



NEWSLETTER

MARCH

1998

from the President

I am writing this letter the day after the Black and White Ball. It is a time to reflect on the success OIRF has experienced this past year.

In December we cleaned and decorated the museum for Christmas, opened our new museum shop and celebrated with a grand opening party. Two weeks later our Holiday House Tour was held and was a record setting success. The January night tour quickly followed as our volunteers geared up for a busy season. Everyone involved with the February Tour deserves special thanks for their efforts since the tour coincided with the U.S.S. Maine Celebration. All of the volunteers in town seemed to wear two or three hats that weekend. The final House and Garden Tour was held the first weekend in March and was also a huge success. Through the combined efforts of the four tours, OIRF raised \$61,300. Every volunteer can feel that they directly contributed to this amazing accomplishment.

Due to the February storm, the Black and White Ball was rescheduled to March 11th and again was an event not to be missed. Although it was a cool evening, excitement filled the air and everyone competitively participated in the silent auction which was anything but silent.

We now look forward to the Conch Shell Blowing Contest on March 21st, our Annual Meeting on April 14th and the Members' Appreciation party on April 15th.

Success was the name of the game this year. Thank you to all who made it possible.

Lucille Feaker

MEMBERS APPRECIATION PARTY

RE-SCHEDULED

Please, mark the new date...

WEDNESDAY,
APRIL 15TH

6:31pm

THE OLDEST HOUSE MUSEUM
322 Duval Street



Three generations from Nantucket, Massachusetts enjoy the March House and Garden Tours with host, Bill Mansfield.

TOURS A GREAT SUCCESS

The four tours which made up this year's 38th annual House and Garden Tours grossed over \$60,000 with most expenses reimbursed by a Cultural Umbrella grant from the Monroe County TDC.

A striking combination of homes were assembled by the selection committee to create one of the most diverse and enjoyable tours ever presented.

Congratulations to the Tour Committee: Trip Hoffman, House & Garden Tour Chairman; Momy Ortiz-Benavides, Holiday Tours Chairman; Mitzi Krabill, Selections Chairman; Helen Crimmins, Volunteers; and the committee: Lucille Feaker, John Dalbey, Peary Fowler, George Cotten and the Bud Hoffmans.

Problems plagued those in charge of the volunteers, but, as always, everyone rallied to create a warm, hospitable atmosphere for the hundreds of guests who attended each tour. In particular, thanks go to head hostesses Bev Browder, Vi Batty, Rose Marie Barrett, Sue Bennett, Maureen Bramlage, Eileen Evans, Lucille Feaker, Sarah Fowler, Laurie Ann Highsmith, Dick Jones, Audrey Kessler, Mitzi Krabill, Sheila Shkor, and Hal Walsh.

A particularly unusual problem arose before the January tour: with two homes at the intersection of Washington St. and Thompson St., it was discovered that City engineers had planned the sewer replacement work for that corner that week. Thanks to City Engineer Flowers and Commissioners, the work was halted for us.



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MUSEUM SHOP OPEN

After a rushed and anxious Christmas season, the new Oldest House Museum Shop is open and running smoothly with a staff of four: Mary Jane Bondeson, Barbara Martin, Audrey Kessler and John Gallagher. The shop now serves as the entrance to the museum with guests paying, entering and exiting through the new building. The museum docents are now free to "tell the story" and give visitors a good feeling about the museum furnishings and treasures.

Not wanting it to be "just another gift shop," OIRF director and shop buyer and manager Betsy Dietz is seeking to give a maritime flavor to the shop merchandise. "At first, I looked at everything that made up the special charm of Key West: tropical flora and fauna, nautical, historical, etc. But, the more I looked at our ship models (which are to become part of a maritime exhibit in the museum soon), the more I felt that a maritime look with a strong emphasis on ship models of the period of the museum would be relevant, interesting, different, and financially sound." The merchandise orientation has led the staff to subtitle the shop *Fish and Ships*.

Dietz also stressed that value was one her biggest concerns when placing orders - keeping the quality up but the prices down.

Response to the shop has been very good this month, and the relationship with the museum is running smoothly. Staffing needs are always critical, and anyone interested in working at either of the sites at 322 Duval St. should contact Betsy at the office, 294-9501



This year's Black & White Wreckers' Ball provided a grant of \$16,000 to support the Greening of the Garden. The grant will help to upgrade lighting and watering systems, and create new garden areas.

COTTEN AND JAMESON HONORED

Past president of OIRF, George Cotten, and retired museum director, Nancy Jameson, were honored at a luncheon at Mangoes on January 7 attended by the OIRF Board of Directors plus other friends. Both Cotten and Jameson have shown tremendous dedication to the organization in their many contributions over several years. Each was presented with a proclamation announcing a scholarship created in their name.

Cotten was honored with two \$1000 Small Grants to be awarded in his name and with his endorsement to worthy projects in Old Town Key West. The Small grants funding was established four years ago, and Cotten has been a significant figure in the selection process.

Nancy Jameson, who has been director of the Museum for 13 years and has made enormous contributions to the continuation of the museum as a viable historical entity in Key West, will be honored with a bronze plaque on the wall of honor to commemorate her many contributions and her unselfish dedication to OIRF and to the museum.

Jameson will have a scholarship award of \$500 yearly for 5 years established in her name to reward a Key West high school student whose continuing education spotlights either Keys history or local maritime history.

MUSEUM REVAMPED

The museum at 322 Duval Street will soon be renamed to reflect its historical importance to Key West. Your Board of Directors voted in December to return the museum's name to The Oldest House Museum. New signage is being completed and will reflect this new name and emphasize the wrecking trade and maritime artifacts for which the museum is held in high regard and will also highlight the rear gardens, soon to be revitalized with a gift of \$16,000 from the Black and White Wreckers' Ball benefit March 11.

The museum design committee from the Board has revamped the interior of the museum relocating some of the maritime artifacts to a new exhibition room which will be open in the Spring in the former custodian's room. Several of the furnishings have been de-accessed and pieces rearranged to create a living historic home museum.

The committee is looking for suitable Victorian period (1830-1880) pieces to add to the collection, specifically small tables, side chairs, mirrors, area rugs, etc. and would appreciate outright gifts and/or extended loans of such pieces. Of course, a gift is tax deductible to the extent the law permits. If you have something you think might make a worthwhile contribution, please call the office, 294-9501, to discuss the possibilities.

OIRF NEWSLETTER

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