HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS: THE H STREET RESIDENCE*

In 1848 Alexander Hamilton’s widow, Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, rented a house on H Street in Washington. This house was owned by Britannia Peter Kennon of Tudor Place and inherited through a series of events that included her marriage to Captain Beverley Kennon in 1842, his advancing naval career, and his sudden death in 1844 aboard the U.S.S. Princeton. At the home on H Street, Elizabeth Hamilton was in the social hub of the city, where she engaged with such notable neighbors as former first lady Dolley Payne Todd Madison and General Winfield Scott.

Nothing is known of prior occupants of the H Street house until it was rented to Elizabeth Hamilton, or Mrs. General Alexander Hamilton, as she would have been formally addressed in the day. Britannia noted the circumstances of this arrangement, and Elizabeth Hamilton’s suitability as a tenant:

Mrs. Alexander Hamilton boarded on Capitol Hill. (She was trying to put some claims through congress at the time) but, as she grew older, she, with her daughter, Mrs. Holly, decided to take a house of their own and so took the house owned by me on H Street; good tenants they were, paying the rent always on the day it was due and if not called for on that day a note would come from Mrs. Hamilton saying it was ready (BRITANNIA PETER KENNON’S REMINISCENCES, Tudor Place Archive).

Elizabeth Hamilton had moved to Washington from New York by 1848, accompanied by her daughter Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton Holly, the widow of Sidney Augustus Holly of Stamford, Connecticut. As noted by Britannia, Elizabeth Hamilton had traveled to Washington many times prior to her move, regarding the sale and publication of her husband’s papers. She was determined that his memory be vindicated and his manuscripts properly credited to him and published.

During her tenure in Washington, Elizabeth Hamilton and Dolley Madison were neighbors and formed a fast friendship. Dolley Madison spent
the last twelve years of her life in the house her husband, James Madison, had built in 1819, a square house that had its entrance on the east side of Lafayette Square at the corner of H Street. Dolley Madison was famous for her dignified bearing and generous manner. It was considered an honor to attend her New Year’s Day and Fourth of July receptions. The two women were respected as the backbone of Washington society. Influential figures in presidential circles, their continued presence suggested that the executive branch “was still influenced to some extent by ideals and practices of an earlier day.”

Elizabeth Hamilton was frequently the guest of the presidents of the United States and was entertained at presidential dinners, including President John Tyler’s Birth Night ball in February 1845, where members of the diplomatic corps wore their court uniforms. She attended a nine-course state dinner that lasted from seven to nine o’clock given by President Millard Fillmore, who escorted her to the table, “a plain little old lady and very plainly dressed.” But not to be outdone, Elizabeth Hamilton entertained presidents:

She was the first to introduce ice-cream at the national metropolis, and she used to relate with rare humor the delight displayed by President Jackson when he first tasted it. He liked it much, and swore, ‘By the Eternal!’ that he would have ices at the White House (Perley’s Reminiscences of Sixty Years in the National Metropolis, Ben: Perley Poore).

One friend remembered “after passing the compliments and congratulations of the day, [she] insists upon her visitors taking a merry glass from General Washington’s punch bowl, which, with other portions of his table set, remains in her possession” (The Intimate Life of Alexander Hamilton, Allan McLane Hamilton).

General Winfield Scott, hero of the Mexican War, also fell into Elizabeth Hamilton’s orbit as a neighborhood resident. The general moved to Washington in 1850 and occupied one of the three houses that had been built or occupied by Count Charles Julius de Menou, French minister to the United States from 1822-1824. The three houses were consequently also referred to as the de Menou Buildings, as evidenced by the indenture drawn up between Purser G.C. Cooper and Captain Beverley Kennon. “[T]he block of three brick three story houses, sometimes called Count de Menou’s Buildings, erected on the south side of the Square” (Peter Family Papers, University of Virginia Library, 1842). Located between Thirteenth and Fourteenth Streets, two of the three buildings were combined into one, that being the house General Scott’s family occupied. The third house was owned by Britannia, and in it lived “the venerable Mrs. Alexander Hamilton and her only daughter, Mrs. Hamilton Holly.”

General Scott was “head and shoulder above all the rest, and nearly always in uniform, brave, handsome, and frankly vain.” He proved a large presence in Washington society. Marian Gourneur noted that New Year’s Day was an important festive occasion. General and Mrs. Maria Mayo Scott always kept open house on January 1, and “a bountiful collation was served.” Army
THE H STREET RESIDENCE, CONTINUED

officers dressed in uniform tied their horses to the chain fence and paid their respects. The General always called on the president early in the day, but he also “always called on two venerable women—Mrs. ‘Dolley’ Madison … and Mrs. Alexander Hamilton, his next door neighbor” (As I REMEMBER: RECOLLECTIONS OF AMERICAN SOCIETY DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, Marian Gouverneur).

Britannia remembered that once Elizabeth Hamilton had wanted to visit Mount Vernon and asked Martha Custis Peter (1777-1854), her mother and a granddaughter of Martha Custis Washington (1731-1802), to go with her. Britannia recalled this because it was her mother’s last visit to Mount Vernon, and it “made her very sad to go there, everything was so changed from what it used to be when she was a child.” (BRITANNIA PETER KENNON’S REMINISCENCES, Tudor Place Archive).

On November 9, 1854, Elizabeth Hamilton’s son, James Alexander Hamilton (1788-1875/8), notified his aunt Catherine Schuyler Cochran in Oswego, New York: “My dear mother finished her course here this morning at about 4 o clock. She was conscious to the last and although her utterance was inarticulate she said very kind things—She passed off without a struggle altho (sic) for a few weeks past she had suffered much” (LETTER FROM JAMES ALEXANDER HAMILTON TO CATHERINE COCHRAN, Library of Congress, 1854).

In speaking of the tenant of the H Street house years later, Britannia told her grandson, Armistead Peter, Jr. (1870-1960), “It was in this house that Elizabeth Hamilton died. … Before her death she worked me a piece of worsted work and sent it to me” (BRITANNIA PETER KENNON’S REMINISCENCES, Tudor Place Archive). The bearer of this gift was Elizabeth Hamilton’s daughter, Elizabeth Hamilton Holly. It is not known if Elizabeth Hamilton Holly continued to board at 1325 H Street after the death of her mother, or if she lived elsewhere in the city. Elizabeth Hamilton Holly died in Washington in 1859.

Records show Britannia paid taxes on Lot 5 and Lot 21 in Square 250 until 1861. The names of her other renters are not known. When referring to Mrs. General Hamilton and Elizabeth Hamilton Holly, she recorded, “I knew them and used to call on them and charming people they were” (BRITANNIA PETER KENNON’S REMINISCENCES, Tudor Place Archive). Although Britannia only lived at H Street a few months during her marriage, home is always where the heart is. While circumstance curtailed her happiness most abruptly, the presence in that house of kind and benevolent friends would have stood her in good stead.

- Wendy Kail, Archivist

*to read the full story of the H Street house and its association with Tudor Place visit: www.tudorplace.org/hstreet

WELCOME EMILY

We are pleased to welcome Emily Coghlan to the Tudor Place team, as a member of the Building, Gardens & Grounds staff. Emily will assist with the care and management of the living collection. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Biology from Kutztown University of Pennsylvania. Emily gained experience in greenhouse operations and horticulture management at her alma mater and at Bowman’s Hill Wildflower Preserve in New Hope, Pennsylvania.
FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

RISEING TO THE CHALLENGE

Caring for this National Historic Landmark is an awesome challenge. Aged building systems fail and need repair or replacement. Leaky walls and foundations allow water to seep in. Squirrels attack the lead dog sculptures in the garden. The daily challenges of preserving the site are too numerous to list.

Recently, we were reminded of how vulnerable we can be to the ravages of time and the whims of Mother Nature. Due to the wet summer, many of our boxwood were attacked by blight in October. The early signs of blight on a Monday advanced quickly to become a destructive force by that Wednesday.

Quick action by our Gardens & Grounds staff checked the spread of the blight by eradicating affected plants and implementing site-wide practices that stopped the spread of the disease. While communicating with other public gardens in the area, we shared information about the blight with our Georgetown neighbors. Though we suffered the loss of some boxwood, particularly along the walkway to the Smokehouse and along paths in the North Garden, Tudor Place has emerged from this experience prepared to advance our recovery from the blight with more preventative measures in the spring.

Even more disheartening was the loss of an ancient white oak tree in the northeast corner of the site. Sometime during the night of November 15, the stately oak that was witness to more than two centuries of life at Tudor Place toppled to the ground. Fortunately, no one was injured and the damage to adjacent plantings was minimal (except for our nearby trees that fell with the oak). Despite our past efforts to preserve this tree through restrictive pruning, root stimulation, and our daily prayers, its day had come and it fell peacefully in the night. Each day I am reminded that an important part of the living heritage of Tudor Place is gone, as the sun shines brightly through my office windows where once this mighty oak had offered its shade.

Although we are saddened by the loss of boxwood and the white oak, we respect the forces of nature that can change these historic landscapes and seek to learn from each of these experiences. In the coming months, we will share our process for recovery from each of these events. We appreciate your interest and love for this important historic site.

Mark Hudson
Executive Director

*for details on caring for boxwood visit: www.tudorplace.org/boxwood
January at Tudor Place

Every January Tudor Place closes its doors to the public for its annual cleaning. The Collections team undertakes a thorough cleaning of the treasures displayed in all the rooms of the mansion. During this time, we remove everything from the space and place the objects in an adjoining room. Paintings, engravings and other framed works of art are taken down from the walls, and the carpets are rolled and removed. After the room is emptied, it is dusted and vacuumed. Moisture readings are taken, and cracks in the plaster are measured to ensure the condition hasn’t changed since the previous January. As stewards of more than 15,000 objects in the Tudor Place Collection and Archive, we are dedicated to preserving the treasured objects entrusted to us by generations of the Peter family. Tours resumed in February, Tuesdays-Saturdays, 10:00 am - 4:00 pm and Sundays, 12:00 pm - 4:00 pm.

Tudor Place History Quiz

1. Tudor Place’s annual fundraising gala, the Spring Garden Party, is in its ______ year.
   a) 19th  c) 27th
   b) 30th  d) 5th

2. The Tudor Place annual plant sale typically coincides with which international day of observation?
   a) Easter  c) Mother’s Day
   b) Earth Day  d) National Donut Day

3. Which event occurs every January at Tudor Place?
   a) Cleaning and collections maintenance
   b) Exterior power wash of mansion
   c) Weeding the Bowling Green
   d) Annual Board Meeting

4. Which events are free with an annual membership at Tudor Place?
   a) Tudor Nights
   b) Landmark Lectures
   c) New Year Breakfast and Behind the Scenes Tour
   d) Holiday extravaganza, Tudor Lights
   e) All of the above

5. Of the many flowers that bloom in the Tudor Place gardens, which is shown here?
   a) Lavender
   b) Tulip
   c) Balloon Flower
   d) Hornwort

Answers: c 2 3 4 5

2019 Tudor Place Board of Trustees:

We are pleased to welcome Scott Altman to the Tudor Place Board of Trustees. Scott was elected at the Board’s Annual Meeting in December. Our thanks are extended to Pamela Jenkinson, whose service on the Board of Trustees concluded in December, and to Daniel Dowd, who is serving as treasurer for the second year of a term begun by Kate Carr.

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PLEASE JOIN US FOR THESE UPCOMING EVENTS

TUESDAYS-SUNDAYS IN FEBRUARY

Washington Dollar Days: Tour for a Buck
Practice frugality our founding father would approve of: Pay just $1 per person for any regular tour in February, the month of George Washington's birth. We are DC’s only historic house museum with family ties to Martha and George Washington. Highlights of the Washington Collection will be on display as part of all house tours. See it all for one “Washington dollar!” Tours offered every day but Monday; last tour of the day starts at 3 p.m.
Tudor Place Member FREE | Non-Member $1

TUESDAYS, MARCH-APRIL | 10:00 AM – 10:45 AM
TUESDAYS, JUNE-OCTOBER | 10:00 AM – 10:45 AM

Tudor Tots
Join our weekly program tailored to inspire creativity and stimulate the senses. Toddler-approved activities are based on a weekly theme and include songs, stories, crafts and movement. Parents or caregivers must remain with children at all times.
Children $5 | Adults FREE

SATURDAY, APRIL 13 | 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
THURSDAY, APRIL 18 | 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
FRIDAY, APRIL 19 | 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
SATURDAY, APRIL 20 | 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Eggstravaganza!
Eggstravaganza!, Tudor Place’s lively egg hunt and egg roll on the sprawling South Lawn, is back by popular demand. Due to overwhelming demand, a 4th date was added to this popular springtime tradition. Fun for the whole family includes decorating a festive animal magnet, making a jumbo egg-hanging decoration and playing traditional children’s games. Bring your camera for photo ops with the Easter Bunny.
Tudor Place Member Child $10 | Non-Member Child $15 | Accompanying Adult $5

SAVE THE DATE!
WEDNESDAY, MAY 22 | 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM

2019 27th Annual Spring Garden Party
Join us for Tudor Place’s annual fundraising gala that contributes to over 20% of the annual operating budget for educational programming, site maintenance, grounds preservation and collections conservation. A grand celebration takes place under a sailcloth tent on the South Lawn. Tickets go on sale in May.

VISIT US AT WWW.TUDORPLACE.ORG/PROGRAMS OR CALL 202.965.0400.