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Photographs available upon request

Help Bring Back Julia’s Parlor!

In the mid-1880s Julia Finney Monroe (1837-1930), the “First Lady of Oberlin,” who had recently returned from 10 years in the nation’s capital, redecorated her formal front parlor in keeping with the tastes at the height of fashion and in her signature color, blue. There are no known photos of the very private Julia, so being able to recreate the ambiance of her inner sanctum in the Monroe House of the Oberlin Heritage Center has required much sleuthing. Julia’s purchases are documented in receipts from merchants and suppliers with the details of color and texture told in family memories.

Today the parlor at the Monroe House at the Oberlin Heritage Center is the starting point for tours. The Oberlin Heritage Center’s Collections Committee volunteers and staff are refurbishing the parlor in stages, in keeping with extensive research on Julia’s tastes. The first phase of the project was recently completed and included removing inappropriate 1960s shag carpeting and wallpaper, repainting, installing reproduction 1880s aesthetic movement wallpaper frieze and borders, a “bamboo” picture rail, and a locally designed and crafted wood chair rail. The results are stunning and dramatic! However, the project is not yet complete.

Many people have contributed many hours of time and talent to this project, and several generous donors have already supplied partial funding. Oberlin Heritage Center Collections Committee members Paul Arnold, Scott Broadwell, Rob Calhoun, Bert Latran, Louise Richards, Dina Schoonmaker, Jim Underwood, and Anne Wardwell have logged many volunteer hours on this project, as have Prue and Pete Richards, and Deloris Bohn. Doren Harley (Woodreams) designed and crafted the wood chair rail to match the molding profile on the 1880s wood mantle in the room. Scott Broadwell (Broadwell Painting) contributed many hours in painting and wallpapering as did Tim Cowling (Creative Carpentry) who installed the picture rail and chair rail and helped with the wallpapering.

Through almost magically well-timed good luck, the Oberlin Heritage Center was recently given several of the original handsome dark blue fireplace surround tiles which Julia added along with the present mantle. Decades ago, when the house was being renovated after being moved to prevent its demolition, the original tiles were removed and replaced. One wise woman then rescued the least damaged of these stunning tiles from a trash bin and has now returned them to Julia’s home.

The Oberlin Heritage Center is currently having Julia’s blue tiles reproduced in a limited edition by Starbuck Goldner in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania which specializes in museum quality handcrafted reproduction tiles. A prototype was created and a complicated pattern and glaze matching process is being undertaken before the reproduction tiles are produced. Starbuck Goldner’s other reproduction tile projects include Carpenter’s Hall-

Independence Mall (Philadelphia), the Fox Theater (Atlanta), and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum (New York).

Also in the “it was meant to be” category, the Oberlin Heritage Center recently was given a previously unknown portrait of the town’s first settler, Peter Pindar Pease, painted in 1842 by his nephew Hiram Alonzo Pease. It was given to the Heritage Center by the great great granddaughter of Peter, Susan Pease Morganthaler of Yuma, Arizona. The painting requires extensive conservation work before it can be hung in the Monroe House parlor where it will help to tell the early history of our community. This work is being done by McKay Lodge Fine Arts Conservation Laboratory of Oberlin. The portrait will be unveiled later in the year.

The Oberlin Heritage Center is now seeking special gifts to help underwrite the costs of completing the parlor project. Contributions will help to support the costs of the parlor project, including reproducing the tiles, purchasing a period light fixture, making reproduction window treatments, and obtaining an appropriate floor covering. In exchange for a gift of \$100 or more, you may choose to receive one reproduction tile which will make a unique, attractive coaster or wall hanging, or spark your own creative idea. Or, if you prefer, you may elect to have your entire gift support the parlor project and thus be fully tax deductible. Contributions of any size are appreciated. The reproduction tiles will be available in the fall and will be accompanied by an information card explaining the parlor project. To contribute, please send a check to Parlor Project, Oberlin Heritage Center, P.O. Box 0455, Oberlin, OH 44074. Once the reproduction tiles have arrived, they will also be available for purchase in the Oberlin Heritage Center museum store and from our on-line museum store at www.oberlinheritage.org for \$35 plus tax plus an additional \$10 for shipping and handling.

Stop in and take a peek at the Monroe parlor work in progress any Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. or during extended hours over Commencement/Memorial Day weekend (Friday, May 28th through Sunday, May 30th from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.) Or, better yet, learn more of the story by coming on a guided tour of the Oberlin Heritage Center any Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday at 10:30 a.m. or 1:30 p.m. The Monroe House is located at 73 ½ S. Professor Street, behind the Oberlin College Conservatory’s new Kohl Jazz Center. For more information, please contact Pat Murphy or Prue Richards at the Oberlin Heritage Center at 440 774-1700 or via e-mail at history@oberlinheritage.org or visit the website at www.oberlinheritage.org.

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