From the Mountaintop
Print Edition Volume I, Issue 1 - May 2020

Our regular print newsletter, The Glessner Journal, is on hiatus during our period of extended closure. In place of that publication, we started issuing a weekly e-newsletter each Wednesday starting April 1st. Since we don’t have an email address for you, we are summarizing some of the highlights of our first six issues. We hope you enjoy reading through the articles and will go online to read our blog articles and other web content and look at our YouTube videos.

If you would like to start receiving our e-newsletter, please send your email address to William Tyre, Curator & Program Director, at wtyre@glessnerhouse.org.

The title of our e-newsletter was inspired by the Glessners' summer estate, The Rocks, shown above. Their house, known simply as the Big House is at the top of the hill (okay, it’s not a mountain); the carriage house/stable is in the foreground at left. Each year, starting in 1883, the family would leave Chicago in May for a form of self-imposed social distancing. For the next five months, the family would stay connected to happenings in Chicago through letter writing with their friends and receiving the Chicago newspapers, albeit a bit delayed. In that same spirit, we look forward to sharing our news with you.
House closure extended through Sunday May 31
We are currently closed for tours through Sunday May 31 and all programs have been cancelled through the end of June. Please check our website or social media channels for updates to our schedule, as these dates may well be extended.

Glessner blog – The Story of a House
We have been posting weekly articles to our blog, The Story of a House. To read the articles, visit glessnerhouse.blogspot.com. Recent postings:
April 1 Mattie Williamson, the Glessners’ beloved cook
April 8 Mattie Williamson returns to Glessner House
April 15 A tribute to John Maxim Lee
April 22 The Glessner family arrives in America – Part I
April 29 The Glessner family arrives in America – Part II
May 6 Preservation Month Part I – The Dining Room
Upcoming articles in May for Preservation Month will look at the main hall, library, and parlor restorations.

William Morris face masks now available!

Our William Morris face mask program continues to break all records - nearly 340 masks given away in four weeks and more than $12,000 in donations received for our COVID-19 Relief Fund. Thank you one and all!!

Remember that as of May 1st, residents of Illinois are required to wear a face mask in public. Don't have one? No worries, we have a supply of our exclusive Morris face masks in stock, ready to ship!

For a donation of $25 or more to Glessner House, you will receive your own Morris face mask, combining safety and style. To make your donation and receive your face mask (we will select the pattern for you), simply visit our website and select the “COVID-19 Relief Fund” page under “Donate.” Your mask will ship within 24 hours of the receipt of your donation.
Meet Henry, your friendly Glessner House greeter

Although Glessner House is currently closed to visitors, we want to make sure that people walking past still feel the sense of welcome and hospitality that we extend to all of our guests. Our genial house architect, Henry Hobson Richardson, has graciously agreed to stand in the master bedroom window to greet everyone who walks past. He even foregoes meal breaks, no small sacrifice for our portly friend. To further engage our passersby, Henry poses questions to them, which will be changed twice weekly, encouraging people to visit our website to learn more. To date, Henry has posted nine questions, which can be viewed, along with the answers on our website, glessnerhouse.org. Look for the “Ask Henry” page under the “Explore” tab.

Glessner courtyard now open to the public!

Although the house remains closed to the public through the end of May, our courtyard is open Monday through Friday from 9:00am to 5:00pm. Our neighbors and other passers-by will now have the opportunity to step into this beautiful space to see Glessner House from a new perspective. The courtyard opened on Monday April 27th, and many people have already stopped in. As an added treat, we have posted signs on the courtyard windows in the schoolroom, main hall, parlor, and kitchen - all accessible from porches - encouraging people to take a peek inside. We are delighted to share our courtyard with people seeking out places of beauty and tranquility during these difficult times.
George Glessner's bedroom completed and ready for visitors

As part of the project to restore Fanny's bedroom, the bedroom of her brother has been largely restored as well. During the first two months of 2020, work included stripping and refinishing all of the trim on the newly built south wall in the room, and the creation of the two five-paneled doors for his closets. As we do not have the original furnishings for this room, it is being used to exhibit various objects created by Isaac Scott and used in the Big House, the Glessners' house at The Rocks estate.

Shown here are two extraordinary hand-carved mantels by Scott, originally created for the Glessners' Chicago home on West Washington Street. When they moved to Prairie Avenue in December 1887, the mantels were removed and reinstalled at The Big House. A challenging part of the project involved gathering all the necessary components of the door hardware for the two closet doors. Fortunately, pieces were found in storage or removed from the inside of closet doors elsewhere in the house.

The spectacular faceted doorknobs, which exactly match others in the house, were a gift from a couple who visited Glessner House in 1992 and noted the distinctive doorknobs in several of the bedrooms. As active members of the Antique Doorknob Collectors Association, William and Helen Byington donated a number of glass doorknobs from their collection to be used in future restoration projects at the house. In trying to contact the Byingtons to show them how their donation had been used, we learned that Helen died in November 2019, six years after her husband. They won't have a chance to see their doorknobs in place, but their thoughtful gift will be enjoyed by visitors for decades to come.
No, we have no intention of sharing the CONTENTS of her tax return but shown above is the top half of the front page of her return for 1955. In a "normal" year, April 15th is one of the most dreaded days of the year for Americans, as it is the day by which they must file their annual income tax return. For the first time in U.S. history, tax day has been postponed until July 15th, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The history of the income tax dates back to the Civil War, when the Revenue Act of 1861 helped provide desperately needed funds for the war effort. It was repealed after the war and it was not until the passage of the Sixteenth Amendment in 1913 that the U.S. Congress was given the legal authority to impose an income tax. Tax returns were initially due on March 1; that date was changed to March 15 in 1918. The due date of April 15th was not adopted until 1955 (and that is why we shared Frances Glessner Lee's return for that year with you).

Although we won't disclose the details of her tax return, two things are worthy of note. Her charitable contributions for the year totaled nearly $20,000, a huge sum for the time. Most of these contributions related to the Department of Legal Medicine at Harvard, the bi-annual police seminars, and the ongoing creation of her Nutshell Studies. The second fun fact is to note that she listed her occupation as "farmer." The farm operations at The Rocks were significant, and the related income and expenses were a major part of what she reported on her tax return each year.
New York Governor Andrew Cuomo can be seen daily on the news during the pandemic. During many of his interviews, he is seated in front of the fireplace in his office in the New York State Capitol building (as shown above in an early 20th century postcard in the Glessner House collection). Like me, I'm sure your first thought, as you look behind Governor Cuomo's shoulder, is "doesn't that fireplace look Richardsonian Romanesque?" And you would be right! Construction on the capitol building began in 1867 under the supervision of architect Thomas Fuller (designer of the Canadian government buildings at Ottawa). After seven years, the project was put on hiatus due to lack of funds, and a new commission was appointed to oversee the work. In 1876, Henry Hobson Richardson, along with Frederick Law Olmsted and Leopold Eidlitz, was hired to complete the building.

Although Richardson recommended Romanesque for the exterior, he settled on the French Renaissance style, as the first two stories had already been completed from Fuller's design. Richardson and Eidlitz divided responsibility with Richardson designing the roof and exterior walls (from the third story up), the Senate and Governor's chambers, the court of appeals, the state library, and the western stairway. The first portions of the building were opened in 1879. The Senate chamber is the most opulent of the spaces, although the Governor's chamber, also known as the Executive chamber, features a huge fireplace set in an inglenook under an arched wood beam and mahogany paneling, all featuring Richardson's trademark ornament.

Richardson was still working on the building at the time of his death in 1886, and the last portions of the building, including the monumental western staircase, were not completed until 1899.
For those of you who enjoy cooking (and who isn't doing more cooking these days) we are pleased to launch a new page on our website, Cooking with Mattie. You've met Mattie in the past, the Glessner's beloved cook from 1892 to 1912. Ellie of ElliePresents, who recreated Mattie and participated in our events in early March, has graciously agreed to share historic cooking techniques and recipes (with modern conversions) for those of you who would like to sample an authentic taste from the past. To review the recipes, simply visit our “Cooking With Mattie” page on the website under “Explore.”

April 15 Brown Bread
April 22 1,2,3,4 Cake
April 29 Cocoanut Cake
May 6 Chicken a la Reine
Videos posted to the Glessner House YouTube channel

With people unable to visit the house in person these days, we have tried to fill the gap by posting weekly videos to our YouTube channel.

The first series of three videos focused on the different sounds in the house:
Glessner House – Steinway Piano (Rachmaninoff Rhapsody)
Glessner House – The Annunciator
Glessner House – The Singing Bowl

The second series, which will continue into mid-May, reveals “secrets” of the house:
Secrets of Glessner House Part I – The Partners Desk
Secrets of Glessner House Part II – The Dressing Room Closet

Simply visit YouTube.com and type in the titles above to listen to these short and informative videos.
Payroll Protection Program funds received

The $2.2 trillion CARES Act provides essential funding for small business and non-profits during the stay at home period when businesses are closed. One of these programs is known as the Payroll Protection Program and provides funding for eight weeks of payroll and benefits, as well as utilities. We submitted our application for funding through our bank, Lakeside Bank, on the first day the program opened and received word on April 9th that our application for $40,700 in funding had been approved! Although this program is set up as a loan, that loan will be 100% forgiven as long as staff is retained, which is our intention. This grant will only cover 50% of the revenue we anticipate losing between March and June 2020, so we are pursuing other options as well. Many of you have already sent a gift since our closure in mid-March for which we are truly grateful. Thank you for your incredible support!

Glessner House awarded Preservation Heritage Fund Grant

We are very pleased to announce the receipt of a $4,000 Preservation Heritage Fund Grant from Landmarks Illinois, which will cover 50% of the cost of emergency sewer repairs along the 18th Street side of the house. The issue was discovered last fall, when water infiltration was noted at the east end of the basement after heavy rains. Work commenced on May 6th and will involve the removal of several limestone sidewalk slabs, that work being done pro bono by arrangement with emeritus board member Jack Tribbia, President of the Restoration Division of Berglund Construction. We are deeply grateful to both Landmarks Illinois and Berglund Construction for their generosity which is allowing us to undertake these necessary repairs. (Photo above shows similar work on the Prairie Avenue side of the house in 2013).
Thanking our First Responders

On Tuesday, April 28, Glessner House expressed its gratitude to our courageous first responders by providing lunch to all 250 officers at the 1st District Police Station, located just a few blocks west of the house, at State and 18th Streets. As part of this activity, we also supported one of our neighborhood’s best community partners – Weathermark Tavern - which provided the food and beverages. It is during times such as this when community residents and businesses really come together to support each other, and we are glad to play our part. The lunch was served in honor of Frances Glessner Lee, the first female state police captain in the U.S. and an honorary captain in the Chicago Police Department. Our thanks to the anonymous donor who made this act of kindness possible!!

Virtual tour available 24/7

Before we bring this issue of the newsletter to a close, we wish to remind you that you can always take a virtual tour of Glessner House, utilizing the terrific 360-degree views of the house created by David Ramsey in August 2019. The link is always available at the top of our home page.

Until next week, we wish everyone good health. Please stay safe, make the most of this challenging time to spend more time with your family, and take advantage of the many ways in which you can remain connected to Glessner House and all the wonderful cultural attractions in Chicago and beyond!

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