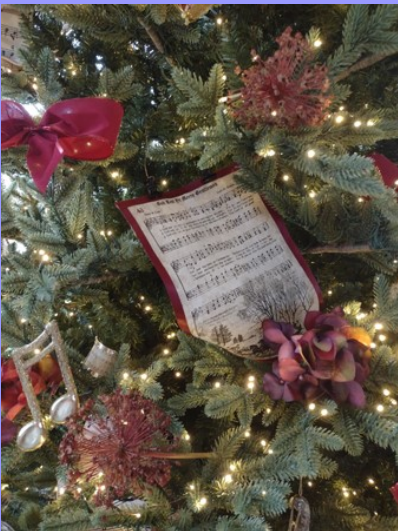


LAUREL HILL MANSION NEWS



The 2024 holiday theme at Laurel Hill Mansion was
The Sounds of Music

Laurel Hill Mansion was once again beautifully decorated by the Militia Hill Questers. More photographs of their wonderful creations are in the pages that follow.



A Message From the Vice President

As we look back on 2024, we are very grateful for our Laurel Hill family and friends who helped in so many ways. We filled the mansion with a festive Preview Party kicking off our Holiday Tours. During December, guests were able to see our house beautifully decorated by the Militia Hill Questers, visit our very popular shop, and purchase delicious gingerbread cookies. We are so appreciative of all the people who made this possible by hosting our guests, spreading the word by social media, signs and posters, donating to our shop, baking etc. Thank you!

In the spring of 2024, we were fortunate to welcome our new Guide Kara Christiansen. She has been a great asset in researching our history and sharing it so well with all our visitors.

Throughout the year we enjoyed so many events at Laurel Hill including our well-known Summer Concert series, Spring Tea, and Welcome America Family Day. We hosted Chess playing on the porch and Plein Air painting sessions, and met with other Park house directors. Although there is much work involved in preparing different events, the wonderful people at Laurel Hill make it fun!

Looking ahead to this year, and the next, we are very excited! In addition to our ongoing events, we are planning for some new programs. Our ideas include a Members Appreciation event in the spring with History presentations and refreshments on the porch, a Colonial Beer event, Historic Fact and Fiction Book Club, juried outdoor Sculpture Exhibit, and a Women's History event. We are also preparing for America's 250th Birthday Celebration. We will be opening and updating the Time Capsule started in 1976 by our founding members, holding a Benjamin Franklin event, and telling our story through media and live presentations.

There is much to do and many interesting projects both continuing and new. We would love to have more people involved to share ideas and fun with us. Please let us know if you, or someone you know, have interests, expertise, or energy to share. We are in the process of updating our committees and would be happy to have you with us.

Wishing each of you a very Happy New Year filled with Good Health, Good Times and Good Friends!

Christine Fisher Smith, Vice President WFGP

Many thanks to Kara Christiansen the 2024 Laurel Hill Mansion Tour Guide and Historic House Educator. Kara generously shared her talents as an artist and designer creating graphics for WFGP programs and creating the costumes she wore when guiding visitors through Laurel Hill Mansion. We look forward to Kara's return to Laurel Hill Mansion for the 2025 season.



Kara at the Yuletide tours in a costume she designed and made using thrifted tablecloth and sheets.

Women for Greater Philadelphia Members Opportunity

WFGP is collaborating with Philadelphia Sculptors on an exhibition that will take place on the grounds of Laurel Hill Mansion Summer / Fall 2025 titled Timeline. All members of Women for Greater Philadelphia are eligible to submit work for consideration.

Submission deadline: March 3, 2025

Artist notification: April 2025

Artwork delivery and installation: July 10-12, 2025

Exhibition: July 18 - October 17, 2025

Opening reception: Friday, July 18, 6-8 p.m.

Learn more or download the exhibition prospectus at

www.laurelhillmansion.org/art.html

It is time to pay WFGP Annual Dues

Dues are payable online at

www.womenforgreaterphiladelphia.org/pages/membership.html

A membership form can be printed at the same web address for those who wish to renew their membership or join as a new member with a check.

UPCOMING WFGP EVENTS

Women's History Event Sunday, March 23, 2025

Information will be posted at

www.womenforgreaterphiladelphia.org/pages/womens_history_month.html

The 2025 Women's History Month theme is

Moving Forward Together!

Women Educating & Inspiring Generations

Interested in having a part in choosing those whom Women for Greater Philadelphia will honor and creating the event where they will be presented with awards? Join the Women's History Month Committee! For more information or to join the committee e-mail c.smith@wfgp.org or s.kittner@womenforgreaterphiladelphia.org

Ice, Anyone?

The Women for Greater Philadelphia at Laurel Hill Mansion are extremely grateful to everyone who visited us to celebrate 2024. While on tour, we talk a lot about the summer season but did you know areas along the banks of our wonderful summer retreats were bustling during the cold, winter weather?

Wealthy Philadelphians constructed summer homes along the Schuylkill River. Enterprising businessmen, eager to profit from these pampered lifestyles, established ice harvesting businesses by cutting blocks of ice from the banks of our scenic waterway. Harvesting ice was physically challenging and in demand. It was extremely fashionable to serve cold beverages and desserts made with ice in the heat of the summer but this luxury item had to be obtained in the cold of winter.

Ice houses which were essentially elaborate pits in the ground with roofs were used to store large amounts of ice for warm weather. Documentation exists about these outbuildings at both Lemon Hill and Mt. Pleasant, neighboring properties to Laurel Hill Mansion. It is safe to assume additional ice houses existed in the area. Jonathan Williams purchased Mt. Pleasant in 1792. His receipt book for payments to workmen in 1793 documents repairs and painting to the ice house which was apparently part of his property purchase.

We don't know if ice was shared or sold to neighboring property owners.

A well constructed ice house was generally 18 ft. deep and 16 ft. wide, in a conical shape which narrowed as it deepened. Most of the structural volume was underground. The above and below ground walls were constructed of thick stone or brick (see illustration of Mt. Pleasant ice house). The bottom interior contained leveled gravel so melting ice could drain. Above ground, walls could rise as high as 10 ft. with shingled roofs stuffed with straw for added insulation. Ice could successfully be stored there until the following autumn.

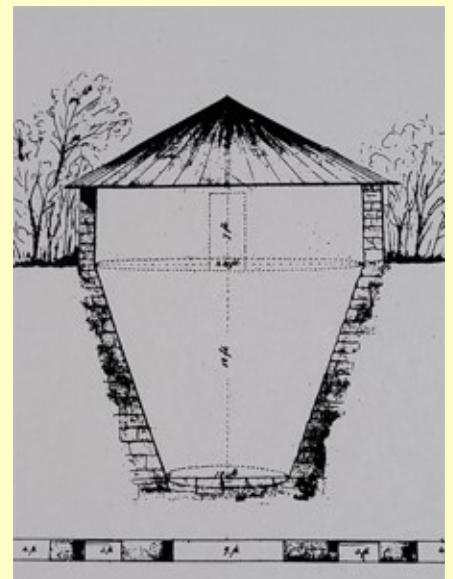
Both Washington and Jefferson built ice houses on their properties. Jefferson enjoyed "summer ice" while on his tour of duty as the minister to France in 1785-89 where he ate sorbets, ice cream, and drank cold lemonade. In his own ice house, he installed racks to chill wine.

Having money to afford frozen water in sweltering heat not only provided bragging rights to the wealthy but more importantly provided better health. "Summer Complaint" was noted by diarrhea brought on by intestinal bacteria due to lack of food preservation. This was the second cause of death after consumption in the colonial era.

Ice saved meat from spoiling, milk would not sour and butter no longer ended in slimy puddles.

Just imagine what ice harvesters could have done with the ability to produce 6-packs of beer and bags of Doritos!

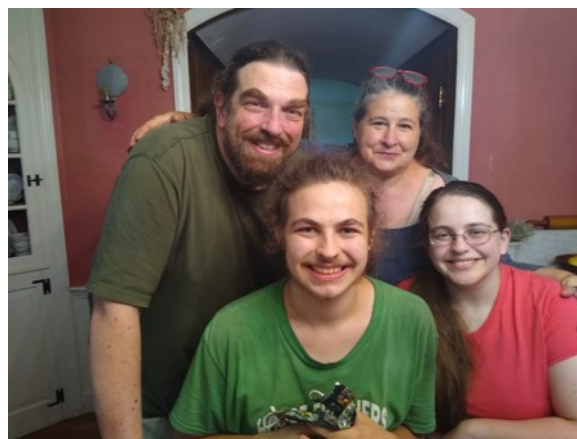
Enjoy your cocktails,
Christine Mifsud,
Board Member of Women for Greater Philadelphia



Mt. Pleasant Ice House

GINGERBREAD COOKIES

OUR TREAT AT LAUREL HILL MANSION



Laurel Hill Mansion is known for its delicious gingerbread cookies and we were delighted to feature them again for 2024. Baked by the Robert Werner household of Sturbridge, Massachusetts, this family has the baking process down to an art form. Suzanne (mom), Sophie, Alexander, and Rob (father), all work together to make the gingerbreads. Being the third year of their offering, I thought I would travel to their home and get a good view of the operation. (I am the grandmother as well as a proud member of WFGB.)



Master Gingerbread Dough Mixer, my grandson Alexander, 21, read the recipe and gathered all the needed supplies on the counter. After he added the ingredients one at a time the professional mixer did the rest of the work. Soon he divided the dough onto the wax paper and wrapped it carefully. The dough package was then placed into the refrigerator for an overnight chilling.

The next morning the large dining room table became the worktable with a baking mat, rolling pin, dough, flour, and gingerbread cookie cutters—a boy and a girl. Trays were lined with baking sheets and the work began. This time my daughter-in-law Suzanne took over the rolling of the dough and soon the cut out cookies were ready for

the oven. The cooling racks were set up and when the tray was finished baking, we carefully placed the cookies onto them. When the cookies were cooled, the cookies were transferred to large trays to rest for the overnight. The baking rack held many trays and we wrapped the cart with plastic to keep the cookies airtight.





The following morning the hard work of trimming the cookies with the icing began. Now my granddaughter Sophie really has the agility to work on icing the gingerbreads. I learned how to do this too but my hands tired as we iced each and every cookie. After the icing, we again had to wait a day until we could pack the cookies individually into a plastic covers and seal each with a label that shared the ingredients and baked in a NUT FREE KITCHEN. (Sophie created the labels for us.) This was a family production line as Suzanne placed 50 cookies to a box. Boys and Girls were separated. We did this for 4 days until all were packaged and placed in the boxes.

Then the process was restarted as we had more dough to be rolled and baked. We again had a production line with the same routine. Yes, another day of the exact same process as the day before. Cookies cooling overnight on trays covered in plastic and then icing the cookies. (I found the boy gingerbreads easy to ice as those girls really have some curly hair and decorative dresses.)



We even made cut outs of gingerbread boys and girls that were about 10 inches tall that we sold in the Gift Shoppe. The fun of these was being more creative with the icing. It wasn't the size of the cookie but the scent of gingerbread that was most appealing. Nothing is more welcoming to our visitors then the delightful smell of the gingerbread. (As the driver bringing home the cookies for the 5 hour ride, it was heavenly.)

As side note, the creation of gingerbread cookies takes time in planning the purchase of ingredients and who is doing which job in the assembly line. We wore white jackets, hats, and even gloves while handling the cookies, and I even had gingerbread aprons for us to wear. The best part of our baking adventure was the memories that were created. I am proud of them for offering their talents and as a final reward, I have given them a membership to the WFGP.



Nancy Werner, WFGP Board Member

WELCOME HOME

Over its long life, Laurel Hill Mansion has been home to many individuals, families and organizations. In the early 1960s, the Marine Corps League, a veterans group, was once headquartered at the mansion for some ten years.



"Dedication of Randolph (Laurel Hill) Mansion in Fairmount Park as national headquarters of the Marine Corps League" at Veterans Day ceremonies on November 11, 1961. Photo courtesy of the Temple University Archive, George D. McDowell Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Collection.

Today, the National Marine League is headquartered in Stafford VA. Sadly, the national organization knows little about its history at its former outpost. Research efforts are ongoing however to uncover who were its former members; what kinds of activities the group supported, and possibly early site photos! Interestingly, some physical remnants of the organization's early years at the mansion still exist—the drop ceilings with recessed lighting in the sitting room and in our current office — when the first floor wing was subdivided into four office cubicles.

This year, Women for Greater Philadelphia is gearing up to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2026 as part of Philadelphia250 events, but the Semiquincentennial isn't the only important anniversary. This Fall, the Navy and Marine Corps celebrate their American Revolution-era founding with HomeComing250! The Philadelphia-based HomeComing250 organizers are actively recruiting helpers and enthusiasts in honoring the legacy of the Corps.

An array of public events are planned in Philadelphia and Camden, including Blue Angel flyovers, a flotilla of navy ships that date from the American Revolution to the present, and a dedication of a recreated Tun Tavern in Old City. Up to 500,000 military veterans, friends and family are expected to visit Philly in October and November this year. The City's tourism industry is fully on board! Members of the Association of Philadelphia Tour Guides anticipate working with HomeComing250 by promoting and hosting tours, programs and exhibits.

*The Navy was founded on October 13, 1775; the Marines were founded on November 10, 1775.

Anita McKelvey, Former Fairmount Park House tour guide and site historian, Anita McKelvey, is a founding member of the Association of Philadelphia Tour Guides.

Women for Greater Philadelphia, the Navy and Marines Corps



Rear Adm. Richard C. Ustick escorts WFGP founding member Carolyn Ancker down the runway at a WFGP fashion show at the Union League.



Captain Arthur Clark escorts WFGP founding member Martha Gable down the runway at a WFGP fashion show at the Union League.

In 1980, the City of Philadelphia undertook a massive campaign to make Philadelphia more attractive to the Navy. As part of this effort Women for Greater Philadelphia, WFGP, was invited to send hostesses in colonial gowns to greet arriving ships. WFGP, presented copies of Museum Showcase* guide to the ship Captains for their crews and families. Every aircraft carrier was visited while they were being refurbished, including USS Saratoga and the John F. Kennedy. WFGP and its members formed many happy relationships with the captains and crews as well as with the Officers Wives Club, inviting them to special events at Laurel Hill.

In 1982 when Admiral C. Johnson was Naval Base Commander he asked the WFGP to help promote the sale of tickets for the Army-Navy football game. The first year was a huge success and the Admiral in charge permitted WFGP to purchase good seats for the game and attend the pre-game brunch at the Base for many years to come. When the Philadelphia Navy Yard was closed many WFGP members attended the emotional closing ceremony.

Given that Laurel Hill Mansion is a Blue Star Museum, the combined history of Laurel Hill Mansion and the National Marine League, WFGP's relationship with the Philadelphia Navy Yard personnel and their families perhaps the offer of a homecoming welcome to the Navy and Marine Corps is in order. Hosting a special exhibit, event or music program honoring the 250th anniversary of both the Marines and Navy at Laurel Hill Mansion seems appropriate. All ideas and support is welcome!

Email events@laurelhillmansion.org with yours.

*Museum Showcase was a program WFGP created to highlight Pennsylvania and Delaware Valley Museums which they ran from 1977 to 1985 when the Public Relations Committee of the Museum Council of Philadelphia and Delaware Valley requested that WFGP transfer the Museum Showcase promotion to them.

A PRICELESS PAINTING IN THE WARMING ROOM



One of the interesting things about volunteering at the Laurel Hill Mansion are the stories that are learned. As I was checking out one customer she pulled out her cell phone and began to take photos of the watercolor painting over the hearth in the “warming room.” I thought, “oh boy, she is going to ask me about whom they are and I don’t know”. BUT what a surprise when she said to me, “I know that couple”. With that opening, she shared that they were Bill and Gloria Earnest of Glenside. They had joined the Women of Greater Philadelphia many years ago and supported the Laurel Hill Mansion as much as they could. The outfits that they wore were of the Revolutionary Days and were sewn by Gloria herself. They were so proud of their involvement. Who did the watercolor, I do not know but it represents the dedication of many of the members of the Women of Greater Philadelphia.

I asked how she knew them and she shared that they were her neighbors. They were the best neighbors ever. She proceeded to share that Bill passed away a few years back but Gloria continued to live in their home. As she became older, her daughter moved her to Connecticut to have Gloria be near her. The friendly customer received Holiday cards every year until they stopped. Gloria, too had passed away.

The photos she was taking were for her to send to her brothers as she wanted them to also see their old neighbors. She promised to return again so she could again see the painting of her former neighbors. You never know what you will learn as you share your time at the mansion. Always something to be gained.

Nancy Werner, Board Member of WFGP

The Militia Hill Questers Decorating Laurel Hill Mansion



WFGP Members Holiday Preview Party



www.womenforgreaterphiladelphia.org

Women for Greater Philadelphia, Inc. is a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation of volunteers.