

Annual Report of the Ball-Sellers House

BY ANNETTE BEMBOW

This annual Report of the Ball-Sellers House covers events since the end of the 2014 season through September 2015. The Ball-Sellers House season begins the first Saturday in April and ends on the last Saturday in October. During the 2015 season, we had 15 docents supporting our mission to keep the Ball-Sellers House open free to the public.

At the end of the Ball-Sellers 2014 season, we recorded 432 visitors. (In 2013 we had 341 and in 2012 we had 228). We had 10 special group tours totaling 219. Tours in 2014 included two troops of Girl Scouts, Arlington's Encore Learning history class, the Arlington Retired Teachers Association, the Ballston-Virginia Square Neighborhood Village, and the Washington, D.C. Historical Society.

During the winter between our 2014 and 2015 seasons. We got an energy efficiency check-up for the 1880s section of the house conducted by the Local Energy Alliance Program (LEAP). They found that the 1880s section lacked effective insulation in the attic and under the house in the crawlspace. The windows of the 1880s house also did little to prevent cold air from getting in or warm air from leaking out. To reduce heating costs, we hired Fifth Fuel to remove existing loose fill insulation in the attic, seal all wiring holes, electrical junction boxes, and other openings to the attic floor, replace insulation and, insulate the water pipes at the front side of the house. We also installed internal storm windows for the 1880s section to further reduce heating costs. The windows were made and installed by Environmental Windows—a company that makes customized windows for historic buildings.

We also replaced the porch stairs to the 1880s section with like materials because their poor condition was causing an ice hazard. We also replaced the wooden root cellar door to the 1740s farm cabin with like materials because the door's poor condition was posing a problem when opening and securing the door in place for visitors to enter the root cellar.

Our 2015 Season opened on April 4. This year we commemorated the 40th Anniversary of the Arlington Historical Society accepting the gift of the house from Marian Sellers. We had a special exhibit on the Ball-Sellers House at the Center for Local History at the Main Public Library throughout our season. Martha Orth, one of the AHS officers who accepted the house and served on the committee to restore it, spoke at the AHS June Public Program about the house, the preservation of it, and the people who lived there over the past three centuries.

On Sunday, May 3, the Ball-Sellers House co-hosted “Glencarlyn Garden Day,” with the Glencarlyn Library Community Garden and the Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC) The house was open starting at 10:00 AM for free tours and colonial era treats and AFAC offered gardening advice and free seeds. Neighborhood gardeners offered plants for sale and tours of the community garden at the Glencarlyn Library.

On Saturday, May 30, the Ball-Sellers House hosted the Washington Forest History Walk with local historian Kevin Vincent. The three-mile walking tour started at the Ball-Sellers House, then visited survey markers used by Washington in 1785, a DC boundary stone, and the site of a mill built by George Washington’s step-grandson.

On Saturday, June 6, the Ball-Sellers House offered extended hours from 10–4 to help the Glencarlyn neighborhood celebrate its annual Glencarlyn Day. We participated in the Open House tours and offered colonial era snacks to visitors.

Martha Orth presented “The House That John Built” at Arlington Central Library on Thursday, July 16. She showed rarely seen pictures of the Ball-Sellers House. Several people who had a role in accepting and preserving the house, such as Dean and Connie Allard were also on hand to share their perspectives.

The Ball-Sellers House expanded its hours of operation to include the three summer holidays: Memorial Day on May 25, Independence Day on July 4, and Labor Day on September 7.

As this magazine goes to press, we are conducting our second annual Appraisal Roadshow with Paradigm Experts on October 10 at the Carlin Hall Community Center. The antique and jewelry appraisers donate their time so that every dollar raised during this event goes directly to the preservation and maintenance of the Ball-Sellers House.