

LAUREL HILL MANSION NEWS

Message from the President

As the 2023 Holiday Tours came to a close, we were pleased to welcome visitors to Laurel Hill Mansion. As part of the Welcome America Free Museum Day on December 16, about 175 people visited the mansion free of charge, which was the highest attendance day of all the tour dates. Our visitors enjoyed colonial crafts, tea, gingerbread cookies, and shopping in the gift shop as well as hearing the history of Laurel Hill.

I must say "thank you" to all our volunteers who helped with preparation for the tours, worked in the gift shop, served tea or helped give tours. A special "thank you" to Tish Deturo, who set up the gift shop, the Militia Hill Questors and Darren Fava, who decorated the mansion, Jacqui Martin, who always made sure the mansion was ready for visitors, Christine Smith, who scheduled volunteers, Smokie Kittner, who used social media to advertise the tours, and Karen Phinney, our tour guide extraordinaire.

Moving forward into 2024, we will continue to forge a relationship with the law firm Rawle and Henderson and work on ways to increase the visibility of Laurel Hill Mansion in the historical story of Philadelphia through new programs, summer music, and our annual tea and more.

Wishing everyone a Happy and Healthy 2024!

BARBARA FRANKL, PRESIDENT, WFGP



We say a heartfelt Thank You to House Chair Jacqui Martin for her extraordinary efforts that enabled the Laurel Hill Mansion heater to be repaired ensuring that house could be open for Holiday Tours.



Laurel Hill Mansion was beautifully decorated this year by the Militia Hill Questors. What a delight it was to work with these talented ladies.



detail, tree

The

Militia Hill Questers

spent hours designing dried flower arrangements. Some were in cup & saucers to adorn the 12ft. Christmas tree while others carried the tea theme throughout the Mansion on mantles & tables. In addition, the retiring room was transformed into a New Year 's Eve celebration.

The creativity of these ladies was stellar & much appreciated.

Laurel Hill Mansion
Gift Shop

The shop was beaming with many handcrafted artisan items for sale as well as Christmas decor & gifts. One cupboard was filled with holiday & hostess gifts including our own Laurel Hill honey. We were thankful for all the lovely items donated to the shop.

Many thanks go out to all the donors & volunteers who were involved with the shop. All the proceeds from the shop support the maintenance of the Mansion.

Until next year....

Tish deTuro

Chair Gift Shop Committee



UPCOMING WFGP EVENTS

WFGP Board Meeting Online Saturday, Jan. 27 at 11 A.M.

Women's History Event Saturday, March 16th

Information will be posted at

www.womenforgreaterphiladelphia.org/pages/womens_history_month.html

Time to pay WFGP Annual Dues.

\$30 per year

www.womenforgreaterphiladelphia.org/pages/membership.html

Sarah Coates Burge Rawle portrait at Laurel Hill Mansion

In 1783, William Rawle married his childhood sweetheart, 22-year-old Sarah Coates Burge. She was the daughter of Samuel Burge and Beulah Shoemaker, sister to Sam Shoemaker, William Rawle's stepfather. She and William would have 12 children and their sons would follow their father into the legal profession, as would subsequent generations.

Early in his professional career, William was appointed US District Attorney by Washington and he formed a close relationship with the president during his years in Philadelphia. The Rawles entertained George and Martha Washington regularly at their home in Germantown.

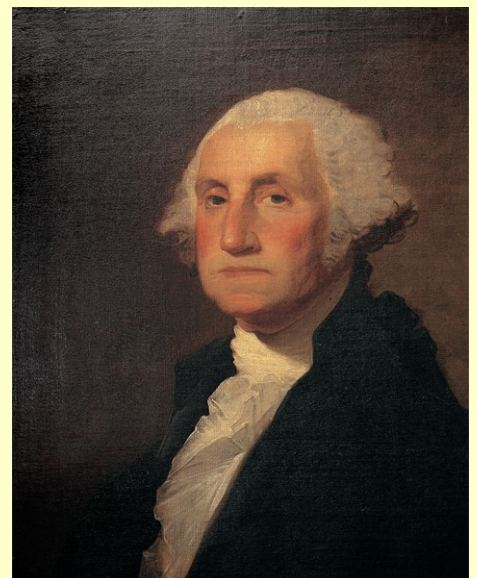
William's great grandson, William Brooke Rawle, published an often-told family story about how when his grandfather was a child, Washington was visiting the family for dinner, and he donned Washington's hat and sword and stepped out into the street, strutting up and down to the amusement of small boys in the neighborhood and passersby.

Around 1795, William Rawle commissioned two paintings by Gilbert Stuart, one of his wife, Sally, Sarah Coates Burge Rawle, and another of Washington. William's original commissioned portrait of Washington still exists and is on display at the private Harlan Crow Library in Dallas, Texas. Known today as the Rawle-Cranill portrait, it is among the 72 known copies created by Stuart from his original 1796 unfinished portrait of Washington.

Sally Rawle's portrait, seen here, is a copy of Stuart's original portrait, completed in 1798. It's possible that this copy was created some years after the original by Stuart's daughter Jane, who worked for some years as a successful painter in her own right making miniatures plus commissioned copies of her father's work.

After William's death in 1836, his daughter Beulah inherited the original painting and she later bequeathed it to her brother Francis William Rawle. It continued to pass down through the family. The original portrait was purchased at auction at Sotheby's in 2006 for some \$51,000 by the Lyman Allyn Art Museum in New London, CT. The second portrait copy was presented to Laurel Hill Mansion around that same time by descendants of William and Sarah's great grandson, William Brooke Rawle.

Anita McKelvey



Ali Valin, Spinner

I was mesmerized by the demonstration of drop spinning performed by Spinner Ali Valin at Laurel Hill Mansion on December 10 as we were surrounded by the backdrop of the Mansion decorated in its Christmas splendor. Ali Valin demonstrated this ancient skill, its tools, and regaled listeners with stories of spinning's history and uses.

Ali is a member of the Philadelphia Guild of Hand Weavers (PGHW) – a center for fiber arts located in Manayunk, PA . The Guild provides support for artists who are using a multitude of natural and synthetic materials via its provision of resources, lessons, exhibitions, pop-up stores, and camaraderie.

Ali's background in internal communications for an international corporation was also showcased by an admirable ability to interact with the audience while demonstrating spinning. We were drawn to Ali's easy style and felt free to ask many, many questions.

We learned that an important feature of this craft is that historically, it was not considered a woman's craft. Rather, everyone worldwide used this method to create yarn. This was proven by the discovery of drop spindles within ancient graves of both women and men, including the Vikings. For example, Lucets - handheld tools - were used by the Vikings to create a type of thread. The shape of a Lucet reminded me of a musical lyre. As we learned, sailors needed to be proficient in the art of sewing and spinning to maintain their sails and for use on shipboard.

A drop spindle is a handheld spindle used to create yarn. A spinner holds one end of the spindle by a cord, with the wool connected to the bottom of the spindle, and the spinner uses their free hand to pull out the wool fibers as the spindle turns after it is dropped. Drop spindles range in size from very small (Takhli) to large. The larger ones, e.g., two feet long, are placed on the floor for support to spin. The process is relaxing and fascinating as the yarn is spun.



In the photo, from left to right on the table: A wool comb, a Turkish-style spindle, a top whorl drop spindle, a takhli spindle (in the bowl), and two kinds of lucet forks. Ali is using a whorl drop spindle .

Ali obtains “kind” wool in various stages of preparation for spinning from local farms and from select on-line sources. Many types of materials, both natural and synthetic, can be used for spinning either individually or in combination when a blend is desired. Examples are plants such as hemp and flax, angora, and even my beloved pet dog's long, shed fur is a potential source. I was delighted to learn that this fur can be used although it may need to be combined with another fiber to create a usable yarn. Another interesting option is the use of recycled silk saris wherein the silk fibers are removed and used to spin new thread .

As described by Ali, the art of drop spinning is an accessible craft in that it is inexpensive, portable, uses many types of fiber, and brings people together as they connect in learning and sharing the skill. Then one's mind goes to the next step of contemplating what to make with the yarn. A world of possibilities and colors awaits. As Ali stated, “What you pick up is not what you put down”.

Submitted by

MonaLisa Fiorentini, WFGP Board Member, 250 Committee Member

¹Ali Valin is a 'fan' of the Fairmount Park Charm Houses and has fond memories of touring the historic homes during the Christmas season. Ali has a cross stitch of a 1776 memorial hanging at home today which was obtained on one of these visits.

²Philadelphia Hand Weavers Guild House is located at 3705 Main St. Manayunk, PA 19127. Contact information: 215.487.9690/info@pghw.org.

AN AMAZING DISCOVERY RIGHT IN OUR LHM GIFT SHOP

Back on November 9, I had my first experience watching Tish deTuro and Christine Smith transform the “supposed kitchen” of the Laurel Hill Mansion into the fabulous wonderland of all our donated items. With us was Barbara Jean Maresca and we, four, were like Santa’s elves. Setting up the tables and covering them with muslin was rather easy. Checking what we received from our dedicated members and where to place all the items was an interesting study of commercialism. From the jewelry items, to the knitted items, to the tree ornaments, to the Philadelphia postcards and related items, and to the holiday garlands, we had a great time placing every item around the room. We even had honey jars and homemade bee wax candles from the Philadelphia Bee Company. We had tea samplers and fantastic bottles of lotions. The gnomes were back in force. Kitchen items of Holiday towels, sponges and scrapers were in a basket. A marvelous quilted coverlet was hung and a traditional German pyramid graced our table. A basket of colorful scarves was placed on the end of a table. The room was as eclectic as you could find. Now we did not get done that day, but Tish and Christine returned Friday to complete the job. They are a “marvel” to watch as they worked their display talents.



I must share that our octagon room was busy being decorated by the Militia Hill Questers. The tables were filled with dried flowers and decorations of every kind. Watching them climb the twelve foot ladder to decorate our beautiful new Christmas tree was challenging to watch but they did it. This group of women were awesome to watch as their artistic eyes created the most beautiful Holiday displays of our mansion.

Now some donated items appeared during the second weekend that I wish to share. I worked two days of



the first weekend in the Gift Shop so I knew our inventory. When I arrived for the third weekend, I was met with a new item or should I say many items. I learned that our member, Kathy Vissar, placed her sculptures in the shop for us to sell. It was Saturday, December 16, when a visitor shared his knowledge about these art pieces, He bought a one and couldn't wait to share with his wife what he had found. It was to be a gift for his daughter. I needed to know more so I went to my trusty cellphone and googled, “Kathleen Vissar, President of the Wells Vissar, Inc.” Her work

shows artistic vision and mastery of scagliola and fancy plaster. It has also been featured in the Architectural Digest and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. WOW!

But there is more to this story. It was the next day, that a limo bus appeared and we had 4 people come through our shop. They were all huddled around these art pieces and began to talk excitedly. I know it is bad manners to eavesdrop but I could not resist. These guests were associates of Kathy's and were delighted to view her pieces in our Gift Shop. They gave me a brief overview of their connections and welcomed a photograph that we could reproduce in our quarterly newsletter. They shared that they would be coming to our Laurel Hill Mansion in the year 2025 with a sculpture show and told us to stay tuned. But no sooner than we met, they had to hurry onto the bus with their group. What a story to share with you. Photo – John Staack, Darla Jackson, Doug Bucci and Paul Romano.



Let me go back to Saturday, December 16, as we participated in “America Free Museum Day”. Our WFGP President Barbara Frankl worked hard to complete the paperwork that we could host this special day with other “Charms of Fairmount Park”. Barbara provided three colonial activities for the children. She had the materials for these items- yarn dolls, the whirligigs and the tin punch. She had everything prepared. I must share that the word “free” sure was inviting to many families for we must have accommodated hundreds of visitors. It was nonstop as our member and tour guide, Karen Phinney, and President Barbara never sat down for a minute.

The gift shop was doing a brisk business that third weekend, too. The dining room was humming with the serving of our delicious brewed tea. I must mention that the gingerbread inventory was almost gone. My grandson, Alexander, and his family baked another 100 gingerbreads to the total of last year's count to make it 350 gingerbread cookies. Delicious, soft gingerbread cookies decorated with the white icing were again given high reviews. The best was visitors returning to the LHM and purchasing some more gingerbread cookies. (Alexander loved hearing that last comment.)

There is definitely a wonderful feeling of sharing the story of the Laurel Hill Mansion with so many people. Again, we had many from the Philadelphia area who never before got around to visiting the Fairmount Charms. And again we had visitors from “away” who just wished to soak in some history and architectural tidbits. But they all love our mansion- not too big, not too small but just right to glean the story of the Laurel Hill Mansion.

Nancy Werner, Laurel Hill Mansion Board Member

Women for Greater Philadelphia is partnering with Philadelphia Sculptures, www.philasculptors.org, to bring an outdoor sculpture exhibition to the grounds of Laurel Hill Mansion Summer 2025.

Women for Greater Philadelphia, Inc. is a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation of volunteers.

Nancy Santucci Cohen, M.B.A., LHM Newsletter Editor