



Bowne House Quilt Exhibition Celebrates Black History Month, Abolitionist Past

FLUSHING, QUEENS — To celebrate Black History Month, the Bowne House Historical Society will offer tours from 1 to 4 pm on February 15-16 focusing on the history of abolition in Queens and the house's role as a "safe house" along the Underground Railroad. An exhibition of quilts by fiber artist and professional quilter, Thadine Wormly-Herndon, will be on view at Bowne House February 12-29. Additionally, Black History Month launches Bowne House's year-long "Liberty 2020" initiative, which commemorates the 375th anniversary of the Charter of Flushing granting the right to practice one's religion of choice without fear of persecution.

The oldest extant house in Queens and one of the oldest in New York City, Bowne House displays a quilt depicting the life of American abolitionist and political activist, Harriet Tubman (1822-1913) and one telling the story of freed slave, abolitionist and member of the United States House of Representatives, Robert Smalls (1839-1915). Another large quilt sampler titled "Underground Railroad" features symbols well known to slaves fleeing to freedom during the Civil War through a system of "safe houses" such as the Bowne House. Featured on the sampler are the log cabin (the colors of lights in a house's windows indicated if it was a safe haven in the day or in the night); the bowtie (which warned slaves to travel in disguise); and the sailboat (the symbol indicating boats were available for escape by water.)

At 1 pm on Sunday, February 16, at the Flushing Quaker Meeting House (137-16 Northern Boulevard), professional archivist Charlotte Jackson and researcher Kate Lynch will speak about the Bowne and Parsons families' role moving slaves to freedom on the Underground Railroad during abolition. "Bowne House on the Freedom Trail" will discuss the role of the Bowne and Parsons families in the abolitionist movement and the Underground Railroad, within the context of evolving



Bowne House, courtesy Bowne House.

Quaker belief from the Seventeenth Century forward. Lynch's recent research explores the origins of anti-slavery conviction among other early Friends, many with ties to the Bowne Family and the Flushing Meeting. Jackson will showcase discoveries from the Bowne House Archives and other local collections, including a rare letter from the Underground Railroad. A question and discussion period will follow. The lecture is included in the \$10 general admission to Bowne House.

Following the talk on February 16, Wormly-Herndon will lead a quilting workshop from 2 to 4 pm at the Flushing Quaker Meeting House. The workshop is included in the \$10 cost of general admission to Bowne House.

About Thadine Wormly-Herndon

A 40-year resident of Flushing, Thadine Wormly is an artist and teacher whose quilts tell the story of freedom for enslaved African American and Indigenous people in the United States. Her work has been exhibited in galleries, museums and public venues throughout New York City. During her professional career, Wormly taught quilting to Moroccan women in Tangiers and Rabat through a US Department of State-sponsored initiative. Her work has been featured in the offices of Queens Borough Presidents

Helen Marshall and Melinda Katz and a quilt, "The Price of Cotton," was included in the WestBeth Gallery exhibition, "The Fiber Matrix." Wormly is a co-founder of the Pomonok Quilt Guild and is a teacher and member of the Brooklyn Quilt Guild, Quilt-N-Queens, and the Quilters of Color Network, New York City.

About Liberty 2020

During 2020, the Bowne House Historical Society will celebrate the 375th anniversary of the signing of the Flushing Town Charter. An initiative called Liberty 2020 will feature exhibitions, educational programs, lectures and a reunion gathering of descendants of early Queens families — those Native Americans, African Americans, English, Dutch and many others who settled the region. A list of these names will be posted on the society's website later this spring. In addition to the names of the settlers, we have biographies of many of these original families. The Family Reunion will be held in Flushing, which will give these descendants an opportunity to visit the Bowne House and the Quaker Meeting, and other local sites of note.

Signed in 1675 when Flushing (or Vlissingen) was part of the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam, the Flushing Town Charter granted all residents the right to practice one's religion without fear of



Interior of Bowne House, courtesy Bowne House.

persecution. Predating the Bill of Rights — the first of ten amendments to the United States Constitution, which was ratified in 1791 — the Charter is the earliest known experiment granting freedom of conscience in America.

About Bowne House

The best-preserved example of Anglo-Dutch vernacular residential architecture in the country is Bowne House, and it continues to occupy its original site. Based on a Dutch plan but employing English building techniques, the house represents a blend of the two main architectural traditions of colonial New York.

The structure that became the Bowne House was built around 1661 by John Bowne, who emigrated from England to Boston in 1649 and eventually settled in Flushing when New York was under Dutch rule. By the mid-1650's, Bowne had acquired land from the Matinecock Indians in the area. It was there that he met Hannah Feake, who became his first wife and the mother of eight of his children. Hannah was the daughter of Elizabeth Fones Winthrop Feake, a niece of Governor John Winthrop of Massachusetts and cousin of Governor Robert Winthrop of Connecticut. As his family grew and prospered, he expanded the house in 1669 and later in 1680. The present footprint of the house was completed in 1695 and the last alterations were made in the Nineteenth Century. The Bowne House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is designated a New York City landmark.

About Bowne House Historical Society

The Bowne House was purchased in 1945 by a group formed by local residents who wished to preserve the house and open it as a museum. The last occupants were Bertha and Anna Parsons, who continued to occupy the house until they were in their 90s. The Bowne House was dedicated as a museum on October 10, 1945. Mayor Fiorello spoke at the dedication; his speech was made from the dining room, the original room of the house.

In 2009, the Bowne House Historical Society donated the house to the City's Parks

Department, and it became the 23rd member of the Historic House Trust of New York City. The three organizations are now partnering on a phased restoration of the house, construction of a visitor's center, archaeological investigation of the site, and redevelopment of the surrounding park to represent the rich horticultural history of Flushing.

The Bowne House Historical Society offers tours and special events throughout the year for the general public as well as customized tours for students of all ages. Most of the approximately 5,000 objects in the museum's collection are original to the House; a rarity found in few cultural institutions open to the public. The Bowne House archives, an extensive collection available to readers by appointment, document the history and civic activities of the Bowne and Parsons' families, who were occupants of the house from the Seventeenth through the Twentieth Centuries. On view are examples of English and American furniture — examples by early Flushing and New York cabinetmakers — and decorative art; paintings, textiles and costume; household artifacts; rare books and manuscripts; and toys.

A recent acquisition to the house is a Dutch kas; it is similar to one John Bowne mentioned in his record book. Peter Kenny, who is on the Bowne House Museum Advisory Committee, examined the kas as few months ago and believes it dates from about 1700 and was made by an unidentified craftsman in the Queens/Brooklyn area (close to the current border of those boroughs). An unusual feature is the original lace drawer; a feature that did not often survive. The kas was donated by a generous collector. Members from the Bowne and Parsons families have also donated items that were originally in the house during the period of family occupancy. These donations include — from a West Coast descendant — an early set of Chippendale chairs that had been in the dining room.

Bowne House is at 37-01 Bowne Street. The Flushing Quaker Meeting House is at 137-16 Northern Boulevard. For information, 718-359-0528 or www.bownehouse.org.



Dutch kas recently acquired by Bowne House, courtesy Bowne House.



Thadine Wormly-Herndon, "Underground Railroad" quilt, courtesy the artist.