

Winter 2019



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The sale of the Lear house was years in the making and absorbed much of the Board's time and energy. With that behind us, we expect to focus our efforts on the maintenance and upgrading of our buildings and grounds, as detailed in B&G Committee chairman Kelly Davis' report in this newsletter.

We should note that our Association no longer has any ties at all with the Lear house or its new owner, Stephen Foster. His house rehabilitation work is now being overseen by Historic New England, holder of the Preservation Restriction Easement. That said, we look forward to a congenial and mutually advantageous association with Mr. Foster as he pursues his objective of bringing the Lear house to probably the best condition it has ever enjoyed in its 279 years of existence.

Board member Walter Bardenwerper has stepped down after years of valued service, citing travel demands imposed by his many volunteer activities. Walter will be greatly missed; his wise counsel has been invaluable as the Board has wrestled with many complex issues during his tenure.

Because Board and committee service is strictly voluntary, there is always room for new members to offer their time and expertise in a wide array of needs. Those willing to help should contact me or House Manager Jen Widmark. No reasonable offer will be rejected.

Dick Adams, Board President

TREASURER'S REPORT



Financial activity of the past fiscal year, which ended September 30, 2019, was dominated by sale of the Tobias Lear House. The closing took place in August. In September the \$397,000 net proceeds of sale were added to the Association's financial assets. The Finance Committee, in anticipation of the sale, had developed options for incorporating the money into our financial structure. The major part went into the Association's endowment, thus assuring the financial well-being of our organization well into the future. It should be noted that access to a substantial portion of the net sale proceeds is restricted by probate court order.

As for our annual operations, the Operating Budget ended the year with a small surplus. Income for the year was \$48,920; expense was \$42,716. The primary reasons for the surplus were (a) income from our nine historical/cultural events was approximately \$1,500 more than budgeted and (b) wages were approximately \$5,000 less than budgeted because partway through the year our agreement with Jen, our House Manager, was by mutual agreement modified for her to work fewer hours.

Funds, separate from the Operating Budget, have been established to set aside money for specific purposes. There are currently three funds. One is for major maintenance/repair of the Wentworth-Gardner House. Another is for major maintenance/repair of the warehouse. The third fund, the Jane Nelson Fund, is for carrying out special programs and activities that encourage the engagement of Portsmouth area residents in historic preservation. Collectively these funds contain just over \$75,000.

Fred Engelbach, Treasurer



DEVELOPMENT NEWS

2019 has been a landmark year for the Wentworth-Gardner Historic House Association. With the sale of the Tobias Lear House to Mr. Stephen Foster, the proceeds are earmarked for the growing endowment for purposes of maintaining the Wentworth-Gardner House, its grounds, and the supporting warehouse. Clearly a tall order!

The membership dues this year increased by roughly \$2,000. And although the Annual Fund has lost roughly the same amount, overall unrestricted operating income from all sources has increased by \$1,750 since 2018. The Board looks forward to 2020 with eagerness. We hope to increase both Annual Fund and Membership income and continue our unique programs like the Noree Chamber Group and performances by Seven Stages Shakespeare Company. In addition, we plan to make our site available to special groups like Friends of the South End and an occasional wedding or private party, revenue which adds nicely to our bottom line.

We have continued to receive generous gifts from individual donors for both restricted and unrestricted purposes and plan to seek funding from granting agencies for continued work on the Warehouse and the interior of the Wentworth-Gardner in this next calendar year.

Joanna Brode, Development



A MESSAGE FROM OUR NEW NEIGHBOR

The long anticipated sale of the Tobias Lear House to Stephen Foster and the Tobias Lear House Historic Inn, LLC finally went to record in early August and by mid-September, work on the house had begun in earnest under the direction of project manager John Schnitzler and his associate Aaron King. In a month's time, John and Aaron had completed most of the exterior work on the west façade, repairing and replacing clapboards, pulling out windows for repair, re-glazing, and repainting, and installing a new roof of Alaskan yellow cedar. By early November, the two old-house specialists had moved on to the south façade, where, in addition to the new roof and clapboard repairs, new flashing, and other fixes for the three attic dormer windows are underway. John and Aaron have also been scoping out their work schedule for the interior, all the while probing paint, plaster, woodwork, trim, doors, and floors for tell-tale signs of changes over the course of the nearly 300-year history of the house. Their detective work will soon be supported by the extensive paint analysis done by Susan Buck, based on some 150 paint samples taken on two busy days in early August. Susan's 115-page report has now identified, under up to 18 layers of paint, the original paint colors – red-browns, dark tans, ochre-yellows, Puritan grays, and a surprise dollop of Prussian blue -- from the 1760's. That's the likely time frame when Tobias Lear IV expanded the house his father built from a two-over-two, central chimney, gable-roofed dwelling to its present four-over-four, hipped-roof configuration. While all this has been going on, colonial garden specialist Cindy Brockway has been drafting coordinated landscaping, garden, and fencing plans for both the Tobias Lear and the Wentworth Gardner houses. "Things are off to a great start," says Foster, who looks to a completion date "sometime in the spring of 2021." Details of ongoing work and future plans will soon be available at www.tobiaslearhouse.com.



Stephen Foster, Tobias Lear House Inn

BUILDINGS & GROUNDS UPDATES

This has been another active year for the Buildings & Grounds Committee:

Lear House

The deaccessioning of the Tobias Lear House was the main focus of our work through the first half of the year, with the sale to Stephen Foster taking place in late summer. The overall effort was led by Karen Bouffard who put in countless hours attending to details, meeting with principals, and shepherding the project through the various City governing boards. We applaud her tireless efforts.

Wentworth-Gardner Powder Room

With the sale of the Tobias Lear House we were in need of finding a place for a new powder room for use by the public. It has been installed in the rear vestibule of the Wentworth Gardner House and we much appreciate the work of our subcontractors.

Wentworth-Gardner Exterior Painting

A commitment has been given by historic painter Tim Berry to repaint the east (front) elevation of the Wentworth-Gardner house this coming spring. We have specifications and sample descriptions from previous painting research to review.

Warehouse

Electric service to the Warehouse is fed from a panel in the Tobias Lear House. The Board is planning to install new service to the Warehouse underground from the Wentworth Gardner House at the time our masterplan landscape work is implemented.

In addition, a grant application is being written to help finance a historic structures report on the Warehouse.

House Manager's Report



In September we acquired PastPerfect, a collections and constituent database software. With this program we will be able to manage information on a variety of items—membership, donations (financial, volunteer hours, objects), inventory the Wentworth-Gardner house, and organize our collection in full.

The main task ahead of us will be to conduct an updated inventory of the collections in the Wentworth-Gardner house. Once this is complete, we will need to do some research. This is where you come in! If you are interested in conducting research on historical artifacts (ceramics, furniture, textiles, etc.), please reach out. This interesting work can be done from the comfort of your home, local library, and even here at the Wentworth-Gardner house. If this project is of interest to you, feel free to email me at housemanager@wentworthlear.org or call the house at (604) 436-4406. Thank you!

This report will provide valuable information for rehabilitation and reuse. Of immediate concern is the condition of the stone foundation and windows.

A new wrought iron handrail has been installed at the entry steps facing Mechanic Street by local blacksmith Peter Happny, using a similar design to the handrail at the WG front entrance.

Master Landscape Plan

Lucinda Brockway from Kennebunk ME has been hired by Stephen Foster to prepare a historic landscape plan for both the Tobias Lear House and the grounds of the Wentworth Gardner House. She has submitted a concept for discussion by the B&G landscape subcommittee and we look forward to working with her.

Exterior Fence

The fence along Mechanic Street has been repaired with new wood slats and repainted. Thanks to volunteers Dick Adams, Peter Follansbee and Kelly Davis, as well as our house manager Jennifer Widmark.



Kelly Davis and Dick Adams, hard at work repainting the fence.

Future Projects

Projects under consideration for the near future include a drainage study at the rear patio and basement of the Wentworth-Gardner house manager apartment; painting the main hall in the Wentworth-Gardner House; and repair to the parking lot pavers.

Kelly Davis, Buildings & Grounds

Jennifer Widmark, House Manager & Caretaker



WENTWORTH-GARDNER
Historic House Association

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

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

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