An Artistic Vision of Tudor Place

Editor's Note: Peter Waddell is artist-in-residence at Tudor Place. He is a history and architectural painter who has created major works with the White House Historical Association, Mount Vernon, The U.S. Capitol and other historic sites, including Tudor Place, for which he has created images that depict the house, gardens, and history of the site. Here he explains his research process.

My work frequently starts with someone needing an image of a place in history, usually where no images exist. Sometimes I am asked to record an existing building or interior because of a need for a permanent and minutely detailed record that also reveals the deeper meaning of the subject. Others start with an interest in painting an interesting place at a specific time in the past.

Whether because of an impulse, or with detailed instruction, all the works begin with a visionary moment that defines what I want to say and how the image will be composed. I am usually drawing at the time, but also may be showering or swimming, as I find water is conducive to creative activity. I try to hold the vision until I can get it down on paper or canvas, as it can be fleeting. The initial vision is then informed, and often inspired, by subsequent research. This research is essential to my work.

Tudor Place is unique because so much detailed information is available about one house. The Peter family, who lived here for 178 years, were proud of their lineage and never threw anything away. Once it became a museum, a professional staff of curators and archivists have continued the family tradition, digging and discovering, preserving and recording, the Tudor Place story. Despite this, there is much to be discovered about the early history of Tudor Place. Images of the house in its earliest period do not exist except William Thornton’s original designs for the house. His “as-built” drawings are not known to exist, perhaps worn out and never copied in those pre-Kinko’s days.

My painting of the original entrance to the property was based on historic maps and other sources, but also on educated guesses. From these sources we know that visitors arrived at Tudor Place from Road Street (R Street today), at the northern end of the property. During the mid-nineteenth century, in accordance with Martha Peter’s will, northern sections of the Peter family’s estate were sold and the main entrance includes slave quarters.
trance moved to the east side of the property along Congress Street (31st Street today). Information passed down through the family says that slave quarters were located beside the original drive near the entrance, a common arrangement on Southern plantations. The gate posts are conjectural but of a type common in the South at the beginning of the 19th Century. Opportunities for exploring for further evidence of these structures have passed since our neighbors probably would not appreciate major archeological excavation beneath their properties.

With a house undergoing such close examination as Tudor Place, discoveries are being made constantly. I created a painting depicting the site when it was first purchased by Thomas and Martha Peter in 1805. It was based upon the site's interpretation at that time. According to the Peter family the previous owners, the Lowndes family, had already constructed the wings of a grand house on the site but got no further. My painting shows the two wings, the east used as stables the west as a dwelling. It also expresses the openness of the site and the distant prospect from Georgetown Heights in those times.

Recent scholarship and dendrochronological evidence (the examination of tree rings) indicate that the west hyphen, the section joining the wing to the central part of the house) was built around the same time as the wings, and the east hyphen at a later time. With the results of this examination and the assistance of Curator Grant Quertermous, I am adding the west hyphen to the painting and showing the East Hyphen under construction to take account of the new information. If more information turns up I will change it again, much like a book undergoing revision.

Much of what is important about Tudor Place is subtle. In my painting of the Entry Hall I have tried to convey not just the minute details of the architecture but also the feeling of the space and of the sense of time stood still, and time passed. The artist J.W.M. Turner's last words were "God is light." Light is the common subject of all my work. The beauty of the light in Tudor Place is a testimony to the quality of William Thornton's designs. Being frequently in the house has allowed me the deep examination of the pattern of light and shadow in this space.

Because Tudor Place was lived in by the same family for many generations, the rooms convey layers of history. They tell us a great deal about the taste of the last owner Armistead Peter III (1896-1983). His final iteration of the house was a sort of mid-century modern interpretation of an English country house.

My paintings are constructed realities. I try to find out everything that is known about the subject I am painting. I dread the thought that there is some important detail I have not found. Washington is full of historians, professional and amateur. If I miss something I am sure to hear about it.

The evidence I love most are firsthand accounts from people who were there and saw it as it was. For nineteenth century Washington, Margaret Bayard Smith, wife of Samuel Harrison...
Smith, editor of the *National Intelligencer*, is an indispensable source. She seems to have known everyone from President Jefferson on down. She was everywhere and saw everything and recorded the details in her diary. Likewise, we are fortunate that the Peter family recorded the details of their lives, like the arrival of Lafayette at Tudor Place in his yellow carriage in 1824. Britannia W. Kennon Peter in 1895 recorded her remembrances of this event:

He drove to Tudor Place in a private carriage. I can see the grand old man now as he entered the door of the parlor, his general manner and dignified appearance making an impression on my mind which time cannot efface. Advancing to my mother, he tenderly embraced her, the meeting with whom no doubt bringing to his mind recollections of former days when he had known her as a child, roving over the lawns of Mt. Vernon, the guest of his everlasting friend George Washington. —“A Page from the Life of Lafayette: His Visit to the Tudor Place in 1824 Related by the Great-Granddaughter of Mrs. Washington” *The Washington Times*, July 4, 1895.

I included that memory in my allegorical screen about Tudor Place.

Newspapers from the nineteenth century contained masses of detailed description. I had a good technical education and learned architectural drafting. Often buildings are changed over time and I can restore them to the original plans when I need to. From the Tudor Place collection, we can discern the evolution of the architect’s ideas for the house.

The puzzlement of what was here, what it looked like, and how it felt was a constant companion of my childhood, one which has stayed with me and become an integral part of my work as an artist. In my native home in New Zealand such recreations were easy, as European settlement didn’t take place until the middle of the nineteenth century and was much in evidence as were the primeval forests and sites of Maori settlement.

One of the unique things about Tudor Place is that much of it remains as it was from its earliest days. With the exception of the 1876 kitchen addition, the house is little changed architecturally from its completion in 1816. Although many of the contents are still there from Thomas and Martha Peter’s time, other furnishings and the garden are greatly changed. So Tudor Place offers distinct challenges to the history painter—challenges that intrigue me.
Among the joys of being affiliated with this organization are the many opportunities to meet extraordinary people who share a love and passion for this special place. Two of the most extraordinary I have known in my brief time here at Tudor Place recently passed away.

In February we were saddened to learn of the passing of Elizabeth Powell. As a Trustee and active member of several committees, Elizabeth was thoughtful of others but never reluctant to speak up. Many people in the Tudor Place family remember in particular the creativity and style she displayed as chair of the Spring Garden Party in 2015. She was filled with great ideas and exuded a positive energy that convinced you anything was possible.

Since her passing, I have gained a deeper understanding of the many ways Elizabeth was loved and respected throughout our community. She leaves behind a loving husband, two young children, and scores of close friends. While this tragic loss still fills our hearts with sadness, Elizabeth’s life also reminded us to make every day count and filled with joy.

Speaking of a joyful life, we mourn also the loss of Trustee Dain Anderson (Andy) Williams who died in mid-May. Andy had a passion for historic preservation and freely expressed his love of Tudor Place. He was always willing to share his marketing skills to help spread the word about our historic landmark. During our 2016 Bicentennial, Andy provided banners and lapel pins to promote the commemoration.

A man of many interests—art, food, travel, and the outdoors—Andy enlivened our Board meeting with delightful and humorous stories of his adventures. At his core, however, Andy was a serious preservationist. We were fortunate that he joined the cause at Tudor Place and will miss his booming voice and broad smile at our next meeting.

—Mark Hudson
The Value of History

Dear Friends of Tudor Place,

Throughout my career in public history, I have struggled to articulate the importance of the work we do. While this is something I know and believe in my heart, defining and explaining it has been challenging, often distilling to a pithy quote about the perils of those who forget their past. It has been a great relief, therefore, to be part of a discussion among history professionals and the organizations they represent during the past six years. The result of this discussion is the Value of History Statement.

At their meeting in March, the Tudor Place Board of Trustees voted unanimously and enthusiastically to endorse the statement. In doing so, we join hundreds of organizations from throughout the U.S. in asserting that history is crucially important to the wellbeing of individuals, communities, and our nation.

As individuals, an understanding of the past nurtures our self-identity and the practice of history fosters the development of personal skills critical to navigating an increasingly complex world. Within our communities, an appreciation of the past strengthens our connections and commitments to one another. Historical organizations, like Tudor Place, are also catalysts for economic growth and contribute immensely to the quality of life in our communities.

History also is essential to our future as a nation. It informs discussions on contemporary issues and can help us craft better solutions. From the past we also find inspiration from leaders and the challenges they confronted. And finally, preservation of the past allows us to leave a legacy to future generations.

More than a platitude, The Value of History Statement is a comprehensive explanation grounded in the work we do preserving, interpreting, and sharing the stories of Tudor Place. In the coming weeks and months, I will be writing more on the Tudor Place Blog about the ways our activities and programs are making history essential to ourselves, our community, and our future.

To learn more about the Value of History Statement and to see a list of the organizations that have endorsed it, please visit www.historyrelevance.com/value-history-statement.

Mark Hudson. Executive Director

Kudos for our Book

As part of our Bicentennial celebration last year, Tudor Place, in cooperation with the White House Historical Association, published Tudor Place: America’s Story Lives Here, a beautifully illustrated history of the people, architecture, collections, and landscapes of this landmark. The book recently received two prestigious awards.

The Independent Publishers Book Awards presented it the Gold Award as the Best Regional Non-fiction in the Mid-Atlantic. Independent Publishers’ annual “Ippy” awards bring recognition to exemplary independent, university, and self-published titles. It is the world’s largest international and regional book awards competition.

The book also was the Gold Winner of an Independent Book Publishers Association’s Ben Franklin Award as the best regional publication. IPBA’s awards recognize excellence in book editing and design and are regarded as one of the highest national honors for independent publishers.

Our congratulations are extended to former executive director Leslie Buhler and everyone else who contributed to the success of the publishing endeavor. Tudor Place: America’s Story Lives Here can be purchased at the Tudor Place Museum Shop, at the online shop, through the White House Historical Association, and on Amazon.com. For more information or to order your copy, please go to www.tudorplace.org/shop/americas-story-lives-here.
New Faces at Tudor Place

In recent weeks, we welcomed five new members to the team at Tudor Place. In February Courtney Bryce began in the new position of private events manager. In this role she manages rentals and related events, including weddings, group tours, and tea & tour programs. Courtney is a graduate of James Madison University where she majored in history.

Also joining us in February was Hannah Chasen as a visitor services assistant. Hannah assists with the operation of the Visitor Center, including helping with museum tours and managing the museum shop inventory. She is a graduate student in exhibition design in the George Washington University Corcoran Design Program, and previously served as an intern at Tudor Place.

March brought the arrival of visitor services assistant Lacey Shaw. Lacey also helps with visitor center operations, tours, and the museum shop. She recently relocated to this area from the State of Washington, where she earned a degree in anthropology and worked in retail sales.

In April, Virginia Thaxton began as gardener. Virginia works with other staff and our garden volunteers to care for the beautiful gardens and grounds of Tudor Place. She has a master’s degree in horticulture and a bachelor’s degree in biology, and is passionate about gardening and horticulture. Virginia served previously as a Tudor Place garden volunteer.

Our most recent addition is seasonal gardener Lauren Pepe. Lauren has a great passion in horticulture and gardening, as well as sustainability. She completed a certificate program in gardening through the DC Department of Parks and Recreation and has learned about plant propagation through self-study and practice. She has also volunteered at a few DC gardens and farms and at an organic farm homestead in Costa Rica. Lauren’s position was funded through a generous contribution from Honorary Trustee Bruce Whelihan.

T.P.’s G.Q. on C-Span

Curator Grant Quertermous discussed the Peter family’s love of Pierce Arrow automobiles with the crew from C-Span. Tudor Place was featured on a recent episode of C-Span’s “American Artifacts.” Curator Grant Quertermous led the program’s film crew on a tour of the site, showcasing highlights of the collection, including Martha and George Washington artifacts and the Pierce Arrow automobile. The program initially was broadcast in early May, but can now be streamed at www.tudorplace.org/CSpan-Grant.
Summer Events at Tudor Place

We invite you to join us for these upcoming events. For additional details and to register, please visit www.tudorplace.org/programs.

A Fun Summer Lies Ahead at Tudor Place

We have planned a fun summer of activities and programs at Tudor Place. You are welcome to participate and enjoy each of these events. For a full calendar of events, please visit www.tudorplace.org/programs

DC Jazz Festival's Jazz in the Hoods at Tudor Place Featuring The Nicole Saphos Trio

Sunday, June 11 from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Relax on the beautiful grounds with sounds from a jazz trio featuring singer-bassist Nicole Saphos. She has performed at The Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, Strathmore Mansion, and the Kimmel Center, and played with Terell Stafford, Joanna Pascale, the Cab Calloway Orchestra, Sharon Clark, Chuck Redd, and Paul Carr. She’s been featured in Washington City Paper and received the 2008 Essentially Ellington Competition's award for Exceptional Bass Soloist.

$15 for Tudor Place members | $20 for non-members | for information about membership: www.tudorplace.org/get-involved/become-a-member

Since 2005, the DC Jazz Festival (DCJF) organization has provided enriching and entertaining jazz performances and programs that introduce students and adults from all walks of life to jazz, our nation’s singular original art form. Tudor Place is pleased to welcome jazz fans to our historic grounds for the 2017 DC Jazz Festival.

For more information or to register, please visit www.tudorplace.org/programs/86/dc-jazz-festival-nicole-saphos-trio.

Fathers' Day Kite Flight

Sunday, June 18 from 12:30 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Celebrate Father’s Day at Tudor Place! Build and fly your own mini kite on the grand South Lawn.

$7 for Tudor Place member child | $10 for non-member child | $5 for adults

For information about membership: www.tudorplace.org/get-involved/become-a-member.

For more information or to register, please go to www.tudorplace.org/programs/72/fathers-day-kite-flight.

Happy Birthday, America!

Saturday, July 1 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Celebrate Independence Day with your family at the home of Martha Washington's granddaughter and five generations that followed. Here you can play traditional outdoor games, tour verdant garden “rooms,” make patriotic crafts, and of course, savor patriotic sweets. All ages are welcome.

For more information or to register, please visit www.tudorplace.org/programs/74/happy-birthday-america.

Art in the Garden

June 9, September 8, October 13, and November 3 from 12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Beginning and advanced artists alike will find inspiration in the historic gardens of Tudor Place. Join Director of Buildings, Gardens and Grounds Kellie Cox, an award-winning botanical artist, to explore a variety of subjects, media, and locations in the historic garden. Students will learn tips and techniques for working in pencil and pastels or pen-and-ink, creating their own unique art piece during each class. No art experience is required!

To register or for more information, please visit www.tudorplace.org/programs/75/art-in-the-garden.
Tudor Explorers Summer History Week

July 31 through August 4 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Exploration and authenticity are the hallmarks of camp at Tudor Place. The summertime Tudor Explorers program engages hands, minds, and bodies of children aged 4 to 10, indoors and out. Activities include games, dance, exploration of the Tudor Place estate, and the examination of artifacts from the museums’ education collections. Before- and after-care is available.

$175 for Tudor Place members | $190 for non-members | for information about membership: www.tudorplace.org/get-involved/become-a-member.

To register or for more information, please visit www.tudorplace.org/events-programs/camps.

Become a Docent and Help Us Tell America’s Story

Docents serve the Museum’s diverse audiences by providing dynamic, engaging, and meaningful tours. They work two weekday or one weekend shift per month. New docent training will begin later this summer. For more information, please contact Director of Education and Visitor Services Hillary Rothberg at education@tudorplace.org.