



NEWSLETTER

WINTER

1993/94

from the President

The House Selection Committee has been busy putting together an interesting program for the 1993-94 House & Garden Tours. This is our main source of revenue during the year, and we're always looking for ways to improve it. It is planned that next year the House Selection Committee will meet earlier to enable us to produce a calendar of the homes on tour. The calendar would be available before Christmas and will make a terrific Key West present to give over the holidays. This should add nicely to our coffers, as well as act as an inducement for more people to offer their homes for the tours.

St. Peter's Episcopal Church roof and stained glass windows are in need of repair, so we are assisting them in applying to the Department of State in Tallahassee for a matching grant. We're grateful for Susan Olsen's assistance in writing this grant application.

The Old Island Days brochure is already out, thanks to the hard work of Mary Kathryn Taylor and Rita Kemp. The cover shot of our Red Shawlers is courtesy of Quentin Dietz, a good friend to OIRF, and we do thank him.

Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year to all!

1993-94 Calendar

Dec. 28-29 Christmas Tours

Jan. 28-29 H & G Tour #1

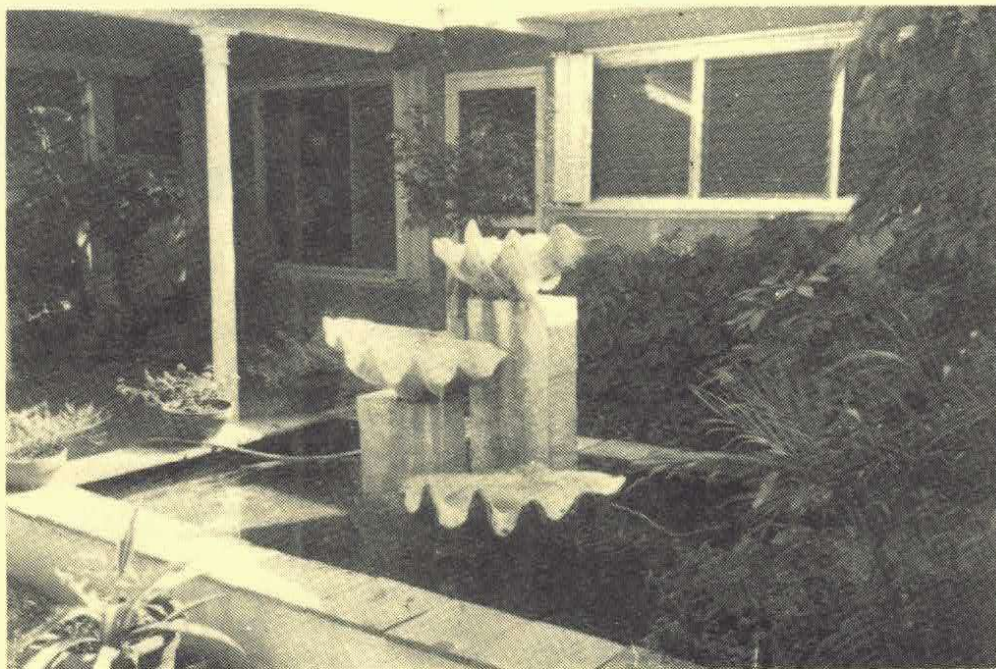
Feb. 18-19 H & G Tour #2

Feb. 23 Wreckers' Museum
Benefit

Mar. 4-5 H & G Tour #3

Mar. 30 Members' Free Party

Apr. TBA Conch Shell
Blowing Contest



Ortiz-Benavides home on Riviera Drive

CHRISTMAS HOUSE TOURS

This year OIRF is fortunate to be able to host its annual Christmas House Tours in the middle of the holiday season. Five festively decorated private homes will be presented for self guided touring on Tues. and Wed., December 28 and 29, from 5 to 8 PM each evening. Chairman Momy Ortiz-Benavides has gathered an exciting and diverse group of homes in the eastern part of town, each with a its own unique holiday decorating scheme

Ortiz-Benavides own home will captivate, from the courtly columned front walkways and shell motif fountain to the rear pool with classical gazebo through which can be glimpsed the canal and the coral fields and salt marshes beyond.

Two elegant renovations will be seen

at 3405 and 3605 Eagle St., each having a distinct approach toward space and furnishings. While holiday decorations are the tour's theme, the outdoor living spaces seen here will charm tourers.

The Bevers at 3528 Sunrise Dr. favor traditional holiday decorations, with a large tree full of ornaments either home-made by them or received as gifts from party guests over the years.

The theatrical McDonald family will mix drama with the traditional at 3625 Flagler Ave.

Tickets, at \$12 each, will be available at Fast Buck Freddie's, Cook's Bazaar, the Donkey Milk House, Hospitality House, any of the houses on the tour or call the office, 294-9501 for further information.

Don't miss this holiday treat!

TRIBUTE TO A VOLUNTEER: NANCY JAMESON

Nancy Jameson is one of those people who can spice up a conversation or the monthly report she gives to the board of the Old Island Restoration Foundation.

Jameson also makes history interesting to the thousands who go through the Wrecker's Museum / Oldest House, where she's a curator who must sometimes wear several hats.

"I think of myself as a one-man band," she says. "I'm a volunteer director, hirer and firer, administrator, purchaser, advertising chief, check writer, bookkeeper, paymaster, groundskeeper, sometimes the plumber, housekeeper and, yes, I do windows."

"But most of the time, I seem to be acting as docent, dealing day-to-day with the public and enjoying it - along with the faithful volunteers who give their time so cheerfully."

"And that's been my job for over ten years, which I think I've grown too old to do as well as I would like."

She has worked at the museum for two decades, starting when Mag Smith was curator.

"I took over in 1983," she says. "How many people have I greeted? Don't ask me that. Just say thousands."

The place is open from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. Generally, volunteers work there in two shifts. But when there aren't enough volunteers - which is often - Nancy Jameson and her husband, Colin, fill in.

She revels in the job, making Key West history come to life as she rattles on about wreckers and Capt. Francis Benjamin Watlington and his family, residents of the house that was built about 1829.

There are two stories about the oldest house - as there are about many in Key West. One is that it is actually made up of two houses - that is, a home stood on the property at 322 Duval and another was moved over from Whitehead Street and the two were joined.

"The family said a house was moved over," she says. "Architects say it doesn't look as if it was. We say it was - it makes for a more interesting story."

When discussing the Watlington family and Jameson points out a photo of



the daughters (the Watlingtons had nine daughters, two of whom died in infancy), she is apt to hear a remark from someone touring the house that the daughters certainly were homely.

"I say plain-looking," says Jameson.

She uses that diplomatic term because one time when she was less kind than that in describing the daughters, a distant Watlington descendant happened to be touring and heard.

Jameson, incidentally, was responsible for changing the museum's name from the Oldest House to its present one.

An old home furnished with period furniture in Key West didn't attract all that many visitors, she found. But it became one of the more popular museums in the city when she added maritime artifacts, newspaper clippings and other memorabilia and changed the name to the Wreckers Museum / Oldest House.

Jameson was born near Seattle when her father was in the military, but spent most of her adult life in Washington, D. C.

On a cruise through the Panama Canal to San Francisco some 20 years ago, she met Colin Jameson, one of three eligible widowers among the dozen persons in the party she was with.

After they were married, she moved into the gracious old Conch home her husband had on Olivia Street.

She has long been active in Key West affairs and is a fixture at many of the island's parties, but disdains being called a socialite.

She has served as president of the Key West Woman's Club and been on the board of the Key West Art and Historical Society - as has her husband. She is an-officio member of the Old Island Restoration Foundation.

"Hobby? I haven't a hobby, I'm too busy," says Jameson. "But I am very interested in maritime history."

Now, she talks vaguely of retiring, of turning her curator's job over to someone else, saying:

"I'm getting too old to do this...becoming lazy...and forgetful."

But she still sparkles when she greets a group of visitors and starts talking about Key West's fabled wreckers and the family that lived in the island's oldest house so long ago.

OIRF NEWSLETTER

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