

THE WORNALL/ MAJORS COLUMNS



ALEXANDER MAJORS
HISTORIC HOUSE AND MUSEUM

Our Mission—To engage community by bringing history to life through hands-on, innovative programs and experiences.

Volume I, Issue XXVIII
Fall 2012

Dating from 1858 and 1856 respectively, The John Wornall and Alexander Majors Houses are two of the oldest and most important antebellum structures in the greater Kansas City region. Now under one nonprofit umbrella, the Museums serve 8,000 visitors and program participants annually.

FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I am delighted and honored to be the new executive director of The Wornall/Majors House Museums (the Museums). The John Wornall and Alexander Majors Houses anchor our community to a rich and meaningful past. At this time, I enthusiastically embrace the opportunity to build the capacity of the Museums during such an exciting time in their history.

I come to the Museums as the Board launches a new strategic plan that will guide our priorities for years to come. This plan includes measurable goals for capital improvements, generating more revenue, and reaching a larger audience. By 2015, we aim to have an annual operating budget of \$300,000, allowing us to preserve and restore both houses and to deliver qual-

ity education programs and services for 10,000 visitors and participants annually.

This newsletter will provide up-to-date information on our programs, events, and activities. We will continue to mail a newsletter to you on a quarterly basis. Also, enclosed please find our year-end appeal letter. I hope you will consider making a tax-deductible contribution to the Museums by December 31, 2102. Your support is vital to our success in expanding the educational and community impact of these treasured landmarks.

Sincerely,
Anna Marie Tutera
Executive Director

- Connect With Us -

816.444.1858

The John Wornall House
6115 Wornall Road
Kansas City, MO 64113
www.wornallhouse.org

Hours

10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tues.-Sat.
1 p.m.-4 p.m. Sun.

The Alexander Majors House
8201 State Line Road
Kansas City, MO 64114
www.alexandermajors.com

Hours

1 p.m.-4 p.m. Sat. & Sun.

Discounted Rates for Groups

VOLUNTEERING AT THE ALEXANDER MAJORS HOUSE

We are looking for volunteers to be docents at The Alexander Majors House starting in January 2013. If you are interested, please email director@wornallhouse.org or call 816.444.1858 and ask to speak with Dorene Disbrow.

GIFT MEMBERSHIPS

This holiday season, purchase a Museum membership as a gift and continue the legacy of supporting both Houses. For more information, call 816.444.1858.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Historic Holidays at the Museums:

CANDLELIGHT:

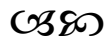
The John Wornall House

Join us for our **annual 19th Century Candlelight Christmas Tours on Friday, December 7th and Saturday, December 8th from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. each evening.**

This year, you will experience a unique Christmas story from the Victorian period told in each room of the home. This is an interactive tour. There will also be music, singing, and open hearth baking.

All tours begin in the carriage house with refreshments and entertainment. Tours enter the house every 15 minutes starting at 6:30 p.m. The last tour starts at 8:30 p.m. Each tour lasts about 30 minutes. The carriage house will open at 6 p.m. The cost is \$8 for adults and \$5 for seniors and children ages 6-12. This event is free for children ages 5 and under.

Advance reservations are recommended. To register and pay online, visit our website, www.wornallhouse.org or call 816.444.1858.



FATHER CHRISTMAS:

The Alexander Majors House

Enjoy a fun-filled and memorable day with your children and grandchildren at our **Father Christmas event on Saturday, December 15th from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.**

Each child will have the opportunity to participate in traditional Christmas activities, listen to stories, hear music, and meet Father Christmas. Your child is welcome to sit on his knee and have a photo taken!

The cost is \$8 per child, which includes one emailed image. This event is free for adults and children ages 2 and under. Advance reservations are not necessary, and you may pay at the door.

COLLECTIONS CORNER

Visit The Alexander Majors House this holiday season and see an authentic feather Christmas tree with historically collectible ornaments, graciously provided by Rich Hoffman and Christopher Filley.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PAST

OCTOBER "ACTIVITY"

Over 150 people enjoyed ghost tours and paranormal investigations on October 19th, 20th, 26th, and 31st at The John Wornall House. Wafting pipe tobacco, electronic voice phenomena, and a full-body apparition were all reported! Thank you to ELITE Paranormal of Kansas City, Paranormal Distraction, the Missouri Irish Brigade, and our staff and volunteers for all of their support and generosity.

OPEN HOUSE

On October 4th, our Board of Directors hosted a party at The Alexander Majors House to welcome Anna Marie Tintera, to showcase the House's newly-restored windows and an expanded collection, and to celebrate Alexander Major's 198th birthday!

We thank The William T. Kemper Foundation, R. Crosby Kemper, Jr., and the Kearney-Wornall Foundation for funding the restoration of the windows and the new collection of historically significant furniture and artifacts.

We are also thankful to Bruce Burstert for housing his substantial collection of Missouri River Valley Pottery. We are grateful for the expertise and hard work of our Collections Committee: Libby Gessley, Gloria Dobbs, Tom Taylor, Janice McCollum, and Day Kerr, with a special thank you to Courtney



Gary Hicks as Alexander Majors Sloan. And, finally, we are indebted to Gary Hicks who graciously portrayed Alexander Majors and who continues to support all of our efforts.

SUMMER CAMP

Over 80 children attended our summer camps offered in June and July at the Museums. Our camps gave children the opportunity to experience daily life in the 1850s through a variety of hands-on activities. Children learned how to shear sheep, feed baby lambs, haul water, bend iron, and make nails. Campers played games such as croquet, horseshoes, and hoops, and tried sewing, diary writing, ink making, and quilling. They made homemade lemonade and ice cream. They listened to banjo music and experienced frontier dancing with the Missouri Town Dancers.

Reenactors gave demonstrations about Civil War medicine. Artist Sarah Poff taught about the Underground Railroad through visual art activities. We are grateful to our staff members Dorene Disbrow and Sharon Cassity for developing and implementing the summer camps.

RESTORATION REPORT

Major Window Repair Project Finishes at The Alexander Majors House

A nearly 6-month long project of repairing and replacing windows at The Alexander Majors House was completed in August. Thirty-seven windows were repaired or completely rebuilt with Ponderosa pine and antique glass.

Sheldon Vogt, a Kansas City carpenter, began the project in late March. He said some of the windows appeared to be original to the 1856 house, because they had mortise and tenon construction and were put together with wooden pegs; no nails or glue. Other windows had been installed during the restoration of the house in the mid-1980s.

The windows had deteriorated and were in various states of disrepair with rot, because they had not been protected with storm windows. Only six windows that were protected by porches were found to be structurally sound. The Wornall/Majors Board will be seeking funding in the future for protective storm windows to prevent the windows from deteriorating again.

The project was funded with an initial grant from The William T. Kemper Foundation and an additional grant by R. Crosby Kemper, Jr., from the Kearney-Wornall Foundation. The cost was approximately \$32,000.

The Majors House has a total of 43 windows with more than 500 individual panes of glass. This represents the wealthy status of Alexander Majors because the sashes and glass had to be expensively shipped to the frontier from the east when the house was built.

Rebuilt windows were matched exactly to the originals by a millwork shop in Wichita and antique glass was used to replace broken panes. Behind the barn's blacksmith forge, Vogt built a steam box that created temperatures of more than 200 degrees. Each window was placed in the box for a couple of hours. "It was important to get the antique glass out without breaking it. There are 12 panes in each window. The steam box softens the old rock-hard glazing putty, so it can be easily scraped away and the glass panes removed," Vogt said.

Vogt has a Bachelor of Arts in History from Wichita State, and originally wanted to be a history professor. He started doing carpentry, cabinet making, and custom furniture building as

a hobby and with his skills, it turned into a profession.

"Because of my background in history, I have gotten a lot of satisfaction working on the Majors' house. I really appreciate the Greek Revival style and the hard work that went into it by the builders in the 1850s," Vogt said.

The project conformed to EPA requirements for the safe removal of lead paint, which was used before 1970. Tarps were used on the ground outside the house to collect paint chips. Temporary plastic vapor and dust barriers were installed inside the rooms around each window opening to contain any paint dust from seeping into the house as windows were removed. Vogt also built a sealed paint removal station in the woodworking room in the barn for the duration of the project.

"The lead removal safety requirements added a lot of time to the project. They are not convenient, but they are important. We wanted to be safe with all of the kids at camps this summer and people coming through the house on tours," Vogt said.

Vogt began the project in late March. He worked an estimated 45 to 50 hours a week through the extremely hot summer when temperatures on many days were 100 degrees or higher.

By Tom Taylor



THE FOUNDATION OF OUR FUTURE

The John Wornall House has sustained serious damage to its foundation and facade as a result of the two-year drought. At this time, we ask for your financial support as we plan for the major structural restoration project, which will begin in Spring 2013. Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution to the Museums by December 31, 2012. The preservation of The John Wornall House is vital to our future growth. If you would like more details about the restoration project or would like to make a pledge, please contact Anna Marie at director@wornallhouse.org.

THE JOURNEY HOME

Two Majors' Gravestones Returned to Kentucky

Several months of research have turned up some answers to the mystery of the five gravestones that were discovered in the Alexander Majors' smokehouse last year. (Previously featured in a story in the Winter 2012 issue of this newsletter).

Two of the gravestones belonged to Alexander Majors' grandparents; Alexander Wilson Majors (1776-1846) and his wife Catherine Majors (1767-1855). They lived and died in Simpson County, Kentucky, and were never in Missouri.

When the Majors' house was restored and opened to the public in 1984, it appears that a volunteer, Paula Smith, who was a distant relative of Majors, discovered the gravestones in a neglected pioneer country cemetery near Franklin, Kentucky, and brought them back to Missouri.

Simpson County records indicate the cemetery at that time had a farm building constructed on part of it and many of the remaining gravestones were broken and stacked.

The cemetery is named for the Farmer family and is on private property. Freightier Alexander Major's aunt, Rebecca, had married into the Farmer family. Although the volunteer apparently received some permission to remove the stones from a county judge or commissioner, that cannot be confirmed these many years later. Family descendants and others at the Simpson County Historical Society were concerned and upset that the gravestones were removed.

The Farmer Cemetery is now being maintained and the location of the two Majors' burial plots have been identified. After discussions with officials of the historical society to insure the gravestones will be appropriately preserved and protected, in July The Wornall/Majors Board voted unanimously to transfer the stones back to the society for replacement on the graves.

Two members of the Simpson County Historical Society came to Kansas City October 16 and picked up the gravestones, Archivist Sarah Jo Cardwell and Treasurer Jean Almand. They were given tours of the Majors and Wornall Houses and Union Cemetery, where freightier Alexander Majors and his wife, Katherine, and several of their children are buried.

Three more Gravestones are still at the Majors House

There is a completely different story for three other gravestones that remain on display in the Majors House. They belonged to members of the Gan Johnston family who were relatives of Majors' great-granddaughter Louisa Johnston on her father's



Transfer of the Majors' gravestones in October. Pictured left to right: Archivist Sarah Jo Cardwell (Simpson County), Board President Alex Rosser, Treasurer Jean Almand (Simpson County), and Anna Marie Tutera.

side of the family.

A note from Louisa was found that said she removed the stones from the neglected pioneer Campground Cemetery in eastern Independence because they were broken and had fallen over. They were apparently removed in the 1920s and Louisa kept them on the dining room fireplace mantle in the house for decades while she lived there. When the house was restored in 1984 by Terry Chapman, they were removed from the house and stored in the reconstructed brick smokehouse, where they remained covered and stacked in a corner until being discovered by board member Tom Taylor in the fall of 2011.

The Jackson County Historical Society recommended against placing the stones back outside because of their rarity and the possibility of theft and vandalism. The Campground Cemetery still exists near Highway 40 and Norfleet, but it is overgrown and the few remaining gravestones there are broken and fallen over.

Presently, the three Johnston family gravestones are being displayed in an upstairs room of the Majors' House that is dedicated to the history of the house and Louisa Johnston's involvement in it.

The three gravestones belonged to Louisa's great-grandfather, Gan Johnston (1781-1853) and two of his daughters, Pantha Weeden Johnston (1828-1844), and Huldah McSpadden Johnston (1825-1845). Gan Johnston was an early Jackson County settler who held Cumberland Presbyterian camp and revival meetings on his farm. He set aside part of it to be used for the cemetery. Early newspaper stories indicate freightier Alexander Majors, who was very religious, was converted at one of the camp meetings on Gan Johnston's farm.

By Tom Taylor