

## **NEWSLETTER**

### **Winter 1998**

#### **RENOWNED CURATOR TO TAKE LIBRARY HELM**

There is, perhaps, no one more appropriate to direct the development of the National First Ladies' Library than its new Executive Advisor, Edith Mayo. Curator Emeritus in Political History at the National Museum of American History, Mayo has devoted her career to exploring the role of women in the evolution of American democracy.

Mayo earned national recognition for her reconceptualization of the Smithsonian Institute's famous exhibit on America's First Ladies. Once merely a collection of gowns, *First Ladies: Political Role and Public Image* is now an interactive exhibit that presents a more complete view of each woman and her contributions to politics and the social issues of the period in which she lived.

Mayo also curated the major, permanent exhibition *From Parlor to Politics: Women and Reform in America, 1890-1925*, exploring women's entry into reform and politics at the turn of the century and their impact on American social policy. Retired after more than 25 years as a curator and historian at the Smithsonian Institution, Mayo is active in the field of women's history and brings a wealth of knowledge and dedication to the National First Ladies' Library.

#### **OHIO FAMILY DONATES HISTORIC LETTERS**

We all know the story: A person cleaning out the attic comes across an old painting, vase or some other item and thinks it might be valuable. An appraisal proves the painting to be worth millions, the vase to be a rare treasure. We sigh wistfully and perhaps go and search our own attics.

Thanks to the generosity of two Ohio women who did just that, the National First Ladies' Library has five valuable letters written by President and Ida McKinley in its collection. Patricia Cole France of Massillon, and her daughter, Chrisse France of Cleveland Heights, donated the documents that had been with their family for generations.

The family connection comes through Patricia Cole France's great grandfather, Dr. Peter H. Barr and her mother, Ada Mary Pettit. One of the letters from President McKinley to Dr. Barr discusses a law in which both men were interested. Barr, a long time friend of the McKinleys, was a Canton druggist who lived next door to the McKinleys. The letters written by Ida McKinley were addressed to Minnie Barr, older sister of Winnie Barr Pettit, Ada Mary's mother. Ida McKinley gave Ada Mary a scrap of her wedding dress to be made into doll clothes when the girl was about four years old.

The National First Ladies' Library expresses its sincere thanks to Patricia Cole France and Chrisse France for their valuable donation to the Library's collection.

## **LIBRARY RESTORATION NEARS COMPLETION**

Restoration of the historic Saxton-McKinley House, the Canton home of the National First Ladies' Library, is nearly complete.

Under the direction of board member Dr. Sheila Fisher of Canton, the last remaining residence of President and Mrs. Ida McKinley is being restored with painstaking historical accuracy.

A retired psychologist and active community volunteer, Fisher spent countless hours researching and documenting the fine details of the renovation. For example, starting with a photograph of President McKinley's study, Fisher identified the wallpaper as an American Alhambran wallfill printed in the 1880s. Piecing this detail with the knowledge that highly patterned papers with exotic motifs were considered suitable for a gentleman's study at that time, Fisher selected three additional historic papers to cover the ceiling and borders.

The paper hanging in the study was produced by Bradbury & Bradbury of California, a purveyor of historic wallpapers. Working from a scrap of identical wallpaper from its archives, the company recreated the handblocks that were used to print the original papers and produced the material now covering the study's walls. "To have wallpaper with Oriental scenes spoke of being well-traveled and well-read," Fisher explained.

Similarly, the 23 intricate patterns of wallpaper and border trim in the main parlor reflect the mixed revival of Renaissance and Baroque motifs popular in Italianate and Second Empire interiors following the Civil War. This room was modeled after the 1868 Lockwood-Matthews mansion in Norwalk, Connecticut, considered to be the most sumptuous private home of its time. "This was the mid-nineteenth century way of expressing solid confidence in the progress of civilization, education and western culture," Fisher said.

## **SPONSORS HELP ENSURE THE FUTURE OF HISTORY**

Development of the National First Ladies' Library has progressed tremendously with the generous support of its founding sponsors. George Davidson, Chairman of the Founding Sponsors Committee and Chairman and CEO of Consolidated Natural Gas Company, said, "The contributions of America's First Ladies to America's political and social history are largely unknown or unappreciated, and we hope our involvement with the National First Ladies' Library will help make this information available to future generations."

The Library expresses its sincere thanks to The Coca-Cola Company, Consolidated Natural Gas Company, General Motors Corporation, The Longaberger Company, MARBEL Energy Company, Microsoft Corporation, Northern Telecom, The Procter & Gamble Company and The Timken Company.

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