

OLD ISLAND RESTORATION FOUNDATION

Key West's Oldest House Newsletter

December 2017



The Oldest House in Key West, built in 1829, is located at 322 Duval Street. Tours of the house are free and is open daily 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. Closed Sunday and Wednesday.

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Old Island Restoration Foundation, Inc. is a non-profit 501C(3) organization.

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Our Mission: Celebrate and sustain Key West's unique architecture, culture and history.

December Home Tour

We have a great lineup of homes planned for our first Home Tour of the season, to be held December 27 & 28 from 3:00 to 7:00 pm. [Purchase tickets online](#), in person at the Oldest House (322 Duval Street) or during the tour at any of the houses. For more information go to www.oirf.org.

Introducing Chris Hamilton

We bid farewell to our administrator Teri Beard, who was an inspiration to all who worked with her. We are all sorry to see her leave, but are happy to know that she is now able to pursue her abounding passion for sailing, and her desire to help those around her who are in need. We wish her much happiness in her future endeavors.

Although Teri's shoes may be hard to fill, we are extremely fortunate to have found someone who has jumped into the fray with both feet, and is ably taking over the role of Oldest House Administrator. Chris Hamilton has a wealth of experience within the local community as he was most recently the City's Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator. In that role he learned the City street by street and neighborhood by neighborhood. He spearheaded the City's Car-Free Key West campaign, the new Duval Loop and brought many grant dollars into the City for planning and educational purposes.



Previous to moving to Key West, Chris worked for Arlington County, Virginia where his contributions to getting people to use transit, bike and walk instead of driving was instrumental in the County becoming a poster child for smart growth. Chris is a District of Columbia native who worked for the D.C. Preservation League while getting an urban planning degree at the University of Maryland. While he loves Key West he misses going to Nationals baseball games.

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New Museum Docents

We are thrilled to welcome two new docents to our team of volunteers at The Oldest House Museum. For more information on becoming a volunteer docent go to [Become an OIRF Supporter](#).

Antonio Magwood, Pastor at the Bethel AME Church in Key West. Antonio brings a wealth of knowledge about the history and churches of Key West. He is also anxious to become involved in our Home Tours, and to incorporate Churches into these tours. He is quite familiar with the Watlington family, and the roles that the family played in the Key West community.

Roberta Ginsberg, a Key West resident living in an historic home on James Street. She and her husband's house was originally owned by George Packwood and Joseph Albury, between 1895 and 1916. Their house has been fully documented by Historian Sharon Wells. Roberta has had a long-standing "love affair" with the Oldest House in Key West, and is excited to become a member of our docent team of volunteers.

Expanding Our Education Program

by Andy Herdan

Chris Hamilton and I recently met with the *Key West Art and Historical Society* Education Director, Adele Williams, looking for opportunities for partnerships in a variety of childhood and adult education programs that fall in line with our stated mission. The first such collaborative effort will be the launch of our Vintage Play Day project, which will take place at The Oldest House early in 2018. This will be a full day "camp", with an anticipated participation by up to 25 local children. KWAHS will be providing skilled teachers alongside our own volunteer docents, and up to five work/play stations will be organized throughout the day. The event is sponsored through a generous grant from the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys, and following this initial launch we plan to hold periodic Play Days at The Oldest House, scheduled for two hours on weekends. These abbreviated Vintage Play Days will be handled by our own OIRF volunteer docents. The following is a list of other possible activities in which both OIRF and KWAHS could jointly become involved:

- Woodworking and Boat Modeling, with live demonstrations by our skilled docents
- Rope knots and splicing, supported by ex-Navy and Civil War re-enactors
- Assisting in gardening and landscaping at the Oldest House
- Permanent availability of "Croquet on the Lawn" at The Oldest House

We believe that OIRF has many opportunities to further educate our local children, which would include leveraging the experience of the fulltime KWAHS education staff.



Docent volunteer Karl Reutling is restoring one of the ship models on display at the Oldest House Museum

Recent Events in Our Garden

The Oldest House and Gardens are rapidly becoming a "Site of Choice" for both social and cultural groups in Key West. Following are major activities which OIRF has been proud to host over the past Quarter:

[Click here](#) for more information about holding your event in our garden.

Parade Watching Party in the Garden and on the Duval Street porch. Participants, appropriately dressed in Fantasy attire, were treated to a sumptuous steak dinner and rousing music. A memorable event for all involved.

Keys Council of the Arts Culture Crawl kicked-off in style after enjoying heart-healthy refreshments in the Oldest House Gardens. This event has further cemented a long-standing relationship between OIRF and The Keys Council of the Arts, the next joint event being an Open House at The Oldest House on April 4th, 2018.

The 58th Annual Home Tour Kickoff took place in the Oldest House Gardens, this being the first of what promises to be a lively annual event. Participants included sponsors, house tour owners, docents, and OIRF members. Open bar and refreshments made for a lively gathering of friends and volunteers.

Weddings and Rehearsal Parties continue to provide much needed sources of revenue. Now that we are moving into "peak season", barely a weekend passes without our grounds resounding to the sounds of live music and wedding festivities.

Watlington Descendant Visits Oldest House

Docents at the Oldest House are extremely fortunate to occasionally meet visitors whose lives are inextricably tied to Key West's fascinating history. Following is one such event.

We recently had a visit from Sheri Lavery who claimed she was a descendant of one of the original residents of The Oldest House, our Watlington family. After briefly speaking with Andy Herdan, she returned later to talk with our volunteer historian Karl Reutling. Sheri listed some known names of her ancestors, and Karl recognized one of the last names from his recent genealogy search that he had completed last year. Sheri and Karl then worked together online to put the puzzle together. We have now established that Sheri is the great, great, great, granddaughter of Francis and Emeline Watlington. She is directly descended through an all maternal bloodline. Following is the "Bloodline Chart" as created by Karl and Sheri; amazing work!

Watlington to Gillen Bloodline



Let's just take a descriptive view of the "direct bloodline" diagram shown above.

One of the nine Watlington daughters was Mary Amanda, who married Dr. Charles Johnson, an immigrant to Key West from the Bahamas. Their daughter Frances E. married Frithjof Cold, an immigrant to Key West from Norway. One of their children, Mary Bergitta wed Robert Belgau. They had a daughter Vivienne L., who married Robert C. Gillen. Vivienne and Robert are the parents of our visitor Sheri Gillen Lavery.

Karl's work using Ancestry.com has confirmed this lineage. The thrill of the hunt and the reward for dedicated research make the life of a docent something truly special.



Sheri Lavery's daughters, niece and granddaughters. L-R: Kalyn Gillen, Alana Hope, Mia Lavery, Sheri Lavery, Savannah Hope and Jennifer Hope

The Past Is In Our Future

Our lush tropical landscaping will have a new look as we develop a plan to incorporate new plantings native to the Florida Keys and Caribbean. Non-native plants that would be found in gardens in the mid-1800s, when the Watlingtons moved into their home, will also be added to those already present. We are also hoping to include plantings that will attract many of our local birds and butterflies, to add additional color and life.

The first step in the renewal process will be the entrance walkway and work has already started with the planting of attractive ferns as ground cover. There is also discussion of a kitchen garden using available space and pots, since it was typical in



every family of wealth during the 19th century to have herbs, fruits, and vegetables readily available for cooking and eating.

We will keep our flourishing tropicals and our lawn while restoring native plants, many of which are now threatened and endangered. Our goal of preservation will now extend to the Garden as well as the House. Volunteer Master Gardener Susie Reutling will be assisting the organization in the process of transformation. Watch for updates, or better yet, come visit us to see what is happening. We see the garden becoming an additional education opportunity for our younger local visitors, with lectures and hands-on gardening activities.

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Old Island Restoration Foundation Membership Form

OIRF is a non-profit organization as defined in section 501C(3) of the Internal Revenue Service code. Your donation may be tax deductible depending on your particular tax situation. Please join us in our mission to "celebrate and sustain Key West's unique architecture, culture and history".

Join or renew your membership online at www.oirf.org or mail this form to: OIRF, P.O. Box 689, Key West, FL 33041. Make your potentially tax deductible donation [here](#).

____ I wish to **RENEW** my OIRF membership

____ I wish to **BECOME A MEMBER** of OIRF

____ \$50 Individual ____ \$95 Couple ____ \$125 Family ____ \$250 Business

____ \$500 Patron ____ \$1,000 Benefactor ____ \$10,000 Life Member

____ Enclosed please find my check payable to: Old Island Restoration Foundation, Inc.

____ Please charge my: ____ VISA ____ MASTERCARD ____ AMEX

NAME AS IT APPEARS ON CARD:

CARD NUMBER: _____

CARD EXP. DATE: _____

CARD SECURITY CODE: _____

SIGNATURE: _____

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Old Island Restoration Foundation, Inc., is located in Key West, FL at 322 Duval Street, and is a charity registered (registration number CH32401) with the *Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services*. A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Division of Consumer Services by calling 800-435-7352 toll free within the State or at their website, www.FloridaConsumerHelp.com. Registration does not imply endorsement, approval or recommendation by the State.