



# Wornall/Majors Columns

The newsletter of the Wornall/Majors House Museums

Volume II, Issue 5 | Fall 2017

## Spotlight on Our 2017 Educational Programming



**Above** Megan Garrett of the Westport Branch of the Kansas City Public Library tells stories at our Families & Food Trucks story time.

**Middle (Top) & Far Right** Summer camp participants experience living history.

**Middle (Bottom)** Students on a field trip participate in a scavenger hunt on the Wornall lawn.



**2**017 has been a busy year for educational programming at the Wornall/Majors House Museums. Building on the success of our record-breaking 2016 field trip season, the Museums have served over 1,000 children in 2017 through field trips, scouting trips, and summer camp.

Education, particularly for children, is at the core of the Museums' mission of bringing history to life through interactive, hands-on programs and events. Students can learn about the importance and relevance of local history through activities designed to engage all the senses. They might dress in period clothing, make and taste their own butter, visit with a Civil War soldier, walk through the historic Wornall herb garden, or create their own corn husk doll to take home with them.

We also enjoy community partnerships with organizations such as the Westport Branch of the Kansas City Public Library, which has worked with us to create a unique story time opportunity in the barn.

Families and teachers know that they can turn to the Museums for interesting, authentic, interactive, and accurate information about the Civil War, travel and transportation across the plains, nineteenth century life, the development of modern medicine, and many other engaging topics that remain fresh and relevant today.



# A Letter from Board Chair Joe Vaughan

As the waning days of this year pass, we wish to thank all of our members, volunteers, friends and supporters for the countless contributions of many kinds in 2017! The Board takes great pride in another year of preservation and programming aimed at spreading the word about these fine Museums as far as possible.

In spite of a soggy summer, both Museums got all of the programs and activities completed on schedule. And the interest and attendance held up well. A full schedule of winter events has begun as you will see in this newsletter.

There are still several wonderful opportunities remaining in this calendar year:

- **Holiday Open House on December 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Majors House**
- **Candlelight Tours December 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> at the Wornall House**

Be sure to make note of these as December is one of the busiest months of the year for everyone.

These events are all free or reduced price to members. And while we are mentioning members, what a great opportunity these events offer to bring your friends and neighbors, who might be potential NEW Museum members! These traditional seasonal presentations are warm and inviting with all of the joy and color the Museums offer in November and December!

Happy Holidays!

Joe H. Vaughan



## Ghost Tours a “Spirited” Success!



The Wornall House welcomed a record-setting 530 attendees over 4 nights of Ghost Tours this October! The evening was full of surprises for visitors. They had the chance to participate in a Civil War medical procedure (*guests with “patient” Walker Stephens, left*), hear stories about the Wornall family (*Lucy Gobber as Eliza Wornall, center*), and learn about the ghost stories associated with the children’s room (*Goia Serra, Piper Riffe, Violet Gowin, and Cooper Most, right*).

# Celebrate the holidays with us!

The holidays are a special time at the Wornall/Majors House Museums. There is something nostalgic and romantic about enjoying the season in a Victorian style. We would like for you to be our guest at one of our upcoming programs. If you can't make it, both the Wornall and Majors Houses will be decorated throughout December, and you are welcome to join us for a public tour to view the elegant and rustic décor.

## December 2: Holiday Open House at the Majors House

1:00-3:00 PM, 8201 State Line Rd., KCMO

The holiday open house is the perfect family event. Guests are welcome to explore the Majors House at their leisure, and there will be many fun surprises throughout the house, including music, stories, and even a visit from Father Christmas. This magical event is free for members of the Museums, or just \$5 for members of the public (free for children under 12).

## December 8-9: Candlelight Tours at the Wornall House

Tours leave every 15 minutes from 6:00-7:30 PM, 6115 Wornall Rd., KCMO

Tour the Wornall House by candlelight and experience Christmas themes throughout the house, as we imagine how the Wornalls might have celebrated their holidays. Listen to authentic nineteenth century music, enjoy a treat in our warm and welcoming kitchen, and thrill at the talents of players from the Heart of America Shakespeare Festival's Team Shakespeare as they present a Christmas scene. Tours are \$15 per person, and perfect for the whole family.

Visit <http://www.wornallmajors.org> for more information or to buy tickets. Tickets can also be purchased by calling 816-444-1858.

## *Would the Wornall and Majors families have celebrated Thanksgiving?*

While Thanksgiving had been celebrated since the 1600's, not all states celebrated it and there was no set date. As early as 1837, Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of the popular *Godey's Lady's Book*, began a campaign to make Thanksgiving a national holiday.

Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation calling for a "day of thanksgiving" in 1863 and again in 1864. As the Civil War raged on, Union League clubs delivered Thanksgiving dinners to Union soldiers, including turkey, ham, and mince pies.

Many past presidents had also made thanksgiving proclamations, although not all occurred in November. But Lincoln's proclamations in particular had a special appeal for Americans and began to solidify Thanksgiving as a late November holiday. Existing traditions and feasts comingled with Lincoln's proclamations, as the idea of the iconic Thanksgiving meal and the connection to the Pilgrims became part of the popular imagination. However, Thanksgiving was not a federal holiday with a fixed date until 1941.



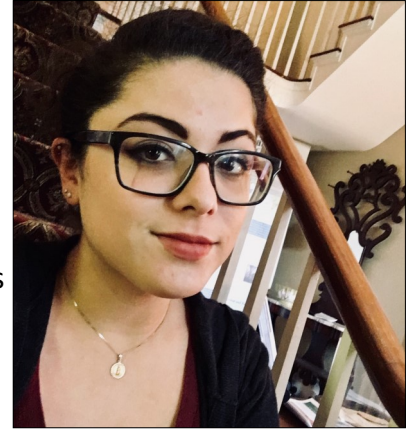
*The holidays at the Wornall and Majors Houses are special times full of music, story-telling, and more.*





# Staff Spotlight: Lena White

**W**e are pleased to welcome our newest staff member, Lena White, to the Wornall/Majors team. Lena is our new Weekend and Volunteer Manager. She oversees weekend operations at the Wornall House, and manages our relationships with new and existing volunteers.



A native of Kansas City, Lena will graduate this summer with her BA in History from UMKC. Her interest in history has been lifelong; she is especially interested in the ways historical events have shaped the present. For her Capstone project at UMKC, she researched a microhistory of crime and punishment during the Reconstruction Era in the Border States. While she didn't focus exclusively on Civil War history at UMKC, she is excited to learn more about the Wornall and Majors families and their role in the larger context of the mid-nineteenth century.

"I'm interested in a career in history education, ideally in museums. I love telling people about history almost as much as I like studying it myself," says Lena.

*Wornall/Majors volunteers are critical to the success of the Houses. Volunteers serve in many capacities, including tour guides, gardeners, board members, special event volunteers, costumed interpreters, interns, and more! These dedicated individuals bring history to life for thousands of individuals each year through their unique skills and talents. If you would like to join our family of volunteers, please email Lena at [administrator@wornallmajors.org](mailto:administrator@wornallmajors.org) with your area of interest and general availability. All volunteers receive training and are invited to special outings and volunteer appreciation events.*

## Majors House Now Open for Extended Hours with New Self-guided Tour Experience

**T**he Alexander Majors House Museum is now open for tours four days a week! The house was previously open only two days a week.

The Museum is open for self-guided tours Thursday-Saturday from 1:00-4:00 PM, and for guided tours Sunday at 1:00, 2:00, and 3:00 PM. Self-guided tours have not previously been offered at the Museum. This new tour experience includes signage exploring the life and legacy of Alexander Majors as well as interactive and touchable elements. Self-guided tours are just \$5 per person (children 5 and under free).

Majors' story is one of local and national relevance. He was instrumental in making Kansas City a gateway to the West and a thriving commercial hub.

His influence, which included his freighting firm Russell, Majors & Waddell and the Pony Express, significantly opened the West for transportation, travel, commerce, and communications.

Self-guided tours were made possible by a grant from Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area, one of 49 heritage areas in the U.S. Heritage areas are nonprofit affiliates of the National Park Service (NPS).



# History Corner



## Artifact Fact: Our Antique Dollhouse

One of the many treasures of the Majors House is an antique dollhouse, located in the children's room. The dollhouse, complete with period miniature furniture and accessories, was donated in 2012 by Mrs. Homer C. Evans of Kansas City. Mrs. Evans inherited the dollhouse from her mother, Mrs. Ellis C. Cook, who purchased the house and furnishings at the estate sale of Evelyn Searcy Park at a large house on Belleview in 1964.



When Mrs. Cook bought the house, it had been in storage in the attic of the Park House for 50 years and was in a state of disrepair. Mrs. Cook restored the house, regluing all the small items of furniture, repapering the walls, and making new braided, crocheted, and needlepoint rugs for the floors.



The house was made by hand, probably in America, and dates to about 1890. The scale is 1:12, or one inch equivalent to one foot. Most of the furniture in the house was probably made by Gebruder Schneegass (Brothers Schneegass) of Waltershausen, Germany. Schneegass made high quality, functional doll furniture between 1870 and 1890 and exported it to the United States. It is made of yellow cherry wood. The drawers and cabinets open, and the kitchen and dining room tables are expandable with extra leaves stored underneath. The

furniture is so highly detailed that even the sewing table in the upstairs hallway has tiny sewing items in its drawer, including scissors, yarn, and needles.

## The Many Uses of Horsehair

Both the Wornall and Majors Houses have several fine examples of horsehair furniture. The furniture is upholstered in a shiny black fabric made by weaving the hair of a horse with cotton or silk to form an extremely durable and elegant looking textile.

But did you know that horsehair was also often used to stuff that very same furniture? Horsehair was a surprisingly versatile material in the nineteenth century. It was used for stuffing furniture, used to make shaving brushes and paintbrushes, and was common in women's hats and undergarments.

Walls were also often plastered with a horsehair plaster—the hair served as the binding agent. Most of the walls in the Wornall House were made with some type of hair plaster, either horsehair or hoghair. During the restoration process, the texture of the hair was very apparent on the exposed walls.

Interested in learning more? Both the Wornall and Majors House Museums have touchable horsehair fabric samples, and you can view some horsehair products first-hand.



*A horsehair chair in the Wornall House collection.*



# Volunteer Spotlight: Sandy Wurth

**A**fter 21 years, one might expect a volunteer to have tired of the quiet routines of an historic home – the dim, chilly rooms; the slow afternoons; the strange noises of a 161-year-old structure. Sandy Wurth, however, shows no interest in abdicating her Sunday afternoon shifts as a docent at the John Wornall House Museum. “I used to do Wednesdays, too,” she says, as though the significant time she commits to our organization alone is nothing at all.

Sandy’s involvement with the Wornall House began in 1996, after she returned to live in the area and was looking for ways to socialize and get involved in the community. A Kansas City native, Sandy was familiar with local history – some members of her extended family even helped to make it. Sandy’s grandparents lived just a few blocks from the Wornall family’s downtown residence, and one of her great-aunts had been acquainted with Roma Wornall in the 1920s. Remembering the Wornall House as a landmark from her childhood – and curious to see its interior – Sandy chose the museum as one of several organizations to give her time to.

In the years that followed, Sandy’s passion for American history blossomed. She did extensive genealogical research and joined the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) in 2007, eventually becoming Regent of the organization’s Prairie Village, KS “Tomahawk” chapter and the Kansas State DAR’s American Indian Chairman. Through her work at the Wornall House, she became interested and involved with the Shawnee Indian Mission State Historic Site, and remains instrumental in maintaining connections between that organization and Wornall/Majors. After 21 years of leading tours at the Wornall House, she is one of the Museum’s most dependable docents. Thank you, Sandy!



*Sandy with junior volunteer Ava Most at a 2013 tea at the Wornall House*

## 2018 Wornall/Majors Board of Directors Elected

The Wornall/Majors House Museums has elected its board of directors for the 2018 year. Officers include: Chad Milton (Chair), Janet Kelley (Vice Chair), Alisha Thomson (Secretary), and Shane Hamman (Treasurer). Board members include: Daphne Bitters, Gloria Dobbs, Libby Gessley, Vicki Helgesen, Karen Hornig, Day Kerr, Elaine Mann, Janice McCollum, Michael Monaco, Diane Mutti-Burke, Marianne Noll, Foster Paulette, Alex Rosser, Vicki Smith, Joe Vaughan, Esther Walker-Young, and Jim Wornall.

The board was elected at the Museums’ annual meeting on November 16, and the new board will begin their terms on January 1, 2018.

## Wood Restoration Begins at Majors House

Just in time for the holidays, critical wood restoration has begun at the Majors House. The House is well known for its distinctive white siding, and the project will preserve the home’s character while protecting it from the elements and preventing further deterioration. We are still closing a funding gap on this project. To donate, contact Kerrie Nichols at [director@wornallmajors.org](mailto:director@wornallmajors.org).



# The Importance of History

## -Wornall/Majors Board of Directors

***Why is historic education important to our community & how are the Wornall/Majors House Museums unique in their ability to provide that education?***



History education is a solid foundation for any community. How can we plan our tomorrows if we don't have yesterday's wisdom?

-Gloria Dobbs



The Wornall/Majors Museums are unique because they are two of the very few antebellum structures remaining in Kansas City, as such are important visual connections to our history.

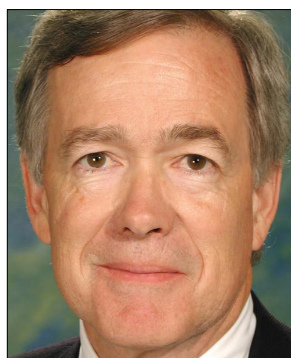
-Day Kerr



These two homes are a visible and tangible connection to our past. They provide a unique insight into the life and times of the mid to late nineteenth century and allow the visitors to experience first hand how people lived. Experiential education I

believe has a much stronger ability to make a more lasting impact and deeper understanding than traditional museums.

-Michael Monaco



We think we live in a time of turmoil, but imagine Kansas City in the 10-year period of 1855-65. In that brief time, the area was flooded with newcomers from the eastern US, political divisions were raw, and the country, including this part of it, endured a Civil

War. John Wornall and Alexander Majors had important roles in these tumultuous times and their homes survive to help tell their stories. What a rare opportunity we have to learn from those stories.

-Chad Milton



I have always been drawn to historic structures and their distinct ability to give us a tangible glimpse into our ancestors' lives. The Wornall/Majors House Museums are particularly captivating not only because of how well they've been preserved, but

because of the truly unique stories brought to life through their carefully-planned programming and collections.

-Alisha Thomson

Carefully restored, the Wornall and Majors Houses are two of the few mid-nineteenth century homes remaining in the area. They tell the stories of two influential men (John Wornall and Alexander Majors) and their families.

-Libby Gessley

Why is historic education important to you?  
Tweet us at @historyalivekc!



# Eagle Scout Projects Beautify the Museums

**A**s a small not-for-profit, we rely heavily on the generosity of our community partners in many ways. One outstanding example is our partnership with the Boy Scouts of America, Heart of America Council. Working with troops throughout the Kansas City region, our organization provides many scouts an opportunity for personal growth by offering meaningful Eagle Scout projects. We benefit tremendously, while scouts learn and gain valuable project management and leadership experience.

2017 was an extremely rewarding year. We had the honor to work with four scouts on projects that helped preserve and protect two of Kansas City's most historic treasures by providing needed repairs and adding curb appeal for our properties.

The Museums are forever grateful for their contributions. A big thank you to the following scouts, their troops, families, and the community at-large for the support!



**Ryan Holmquist, Troop 118**

New arbor and trellis for the Wornall House  
Herb Garden



**Peter Leimer, Troop 84**

New picnic tables on the grounds of the  
Wornall House



**Dustin McCasland, Troop 16**

New flag pole with lighting and an 1856 period flag  
and removal of old flagpole at the Majors House



**Devin Allaman, Troop 220**

Fenced enclosure for the unsightly dumpster at the  
Majors House and Barn

**John Wornall House Museum**  
6115 Wornall Road; Kansas City, MO 64113  
**Alexander Majors House Museum**  
8201 State Line Road; Kansas City, MO 64114



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[@historyalivekc](https://twitter.com/historyalivekc)