

HISTORIC HOUSES PRESERVED BY SOCIETIES of AMERICAN WOMEN

By Bertha Damaris Knobe



Betsy Ross House, Philadelphia

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CATCHING the spirit of the movement in 1890 for preservation of historic houses, Southern women undertook the restoration of the White House of the Confederacy at Richmond, which had been converted into a public school. Inspired by Mrs. Joseph Bergan, the Confederate Memorial Literary Society was organized and, six years afterward, this fine old Virginia homestead was transformed into a Confederate museum of national renown, costing, aside from its priceless relics, an expenditure of sixty thousand dollars. Annually visited by hundreds, it reminds of the stirring time when Jefferson Davis arrived as first President of the Confederacy, inaugurating the brilliant receptions which the Southern belle of '61 still recounts with sparkling eyes; and, aside from political affairs and functions, it suggests the sacred sorrows of family life, for little Joe, eldest son of the President, was killed instantly by falling from the east portico, and later was born the "war baby" of the South, Winnie Davis, the lamented "Daughter of the Confederacy."

Upon the importunities of these women, ever mindful of the "tender grace of a day that is dead," the city of Richmond agreed to surrender ownership, providing they raised the "improvement" fund. This they promptly proceeded to do through a bazaar, with each Southern State in charge of a booth, which netted thirty thousand dollars. Half of this sum was turned over to the rehabilitating committee, and on June 3, 1894, the eighty-sixth anniversary of Jefferson Davis' birth, the keys were formally handed to the women, and on February 22, 1896, in remembrance of the inauguration of Jefferson Davis as President of the Confederacy, they opened the house to the public.

There it stands on duty, as it were, in its gray coat of paint—reminder of the coat of the Confederate soldier. Filled with sacred mementos, from the faded uniform of General Lee to the "picket off duty forever," each room is sponsored by a Southern State, with its Confederate coat-of-arms emblazoned thereon, and with one of its daughters as regent. The entrance-hall and reception-room are reserved for the loving care of Mrs. Davis. The "Mississippi room" was formerly Mrs. Davis' little sitting-room, wherein she served coffee to her husband's visitors, and the "Georgia room" was the stopping-place of Abraham Lincoln when he visited Richmond the day after the evacuation.

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Also through an organized army of thirty thousand Southern women known as Daughters of the Confederacy, the first "White House of the Confederacy" at Montgomery, Alabama, wherein Jefferson Davis lived as President of the Confederacy for three months before moving to Richmond, ultimately will be purchased for a museum. In the meantime the White House Association, with Mrs. Davis as queen regent, and Mrs. J. D. Beale of Montgomery as regent, works under the auspices of Daughters of the Confederacy for the necessary funds; and, pending their proprietorship, they keep their treasures, many of which have been given by the mistress of the first White House of the Con-



From a Photograph by Ed Hagaman Hall

Jumel Mansion,
New-York City

federacy, in the State Capitol building at Montgomery, wherein Jefferson Davis took his oath when he became the first President of the Confederacy.

Southern women also rose patriotically to the occasion, so to speak, when "Liberty Hall," the home of Alexander Hamilton Stephens, Vice-President of the Confederacy, was preserved by citizens of Crawfordsville, Georgia, the assisting "Ladies' Auxiliary" contributing and even to this day maintaining Mr. Stephens' private room in its original setting.

Other houses that may be numbered among those with which Southern women, directly or indirectly, are concerned are Heard House at Washington, Georgia, historic as the last meeting-place of the Confederate Cabinet; the General Robert E. Lee Home in Richmond, Virginia, now headquarters for the Virginia Historical Society; the Stonewall Jackson House at Lexington, Kentucky, whose hospital has the Southern woman as patron saint; and "Beauvoir," the beautiful home of Jefferson Davis in Mississippi after the war.

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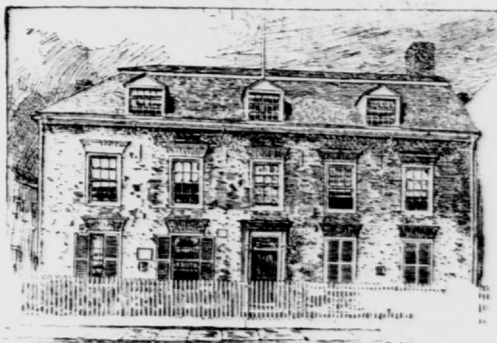
King Manor, set among five acres of fine old forest trees at Jamaica, Long Island, is a picturesque "1750" house preserved not by a national but a local organization, and in its prime was occupied by Rufus King, whom Washington appointed Minister to the Court of St. James,



Wallace House, Somerville, New-Jersey



King Manor, Jamaica, Long Island



"Yankee Doodle" House, Rensselaer
New-York



White House of the Confederacy,
Richmond, Virginia

Thereby hangs a little historic story, which women who make up the King Manor Association have gleaned from the King family letters. Rufus King was in England at the time of Washington's death, and the day after receiving the sad news, being obliged to attend an official function at the Court of St. James, he appeared with a band of crape on his arm. The King greeted Ambassador King as usual, but made no allusion to the passing of his illustrious countryman. One dignitary after another conversed ordinarily with him; but still there was no mention of the national sorrow in America, until one officer noted the badge of death, and with more effrontery than sympathy said, "Oh, I see your Mr. Washington is dead!"

This old King Manor House, as it is known familiarly, belongs in the category of historic structures saved by a local organization. The park commissioners of Brooklyn, who had had charge of the property for several years, decided that they would pull it down. Thereupon the dissenting women formed themselves into the King Manor Association, and induced the commissioners to let them have the place. They promptly converted the house into headquarters for various organizations in that locality. The Long Island contingent of Daughters of the Revolution were given the drawing-room, after having reset it with fine specimens of eighteenth-century furniture, and the dining-room, which was added to the original house by John King, the son of the Governor of New-York, became the meeting-place for the Jamaica Woman's Club.

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The officers of the Revolutionary Memorial Association, incorporated seven years ago for the care of Washington's headquarters at Somerville, New-Jersey, are composed of both men and women. Their chief interest is Wallace House. This was built in 1778, just before it became winter headquarters, and was chosen because of its nearness to Camp Middlebrook. To the camp came the wives of officers, and no less a chronicler than General Greene, in writing long ago of a social function, thus quaintly reflected the festive side of Washington: "We had a little dance at my quarters. His excellency and Mrs. Greene danced upward of three hours without once sitting down. Upon the whole, we had a pretty little frisk."

Upon crossing the small porch and entering the house, one notices on the stairs a tall old-time clock, reminding of the time its insides were hidden in the Raritan River to prevent their destruction by the British. This entrance-hall runs the length of the house, and its walls to right and left are plastered with Revolutionary engravings and portraits. Two of the rooms have been reset with Continental trappings by the main society, the Revolutionary Memorial Association (which, by the way, is a stock-company, that issued shares at ten dollars each for the purchase of the house), while various chapters of Daughters of the American Revolution have furnished four and Daughters of the Revolution one of the remaining rooms. At every turn are found reminders of Washington, one paper recounting the General's appearance at prayer-meeting on a Sunday afternoon, which was held in the "court-martial house near his dwelling."

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Women have been not less cooperative in saving the home of their illustrious countrywoman, Betsy Ross, maker of the first American flag. Though not a single feminine name adorns the officers' list of

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