A Message from our Leadership

Stone axes set an inspired example of adaptation

I am often astounded by the capacity people have for forgetting. We tend to think the problems we face are unique to us, across all human history. It’s rarely true. We can almost always look to the past for lessons. But how can we apply this approach to an existential threat like climate change? Years back, at a talk by paleoanthropologist Rick Potts, I learned how.

Potts spoke about a collection of stone axes he had found near an 800,000-year-old meteor impact site in modern day China. These axes are some of the world’s oldest known tools, and they only exist because of that meteor. For the ancient people living at that site, the meteor destroyed everything they knew. Fires raged for miles around the crater. You’d suppose they would die or drift away from the area, but that’s not what happened.

The people remained, banded together, and survived. They adapted. The fires uncovered stone previously unavailable to them. The axes Potts found were made from that stone, just decades after the impact. Within the space of a single lifetime, a nomadic society became a tool-building one. The community endured. Potts said when he worried about climate change, this story gave him hope.

As a seaside community, Salem must be a driver in making the necessary changes that will shield our history, our properties, and our people from the worst effects of what’s to come. The House of the Seven Gables will be at the front of that effort regionally, thanks in part to a $509,919 Coastal Resilience Grant from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

You can read more about this grant in this December newsletter, but I am most excited about its potential to engage others. Throughout 2023 we will be holding programs, dialogues, and events to discuss what the future holds for the North Shore, and how we can be ready to meet it. I hope that you will continue to be part of our enduring community.

With appreciation,

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The House of the Seven Gables Settlement Association is extremely pleased to announce the award of a $509,919 grant from the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM). These funds from the state’s Coastal Resilience Grant Program will be used to address the impact of climate change on this 354-year-old historic property now and into the future. The grant, to be jointly administered by The Gables and its project partner, Salem Sound Coastwatch, is the first in the state to go to a nonprofit museum like The Gables. The two-year project will result in an adaptation plan that lays out short-term site improvements, as well as a series of longer-term actions and decision points. Of significance is the fact that this process will result in a procedural model for other similar institutions in the region.

“We are thrilled to have the support of the state, the city of Salem, and so many other partners on this project,” says Gables’ Executive Director Dakota Russell. “This level of cooperation speaks to the urgency and importance of addressing climate change and sea level rise in our community.” The project team will be led by The Gable’s new Director of Preservation and Maintenance, Paul Wright, who will bring his background and experience in sustainable design to the table. Also project managing with The Gables will be Barbara Warren, Executive Director of Salem Sound Coastwatch, a 30-plus-year-old nonprofit dedicated to water quality in Salem Sound.

Since 1880 alone, the sea level has risen more than 13 inches, says Warren. But rising sea levels are only one part of a much larger set of urgent problems that The Gables and other historic properties in Salem are now confronting.

Gables’ Collections Manager Susan Baker led The Gables’ efforts to get involved in climate change actions. “We’re not just concerned with coastal surges and rising sea levels,” she says. “It’s also increased rain; the heat and humidity that lead to rot; mold; and pests that affect the historic structural elements of the buildings as well as the collections and archives housed within them.”

These are complex problems, she says. “They drive the future of the site, and we all recognize that now. We cannot be totally reactive.”

Baker joined Preservation Partners in Salem, a city-led forum for historic preservation groups to meet and share news and concerns. The issue of climate change and what to do about it was a frequent topic. Evidence of damages to structures in the city due to climate change had become undeniable. The question was: How to adapt to the challenge the city faces?

“Those of us who were particularly concerned formed a sub-group,” says Baker. “Led by the city’s preservation planner, it included Salem Sound Coastwatch, Historic New England, the Peabody Essex Museum, Essex National Heritage Area, Destination Salem, Historic Salem, and the National Park Service.” The group has organized two conferences devoted to the topic of climate adaptations, and is beginning to plan for the third to be held in September 2023. Over the course of the sub-group’s work, Baker and Warren began to discuss the possibility of creating an adaptation plan for The Gables that could reach beyond the Derby Street Historic District. “We thought, how great it would be if The Gables could tackle a big project as a model for other similar institutions in the region,” says Baker.

“So, Barbara Warren and I collaborated to develop a Coastal Zone Management grant request,” she says. The urgency was already at hand. “At The Gables, our seawall is under greater stress than ever and is now over-washed and undermined with sinkholes forming behind the seawall, and we’re struggling to...continued on page 10
Our Secret Staircase

By David Moffat, Visitor Services Specialist

They opened at the top to a small room in the attic, christened Clifford’s chamber after a character in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s 1851 novel, *The House of the Seven Gables*, which drew inspiration from the house.

As restoration was still ongoing, an article in *The Boston Globe* stated “The great chimney of olden times, with a secret staircase leading to one of the chambers...has been reconstructed on its original lines.” The source for this work was given as the chimney’s base in the cellar and a man in the neighborhood “who had pulled down the old chimney and recalled that there had been a secret staircase, which he described.”

That man was Henry Upton who lived in The House of the Seven Gables with his family for 25 years from 1883 until selling it to Caroline Emmerton in 1908. Much of the original chimney of 1668 had survived two centuries into the house’s history with some alterations along the way. However, by the 1880s, it was seen as out of date and the Uptons needed only a small chimney for their coal stove. The old chimney was proving dangerous as it occasionally dropped large bits of masonry and the drafts were so great they blew the fire back out onto the kitchen floor. Thus in 1888 Upton set about removing it, and in the process he alleged to uncover a secret staircase.

He proceeded to climb it and discovered two historical artifacts, a pine tree sixpence (a coin used in colonial Massachusetts) and a “very ancient” religious book marked “Cuffy his book” (suggesting it belonged to an enslaved man). Cuffy’s book long ago disappeared, if it ever existed, but the sixpence is still part of The Gables’ collection today. Upton completed the demolition, including the staircase he uncovered, but when Emmerton bought the home 20 years later, the romance of this secret space was irresistible.

Within the great brick heart of The Turner-Ingersoll Mansion, there abides a mystery. An obscure past lurks behind the secret staircase, a winding staircase of 20 wooden steps wedged inside the central chimney of the home since 1910.

In that year the museum’s founder, Caroline Emmerton, completed a comprehensive renovation of the seventeenth-century house with architect Joseph Chandler and thereafter opened it to the public with guided tours intended to provide revenue for a settlement house with classes and services for immigrant families. Visitors were led through six furnished rooms, and allowed to climb the secret staircase, the door of which the tour guide instructed visitors to find, hidden within a false wall at the rear of a closet in the dining room.
Emmerton was transparent that her staircase was a recreation, but speculated over many possible reasons the original was built. She concluded that “the most probable” was “a means of escape in witchcraft times,” and that John Turner II constructed the staircase to protect his sisters Elizabeth and Eunice from future witchcraft delusions in the aftermath of the trials of 1692. Legends of a similar secret staircase and hiding place constructed in the mansion of the Turners’ neighbor Philip English after his wife was persecuted for witchcraft contributed to this theory.

In 1914, Salem antiquarian Mary Harrod Northend wrote about a visit to the house in *Historic Homes of New England*, saying that when asked the staircase’s purpose, the guide confessed “no one knows,” but that “there have been many surmises,” including hiding from Native American attacks and smuggling.

Parallels to the book were tempting as well, though Emmerton noted that there is no secret staircase mentioned in the novel, Chapter XVI focuses on the disappearance of the character Clifford from his room in the attic during a tense confrontation between his sister Hepzibah and their cousin Jaffrey. Perhaps Hawthorne had knowledge of the secret staircase which inspired that part of the book. However when

his son, Julian Hawthorne, visited the home in 1926, he sarcastically dismissed the idea and called the staircase “otherwise uncalled-for.”

Caroline Emmerton died in 1942, and by the 1950s, the theories remained but staff and visitors alike believed the existing staircase to be the original. Bryant F. Tolles’ 1983 *Architecture in Salem: An Illustrated Guide*, stated that the secret staircase was built by John Turner II around 1692.

In the late 1980s, a new theory emerged that the staircase had been a refuge for enslaved people escaping on the Underground Railroad to Canada with the aid of Susanna Ingersoll, though little evidence of this exists. In 2004, it was rediscovered that the current staircase was not original due to the discovery of Chandler’s blueprints for the restoration. The interpretation shifted to the staircase’s similarity to Hawthorne’s novel and Emmerton’s desire to attract tourists to the home.

In 2008, Bill Finch and Anne Grady prepared a historic structure report of the mansion, examining its architectural features and assigning them dates where possible. Their conclusion was that the staircase uncovered by Upton was likely an old staircase, not within the chimney (as this was impossible) but beside it to the south. Its entrances were later covered over by closets as the house changed to suit the needs of new generations. The staircase was never intentionally secret, but merely made secret by the passage of time and memory.

Whatever the origins of the lost staircase uncovered by Henry Upton, visitors today can still climb Caroline Emmerton’s version just as they did in 1910, and wonder about the further mysteries it conceals.
Your membership supports our efforts to preserve our historic campus and to provide educational opportunities to newly arrived immigrants.

This Year in Development

Sips by the Sea a great success

The Gables’ annual fundraiser held this year on September 10 — Sips by the Sea — was a tremendous success. After a two-year hiatus, we were thrilled to welcome over 160 guests back to The House of the Seven Gables to enjoy a beautiful evening together and reflect on the importance of our organization’s mission. With your help, we were able to raise over $50,000 to support our programs, the preservation of our historic site campus, and our work with immigrant communities on the North Shore. This year, we placed a special emphasis on responding and adapting to climate change and sea level rise.

We say a heartfelt thank you to our sponsors, donors, and all those who attended.

An exciting year ahead for Gables' members

As we wrap up the year, The Gables extends a thank you to all our members. We have reached another milestone for our membership program. This fall, we officially surpassed 600 members — the most we’ve ever had. We look forward to 2023 when we continue to provide our members with the best benefits, events, and customer service.

Sneak peak for 2023 member events!

Gables’ Movie Night; Visit to the Jeremiah Lee Mansion; Literary and Art Nahant Walking Tour with Board President Ken Turino; Celebrate the Fourth; Settlement House Lecture with Executive Director Dakota Russell; Making Merry with The Gables; and a collaboration with the Hammond Castle Museum.
In collaboration with Dobro New England, The House of the Seven Gables Settlement Association has developed a series of programs to support Ukrainians on the North Shore and in Ukraine. Dobro New England is a women-led organization that provides humanitarian assistance to Ukrainians as it raises awareness. “Dobro” means “kindness” in Ukrainian.

A winter clothing and supplies drive started in October at The Gables. Those who wish to drop off new or gently used hand and foot warmers, socks, gloves, thermals, boots, blankets, and sleeping bags may do so at The Gables’ admission desk. Financial and Amazon wish list contributions can also be made to Dobro New England at www.dobroinc.org.

Events to expand awareness of Ukrainians’ plight abroad and to explore the deep cultural bonds connecting those here with their homeland were scheduled through the fall and winter at The Gables. In November we hosted a Petrykivka Paint and Sip fundraising workshop. Participants enjoyed wine and pastries while learning the Ukrainian folk art of Petrykivka painting and shopping for holiday gifts presented by several local Ukrainian artisans.

The Petrykivka folk art style, which originated in the 1700s, has become symbolic of Ukrainian culture. Works often feature fantastic flowers and other natural elements, based on careful observation of the local flora and fauna. During this workshop, participants created their own holiday ornaments, with instruction by artist Svitlana Rozghon.

Also in November, we hosted Oleksandra Kovalchuk, Acting Director of the Odesa Fine Arts Museum in Ukraine. Kovalchuk discussed 10 exceptional works of Ukrainian art and culture from Byzantine mosaics to contemporary works.

Still to come, on December 4 at 2 p.m., Emily Channell-Justice, Director of the Temerty Contemporary Ukraine Program at the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard, will review highlights of Ukraine’s history, provide background on the ongoing Russian invasion, and explore potential future outcomes for Ukraine and the world.

The Gables’ Executive Director Dakota Russell says this partnership with Dobro continues the mission envisioned by the organization’s founder, activist Caroline Emmerton. “For more than 100 years, The House of the Seven Gables has worked to give immigrants and refugees a place to tell their stories,” he says. “We are honored to partner with the resettled Ukrainian community on the North Shore to raise awareness about the ongoing attacks against their home country.”
This Year in Programming

By Zoë Quinn, Director of Visitor Services and Public Programs

2022 programming paid tribute to building community over time

2022 saw the return of in-person programming at The Gables, and we were so happy to see you all again! Our annual lecture series based on the year’s theme of building communities called to mind some of the region’s interesting and often forgotten histories. We began the year virtually with “Taverns, Gardens and Parties: A Journey Through Essex County’s Black History,” with Dr. Kabria Baumgartener. We also proudly welcomed a virtual presentation by Gables’ Board Member Robin Woodman titled “Women of the Seven Gables and Their Community.” Her extensive research on the women who lived and worked at the mansion resulted in a fascinating evening.

For our first in-person event we hosted Professor Carl Carlsen from North Shore Community College. He related stories from his book, “Brickyard Stories 2.0: A Lynn, MA Neighborhood Before and After Urban Renewal.” Dan Eshet and Regina Kazyulina of Salem State University’s Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies delivered an engrossing presentation — “The Struggle for Soviet Jewry and the Making of a Local Émigré Community.” The last of the themed presentations felt especially close to home. Salem-born Richard Tobin shared many of his favorite memories of growing up on Derby Street and attending Settlement dances and other activities, detailed in his book “Miss Zib.”

We were thrilled to participate in several of Salem’s annual festivals including Salem So Sweet, Salem Arts Fest, Salem Ancestry Days, and Trails and Sails. For each of these events we offered special activities for families, welcomed the public to explore and artistically engage with our site, and took the public on specialty tours of the Turner-Ingersoll Mansion.

For the first time, The Gables partnered with local performance company History Alive, Inc., to stage a run of performances of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “The Scarlet Letter.” In this immersive experience, the audience moved through The Gables’ campus with the characters of Pearl, Hester, and Dimmesdale — as if in the book’s Boston setting. It was a unique experience and a new way to explore The Gables’ campus!

Community Conversations also came back in person this year and featured a four-part series on racism with Shawn Newton of the Salem Race Equity Task Force, later followed by a community discussion of what civic engagement means led Cynthia Lynch of Salem State University’s Center for Civic Engagement. Community Conversations 2022 concluded with an evening of immigrant-directed film screenings and discussions led by New Immigrant and Refugee Visions.

We revised our education programming this year and launched updated versions of our field trip programs and drop-in “Hands on History” activities (formerly known as “Living History Labs”). As such, we were able to engage our younger visitors, welcome back school groups in capacities beyond the regular tours, and refresh our partnerships with Salem Schools.

We look forward to even more in 2023, so stay tuned!
Moisture in attics is a common concern for historic property owners. The interplay of warm interior air rising to meet cold attic framing can create all kinds of headaches, from mold growth to severe wood rot. During a spring inspection of the Phippen House attic, powdery dry rot was observed on framing in several areas. Initial assumptions were that the rot was caused by condensation in the attic that had long since dried. This rot looked to be old and inactive. Moisture meter readings showed the wood to be well below moisture tolerances. But the question remained, what was the source of the moisture that caused the rot in the first place?

Thanks to the help of one of our advisory council members, John Watne of Structures North, a simple...
$509,919 coastal resilience grant awarded to The Gables

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maintain it. It’s getting beaten up.” Work on the two-year project began in mid-October after all the contracts with consultants and engineers were signed. Year-one work includes site data gathering, building and site analysis, adaptation planning, short-term maintenance planning, and both peer-to-peer and public outreach.

In the second year, there will be continued reporting on site analysis, detailed planning for permitting, construction-ready planning, drawings and documentation for near-term modifications and longer-term adaptation recommendations. There will be continued peer-to-peer and public outreach and, also, delivery of the final adaptation plan report. Total project cost is $604,242, with $94,323 contributed by The Gables.

“Salem is unique in its number of historic buildings. Not all are at risk, but the city does have at-risk areas and the sooner that everyone comes together, the better,” says Warren. “Because of the work this grant enables, we will have a better understanding of how, together, the city can become more resilient as climate change intensifies.”

Russell says he looks forward to the work ahead. “Climate change poses a threat to nearly every aspect of our lives, including the preservation of our cultural sites and resources. The House of the Seven Gables is literally on the front lines of this fight, and I’m proud that we are taking proactive steps to plan and adapt for the future. I hope our work can be a model for other sites in New England and across the nation.”

Solving the Dry Rot Mystery

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answer was found. Sapwood, the soft, outer layer of wood of a living tree, tends to be more moisture laden than the tree’s inner structural heartwood. This outer layer also lacks the cellular density to prevent water absorption and fungal infections. Sometimes a fungal infection in the sapwood can occur before the tree is even cut down. Once the sapwood has softened from a fungal infection, there is little to do to stop the rot and attack by pests like powder post beetles. But the heartwood remains structurally safe if the initial source of moisture is removed.

This effect was confirmed during a follow-up site inspection by our preservation director and Structures North in the fall. With lumber moisture readings well below the 20 percent threshold, a sound heartwood structure, and no new signs of rot developing, the Phippen House roof is safe. In the meantime, we continue to inspect our historic properties for moisture issues that may affect their structures. To prevent moisture damage developing through means other than sapwood rot, roofs should be inspected for possible leaks and properly ventilated, interior humidity should be controlled, and warm interior air should be prevented from meeting cold attic surfaces.
Looking Ahead to 2023

Dear Friends,

I am now wrapping up my first six months as Executive Director of The House of the Seven Gables. Every day, I continue to be impressed by how much this community loves and supports the multi-faceted mission of The Gables. It is a pleasure to come to work with the knowledge that so many people believe in what we do.

In that spirit, I would like to take a moment to reflect on what we have accomplished this year at The House of the Seven Gables, and to provide a preview of what’s coming in 2023:

- We continued to serve Salem by providing free English as a Second Language and Citizenship classes. Demand for these classes is higher than ever. We are grateful to our partner, the Peabody Essex Museum, for providing classroom space and staff support. In 2023, we will also be partnering with the North Shore Community Development Coalition to offer additional classes in their new Espacio Community Space.

- Thanks to a generous grant from the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism this year, we premiered a refreshed website that is more dynamic, modern, and user-friendly. In the new year, our communications will be getting a refresh as well. We will be expanding each issue of our newsletter to showcase more stories from our past and news about our work today.

- This summer, we began to focus on beautifying the perimeter of our historic campus. We removed several invasive and dying trees and replaced them with shade trees that will benefit The Gables and the surrounding neighborhood for years to come. Next year, we plan to improve the parking lot by installing new Derby Street signage and reimagining our pedestrian entrance and pathway.

- The Kids’ Cove at The Gables’ Counting House received an exciting makeover this fall. Our young visitors are now welcomed with stories of Salem’s seafaring history, interpretive activities, and interesting places to play—including the newly christened ship, the Sukey & Betsey. Keep an eye out for more innovative ways we will be engaging visitors at the site in the new year.

- You may have noticed some recent changes to the interiors of the Turner-Ingersoll Mansion. We have been adjusting our furnishings and decorations in certain rooms to make them more historically accurate. These rooms will truly come to life in 2023, with new wallpaper, floor coverings, and textiles. We are also developing a new vision for the Dining Room Chamber, which will be transformed into a settlement workers’ bedroom from the early 1900s. This will give interpreters a greater opportunity to teach visitors about our history as a settlement house.

As you can see, we have big plans and a busy year ahead. None of this would be possible, however, without the support provided by members and donors like you. If any of these projects speaks to you, please consider making an end-of-year donation to The House of the Seven Gables. Join us in our commitment to preserve history and to build a stronger community for the future.

Thank you,

[Signature]
HOLIDAY MEMBER SHOPPING EVENT
DECEMBER 9, 5:30 – 7:30PM

Join us for our annual holiday shopping event. Members will receive 25% off all purchases at the museum store.

Free for all members.

GIVE THE GIFT OF THE GABLES THIS HOLIDAY!
The House of the Seven Gables is delighted to offer gift memberships during the approaching holiday season.

INCLUDED WITH YOUR GIFT MEMBERSHIP:
• Recipient’s Membership Cards
• 2023 Member Events Bookmark
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PURCHASE THE PERFECT GIFT TODAY!

*To ensure that the membership package is shipped before the holidays, please make your purchase no later than December 17.