

The Cupola House

Spring Newsletter 2022



A Note from the President – Preservation is a Privilege

Vanna O' Neill

2022 marks the 104th year the 1758 Cupola House Association has been in existence. All these years we've continued to do our best to protect and preserve the Cupola House and gardens. Challenges always surface when taking on such high and lofty goals while trying to find new ways to keep people interested in our history. During the 2021 Candlelight Tour, the Cupola House Association persevered under the leadership of Membership Chairperson, Sue Willhauck, and once again opened the doors to serve our famous Wassail and homemade cookies while showcasing the beautiful decorations by the Garden of Eden Club. We had so many visitors from near and far who exclaimed how much they loved the stories and the ambience at the Cupola House. We were thanked many times for opening and trying to maintain a semblance of normalcy during new challenges. The Renaissance Consort provided beautiful music both days to the complete delight of everyone. The 1758 Cupola House seemed to be the center of hospitality with the Wassail, cookies, music and 21 decorated Christmas trees in the front gardens. Your continued support and membership in such a vibrant organization makes all this possible. Thank you!

Last year, funds were raised during the Garden Ball to fix the fence. With the challenges of trying to obtain appropriate materials and expertise, that project has been delayed. The back door of the Cupola House also needs repair, and we need to paint this year. There is always something demanding attention when you want to maintain and preserve, but we will make steady progress this year! Thank you, Henry Smith, for taking the lead on all the projects!

The real excitement has been the publication and release of the book, "**The Cupola House Carver**", written by Don Jordan, Tom Newbern, and Jim Melchor. We hope to have an official book signing soon and lectures showcasing the Cupola House and the Corbin chairs that are being replicated and will take up residence in our Dining room. We have many ideas to bring others into the fold to accentuate and appreciate our preservation efforts and provide outlets for education to further that cause. See related article.

Finally, behind the scenes, Sherry Jordan has directed our wonderful, dedicated gardeners in planting bulbs so we will flower in abundance for the spring. The bi-annual **Easels in the Gardens is set for May 20th & 21st** under the expert guidance of Marshall Creighton and Carey Stegall. They have been working tirelessly with their committee to ensure that this major fundraiser for the Cupola House in cooperation with the Arts Council, serves to raise money and awareness to continue our preservation and education goals. See related article and check our website for all updates. Get your tickets early and invite friends and family to enjoy this Cupola House tradition!





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Easels in the Gardens

Marshall Creighton

Mark your calendars for **May 20-21, 2022**, as Easels in the Gardens returns for the first time since 2018! The two-day affair will offer an exceptional pairing of 15 private gardens with talented plein-air artists, each creating unique works of art in beautiful outdoor settings.

New this year, an Art in Bloom exhibit at the Chowan Arts Council will bring the combination of nature and art inside, as local floral designers showcase their creativity by interpreting individual works of art as floral arrangements.

Entertainment will continue after the sun goes down on Friday night with Boogie on Broad featuring The Embers. Easels in the Gardens will conclude Saturday evening with an elegant and festive Garden Party, at which the artists' completed works will be displayed and available for purchase.

Tickets may be purchased at www.cupolahouse.org and, as of March 1, 2022, by calling the Penelope Barker House Welcome Center at 252-482-7800.

Advance tickets \$35 (\$40 day of the event).

Groups 15 or more \$25 each, telephone sales only, by May 13, 2022.

All proceeds from Easels in the Gardens benefit the Cupola House Association. Volunteer assistance is welcome! If interested in volunteering for this event, please contact event co-chairs Carey Stegall at careystegall@gmail.com or Marshall Creighton at amscreighton@gmail.com.



Cupola House Membership News

We have an outstanding number of members this year with a total so far of 106 membership units. Many of these represent couples or families. We welcome those who have joined for the first time this year, and of course, our returning members. Our membership consists not only of local residents but of out-of-towners as well. Membership benefits include an invitation to our speaker series and other member only events throughout the year like our fall members' brunch. The Cupola House Association has furthered interest in Edenton, and the many people who tour the house speak highly of our efforts to preserve history. Your donations allow us to maintain and enhance the Cupola House's imprint on our community. Thank you to our wonderful members who volunteered to make cookies and serve during the Candlelight Tour. We are grateful for all of our members' continued support! If you are not yet a member, please consider joining. It is a great way to meet people and learn about Edenton's history. You may join on our website at www.cupolahouse.org, or send an email to cupolahousemembership@gmail.com.

Sue Willhauck
Membership Chair



Legends, Legacies and Looting...all part of the Cupola House Speakers Series

Gay Chatham

In the still, often uneventful months of January through April, The Cupola House Speaker Series unfolds. The 2022 Series focuses on legendary homes, town legacies and a surprising outcome of Nazi looted art.

January 31: *Hayes Plantation, Past, Present and Future*, Sam Dixon brought Cupola House Members the latest news and plans for Hayes Farms. The historic and important home and outbuilding was and remains to be a building block of Edenton life.

February 28 The Speaker Series launched an in-costume program presented by Trent Carter. *House in the Horseshoe* which has the unique distinction of being both a revolutionary period home, as well as a battlefield.

March 28: The legacies of Edenton townsfolk and leaders discovered in our program: *Early Edenton Life: As seen through the Cupola House Documents*. Given by Cupola House Document Archivist Martha Smith. Cupola House documents reveal family, town and civic history and mysteries.

April 25: *Nazi Looted Art in North Carolina* program by Lisa Hudspeth. A little known and surprising part of North Carolina's complicated and intriguing history.

We invite all members to join us at the Cupola House for these historic programs. Meet and Greet at 5:00 pm. Program at 5:30pm. See you there!



Did you know?

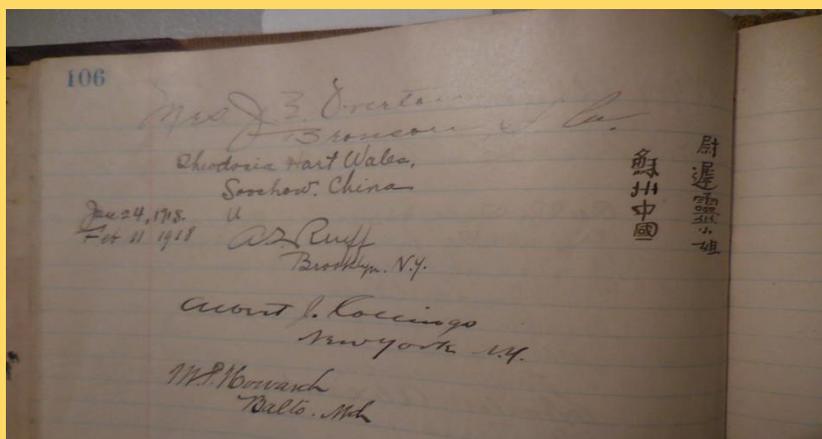
On February 11, 1918, Miss Tillie Bond, last resident of the Cupola House, welcomed three gentlemen who wanted to see the house and perhaps purchase some of her precious antiques. Pictured are the signatures in Miss Tillie's guest book—the last signatures entered, as these guests would trigger a tumultuous few months that would eventually lead to the establishment of the Cupola House Association and its purchase of the Cupola House.

The gentlemen were Andre Rueff, assistant curator of the Brooklyn Museum, and antique dealers Albert Collings of NYC, and M. T. Howard of Baltimore. That day Mr. Collings persuaded Miss Tillie to sell him all the woodwork and paneling on the first and second floor, even including the front and back doors.

After getting approval from the Brooklyn Museum, Mr. Rueff purchased from Mr. Collings all the first- floor woodwork for \$5,117.98. He immediately began preparations for its removal.

These were the last entries in Miss Tillie's guestbook. The previous entry in the guestbook of January 24, 1918, is Theodosia Hart Wales, who was the U.S. Envoy to China, located in Souchow, China. He signed his name in Chinese characters.

Stay tuned for exciting updates about this activity in the near future. Aren't you glad you are a member of such a dynamic organization? Something always interesting and exciting goes on at the 1758 Cupola House!





Major Changes in Our Understanding of the Cupola House

By Tom Newbern



The Cupola House is one of the most iconic structures in the state, if not the nation. It has been studied and admired for decades. However, over the past two years, two discoveries have been made that, for the first time, bring into focus the who, what, and why of the Cupola House. Who was the person responsible for its carved interior and the creation of its furnishings? What was Francis Corbin's intended function for the Cupola House? Why did Corbin design the interior room layout as he did?

The first discovery was the realization that the estate sale in 1768 that followed Corbin's death was recorded room by room. It is rare to find an 18th century inventory recorded room by room, much less an estate sale. With this knowledge, we now know how Corbin chose to present his business headquarters to the citizens of Edenton and beyond, including which rooms were reserved for Corbin's use and which rooms were to serve the business interests of his employer, John Carteret, 2nd Earl Granville, at the time construction on the house began. Corbin's dining room has become a main focus of research, just as it was the main focus of the house in Corbin's time. Dining rooms had only recently developed as centers of entertainment in the colonies around 1750, and this example was designed to impress. At the time of his death, and no doubt from the time construction was completed in the late 1750's to early 1760's, Corbin's dining room contained "8 Arm Mahogany Chairs", two square mahogany tables, and a round mahogany tea table (Fig. 1, Dining room contents from Corbin estate sale). Sets of armchairs are basically unheard of in 18th century colonial records, save one set documented to the colony of New York's Council Chamber. And even more shocking, based on overwhelming evidence, four of Corbin's eight dining room armchairs still exist, three in leading museums and one in a private collection (Fig. 2, Original Cupola House dining room armchair).

Based on this new discovery, the Cupola House Association enlisted the help of Edenton's own Master Cabinetmaker, Don Jordan, to recreate a set of eight armchairs matching Corbin's originals to return to the Cupola House dining room. Don's work led to the second discovery. Don had created templates of carving details from the original Corbin armchair held in the MESDA collection, which was then on loan to the Cupola House in celebration of its 250th anniversary. He chose from hundreds of differently shaped and sized gouges to determine the modern equivalents of the exact original tools used to carve the MESDA example. He soon discovered that the same few tools, nine in total, were used over and over again on different elements of the chair's carving. Those same nine tools were then compared to the original Cupola House carving and all the elements were found to have been created with the exact same nine tools. This proved for the first time that the same craftsman who created the armchairs also executed the Cupola House carving and that the chairs were created at the time the house was carved, 1758 to 1759. It also allowed the craftsman, Samuel Black, to be identified.

The set of eight armchairs Don is creating for the Cupola House dining room is not just chairs that look like the originals. These are exact copies of the originals in every detail to the point that, except for 260 years of wear, Mr. Corbin would not know the difference. The first chair, which will be the guide for the creation of the rest of the set, is complete, and the second is nearing completion. After it is finished, and after its slip seat has received appropriate upholstery, it will be the first of eight exact replicas to return to grace Mr. Corbin's dining room at the Cupola House (Fig. 3, New Cupola House dining room armchair number 1).

A detailed discussion of the history of these armchairs, the storied career of Edenton's most prominent 18th century cabinetmaker, Samuel Black, other furniture attributed to Black, Black's other Edenton and area clientele, and especially the procedure used to determine the exact nine tools used by Black, can all be found in the newly published book, *The Cupola House Carver*. It is available at the Barker House. All proceeds from its sale are dedicated to the Cupola House and the Barker house.

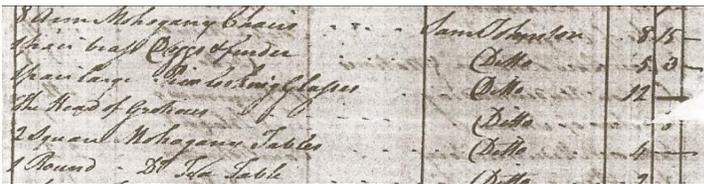


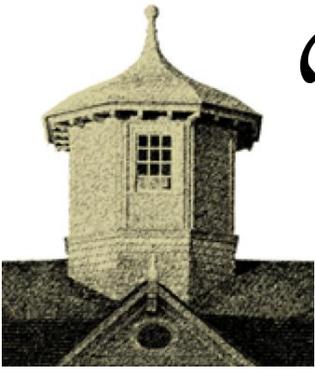
Figure 1:
Dining room contents from Corbin estate sale



Figure 2:
Original Cupola House dining room



Figure 3:
New Cupola House dining room armchair #1



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Christmas at the Cupola House

