DH Wallpaper Project: From *Marble Ashlar* to *Ribbon Trellis*

With so many issues and causes in the world today, the DH folks ponder, “Who cares about the wallpaper?” In fact they posed a slightly different version of the question, “Why is the DH’s wallpaper important,” to members of the Museum community and received some incisive comments. See the responses within.

The questions weighed heavy on the Museum during the past year because the masonry patterned wallpaper (*marble ashlar* is the term used for the design) installed in 2002 was coming off of the walls in the DH’s iconic stair hall. After a series of repairs over the years, wallpaper experts offered no alternative other than to remove the paper, repair the surface of the wall and put up new paper.

The marble ashlar paper should have lasted 40 years, yet in eleven years it was not sticking and could not be made to adhere in visible exhibit areas. There were several causes including the high velocity air conditioning system (new in 2002) blasting air onto the paper as well as the humid environment in which we live in the Lowcountry. However, the truest determined causes were insufficient prep work and a “bad layer of paint.” Wallpaper expert Jesse Coopersmith concluded, “The failures are caused by poor adherence of the oil primer layer, which when split, separated from the wall. If oil paint had not been used, and a resin type primer would have been used instead, the failure would have been far less likely. If a lining paper had been used as well, this type of failure might have been avoided.”

Because the DH’s standards had been set so high in the 2002 restoration – hiring the most prominent expert on Savannah interiors, using nationally recognized paint analysis expert and utilizing only hand-blocked wallpapers created using historical methods – this latest wallpaper issue proved a challenge, particularly with regard to money, time and finding the best people to do the job. Thankfully, the DH Endowment Directors saw the
“Project’s value, “It had to be fixed,” and agreed to use a portion of the funds available to correct the problem. This of course meant/means that the Museum must shoulder funding of operations primarily through earned income since Endowment funds were committed to the project. The next concern was timing, since the Museum makes much of its “living” through admissions, the work had to be scheduled so as not to conflict with visitation. As DH director Jamie Credle said, “The only good time for this project was the second week of January!”

Thankfully the Museum knew the best people to produce and to hang new wallpaper. In 2009 the Museum hired Alan Cooper-Smith to assist with the adherence problem. His son, Jesse, who took over the business following his father’s untimely death, was the one the DH looked to hang new paper. Getting new paper offered an opportunity to address what had become one of the Museum’s biggest interpretive challenges. “People pretty much hated the marble ashlar paper. Visitors in person and on social media were vocal and often harsh in their disdain for the design even with assurance that it was indeed appropriate and authentic.” The DH acquired the paper from Adelphi Wallpapers in 2002. The firm is highly regarded, and as wallpaper expert Mary Ellen Higginbotham says, “They are the only company making quality papers these days.” And as luck would have it the marble ashlar was no longer available.

The question then became, “What pattern would be appropriate for the Museum’s most important vista” – the Entrance Hall and Stairs. Should it choose another masonry pattern? Prominent wallpaper consultants were adamant that masonry patterns were “the most compelling” patterns for early 19th century hallways in America.

This is where timing comes in. In April of last year, Steve Larson from Adelphi Wallhangings sent staff photos of five layers of wallpaper from an unknown house in Savannah that was “to become a bank.” He said two of the patterns were appropriate to the DH’s time period and would be right for the Entrance Hall. As the Museum was grappling with what to do, the Major John Berrien House, which had been derelict for decades, was undergoing an astonishing transformation both inside and out just one block from the DH. Through the commitment of Berrien descendant Andrew Jones, his ancestral home was receiving state-of-the-art preservation. Passersby could see what was happening on the outside, but learning about what was happening on the inside

Continued on next page

What is important about the DH Wallpaper?”

Daniel Carey, President and CEO, Historic Savannah Foundation
This is far more than just about wallpaper. This is about research, analysis and execution. So when people visit the Davenport House Museum, they can be confident of our commitment to upholding the highest standards of good scholarship and stewardship.

David Bloomquist, Member of the Davenport House Endowment Directors
Having walls covered in decorative paper, at the time, was an important indication of taste and means. Selecting the right paper is as important as selecting the right tie or necklace. When done well it not only completes but complements one’s proper appearance, which in turn is the best outward indicator of one’s station on life.

Kathy Horne, Chairman of the Board of Historic Savannah Foundation
DH always makes every effort to see that history is accurately represented; thus it is important that where possible, all facets of the house are authentic. We were extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to confirm that our new wallpaper is an accurate representation of wall coverings from the period when the residence was home to the Davenport family.

Howard Zar, Executive Director, Lyndhurst/NTP, Tarrytown, NY
This ain’t just wallpaper. This is the visual representation of how independence and democracy led to widespread affluence and the ability to express individual taste that financial and political freedom allow.

Visitors to the U.S. during the period described how Americans were out making money and had the types of possessions that were only common to aristocrats in Europe. This sense of our homes and possessions...
expressing who we are is very American and still part of our lives today. While it might have been the choice of wallpaper in the early 19th century, today it’s our car and our kitchen appliances, but essentially, it’s the same thing.

**John Sorel, Docent and Member of the Davenport House Committee**

It is the very first impression for most of our visitors. It is what they see when they enter the fine entrance hall. It tells these visitors what we stand for — preservation in its finest form. We can share the story of how and why we chose the wallpaper pattern as an example of exemplary guardianship.

**Maryellen Higginbotham, Independent Scholar**

My research indicates that Georgians enjoyed "papered walls" throughout the nineteenth-century. The DH is a specific and an early example of this little appreciated fact.

**Mills Morrison, Jr., Chairman of Davenport House Endowment Directors**

The job of interpreting historic houses is all about details, such as furnishings, decorating styles and wallpaper, among other things. Attention to the small details is what separates the authentic museum house from the rest.

**Nancy White, Retired History Professor at Armstrong State University and Member of the Davenport House Committee**

The wallpaper, newly installed at the DH, like any other historical artifact and especially those of the decorative arts, is very important, because it tells us about the daily life - experience - the tastes, values, and points of view - of those who precede us; the voices from Savannah's past which helps us to better appreciate the present.

**Steve Larson, Co-Owner of Adelphi Wallhangings, Sharon Spring, NY**

The wallpaper at the Isaiah Davenport House not only defines and unifies the structure of the hall and stairway but also personalizes the home; the playful yet bold pattern points to very specific and confident tastes of the owner and, by extension, the culture in general.

was left up to speculation by the curious.

Preservationists in Savannah had long known that upstairs in the Berrien House was “an intact ballroom” and that there were “layers and layers of wallpaper.” In fact the corroborating evidence for the marble ashlar paper for the DH hallway was from a fragment of paper taken from the Berrien House in 2003. Unable to find anything other than a photocopy of this paper, staff asked workers at the Berrien House if they could enter the house to see for themselves what wallpaper was there. Drew Glenn, Structural Engineer with J.T. Turner Construction, was accommodating and said when originally contacted that “I feel like I work in a wallpaper store!” He escorted staff on a hard-hat tour and on what turned out to be a revelation. There before them were layers and layers of wallpaper — all the wallpapers sent from Adelphi of the “unknown house in Savannah.” As they walked into the parlor level space the first layer of wallpaper — the “youngest” layer — was the masonry paper the DH has mistakenly said for years was from the 1820s. Being “the youngest” paper it certainly could not have been used in the Davenport House in the 1820s.

Two patterns emerged as appropriate — one a diaper pattern (meaning all over geometric pattern) and one was ribbon pattern. After much discussion, measuring and contemplation, a DH committee decided on what would become *Berrien House Ribbon Trellis*, a brand-new pattern created as an exact copy of what dates to 1810-20 in the Berrien House. The DH received a discount on the papers by going in half on the creation of the three blocks required to make the paper with Adelphi. Berrien House project manager David Kelley did further research into the papers found at the Berrien House and discovered a border which coordinates with the diaper/Ribbon Trellis paper.

Much communication was had between Adelphi and Jesse Coopersmith over the summer and fall, but the DH folk remained unknowing and unprepared for the crucial missing step --- plaster work. The job required so much more than pulling down the old paper and putting new up. They did not fully understand the original
problem. After the old paper was taken down the plaster had to be repaired and the walls reskimmed to the paper hanger’s specifications in order for him to guarantee his work. Preston Miller of Two Brothers handled the plaster work during nine days in January. Following that, and for the next three weeks, working from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m., Jesse Cooper-smith prepped the walls, applied a lining paper and then installed the new paper and border which now hangs in the Museum’s Entrance Hall. On visiting the site in late January just as the paper was being applied former HSF Executive Director Mark McDonald said, “Boy, the new paper really warms up the hallway.” We hope you will agree.

While we did not go for the most compelling wallpaper, the DH choose and helped create a paper that we know for sure was used in a home across the street from the the Davenports’ home on Columbia Square. It is a paper they would have known and hopefully liked. We hope you like it too! Come see it!
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Sunshine and Serendipity: Oyster Roast 2015

The Saturday, March 7 event was a success thanks to hosts, attendees, sponsors, volunteers and the weather. The DH is grateful to the following:

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Beth and Harvey Zarem

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**HURRAY TO THE 2015 DH OYSTER ROAST COMMITTEE:**

Katherine Albert, Diane Kaufman,  

**EXTRA MEDIA SUPPORT:**

WJCL – Jennifer Andrews,  
WTOC – Mid-Morning Live

**THANKYOU TO EVERYONE WHO ATTENDED!**

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**SPRING PROGRAMS!**

**EARLY BIRD’S PRESERVATION WALKING TOUR OF THE LANDMARK HISTORIC DISTRICT’S EAST SIDE**

*Program Date: April 4, 11, 18, 25*

**TIME:** 8 a.m.  
**ADMISSION:** $21  
**LENGTH OF PROGRAM:** 100 min.  
**DISTANCE OF WALK:** 2.5 miles  
Take an early morning walk through one of the oldest and most varied neighborhoods to learn how historic preservation has revitalized downtown Savannah. Coffee and treats in the Davenport House garden to follow.

**TEA IN THE GARDEN AT THE DAVENPORT HOUSE**

*Program Dates and Times: May 1, 7, 8, 14 and 15 at 4:15 p.m. and 21, 22, 28 and 29 at 5:00 p.m.*  
**ADMISSION:** $18  
Reservations recommended. Limited attendance.  
**LENGTH OF PROGRAM:** 60 to 75 minutes  
Learn about tea traditions and experience an early 19th century tea in Davenport House’s beautiful courtyard garden. Patrons will visit areas of the home where tea service took place and will participate in an afternoon tea given with costumed interpreters in the garden. On inclement weather dates, tea will be taken inside the house museum. The performance requires that guests be able to walk up and down stairs.

**DISCOVERING 1820S SAVANNAH:**

**EARLY BIRD’S WALKING TOUR OF THE CITY ISAIAH KNEW**

*Program Dates: May 2, 9, 16, 23, 30*

**TIME:** 8 a.m.  
**LENGTH OF PROGRAM:** 120 minutes  
**DISTANCE OF WALK:** 2.5 miles  
**ADMISSION:** $21
See what survives of the 1820s Savannah that master builder Isaiah Davenport knew. Beginning at the Davenport House Museum (1820) participants will walk by some of the finest examples of preservation in the city and learn about what no longer remains. Coffee and treats in the Davenport House garden will follow.

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For information about the Museum:  
324 E. State Street  
Savannah, GA 31401  
www.davenporthousemuseum.org  
912/236-8097  
info@davenporthousemuseum.org  
Facebook: “Davenport House Museum”  
*Tours are offered Monday through Saturday 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. when the last tour begins and on Sunday from 1 until 4 p.m.*
The Davenport House prides itself on mentoring young people through their high school years. Some “grow up” at the DH. This year five Junior Interpreters will graduate. All attend Savannah Arts Academy.

**Name:** KATE BOSEN  
**Parents:** Carmen and Peter Bosen  
**What things have you been involved in here?** JI training, mentoring JIs, Candlelight Holiday Tours, Holly Jolly Tours, Lafayette Fete, Tea at the Davenports, Yellow Fever, Super Museum Sunday, Oyster Roast, Spring Garden Party, maybe some other things I don’t remember?  
**How long have you been at the DH?** 2½ years  
**College Plans?** GA Tech  
**What has your time at the DH done?** Being a docent at the Davenport House has improved my social skills and public speaking. Though I was not a shy person when I came to the DH, I had my moments. Now, it is easy for me to talk to people, no matter if it is a one-on-one conversation or with a large group of people. The DH has also opened my eyes to the true beauty of Savannah and historical places. I used to think of Savannah as a small town with hardly any significance, but I know now that is not the case. I’m now a history nerd, and proud of it!  
**What do you think will be a found memory of your time here?** I think my fondest memory is going to be of all the amazing people I’ve gotten to know. I have had many great adventures at the DH, which are going to make fantastic stories to tell.  
**Plans for the future?** After college, I plan to travel before settling down anywhere. I want to travel all over the world, but specifically throughout Europe. When I find myself ready to settle down, hopefully I will be working in a field that I love and makes me happy.

**Name:** CATIE MORRIS.  
**Parents:** Ben and Rosemary Morris  
**What things have you been involved in here?** JI Day, Holiday Tours, Super Museum Sunday, Tea with Mrs. Davenport, the Yellow Fever program, Holly Jolly Trolley Tours, Valentine’s Day Weddings  
**How long have you been at the DH?** 2 ½ years  
**College Plans?** I plan to attend San Diego State University in California where my major will be Theatre/Film and minor in either US History and/or Spanish.

**Name:** USHA LEAH RAHN  
**Parents:** Marty Rahn and Ujjvala Bagal  
**What things have you been involved in here?** JI program, Valentine’s Day Weddings and Holiday Evening Tours  
**How long have you been at the DH?** 2 ½ years  
**College Plans?** I’m attending University of Georgia in the Fall. I haven’t decided on a major.  
**What has your time at the DH done?** Without a doubt being at the DH has made me comfortable with public speaking and taking charge of situations. It’s also improved my time management, which means in all aspects of my life after working at the DH (professional, personal, academic, etc.) I’m much less likely to waste time and be unprepared.  
**What do you think will be a found memory of your time here?** I’ll never forget the first day I showed up as an official DH docent and I was ten minutes late. Nor will I forget the horrified looks on visitors’ faces when they heard about and saw a palmetto bug for the first time. I have a nice blend of specific and general memories of my time at the Davenport House. I am thankful that this was my first job. I will look back on every moment, embarrassing, fun, hectic, or relaxed, with equal fondness.  
**Future Plans?** I would like to work in more museums. I’m taking an AP class in Art History and I’ve known for a long time that both history and art were things that I am happy doing. But I don’t know for sure, because I don’t like making firm decisions for the future without enough information. However, I know what I definitely don’t want to do, which I suppose is a step in the right direction.

**Name:** Cierra Smith  
**Parents:** Danielle Gibbions and Craig Smith  
**What things have you been involved in here?** Holiday programs, Valentine Day Weddings, Tour of Homes and Gardens, training new JIs, and anything else that Mrs. Jamie ask me to do.  
**How long have you been at the DH?** 2 ½ years
College Plans? I plan to go to Air Force Academy and study computer science with a minor in system engineering.

What has your time at the DH done? The Davenport House has made me a more polished speaker and it has also enhanced my people skills in general. Also working here has taught me to be flexible and to give 100% to everything that I do. Those skills will become necessary when I have to speak in front of large groups of Airmen or when I am asked to represent the Air Force Academy in formal situations.

What do you think will be a fond memory of your time here? My favorite memory is working and having fun with all of my friends. I have made so many great friends from this place. Most of these students I would have never talked to if it wasn’t for the DH.

Plans for the future (college, etc.): I plan to go to college and get a commission into the Air Force and one day become a general in the United States Air Force.

Name: Giuliana Stovall
Parents: Chris and Teresa Stovall

What things have you been involved in here? JI Program, Christmas and Lafayette Living History Programs.

How long have you been at the DH? I joined the JI program the summer of my junior year, so almost two years.

College Plans: I plan to attend Georgia Tech in the Fall.

What has your time at the DH done? My days at the DH are always filled with wonder and delight. Throughout the summer JI program, I marveled at how the Davenports led such a different yet similar lifestyle to us, their modern counterparts. The knowledge I gained while participating in everything from the JI Program to the Living History Programs has helped me to understand my city, my culture, and my people. The Davenport House has also inspired me to be unafraid to question the past. Seeing the archaeology project unfold, and finally having the results, provided me with some new perspectives on the Davenports’ lives and showed me that a little curiosity can go a long way. This curiosity can lead to advancements and better understandings of our world.

What do you think will be a fond memory of your time here? My favorite memory is the Christmas season. The house is cozy, a perfect escape from the cold. Inside, small decorations adorn the house, almost unnoticeable to the inexperienced sight-seer, and these objects provide me with pleasure and a little glow inside my heart. From the JI Christmas party (which is always loads of fun) to the Christmas/New Year tours (merry occasions that always lighten one’s spirit) the season is filled with joy.

Plans for the future (college, etc.): I am definitely on my way to college. I plan to pursue a major in Civil Engineering and become an engineer.

LADIES NIGHT OUT:
An Evening of Shopping, Food, Wine and Friends

DATE: Thursday, April 16

TIME: 5:30 to 9 p.m.

LOCATION: At the Home of Jan Vach, 109 Gray’s Creek Drive, Savannah.

ADMISSION: $10 per person. Admission may be purchased online or by calling the DH at 912/236-8097.

Deadline to purchase admission: Monday, April 13

Experience a contemporary creekside home in a gated community. Tour the property and enjoy refreshments – appetizers and dessert – as well as seeing and having the opportunity to purchase clothes by Affordable Apparel, bags, jewelry by Stella and Dot as well as original fiber art and clothes by local craftspeople. Other vendors will be in attendance. Admission includes one glass of wine. Cash wine bar. There will be a raffle for items from each vendor $1 ticket or six for $5. The proceeds will benefit the Davenport House Museum.
Friends of the Davenport House: Annual Giving Response Info

☐ $1—49 – Brick Mason  ☐ $50—149 – Carpenter  ☐ $150—249 – Master Builder
☐ $250—599 – Alderman  ☐ $600—999 – Fire Warden  ☐ $1000 – McKinnon Circle

Every dollar counts! Donations are tax deductible.

Renewal: ________  First time member: ________  Additional Gift: ________

In honor of: ______________________________________________________________

Name: __________________________  Phone #: ___________________________
Address: _________________________________________________________________
City, State, Billing Zip: ____________________________________________________
Email Address: __________________________________________________________

Make check payable to Friends of the Davenport House or charge by credit card:

Visa  MasterCard  AmEx  Discover (circle) - Donation Amount to Charge: ________
Account Number: __________________________________________________________
Expiration Date: ____________ 3 or 4 Digit Code on the Back: ________________
Signature: _______________________________________________________________

Send to: Davenport House Museum, 324 E. State Street, Savannah, GA 31401

Thank you for being a Friends of the Davenport House Museum! Your support is vital!