

The Bowne House Historical Society, Inc.

AUTUMN 2017

NOTES FROM THE BOWNE HOUSE ARCHIVES

It's Fall once again, and a fitting time for an update on the goings-on at the Bowne House Archives. Here are some highlights from the cornucopia of history now gathered into the former William Penn Bedroom.

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD UPDATE

In last Fall's newsletter, we featured a newly discovered letter from the Underground Railroad that was found among the Parsons Family Papers. For those who didn't see the article, it described a note carried from abolitionist Simeon Jocelyn to William Bowne Parsons of Flushing by an unknown fugitive, with a plea to aid "this colored brother" in his escape. Since publication, a fresh piece of information has come to light regarding this find.

Previously, we could claim no connection to the Bowne House itself, as the letter was addressed simply "Flushing." However, we've since found 1850 Census records that show 27-year-old William B. Parsons, horticulturist, living under the same roof as his aunt, Anne Bowne- known owner and lifetime occupant of the Bowne House. In fact, all of William's unmarried siblings are listed as household members, including his brother Robert Bowne Parsons, whose obituary later read, "It was his boast that he assisted more slaves to freedom than any other man in Queens County." While no particular rendezvous is specified in the note, it now seems entirely plausible that escapees such as the letter's bearer turned up on the threshold of the ancestral home.

Of course, this still does not prove that the Bowne House was a "station" on the Underground Railroad, in the sense of a hiding place. Ms. Penelope Bowne Perryman, herself a Bowne descendent whose father compiled a history of the area, wrote in to suggest that the old Bowne's Grist Mill would have been a likelier refuge due to its proximity to the Bay. This structure was a tidal mill on Mill Creek in present-day Flushing Meadow Park. Perryman also related that her great-grandmother, born in 1847, recalled being told as a child not to play in the woods overlooking Flushing Creek, as runaway slaves were hidden among the trees. Such refuges may have seemed more discreet and practical than a family home in town. We may never know whether or not the Bowne House itself was an Underground Railway stopover, but at least now we do have documentary evidence to show a Bowne House resident was a Conductor.

IN SEARCH OF HANNAH BOWNE

Last summer we received a query from a researcher named Kate Lynch, a local historian preparing a talk for the annual conference of the New Netherland Institute. This year's theme was Women in New Netherland, and Lynch's presentation was titled, "She Removed to the Dutch Against the Advice of Her Friends': Lady Deborah Moody and New Netherland's Dissident Women." One of the dissident women that she had grown increasingly curious about was none other than Hannah (Feake) Bowne, the first wife of John Bowne. Although clearly a remarkable women for her age, Hannah remains an enigmatic figure. She was raised in then-Dutch Greenwich, CT., the daughter of the notorious Elizabeth Fones/Winthrop/Feake/Hallett, whose unconventional family life was fictionalized in Anya Seton's novel "The Winthrop Woman." We know that Hannah converted first, then introduced her husband to the Quaker faith; that she became a preacher herself; and that she went on at least two religious missions abroad. After visiting the British Isles in 1676, she accompanied George Fox, founder of the Quaker faith, on a voyage "thro' Holland, Friesland, and so far as Embden in the Low Countries," where according to John Bowne she was "enabled to clear her conscience to them in their own Language, in which she had been little exercised ever since I had knowledge of her." Her proselytizing in Embden reportedly revived a lapsed Meeting. Her husband honored her vocation and willingly stayed behind with family and farm, before joining her for the final months of her life. Yet we have no letters or diaries written in her hand; nor do any of her sermons or testimonies survive. Most of what we know about her comes from John Bowne's testimony at her memorial service.



NOTES FROM THE BOWNE HOUSE ARCHIVES

(CONT'D)

However, the Bowne Family Colonial Document Collection does contain a file of correspondence received by Hannah Bowne. While the original documents are currently held in climate-controlled storage for preservation, the Archives make high-resolution scans of the materials available to researchers at the Museum. In addition to John Bowne's eulogy, we own a total of eleven letters written to or for Hannah. Several of these were written by John Bowne, but a few others bear the signatures of historically significant Quakers abroad, including a letter of introduction from George Fox to Friends in London, which proclaims, "She is an honest woman and I know her well." After perusing this small trove of letters, Lynch was inspired to secure a grant for a forthcoming research paper to focus exclusively on the neglected history of Hannah Bowne. We expect that she will share her findings with us, and look forward to featuring them on our website or in a future newsletter. Naturally, if any readers have additional information on Hannah, or the whereabouts of any letters or other writings by her, the Bowne House would be most eager to hear!

THE FLUSHING REMONSTRANCE STUDY ACT

This past September the Archives hosted another distinguished researcher, the historian Evan Haefeli. Professor Haefeli, whose C.V. includes stints at Columbia, Tufts, and Princeton, currently teaches at Texas A&M; his areas of study include Colonial America and early American religious history. He is the author of the book *New Netherland and the Dutch Origins of American Religious Liberty* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). Given his particular expertise, Professor Haefeli was tasked by the U.S. Park Service under the Flushing Remonstrance Study Act to help them evaluate the national historic significance of the Flushing Remonstrance and John Bowne.

The Flushing Remonstrance Study Act authorizes the Department of the Interior to conduct a "special resource study" into the feasibility of incorporating sites connected to religious freedom in the era of the Flushing Remonstrance into the National Park System. The Act began as the brainchild of Adam Sackowitz, a graduate student of history and Bowne House Museum educator. Adam approached U.S. Representative Grace Meng of Queens' 6th District, which includes Flushing. Raised in Flushing herself, Rep. Meng became the first Asian-American from New York to serve in the U.S. Congress, where she now serves on the influential House Appropriations Committee, and in the roles of Senior Whip and Regional Whip for New York. As someone brought up and schooled locally, the Congresswoman has a personal understanding of the importance of the Bowne House and the nearby Quaker Meeting House (for which John Bowne deeded the land.) Rep. Meng agreed to sponsor the legislation, and the Act was signed into law in December 2014. The National Park Service is now conducting an in-depth evaluation of the Bowne House and the Old Quaker Meeting House (for which John Bowne deeded the land). These two sites, and likely the associated Quaker Burial Ground, currently comprise the landmarks under consideration. While exact details would be negotiated at a future date, partnering with the Park Service as part of a historic district would boost the visibility of the Bowne House, and potentially render the Bowne House Historical Society eligible for expert technical assistance, such as help with conservation and preservation.

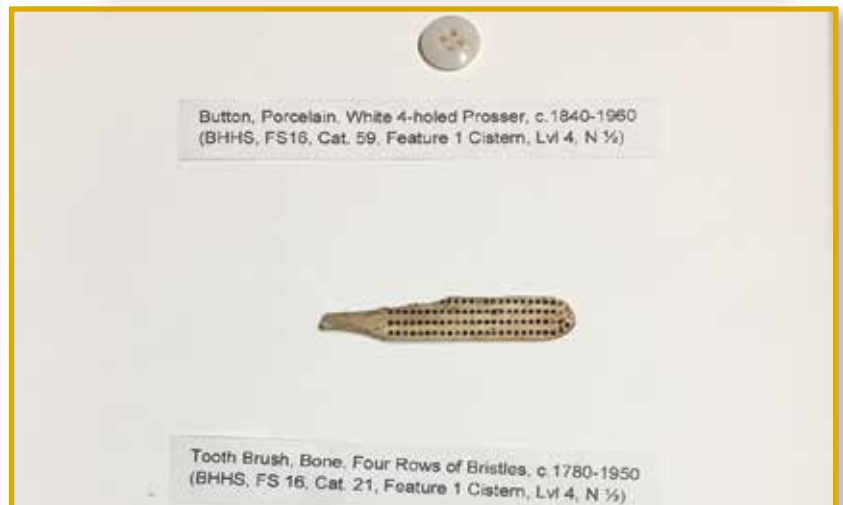
As the study aims to establish the nation-wide significance of these prospective landmarks, Professor Haefeli came to research exactly how the Flushing Remonstrance and John Bowne fit into the broader context of religious dissent and freedom of conscience in the early Colonies. He was particularly interested in any influence of Rhode Island and Roger Williams upon the Remonstrance signers and/or the Bownes. Another historian, R. Scott Hanson, is also contributing to the study. The author of *City of Gods: Religious Freedom, Immigration, and Pluralism in Flushing, Queens* (Fordham University, 2016), Hanson will reportedly focus on the lingering influence of the Remonstrance on later generations.

To learn more about the Flushing Remonstrance Study Act and how you can weigh in on the historical significance of the Bowne House, see the following handout: <http://npshistory.com/publications/srs/flre-srs-handout.pdf>. CHARLOTTE JACKSON, M.S., IS THE ARCHIVAL CONSULTANT TO THE BOWNE HOUSE.



A NEW DISPLAY FOR THE BOWNE HOUSE CISTERN ARTIFACTS

We are pleased to announce that, thanks to the support of Queens City Councilman Daniel Dromm of District 25, the Bowne House is now able to display many of the interesting historic artifacts that were excavated from the cistern in 2013. This work was completed over the summer of 2017 through the Education Department's summer internship collaboration with New York City's Student Youth Employment Program (SYEP). Dr. Elizabeth Martin, Director of Education and Christian Japa, SYEP intern, worked together over the 6 week program to train Japa (an electrical engineering student at BMCC) in the management and handling of archaeological artifacts. They will now become a key piece of our educational programming for students young and old.



CENTURIES OF LIGHTING AT THE BOWNE HOUSE

BY ELLEN M. SPINDLER, VOLUNTEER, COLLECTIONS



The Bowne House ("the House") has a variety of lighting devices in its Collection, including the Betty lamp shown above. The Collection reflects the evolution of lighting in the house over time, leading ultimately to the installation of larger glass windows for natural light and electric lighting to provide artificial illumination. Thus, in the almost 300 years of occupancy of the House by the Bowne family from at least 1661 through 1946, the residents were able to illuminate their daily activities in a variety of ways. First, they used oil lamps, candlelight, fireplaces and small south facing windows, then a variety of lanterns and other lighting devices, and finally electric lighting believed to have been installed around 1900.

Lighting during the day may have principally come from much smaller windows originally installed at the House. The glass may have first been shipped from England, since American glass factories in New York were later founded in 1732. The House also has a Dutch door which opens horizontally on both the top and bottom. This would have served many purposes, including allowing more natural light and fresh air into the House.

Illumination affected all aspects of colonial life from the design of houses (the Bowne House faces south) to the human activities possible (both indoors and outdoors) in a rural community without street lights. Even indoor activities such as spinning, needlework, writing letters, and reading the Bible all likely required some form of illumination and those activities may have been sharply curtailed once the daylight hours were over.

OIL LAMPS

The Betty lamp is thought to be of German, Austrian, or Hungarian origin. The name is believed to be derived from the term "better" as these lamps were thought to be an improvement over earlier open "slot" lamps that easily spilled oil when carried about. Another view is that the term derived from the phrase "bettyng", a phrase used dialectically in old England for fuel or material for fire. Most households used oil lamps in colonial times, reserving candles for special occasions.

Betty lamps were first commonly made of iron or brass and later of tin. The accession record (AN#1945.181) and appraisal notes of the Betty lamp shown above in the Collection indicate that it was made of iron. An iron Betty lamp like this one is not commonly found and is probably reflective of its early origins (although the earliest of such lamps were open and not closed like the one in the Collection). These lamps burned fish oil or fat trimmings which created smoke and had a rank odor, with open wicks of twisted cloths. Because of its association with colonial domestic activity, the Betty lamp was chosen for the symbol of the American Home Economics Association in 1926.



CENTURIES OF LIGHTING

(CONT'D)

Betty lamps first came into use in the 17th century; the original New England settlers are believed to have brought these lamps with them from Europe. The design and principle, however, is similar to lamps found in excavated areas of Greece, Rome, and other countries going back as far as 6,000 B.C. Remarkably, scholars have noted that this demonstrates that the important area of artificial illumination did not technologically advance for more than 7,500 years, even when so many other facets of human adaptation to the environment did. The later technological advances in lighting in the Bowne House in its 300 years of occupancy is reflective of the rapid pace of change in many areas of household convenience during those centuries.

Betty lamps often had a spindle with a hooked end used to hang it from the fireplace or a chair and a “wick pick” used to clean it when crusted with soot or carbon. The image of the one in the Collection is cut off on the top but it does appear to have some type of chain attached and it is described as a “hanging fat lamp” in accession records. Betty lamps were standard until the advent of the whale oil lamp in 1820, but whale oil was used in Betty lamps since at least 1760.

In general, iron lamps were clumsy and heavy and consequently only made for a relatively short period of time, before being supplanted by lamps of tin and pewter. The



Collection includes some early tin oil lamps, as well as tin candlesticks and candleholders with round bases. These types of early tin lamps are no longer commonly found and vary greatly depending on the artisan. See, e.g., (AN#1963.56) (tin, adjustable on chain, ca. 1800).ii There is also one possible 19th century brass lamp (AN#2007.397.), and one pewter oil.



The Collection also has mold blown glass oil lamps. (AN#2007.55). Kerosene lamps became popular by the mid to late nineteenth century. There is one kerosene glass lamp with a hexagon base described in records (no image available). Kerosene lamps used kerosene (paraffin) as a fuel and protected by a glass chimney or globe. The Bowne family tinware fluid can, presumably for filling early 20th century.



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(AN#1945.182)

CANDLES

Some of the earliest lighting in the Bowne House was also likely provided by candles held by candleholders and “chamber sticks”, and doused by candle snuffers in the Collection. It is believed that candles were made at the Bowne House by dipping wicks into tallow and later using molds similar to many Colonial households.

Dipping (the earliest method) and moulding were the two distinct ways of making candles. Each household usually made its own candles once a year or else would need to purchase them elsewhere. There were generally men who travelled around providing the annual supply, for a fee, if necessary. It is believed that the Bowne family may have made its own candles, at least in early years, although the family was prosperous enough to have purchased them or had them made by servants. Candlewood was also popular in early colonial life—namely, using pitchy strips of pine-wood in lieu of candles.



CENTURIES OF LIGHTING

(CONT'D)

The average household needed around 400 candles a year. Candle making was a slow and tiresome process; candles had to be cooled very slowly or they would be apt to crack. Still, a skilled candle maker or chandler could potentially make up to two hundred candles a day, generating a year's supply in approximately two days. Candles were considered a luxury item for many years. Oil lamps were used for ordinary occasions, but families kept a good supply of candles on hand for all special affairs.

Tallow was generally made from sheep or animal fat. The best candles were considered to include one half of each type. A wick of cotton (spun cotton or flaxen, either three or four strands thick) was dipped repeatedly in the melted tallow, with time to cool and harden in between dips. This created a tapered candle. Candles could also be made by hand or with a ladle from a wick fixed on a hook on a wall. Some households used beeswax but it was very expensive. Bayberries could also be used or added for a better fragrance, but large quantities were needed. The bayberries would need to be boiled and skimmed several times before the fat was sufficiently refined.

As described by Hayward:

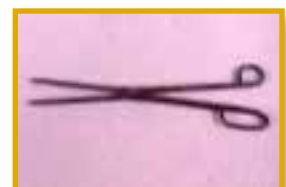
The general procedure for households that made candles by dipping was to hang iron kettles with tallow or whatever fat was to be used and boiling water over the fire in the fall when the cattle were killed to provide meat. Fat rising to the top was carefully skimmed off and the process repeated several times to clear the tallow of impurities, with an even temperature kept as much as possible. Two long poles were then placed parallel to each other across the backs of chairs, with smaller sticks crosswise from which hung the candle wicks. These shorter sticks with the cotton wicks hanging down at regular intervals would then be taken, one at a time, quickly dipped in the kettle of hot fat, and hung up to dry across the two long poles. By the time the housewife had reached the last stickful of wicks, the first ones would be sufficiently cooled for a second dipping ...each dipping adding another coating of wax over the previous one, until the candles were of the desired thickness...

In the late 1700's as whaling became popular, spermaceti (a fatty substance found in the head of the sperm whale) was found to make better candles. Its wax was harder and the candle burned longer and brighter, almost double the light of tallow dips, but it was also expensive. For those families unable to afford large quantities of this wax, a small amount could still be added to the tallow to make the candles harder and easier to store.

Candle molds came into use around the same time, speeding up the process. Molds were usually brass, tin, lead, or occasionally pewter, with tin considered the best. Molds were simpler and more rapid, but care and some degree of skill was needed to keep the candle wicking taut and straight as it hung down inside the mold. In the early 1800's, paraffin made from coal tar was also used to make high quality candles.

There are five candle molds in the Collection made of metal : one made possibly of tin for 12 candles (AN#1945.185), a twelve section tin candle mold with a handle(AN#2007.605), a twelve section steel candle mold with two handles (AN#2007.606), and two twelve candle metal molds with arced bottom and a vertical back handle (AN#2007.712, 713). Images are not currently available for these.

The Collection also includes an iron candle wick trimmer (AN#2007.310). There is also a candleholder or candle box (with no available image) made of tin and/or brass designed like a temple and described as having a leather handle (AN#2007.532).

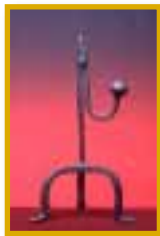


CENTURIES OF LIGHTING

(CONT'D)

Matches did not come into use until at least the early 1800's. Prior to that, fire was produced by lighting a sliver of resinous wood from glowing coals or, if there was no fire, striking rough flint with a sharp edge against iron or steel, igniting a piece of punk, charred linen cloth or other inflammable material and blowing the spark into a flame. The first self-igniting match was invented in 1805 by Jean Chancel, assistant to Professor Louis Jacques Thenard of Paris. The head of the match consisted of a mixture of potassium chlorate, sulfur, sugar, and rubber.

Friction (also called Lucifer) matches were later created and introduced in the 1820's. It is believed they were first made in colonial America around 1825-27, but did not come into general use until some years later. The Collection does have an English matchbox inlaid with a teak veneer, dating to the 19th century (AN#2007.47, no image available).



There is also a cast iron or wrought iron rush lamp on a tripod base in the Collection donated by a trustee from an ancestor who obtained it in 1903 from a 13th century castle in Wales. Although it is not original to the House, it does reflect another kind of lighting that could have been used during colonial times.

(AN#1945.179)

Rush lamps or light holders were designed to hold a torch or larger candle made of long, peeled and dried stalks of flax or twisted hollow reeds called "rushes" pressed together which were saturated with grease, or tallow (animal fat). This form of illumination burned freely and rapidly with a clear steady light, free from odor, smoke, or drip, in a rush holder at a 45 degree angle, kept coiled up and pulled out as fast as it was consumed. Rushes were sometimes dipped many times to form a rush candle which was burned in a vertical condition. Since rush candles did not require snuffing, they were used at times as nursery lamps.

CANDLESTICK HOLDERS AND SNUFFERS



Some candlestick holders or chamber sticks in the Collection are made of tin with a rather primitive design. (AN#1945.29d, tin adjustable with round base). One candleholder is described as hanging and made of skin (AN#2007.624 (no image available).

Later designs at the House were more elegant and used brass and other materials. See, e.g., a George III brass chamberstick , (AN#2007.396),

(AN#1945.9a, b, olive wood), and



(AN#2007.46, copper desktop snuffer).



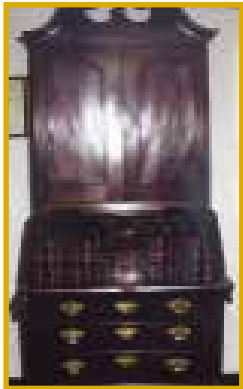
CENTURIES OF LIGHTING

(CONT'D)



Other examples of tall brass or pewter candlesticks in the Collection show a more elegant and polished design:

(AN#1945.8a, b; (pair of brass lamps, AN#1945.21a, b); one of pair of brass candlesticks, circular base, glass wax catcher on one), and far right, (pewter candlestick with a piecrust cottom and leaf decoration around the top; AN#1945.82a).



A more sophisticated alternative is a late 18th century Secretary formerly located in the 1669 parlor at the House which also had two pull out candle rests.

The Bowne House Collection database also has a description of some candlesticks which are at least approximately dated. For example, there is a "hurricane" brass chamber stick (AN#1945.13), circular with a dished and chased base, a snake handle and a glass chimney; European, late 19th to early 20th century, acquired by the House in 1945. Records also describe a pair of brass, beehive type candlesticks (AN#47.1.22.8a, b or 45.7) on rectangular feet; American or English ca. 1830-60. They are variously described as formerly located in the 1669 parlor or living room and are also noted to have been acquired in the purchase of the House or from Mr. Parsons on June 11, 1947.

One study conducted in Williamsburg found that most colonial homes had only two candlesticks. The average number studied was slightly less than five per household. The Bowne collection has many more, but it was a large prosperous household and spanned many centuries.



The Bowne family also had at least four tin wall sconces. (AN#2007.612a-d), pewter sconces (AN#2007.430a, b) and several brass wall sconces later. There are additionally two mirror sconces without images.



LANTERNS

The Collection also has a few lanterns. Lanterns use a light source (candle or wick in a fuel or mantle) enclosed in a container that protects the flame so the wind does not put it out, and yet allows light to pass through. Metal (Brass, copper, and tin) and glass lanterns were common by the first quarter of the 1700's until superseded by electric light. Some used candles, others had small oil lamps. Most used glass for the windows.

Some of the lanterns in the Collection show an unusual configuration. For example, this one displayed is made out of tin with a hinged, cylinder shape with pointed roof, hinged door and a repousse design. (AN#2007.626). Some candle lanterns in the Collection were later electrified. The Collection's database also has one accession record for AN#1945.10 referring to a 17th century English cylinder based candle lantern with a leather wrapped handle, fluted sections on the top and a brass finial top, donated by Carlbach Gallery in New York City. Accession records state it was formerly on the table in the library at the House.



CENTURIES OF LIGHTING (CONT'D)

CHANDELIERS AND ELECTRICITY



The Collection additionally has a crystal candelabrum designed to hold flowers in a vase in the top tier and four crystal arms and pendants to hold candles on the sides. (AN#2007.456). Accession records describe this piece as a 19th century cut glass Anglo Irish chandelier that was hanging in the North Hall. This was in keeping with the custom of wealthier homes placing a lantern or other lighting in the front hall near the foot of winding stairs which led to the front hall above.

Most homes in America were electrified by the end of the 1920's, with the exception of rural communities and farms. The Bowne house did have a large amount of farm land surrounding it, but since the Bownes, Parsons and their descendants were relatively prosperous, it is believed the House had electricity circa 1900.

LIGHTING THROUGH THE CENTURIES

The Bowne House is a fascinating example of how the technology of artificial illumination evolved over the multiple centuries the Bowne family lived in the House. The Collection thus provides a valuable window (no pun intended) into colonial life.

SOME READINGS

Cooke, Lawrence S., *Lighting in America: From Colonial Rushlights to Victorian Chandeliers*, Universe Pub (1976)

Gill, Harold and Powers, Lou, *Candlemaking*, Research Department, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Research Report Series-33, April 1981

Hayward, Arthur H., *Colonial Lighting Volume 2*, Little Brown and Company (1927), republished by Dover (1962) and with additional material (2012)

i

This is similar to a Betty lamp in the Burton N. Gates's Collection, Worcester displayed in Plate 8 of Arthur Hayward's *Colonial and Early American Lighting*, p. 13.

ii

This oil lamp appears similar to one tin lamp in the Henry Ford Collection, Michigan, depicted in Plates 11 and 31 of *Colonial and Early American Lighting*, pp. 17 and 40.

iii

These are similar to early tin candle sconces in Plate 38 of Hayward's *Colonial and Early American Lighting*, p.52.



2017-2018 EVENTS



Open House New York
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2017 1 PM – 5 PM
360th Anniversary of the Flushing Remonstrance



Witches, Brews and Folk Remedies A Bowne House East West Halloween
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2017 1 PM – 5 PM
East West Traditions:/. Celebrations, family-friendly activities for young and old based in ancient folklore and medicinal practices.



The Historic House Holiday Tour
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2017 1 PM – 5 PM
Seven local sites decorated for the holidays with special programs.
360th Anniversary of the Flushing Remonstrance



Lunar New Year Celebration / 慶祝農曆新年
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 2018 12:00 PM – 4 PM, date to be announced
Celebrate lunar New Year with family friendly activities & traditions from East to West.
合家歡活動：各位歡迎來邦恩之家博物館慶祝農曆新年



Spring Festival and Garden Planting Workshop
SATURDAY, MARCH 2018 and APRIL 2018 9:00 AM – 1 PM, dates to be announced
Learn about historic kitchen herbs and medicinal plants; All ages welcome.

EARTH DAY and ARBOR DAY EVENTS APRIL 2018, date to be announced

FLUSHING'S 2nd ANNUAL SPRING HISTORY & COMMUNITY FESTIVAL

Saturday, **MAY 5, 2018**
"This Place Matters" and National Preservation Month



NY Landmark Conservancy's "Sacred Sites Open House" Weekend
MAY 5, 2018 12:00 PM – 5 PM
Weekend focusing on archaeology of Flushing and Queens. Presentations and tours by authors for National Preservation Month



NY State's "Path through History" Weekend
JUNE 16, 2018 12:00 PM – 5 PM
Presentations by authors and walking tours of local historic sites.

INDEPENDENCE DAY and CITIZENSHIP EVENTS JULY 2018, date to be announced



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www.bownehouse.org



**2017 - 2018 MEMBERSHIP DUES RENEWAL
THE BOWNE HOUSE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
37-01 Bowne Street, Flushing, NY 11354
789-359-0528**

Individual	\$25.00
Student (non-voting)	\$15.00
Family	\$50.00
Sustaining Membership	\$100.00
Corporate Membership	\$500.00
Life Membership (one time payment)	\$1,000.00

In addition to my dues, I would like to make a contribution in the amount
of \$ _____ .00

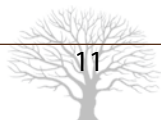
Signature _____

* Life Members may receive, if they wish, a complimentary framed hand painted Life Member Certificate, personalized with calligraphy. Please list your name as you wish to have it appear on the certificate.

Please print your name and address below as you would like them to appear on our mailing list, as well as email, fax and phone so that we can better communicate with you.

Referral names and contact information:

We welcome your suggestions of friends and family who like to hear about the Society. Please list names and contact information below.



The Bowne House
37-01 Bowne Street
Flushing, NY 11354

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Circa 1661

