

Vol. 4 No. 4
Fall 2009

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SAVE THE DATE!

**Historic House
Festival**

**Saturday & Sunday,
September 12 & 13**

Historic houses in parks throughout the five boroughs will open their doors for special events and tours. See the Event Calendar or visit www.historichousetrust.org for details.

**HISTORY BEGINS
AT HOME.**

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.

PRINTING OF THIS NEWS-
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PUBLISHED
QUARTERLY BY THE
HISTORIC HOUSE TRUST
OF NEW YORK CITY.

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ISSN 1083-379x.*

THE TRUST COLLECTION GROWS

BY MEREDITH SORIN



The Bowne House in Flushing, Queens, seen here in a 1905 postcard, joins the Historic House Trust.

THE HISTORIC HOUSE TRUST is proud to announce the latest addition to its collection—the Bowne House in Flushing, Queens! Built c. 1661, the house is one of the oldest surviving structures in New York City and the oldest in Queens. The property was donated to the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation by the Bowne House Historical Society (BHHS), the nonprofit organization that will continue to operate the house as a museum.

The house is a fine example of mid-17th century Anglo-Dutch architecture with an exceptional collection of furnishings, but its true magic is its story. The house was built by John Bowne, a prominent Quaker and advocate of religious freedom, who emigrated from England to Boston in 1649 and eventually settled in Flushing, Queens. His family prospered in America and became businessmen, educators, politicians, and horticulturists (see

page 4). The contributions of this family to New York City's heritage began with the courageous actions of John Bowne, who used the house as the first indoor meeting place (1661-1694) for the Society of Friends, which, at the time, was forbidden by law.

BHHS purchased the house from the last occupants, the Parsons sisters, and has operated it as a museum since 1947. In 2000 the house, which had begun to suffer from gradual decay, was closed to the public. Shortly thereafter, BHHS joined forces with HHT and the City to ensure the preservation of this historically, architecturally, and culturally significant structure.

Although the house is currently closed to the public, HHT, Parks, and BHHS are planning several projects that will jointly contribute to a better understanding of the house and site (see page 3).

Please join us in welcoming the Bowne House to the HHT family!

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NEW YORK CITY

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A NOTE FROM
FRANKLIN D. VAGNONE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As I reflect on my first summer with the Historic House Trust and we celebrate our newest member—the Bowne House—I can't help but notice how the 23rd house to join our collection represents what HHT does in a microcosm. If we look closely at HHT's mission, it simply states that we provide essential support for houses of architectural and cultural significance. Throughout the acquisition process and beyond, we serve as the liaison between Parks and the nonprofit organizations that operate our sites. We also consult on restoration projects small and large and, through projects like the master plan for the Bowne House and surrounding park, aim to strengthen the relationship between the buildings and the urban landscapes and communities around them. We will work closely with the Bowne House Historical Society to care for their extensive collection, interpret the space, and educate the public about this story. You can get a taste of its fascinating story by reading *Destined to Serve: the Bowne Family* on page 4.

In recent months, we have also been busy with our annual Founders Award Dinner and holding a professional development workshop for the houses' staff and board members—also key elements to fulfilling our mission. As I close out my first summer and HHT completes its 20th Anniversary year, I hope you will enjoy this glimpse into our efforts to restore, interpret, and promote this collection of historic houses.

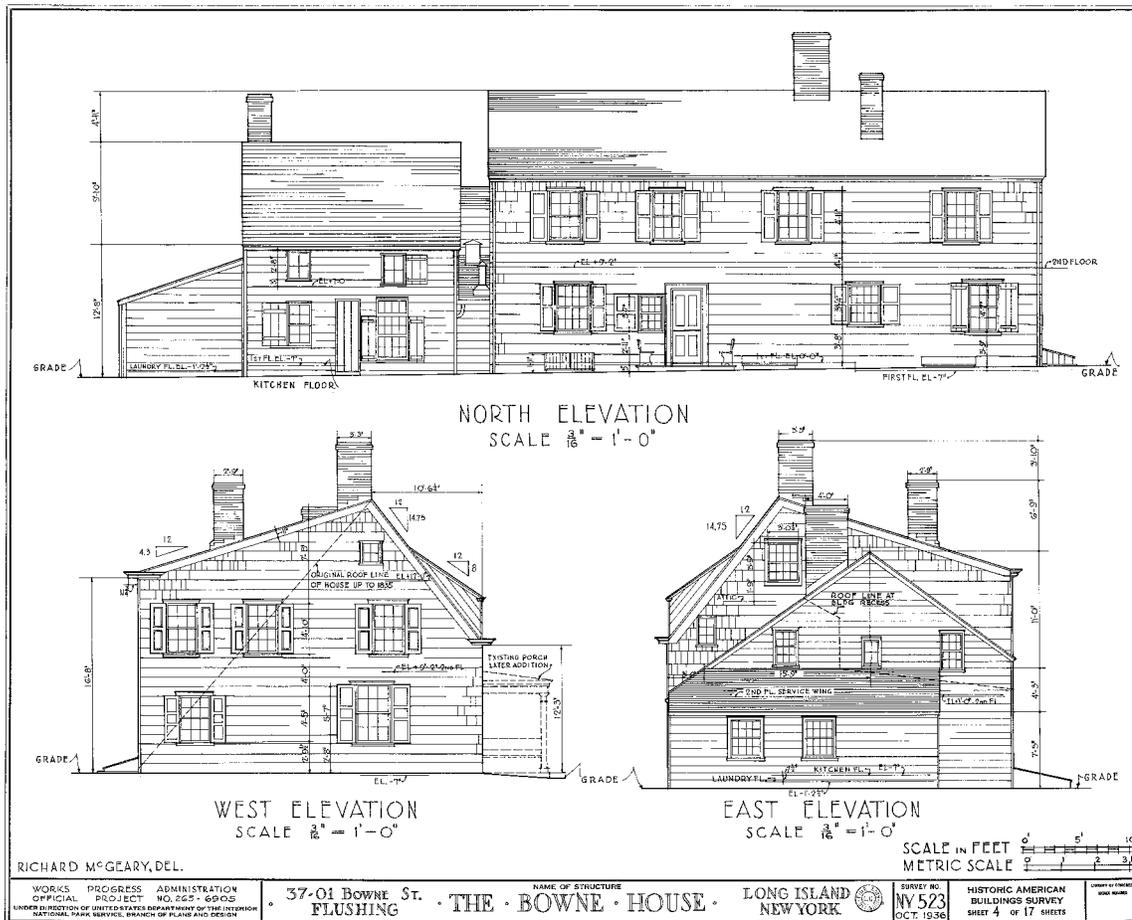


Executive Director Franklin Vagnone discusses the upcoming restoration of the Bowne House with Bowne House Historical Society President Rosemary Vietor.

WE SALUTE
OUR CORPORATE MEMBERS



For information
on corporate membership
call 212-360-8282.



In 1933, the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), part of the Works Progress Administration, selected and surveyed the Bowne House as one of the United States' leading examples of timber frame construction. These highly dimensioned and detailed surveys are still used today to assist in preservation.

THE FUTURE OF THE BOWNE HOUSE

BY MIKEL TRAVISANO

WITH THE ACQUISITION of the Bowne House complete, the Historic House Trust, the Parks Department, and the Bowne House Historical Society (BHHS) are planning several projects at the site.

RESTORATION

Beginning in the spring of 2010, the Bowne House will undergo a significant restoration. The phased work will begin with the exterior and include replacement and repair of timber framing, siding, windows, doors, shutters, and wood shingle roof, replacement and repainting of brick, and exterior painting. To accomplish this large project, more than \$2.25 million has been raised in public funds and BHHS has raised \$700,000 in private funds. We thank Queens Borough President Helen Marshall, Council Member John Liu, State Senator Frank Padavan, Assembly Members Ellen Young and Barry Groden-chik, a New York State Clean Air/Clean Water Bond Act grant, and the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission for making this project possible.

VISITOR'S CENTER & ARCHEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

A \$1.6 million Visitor's Center, which will be used for programming, administrative purposes, and storage, is also planned for the site. The design, including possible green features, is being funded by BHHS with construction funding allocated through the generosity of State Senator Frank Padavan, Queens Borough President Helen Marshall, and Council Member John Liu. An archeological investigation will be done at the site prior to construction with monitoring occurring throughout construction.

MASTER PLAN

We are also embarking on the next generation of interpretation with the Bowne House and the adjacent Kingsland Homestead and Weeping Beech Park by developing a master plan and cultural landscape report for the three sites. By looking at the site as a whole, we hope to establish a stronger connection between all three sites, tying them back to the rich horticultural history of Flushing.

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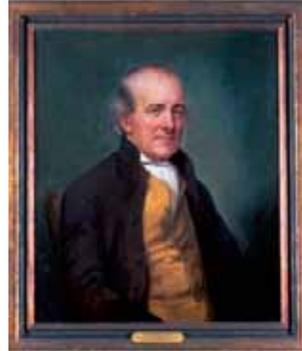
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DESTINED TO SERVE: THE BOWNE FAMILY

BY OLIVIA MITCHELL



Robert Bowne.



Walter Bowne.



Samuel Bowne Parsons Jr. worked with Calvert Vaux and Stanford White to design the arch in Greenwich Village's Washington Square Park.

TRADITION IS VALUED in historic preservation, and the Bowne family has a tradition of public service in New York City. Upon acquiring the Bowne House, the City has re-forged the bond with this family, which has been so much a part of its long and colorful history.

Robert Bowne (1744-1818) was a prominent New York City businessman who founded Bowne & Co., a financial printing company that is still in existence today. Bowne also championed the case for free education for all New Yorkers and helped found the New York Free School Society in 1805. In their initial memorandum to the state legislature, the Society argued that, "the rich having ample means of educating their offspring, it must be apparent that the laboring poor...have a superior claim to the public support." By petitioning the state legislature and collecting private donations, the Society was able to establish schools in New York for children of all financial and religious backgrounds.

Walter Bowne (1770-1846), founder of the Union Engine Co. on John and Pearl Streets, served as mayor of New York City from 1829-1833. At that time, the population of New York began to swell as immigrants poured in through the city's ports, and the already crowded neighborhoods in the lower wards overflowed with new New Yorkers. In the spring of 1832, Mayor Bowne faced the menacing possibility of a cholera epidemic and attempted to prevent the disease from spreading to New York by limiting travel to and from the city. What Bowne didn't know, however, was that cholera spread through water sources, and thus couldn't be contained easily. Despite issuing a quarantine and establishing a health commission, the overcrowding and deplorable conditions in the lower wards provided a perfect breeding ground for the disease. By the end of the summer of 1832, 3,500 people were dead.

A matrilineal descendant of the Bownes, Samuel Parsons Jr., had perhaps the closest connection to the Parks Department, as he served as the head landscape architect for New York City and as Superintendent of City Parks. Parsons started his career as an apprentice to Calvert Vaux, one of the designers of Central Park, and later became his partner. The Parsons-Vaux partnership resulted in the creation of Christopher Street Park, Abingdon Square, and the restoration of Ladies Pond in Central Park. The two also collaborated with architect Stanford White to produce the iconic Washington Memorial Arch in Washington Square Park. After Vaux's death, Parsons assumed the role of head landscape architect for the city, and can be credited with the design for St. Nicholas Park, the redesign of Union Square for subway accommodation and interestingly enough a Dutch garden for Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx (the location of another HHT site!).

HHT's new relationship with the Bowne House is in some ways not new at all. For many years the story of New York City and that of the Bowne family have been interwoven. In good times and in bad, the Bowne family has served New York well, and will continue to serve the city through the interpretation of their family home.