The Column
DAVENPORT HOUSE MUSEUM
March 2018 For 2017-18 Annual Giving Donors

Celebrating the Ladies: Remember the Researchers

No, not those ladies! We do a lot of focusing and celebrating the Seven Founders of the HSF, but today, as we look to new stories to tell at the DH, it is important to know how we got here – museum speaking – and the people who made our stories happen. On March 9, the Museum turned 55. In 1963 Mrs. Ethelyn Nightingale McKinnon was the legendary first volunteer director and collections chairman. She ably oversaw the house creating a showplace from almost nothing until 1977, when she retired. Since McKinnon’s time the DH’s story has evolved from a showcase of the early 19th century through antiquites and decorative arts to a more fully fleshed-out story of how people actually lived here when the house was first built. This push for greater accuracy began in 1985, when an expert made a site visit to examine how the Museum stacked up professionally. She wrote, “[While] the house is clean, well-maintained and a stunning site. . . . One of the first questions I had after touring the house, ‘Why aren’t the rooms used for their original purpose?’ If everyone is concerned about authenticity, this should be a significant consideration.” (Linda Ellsworth, MAP Assessment).

This concern for a more accurate and true depiction of life eventually put the DH on the path it continues to follow. In 1991, the DH’s then director Janet Waters (Hunton) hired a consultant, Susan M. Mays, through funding from the Georgia Association of Museums and Galleries Muse Program to develop an interpretive plan. Both Mays and collections consultant Mimi Rogers, recommended that our Museum focus on the life of Isaiah Davenport. “In reviewing the historical materials currently available about the family and the furnishings, my recommendation would be to focus on the period of Isaiah Davenport’s life from 1820-27. This would not exclude mention of the time after his death, but would center the interpretation on the time for which the most documentary evidence is available.” In addition to making this crucial recommendation, Mays wrote “Isaiah Davenport: A Biography,” a thirty page monograph with extensive footnotes, in 1992, which has been the cornerstone of the Museum’s story ever since.

To further this quest for authenticity, scholar Rogers was hired to write a furnishing plan which has guided Museum leaders in creating the period rooms which constituted the Museum experience. Roger writes, “As defined by the mission statement, the goal of the Davenport House is to recreate interiors which reflect the period when Isaiah Davenport lived in the house, that is 1820-27. Fortunately, the estate inventory and sale documents for Mr. Davenport exist, providing invaluable

It's not too late to be a DH Friend! See the list of current Friends of the Davenport House Museum within. If you do not see your name, know your museum needs you!
information upon which to base the furnishing plan.” Good house museums have furnishing plans as foundation documents which basically tell staff “where to put the furniture and why.” Rogers’ 180-page plan provided us ample rationale for making the decisions on how the rooms should look.

The plan was controversial for Savannah at the time because the prime tenet was “To recreate accurately the ambience of the 1820s, one must avoid the impulse to clutter a room with decorative objects.” This stuck like a dagger in the heart of those who loved the portraits, silver, furniture and curtains that the Davenport House had accumulated and exhibited over the years. In fact, the decisions were so provocative (for us!) that Rogers’ work was put in a drawer for several years until a group of community-spirited individuals hoped to give the DH “cred” by embarking on its award winning reinterpretation.

At that time, 1999-2002, DH folks acquired the input of noted interiors scholar Page Talbott, who assured the DH Committee that they already had good scholarship in Rogers’ report and to use this work as the basis for decisions. What Talbott did was put Davenport House people in contact with vendors and provided choices for fabrics, wallpapers, etc. She also helped leaders execute the Rogers’ furnishing plan.

The reason I am recounting what is probably old news to you is that we now have a whole new set of information which broadens our story and provides insights into the lives of twelve people who lived and worked in the house in the early 19th century. The scholarship on the enslaved workers owned by Isaiah Davenport provided by graduate student Kelly Westfield takes its place alongside the work of Mays and Rogers as stepping stones to greater understanding of our site. Besides Isaiah, Sarah and their children Isaiah, Jr., Henry Kollock, Hugh McCall, Benjamin Rush, Archibald Clark, Cornelia Augusta and Dudley, now we have details about Nancy, Bella, Jack, Jacob, Isaic, Polly, Ned, Davy, Mary, Ann, Tom and Deeping. Through thoughtful scholarship, our story keeps getting richer and more precious!

Thank you, ladies!  

Westfield’s Work: Building on our Foundation of Historical Research

In the fall, Kelly Westfield, a graduate student at GSU-Armstrong Campus, presented the DH with her “A Report on the Davenport House Bondpeople: A Review of New and Old Sources and a Reconstruction of their Pre-Davenport Lives.” This was not an unexpected gift as she had been working on it through the summer, but its quality and comprehensiveness were an unanticipated revelation. The Museum often cultivates and receives wonderful student work, but usually its creation is an academic exercise and not always something that has a life once the work is turned in. As Kelly searched for a project to fulfill graduate credit, she had hoped to find descendants of the Davenport’s enslaved workers and to bring their story into the present. Not having a background genealogical research and having limited time, she decided to look in another direction. Sensing her keen research skills would be better used combing repositories and record centers both online and in person, she found a wealth of new information tracing the lives of the Davenport’s enslaved back in time from the 1820s, and then following their chain of sale and their documentary footprint as far back as the records would take her. From this work, which she continues to refine, she presented three different training sessions in the winter – each to a capacity crowd of DH docents listening with eagerness and hanging on her every word.

She launched her work checking and adding to Davenport’s property information gathered by Susan M. Mays in the early 1990s. Following this, Westfield examined cemetery records, ship manifests, jail records, newspapers, personal correspondences, tax and land records, as she chased down information about Davenport’s chattel property – his enslaved workers. This work is remarkable and rare for a house museum. Important new themes will be incorporated into our story because of this research, including the interconnectedness and mobility of slave families between country and city and between squares and neighborhoods; use of chattel property as collateral in financial dealings of
the household; enslaved young people and children within the household; long term service (some domestics remained with Sarah Davenport for decades — Mary, Ann, Bella, Isaac and Jacob—while others were sold); enslaved workers’ spirituality and religious life (some enslaved workers lived for a time with the Salzburgers and Ned’s family has connections to Brampton Plantation where George Leile preached and baptized Andrew Bryan); freedom seeking, resistance, and family separation; and occupations within the household. This research provides new mysteries and questions which will be fodder for future research. We are grateful that Kelly’s work has pulled back the curtain on the lives of half the household giving us many new stories to tell and lives to explore.

Here is a smattering of new material to ponder.

- **Nancy** originated in Ebenezer and was sold five times before she was purchased by Davenport. Her original home in Savannah was with the Salzburgers, German-speaking Lutherans, in the rural area of Vernonburg/Whitebluff/Skidaway Island. Nancy could speak German. She ran away and through the runaway ad placed in the local newspaper, we know details about her physical appearance. She traveled to New York in 1816 and we don’t know what happened to her after that.

- **Bella** was from the Beaufort/Hilton Head Island area and was owned by a large plantation owning family, the Baldwins. Prior to her sale to Davenport, she spent her life in the area of the Lowcountry known for the cultivation of rice, indigo and cotton. She was sold to Davenport along with her four children. Her family remained intact for a number of years, but eventually her son Jack died or went to live elsewhere as did her daughter Polly. Bella and her twin sons Isaac and Jacob remained the property of Sarah Davenport for at least 31 years.

- **Mary, Ann and Deeping** were purchased by Isaiah Davenport and then sold to his mother-in-law, Susannah Clark. In the sales records, Mary is listed as being “yellow.” Because they were owned by Clark, they were not subject to the sale of Isaiah’s property in 1828. On Clark’s death Mary and her daughter Ann became the property of Sarah Davenport and remained with her until the 1860s. Either Mary or Ann or both had a number of children in the 1830s, 40s and 50s born into servitude and became Mrs. Davenport’s property. Mary and Ann were seamstresses. Ship manifests show that Mary made at least three trips to New York City during her life as Sarah Davenport’s servant.

- **Ned’s** family was owned by Jonathan Bryan of Brampton Plantation and was listed with Andrew Bryan, Savannah’s pioneering religious leader. Ned was a carpenter as was his father who was also named Ned.

- **Dave**, like Nancy, was a freedom seeker. He was once the property of Isaiah’s brother Samuel and was a wagoner. He, like Ned, was not repurchased following the sale of Isaiah Davenport’s property in 1828. At that time he was purchased by Aaron Champion and remained his property until 1856 when he died of “old age.” He is buried in Laurel Grove South.

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**REFINISHING THE STAIR HANDRAIL**

Take a look at the DH stair handrail in the hall the next time you are in the house. It was refinished during Annual Cleaning Week by Chuck Heydinger with Jane Crawford of Frank Furniture Studio. After five days of their labor, it looks beautiful. Heydinger and Crawford took off the top layer of residue, did a minimal amount of sanding and applied a layer of shellac. Prior to refinishing, DH maintenance committee members, David Bloomquist and Tom Hoffman, along with Heydinger, removed the pin at the newel post to see what was inside in order to address the looseness of the rail and posts. The pin and newel post hold the key to much of the stability of the stair railing and banisters. Inside the pin was a wooden washer that we guess Isaiah put in place. Heydinger tightened the central support spindle within the newel post and all appears to be as stable as ever.

We ask our docents to tell our visitors to treat the railing and stairs as our premier artifact, as well as access to the bedroom level.

Thank you to Ann Lytle who funded this important preservation work.

FYI – The railing is made of Honduran mahogany. One wonders how it was acquired for the home. One can imagine a shipment coming into the port and Isaiah choosing it for his home and showplace.

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Laurel Grove South Interment Report from January 1860 show Isaac’s death.
Cornelia’s Album Takes a Trip

Last summer DH volunteer archivist Sherry Cortes recommended that the Museum send “Cornelia’s album” to get evaluated for conservation. Similar to Sarah Davenport’s album on exhibit in the second floor hallway, Cornelia’s is a multipage memory book from 1839-40 filled with girlhood mementoes including leaves and flowers, locks of hair, examples of penmanship and poetry, sheet music, and calling cards from her time at Hartford Female Seminary in Connecticut. Although one of our most precious artifacts, it is filled with what a curator calls “inherent vice,” which is “a natural characteristic that causes some goods to be spoiled or become damaged” and has been a problem to care for. The binding is gone and many of the items encased are no longer held in places an slide to the center when the books is picked up.

In February, Frances Harrell, senior preservation specialist with the Northeast Document Conservation Center in Andover, MA came to the DH to pack the book for shipping. It arrived successfully at its destination. The evaluation will be free of charge but any solution to its conservation and preservation will incur a fee. So we wait and hope for solutions to preserve the album and maybe also methods to exhibit it on occasion. If we are satisfied with the work on Cornelia’s album, we will need to think about the same for Sarah’s!

Below is a transcribed treasure of a letter from Algebra class 1840 contained in Cornelia’s Album:

I Elisabeth Terry of Hartford, Conn. Do faithfully promise, that one of my daughters (should heaven kindly grant me any) shall be called Cornelia or Augusta Davenport, in honor of my dear friend & school mate C.A. Davenport of Savannah Georgia, & I hereunto do I annex my name and seal.

Algebra class 16th day of June 1840

L.L.S. Elizabeth Terry
In presence of Maria E. Collins
   Theodoria C. Eckley

And may she posses the inward and outward adornments of that conscientious conqueror. Completely complaisant Carefully compounded of courage conviviality, courtesy, comeliness. Not continually colloquial,concitied, comic, cold, close, complaining

Her complexion clear. Contour comparatively comognous. Conduct commendable constantly correct.

Recent Collections
News

Recently, Hugh Golson donated this 1965 booklet on Savannah’s squares, which once belonged to HSF founder Anna Hunter and was a gift to her from preservationist Stella Henderson.

Last spring The Decorative Arts Trust held its conference in Savannah. The results of the visit are reflected in its summer publication with the cover story being about wallpaper discoveries at the Major John Berrien House. The DH is mentioned in the story with photos of its Entrance Hall wallpaper “Berrien Ribbon Trellis.”
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These are donors who responded to the Friends of the Davenport House Annual Giving Campaign since which began in November 2017.

Thank you for your generosity to the Davenport House!

Those who have not yet donated, please let us hear from you!
The Best is Yet to Come! A Grand Celebration for the Davenport House!

The Davenport House put on a fundraiser at Brockington Hall on February 25. It was a grand success thanks to sponsors, patrons and all who attended. The DH volunteer committee did a terrific job and the Museum is much better for all!
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Junior Interpreters—Long Term Commitment to the DH

It's the time of year that the Davenport House thinks about all the good work performed by our high school age volunteers. Five Junior Interpreters, who have donated much service to the museum over their high school careers, will soon graduate. We are proud of them all!

**Name:** Caroline Jackson  
**Parents:** Tom Jackson and Linda Jackson  
**School:** Savannah Arts Academy

**What things have you been involved with here at the DH?** I have been a docent after I went through the JI program my sophomore year. I also participate as an actress reenacting life in the 1800s. I have been in the tea programs for 3 years, Yellow Fever one year, and lastly, Lafayette one year. I have also participated in the Holiday Sights Tours and the Tour of Homes.

**How Long?** In total, I have been at the Davenport House for 3 years.

**What can you say about your time at the DH and how it has prepared you?** Before I got involved with the Davenport House, I was not very comfortable speaking in front of a group. Working at the Davenport House has given me a lot of confidence and taught me how to communicate more effectively with people of all ages. I have also learned that I will not always know the answer to everything, and that’s okay. History has always been a favorite subject of mine, so working at the Davenport House has been the best possible high school job!

**Fondest Memory?** I once had the opportunity to put on a 19th century dress and play piano in the Drawing Room for a special dinner. Getting to play music in my favorite room of the house was such a memorable experience. In general, all of my experiences at the Davenport House have been filled with kindness and love. Each time I walk through the door, I'm greeted by smiling faces who are happy to see me.

**Future Plans?** I plan to attend Mercer University in the fall. I’m sad to leave Savannah, but extremely excited for what the future holds. I’m still a little unsure on what I want to study, but I’m interested in possibly doing something with education or working for a nonprofit. I know that my time at the Davenport House has taught me skills that will help me in whatever I do!

**Name:** Magee Roe  
**Parents:** Tyler Roe and April Guyton  
**School:** Savannah Christian Preparatory School

**What things have you been involved with here at the DH?** I am a docent and I participate in living history programs. My favorite program is Tea in the Garden. I am also a part of the Davenport Dancers and I enjoy performing at events. I enjoy helping out whenever I can.

**How long have you been at the DH?** I have been at the Davenport House for almost three years since I took the summer JI program in 2015.

**What can you say about your time at the DH and how it has prepared you?** I am so glad I took the JI program and started working at the Davenport House. After learning to give tours I have gained confidence in talking with people and to groups, when before I was very shy. My experience at the Davenport House has proven to me that even though I may be afraid to try new and different things, if I work hard I can succeed.

**Fondest Memory?** My fondest memories will be JI meetings with Ms. Jamie and dance practices. If it's making hardtack or learning safety procedures, I’ve always enjoyed attending meetings. I’ve learned so much and I appreciate everything Ms. Jamie has taught me. I’ll also always remember dance practice because I got to have fun learning dances as well as seeing and talking to my favorite people every week.

**Future Plans?** I am going to attend the University of Georgia. I am still trying to decide on my major.
Name: Anna Smith  
Parents: Nina Smith and Andy Smith  
School: Savannah Art's Academy  

What things have you been involved with here at the DH? I first got involved at the Davenport House in 2015 through the Junior Interpreters Program. I have since become a docent as well as a volunteer in special programs such as Yellow Fever, Lafayette, and the Holiday Evening Tours.

How long have you been at the DH?: I have volunteered and worked at the Davenport House for a little over two years now.

What can you say about your time at the DH and how it has prepared you? I've loved my time at the Davenport House because I've learned so much about Savannah that I previously knew nothing about, despite living here for almost ten years. Being in the JI program sophomore year gave me the opportunity to apply what I was learning about in AP United States History to a real-life example of how families lived in the 1800s and the events that were occurring around that time in history. But more than this, I've had the opportunity to meet and socialize with people around the world that I normally would not. Being a shy person, working and volunteering here has further pulled me out of my comfort zone through having the experience to interact with strangers and also perform and give tours for an audience. Overall, I can't imagine what these past few years might have been like without the Davenport House. I'm grateful to have met some of my closest friends here and to share my fondest memories with them.

Favorite Memory? While I can't pick just one memory, my favorite times have been sharing the experience, laughs, and the common love of the DH among my friends. This ranges from getting ready for events to a tradition of getting ice cream afterward, running from Ardsley Park to the DH and back, having a possible ghost cat encounter, going to History Camp, and so much more.

Future Plans? After graduating in May, I plan to attend University of Tennessee-Chattanooga or Manhattan College. I look forward to working at the Davenport House when I come home from college.

Name: Tyra Steele  
Parents: Tasha and Darrel Steele.  
School: Savannah Arts Academy, where I am currently a senior.

How long have you been at the DH? What can you say about your time at the DH and how it has prepared you? I became involved at the DH back in 2015, during my sophomore year of high school, as a Junior Interpreter. Since then, I've been a docent giving tours on the weekends. I've also participated in the annual Super Museum Sunday event. My time at the DH has been one of the best experiences I've ever had. I've met many people from different countries and backgrounds. It has been interesting learning about the history of other regions within the US from other visitors.

The DH has given me experiences talking to other people and got me out of my comfort zone, which is usually a hard thing for me. I've learned to just not be nervous when it comes to talking in front of people but to get over it, because in the end it'll all be worth it.

Fondest Memory: One of the things that I will remember about the DH is the many gatherings, such as the garden parties, tea parties, and even meetings. It's nice to see everyone together and just having a genuine connection with one another.

Future Plans? I plan to attend Georgia State University, in Atlanta, in the fall as a business major. My time at the DH has definitely prepared me for my major, as I feel more confident in communicating with others, which is needed within the business field.
Spring Programs at the DH

“EARLY BIRD’S PRESERVATION WALKING TOUR OF THE LANDMARK HISTORIC DISTRICT’S EAST SIDE
Saturdays in April 2017
TIME: 8 a.m.
PROGRAM LENGTH: 100 minutes.
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. Tours are led by the Davenport House Director who will introduce the personalities, structures and issues that have marked Savannah’s preservation movement. Coffee and treats in the Davenport House garden to follow.

TEA IN THE GARDEN AT THE DAVENPORT HOUSE
Thursdays and Fridays in May 2018
PROGRAM DATES AND TIMES: May 3, 4, 10, and 11 at 4:15 p.m. and on May 17, 18, 24, 25 and 31 at 5 p.m.
Reservations recommended. Limited attendance.
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.

EARLY BIRD’S WALKING TOUR: DISCOVERING 1820S SAVANNAH
Saturdays in May 2018
TIME: 8 a.m.
LENGTH OF PROGRAM: 120 minutes.
DISTANCE OF WALK: 2.5 miles.
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.

NEW ORLEANS STUDY TRIP: HSF Membership Coordinator Chassidy Mallory was one of seven DH community members to travel to New Orleans in January to see how sites in the port city interpret urban slavery. Insights the group gathered will be used in the Museum’s evolving interpretation. Mallory is pictured in a slave cabin at Oak Alley Plantation on the Mississippi River Road.

Local Middle School Students Get the Fever! - Yellow Fever Studies
In January the DH welcomed 200 middle school students from Chatham STEM Academy for a Yellow Fever program. These public school students received a half day experience including interpretation by living history interpreters and a special focus tour by docents. It was a rare and memorable time. Every student wrote a thank you note!
To:

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Remember the Davenport House Shop for spring gift giving!