Coming Soon! 2020 – A Building and A Birthday

During the holiday season, do you often look back on the last year and think “How did we make it through the year?” That’s what we do at the Davenport House (DH). We glance backwards before forging ahead. Along with excellent daily operations, 2019 saw discussion and planning for an exciting museum expansion. It is hard to present an interesting picture of the planning and show you how the good work is taking shape. The coming year will bring big things that will be “photo worthy” as a result of thoughtful planning. Firstly, it is the DH’s 200th birthday year, and we plan to make it memorable. Secondly, DH/Historic Savannah Foundation (HSF) will break ground on the long awaited expansion project.

If you follow this newsletter you know that at the end of last year we said “The DH is on the verge.” It still is. Building projects usually take longer than one would hope. One of our visitors’ most asked questions is, “How long did it take Isaiah to build the house [DH]?” For many years and for convenience sake, we said “five years,” but the timeframe is not what the research shows. Davenport purchased the property in November 1812 from Edward Stebbins and began paying “ground rent” (property taxes) in February 1813. In 1821 the property’s entry in the tax digest takes a big jump (to $5,000), leading us to believe that 1820 is the year the house was completed enough for the family to move in. We do not know how long it took him and his crew to construct the house nor when that work began. We do know it was completed or nearly completed in 1820. So, we have a 200th birthday to celebrate in 2020.

As in Isaiah Davenport’s day, there are variables to contend with in our expansion project, including the management of other projects, financing, workers, construction materials, etc. in bringing a project to fruition. We want to get the project right for our fine institution. Although we may be anxious, building a showplace should not be rushed. The project leaders want to share with you their enthusiasm.

During his twenty-eight-year-career, architect Brian Felder has built an impressive body of work which includes designing the Savannah Toyota 2015 Vision Upgrades, the Seacrest Partners Office Rehabilitation, and the Titlemax Headquarters. Founder of Felder Associates, he is the immediate past Chairman of the Board of HSF and the project architect for the DH/HSF expansion. Josh Brooks is the current Chairman of the Board of HSF and is the general contractor. His company, Brooks Construction Group, was chosen by a unanimous vote by the Board of HSF, based on the Request for Qualifications submitted.

Felder says of the Kennedy Pharmacy expansion, “It is fully designed by a committee and will include adding a

DH/HSF Planning Document for Museum Expansion
space onto the back of the building, converting the second floor apartment to office space and creating a functioning and delightful museum shop fronting on Broughton Street.” He adds, “It has been my job to listen and to synthesize the needs and special components of the building from stakeholders.”

While the Kennedy Pharmacy’s addition will be the most visible part of the project, both Felder and Brooks are intrigued by the potential for discovery in the Davenport House’s lower level, which will be converted into exhibit space. Felder knows the story of urban slavery will be an important draw for the Museum adding, “The story of urban slavery was not broached in my 1970s-80s public school education and for me every new discovery is an eye-opener.” Most of Brooks’s building and preservation work is concentrated in the Landmark District. He and/or members of his crew have worked on many high profile jobs including building the World War II Memorial on River Street, building the addition on the Juliette Gordon Low Birthplace (JGL) as well as work on the Pink House and the Andrew Low House. This fall he was part of the team working with noted preservation architect, Jobie Hill, at the JGL hoping to uncover evidence of slavery on the property.

For Brooks, the interesting part of our project will be the process of discovery and allowing the building to “speak for itself.” He says, “Discovery is different from the creative work of building and designing something new. Preservation work is uncovering layers of the past and allowing the building to reveal its story. There is no telling where that discovery will take us. It may cause us to rethink assumptions depending on what we find. I like being the conduit between the building and what it will be. In doing this, I have to be able to communicate what is being revealed and what it will mean for a project.”

Luckily for the Davenport House, a respected architectural conservator will work with Brooks and Felder on the DH project. In January George Fore will make one of several trips to the DH to conduct a historic architectural analysis on the ground floor, documenting the physical evidence and historic details and evaluating new findings to incorporate into the new interpretation. He will also conduct a historic analysis of the attic and do a historic finishes analysis of the ground floor and exterior of the DH. His work will guide the installation of exhibits, as well as shed light on the history of the structure.

All involved are humbled by the opportunity to work on the expansion. Brooks calls it “a lifetime project,” as endeavors of this sort only come around once in a lifetime. He adds that creating education spaces and preserving old places for great interpretation are “what makes Savannah a wonderful place to live.”

In the new year, we look forward to sharing the news of the expansion as well as wishing the old house Happy Birthday. Having you along for this grand ride is a thrill. Thank you for your support. If you have not made your contribution to the DH Annual Giving Appeal, please do so! We will put it to good work. Even with the expansion, we still have a Museum to run! JC
Most of you remember Sarah Davenport's memento book that was on display under a protective plastic box in the bedroom level hallway for years. It had remained open to one particular page that had hair samples from family members. After the success we had with the conservation of Cornelia's album by staff at the Northeast Document Conservation Center, we decided to have Sarah's book conserved as well. In March 2019, with funding provided by the Endowment Committee, we shipped the book to the NEDCC in Andover, MA. Their initial inspection showed the book to be in poor condition. “The front cover was detached and the spine was cracked in several places. The sewing was broken and the inner leaves of the first signature were detached. Locks of hair tied with ribbon were laced or stitched onto the pages. Brown manuscript ink notations identified each lock of hair. Many locks of hair had become detached from the page and many were missing. Of the 16 locks of hair found in the volume, 9 were detached.” They outlined the suggested steps to repairing and preserving as much of the book as possible and we advised them to proceed. In August, we received the finished product. The treatment report detailed what they had done. “The volume was collated and disbound retaining the original sewing. The head, tail, and pages were surface cleaned where possible. Tears were mended and folds guarded where necessary with Japanese kozo paper and wheat starch paste. Detached locks of hair were stabilized by loosely stitching them to nylon net with a very fine polyester thread. The locks were reattached to the support leaves using tabs of Japanese kozo paper and wheat starch paste. Fragile and broken silk ribbons were stabilized with a remoistenable silk crepe line textile support and Piextol B500 adhesive. The sewing was reinforced and the binding was repaired. Loose locks of hair that were not able to be reattached to the support leaves were placed in glassine envelopes and housed in pH neutral folders.”

They also created a museum quality box to house the album in and advised that the album only be displayed on special occasions. They photographed both the front and back covers and each page inside so we could display the contents however we wished. The detached locks of hair proved to be very important. During the conservation process, we were contacted by the Director of Book Conservation at the NEDCC. “We have begun conservation of the Sarah Davenport album and it is proving to be an incredibly interesting project. Assistant Conservator Mary French has developed a new technique to stabilize and reattach the locks of hair to the album. We have found very little published on the conservation of hair albums and Mary would like to present on her findings at an upcoming conference.” Of course we were delighted and gave them our wholehearted support. Mary submitted her abstract and last month we received this exciting news from her. “I wanted to let you know that my abstract on the conservation of the Sarah Davenport album was accepted at the American Institute for Conservation’s (AIC) annual conference, which will be happening in May 2020 in Salt Lake City, Utah. I am really looking forward to presenting, so thank you to you and your colleagues at the Davenport House Museum for giving me permission to talk about this incredible book from your collection!” We look forward to the national exposure that the Davenport House and Sarah will be receiving with this presentation and take pride in the fact that we have played a role in furthering historical document conservation techniques. JF
In early 2019, we were contacted by Ms. Beckett Olmstead of Atlanta who said she had a miniature portrait of Cornelia Davenport and wanted to know if we were interested in it. Of course, our answer was an emphatic yes! Her brother delivered the item to us this past April. The exciting part was that this particular miniature looked a lot like the portrait of Cornelia hanging in our basement hallway painted in 1957 and donated to the DH in 1958. Our collection records state our painting was based on a miniature of Cornelia owned by Mrs. Frank McIntyre, a descendant of Cornelia. There must have been more than one copy of that miniature as Mrs. Olmstead said of her miniature that “I believe the portrait of Cornelia came from General (Henry Rootes) Jackson to his daughter Cornelia, who married Middle Pope Barrow in Athens. Their daughter, Patience Crenshaw Barrow married Lionel Edward Drew in 1915. She inherited the portrait and left it to her son, Lionel Edward Drew, Jr., my adoptive father.” Interestingly, Patience Crenshaw Barrow is the person that donated Sarah’s memento book to the museum in 1963. The miniature came in a 20\textsuperscript{th} century oval frame that was damaged and had been repaired. We decided to see if we could mount it in a better frame and took it to Kendall Bowles of Bowles Fine Art here in Savannah. Kendall had done some work for us in the past. When she removed the picture from the frame, we discovered that the image itself was square and that the oval frame had been hiding some of the details. Kendall presented Gaye Kurmas and Jeff Freeman with some ideas about how to properly reframe the image and we decided on a black and gold wooden frame. Kendall placed the image behind museum quality glass to protect the surface from ultra violet light and then secured the picture in the frame with acid free paper to prevent chemicals leaching through and damaging the portrait. We now have several images of Cornelia in the museum. Hopefully one day we will be able to acquire other images of the Davenport children from descendants. There may even exist an image of Sarah as she lived well into the age of photography. Wouldn’t it be great if someone rummaging through their attic found a long forgotten and treasured relic from the past and decided to share it with us? JF

Cornelia’s Miniature Among Other Gifts

| Portrait: Cornelia Davenport Jackson |
| Artist: Kate Edwards                  |
| Date: 1957                           |
| Donor: Florence Jackson Bryan        |
| Museum Acquisition Date: 1962         |

The Sorel Girls: DH Junior Interpreters 2031!
Museum Interpretation

Know William Grimes: A Savannah Story

The Davenport House and its partners, Andrew Low House and Ships of the Sea Museum, brought genealogist and researcher Regina Mason to town in November to talk about her ancestor's life. William Grime’s connection to Savannah fit into the Davenport House’s plan to provide a lecture shedding light on the Museum’s interpretation. What the partners found were two interwoven stories—one of William Grimes and the other of Regina Mason, his great-great-great daughter, who is reclaiming the historical narrative of a forgotten man whose life and story are bound to the history of Savannah. Mason’s visit was a revelation. Here’s why:

Mason presented two programs; one—a lecture at Second African Baptist Church about her ancestor’s autobiography entitled, William Grimes: Savannah’s Literate Urban Slave and the other a Savannah film premiere of “Gina’s Journey: The Search for William Grimes” at Savannah State University. These programs made a persuasive case for Grimes’s story fitting alongside the most notable early 19th century Savannah events and people—Steamship Savannah, the architecture—William Jay, the fire of 1820, etc. William Grimes’ name and story should be known.

Born in 1784 (the same year as Isaiah Davenport) to a white Virginia planter father and an enslaved mother, Grimes had ten masters before stowing away on a steamboat carrying cotton out of the port of Savannah bound for New York. He spent his early years among the Virginia gentry whose circles included surnames like Fitzhugh, Washington, Lee and Jefferson. At ten years old, he was sold to Col. William Thornton of Montpelier in what was then Culpeper County, where he became the property of Col. Thornton’s sons who were his peers. As a young adult, he followed Philip Thornton to Richmond and became his coachman. For some unknown reason, a man only identified as Mr. A., the Jew from Savannah traveled to Richmond in search of a coachman. Mr. A was directed to Thornton and Grimes. After coaxing and promising to “give Grimes his time,” Grimes was sold to Mr. A and they headed to Savannah. Of his sojourn in Savannah, he wrote of unrelenting violence and brutality. Following his escape to the North, he was on the run from slave hunters for the rest of his life. He made his home in New Haven, CT, married and began a business. An associate of his Savannah owner saw him there, hounded him and threatened him with return to the South. Grimes sold his home in order to pay his master in Savannah for his freedom spending the remainder of his life in difficult financial straits or destitution. Hoping to recover from financial loss suffered by sacrificing his home to purchase freedom, he wrote his life story Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave in 1825, with a second edition issued in 1855. In the frontispiece he made sure everyone understood it was “written by himself” and no other (at a time when it was illegal to teach an enslaved person to read and write in most of the South).

Attendees at Mason’s lecture struggled to process just how pioneering and precedent-setting the Grimes narrative is. When compared to the autobiography of the famous Frederick Douglass, Mason explained that Douglass was only seven years old when the Grimes’s narrative appeared and that the slave narrative “standard” had yet to be developed. Some scholars say that William Grimes may have unwittingly paved the way for the American Slave Narrative. Grimes’s autobiography was published before William Lloyd Garrison’s The Liberator newspaper stoked the passions for abolition. Grimes’s story occurred before an organized “railroad” to freedom. As far as is known, Grimes’s book is the first runaway slave narrative to be published in American history, and it was written without the assistance of others—as mentioned above. Most runaway slave narratives were ghost written or written with the assis-
tance of an abolitionist wishing to promote the cause.

Early on in her research, Mason found a passage which read “William Grimes, a slave from Savannah, GA” verifying her ancestor’s enslavement in the port city. Mason said that Savannah shaped Grimes. He was a slave in the urban areas of both Richmond and Savannah. He had access to literacy as one of his owners was the editor of the **Columbia Museum**. [The editor’s widow, Mrs. Woolhopter, lived across the street from Sarah Davenport in 1828.] As an urban slave he could sense freedom and liberty more readily than a slave on a plantation. Mason says he was not suited to his condition. He wrote, “I could not be governed.” Yet for all of his restless agitation he continued to be owned and sold to the same Savannah elite*. Most, if not all, of his Savannah owners knew each other and must have known him. Mason wonders why. She speculates that his skill as a carriage driver and knowledge of equine management may have been one reason. Another may have been as a light-skinned black man, who could pass as a white person, and who spoke “the king’s English” as opposed to the Gullah patois of people living in the Low Country, he may have provided status to his owner.

Grimes spread the fault for the inequity of his American life around to the North, as well as the South. One is cautioned not to look away lest the price of freedom be misunderstood. Though he was given shelter in the North, it failed to protect him when he was considered property in the South. He calls out to America to live up to the ideals of the founders. His freedom meant everything to him and cost him everything. All he had left was his story. Georgia Southern University professor Jonathan Bryan, an authority on early 19th century Savannah history, said of Grimes’s story, “[It is the] most important narrative for Savannah history period! A Treasure!”

Mason admits that her ancestor’s narrative is difficult to get through. The brutality is hard to take and his bitterness is intense. But this very quality turns the idea of a contended slave on its ear. Her fifteen year search to uncover his story produced the authoritative annotated edition of **Life of William Grimes**, which was co-edited by UNC-Chapel Hills William Andrews, and was published by Oxford University Press in 2008. Even now she continues to document the narrative and to inspire audiences with her own story. On her visit to Savannah, she was thrilled to see that the Oliver Sturges House still stands on Reynolds Square as Sturges owned Grimes for a time.

As an average citizen, and not a scholar, she uncovered her ancestor's story through diligent research into genealogical records. Much of her work was conducted prior to computer access to repositories and the internet revolution. Her story so inspired film maker Sean Durant that he crowd sourced a funding initiative to make the documentary **Gina’s Journey**, which tells Mason’s personal story of discovery. Now a professionally produced film, Mason insisted that it be shown at Savannah’s HBCU – Savannah State University – as part of her visit. While Durant works to find wider distribution, the film is available on Amazon Prime.

A scholar in *Gina’s Journey* praised Mason’s work as going beyond mere research. In the truest sense it is the finest of American story telling. Mason says her “mission is to get people to tell their stories” using hers as an example of what can be done.

*“Some of Grimes’s Savannah owners:*
Mr. A., “the Jew”
Archibald S. Bulloch: Collector of Customs at Savannah
Benjamin Burroughs (1779-1837): Merchant, Investor in the Steamship Savannah
Lemuel Kollock (1766-1823): Physician, a founder of GA Medical Society
Oliver Sturges (1777-1824): Merchant, Steamship Savannah
Francis Harvey Welman (1780-1861): Merchant, Veteran War of 1812
Philip Woolhopter: Editor and Printer of the **Columbia Museum**

JC

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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.
Museum People

MAKING THE CREEPY MONTH FANTABULOUS: GHOST BROTHERS INVESTIGATE

Dalen Spratt, Marcus Harvey, and Juwan Mass are “the Ghost Brothers” on The Travel Channel’s show by the same name. Over the summer Juwan contacted the DH in hopes of using the Museum for a special “top fans” paranormal investigation. On a Friday evening in October, thirty-five fans had the rare opportunity to move throughout the house, under the watchful eyes of the staff, and with the guidance and coaching from the Ghost Brothers. Fans were ecstatic to be with their heroes experiencing late night frights at the DH.

IT TAKES TWO! COUPLES IN THE DH DOCENT CORPS

Currently there are forty-five trained adult tour guides on the DH roster. They come in all shapes and sizes, ages and back-grounds. All provide a vital service giving daily tours and working programs. A trend is emerging with our docent group – couples! Currently we have three married couples in our docent ranks. John Leonti and Gayle Mongrandi are DH veterans but Linda and Ed Flanagan and Dan and Carole Massey are new. All three couples are retired and give back to the community by volunteering at the Davenport House.

YOUTHFUL PRESENCE: 2019 SAVANNAH ARTS ACADEMY JUNIOR INTERPRETER PROGRAM

The Davenport House has had a partnership with Savannah Arts Academy (SAA) to provide students from American history classes for its Junior Interpreter Program since 2005. That means that over 200 stellar young people have learned to be tour guides at the DH. This year – remarkably – fifty students from Mr. Michael Johnson’s AP American History classes vied for fifteen places in the DH’s program. Through a lottery fifteen students were selected, and all fifteen completed the nine-week program. They gave tours on the weekend after Thanksgiving.

Participating in the program meets community service hours requirements at school. The Museum hopes SAA JIs will continue their relationship with the Museum by volunteering throughout the remainder of their high school careers and making the Museum their “geekish niche.”

GENEROUS COLLEAGUES AND DONORS: ARTIFACTS TO FILL THE DH’S URBAN KITCHEN

As part of the Museum’s expansion project, the DH plans to recreate the Davenport’s urban kitchen, ca. 1820. During much of 2019, Exhibit Committee members considered appropriate objects to convey the story of Bella and her family in the lower level of the house. The only thing that appears on Isaiah Davenport’s 1828 estate inventory is “kitchen
furniture $5” so what they will acquire needs to be period accurate as well as appropriate to the Davenport Household. As often happens with the DH, generous people and institutions came forward at just the right time as if by magic.

Last spring Claudette Engvall broke up housekeeping at The Landings and moved to Arizona. During her years in Savannah, she was a DH docent and served on the Davenport House Committee. She shared her expertise with the Collections’ sub-committee, as she once operated a reproduction furniture business in Massachusetts and has had a lifelong affinity for antiques. While planning her move, she called the DH and asked if we would like a number of her pieces for the planned kitchen exhibit. Among the items given is a dry sink!

Davenport House Committee member Katherine Keena, who is also on the Exhibits/Expansion Committee gave the DH a number of pieces, including a bucket she handmade while employed at Colonial Williamsburg in the 1980s. It was Katherine who suggested that the Museum contact fellow museums to see if they had objects that may be loaned to be used in the recreated kitchen. As a testament to the collegiate spirit of Savannah museums both the Juliette Gordon Low Birthplace and the Telfair Museum provided a list of objects for consideration. All items are duplicates or no longer fit with their sites’s interpretation. Selections were made and the institutions contacted. The JGL offered a number of iron cooking implements and the Telfair’s loan includes a Dutch oven, a pine table and two pine chairs.

With all the kindnesses there will be very few objects which the Museum will need to purchase for the new exhibit.

**HEADDRESS MAKES FOR THE BEST DRESSED**

When Mary Mistak, DH friend and seamstress, heard we were having a Dickensian holiday event she ran home and made three period appropriate hair ornaments for the performers.

**SAVANNAH MUSEUM MUSIC THROUGH THE AGES: SAVANNAH VOICE FESTIVAL/ DH PARTNERSHIP**

In September, Professor Christopher Hendricks from GSU-Armstrong introduced the new series with a discussion of music from the Davenports’ era (1800-1860). The lecture introduced a concert that was held in the DH Drawing Room.

In December, Robert Gibson of The Kessler Collection provided context in a lecture on the early jazz era (1900-1940) for a concert held in the Kennedy Pharmacy.

The next lecture and concert in the series is in February.
VALENTINE'S DAY WEDDINGS IN THE DAVENTPORT HOUSE GARDEN
Friday, February 14, 2020
TIMES: 10 minutes increments from 5 to 7 p.m.
DONATION: $100
Ceremonies will be offered every 10 minutes. $100 donation to the Museum.

TEA AT THE DAVENPORTS'
Wednesday and Thursdays in March 2020
PROGRAM DATES AND TIMES: March 4, 5, 11, 12, 18, 19, 20, 26 at 5 p.m.
Reservations recommended. Limited attendance.
LENGTH OF PROGRAM: 60 to 75 minutes.
Learn about tea traditions and experience an early 19th century tea in the historic atmosphere of the Davenport House Museum.

EARLY BIRD'S WALKING TOUR: DISCOVERING 1820s SAVANNAH—ARCHITECTURE OF THE NEW NATION
Saturday in April 2020
PROGRAM DATES: April 4, 11, 18, 25
TIME: 8 a.m.
LENGTH OF PROGRAM: 100 minutes.
DISTANCE OF WALK: 2.5 miles
See what survives of the 1820s Savannah that master builder Isaiah Davenport knew. Coffee and treats in the Davenport House garden will follow.

SAVANNAH VOICE FESTIVAL/DH PARTNERSHIP: SAVANNAH MUSIC THROUGH THE AGES
For tickets to the Vocal Performances with opera stars of the future, see https://savannahvoicefestival.org
TOPIC: 1950-1970, Broadway and the American Songbook
LECTURE: February 3, 2020 @ 6pm
SPEAKER: Justin Havard
CONCERTS: February 10, 2020 @ 6pm and 8pm at the Davenport House Museum

SPRINGTIME TEA AT THE DAVENPORTS'
Wednesday and Thursdays in May 2020
PROGRAM DATES: May 6, 7, 13, 14, 20, 21, 27, 28 at 5 p.m.
Reservations recommended. Limited attendance.
LENGTH OF PROGRAM: 60 to 75 minutes.
Learn about tea traditions and experience an early 19th century tea in the historic atmosphere of the Davenport House Museum and Garden.

EARLY BIRD'S PRESERVATION WALKING TOUR OF THE LANDMARK HISTORIC DISTRICT'S EAST SIDE
Saturday in May 2020
Program dates and times: May 2, 9, 16, 23, 30
Location/Begins: Davenport House Museum, 324 E. State Street, Savannah
INFORMATION/RESERVATIONS: 912-236-8097; info@davenporthousemuseum.org; Davenporthousemuseum.org
Take an early morning walk through one of the oldest and most varied neighborhoods to learn how historic preservation has revitalized downtown Savannah.
Friendsof theDavenport House: Annual Giving Response Info

☐ $1—49 – Brick Mason  ☐ $50—149 – Carpenter  ☐ $150—249 — Master Builder
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Send to: Davenport House Museum, 324 E. State Street, Savannah, GA 31401

Wishing you a bright and shiny New Year!

Remember the Davenport House Shop for holiday gifts.