



GREAT AMERICAN TREASURES

WOMEN PRESERVING HISTORY SINCE 1891

THE ARTIST BOOK FOUNDATION
North Adams, Massachusetts



Preface

Women Opening Doors to America's History

Katherine Taylor Cammack, National President (2020–2024); Honorary National President

Sally Connelly, National Historian

WOMEN HAVE ALWAYS BEEN MEMORY KEEPERS and, as such, have been the main force behind the historic preservation movement in America. This book celebrates and recognizes women's pivotal role in preserving and recording the United States' vast stories—past, present, and future. American women were integral in grassroots efforts to save buildings, document history, and create memorials. Among the women most involved in this movement are those who called themselves “Dames,” members of The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America (NSCDA) whose vision, dedication, and passion for historic preservation and education have spanned over 130 years.

In 2020, The NSCDA launched Great American Treasures (GAT), an effort to organize our individual historic sites into a nationwide affiliation to share our stewardship of distinguished buildings, landscapes, and collections. Great American Treasures' mission is grounded in preserving community-based memory from the east to the west coast, opening doors to history, and helping *all* people see themselves in America's ongoing history. We are committed to discovering and highlighting the stories of men and women—founders and everyday people, free

and enslaved—who helped to create and advance the foundation of our country.

During America's centennial celebration of 1876, a group of women in Philadelphia worked tirelessly to build and curate the “Women's Pavilion,” which highlighted the achievements of American women and featured lectures on some of the country's first teachers, who were known as “Dames.” Many of these same women started the NSCDA to preserve history, monuments, artifacts, and documents to share with the public. In 1896, their work in historic preservation began at Van Cortlandt House in the Bronx, New York, and as early as 1892 they were working with the Smithsonian Institution on exhibitions that helped to illustrate the history of America.

From the beginning of The NSCDA, these dedicated women gave public lectures, organized exhibitions, opened historic houses to the public, and helped welcome America's newest citizens. They built the Spanish-American Monument (1902) at Arlington National Cemetery and the canopy at Plymouth Rock (1921), and they restored the Church at Jamestown (1907). In more recent years, The NSCDA collaborated with the Smithsonian in 2021 for the first “Women in Preservation

Symposium” that highlighted the work of women in the field of preservation.

The impact of these women has extended far beyond architectural conservation. Their efforts not only continue to save buildings but also the stories that echo within them. Our diverse GAT sites reveal our country’s complex history that would be lost without preserving these houses and their furnishings, and historic monuments that commemorate landmark events. Today, modern “Dames” work hand-in-hand with communities to keep the doors of history open to all and to offer scholarships and educational opportunities to new generations.

As American historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich wrote, “Some history-making is intentional; much of it is accidental. People

make history when they scale a mountain, ignite a bomb, or refuse to move to the back of the bus. But they also make history by keeping diaries, writing letters, or embroidering initials on linen sheets. History is a conversation and sometimes a shouting match between present and past, though often the voices we most want to hear are barely audible. People make history by passing on gossip, saving old records, and by naming rivers, mountains, and children. Some people leave only their bones, though bones too make a history when someone notices.”¹

Through their tireless dedication to historic preservation, Dames are helping to keep history’s doors open.

NOTES

¹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History* (New York: Vintage-Random House, 2007).

Acknowledgments

THIS PUBLICATION REPRESENTS A TRUE COLLABORATION among the members and staff of The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America (NSCDA) and the Great American Treasures (GAT) sites around the country. Since its founding in 1891, The NSCDA has been dedicated to historic preservation; in fact, this organization has conserved more sites than any other preservation society. Our members are inspired by the belief that, while these historic houses belonged to people with socio-economic power, history belongs to everyone, and our GAT sites are dedicated to broadening the lens through which we view history. The NSCDA is actively working to discover stories of historically marginalized people who lived and labored at these homes so these sites may help tell more complete, complex, and therefore more inherently American stories. In recognition of the collaborative nature of this book, The NSCDA wishes to thank many different groups and individuals for their invaluable contributions and enthusiastic support of this project.

We are grateful to the two previous texts that focused on The NSCDA’s historic homes: Richard Pratt’s *Houses, History and People* (1965) and William Seale’s *Domestic Views* (1992). As Pratt noted in his foreword to *Houses, History and People*,

“History occasionally seems to come alive, in words written and spoken. But what makes it seem to come alive most vividly is when in certain houses and certain places we consider what certain men and women did and said in those houses and those places.”¹ We hope this publication will serve as a waypoint between these previous texts and those that our successors will someday write.

This publication is a result of a broad team of contributors, champions of the project, and financial supporters. In recognition and celebration of the transformational role women have played in preserving and interpreting American history, *Great American Treasures: Women Preserving History Since 1891* includes scholarly essays and narratives written and edited by an all-female collaboration of historians, curators, and preservationists. The NSCDA is grateful to The Artist Book Foundation (TABF), a nonprofit female-founded and owned publisher, for their enthusiasm in and support of a women-led effort by one of the nation’s oldest women’s organizations. Executive Director and TABF founder Leslie Pell van Breen guided the development of the manuscript from inception to final pages while offering perspective, encouragement, and wisdom gained from her decades of experience publishing artists’ monographs, cata-

logues raisonnés, and museum, exhibition, and collections catalogues, as well as collaborating with the arts and culture sector. The NSCDA was fortunate to have had Leslie as a publication partner and her talented team as collaborators in assembling, editing, and designing the pages.

The impetus to embark on a new survey of the sites and stories of The NSCDA's Great American Treasures (GAT) began with the South Carolina Society of The NSCDA. They established the vision for the work to not only share the ways in which The NSCDA's historic places provide a window into how America became America, but also to illuminate the role NSCDA women have had in preserving historic sites through early and extensive fundraising, public-private partnerships, and ongoing efforts to make museum houses a community resource. While he was executive director of *The Powder Magazine* in Charleston, Alan Stello began researching and assembling histories of the individual properties in the museum alliance. We are grateful for his early enthusiasm for and commitment to the project. South Carolina also contributed the initial funds for the publication through a matching grant from former South Carolina president and current national president, Mary Heyward Mundy. The South Carolina Society's early vision and investment as lead project sponsor enabled our contract with The Artist Book Foundation as well as additional financial support from various corporate societies and foundations. Former Museum Alliance chair and current honorary president, Katherine Taylor Cammack, pledged her support on behalf of her native North Carolina. Her longtime infectious enthusiasm for the GAT museum alliance coupled with her financial support have helped make this publication possible. Joining North and South Carolina in lead support, the Georgia Society of The NSCDA—led by former president, Lisa Lacy White, and current president, Lyn Brown Hunt—demonstrated their belief in this project through a donation from the bequest of Harry Hodgson McNeel and Patricia McCormick McNeel. This substantial gift

was matched by the Martin Family in honor of their mother, Julia Groves Martin, who served as both Georgia Society president and national president. Two generous foundations stepped forward to offer the financial means to see the publication through to completion. With gratitude for their faith in The NSCDA mission and support, we would like to acknowledge the Richard C. Von Hess Foundation, a longtime generous supporter of The NSCDA, and the Evelyn Y. Davis Foundation, made possible through longstanding assistance from the Bank of America.

For the instrumental vision, enthusiasm, and support for our historic properties, we are grateful for The NSCDA Museum Alliance Committee, chaired by Catherine Cooper. This committee of dedicated women continue to fuel The NSCDA's historic preservation mission and focus on the broad stories that can be uncovered and told through historic places and objects. Two early advocates for *Great American Treasures*, former National Historian Sally Connelly and Honorary National President Katherine Taylor Cammack, collaborated on the preface to this volume. Their historical perspective provides the necessary background for understanding the evolution of The Society and individual sites into a nationwide alliance. A range of talented female historians, preservationists, and museum professionals contributed to the perspectives presented in this work. Alison Bazylinski, Curator at the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum, provides a window into the federal government's expansion across the continent through her essay, "The Post Office, Community, and Western Expansion in Sheridan, Wyoming." Scholar Nicole Belolan offers insight into the experience of people with disabilities in early America in her essay, "America's Favorite Historian at Home: Living with Disability in Boston's Beacon Hill." Historian Amy Hudson Henderson's "Ivory Furniture Fit for a Queen in the Nation's Capital" is a fascinating unveiling of nation building and women's roles in the early republic. Alden O'Brien, DAR Museum Curator

of Costumes and Textiles, encourages readers to consider the meanings imbedded in preserved textiles in her contribution of "Textiles as Memory and Meaning." Anastacia Scott, Director of Community Partnerships & Special Projects at the Georgia Historical Society, illuminates the lives and contributions of enslaved Africans in Louisiana with her essay, "The Hermann-Grima House and the Creole Influence on New Orleans Cuisine." We are grateful to each of these women for lending their extensive knowledge and rich perspective. Our profound appreciation also goes to the nation's first woman to serve as Archivist of the United States, Colleen J. Shogan. In her introduction to this publication, "Celebrating America250: Our Shared Vision of Preservation and Appreciation," Dr. Shogan enables a better understanding of the many ways in which generations of women have contributed to American history and its preservation.

NSCDA historians, authors, and museum staff collaborated in building the narratives and site histories that provide the framework for this publication and offer context to the scholarly essays. Museum staff and volunteers at each of the properties in *Great American Treasures* contributed historical information and recent research. This book is a direct result of their expertise and generosity. At NSCDA headquarters, former Executive Director and NSCDA member Carol B. Cadou made the South Carolina Society's vision a reality. Her dedication to this publication, her deep knowledge of Colonial history and material culture, and her scholarship helped shape this project in profound ways.

She contributed critical sections of this publication, served as a co-author, and helped edit the content for accuracy and continuity. Maya Foo, former Curator, and Abby Schulte, former Archives & Collections Manager, led the effort to gather and assemble contributions, historical information, and images of all historic sites, and they both wrote significant sections of the critical first draft of this book. Former Director of Institutional Advancement Cecily T. Nisbet lent her expertise in Hawaiian history and culture by writing on The NSCDA's Historic Mission Houses in Honolulu. Writer and former NSCDA Vice President Ellen Boomer wrote narratives on westward expansion, lent her editing expertise to the entire manuscript, and managed the book project on behalf of The NSCDA. August Czeschin, *Great American Treasures* Coordinator, contributed by writing narratives on the Colonial Midwest and NSCDA memorials, offered invaluable suggestions based on his extensive historical knowledge, and ensured narrative continuity. Executive Assistant Giovanna Baina had the challenging task of assembling images from dozens of sources into the beautiful array included in these pages; she accomplished this task deftly and always with a smile. NSCDA staff members Emily Knapper, Makenna Graves, Edith Laurencin, Caroline Eisenhuth, and Isabella Kiedrowski contributed their time and expertise to support this publication. We all worked together to carry this project from its inception to its completion, reminding us that our most impactful work is collaborative.

NOTES

1. Richard Pratt. *Houses, History and People* (New York: M. Evans and Company, Inc., 1965). 5.



Introduction

Celebrating America250: Our Shared Vision of Preservation and Appreciation

AS THE ARCHIVIST OF THE UNITED STATES, I am honored to share a brief contribution to this noteworthy publication, *Great American Treasures: Women Preserving History Since 1891*. As the preface states, this book has been written in honor of our nation's semiquincentennial, America's 250th birthday.

Since 1891, The NSCDA has dedicated itself to “promoting our national heritage through historic preservation, patriotic service and educational projects” and “appreciation for the people, places and events that led to the formation and development of our country.” These are aspirations I wholeheartedly share. At the National Archives, our job is to protect, preserve, and share our nation's records with all Americans. The Archives takes its role in preservation seriously—without preserving our past, we cannot truly understand how our present came to be, nor can we provide access to history for future generations.

The National Archives holds the history of many noteworthy federal preservation initiatives; several led by prominent women. For example, our Presidential Libraries have the records documenting the work of Lou Hoover, Jacqueline Kennedy, and Pat Nixon, who were indispensable in restoring the White House and making its grounds more accessible to all Americans. It was another First Lady who had perhaps the biggest influ-

ence on federal historic preservation policy. Lady Bird Johnson supported the most important piece of legislation related to historic preservation in American history—the landmark National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. This legislation created a comprehensive and holistic framework for historic preservation. When President Johnson sent the legislation to Congress, he attached a handwritten note that read: “Lady Bird wants it.” The act formalized the federal government's role protecting our nation's heritage sites and elevated the field of historic preservation. It created the National Register of Historic Places, the list of National Historic Landmarks, and State Historic Preservation Offices. These programs facilitate public and private collaborative efforts to protect, preserve, and tell the story of America's historic treasures.

As the 11th Archivist, and first woman to lead this institution, I'm proud to stand in this tradition. Records related to the National Historic Landmarks and the National Register of Historic Places are among the billions of records in the National Archives collection that document our nation's history from its founding until today. These records are a rich resource for those researching our nation's history and cultural heritage. I'm also proud to mention that in 2023 the National Archives Building

in Washington, DC, became a National Historic Landmark. Our nomination recognized not only the building as an architectural and artistic phenomenon, but also acknowledged our role in fostering an informed and learned populace by facilitating access to historical knowledge through federal documentation.

The preservation and protection of federal records ensures that women are recognized in the larger American story. For instance, in my beloved hometown of Pittsburgh sits Allegheny Commons, the oldest park in the city. In its recent addition to the National Register of Historic Places, its nomination mentions one of the few monuments in the city commemorating a woman, Annie Hartzell. During her lifetime, Hartzell was involved in a number of charities and societies, including the Western Pennsylvania Humane Society, now known as Humane Animal Rescue of Pittsburgh. She loved animals so much that

when she passed away in 1907, she left funds for a fountain designed to provide drinking water for, “Man, Beast & Bird.” Her husband, James, honored her wish, and the Hartzell Memorial Fountain was formally dedicated in 1910. It still serves as an important local and communal landmark. This is just one example of how historic preservation efforts and their records can connect us with the past and shed light on women’s contributions to American history. This beautiful compilation, written exclusively by women, illuminates vital and important people and places in the collective journey of our American life.

As we celebrate such a remarkable birthday as a nation, let us continue to draw wisdom and insight from our past by examining that past in meaningful and thoughtful ways. *Great American Treasures* helps us do that.

—Dr. Colleen J. Shogan
Archivist of the United States





the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In this private–public partnership, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) took ownership of the property and responsibility for maintaining the exterior of the house and its grounds. The NSCDA-MA members agreed to furnish and maintain the interior of the house and to interpret its important history for visitors. The relationship, which continues today, mirrors those at NSCDA properties across the country where women stepped up to preserve a historic place, ensure its long-term financial sustainability, and maintain its public access. The Dorothy Quincy Homestead is one of The NSCDA's Great American Treasures listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



*Fig. XXX.
The dining chamber of the Quincy Homestead with a portrait of Edmund Quincy III after John Smibert.
Photograph courtesy of Allyson Lee.*

*Fig. XXX.
Pastel portrait of Dorothy Quincy Hancock by William M.S. Doyle in the music room with Spinet, ca. 1750, by William Pether of London.
Photograph courtesy of Allyson Lee.*

out of Newburyport, Massachusetts. In 1778, the patriot-leaning New Jersey Gazette reported that the owners of the Civil Usage presented “an elegant coach which was lately taken in one of their prizes, as a token of their respect for that gentleman [John Hancock], who has so nobly distinguished himself in the present contest with Great Britain, as the friend of his country.”¹⁵ Dorothy and John presumably used the chariot while in Philadelphia. Two months later, the Tory-leaning Pennsylvania Gazette reported that “John Hancock of Boston appears in public with all the pageantry and state of an Oriental prince. He rides in an elegant chariot [fig. XXX], which was taken in a prize to the ‘Civil Usage,’ a pirate vessel, and by the owners presented to him. He is attended by four servants, dressed in superb livery, mounted on fine horses richly caparisoned.”¹⁶ The two accounts of the Hancock chariot are a reminder of the opposing views held during the Revolution by the Americans who supported independence and the Tory American colonists who favored the Crown.¹⁷



*Fig. XXX.
John Hancock's horse-drawn chariot, manufactured in England ca. 1777.
Photograph courtesy of NSCDA-MA.*



*Fig. XXX.
Ramsey House dining room.
Photograph courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

grandfather's life and career. They made critical decisions to ensure the house could one day be preserved as a museum, such as saving original fixtures when they made technological updates. Anita and Laura also produced detailed accounts of the house furnishings as remembered from their childhood in the late nineteenth century (figs. XXX–XXX). The sisters never married and lived in the Ramsey House until Laura's death in 1959 and Anita's in 1964. They gave the Ramsey House and its collections to the Minnesota Historical Society and established the museum's Board of Governors to include the President of The NSCDA-MN, two additional NSCDA appointees, and two representatives of the Minnesota Historical Society. Today, the collection of the Alexander Ramsey House includes more than 14,000 original furnishings donated by the sisters and is one of the most intact Victorian historic houses in world.



*Fig. XXX.
Box made of timbers from the USS Constitution, given to Alexander Ramsey in 1879 upon his appointment to Secretary of War by President Rutherford B. Hayes and used by Anna Ramsey to store her sewing supplies.
Photograph courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society."*



*Fig. XXX.
Ramsey House library.
Photograph courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*



Spring Street Historical Museum (1865)

Shreveport, Louisiana

ONCE OCCUPIED BY TALLY'S BANK IN 1866, the Spring Street Museum (fig. XXX) is one of the oldest buildings in Shreveport. The exterior features one of northwest Louisiana's few remaining examples of New Orleans-style cast-iron grillwork. Owned by the Shreveport Committee of The NSCDA's Louisiana Society since 1976, the building was carefully restored and currently operates under the secretary of state's Museum Program, although the Dames own the collection. The Shreveport Committee oversaw the building's restoration and placement on the National Register of Historic Places and continues to assist in its daily operations.

*Fig. XXX.
Spring Street Historical Museum.
Photograph courtesy of Carol M. Highsmith Archive,
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.*