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Morris-Jumel Mansion
and the American Colonial Revival

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Introduction

On November 19, 1904 an unlikely face-off occurred at the headquarters of the New York City Parks Department, the Arsenal, in Central Park. It was the latest volley in a battle that had raged in government and in the press for more than a year. The decision at hand was so grave it had deadlocked in the New York State legislature with each house supporting a different protagonist. The outcome of the day, it was hoped, would determine who would have the privilege of operating a small museum in a modest mansion in northern Manhattan. The unlikely contestants in the dispute were rival associations of patriotic society ladies. Their desire to control a relic of the past was not unusual during this period, which we now know as the American Colonial Revival. This struggle was a response by established Americans who were primarily white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant, to societal pressures like the mass immigration of Irish Catholics and eastern Europeans, rapid industrialization that seemed to threaten a genteel
American lifestyle, and the urbanization that resulted from both immigration and industrialization.¹

The Colonial Dames of America (CDA) were first to arrive. They came by carriage and were said to have “swept into the room.” The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) followed, arriving at the Arsenal on foot or via streetcar. The members of each group believed that their own organization was uniquely qualified to operate Manhattan’s oldest remaining house as a museum honoring George Washington. Washington’s use of the site as his headquarters for a month and a week in the fall of 1776 made it a very desirable possession indeed. Although actual ownership of the property was not on the table, the city would retain the deed, the proprietary desires of the two groups were stirred. It was not so much the building as it was the history that they wished to possess.

These two patriotic societies were part of a growing movement to enshrine monuments and objects of the past as symbols of American virtue and morality. The ladies who gathered at the Parks Department’s
headquarters that day, on both sides of the table, simply thought of themselves, their motivations, and their actions as patriotic. The Dames were among the most exclusive of these societies at the time with just 70 members in New York State, while the Daughter’s, who prided themselves on their inclusive, democratic model, had more than 7,000. The entire membership of the Dames numbered about 300 while the Daughter’s national organization, just fourteen years old at the time, numbered a whopping 40,000 members. A closer look at these groups will reveal two sets of New York elites in pursuit of some degree of social superiority.

So politically heated was the debate between the two factions that it stymied both houses of the state legislature. With the Senate supporting a bill in favor of the Dames and the Assembly favoring one in support of the Daughters, the stage was set for a deadlock. And so, although each bill was advanced to the opposing house, once there each was permanently locked in committee. Assemblyman Josiah T. Newcombe
successfully blocked Senator Thomas F. Grady’s bill from reaching the full Assembly and Grady, in turn, blocked the Assemblyman’s bill from reaching the full Senate. Finally, in the spring of 1904, a bill was passed that placed the disposition of the Mansion squarely on the shoulders of the City’s Park Commissioner.³

Commissioner John J. Pallas too was stunned by the gravity of the decision. Considering the acrimony of the Nov. 19 meeting this comes as no surprise. Newspaper coverage of the debate in Albany surely contributed to the Commissioner’s quandary. The presence that day of State Senator Grady, there on behalf of the Dames, and Assemblyman Newcombe, in support of the Daughters, must have added to his discomfort. The meeting was surely an unusual experience for all who attended. This was a period when such negotiations were normally conducted by, and for, men. Indeed, Daisy Story, who led the Daughters, initially addressed the Commissioner as “Madame President.” In apologizing she admitted that she had
“little experience in speaking except at women’s meetings.”

What would cause there to be so much rancor and tension over so small an issue as the management of a house museum? Why would these society ladies challenge the social order by forging their way into the public sphere to take on a responsibility which offered no monetary compensation? Why did the media and the public take so keen an interest in the debate? The answers to these questions can be found by examining the American Colonial Revival and the social pressures, catalyzed in part by the Civil War, mass immigration and rapid industrialization, that led to that movement. Urbanization, stimulated by both by immigration and industrialization was also a factor in the evolution of the movement. Morris-Jumel Mansion was one of many house museums established during the Colonial Revival Movement. I will demonstrate that the story of the mansion’s evolution from home to house museum supports the evidence that historians like Karal Ann Marling, Patricia West, Steven Conn and William B. Rhoads have
identified in defining the movement. Specifically, these historians have noted the ways in which colonial revivalists used the buildings and artifacts of the colonial and Revolutionary war era as symbols of a national origin based in virtue and morality. Each of these historians note this phenomenon, but Marling and Rhoads explore the topic in depth. These Historians agree that such symbols served to quell a longing for simpler times among established Americans, and they also describe their use as tools to aid in the Americanization of the immigrant. The Civil War, industrialization, and mass immigration each contributed to a sense of unease and uncertainty about the future of the country. The architecture, objects, and the stories of the past offered comfort in the face of so much change.\

The Civil War is perhaps the most easily understood of these pressures. The struggle left many Americans deeply conflicted between morality and economics. Much of the tension that led to the war, state’s rights versus a strong federal government and
the ethical question of slavery for instance, was present since the nation’s founding, influencing generations of Americans. Those tensions did not disappear with the war’s end and they served as a reminder of the tenuous nature of national stability.\(^6\)

Industrialization brought wealth and prosperity to the nation but it also placed an intense pressure on the society. A growing, concentrated, labor force threatened to destabilize the social order with massive strikes in cities like Pittsburgh and Baltimore, as occurred in response to the economic depression that began in 1873. Historian Harvey Green notes that this period was marked with violent strikes, even when the economy was in recovery. This occurred in New York City in 1886 when street car workers went on strike. Green describes newspapers and magazines of the period with “printed engravings of cities ablaze, overrun by hordes of faceless, menacing workers.”\(^7\)

Industrial development led to increased urbanization as migrants left agricultural communities to find work in the cities. Lifestyles changed as
production relied less on the natural rhythm of the sun and the moon and more on the hands of the clock. Some even found a challenge to American morality in the shift from an agrarian to an industrial lifestyle.\textsuperscript{8}

When combined with the pressures of the Civil War and industrialization, the massive immigration of the 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century ensured the establishment of the colonial revival aesthetic within American Culture. This pressure begins as early as 1840 but really comes to bear between 1880 and 1930 when, according to William Rhoads, the “foreign born population of the United States more than doubled from 6.7 to 14.2 million” with “immigrants bringing their own speech, culture and politics.”\textsuperscript{9} This was a period of tremendous population growth for the nation in general. The overall population grew from roughly 50 million in 1880 to a little more than 137 million in 1930. Even more dramatic than overall population growth, however, was the proportion of Americans living in the cities which went from 27.5\% in 1880 to 56.2\% by 1930.\textsuperscript{10} The sheer volume of immigration and urban growth during
this time was enough to unsettle most any society, but it was the religious and cultural distinction between the new immigrant and the older more established American that caused the greatest reaction.11

By focusing attention on the acquisition of historic sites, the use of certain objects to disseminate an ideology, and the desire to “Americanize” immigrants in the body of the proceeding thesis I hope to provide the reader with a clear understanding of how the Morris-Jumel Mansion story illustrates current scholarship regarding the colonial revival. I will begin with a look at the factors that motivated the colonial revivalists and the reasoning behind their responses. These ideas will provide context for the second part of my study, the use of objects as informative tools.

Although the colonial revivalists achieved many positive outcomes, over-all theirs was a regressive movement wherein more established Americans endeavored to associate themselves with the nation’s historic origins in a proprietary manner. For example, they
sought to control historic sites associated with the founding of the nation and to prevent those who didn’t share their heritage from involvement with those sites. In some cases this effort was achieved literally, by actually acquiring historically significant sites, but in other instances these groups had to be satisfied with some degree of control over publicly owned sites. Given the rapid growth of American cities during this period many historic sites owe their survival to such advocates. Nonetheless, in many of these cases the operational and interpretive models of these sites delivered the unspoken message to the recent American immigrant that this was this is our history, not yours. In a sense this aspect of the movement was a virtual circling of the wagons in a defensive measure against the unknown ways of the new immigrant and other societal changes. Historians like Karal Ann Marling have described this acquisitive tendency among colonial revivalists, but none have made it a specific focus of study. My research has shown it to be a significant factor in the movement and one that
reveals the motivations of many adherents. I refer to this aspect of the colonial revival as the “proprietary model” and I feel it is particularly well illustrated through the story of Morris-Jumel Mansion. Ironically, while the goal established Americans under the proprietary model may have been to control sites associated with the nation’s history and exclude individuals deemed unworthy of that heritage, ultimately this aspect of the movement resulted in a valuable resource to disseminate a shared history in the form of a vast collection of historic sites.

A second aspect of the revival was the way in which some adherents viewed the objects, structures and stories associated with the movement as tools to aid in the Americanization of the immigrant. Although there was a patronizing aspect to this effort, overall I view its advocates as the more progressive of the colonial revivalists since they did, after-all, aid immigrants in the assimilation process. The alternative to this approach was to shun the immigrant and dismiss any possibility of assimilation. I will
present the bulk of evidence regarding this factor within the “Motivations” portion of the proceeding thesis, but it is a significant enough issue to merit introduction here. Premised on the belief in a standard of American morality, many revivalists felt that stories of the founders, sites of architectural or historic significance, and objects representative of the founders or their beliefs could make ‘good Americans’ of the nation’s newcomers. Karal Ann Marling, Professor of Art History and American Studies at the University of Minnesota, examines how individuals like Henry Ford, and groups like the DAR, used buildings, objects and stories to convey a revised history of the nation with virtue and morality as a foundation.\textsuperscript{12} Historian William Rhoads also discusses the Americanizing aspect of the DAR and similar groups, noting their use of sites like the Dyckman House in New York, during this period.\textsuperscript{13} The paternalistic outlook of these groups and individuals was indeed less regressive than those who wished only to possess the objects of historical significance;
however, given the Americanizer’s willingness to revise history in order to deliver the desired message we cannot credit them with pure altruism. The Americanizing colonial revivalist still believed ‘this is our history, not yours’ but they apparently accepted the inevitability of new immigrant populations and hoped to minimize the threat presented by those groups. The Americanization effort was not limited to adherents of the colonial revival, however the revivalist’s use of revisionist history based on the ethics of the nation’s founders to disseminate the myth of a homogenous standard of American morality may have been unique.

The use of inanimate objects to Americanize the immigrant was premised on the belief that those objects would inspire a desired effect upon the viewer. This idea forms a third significant element of the movement as turn-of-the-century Americans believed objects to be imbued with the spirit of the past. In some cases it is the symbolism of these objects that is meant to inspire and in others the object is merely
representative but in all cases it was believed that the object or building could, in a way, communicate with the viewer. Classically designed structures like the Morris-Jumel Mansion were valued for their simplicity of design, their proportion, and their symmetry, but also for their association with the earliest republic. Structures with a direct relationship to one or more of the founders, again, like Morris-Jumel Mansion, were revered as shrines. Representations of the founding fathers (the founding mothers play only a bit part in the colonial revival presentation of history), whether in print, applied to commemorative dishware or created as an objet d’art, were thought to inspire awe in the viewer. Symbols like the hearth and, notably, the spinning wheel were used by revivalists to represent the home, family life, self-sufficiency, independence, and virtue. We still view many objects as symbolic of an idea or another time period, but our understanding of inanimate objects differs from that of our late 19th – early 20th century counterparts. Museum Curator Michael Ettema
explains that, in the 19th century, there was a growing belief that “objects expressed the spirit of the people that made and used them” and that “museum artifacts seemed to actually contain moral qualities that would be self-evident in their appearance.”

Historian Steven Conn, notes what he describes as an “object-based epistemology” during the late 19th century wherein “Americans held a belief that objects, at least as much as texts, were sources of knowledge and meaning.” Conn goes on to quote Edward Everett Ayer of The Field Museum in Chicago who stated, “All Museum material should speak for itself upon site. It should be an open book which tells a better story than any description could do.”

By examining these elements of the colonial revival and exploring how they came to bear upon the story of the Morris-Jumel Mansion I will provide a better understanding of how some of the patriotic ladies of New York City came to so bitter a confrontation and how they engaged elected and appointed officials in the fight. Along the way I will
reveal details about class, social hegemony, and gender in America during the late 19th and early 20th century.
NOTES

1 “Dames and Daughters Urge Claims Again” New York Times 20 November 1904:7
2 “Dames Score Once More” New York Times 2 February 1904
8 Butler, 36
15 Steven Conn, Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1998)
Motivations and the Proprietary Model

Some of the activities that would later be associated with the colonial revival actually began decades before the movement reached its stride. It is important to understand how these responses built over time and became simply another aspect of the society in order to understand the motivations of the colonial revivalists. As noted earlier, the Civil War and industrialization were two factors that contributed to the movement, both of which were evident before the massive immigration of the late 19th century. These two factors certainly influenced socially active Americans in the early to mid part of the 19th century who, in response, looked to the stories of the nation’s founding fathers, the Puritans of Massachusetts, the Western pioneers, and other examples of virtue and moral fortitude for direction. Those who wished to dictate particular models of virtue and morality quickly recognized the value of these symbols in conveying their message.
As historian Neil Harris points out, “Americanism itself had never been easily defined, for membership in our national community was theoretically not racial but ideological. This, at least, was the lesson of the revolution.”¹ Historian Alan Axelrod notes that our “ethnically heterogeneous citizenry fostered America’s image as a land of prosperity open to all” but also that this “created significant social tensions, both among the older stock, which felt threatened on many levels by the newcomers, and among the newcomers themselves, the “uprooted,” who sometimes found cultural change excruciatingly difficult.”² Without a shared ethnic heritage Americans naturally sought other themes on which to base national unity. As Harris indicates, the lesson of the revolution was a national ideology. Under this theory the principles set out by the founders, and defended by the revolutionary soldier, substituted for a shared ethnic heritage in unifying American citizens. How better to convey this national ideology than through the stories
of the men who fought the revolution and of the nation’s founders.

The stories and symbols of the founding fathers were used to influence Americans as early as 1806 when the Reverend Mason Locke Weems produced the most popular and long-lived fable about Washington by placing the famed hatchet in his young hand and the cherry tree at his feet in his book ‘Life of George Washington.’ Like many of his stories, Weems crafted the cherry tree tale to advance his own moral agenda. His choice of Washington as an ideal character on which to base a morality tale was no doubt influenced by the former President’s virtuous reputation, but he nonetheless felt it necessary to embellish the man’s deeds with this baseless story. Those who knew Weems were well aware of his use of fiction to convey a message of morality. In describing the history of the equally fictitious “Two Prayers in the Snow” story, which Weems created, Karal Ann Marling discusses Virginia historian Bishop Meade. Meade, she says “knew Weems well,” and was openly skeptical of the most
edifying tales manufactured by his clerical comrade. But, because he too was eager to promote certain causes by associating them somehow with the first president, the bishop wanted Washington to have said those chilly prayers while kneeling in the snow at Valley Forge.⁴

Storytellers like Mason Weems took advantage of American reverence for the founders to increase the credibility of their tales of morality and virtue. These stories served their purpose and they also compelled many Americans to truly idolize the founders. No American hero was idolized more so than Washington. As preservationist and scholar William Murtagh puts it, “No other colonial American comes close to Washington in personifying the symbol of patriotism expressed with what approaches religious zeal.”⁵

By the mid 19th century, as the Civil War grew near, another aspect that would later be associated with the colonial revival became apparent in the use of objects and structures associated with the founders
to advance the causes of patriotism, virtue, and
American morality.

Thought to be the first historic house museum in
the United States, the Washington’s Headquarters site
at Hasbrouck House, in Newburgh, New York opened its
doors to the public in 1850. William J. Murtagh has
described the site as “the first publicly owned shrine
to an American secular patron saint.” The opening of
the most famous of American Historic Houses,
Washington’s Mount Vernon, also preceded the Civil War
and it set a precedent for the preservation of
patriotic sites. In just 5 years, the Mount Vernon
Ladies’ Association of the Union raised sufficient
private funding to purchase Mount Vernon and begin its
operation as a privately held site for the public
benefit. The Association’s model strongly influenced
the colonial revival and has had a lasting impact on
the field of preservation. As Murtagh describes it,
the Mount Vernon model established certain
“presuppositions about historic preservation in
America” including “the idea that private citizens,
not government, were the proper advocates for preservation; that only buildings and sites associated with military and political figures were worthy of preservation; that such sites must be treated as shrines or icons; and that women would assume a dominant role in the acquisition and management of such properties.”⁷ (emphasis mine)

The establishment of these historic sites for the public benefit is significant in that they represent two very early examples of historic preservation in the United States, but they also mark a new way of thinking about the past. As with stories about George Washington, colonial revivalists believed that exposure to these sites could help to build individual character and inspire deep patriotism. That women were engaged in this public activity was also a new and daring challenge to the American social structure. Gender roles in nineteenth century American society were somewhat rigidly defined. The public sphere, that of business and of politics, was the realm of men while the private sphere, that of home, family and the
raising of morally upright children belonged to women. Curator and scholar Patricia West credits universal white manhood suffrage for opening the door of the public realm to women. As West puts it, “Women’s “benevolence” was one stabilizing source of authority in a society no longer governed solely by landowners.” She notes that “Traditionally, civic virtue had been understood to have been based on the independent republican household.” With the advent of universal white male suffrage, that household was no longer limited to a land owning class. The entry of all white men into the political arena brought a perceived threat to the stability of government. This threat gave women, already charged with instilling republican values within the society via the family, justification to extend their reach. Put simply, women who had previously believed they engaged in the political process via their influence on male family members now believed they had some obligation to express their values to a broader population. There is an indication of class bias in this response. It
implies that women of non land owning households, could not share the same values, in the perception of the landed, as those who had attained landed status. The statement of one adherent to this principle, Mount Vernon Ladies Association vice-regent Elizabeth Willard Barry, demonstrates how these women perceived, and justified, their engagement in the public sphere. Mrs. Barry asserted that “Woman’s Mission” was to do what she could within her sphere to raise republican sons – “Christian statesmen” – and the rescue of Mount Vernon was clearly a contribution to the rehabilitation of “the corrupted politics of the country.” Elizabeth Barry alludes to the traditional feminine role of raising republican sons but she is not satisfied with doing so within her own family. Through her involvement in Mount Vernon, a home that symbolized this concept of a national ideology, Mrs. Barry clearly hopes to influence all of America’s sons, or, we can speculate, all of her white sons.

Preservation proved to be an ideal avenue for women to enter into the public realm – both Hasbrouck
House and Mount Vernon were, after all, homes and the home was the center of the feminine realm. What is more, these were homes associated with the great virtue of George Washington. Defending virtue and instilling it within the family were indeed appropriate feminine acts during the 19th century. With a perception of virtue’s failure in the public sphere as the Civil War approached, it made sense that women like Ann Pamela Cunningham, the founder of The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, would challenge the status quo and enter the public sphere.10

With the precedent established by the Mount Vernon Ladies, and emulated by other groups that followed them, the mechanism was in place for private ownership or control of public resources. This scenario would prove a critical factor in the preservation aspect of the colonial revival. It is important to remember that Hasbrouck House and Mount Vernon were preserved as resources for the public benefit. But the third major element that catalyzed the colonial revival would also lead to a change in
how private ownership or control of historic sites was perceived. The impact of mass immigration turned this public spirited concept into a more possessive movement.

Roughly 250,000 immigrants entered the United States between 1783 and 1820. Immigration numbers remained modest until the decades of the 1840s and 1850s when 1.7 million and 2.6 million immigrants respectively entered the country. These newcomers were mostly European and a large proportion of them were refugees from Ireland’s great potato famine.¹¹ The Irish presented a particular threat to those who perceived a breakdown in American Society as they were generally poor and for the most part Catholic. Because of their poverty and their desire to remain with others who shared the same religious tradition, most of the Irish settled in cities like Boston and New York. The white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant majority in those cities reacted strongly to the threat of Irish culture infiltrating and undermining American culture.¹²
For the next two decades immigrants entered the country at roughly the same rate as during the 1850s, with slightly fewer in the 1860s and slightly more in the 1870s, but in the 1880s the figure doubles as 5.2 million newcomers flooded America’s shores.\textsuperscript{13} By the mid 1890s another shift had taken place as more southern and eastern Europeans began to replace western Europeans on the boats that entered the nation’s harbors.\textsuperscript{14} Like the Irish, these new immigrants brought cultural and religious values which were abhorrent to established Americans. It is no coincidence that, by the end of these decades of change, established Americans had begun to look for ways to secure their place in the society.

For some the response was overtly directed at the nation’s newcomers. Organizations like the anti-Catholic American Protection Society, established in 1887, fomented fear and disdain for the perceived menace. By 1896 the Society had hundreds of thousands members and substantial political leverage in states like Ohio, Michigan, Iowa and Nebraska.\textsuperscript{15} But for many
others, patriotic organizations with membership restrictions based on heredity offered authentication of their place in society. While the first such American organization, The Society of the Cincinnati, was established at the close of the Revolution, most were conceived at the end of the 19th century.

Published in 1917, American Orders & Societies and Their Decorations listed 98 such organizations each with membership based on descent from an ancestor who was involved in a particular war, a particular battle, or who had played a particular role in government.\(^{16}\)

Internal struggles were endemic within these organizations as individuals vied for control. In October of 1890 a group of ladies held the first meeting of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR) in Washington, D.C.\(^ {17}\) But by October of 1891 one of the organization’s founders, Mrs. Flora Adams Darling, had split with that group to form her own organization, the Daughters of the Revolution.\(^ {18}\) In another example, described by the New York Times, historian and author Martha J.
Lamb was inspired to establish the Colonial Dames of America in New York in April of 1891. This is the group that would later challenge the DAR for the right to operate Morris-Jumel Mansion. Lamb tapped socialite, Mrs. John King Van Rensselaer, to recruit an elite membership. Mrs. Van Rensselaer in turn created so exclusive an organization that Mrs. Lamb herself felt alienated from the group. When a group in Philadelphia formed the National Society of Colonial Dames of America (NSCDA), Mrs. Lamb and several of the other founders of the CDA broke off from that group and formed the Colonial Dames in the State of New York in association with the new national group. The NSCDA rapidly established associations in nearly every state, began to acquire historic artifacts some of which garnered headlines and they took control of several historic sites. Their lectures and other membership events were featured in the society pages. The CDA remained a more secretive society with members in New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore. They remained out of the headlines until 1898 when they filed suit against
the NSCDA and the NSCDA in the State of New York for use of the name “Colonial Dames.”

Under Mrs. Van Rensselaer’s rule the CDA took exclusivity to an extreme. Early in her tenure she invited Mrs. Edward Walsh Humphreys to join. A great-great-granddaughter of Benjamin Franklin, Mrs. Humphreys application demonstrated an exceptional pedigree. Mrs. Van Rensselaer, however, disapproved “of the morals and manners of the famous moralist,” and asked Mrs. Humphreys to apply under a different line of her ancestry. (To her credit, although she may have been able to do so, Mrs. Humphreys declined). The New York Times stated that this was “only one case of many in which this so-called patriotic society has made itself famous for very unpatriotic acts” and they go on to quote an unnamed source as saying that “the society was started with the avowed purpose of existing and keeping out certain fashionable women of New-York.”

The desire of turn-of-the-century Americans to associate with patriotic societies is demonstrated by
the rapid growth in the number of these organizations. Published in 1914, just three years before *American Orders & Societies, Patriotic Societies of the United States, And Their Lapel Insignia*, lists 60 patriotic organizations. Twenty-five of these organizations were established in the 1890s and another sixteen were launched before 1910.\(^{22}\)

With the settlement of so many new immigrants in New York City it is no surprise that there was great competition between the patriotic societies in that city by 1904. In 1896 the National Society of Colonial Dames in the State of New York, the New York affiliate of the NSCDA, was awarded the right to operate the circa 1748 Van Cortlandt House in the Bronx as a museum. The site had a modest association with the Revolution because the property had served as a hiding place for city records throughout the revolution and Washington held several meetings there during his time in New York.\(^{23}\) The success of the New York NSCDA in gaining control of the location started a scramble within the city as various societies endeavored to
establish their control over the remaining sites of historical significance. For the CDA, the disposition of Van Cortlandt House was especially offensive given their relationship to the New York chapter of the NSCDA. Their interest in possessing a site of their own, and one that would confirm their social standing, was palpable.

Although the CDA provides an extreme example of the elite nature of these organizations, they were all, by there very nature, exclusionary. That fact lies at the heart of the proprietary model. The desire of individuals to associate with these societies, the desire of the societies' to control historic sites, and their desire to control the dissemination of history, were all guided by a longing to establish a sense of place in that history - to be the owners of that history. To be sure, all of these groups presented some benevolent, educational or Americanizing aspect in their public face, but for groups like the CDA ownership of that history appeared to be more compelling motivation than dissemination.
In a letter to the editor of the New York Herald on February 27, 1904 an anonymous advocate for the Dames noted that “It would be wise if our legislators would take into account the necessity of placing the old time Morris, later styled Jumel, Mansion into the hands of those best qualified to put it into its original quaint style. Are not the Dames so qualified?”

The Daughters also touted their ability to furnish the Mansion in a period appropriate manner, but they maintained, much more aggressively than did the Dames, that their intention was to do so for the public benefit. Mrs. Frederic Hasbrouck referred to the thousands of school children who had benefited from viewing the Van Cortland House Museum in the Bronx, which, she reminded the Times “is maintained by the real Society of Colonial Dames, not the small organization that is an applicant with us for custody of the mansion.” Mrs. Hasbrouck assured the Times that the Daughters “motive in applying for custody was
purely a patriotic one. We aim to make it a museum and have relics there dating to Washington’s time.\textsuperscript{26}

To understand motivation under the proprietary model, and this contest for social hegemony, it is useful to think like a late-nineteenth century American. Our understanding of genetics, heredity and the transfer of human characteristics varies dramatically from that of our turn-of-the-century counterparts. As Michael Katz explains it, the general belief at the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century was that individuals could inherit the acquired characteristics of their ancestors. This mode of thought justified the actions of the colonial revivalists who belonged to a given patriotic society in that they believed themselves to be inherently superior by virtue of their distinguished ancestor. While this reasoning might allow for an inflated sense of one’s own character, it did not preclude the ability of anyone, regardless of their ancestry, from acquiring good qualities. Any individual, in this manner of thinking, could behave as a good and virtuous American even if
they lacked the superiority of distinguished American lineage. This way of thinking probably motivated some colonial revivalists who viewed the symbols of the movement as tools to improve the character of the poor. Others, however, seemed to believe that the character of the poor could not be improved - that without the proper pedigree they simply lacked the inherent qualities that characterize ‘good Americans.’ These colonial revivalists simply wanted to protect the symbols of the movement from outside influence. In relation to the nation’s newcomers these two types of colonial revivalists each believed that America’s past was “our history, not yours,” however, the more progressive of the two groups believed that the immigrant should learn from that history.

In 1923 the automaker Henry Ford purchased the Wayside Inn in Sudbury Massachusetts and furnished it with antiques for the public benefit. Formerly the Red Horse Tavern, the Inn was reported to be the inspiration for Longfellow’s Tales of the Wayside Inn wherein he memorialized the legend of the “Midnight
Ride of Paul Revere" in the story “The Landlord’s Tale.” According to Karal Ann Marling, Ford opened the Inn as a museum-hotel-restaurant (alcohol was not on the menu), and offered free meals to traveling clergy. Ford is quoted as stating that the true purpose of the endeavor was “to give foreigners who come to us … a way of finding out what is the real spirit of this country.” Marling points out that the “Patriotic societies also believed in the efficacy of exposing all comers, but immigrants in particular, to the spirit of Americanism stored up in the pores of old wood.” She notes that both the DAR and the Colonial Dames brought “bus loads of Italian youngsters to the Wayside Inn on a regular basis as part of an ongoing program of Americanization.” This story illustrates the role of historic sites, even those with a tenuous connection to the Revolution, in the effort to Americanize the immigrant population and it bolsters the argument that patriotic societies were engaged in this effort. William Rhoads too cites the DAR’s campaign to Americanize Boston’s Italian youth by
bussing them to the Wayside Inn and he also points to the City History Club in New York for their use of historic sites, like the Dyckman House in northern Manhattan, in the Americanization process. The Club, Rhoads tells us, was “founded by bluebloods in 1896 as a “kindergarten of citizenship.” He notes that “the club found its most eager students among immigrant children, led by the Jews, with “the Germans, Italians and Irish in hot pursuit.” 29

The last private owners of Morris-Jumel Mansion, the Earle family, were surely worried about the threat of immigrants and the poor, and we know they were aware of the competing patriotic societies of New York. Constance Greiff tells us that, in 1895, Ferdinand Earle proposed that all patriotic societies in New York City established one shared headquarters. He proposed the building soon to be constructed by the New-York Historical Society, on Central Park West, as the appropriate locale for this elite crucible. Greiff notes that General Ferdinand P. and Lillie Earle were
interested “in historical affairs.” She further notes that:

This was tied strongly to class consciousness and to familial associations with the pre-Revolutionary past. Gen. Earle was a member of the Society of Colonial Wars, the Order of Founders and Patriots of America, the Sons of the Revolution, the Maryland Society and the New England Society. His wife founded the Washington Heights Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

The Earles were interested in the preservation of the Mansion as a shrine to Washington. Given the description offered by Greiff, it is likely that they viewed the future of their home as a gathering place for patriotic societies, a clubhouse, more so than a public resource. In this attitude we find the distinction between the motivations of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ and those of many of the colonial revivalists. The MLVA and some of the later colonial revivalists asserted their desire to possess historically significant sites primarily for the public benefit. For revivalists like the Earles and many others, possession for social status and to provide a venue for social gathering was the primary goal. For the Earles and their peers the possession of
historic sites was symbolic of possessing the history itself and linking themselves to that history. It was a status symbol. To them it would have been inconceivable that newcomers to the nation, or even Americans of undistinguished background, could or should have any hand in controlling such sites of the past. Murtagh notes that “In the face of post Civil War affluence, established families pursued genealogy and the preservation of their ancestral homesteads as a challenge to “new Money’s” claims of legitimacy.”

But the Earle family’s purchase of the Morris-Jumel Mansion and their desire to see it preserved demonstrates that it was not just ancestral homes that drew the attention of established families. Nor was “old money” alone threatened by immigration and the changing society. As Murtagh goes on to point out, the recently established middle class at the turn-of-the-century, also threatened by massive immigration, “calmed its own anxieties by a veneration of the past.”
With the status of both the upper and middle classes of established Americans threatened by immigration and other pressures, the proprietary model of the colonial revival begins to take form. If for a moment, we accept the legitimacy of ancestral association as a qualification for the dissemination of the true history of the nation. If we imagine, as these Americans did, that our heritage somehow imbues us with experiences of our ancestors, then we can understand how Americans of the turn-of-the-century legitimized their right to control historic sites. By extension, we must then consider the nature of that ancestral association in terms of its historical significance. Thus the Daughters of the American Revolution, who gained membership because an ancestor fought in the American Revolution, considered themselves most qualified to control sites associated with that war. However, the Colonial Dames of America were certain that it was they who were most qualified to run such sites by virtue of their exclusivity. The Dames offered membership only to individuals with a
direct lineage to someone in colonial government or someone who otherwise played a notable role in colonial America. Surely their membership held a superior link to the past than an organization open to the descendants of any common foot soldier. The Daughters rejected the Dames claim of primacy on the very basis that the latter group believed distinguished them as more exclusive. That the Dames membership requirements did not distinguish between loyalist and patriot ancestors prompted derision among the Daughters and their supporters. Indeed, on the floor of the New York State Senate, on February 1, 1904, Senator Edgar T. Brackett accused the Dames of “affect[ing] the cultivation of the spirit of patriotism by recounting the deeds and preserving the relics of their Tory ancestors.” (Emphasis Mine)

That the Dames were considered the more aristocratic of the two groups at the time is revealed by Senator Grady’s response to Senator Brackett’s comments. Grady, a man of many words, asserts that “if it needed anything to brush away the intimation that there was anything
aristocratic about his bill, the bare name of the introducer would do it in a second. Brackett points out the “artfulness” in the Dames strategy of “securing the services of the greatest commoner in the Senate so as to disarm their enemy.” 33 Whispered accusations of Toryism were heard at the November 19th, 1904 meeting as well. 34

The Dames were the more exclusive of the two groups that sat together at Parks headquarters in November of 1904, and they were also the more socially elite. A survey of the Social Register looking at participants in the November meeting reveals a great deal about the social status of these two groups. A directory of subscribers, the Register was intended to provide seasonal residency information for a constituency with sufficient financial security to summer outside of New York City. To be listed in the Register an applicant’s information had to be submitted along with letters of endorsement from families that were already listed. Meeting this requirement did not guarantee listing - only the
anonymous members of the Social Register Association could do that. So, in reality, the publication served as a who’s who in elite social circles.\textsuperscript{35}

All but two of the eleven Dames listed in attendance at the November 1904 meeting were also listed in the Social Register of the previous year. Of the nine women listed in the Times article as having attended the meeting on behalf of the Daughters only two appear in the Social Register of 1903.\textsuperscript{36} A review of the Social Register of 1909 showed no change in the status of these ladies. An examination of a larger pool of Daughters, all associated with the Jumel Mansion cause, bolstered this result.\textsuperscript{37}

On March 4, 1903 the Daughters officially launched their campaign to operate the Jumel Mansion as the “Washington’s Headquarters” in a petition submitted to the municipal authorities. Of the twenty women who signed the petition, only five were listed in the Social Register of 1903. It is a significant nod to the importance of social status that three of
those five sat on the fledgling organization’s executive committee.

These figures indicate that the battle for control of Morris-Jumel Mansion was waged between two groups of unequal social standing. They confirm the elite status of the Dames, and they imply that the Daughters were not quite as privileged as the Dames, but they do not tell us precisely where the Daughters stood in the social order. Clearly, the five members of the DAR who were listed in the Register had achieved elite status. The fact that three of those five were placed in leadership positions certainly indicates the importance of social status to the members of the group as a whole. If the criteria for being listed in the Social Register were limited to measures of wealth or old money versus new money it seems likely that many more of the Daughters would be found within its pages. Certainly Mrs. N. Taylor Phillips, whose own family and that of her husband were among the city’s oldest and most successful, would have been listed. An attorney, Mr. Phillips had
served in the New York State Legislature and in 1904 he was the Deputy Comptroller of the city. However, Mr. and Mrs. Phillips were also Jewish. Among the details presented in the Social Register were church affiliations. A random survey of more than 200 listings in the 1903 edition revealed no synagogue affiliations listed among the members. Surprisingly, a list of abbreviations at the beginning of the book did include one for Catholic. None of the 200 randomly sampled listings, however, sported this abbreviation.  

The proprietary aspect of these two groups is clearly illustrated in their shared desire to control Morris-Jumel Mansion. But that ideology did not stop with the settlement of the dispute between the two parties. With little fanfare, the battle for control of Morris-Jumel Mansion ended when Parks Commissioner Pallas determined that a coalition of four chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution would operate the site. Together this coalition had incorporated to form the Washington’s Headquarters Association (WHA). The by-laws of the Association established an
“Associate Member” status which was open to members of the Sons of the American Revolution and any individual descended from a Revolutionary Patriot. Associate members could not vote but they otherwise enjoyed the same rights as the Daughters themselves in the operation of the site. Thus, men were to be included in future of the Morris-Jumel Mansion. This inclusive model probably made it much easier for the Parks Commissioner to choose the Daughters over the Dames to operate the site.40

Each of the four chapters of the DAR was responsible for the interpretation of one room in the Mansion and given complete autonomy to do so. Unfortunately, this structure meant disbursement of the interpretive records of each room and, when the organization disbanded, most of these records were lost. Fortunately, sufficient resources remain to give us a sense of the public mindedness of the organization. Copies of correspondence by the museum’s first professional curator, William Shelton, who was engaged by the Parks department to work at the site
(although his duties seem to have been limited by the presence of the WHA) provide us with the most useful evidence as to the actions of the organization.

In a 1909 report to then Parks Commissioner Henry Smith, Shelton complains that, “There is not sufficient feeling that all the work done here should be for the benefit of the public.” A year later he seems to grow more frustrated when he reports to another Commissioner that only the Manhattan Chapter, who were responsible for the mansion’s Dining Room, provided public access to their room. Shelton implies in his letters that three of the chapters belonging to the WHA used their rooms only to engage in one of the more popular activities of patriotic ladies of the day, the social tea.

Although the correspondence of William Shelton alone cannot provide us with conclusive documentation of the actions of the WHA, the fact that he includes these statements in official reports to the Parks Commissioner is compelling. While the Manhattan Chapter may have been more benevolent by interpreting
their room and opening it to the public, overall the WHA engaged in a proprietary use of the Mansion. A closer look at how the WHA interpreted the mansion, and an examination of the early evolution of the historic house museum in general, will provide a better understanding of how objects were used to influence people in the early 20th century.
NOTES

1 Neil Harris, Cultural Excursions, Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America (University of Chicago Press: Chicago & London, 1990) 55
4 Marling, 4.
6 ibid
7 Murtagh, 30.
9 West, 28
10 West, 8.
11 Gordon, 9.
12 West, 4.
13 Gordon, 9.
14 Schlesinger, Fox and Carnes, 833.
15 Schlesinger, Fox and Carnes, 962
16 Jennings Hood and Charles J. Young, American Orders & Societies and their Decorations (Philadelphia, Bailey, Banks & Biddle Company, 1917)
18 Hunter, 169.
20 “Ben Franklin No Aid” The New York Times, January 10, 1896
21 Ibid.
24 Stillman, 6.
25 “Supports Dames, Not Daughters” New York Herald 7 February 1904
26 “Pallas in the War of Dames and Daughters” New York Times, 3 April 1904
27 Marling, 163
28 Ibid.
31 Murtagh, 30.
32 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
36 Social Register (Social Register Association: New York, 1903)
37 Social Register (Social Register Association: New York, 1909)
38 Social Register (Social Register Association: New York, 1903)
39 Greiff, 297
40 Constitution and By-Laws of The Washington Headquarters Association, Founded by the
Daughters of the American Revolution, March 17, 1904 Morris-Jumel Mansion, Gladys Brooks
Commemorative Archive.
41 William Henry Shelton to Hon. Henry Smith, Commissioner of Parks, Boroughs of Manhattan,
Brooklyn & Richmond, January 1, 1909, Morris-Jumel Mansion, Gladys Brooks Commemorative
Archive.
42 William Henry Shelton to Hon. Charles B. Stover, Park Commissioner, Feb'y 23d, 1910 Morris-
Jumel Mansion, Gladys Brooks Memorial Archive.
Objects and Structures

An 1886 image of the 1st floor hall of the Morris-Jumel Mansion presents an odd juxtaposition. A wool winder used for gathering newly spun yarn into skeins, a treadle powered spinning wheel and a large, momentum-powered, great wheel stand prominently beside some of the ornate furnishings of the period. A statue of Washington is perched on a pedestal in the background. Was this an eclectic museum exhibit? No, these were Jumel possessions displayed while the family still lived in the home. But why would a wealthy family, in a rapidly urbanizing community, possess these bygone tools of household industry? The record is silent as to whether the matriarch of the
family, Eliza Jumel, owned and exhibited these objects during her lifetime. She did treat her home as something of a museum, but it seems more likely that Eliza’s descendants, especially her granddaughter, Eliza Jumel Chase, were first to embrace this peculiar aesthetic.

By the time of her death in 1865 Eliza Jumel had experienced the turmoil of two of the forces that catalyzed the Colonial Revival, the Civil War and the rapid pace of industrialization. Her mental decline towards the end of her life may have prevented her fully understanding the reality of these events. Nonetheless, the possibility that this social climber would embrace the spinning wheel as a symbol of independence, an object which for much of her lifetime probably conjured images of the toiling lower and servant classes (indeed, the very class from which she had risen), seems unlikely. Her granddaughter, on the other hand, raised in privilege but also unsettled by the war, industrialization and the mass immigration that her grandmother would never know, was a prime
candidate to romanticize such objects and welcome the movement. The lifetime of Eliza Jumel Chase is a useful timeline for the evolution of the Colonial Revival movement. Still in her Twenties during the Civil War, she would also have experienced massive immigration and urbanization through the lens of a wealthy New Yorker. Development around her family’s Washington Heights home no doubt threatened her sense of well being. That Eliza Jumel Chase would cling to objects of the past; objects that symbolized simpler times, independence, virtue and family; objects like the spinning wheel, makes great sense. The evidence makes clear that she was fully absorbed in the spirit of the movement by its peak at the turn-of-the-century when she would have a profound impact upon the development of the Morris-Jumel Mansion Museum.

Born in 1837, Eliza Jumel Chase survived the major societal upheavals of her day in comfort. Her father, Nelson Chase, was a successful attorney who began his career in the offices of Aaron Burr. Much of her early life was spent in the New York City area in
the presence of her wealthy grandmother, Eliza. By 1854, at age 17, Eliza Jumel Chase was married in France to the son of a former business associate of her late grandfather, Stephen Jumel. What financial means her new husband, Paul Guillaume Raymond Pery, brought to the marriage is unclear, but between his own assets and the 5,000 francs guaranteed the couple annually by Eliza Jumel, he was apparently able to support his family without working. Mr. Pery died in the early 1870s, but Eliza Jumel Chase did not suffer financially from the loss. She went on to marry Julius Henry Caryl in 1876. Caryl’s father was the founder of the Susquehanna Railroad and he was a Director of the Exchange Bank.¹

That a family of such means would engage in the production of homespun is unlikely. They surrounded themselves with the finest of furnishings, art, and decorative arts objects. How then do we explain their display of fiber working implements placed prominently in the main hall of their home?
The work of historian Rodrus Roth may provide some explanation. Roth has identified the kitchen exhibits of the 1864 Sanitary Fairs as an early example of the use of objects, such as the spinning wheel, to invoke the spirit of the colonial era.² 

Patricia West notes that these exhibits evoked “national loyalty to a mythologized American past.”³ 

The Sanitary Fairs were fundraising events organized by committees of volunteers, primarily women, in an effort to provide aid to the wounded soldiers of the Union Army. An illustration of the “New England Kitchen” at the Brooklyn and Long Island Sanitary Fair of 1864 depicts a colossal fireplace surrounded by symbolic implements. Two ladies in colonial costume toil over heavy cast iron kettles while, to the left of the hearth, three more labor over spinning wheels. A tall-case (grandfather’s) clock stands by the heavy brick masonry of the fireplace, and food, presumably herbs and cured meats, hang from the ceiling to dry.⁴ 

The use of the spinning wheel in these exhibits offered the public a balm to soothe a yearning for
simpler times. Roth describes them as the “quintessential symbol of colonial times.” Evoking images of woman-hood, the gritty self-sufficiency and independence of the colonists and of the more recent pioneers who tamed the west, this human powered device appears to have been a fixture at all such exhibits. Mechanical spinning equipment, power looms, the sewing machine and other innovations had revolutionized textile work by the 1860s, but the human-powered spinning wheel still represented self-sufficiency at the most basic level by enabling an individual to convert raw material into thread using their own skills and energy.

These exhibits offered many symbols to address a societal yearning for simpler times. Although open fire cooking may have remained a commonplace in rural areas during this period, the practice likely seemed quaint to the urbanites attending the kitchen exhibits. Though slow to achieve widespread use, the 1815 introduction of the James stove began a revolution in cooking technology. By 1860 cookstoves were in wide
use and those who could afford them had already begun replacing their stoves with the even more versatile range, however, the cost of these devices rendered them inaccessible to those of modest means.\textsuperscript{7} Hearthside cooking would likely have held none of the romance for the rural or the poor urban American that it apparently did for the middle and upper-middle class.\textsuperscript{8}

By 1858 the Perys had relocated to New York and it seems likely that they remained there at the time of the 1864 \textit{Metropolitan Sanitary Fair} and the \textit{Brooklyn and Long Island Sanitary Fair}. Whether or not the couple attended the fairs, they likely read about the exhibits in local media and probably enjoyed images of the events in the popular illustrated magazines of the day. Perhaps, after musing together over the “Knickerbocker Kitchen” exhibit reproduced in the April 23, 1864 issue of \textit{Harper’s Weekly}, the two decided to attend the \textit{Metropolitan Sanitary Fair} and see for themselves. Regardless, it would have been difficult for them to avoid the influence of these
fairs which were being staged throughout the northeast. The impact of the fairs would have a lasting influence on American popular culture.

The Perys could certainly afford the cost of admission to the fairs and they may have felt duty bound to attend in support of the war effort. At ten cents admission plus the cost of a meal, the kitchen exhibits courted the middle and upper-middle classes. On the other hand, the average unskilled laborer at the time would have found the admission cost prohibitive. Although there are many variables that make conversion of monetary value from one time period to another an inexact science, one measure - the unskilled wage - which calculates value based on the prevailing wage of unskilled laborers at a given time - is especially telling with regards to the cost of attending the Sanitary Fairs. Calculated based on the gross domestic product, the 10 cent admission to the "New England Kitchen" at the Brooklyn and Long Island Sanitary Fair would amount to about $1.12 today. When we base the admission on the unskilled wage the figure
climbs to $11.58. Even given the inexact nature of these types of conversions, we can speculate from this projection that the cost of admission to the kitchen exhibits would have been discouraging to the average laborer of the day. Given the nature of the fairs as fundraisers, we cannot assume that the admission price was intended to exclude the laboring classes. The price may well have been calculated based on what the market would bear. Intended or not the lower classes were not the target market for the fairs and this distinguishes them from later Colonial Revival era efforts where influencing the poor and the newly emigrated was a motivating factor.\textsuperscript{9}

Even though it may not have been intended for that purpose, the imagery of the kitchen exhibits would have suited the Colonial Revival effort to Americanize the new immigrant well. It seems likely that it inspired those who participated in the movement later, in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and the early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries. Whether it was because of their popularity, their message, or most likely some combination of the
two, these exhibits were recreated at the popular Exhibitions and Expositions of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Through the extensive media attention they received, these great fairs brought the symbols later associated with the Colonial Revival to a much broader audience than the Sanitary Fairs could.

The International Centennial Exhibition staged in Philadelphia in 1876, and the Permanent Exhibition which followed it, each featured a ‘New England’ log house that in many ways replicated the function of the Colonial Kitchen exhibits at the Sanitary Fairs. Thought to be the architectural style of the earliest New England Colonists, this log structure no doubt also conjured images of the nation’s newest ideological icon, Abraham Lincoln. These crude dwellings and Lincoln’s own log cabin, frontiersman story may also have reminded viewers of the self-reliant American pioneer.

An 1877 photograph of the exhibit captures a costumed ‘family’ seated at a table in front of the rustic structure. A spinning wheel and cradle flank
the table. As in the Sanitary Fair exhibits, these symbols of motherhood and self-sufficiency are placed prominently for the benefit of the viewer. The cabin functioned as a restaurant at the exhibit and featured, at the top of the menu, “Ye Baked Beans, prepared as in ye fafhion of ye Olden Tyme in ye Ancient City of Bofton…”\textsuperscript{12}

By the time of the World’s Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893, all of the elements that combined to form the Colonial Revival were in place. Although the fair featured some progressive elements by architects like Louis Sullivan, it is best known for its classically styled “white city” motif. Like the Sanitary fairs and the Centennial Exposition, the World’s Columbian Exhibition featured a rustic restaurant where the spinner took center stage near the hearth.\textsuperscript{13}

Prior to the infiltration of broadcast media into nearly every American home, these fairs served as a means of informing the public as to advances in technology, science, and cultural trends both at home
and abroad. Magazines such as *Harper’s Weekly*, and *Leslie’s Illustrated* brought the spectacle of such events into the homes of many who couldn’t travel to the actual exhibits. In this way the influence of the fairs reached even into the homes of those of modest means.

Even if she never attended a Sanitary Fair, the Centennial Exhibition, or the World’s Columbian Exhibition, Eliza Jumel Chase Pery was unlikely to have escaped the imagery of the kitchen exhibits featured at each. These exhibits, and the symbolic objects they featured, were simply a part of her cultural experience. It would have made sense to her that such objects could invoke a sense of national pride, virtue, and moral fortitude. Perhaps that understanding, coupled with her large collection of artifacts – including those spinning wheels – was part of the reason that, in 1904, the newly formed Washington’s Headquarters Association named her honorary Vice President. On April 4th of that year, Mrs. Frederick Hasbrouck, a WHA founder and regent of the
Knickerbocker chapter of the DAR, informed the Times that Mrs. Caryl had promised “a lot of historic furniture” including “chairs that had been sat on by Washington and his staff... and a bedstead in which Lafayette slept.”

If the juxtaposition of spinning wheels beside the Jumel’s fine French furnishings strikes us as odd, at least one of the exhibits of the WHA is even stranger. Despite some evidence to the contrary, the Daughters interpreted the largest bedroom in the house as the one that Washington used during his tenure at the Mansion.

*Figure 4: Washington's Bedroom, circa 1916*
Given what we know about their use of the museum space, we cannot assume that public edification was foremost on their minds. Nonetheless, they must have intended for others to see the space as they produced a postcard to show it off.

Even to the untrained eye, there is something wrong with this picture. Never-mind that the bed and some of the other objects in the room are of a later period, what was Washington doing with those spinning wheels? And what about that cradle? Was the great general caring for a baby while leading his troops in battle? Although this unlikely grouping of objects in a room dedicated to George Washington strikes us as humorous today, it would have made perfect sense to Eliza Jumel Pery Caryl and the ladies of the WHA. They were not endeavoring to recreate the room in which Washington stayed, but rather, they were trying to evoke the spirit of the father of his country. Here we see the “mythologized American past” that Patricia West spoke of. While the typical period room exhibit of today attempts to provide the viewer with a sense
of life and lifestyle at a given time, the exhibits of
the colonial revival were also intended to stir up
some instinctive sense of the past in the heart of the
viewer. For the WHA, the symbolism of the spinning
wheel, its association with the virtuous and self-
reliant colonists, represented the idea of Washington
more effectively than a room more accurately
resembling the one in which he stayed possibly could.

The ladies of the WHA were not the only ones at
the Mansion who used representative objects to elicit
a visceral, emotional response in the viewer. Curator
William Shelton interpreted the dining room of the
house in cooperation with the Manhattan Chapter of the
DAR. He reports of his effort that, "In that room I
have been creating THE Dining Room of this historic
house by covering the walls with portraits, in old
prints, of its famous hosts and hostesses and
illustrious guests."\textsuperscript{16} This “curiosity cabinet”
approach to interpretation offered the viewer some
sense of who had visited the house but no feeling for
what their experience might have been or what they
themselves might have seen there. Viewing the images of those historic visitors, Shelton believed, was sufficient to move and inspire museum visitors. In addition to prints, William Shelton used bas relief plates and other commemorative ware in the same interpretive style.

Figure 3: Jumel Mansion, Dining Room, Circa 1910.

Like Eliza Jumel Caryl, Shelton also embraced the spinning wheel as a symbol of the colonial era although he may have done so with reservations. In
1909 he railed against the museum’s growing wheel collection reporting that, “We already have six flax wheels and it would be an act of mercy to stop the supply.” But by 1914 Shelton had created three more curiosity cabinet style rooms, each exhibiting colonial era implements. His “spinning room” featured at least 10 spinning wheels and other fiber working implements. A candle room featured a variety of candle molds and dipping equipment and a quilting room was set to appear “as though the workers had but just left.”

While Shelton’s and the WHA’s use of objects to interpret Morris-Jumel Mansion differs from the modern approach, it is not difficult to understand their way of thinking. Still today we revere family heirlooms and their stories as a link to our own past. Often these objects represent an ancestor we never knew, but we nonetheless feel a connection to them as we hold object that they once held. Photographs have largely replaced portraiture and other representational forms, but the spirit of nostalgia when we gaze upon a bygone
hero remains the same. What has changed is the way in which many of us understand objects how they link us to the past. No longer do most of us believe an object, in and of itself, can be imbued with the spirit of the past. Rather, we see these objects as reminders of our ancestors, our civic heroes and of our history. In this way objects have remained powerful storytelling tools as they lend credibility to the stories of the past.
NOTES

1 Greiff, 237; “Miss Eliza J.P. Caryl Dies” New York Times, 29 April 1915
2 Roth, 165
3 West, 42
5 Roth, 165
6 Modern History Sourcebook, Observations on the Loss of Woollen Spinning, (c. 1794)
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1794woolens.html
8 Ibid., 162-164
10 Roth notes an extensive list of publications featuring the exhibit including Leslie’s Illustrated (June 17, 1876), and Harper’s Weekly Supplement (June 15, 1876). While the publications listed may not have been immediately available to the poor and those of modest means, it seems likely that they would, in time, have circulated.
11 A detailed description of the exhibit along with illustrations and photographs can be found in Roth, 176-179.
12 Ibid., 179
13 Ibid.
14 Roth, 177
15 “Pallas in the War of Dames and Daughters” New York Times, 3 April 1904
17 Shelton to Mrs. George Wilson Smith, April 27, 1914.
18 Greiff, 237; “Miss Eliza J.P. Caryl Dies” New York Times, 29 April 1915
19 Roth, 165
20 West, 42
22 Roth, 165
23 Modern History Sourcebook, Observations on the Loss of Woollen Spinning, (c. 1794)
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1794woolens.html
25 Ibid., 162-164
27 Roth notes an extensive list of publications featuring the exhibit including Leslie’s Illustrated (June 17, 1876), and Harper’s Weekly Supplement (June 15, 1876). While the publications listed may not have been immediately available to the poor and those of modest means, it seems likely that they would, in time, have circulated.
28 A detailed description of the exhibit along with illustrations and photographs can be found in Roth, 176-179.
18 Ibid., 179
18 Ibid.
18 Roth, 177
18 “Pallas in the War of Dames and Daughters” New York Times, 3 April 1904
18 Shelton to Mrs. George Wilson Smith, April 27, 1914.
18 “Washington’s Headquarters Association to Give Reception in Historic Mansion” New York Times, 17 May, 1914,
Conclusion

The story of Morris-Jumel Mansion and its journey from private home to historic house museum provides a firm foundation on which to illustrate the evolution of the Colonial Revival Movement. Beginning with the decorative motifs of Eliza Jumel Pery Caryl, continuing through the occupancy of the last private owners, the Earles, and peaking with the interpretive models of the DAR, the details of MJM’s history read like a timeline for the movement.

By placing fiber working implements in the main hall of her home Eliza Jumel Pery Caryl sought to remind herself, her family, and all who came to call on them of the virtue and moral fortitude of the founders. She eased the anxieties of her era through association with these symbols of self-sufficiency and household industry. Her later involvement with the DAR and their campaign gain control of the mansion affirms her involvement in the growing Revival.

The Earle family immersed themselves in the social aspect of the movement through their
involvement in numerous patriotic societies. They hosted the members of various societies at events held in their personal shrine to George Washington. On New Year’s Day in 1897, for instance, the entire Earle family donned colonial costume and welcomed members of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Sons of the American Revolution to an open house at the mansion.¹

The Earles wanted to see the Mansion preserved for posterity and they were at one point willing to donate the house to the City, although they were not willing to give up the land on which the house sat. Their vision was to move the Mansion to a narrow, City owned lot across the street so they could develop the valuable land upon which the house had been built. Fortunately, this vision was never realized.²

The story of the Daughters of the American Revolution, their battle for control of the site and their use of the site once that battle was won, would, by itself, provide an excellent platform for relating the story of the Colonial Revival. The social struggle
revealed in their dispute with the Colonial Dames of America illustrates the desire of established Americans to carve out their place within a changing society. Although both groups may have been considered elite by the standards of the average New Yorker, the contest between the two revealed a strong cultural emphasis on social status. The battle also revealed a great deal about gender roles at the start of the 20th century and the ways in which those roles were changing. That Mrs. Story had stumbled, addressing the Parks Commissioner as ‘Madame President’ was illustrative of the separate spheres of women and men in the society. The fact that the Daughters succeeded in gaining control of the site only after creating a model that allowed for the involvement of men within their organization is even more revealing.

The use of objects like the spinning wheel, and especially the display of wheels and a cradle in a room dedicated to George Washington, exemplifies the symbolism of these objects for the late 19th - early 20th century American. Through the use of the spinning
wheel alone we really come to understand how Americans perceived objects to be imbued with the spirit of the past. Through this seemingly incongruous exhibition, we get a sense of how the colonial revivalists understood these objects to convey what they believed to be the virtue and the morality of the founders.

All of the characters involved in the story of Morris-Jumel Mansion engaged to some degree in the proprietary model, but it is the Daughters and the Dames who best serve to illustrate the idea. Although we can never know for certain how the public would have been served had the outcome of their battle been different, the evidence indicates that the Daughters were the more benevolent of the two parties involved. The diffuse structure of the group formed by the Daughters, the Washington’s Headquarters Association, however, belied their altruistic rhetoric in that it allowed the less progressive chapters of the DAR to use their designated rooms as meeting rooms rather than public exhibitions.
The evolution of America’s patriotic societies in general proved to be of greater importance to the story of the revival than I had understood at the outset of my research. The exclusivity of these groups seemed to tie in well with the proprietary model and the exclusion of outside influences on the symbols of American virtue. In the case of Morris-Jumel Mansion, however, the involvement of Mrs. N. Taylor Phillips belies the complexity of these relationships. The revelation of Mrs. Phillips’s heritage opens an entirely new avenue for future research that may broaden our understanding of colonial revival motivations.

Finally, we must credit the Washington’s Headquarters Association and its DAR founders for the preservation of what is today the oldest remaining house in Manhattan. Whether the individuals involved envisioned a clubhouse worthy of their patriotic heritage or a tool to make ‘good Americans’ of the nation’s newcomers, their campaign preserved an artifact of historical and architectural significance.
at a time when rapid development threatened to swallow the City’s past.
NOTES

1 Greiff, 289
2 Greiff, 290
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