

The Wentworth-Gardner House established an internship for Portsmouth High School juniors in early 2019.

The student intern will receive a generous stipend at the end of the

summer. Duties will include: cataloguing and identifying museum collections under the tutelage of the House Manager; participate and host summer programming as needed; research online and identify the inventories of early in-

habitants of the house; work as a museum guide; and write 1-3 blog entries for our website.

This internship is made possible by a generous gift from Jane Nelson.

2019 Summer Exhibit Announcement

This season's exhibit, entitled "[TITLE TO BE DETERMINED]," is set to debut on Thursday, May 23 with the members' annual opening reception at [TIME TBD].

The exhibit looks at the Tobias Lear house through a different lens, made possible by recent archaeological excavations by Inde-

pendent Archaeological Consulting, LLC.

Displaying uncovered artefacts alongside Lear family biographies and inventories, architectural histories, helpful terms, historical photographs, and similar objects from the Wentworth-Gardner permanent collection, this exhibit seeks to give the Tobias Lear house a proper send off before beginning its next incarnation.

In support of the preservation easements now attached to the Tobias Lear house deed, the Wentworth Lear Historic Houses Association



contracted two archaeological digs, in search of important property "hot spots."

What were we looking for?

Among other things, we sought answers to long wondered questions: Where is the long-lost ell? Where is the old privy? What lies beneath the east yard?

What we found illuminated the previously dim picture of life in the Lear house, something we are very excited to share with you this summer in our newest exhibit.



Recent gift of Frances Atkinson Wentworth Portrait

We are pleased to receive the newest acquisition to the Wentworth-Gardner house: a stunning copy of the portrait of Frances Atkinson Wentworth by John Singleton Copley, generously donated by Mr. Everett Morss.

This painting portrays the young wife of Theodore Atkinson, Jr., Frances (nee Deering Wentworth). She is seated at a table with her pet flying squirrel, the image of high society fashion.

But Mrs. Atkinson was also the topic of much gossip amongst Portsmouth's high society.

Frances was born into a well-connected and wealthy family. The daughter of Samuel Wentworth and Elizabeth Deering, she was the niece of Benning Wentworth. She and her cousin, John Wentworth, fell in love as teenagers but career ambitions took John to England, so the young Frances turned her attentions to another cousin, Theodore Atkinson, Jr. They married when she was 17, two years before her portrait was painted in 1765.

John returned to Portsmouth as Royal Governor, succeeding his uncle Benning. A frequent visitor to



Atkinson house, rumors (as told in Brewster's Rambles) began in earnest when Theodore fell sick with consumption. He died on October 28, 1769; Frances married John on November 11th.

The stuff of Portsmouth legend, an 1871 account by Harriett Elizabeth Prescott Spofford, describes the flurry of events that followed:

“On [Saturday] Theodore breathed his last. His burial took place on the following Wednesday... On Sunday the weeping widow, clad in crape, listened in church to the funeral eulogies; on Monday her affliction was mitigated; on Tuesday all the fingers of the seamstresses of the country roundabout were flying; and on the next Sunday, in the white satins and jewels and fardingales of a bride, she walked up the aisle the wife of Governor Wentworth.”

The couple split their time between their Portsmouth mansion and the Wolfboro farm. As the Revolution loomed and tension grew, they fled Portsmouth, first to Nova Scotia where John became Provincial Governor, before eventually settling in England. John was knighted in 1795 and Frances became Lady Wentworth, eventually becoming lady-in-waiting to Queen Charlotte.

We are grateful to Mr. Everett Morss and his family for this generous gift.

House Manager's Report

As we gear up for the 2019 summer tour season, we are thinking of you, our supportive members of the Association.

This newsletter serves not only as a semi-annual “Hello there!” but also as an invitation to spend time with the history that you are helping to preserve.

Our programming and events calendar is nicely filled up (with more to come, so keep an eye out) and the house is set to open on May 23rd.

We hope to see you at the Members' opening reception on May 23rd at 5:30 pm, when we will unveil the summer exhibit

and our most recent acquisition: the portrait of Frances Atkinson Wentworth.

In the meantime, we hope that you will renew your support with our annual membership drive, which will enable us to keep sending you news items, early access to new

programs, and admission to the Wentworth-Gardner house for tours and special exhibits.

So mark your calendars! We are looking forward to seeing you soon.





WENTWORTH LEAR
Historic Houses

50 Mechanic Street
P.O. Box 563
Portsmouth, NH 03802-0563

603-436-4406
info@wentworthlear.org wentworthlear.org

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