

# This Place Matters

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**Past President, HMPS**

My husband and I bought a stone house on Race Street in Bainbridge in 1998. We loved living close to the river in the middle of a village with such a long history. I used to take long walks up Route 441 and back along Locust Grove Road. On these walks, I noticed the signs for Haldeman Mansion, especially the faded red one with peeling white paint at the end of the drive. We didn't have a lot of money, but I thought that the sign needed a little help, and I contacted the organization's president to see if they would like me to paint the sign – then-President Norma Bair warmly welcomed any assistance I could provide. Just like that, I was involved in the Haldeman Mansion Preservation Society.

I was drawn to the stately stone structure from the start. I still remember the magic of my first tour. The Mansion's former occupants seemed to be present when I walked through the high-ceilinged rooms. I could see John Haldeman, the patriarch who built the original structure in 1798\*, laying out the corners carefully to take full advantage of the ripples in the river out front. I could easily picture Eliza Haldeman, and her friend Mary Cassatt, painting in 'plein air' in the wonderful light on the front piazza. And of course, I could hear the echoes of young Samuel's feet on the stairs, climbing rapidly to his bedroom in order to capture the snail or mollusk he was holding on paper with careful precision.

But more than the occupants, the structure itself resonated with me. We were busy renovating our own home on Race Street, and the two stone buildings shared many of the same problems. Plaster fell in large pieces from the ceilings, the antique wiring hung in a confusing tangle, chandeliers were broken, walls were cracked, floors were ripped up and had gaping holes, and some windows had been installed crookedly and become worse with the settling of 200 years. But even with all its rehabilitation needs and flaws, I could and still can see the building perfectly restored in my mind. And I admit, sometimes I dreamed of owning the place myself. Such a grand home it would be, overlooking the river. But I know that the place is better shared with everyone, and thanks to the brilliant efforts of the Founding members of HMPS, the Mansion belongs to all of us.

Haldeman Mansion has kept watch over its beautiful grounds and the timeless river for more than 200 years. I believe we owe it the dignity of careful and complete renovation. Restored, the Mansion will have many uses that benefit the community. It will be a long slow process, but

given the way the place still resonates with me, even now that I live far away, it will always be a worthwhile effort.

Heidi Shellenberger  
Norway, Maine  
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\*The original structure may be two rooms on two stories c 1740 – 1767 on land warrant of October 28, 1738 from Thomas and Richard Penn to John Galbraith. John Haldeman purchased property on November 5, 1785 and enlarged the mansion in two separate additions, the last one finished in 1812.