HISTORY BEGINS AT HOME.
The Historic House Trust is a not-for-profit organization operating in tandem with the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation. Our mission is to provide essential support for houses of architectural and cultural significance, spanning 350 years of New York City life. These treasures reside within city parks and are open to the public.

BEYOND THE PARLOR
In this issue, we turn our lens out beyond our houses to examine the modern context in which these historic sites are situated. HHT Architectural Conservator Mikel Travisano captures the dynamic cityscapes surrounding HHT houses in a series of photo collages. Mikel has a diverse career as a photographer, and has used architectural photography to construct photo montages and to create large format works.

“this is my home”
VISITING HHT VOLUNTEERS

BEYOND THE PARLOR

landscapes and vistas
AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN TAURANAC
The Romance & the Reality

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Sarah Brockett, Editor

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A NOTE FROM
FRANKLIN D. VAGNONE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“Looking for something? My socks. Why don’t you look in your sock drawer? That’s where I found my underwear. Oh. Well, try your underwear drawer? I am in my underwear drawer.”

Cary Grant & Myrna Loy—Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House (1948)

I love my apartment. I was sitting at my kitchen table, drinking coffee and preparing for the work day. Piles of papers and books battled with my coffee cup for space on the table, much as my assorted furniture jockeys to claim a place against the wall. From the kitchen, I assessed the state of my entire apartment—the orderly but tightly packed closet, the basket of clean socks atop my bookshelf, and the large container full of silverware on a window sill—each attesting to my complete lack of storage space. Yet somehow I’m able to arrange this clutter and provide a sense of functional order. It is my attempt to live in a tight New York City apartment. I can choose to either romantically ignore the incongruent proximities or acknowledge them. Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House comes to mind as I try to reconcile the romance with the reality.

This same theme can be seen on a larger scale when looking at the city. Many of our historic houses are at the “end of the line” in what once would have been countryside. The city has grown up around them, with all of its ordered chaos encroaching. To get to the Dyckman Farmhouse in Inwood, for example, you take the A train to the last stop at 207th Street. On my first visit, I became uniquely aware (as only a newcomer can be) of the juxtaposition between the bustling neighborhood with its big buildings, bright signs, diverse languages, and busy sidewalks and the quaint, serene Dutch farmhouse.

I had a similar impression when visiting the Wyckoff Farmhouse for the first time. As I walked through its sparse, well-organized rooms, I occasionally glimpsed the outside world. The tire service station, liquor store, bodega, and buses outside were completely at odds with the quiet interior. Such anachronisms are often sublimated by the subtle cropping of PR images to exclude the modern streetscape around the site. We often pretend that a historic house has retained its historic context; the chaos of the city is kept at bay.

But what do our 23 houses say about today’s New York City? What meaning can they provide to centuries of change as the city has grown? How can our experience of these historic houses take into account the present as we seek the past? This newsletter addresses some of these complexities. We document the neighborhoods that surround the Dyckman and Wyckoff Farmhouses to recognize the past and present side by side. We seek out John Tauranac to share his perspective on urban growth and its impact on how we approach the houses, both physically and mentally. We examine the preservation of landscape, a hotly debated topic, at Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum. Finally, we introduce a new section: This Is My Home. These photo essays will highlight the real residences of volunteers at our houses. They offer a glimpse at how we live and choose to furnish our homes today.

WE SALUTE OUR CORPORATE MEMBERS

For information on corporate membership call 212-360-8282.
MIND THE GAP: INCONGRUENT PROXIMITIES AT HHT HOUSES

BY VICTORIA C. ROWAN

ANY OF HHT’S HOUSES can be found “at the end of the line.” Dyckman Farmhouse lies at the end of the A line in northern Manhattan, the Van Cortlandt House sits near the end of the 1 train, and the Lewis H. Latimer House, the Bowne House, and Kingsland Homestead all can be found where the 7 ends in Flushing. Yet, as in any metropolitan area, the outskirts are constantly shifting. Today, most of our houses at “the end of the line” exist in the midst of eclectic landscapes of apartment buildings, bodegas and local shops, mechanics, parking lots, athletic fields, and streets buzzing with activity. They remain pockets of history in an urban landscape.

A man who has done the most to help us navigate Gotham’s complex urban environment—the better to find these historic gems—is John Tauranac. Recognized in 1999 by Mayor Giuliani as the Centennial Historian of the City of New York, Tauranac is an author of several critically recognized books of urban and architectural history as well as publisher of his own eponymous imprint of maps (all detailed at Tauranac.com). He was first established as an expert on what he calls the “subterranean and street City” when he created the “undercover maps” for New York magazine in 1972 and 1973. They represented the ultimate insider’s knowledge: how to navigate Midtown and Wall Street using little-known tunnels and passageways to dodge the often brutal elements.

In a course he teaches at his alma mater, NYU, Tauranac explains how transportation developments impacted the growth of New York City. As he says, “population follows transportation; build it and people will go.” And, often, transportation follows geography. The first commuting systems were via the waterways; before the bridges and tunnels, boats were the only way to cross the Hudson and East Rivers. Seafaring ships came into South Street because the East River currents were so strong.

(continued on page 4)
LOTT HOUSE’S CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

“...constraints (face) many cultural landscape reports, especially when the site has changed considerably. Implicit in the above is an approach to writing the CLR for the Hendrick I. Lott house that, out of necessity, must make judgments on writing a history – and making recommendations – based as much on what is documented as on what is consistent and known for the house in its period but not necessarily documented. ...Interpreting the site is the overriding factor which guides the CLR.”

(excerpt from the 2009 Cultural Landscape Report, Joseph Disponzio and Linda Lawton)

The Trust would like to thank Councilman Lewis A. Fidler, the Brooklyn Team at the Department of Parks & Recreation Olmsted Center, and the Hendrick I. Lott House Preservation Association. We are working with the Parks Department and the Hendrick I. Lott House Preservation Association to design the Lott House park landscape, based on the findings and recommendations of the Cultural Landscape Report.

At odds with the street grid surrounding it, Lott Lane gently curves through Marine Park, Brooklyn along the same path it has for more than 300 years. The lane demarcates what was once the northern boundary of the Lotts’ family farm and was one of their primary circulation routes. Photograph by Mikel Travisano. Special thanks to 5 Boro Tile.

It rarely froze. The advent of larger steamboats in the mid 1800s, which needed a larger turning radius, prompted pier development on the wider Hudson River. Crosstown omnibuses enabled ferry commuters to traverse Manhattan island with ease. As Tauranac comments, “until the 1830s, New York City was a walking city... The growth of the horse cars on tracks halved travel time. Then trolley cars were even faster, then the elevated trains.”

But it was the subway that truly unlocked the expansion of the city. Following on the tails of the consolidation of the boroughs in 1898, the first portion of the subway opened on October 27, 1904, on a line that ran from City Hall to the Bronx. In many cases, tracks were laid out in the countryside, preceding and provoking residential development. In ten years, the subway carried 8 million passengers; by 1930, expanded lines carried more than 2 billion annually. Countryside in Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx was sliced and subdivided to provide housing for a population that finally had an opportunity to spread out.

As the subway system grew, its corresponding map became an essential tool and a recognized symbol for all New Yorkers. Yet maps, like all human endeavors, reveal the opinions and priorities of their creators, and Tauranac’s contributions to the cartography of New York are no exception. The first maps of the whole subway system were made by private designers like Andrew Hagstrom, whose original agenda in 1916 was to provide a clear map to direct customers to his new drafting business office; eventually he produced the first official Board of Transport maps in the 1940s. Tauranac left his mark on the City’s understanding of itself by chairing the Metropolitan Transit Authority’s subway map committee that released a new version in 1979. It remains the prevailing influence upon all successive versions.

When Tauranac began the project, the map in use since 1972 was an elegant, hyper-stylized map designed by Massimo Vignelli. It was an aesthetically stunning schematic representation of the system, like London’s Underground, with all the lines depicted in perfect parallels and right angles. Vignelli’s version imposed a streamlined order to the chaos of a transit network that had grown organically, without a coherent master plan over the decades. Yet the pretty picture glossed over a lot of inconsistencies. While Tauranac acknowledged its appeal, he argued the major problem with this depiction was that the factual distortion between the visual depiction and the geographical reality was greatly confusing to passengers—especially as some lines appeared east or west of the other, contrary to their actual locations.

In 1978 the Cooper Union hosted a debate between Vignelli and Tauranac, allowing each to defend his version. As one MTA consultant in the pro-Tauranac camp was quoted in a contemporary New Yorker article about the event, “People want to go places, not to subway stations.” The station
names did not indicate neighborhoods or landmarks or any other streetscape context. When the MTA conducted studies with college and high school students to test which map was easier for first-timers to find the most direct and efficient routes, the Tauranac map prevailed—as anyone who consults the maps in subway cars today can see. Tauranac describes this project of revising the MTA’s maps and signage as “an experience in pentimento or a palimpsest—peeling back the variety of signs that represented the accretion of generations.” Any city is an organism that is constantly shedding old skin and growing into a new one, and the subway map represents that metamorphosis.

Today, visitors to HHT’s houses unwittingly zip along multiple time warps as they journey to places that are no longer indicative of “the end of the line”: they ride in 21st century cars via tunnels dating back to the early 1900s and then walk past apartment buildings from the 1950s or shops from the 1980s to visit buildings constructed in the 1700s. And it is this impulse to mutate that makes HHT’s houses all the more necessary as contextual anchors for this ever-overhauling cycle of change. Few sites have the same surroundings as they did even 20 years ago—and that’s not even as far back as when the subway had wicker seats. Yet at HHT, we continue to see the end of the line as a portal to move in time, connecting the past to a present it never could have predicted.

As a mapmaker, John Tauranac recognizes the challenge of wanting to display accurate context while making routes easy to understand. Many of his map brochures provide both a stylized schematic version and a geographical representation that captures streets and local points of interest, including HHT houses.
VIRTUAL VINTAGE:
HISTORIC RICHMOND TOWN’S NEW ONLINE CLOTHING DATABASE
BY SARAH BROCKETT

FOR THE FIRST TIME, virtual visitors to Historic Richmond Town can glimpse dresses, petticoats, uniforms, camisoles, capes, bonnets, and shoes worn by Staten Islanders over the past 300 years. A portion of the Staten Island Historical Society’s vast clothing collection of approximately 7,900 items is now available for viewing in an online database. Together, the items on view tell the story of the American experience through the lives of Staten Islanders.

With a grant from the Coby Foundation, curators at Historic Richmond Town selected 134 items for professional photographing by V. Amessé Photography. These were modeled on dress forms, and the images have been uploaded into a searchable database along with extensive records detailing their history and fabrication. The styles and periods represented range from Colonial American, through the Civil War era, and onward to the 21st century. Designer fashions, occupational clothing, and sports attire all take the spotlight, and the stories of individual wearers bring life to them.

“We chose clothing as the first portion of the museum’s holdings to be made available digitally, due to strong scholarly interest and also because viewers benefit from seeing clothing mounted as it would appear on the human body. Online access also protects the fragile original materials from the risks of long-term display or repeated handling,” notes Chief Curator Maxine Friedman. Future plans call for collections of furniture, ceramics, and art to be added to the online collection.

The database will serve as an invaluable research tool for anyone investigating the history of clothing and textiles, and it also provides a successful model for similar projects at other Trust houses. Congratulations to the project team!

View the online collection at www.historicrichmondtown.org

above: This military uniform (circa 1775–1805) was given to the Staten Island Historical Society in 1940 by the Friendship Council, Junior Order of United American Mechanics of Port Richmond in Staten Island. Possibly worn during the American Revolution, the uniform, which includes a wool coat, fringed epaulets, waistcoat, leather breeches, and tricorn hat, is inscribed with the name of the original owner, W. H. Gorseline of Newburgh, New York.

top: Lined with iridescent red-green silk, this woman’s short cape (circa 1890–1905) is made of rust-brown wool with brown velvet attached capelet, embroidered black net overlay, and black beaded trim. The cape with its label from the Paris department store Au Bon Marché was donated as part of a large collection acquired in 1945 from the estate of Miss Katherine Seaman of Greenridge, Staten Island.
RAISING THE ROOF, AWARENESS, AND A GLASS TO NEW YORK CITY PRESERVATION

BY KAITY RYAN

On January 27, the Historic House Trust welcomed over 150 of New York’s art, media, and culture class to celebrate the launch of its latest membership group: Roof Raisers. With the Arsenal Gallery and Central Park as a backdrop, the evening kicked off with the sassy lyrics and vaudevillian strings of the Two Man Gentlemen Band. And as the band warmed up, guests did too with wine served by City Winery and lager from Brooklyn Brewery.

Guests ranging from young professionals to entrepreneurs to artists to philanthropists mingled amidst Raymond Sherman’s luminous sculptures. They nibbled lobster, shrimp and crab rolls from Luke’s Lobster in the East Village and met fellow New Yorkers looking to get involved in preserving the City’s history.

In addition to sampling lobster rolls, guests came to the Arsenal hoping to answer the question — what is a Roof Raiser? Taking a cue from 18th-century American life, Roof Raisers is loosely modeled on the principle of barn-raising: community working together toward a common, architectural goal. For Roof Raisers, that goal is to generate awareness and support for the work that the Historic House Trust does on a daily basis.

Much in the way that barns provided an economic wellspring for rural life, New York’s residential architecture is a source of the rich cultural heritage that defines our city. Roof Raisers will take part in that heritage by participating in a forum for ideas, volunteerism, and philanthropy in New York City.
PROVIDING A SENSE OF PLACE is one of the most valuable aspects of a historic house. Just as a house does not stay static over time but is altered and remodeled, its surrounding landscape undergoes constant change. It can be difficult to understand a historic house without some of the original landscape to help illustrate its siting and to provide a historic context.

Houses originally built as centerpieces of large estates, particularly in the New York City area, were often retreats from the noisy congestion of city life. Planning for construction took into account the best views, the most beneficial breezes, and the location of nearby woodland and farmland. But landscapes are certain to change over time—whether through human intervention or natural processes. As New York City grew, those acres once belonging to private estates have now been carved, rezoned, and developed; scarce and precious are those historic properties that have retained even a portion of their original property.

Bartow-Pell Mansion in the Bronx is one of the few remaining houses in the city where “vista” still plays a role. Located in 2,700 acres of what is today Pelham Bay Park, the house is surrounded by woodlands, meadows, and wetlands that give a glimpse of the rural nature of the Bronx that existed in the 19th century. Completed in 1842, the Greek Revival mansion was one of the grand country estates that served as a rural refuge from the metropolis. Today, HHT is working closely with the Parks Department and the Bartow-Pell Conservancy to redevelop the site, and help reestablish some of the historic significance of the surrounding grounds.

The challenges faced when dealing with the preservation of a historic landscape are numerous and complex. Much of the original land around Bartow-Pell Mansion is now part of the park; it has been altered to include a golf course, roadways, and walking trails. New vegetation and trees surround the house, and the original view from the house to Long Island Sound is now gone, interrupted by the creation of Orchard Beach in the 1930s.

Similar problems have been faced at other historic house sites. Fifty years ago at George Washington’s Mount Vernon, proposed development
of nearby land threatened to disrupt the view from the house. Recognizing the importance of the vista, the Board of Mount Vernon raised the alarm and the land was preserved. This important decision recognized that Washington’s design of the house is inevitably part of and shaped by the site.

This relationship between landscape and house was also the focus of a debate during the recent relocation of Alexander Hamilton’s Hamilton Grange. The National Park Service (NPS) ultimately decided that it was more important to have the house face away from modern construction, even though this necessitated changing the orientation of the front door. The decision maximized the site for a good view, but it compromised the original orientation of the house, changed its exterior, and affected the interplay of natural light in the interior.

Unlike Hamilton Grange, Bartow-Pell Mansion remains in its original physical context, though the 200-acre estate has been reduced to a landmarked 60-acre site. It has the rare privilege of retaining much of its historic context, and therefore its sense of place. In order to preserve this unique historic resource while changes are made to improve public access to the museum, Parks, HHT, and the Bartow-Pell Conservancy are developing a master plan for the site. The master plan has been charged with the difficult task of balancing the historic site within the larger context of the important natural areas that have grown around it over time. It addresses modern issues such as parking and public pathways, and historic issues of landscaping and views, all of which have an impact on the relationship between the house and its site.

One of the most pressing issues is how best to adapt the site to accommodate cars. In the 1930s the original layout of the front drive was altered, and a parking area was established directly in front of the mansion. The parking area does not meet the present-day needs for visitors and interrupts their approach to the house, introducing an “inauthentic” experience. Under the new plan, the driveway circulation may be restored to its original oval layout, with a new parking area located in a less visually obtrusive location.

Another major issue is the loss of the original vista toward the waterfront. The panoramic landscape from the house out to the Long Island Sound was emphasized in its construction by the alignment of the mansion to its surroundings. It is evident that the original design of the house and landscape recognized this important axial relationship between house and water; one can draw a clear centerline through the house to the Sound. The house’s inhabitants could look out from the first and second floor, down the sloping garden to the boats travelling up the Sound.

This significant connection between the mansion and the water has been obscured by both natural and manmade changes to the landscape. Most notably, the development of Orchard Beach in the 1930s irreversibly removed this vista. Robert Moses, the Commissioner of Parks, created Orchard Beach by joining together small islands and islets with tons of rock and sand and later constructed a large parking lot across it. The beach and lot blocked the view of the Sound from the house and eventually growth filled in the view.

In order to address the loss of historic views, the master plan proposes a compromise that will partly restore the original view corridor while continuing to hide the modern disruptions of Orchard Beach. Selective pruning and thinning of the landscape and woodlands will open up some of the original vista to the east toward Long Island Sound and southward toward Bartow Creek. Visitors can at least glimpse the views that were once a part of everyday life for the Bartow and Pell families. The development of the master plan for Bartow-Pell Mansion will help bring back a sense of history for visitors, highlighting the long and important relationship between the house and its landscape.
Elderhostel, now called Exploritas, is a nonprofit organization that provides exceptional learning adventures for older adults. Exploritas offers nearly 8,000 programs a year in more than 90 countries that include in-depth lectures, field trips, and cultural excursions.

Participants in the HHT program will have a rare and exclusive opportunity to learn about the history of New York City from the perspective of the parlor. Join in the fun for behind-the-scenes house tours, cooking demonstrations, craft activities, on-site lectures, and special hard-hat tours of restorations in progress.

**Opening Doors: Behind the Scenes with New York’s Historic House Trust**
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**Tia Bryant, a volunteer at the Wyckoff Farmhouse Museum**, was 3 years old in 1974 when her parents purchased a 1934 brick duplex located just blocks from the historic house in Flatlands. A third-generation Brookynite whose great grandparents emigrated from Barbados in the early 1900s, Tia and her daughter Anya still live in the house. Tia has seen the neighborhood change from a predominantly Jewish population to the present West Indian population. Her father was president of the neighborhood association and held an annual block party in their front yard. Today, Tia serves as its secretary, and she and Anya still host the annual cookout in their front yard.

Growing up in the neighborhood, Tia attended local P.S. 208, which Anya attends today. Tia remembers the Wyckoff Farmhouse before it was restored. “It was falling apart,” she recalls, “and then some people broke in and caught it on fire—that’s what caught everyone’s attention, and then the house was made into a museum.” Tia was in fifth grade when she and her classmates attended the ribbon ceremony for the museum’s opening.

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Volunteers from neighborhoods across the city help our houses continue to serve the public. They lead programs, man gift shops, stuff envelopes, and staff events. How did they come to dedicate their time and energy? Where do they live—might their houses someday become historic houses? In this new photo series, we take a peek into the homes and lives of our volunteers to catch a glimpse of history in the making.
BECOME A MEMBER!

By supporting our work of restoring and maintaining these extraordinary historic sites, you will help to preserve New York City’s rich architectural and cultural heritage.

All Trust members enjoy free admission to all the historic house museums in our collection, as well as our quarterly newsletters and members’ discounts at Trust events.

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The cheery blue kitchen was renovated in the 1950s. The kitchen is at the center of activity, with Anya doing homework at the breakfast table while Tia makes dinner. Tia loves to cook, so she helps out with educational cooking programs and food preparation at the Wyckoff Farmhouse. Tia and Anya also attend informal “cookout Thursdays” at the Farmhouse, where locals cook dinner together over the open fire pit. Anya loves to make popcorn over the fire during these evening gatherings.

I would LIKE TO BECOME A MEMBER OF THE HISTORIC HOUSE TRUST OF NEW YORK CITY:

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE, READ ABOUT:
The “incongruent proximities” of historic houses in an urban environment, preserving landscapes and vistas at Bartow-Pell Mansion, Historic Richmond Town’s new online collections database, HHT’s Roof Raisers, and visit HHT volunteers at their own house.

PLEASE VISIT WWW.HISTORICHOUSETRUST.ORG OR CALL 212.360.8282 FOR MORE INFORMATION