

PICKERING HOUSE NEWSLETTER



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The Pickering House Newsletter

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Tag Goodhue, Janice Dodge and Ben Pickering at the June Open House. Janice represents Salem Five, who sponsored the new design of the Pickering Brochure.

Dear friends of the Pickering House,

As you read this newsletter, fall has arrived and hopefully you've had a relaxing summer. I have reached the year-and-a-half mark of my important job as president of the Pickering Foundation. By now, you will have all received my President's letter and hopefully you've renewed your annual membership.

It has been a productive year for the Pickering Foundation with a great deal accomplished thus far. In May, John Goff, of Salem Preservation & Design, completed his report on the house for the Massachusetts Historical Commission. In April, we hosted a very successful and entertaining fund-raising

dinner for 40 guests featuring the Glover Regiment in their period garb and singing songs. At our annual open house in June, we announced that Salem Five generously sponsored the printing and mailing (Keep an eye on your mailbox!) of our newly designed brochure. The beautiful brochure redesign was handled by Dana Jones and Jim Witham of Skunk Hollow Design.

For those of you who could not attend the annual open house, the Foundation was gratefully surprised to receive 150 letters of correspondence written by Colonel Timothy Pickering, presented by Gerry and Nancy

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Completed Pickering House Report Paves Way for Chimney Repair and Other Projects

By John Goff

The year 2006 might best be described as "The Year of the Pickering House" as in Salem's 380th anniversary year, Historic Preservation & Design (HPD) and Structures North Consulting Engineers, Inc. (SNCE) finished preparing a Historic Structures Report & Restoration Plan for the repair, restoration and ongoing maintenance of the ancient and beloved Pickering House at 18 Broad Street in Salem. Supported by a \$20,000 Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF) grant administered by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC), a division of the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth, William Francis Galvin, Secretary, the Pickering Foundation undertook to procure plans and specifications for the appropriate repair of the collapsing central chimney of the Pickering House, while also commissioning a broader study of the house's evolution, significance, neighborhood, maintenance needs, and educational potential.

Regarding the most pressing technical challenge at hand: how to appropriately repair the central chimney, which has been dropping into the basement in recent years, architect John Goff of HPD and John Wathne of SNCE jointly examined the problem conditions in the house. A repair method has been designed, engineered, and approved by the MHC, which will entail the following steps:

1. Steel needle beams will be inserted into the brick chimney above the first floor, and lifted so as to remove the estimated 30 tons of chimney weight and load from the crumbling stone chimney base in the basement. To carry the load, temporary shores will be built in the basement, and the existing wood first floor will be cushioned and supported while transferring the weight downwards.

2. A portion of the first floor stair hall wood floor will be removed so as to provide access to the top of the ancient 17th century dirt core portions of the failing chimney base.

3. Archaeologists, followed by excavators, will remove the entire dirt core from within the stone retaining-walled area of the old chimney base. The dirt will be removed from the house, possibly using a conveyor belt or dirt conveyance system.

4. As the dirt is removed, the back or inner surface of



A circa 1900 view of the Pickering House.

the old stone walls will be exposed and grouted with new mortar by masons to reinforce the old stone wall, which shall be reinforced and retained in place.

5. Once a whole new room is created where the dirt used to be in the chimney base, new excavations shall be made at basement floor level. New concrete footings shall be poured, which shall support new concrete masonry walls which shall be designed and built to safely carry the 30-ton load, without settling or failure. There will be two new masonry walls on concrete footings constructed, one each beneath the west and east chimney stacks.

6. A new door opening will be cut on the south side of the old stone retaining wall in the basement, so as to provide new basement access to the new basement room, or space beneath the new basement chimney support walls, once they are built.

7. The new basement support walls and structure will be carried up to carry the old chimney stacks, and the old stacks lowered to the new support base at the appropriate time.

8. Once the old stacks are joined to the new support base at the correct elevation, the needle beams shall be removed, as well as the temporary shores and associated cushions and blocking.

9. The first floor stair hall floor shall be repaired and restored, and all the other hearths and mantels damaged by the dropped stacks shall be repaired as well.

10. Recognizing that periodic water ingress into the basement was likely the primal cause of the deteriorated chimney base in the first place, additional repairs will be made that shall include a new basement dehumidification

system, repair of missing and damaged basement windows, a cut-back of many plants adjacent to the house that made inspection of basement wall conditions difficult or impossible, and the repair, where needed, of site grading and/or defective downspouts where rain water was allowed to periodically migrate and collect in the west half of the basement.

While significant funds will be needed to undertake the project (precise costs are not yet known, but an \$80,000+ to \$100,000 estimate for just the chimney work has been provided), the chimney repair project is acutely needed, both to restore a central character-defining feature of the house, and to eliminate water leakage, which has been a persistent and troublesome problem for many years. By reducing the size and relocating many plants closest to the house, the project will also succeed in helping to restore the Pickering House more to its very attractive mid- to late-19th-century Salem appearance.

In addition to preparing plans and specifications to guide a central chimney repair, the project prepared by Historic Preservation & Design and Structures North also made recommendations to restore other parts of the property, including reconstruction of a lost Federal-style octagonal gazebo, repair and rebuilding of the beautiful Gothic Revival-style front fence, restoration of a granite step and carriage mount that used to face Broad Street, reconstruction of a lost hitching post, and introduction of a fine new Pickering House sign for the estate that would also include carved letters and a profile portrait of Timothy Pickering.

Colonel Pickering stands as one of Salem's greatest military and Revolutionary War heroes, as well as a noted maritime figure for his role supervising the construction of "Old Ironsides," the USS Constitution. Coincident with restoring the Pickering House, the report recommends applying to the National Park Service to have the house be declared a National Historic Landmark, and developing ancillary space nearby (perhaps in the old COA building across Broad Street) where Pickering's legacy and Salem's role in the American Revolution can be better explored and interpreted to the visiting public. The COA building, originally built as a school building in the 1850s, may soon be vacated if a new Senior Center is built. The COA building additionally has large meeting rooms, parking, and handicapped accessibility to support such a new use, and overlooks not only the Pickering House, but the Broad Street Burial Ground, originally described as the cemetery on "Pickering Hill." Connection of the Pickering House to other historic neighborhood attractions is also recommended, using a variety of new visitor walking tours.



Ben Pickering, president, and Gerry Whitehead. Gerry donated 150 letters written by Col. Timothy Pickering.

From the president

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Whitehead (Gerry's mother was a Pickering) of Farmington, Conn. This unique gift from the Whitehead family to ours is cherished as a welcome addition to articles that connect Colonel Tim to the house. We thank Gerry and Nancy again for recognizing the importance of their letters to the Pickering House.

In 2007, the Foundation will be busier than ever and we hope you'll be there to help out and participate. Our Chimney Restoration Fund-raising Committee will be planning more events that promise to be as much fun as successful for this important project. With all of these accomplishments, we hope to continue to bring to the public's attention the historical importance of the Pickering House and the need for preservation we now face.

Looking ahead, family and friends of the Pickering House are urged to chip in with any ideas or other contributions that may improve the well being of the house. I know that within our membership we have a lot of untapped talent that could make repairs or improvements on the house or grounds. The hard work that the Goodhues perform to make the house function day to day could be greatly enhanced with a little effort from the rest of us.

The Board of Trustees of the Pickering Foundation thanks you again for your past and present support and we look forward to your future participation in our ongoing efforts to preserve the heritage of this great old house. Thank you,

H. Ben Pickering

APRIL 1ST PICKERING PARTY



At the chimney fund benefit dinner party, Glover's Regiment, above, regales the Pickering guests with toasts and chanteys. Below, Sarah Pickering Weese and Dickon Armstrong are enjoying the evening.

The Pickering cousins joined forces to throw the first fund-raising dinner party to benefit the chimney rebuilding effort. The black-tie affair included family, board members and friends of the foundation, with lively entertainment provided by the Glover Regiment.

The evening began in the library with cocktails served by bartenders Mike Pickering and Racket Shreve and elegant hors d'oeuvres passed by Carol, Nina, Rich and eight-year-old Grace Pickering, dressed in a Victorian costume. The Regiment, attired in Colonial garb, sang sea shanties and other historical and hysterical numbers. John Goff spoke to the group about the chimney and the architectural significance of the house.

Magnificent tables were set in the dining room and parlor



with antique Pickering floral vases arranged with blue, white and yellow flowers. Five courses were served with fabulous wine pairings selected and poured by Richard O'Dwyer, our erudite family sommelier. The meal was prepared by chefs Edie Armstrong and Rich Pickering, and included such delectable offerings as cod with fennel ragout, baby greens salad, filet mignon and roquefort roil lards, mashed potato and parsnip, roasted asparagus, cheeses and assorted cakes for dessert. Dinner was followed by more conversation and "nightcaps" in the library. The merry evening was enjoyed by all and a second Gala Dinner is eagerly anticipated.

The entire event was planned, prepared and paid for by the Pickering members of the board, with much assistance provided by Tag and Sherrie Goodhue. —Edie Armstrong



During the Pickering Dinner Party in April, top row, Chef Edie Armstrong, with a tool of her trade, takes a well-deserved break. Richard O'Dwyer, Katharine Pickering, Leila Jahnke and Nina Pickering enjoy an evening of family and friends. Above middle, Racket Shreve serenades the other help, and Hap Binney and Tim Pickering enjoy dinner. Above, John Pickering and Ellie Cabot share a smile, and the Pickerings and Fifields pause in conversation to smile for the camera.

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TO DATE (10/27)

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Foundation members are welcome to attend the June Open House.

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TO DATE (10/27)

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* Indicates a Life Member

The final tally of membership and donations will appear in the Spring 2007 Newsletter.