

HOUSE MUSEUMS AND HOUSING:  
THE STRAWBERRY BANKE HERITAGE HOUSE PROGRAM AS A MODEL

by

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(Under the Direction of Scott Nesbit)

ABSTRACT

Using Strawberry Bank as a case study, this thesis examines the benefits of rehabilitation of unprofitable spaces in house museums in order to create rentable housing units. These units will help preserve these historic buildings by providing revenue for the maintenance of the property while providing new housing and preventing possible gentrification. The thesis examines Portsmouth's developmental history that led to the decline of Strawberry Banke, its founding neighborhood. Then, moves to the establishment of the Strawberry Banke Museum because of Urban Renewal, and finally leads to the Heritage House Program. The final chapter examines the pros and cons of the Heritage House Program and how it can be implemented in other house museums in order to preserve the home and generate revenue.

INDEX WORDS: House Museum, Strawberry Banke, Affordable Housing

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## DEDICATION

A personal thank you for all my friends and family, especially my parents, for their continued support throughout this process. I could not have completed this without your belief in me. I dedicate this Thesis to Heather, Jeremy, Emma Kate, Rachel, and Brennon.

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## Chapter I

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### INTRODUCTION AND ORGANIZATION

Stepping out onto the sandy, dirt streets of this quiet colonial town felt like stepping back in time to the year 1780. The revolution was changing the face of the North American colonies and now this small New England port city was to be a piece of the new nation called America. Every house around the square had a new story to tell. Over two hundred years of history were soaked into the ground. Which only enhanced my excitement to learn more about this place known as Strawberry Banke.

This colonial town, now turned outdoor museum, was created during a rise in popularity of preservation in America during the 1960s. Each of these colonial style buildings told unique stories of different eras of the neighborhood known as Puddle Dock and the people that lived there. For example, while walking into the Marden-Abbot House on 82 Jefferson St.. Visitors are introduced to the home of Walter and Bertha Abbot on the first floor. However, the stairs to go to the second floor of the home is roped off with a red sign saying, "Private Residence" even though the first floor of the home has been rehabilitated and designed to resemble the 1930s and 1940s, the second floor tells a different story of a modern apartment for a young adult. The Heritage House Program, established in 2006, allows Strawberry Banke to rehabilitate the upper floors of their historic homes in order to create new housing within their community and generate new revenue for the museum. I discovered this program during the early research of my thesis and it sparked my interest in the adaptability of this model for other struggling house museums.

According to the Institute of Museum and Library Studies, there are about thirty-eight thousand museums in the United States and 48 percent of them are history related.<sup>1</sup> Many of these are historic house museums. In *New Solutions for House Museums: Ensuring the Long-Term Preservation of America's Historic Homes*, Donna Harris addresses the issue of what to do with a Historic House Museum and how to preserve them for the changing future.<sup>2</sup> In Harris' opinion, if a community wants to preserve a historic property it would be better to sell it to a preservation minded buyer with a conservation easement, which legally preserves and protects land use on a property, attached to the home. However, Harris also advocates for the preservation of current house museums and includes various solutions to help them adapt to the changing world in order to keep their doors open. Harris's first edition of this book, published in 2007, was a catalyst for widespread discussion for alternative solutions for House Museums. Her work includes advice for the board of directors of house museums to keep their doors open. Most of her 10 ideas include retaining ownership of the home but partnering with government organizations, nonprofit organizations, or for-profit organizations in order to expand the home's uses and goals. She also includes short- or long-term leases to nonprofit preservation organizations in order for them to have office space within the home. This allows rental income for the house and gives the house a new use besides being a museum. This is the idea I drew upon for this thesis; however, I would like to expand it through my study of the Strawberry Banke Museum and their rentals of historic spaces as apartments.

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<sup>1</sup> "Government Doubles Official Estimate: There Are 35,000 Active Museums in the U.S.," May 19, 2014. <http://www.imls.gov/news/government-doubles-official-estimate-there-are-35000-active-museums-us>.

<sup>2</sup> Harris, *New Solutions for House Museums : Ensuring the Long-Term Preservation of America's Historic Houses*, 3.

In chapter 14 of Harris's book, she explains the Historic Curatorship Program within the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). This program leases historic homes located inside state parks to rehabilitate them and return them to a useful purpose. The homes are adapted to become non-profit headquarters or commercial entities and save the house from further decay or neglect. The organizations that rent these properties are then "curators" of the property and help with the upkeep and maintenance of the historic building which makes it easier to preserve its integrity. The Strawberry Banke Museum's tenants are similar in this way, but are more intimate with their spaces, because they call them home. This thesis looks at the short-term rental apartments within the historic house museums at the Strawberry Banke Museum and addresses if this system can be applied as another solution to struggling house museums similar to the ones mentioned in Harris's work. Her work already addresses the benefits of additional income from the rentals and how it expands the museums' uses. This thesis addresses the unique issues that come with residences within a museum and suggests how to adapt a historic home with modern amenities while maintaining historic integrity. There is a balance to be maintained between museum and residence that is difficult, but Strawberry Banke has proven it can be done, so it can be applied elsewhere.

This change in use within the upper floor of a house museum into a private residence is an idea that would be strongly recommended by authors Franklin D. Vagnone and Deborah E. Ryan in their book, *Anarchist Guide to Historic House Museums*. In this work, Vagnone and Ryan condemn preservationists for being "change resistant" and insist that dramatic change is what is needed for historic house museums to survive.<sup>3</sup> The book consists of a series of case

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<sup>3</sup> Vagnone, Cothren, and Ryan, *Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums*, 25.

studies from house museums that the authors visited and turning those stories into lessons for others to learn from. These lessons consist of advice on how to create rapport with the community, become more inviting for guests, and expand a house museum's goals and interpretation among other things. The consistent theme among each of the lessons is the need for a museum to adapt and change with the advancement of time and to retain relevance within the community. The authors believe that house museums struggle because they fail to create emotional connections with the past and relate them to the visitor's experience of the home in the present. However, the authors offer a few case studies that they believe are successful in their struggle to retain relevancy. Among these studies is the Strawberry Banke Museum, on which this thesis is focused on.

In chapter 1 of the book, the authors explain that one way to retain relevance within a community is to find partners within the community. The museums should reach out to non-profits and government agencies in order to share goals and ideas and learn how they can be useful to one another.<sup>4</sup> This not only creates allies for the museum within the community but also becomes a way to broaden the museums' guest list. According to the authors, the main way to maintain a healthy relationship with partners within a community is to offer them spaces to use in the museum either for an event or on a permanent basis. Similar to Harris' idea of renting out office space, *Anarchist's Guide's* mentions this and adds their example of the Strawberry Banke museum which also rents apartments to members of the community. *Anarchist's Guide's* main hypothesis of finding an emotional connection within a historic house museum is expressed in Strawberry Banke's short term rental apartments, because not only is it a museum but also

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<sup>4</sup> Vagnone, Cothren, and Ryan, *Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums*, 47.



people's home. Tenants of the museum make emotional connections to this place by living within history and it provides adaptive use and additional income for the museum itself.<sup>5</sup> If the Heritage House Program within Strawberry Banke can be adapted and used in struggling house museums, it can create relevance within the community, new income opportunities, and give the home a new use. These three benefits, Harris, Vagnone, and Ryan would argue, are how the future preservation of house museums must be continued in order for them to remain and thrive and this thesis agrees with their judgement. However, this thesis goes a step further by focusing on the practical application of the Heritage House program not just the emotional benefits. This allows other struggling house museums to not only hear the emotional and theoretical benefits, but also see how this program runs as housing in order to see if works well for them.

In this thesis I will be examining the benefits of rehabilitation of unprofitable spaces in house museums in order to create rentable housing units. These units will help preserve these historic buildings by providing revenue for the maintenance of the property while also providing new housing. In order to achieve this, I visited the Strawberry Banke museum as my case study in order to learn more about their Heritage House Program. This program is the organization of Strawberry Bank's apartments that are on the upper floors of their historic buildings. In order to get more information about the program I interviewed Mr. Rodney Rowland who has worked at Strawberry Bank for 30 years. Through this visit I learned that the program was vital to Strawberry Banke's revenue while also providing housing in the community. This program is a model that can be used by other struggling house museums in order to gain new sources of revenue and give back to their communities. I used this case study along with secondary sources of historic

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<sup>5</sup>Vagnone, Cothren, and Ryan, *Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums*, 33.

research of the area and current research of the housing market in New Hampshire and in Georgia to complete my methodology.

The main body of this thesis consists of two chapters that explain the history and context of Strawberry Banke in Portsmouth, New Hampshire then transitioning to the Heritage House Program that is currently running at the museum. Chapter 2 is a developmental history of the Strawberry Banke neighborhood from its founding in the 1630s. It then moves through the rise and fall of the area from wealthy large homes into working class housing through the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The chapter ends with the introduction of urban renewal in the Portsmouth area in the 1960s that led to the creation of the museum. The creation of the museum acts as a transition for chapter 3 which discusses the Heritage House Program in depth. This provides the case study for the arguments for incorporating modern apartment units in underutilized space in struggling house museums. This chapter lays out the pros and cons of using this program as a blueprint for other museums based on their current struggles and needs.

This thesis provides a developmental history of the Strawberry Banke neighborhood, a model of a solution for struggling house museums, and is relevant to today's current housing crisis. The use of a replicated Heritage House Program in other house museums across the country can become a way for preservationist to be successful at their field while still retaining relevance and providing for their communities. It can be a compromise between maintaining historic integrity and introducing modern amenities to make these homes return closer to their original use as a living space as well as an educational and entertaining museum for the public.

## Chapter 2

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### STRAWBERRY BANKE HISTORY

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Before Strawberry Banke became the museum it is today, it was a traditional New England port city that coincidentally had historic buildings. Just like other neighborhoods and cities, Strawberry Banke had many different stages in its community and persisted through difficult times during its 400 years of existence. From fire, to war, to urban renewal, the neighborhood continued to hold on through the years and served as home for many in the community and still does today.

Before the Europeans arrived in the 1630s, the first peoples to occupy the land around the Piscataqua river were Native Americans whose tribal name has been lost to time. Archeologists have discovered remains of a Paleo-Indian civilization on the opposite side of the Piscataqua river in modern day Eliot, Maine.<sup>6</sup> Artifacts such as bone hooks as well as cod bones and other fish remains inform us that these native peoples took advantage of the river they were situated on as a source of food. They also were agricultural people that grew their crops in order to expand their villages. However, by the time there was an expedition up the Piscataqua river in 1603, European explorers Martin Pring and Bartholomew Gosnold documented the lack of peoples in the area but “signs of fire” where they had been.<sup>7</sup> Most likely, the native peoples that once settled in the area were wiped out by various diseases, including smallpox, that had been brought over by the Europeans. In fact, in 1633, only 3 years after the settlement of Portsmouth, another wave

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<sup>6</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawberry Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 18

<sup>7</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawberry Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 20

of smallpox swept through the region and further decimated the native population.<sup>8</sup> However, even though the native peoples of this region were no longer living in modern day Portsmouth, the idea of trade with them is what drove Captain John Mason and his business partner Sir Ferdinando Gorges to settle in this area.

After John Smith established his colony at Jamestown and Henry Hudson discovered the Hudson Bay, the race for explorers to find a northwest passage was enticing enough for others to join and hopefully get rich. This idea was what encouraged Mason and Gorges to sail down the Piscataqua, hoping to find either riches or a path to the Pacific Ocean.<sup>9</sup> Mason's right-hand man, Captain Walter Neale, and his men sailed down the Piscataqua river and established a colony on November 17, 1629, naming it Strawberry Banke. It was called this because of the abundance of wild strawberries that were growing there when they arrived.<sup>10</sup> Originally, the colonists were encouraged to discover anything of value around their settlement which basically meant to mine for gold, silver, or precious stones. When none of these were discovered, they began building their communal "Great House" which served as their town hall as well as farming off the land, fishing in the rivers, and sawing down the timbers.<sup>11</sup> Even though the "Great House" no longer exists, archeological evidence has shown that the location of this historic community building would have sat where the Oracle House, built in 1702, sits today.<sup>12</sup> This "Great House" or town

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<sup>8</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawberry Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 20

<sup>9</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawberry Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 23

<sup>10</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawberry Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 29

<sup>11</sup> Daniell, Jere. *Colonial New Hampshire: A History*. 1981. KTO Press, n.d.

<sup>12</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawberry Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 30

hall was the center of the community and provided a place for commercial and craft activity to develop around it with the creation of smaller, vernacular dwellings.<sup>13</sup>

After establishing the “Great House”, twenty of the colony’s men came together, formed a government, and created a document called the “Strawbery Banke Combination”.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, this original document no longer exists, but it most likely was very similar to the Mayflower Compact which offered an oath to God and the King, and named a new



Figure 1: The Oracle House

Governor, Francis Williams.<sup>15</sup> However, the independence of the Strawberry Banke colony was short, because they were soon enveloped by the Massachusetts Bay colony in 1641. Between 1645 and 1650, Portsmouth went through at least three governors, all living in the “Great House”

<sup>13</sup> Garvin, James. “National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form: Strawberry Banke Historic District,” June 10, 1974. <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/c46404bd-0d8f-42bc-94ef-31b30229704e/>.

<sup>14</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawbery Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007.46

<sup>15</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawbery Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 46

and all lasting less than 2 years. This time also brought the first African enslaved peoples to Portsmouth, but the practice of slavery was heavily scrutinized by Portsmouth Puritan neighbors in the Massachusetts Bay Colony proper.

The early to mid 1700s was a time of extreme change in the city of Portsmouth leading up to the Revolutionary War, but it is also when the first of the surviving buildings from Strawberry Banke were built and are still maintained in the museum today. The three oldest homes that are preserved in the museum today are the Sherburne House from 1695, The Penhollow House from 1750, and the Chase House.<sup>16</sup> These homes are all two story buildings that were created for prominent, wealthy men of the community. The changes in the 1700's included the growth of Portsmouth financially and this allowed the increase in wealthy businessmen within the community that were able to build these high style, expensive homes. As the shipping industry of Portsmouth increased, the value of waterfront properties also increased, which changed the city from agriculturally centered to an urban space.<sup>17</sup> The beginning of the eighteenth century was defined by three British governors all willing and ready to make money for the crown and all coincidentally named Wentworth. As the Revolutionary War began, the money to be made for the city increased exponentially.

The thriving Portsmouth shipping town supplied many shipping masts to the royal navy. Colonists were chopping down hundreds of white pine to create large masts and all of these trees belonged to the King under the White Pine Act of 1722.<sup>18</sup> The Governor at the time was John Wentworth who, unlike royal governors in Massachusetts, was well liked by the people of

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<sup>16</sup> Strawberry Banke Museum. "Historic Houses." Accessed October 7, 2024.  
<https://www.strawberrybanke.org/houses>.

<sup>17</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawberry Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 61

<sup>18</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawberry Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 69

Portsmouth.<sup>19</sup> He was born and raised in the Puddle Dock Neighborhood, where Strawberry Banke is today, and took over for his failing uncle Benning Wentworth whom the people hated. Wentworth was very against the taxes being levied against the colonists, but instead of rioting like in Boston, he was trying to find a peaceful solution through his government connections. However, between 1771 and 1773 Wentworth refused to disobey the Stamp Act and Townshend Acts and the people in Portsmouth joined the rioting that was happening in Boston.<sup>20</sup> These acts led to the exile of John Wentworth from New Hampshire after he helped his loyalist friend Governor Thomas Hutchinson of Massachusetts.<sup>21</sup>

The Revolution did not inflict physical damage to the shipping town of Portsmouth, because of its location and weather patterns that saved it from two sieges. In October of 1775, British warships were bombing in present day Portland, Maine and the people of Portsmouth feared they would be targeted as well.<sup>22</sup> However, their town was saved by a violent storm that prevented the British from leaving Maine and it allowed General Washington to send Brigadier General Sullivan to take command and defend the Harbor. The fact Portsmouth received no physical damage is the reason so many 16<sup>th</sup> century houses survived at Strawberry Banke. The government of the colony was also moved from Portsmouth to Exeter and then Concord which reduced Portsmouth's political status, but its shipping status was still highly regarded even with the loss of British trade.<sup>23</sup> The town was also hit with an epidemic of smallpox during the war in

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<sup>19</sup> Daniell, Jere. *Colonial New Hampshire: A History*. 1981. KTO Press, n.d.

<sup>20</sup> Daniell, Jere. *Colonial New Hampshire: A History*. 1981. KTO Press, n.d.

<sup>21</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawberry Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 79

<sup>22</sup> Adams, Nathaniel. *Annals of Portsmouth: Comprising a Period of Two Hundred Years from the First Settlement of the Town*. 1825. Portsmouth: Published by the Author , n.d.250

<sup>23</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawberry Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 84

1778 and a hospital was built to accommodate the sick and dying.<sup>24</sup> There were more deaths from this epidemic than actual fighting from the war, because Portsmouth was not raided by the British. At the end of the war, a committee met at Exeter in 1788 and New Hampshire became the ninth state to adopt the Constitution. After this assembly, there was a large celebration held in Portsmouth on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June with a parade and fireworks.<sup>25</sup>



Figure 2: Map of Portsmouth during the Revolutionary War from the Library of Congress.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Adams, Nathaniel. *Annals of Portsmouth: Comprising a Period of Two Hundred Years from the First Settlement of the Town*. 1825. Portsmouth: Published by the Author, n.d. 264

<sup>25</sup> Adams, Nathaniel. *Annals of Portsmouth: Comprising a Period of Two Hundred Years from the First Settlement of the Town*. 1825. Portsmouth: Published by the Author, n.d. 267

<sup>26</sup> *Portsmouth, New Hampshire*. [?, 1782] Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/gm71000982/>.



After the war, Portsmouth developed rapidly to the North and inland. The harbor was extremely lively and maintained its shipbuilding and exports. The Harbor was divided into three distinct neighborhoods during this period, The South End became primarily residential use, the Bank, which existed before the war, grew longer now to accommodate the increase in international trade, and the North End became the town marketplace and an area for shipbuilding.<sup>27</sup> Because of the variety of work Portsmouth provided as a port town, a “merchant class” was forming among the elite.<sup>28</sup> This merchant class lived amongst the extremely wealthy and wished to emulate them with their purchase of fine goods. This was when a materialistic culture became very popular in Portsmouth in the late 1700s. The merchant class wanted nice clothes, homes, carriages, and china like the rich had, and they could afford it in moderation. The city wanted to enjoy its riches and become like the other prospering port towns of Boston or Salem, however their wealth and luck was short lived and Portsmouth began to decline by the 1800s.

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<sup>27</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawbery Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 88

<sup>28</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawbery Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 89



Figure 3: Map of Portsmouth 1850, shows city's growth.<sup>29</sup>

By 1800, the city population of Portsmouth had reached 5,339 inhabitants.<sup>30</sup> However, the prosperous days of Portsmouth were now over and its decline mirrored the decline in international commercial shipping. The decline of Portsmouth was similar to other fading colonial port towns, but these port towns still had plenty of pride in their history and heritage that they wanted to keep alive. Portsmouth's leaders began spinning legends of the founding of the city and local heroes in order to remind citizens of the greatness of their city.<sup>31</sup> These legends also increased interest for the city by outsiders which increased the downtown area, but not the bank or Puddle Dock Neighborhood where Strawberry Banke is today. The Puddle Dock neighborhood that once was the heart of wealthy, merchant class homes turned into a dilapidated area of the city. To make matters worse, Portsmouth suffered 3 large fires in 1802, 1806, and

<sup>29</sup> Map of the city of Portsmouth, New Hampshire 1850, 1850, Item MMN #35631, Maine Historical Society, Portland, Maine. <https://www.maine-memory.net/record/35631>

<sup>30</sup> Adams, Nathaniel. *Annals of Portsmouth: Comprising a Period of Two Hundred Years from the First Settlement of the Town*. 1825. Portsmouth: Published by the Author, n.d. 319

<sup>31</sup> J. Dennis Robinson. *Strawberry Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC, 2007. 94

1813 that destroyed 114 stores and buildings in the north end of the city, but luckily the south end where Strawberry Banke was located avoided the flames and was saved.<sup>32</sup> Because of these fires, The New Hampshire State legislature passed the Brick Act that prohibited the construction of wood buildings over 12 feet high.<sup>33</sup> This is also why Portsmouth is a city made of mostly brick in its downtown north end, but its south end is mostly wood homes and buildings.

By the middle of the 1800s, Portsmouth had become less of a shipping town and more of a production center. The town began a hosiery industry in the 1830s and these factories were how many families made money. Because of this new revenue being made by the people of the city, they were able to support local charities and infrastructure changes like new aqueducts, new bridges, and a new library.<sup>34</sup> However, none of this new money was going into improving the “Puddle Dock” neighborhood that is now Strawberry Banke. In fact, in 1823, Portsmouth hosted a festival to celebrate many intellectuals, including Daniel Webster, who were coming to visit the town. The city wanted to celebrate their history, so they had a parade with scenes depicting stories of the founding of the town and the route went to the oldest sections of the city, except the Puddle Dock neighborhood.<sup>35</sup> The account of this celebration was recorded by many historians, including Nathaniel Adams, the author of *Annals of Portsmouth*, and then distributed widely across the country. The descriptions of Portsmouth as a city and its elite peoples were one of the main drivers of its rise in popularity as a tourist destination.<sup>36</sup> This rise in interest in the city was

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<sup>32</sup> Garvin, James. “National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form: Strawberry Banke Historic District,” June 10, 1974. <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/c46404bd-0d8f-42bc-94ef-31b30229704e/>.

<sup>33</sup> City of Portsmouth. “Portsmouth’s Greatest Fire’s,” 2009. <https://files.cityofportsmouth.com/community/markers/PortsmouthsGreatFires-locatedinAldrichParkatCourtatAtkinsonStreets.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawberry Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007.108

<sup>35</sup> Adams, Nathaniel. *Annals of Portsmouth: Comprising a Period of Two Hundred Years from the First Settlement of the Town*. 1825. Portsmouth: Published by the Author , n.d. 384

<sup>36</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawberry Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 109

what brought the city back to life and is one of the main income sources in the present day as well as being a driving force for the creation and preservation of the Strawberry Banke Museum.

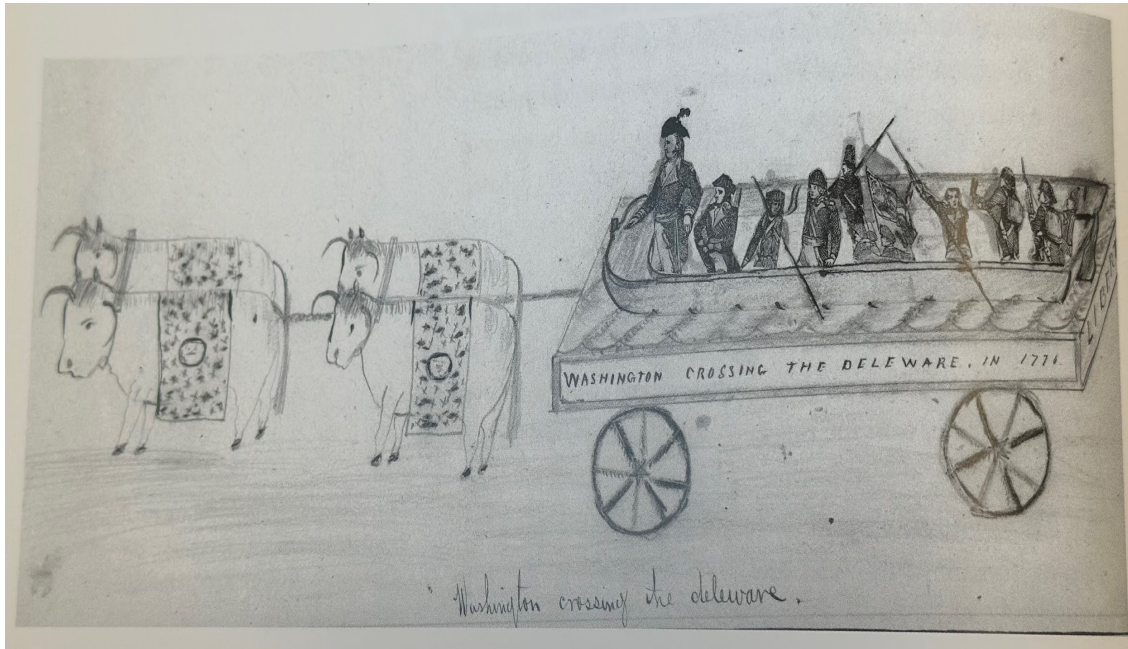


Figure 4: Sketch of Parade in 1823 in Portsmouth, NH drawn by James H. Head.<sup>37</sup>

After the Civil War, America was feeling very nostalgic to the “Good ole days” of the past especially amid the social changes being made by the Industrial Revolution and the Civil War. The colonial revival architecture, furniture, music, fashion, and other aspects of life were becoming very popular in the United States and Portsmouth was no exception to this. The boom of the tourism industry saved Portsmouth from the depths of irrelevance and brought new revenue into the town that they still rely on in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the early to mid 1800s, a journalist named Charles Brewster began a column called “Rambles About Portsmouth” that was a very romanticized version of the history of Portsmouth and its buildings.<sup>38</sup> After Brewster, a

<sup>37</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawbery Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007.96

<sup>38</sup> Brewster, Charles Warren, William Henry Young Hackett, and Laurence. Shorey. *Rambles about Portsmouth : sketches of persons, localities, and incidents of two centuries : principally from tradition and unpublished*

local woman named Sarah Haven Foster created a pocket sized travel manual called “Portsmouth Guide Book” in 1876. Foster combined Adams’ Annals of Portsmouth and Brewster’s column to create this book and it was essentially a romanticized town history and house tour for anyone to purchase.<sup>39</sup> These works of local history helped Portsmouth to gain even more popularity as a tourist destination and Brewster’s stories of local families that were not part of the upper class helped to inspire the preservation movement within the town and the preservation of the buildings these families lived in.

With the increase of upper class wealth within the city also came the increase in the lower class city and the divide was evident with their standard of living. The modern, urban city of Portsmouth mostly consisted of large brick buildings, a result of the 1814 Brick Laws, making the Puddle Dock neighborhood that is now Strawberry Banke seem very run down in comparison with its one-story wood homes.<sup>40</sup> The neighborhood layout remained the same, however the rural environment with large lots and gardens was replaced with overcrowded streets and buildings desperately needing repair. The name “Puddle Dock” became more popular as the neighborhood fell into disrepair and called that because when the tide was out the shallow tidal waterway became a puddle rather than a port.<sup>41</sup> The increase in disrepair and overcrowding also made Puddle Dock the prime location for a dumping ground for the rest of the city which made it even more of a health hazard. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the edges of Puddle Dock’s large

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*documents*. Vol. 1. Portsmouth, N.H.: C.W. Brewster & son, 1859-69. *Sabin Americana: History of the Americas, 1500-1926* (accessed October 21, 2024).

<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CY0104042433/SABN?u=uga&sid=bookmark-SABN&xid=b1a422dc&pg=8>.

<sup>39</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawbery Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007.101

<sup>40</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawbery Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007.108

<sup>41</sup> Garvin, James. “National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form: Strawberry Banke Historic District,” June 10, 1974. <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/c46404bd-0d8f-42bc-94ef-31b30229704e/>.

homes remained single family, however its interior was home to many working class families and immigrant families. Most of the large homes in the interior were turned into tenement buildings and remained this way through the 1960s. An example of one of these tenement homes was the Shapley-Drisco-Pridham House on 63 Puddle Lane.<sup>42</sup> This home was a restoration of the original federal style building built in the 1760's, however in the 1900s when it became a duplex it was severely altered from its original state. The home used to be one side store front, the other side family residence, however in the 1900s a wall was erected between the two doorways and a staircase added in order to create a duplex. Today, the wall has been removed, but the home still acts as a duplex with one side having a 1930s interpretation and the other having a 1780s interpretation with the original store front.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Robinson, Lexie. Strawberry Banke Site Visit. July 28, 2024.

<sup>43</sup> Robinson, Lexie. Strawberry Banke Site Visit. July 28, 2024.





Figure 5: Shapley-Drisco-Pridham House 63 Puddle Lane.<sup>44</sup>

Many other homes within the neighborhood were altered in this way in order to make room for more families to live in smaller spaces. According to J. Dennis Robinson's *Strawbery Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making* version of history, This increase in people caused Puddle Dock to have a perceived higher crime zone in the press and an area of "disorder, noise, and drunkenness".<sup>45</sup> To add to this bad press, it was described as a home to brothels and a

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<sup>44</sup> Robinson, Lexie. Strawbery Banke Site Visit. July 28, 2024.

<sup>45</sup> *The New Hampshire gazette*. (Portsmouth, NH), Aug. 6 1870. <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn84023142/1870-08-06/ed-1/>.

red light district for about 10 years.<sup>46</sup> The interior of the neighborhood was seen as a “slum” by the elites in the north end of the city, because the tenants consisted mostly of working class immigrants, first Irish and then Jewish.<sup>47</sup> These immigrants and working class individuals were drawn to the neighborhood with its low rents, but elites only read about the brothels in the press so the neighborhood became this “slum” in their minds.

By 1912, there were over a dozen “houses of ill repute” were active and law enforcement were bribed to look the other way.<sup>48</sup> The summer of 1912 was the height of this red-light district and the summer of crime for the neighborhood with at least 4 marines being found dead in alleys or in the river near the neighborhood. All the victims had been frequent visitors of the red-light district. In Robinson’s history, The neighborhood families lived in constant fear of robbery or harassment by the visitors of these establishments. They would hide their valuables in secret nooks and crannies in their homes or open a safety deposit box at the local bank to hide their valuables. Even Though this history was written this way, there is very little newspaper evidence to verify these reports and it is unclear if residents of the neighborhood like Alfred Ayers, a laborer, Peter Anderson, a fisherman, or Hiram Gove, a farmer, experienced this history as it was described by Robinson<sup>49</sup>.

This perceived prostitution, drunkenness, and “slum” as described in the newspaper about Puddle Dock were not being policed at all by local law enforcement until September of 1912

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<sup>46</sup> Garvin, James. “National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form: Strawberry Banke Historic District,” June 10, 1974. <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/c46404bd-0d8f-42bc-94ef-31b30229704e/>.

<sup>47</sup> Garvin, James. “National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form: Strawberry Banke Historic District,” June 10, 1974. <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/c46404bd-0d8f-42bc-94ef-31b30229704e/>.

<sup>48</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawberry Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 133

<sup>49</sup> City of Portsmouth, “The Portsmouth Directory, Containing the City Record, and the Names of the Citizens, with Business and Street Directories 1879.”



when President William Howard Taft was planning to visit the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.<sup>50</sup> The Mayor of Portsmouth, Daniel Badger, went on a public campaign to, “forthwith and permanently keep closed all houses of ill repute,” within Puddle Dock in order to prevent further crime in the neighborhood.<sup>51</sup> This cleaning up of Portsmouth won the Mayor’s reelection, however this supposed area of disorderly conduct and prostitution in the Puddle Dock neighborhood left a permanent stain in the minds of the elites in the north of the city, even though the instigators of these crimes were not the residents of the neighborhood. This perceived era of crime as described by Robinson and the press was later brought up as a reason for urban renewal “slum” clearance in order to permanently remove it from the city, however this was prevented by local preservationists who wanted to save their historic homes.

Even though the first decade of the 1900s created bad press for the neighborhood, the first preservation wave was also making its way into the edges of the Puddle Dock neighborhood. This preservation wave began with Thomas Bailey Aldrich’s widow, Lillian, returning to her husband’s childhood home in 1907 only to find it in disrepair, like other historic homes in the neighborhood.<sup>52</sup> Aldrich wrote a book called, *The Story of a Bad Boy* which was a fictional depiction of his childhood in Portsmouth and growing up in the historic Puddle Dock

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<sup>50</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawbery Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007.135

*The New Hampshire gazette*. (Portsmouth, NH), Oct. 29 1870. <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn84023142/1870-10-29/ed-1/>.

<sup>51</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawbery Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007.139

City of Portsmouth. “History.” Accessed April 18, 2025. <https://www.portsmouthnh.gov/police/history>.

<sup>52</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawbery Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 113

neighborhood. Lillian and her son raised \$10,000 to repurchase the house and restored it to its Antebellum look that is described in the novel by her husband.<sup>53</sup> Aldrich's description of Portsmouth and the Puddle Dock neighborhood reflects an elitist, cleaned up version of history that does not describe it in fully accurate details. He described Portsmouth as “the prettiest place in the world” with “streets long and wide, shaded by gigantic American Elms”.<sup>54</sup> His description of the Puddle Dock neighborhood focuses on its colonial architecture and colonial history rather than the early 1900s in which he's writing. He glosses over the fact it is a neighborhood primarily occupied by immigrant renters. Instead he focuses on the “former grandeur” of the houses and “illustrious men” that used to live here.<sup>55</sup> This was the era that Aldrich's widow, Lillian, restored the house to which erased any other history or other families that also lived in the home. This shrine of literary history Lillian Aldrich restored to her husband's fictional description was the first of many historic house museums that Portsmouth became home to and eventually created Strawberry Banke.

Following Lillian Aldrich's house museum for her husband, five new preservation groups were created in 1908 that adopted Colonial Portsmouth homes and began giving house tours within them. The preservation groups mostly focused on 18<sup>th</sup> century Georgian mansions that belonged to the elite, founding families of Portsmouth like the Wentworth's. The Wentworth-Gardner House was built by the Royal Governor John Wentworth in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>56</sup> It then passed to his grandson, Joshua Wentworth, who became a revolutionary patriot during the war. The home was purchased from the Colonial Dames by Wallace Nutting in 1915 and he is

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<sup>53</sup> Aldrich, Thomas Bailey. 2006. *The Story of a Bad Boy*. Project Gutenberg. <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=af430ed1-5dec-3a72-a720-d9ea7c4de0ea>.

<sup>54</sup> Aldrich, *The Story of a Bad Boy*, 23.

<sup>55</sup> Aldrich, *The Story of a Bad Boy*, 25.

<sup>56</sup> Garvin, James. “National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form: Strawberry Banke Historic District,” June 10, 1974. <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/c46404bd-0d8f-42bc-94ef-31b30229704e/>.

the one who put it on the map.<sup>57</sup> Nutting restored the Wentworth house and rather than keep it hidden away in Portsmouth, he published picture books of his work. He also sold reproduction furniture and advertised in national magazines in order to increase tourism. Nutting continued this cycle with five other house museums in Portsmouth and his advertising influenced Portsmouth's visitor interest and the nostalgia of a nation.<sup>58</sup> The Wentworth- Gardner house was so popular that when Nutting offered the house to the MET in 1918 people were furious. The MET was going to carry the house away in pieces to put on exhibit in New York City. However, William Sumner Appleton, founder of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, strongly objected to the removal of the home, so the house remained untouched.<sup>59</sup> The saving of the Wentworth-Gardner House demonstrates the willingness of people within the community to want to save their historic structures from destruction from 1920 till the 1950s with Urban Renewal.

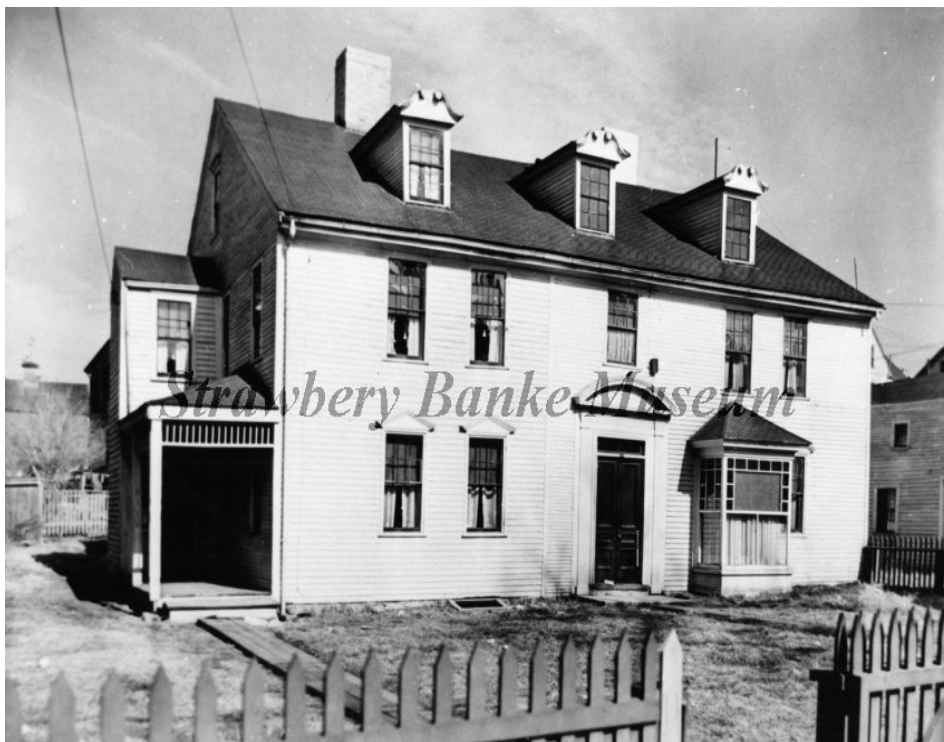
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<sup>57</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawbery Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007.143

<sup>58</sup> Nutting, W. (1923). *New Hampshire beautiful*. Old America Co. 77.

<sup>59</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawbery Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 149

<sup>60</sup> "Print, Photographic - Colonel Joshua Wentworth House | Strawbery Banke Museum." Accessed November 11, 2024. <https://strawberybanke.pastperfectonline.com/photo/4469D076-87D5-4F69-B182-614618073823>.



2 Figure 6: The Wentworth-Gardner House 1937 during the HABS Survey.

The Great Depression changed the way history was seen and house museums were run in Portsmouth going into the 1940s. Because of the boom in House museums the decades before, there were now beautifully restored buildings that stretched throughout the city that just sat empty and were very expensive to run. Because it was too expensive to run these house museums individually, the idea of a running many house museums under the same management, like Strawberry Banke, became popular rather than individually run house museums with romanticized versions of the past and old-fashioned interpretations. The idea for Strawberry Banke didn't begin with the threat of Urban Renewal in 1957. It began with a blueprint in 1936.<sup>61</sup> Two Kittery Point men drew up a blueprint to restore the waterfront neighborhood as a “maritime village” rather than a colonial neighborhood and wanted to use government funding to

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<sup>61</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawbery Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 157

do it. However, there was not enough money at the time, so the project was put on the back burner until it was put under threat.

In the late 1930s, Josephine and Mary Prescott, residents of Portsmouth, became millionaires. The Prescotts were born and raised in Portsmouth and saw the Puddle Dock neighborhood as a blight on the city. Both sisters saw the neighborhood as “blighted”, and believed the only way to get rid of this more dilapidated area was by destroying the neighborhood rather than cleaning it up. At the same time, Congress passed the Historic Sites Act in 1935 and the waterfront neighborhood was being considered for a new national park. While government bureaucracy was taking forever to decide to protect the neighborhood, the Prescotts bought and tore down four city blocks near Puddle Dock.<sup>62</sup> Historian Stephan Decatur and Architect John Mead Howells were champions of Puddle Dock becoming a National Park in Washington from 1935 through 1940. They had many site visits with the NPS and had a WPA survey done of the area in 1936.<sup>63</sup> The men tried to raise funds for support of their project and marketed it as, “greater than Williamsburg,” in order to gain support. However, this campaign was in vain for 1940, because of the beginning of World War II.<sup>64</sup>

After the war, the country was in an economic boom, and the government had many interior infrastructure projects in the works to modernize the country. The biggest example of this was Robert Moses’ plans for New York City. Moses oversaw many New York infrastructure projects from 1924 to 1975 including the Queens-Midtown Tunnel, The Cross-Bronx

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<sup>62</sup> Brighton, Ray., and Portsmouth Marine Society. 1982. *The Prescott Story*. Portsmouth Marine Society, under auspices of the Trustees of Portsmouth’s Trust Funds. <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=7c5b5f34-da26-3f13-8c45-7b293226ee74>.

<sup>63</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawbery Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007.164

<sup>64</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawbery Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007.167

Expressway, FDR Drive and many others.<sup>65</sup> From 1924 to 1966, he had a public housing project in the works that included a committee on slum clearance that worked from 1957 to 1959.<sup>66</sup> This committee was in charge of identifying so called “blighted” areas that could be cleared for new infrastructure to be built like housing and highways. Like Moses, the United States government was supporting slum clearance in order to create new government housing with better living conditions for people to be cleaner and healthier. This project of Urban Renewal seemed very generous on paper, however in practice it destroyed minority neighborhoods and cultures within these neighborhoods were lost to make room for gentrification. Along with the history of these minority neighborhoods, historic structures within these areas were lost and it almost happened to Strawberry Banke. The WPA report that was made back in 1936 labeled the Puddle Dock neighborhood as a “slum” which was a giant red flag for urban renewal. Planners of the city of Portsmouth were concerned about this “blighted” neighborhood and wanted to take the area by eminent domain and condemn the properties.<sup>67</sup> The planners were not concerned with the tenants who lived in Puddle Dock or in the immigrant communities that were created and thriving there. Instead, the planners were concerned with the sixty three people who owned the properties in the neighborhood and how to buy them out as quickly as possible. The three people who campaigned against this destruction and were ultimately responsible for the creation of Strawberry Banke were Dorothy Vaughan, Muriel Howells, and Richard Howland.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Robert Moses. “The Robert Moses Papers 1912-1980.” Manuscripts and Archives Section, The New York City Public Library, March 1986. [https://nyplorg-data-archives.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/collection/pdf\\_finding\\_aid/moses.pdf](https://nyplorg-data-archives.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/collection/pdf_finding_aid/moses.pdf).

<sup>66</sup> Robert Moses. “The Robert Moses Papers 1912-1980.” Manuscripts and Archives Section, The New York City Public Library, March 1986. [https://nyplorg-data-archives.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/collection/pdf\\_finding\\_aid/moses.pdf](https://nyplorg-data-archives.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/collection/pdf_finding_aid/moses.pdf).

<sup>67</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawberry Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 190

<sup>68</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawberry Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 194

The legend of the saving of Strawberry Banke begins with the destruction of the three story Jacob Treadwell House on Congress Street. Both Dorothy and Muriel watched the destruction from a window of the Portsmouth Public Library and decided they would not see another of their historic buildings be destroyed. Howells wrote many letters to the Planning director of Portsmouth offering solutions to prevent further destruction, however these were met with sympathy but no action. Vaughan gave a riveting speech to the men's rotary club in 1957 about saving the colonial character of the city which was well received, but forgotten the next day. Finally Howells invited Richard Howland, the Director of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, to come to Portsmouth to see if it was worth saving. In June of 1957, Howland met with George Kimball, President of the Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce, to discuss strategies for the restoration project of Portsmouth. One week later, Howland sent a letter to Kimball detailing how the saving of the Puddle Dock neighborhood and creation of Strawberry Banke would help redefine the future of the city and make money for the city as well.<sup>69</sup> It was this detailed letter, with encouragement from Howells and Vaughan, that gave birth to the Strawberry Banke museum, saving people's homes and cultural heritage as well as maintaining historic treasures for the public's future enjoyment.

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<sup>69</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawberry Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007. 209

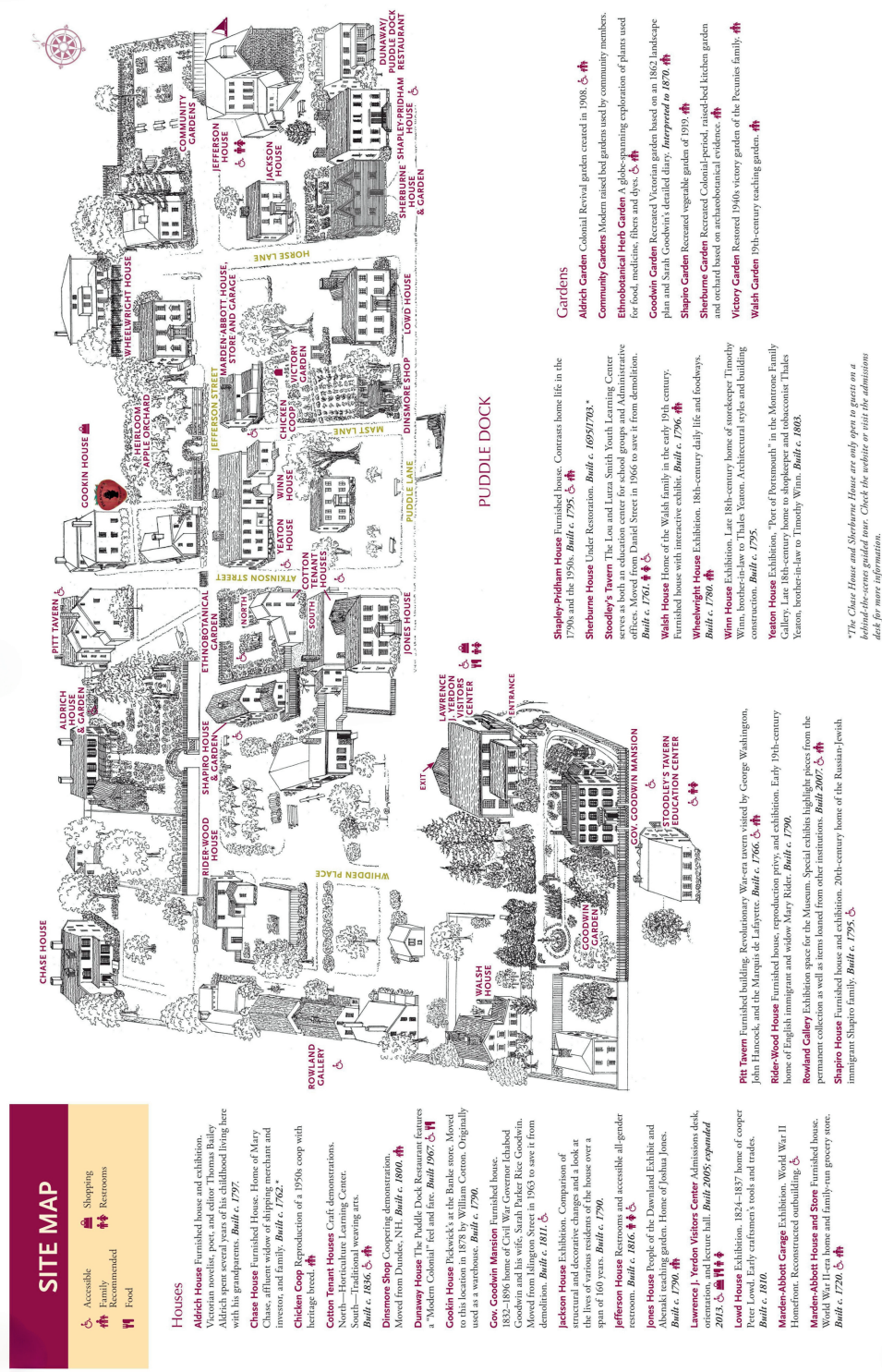


Figure 7: Site Map of the Strawberry Banke Museum.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>70</sup> "Site Map." *Strawberry Banke Museum*, <https://www.strawberrybanke.org/site-map>. Accessed 9 Jul. 2025.



### Chapter 3

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#### **BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF THE HERITAGE HOUSE PROGRAM**

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This thesis examines the creation of apartment units in unused spaces within historic house museums to discover their importance and if they should be incorporated in more house museums. The Strawberry Banke Museum has a program called the Heritage House Program that implemented these apartments to provide a new revenue source for the museum and provide more housing for the community. This program is the organization of Strawberry Bank's apartments that are on the upper floors of their historic buildings. In order to get more information about the program I interviewed Rodney Rowland who has worked at Strawberry Bank for 30 years. Rowland moved to Portsmouth as a child with his parents around the time Strawberry Banke was being transformed into a museum. The creation and implementation of Strawberry Banke was a community effort and Rowland's parents were very supportive of the movement which also meant he was involved in it. He began to volunteer at Strawberry Banke when he was just 10 which inspired his love for history and preservation. After college, he came back to Portsmouth and was hired in the collections office at the museum which began his career at Strawberry Banke.

When the Heritage House Program was implemented in 2009 it was broken down into three phases. Before the museum added new apartments, the museum staff had offices on the upper floors of five of the historic buildings. Then, they began phase one by consolidating the offices into one building and the other offices were rehabilitated.<sup>71</sup> This phase was the easiest of the three, because the offices already had modern amenities, they just needed to be updated.

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<sup>71</sup> Rowland, Rodney. Interview with Rodney Rowland . Recording, July 29, 2024.

Phase two was more extensive, because the museum had to create the apartments in buildings that didn't have those modern amenities. They identified four more buildings that could have their upper floors converted into apartments. This phase was also more expensive adding bathrooms, kitchens, and sprinkler systems.<sup>72</sup> Phase three, which they are currently in, has been the most difficult because it involves restoring previously untouched buildings and determining what its uses are going to be. According to J. Dennis Robison, author of *Strawbery Banke, A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*, the oldest home in the museum is the Sherburne house that was built in 1695. The Sherburne house was built by John Sherburne and sat on the south end of the neighborhood. John Sherburne's father Henry Sherburne was one of the founders of the community and was a member of the group that created the original charter.<sup>73</sup> Sherburne built the house in a very similar style to the other buildings of the time with a two story, wood frame, single cell and chimney bay house with a side gable roof and two front gables on the façade.<sup>74</sup> This home was one of the main drivers of Strawbery Banke becoming the outdoor museum it is today. In 1957, when an urban renewal project threatened the Sherburne house with demolition the people of the Portsmouth community came together to save the neighborhood and primarily save the Sherburne house.<sup>75</sup> The Sherburne house is currently under restoration and may feature a Heritage House Program phase three apartment. Usually when the museum determines those uses, the main two are museum exhibit space and Heritage House Program.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Rowland, Rodney. Interview with Rodney Rowland . Recording, July 29, 2024.

<sup>73</sup> J.Dennis Robinson. *Strawbery Banke: A Seaport Museum 400 Years in the Making*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher LLC , 2007.62

<sup>74</sup> Strawbery Banke Museum. "Historic Houses." Accessed October 7, 2024.  
<https://www.strawberybanke.org/houses>.

<sup>75</sup> Strawbery Banke Museum. "Historic Houses." Accessed October 7, 2024.  
<https://www.strawberybanke.org/houses>.

<sup>76</sup> Rowland, Rodney. Interview with Rodney Rowland . Recording, July 29, 2024.

The Heritage House program began in 2009, but apartments in these historic buildings have existed for many years before the program began. According to Rowland, “The Chase House, which was restored in 1968, has always had an apartment on the third floor because they just knew they would never use the third floor for anything but that. The Goodwin Mansion, which was moved here in the early 1970s, has always had an apartment in the back just because it was space, they knew they wouldn’t use”.<sup>77</sup> These homes had their apartments before the creation of Strawberry Banke and were rental income for the owners of those homes. They now serve as rental income for the museum. The Heritage House Program is a blend of rehabilitation and preservation and for it to be successful there must be compromise between preservation of the original historic fabric and implementation of modern amenities. When doing rehabilitation, the contractors must work with preservationists at the museum to implement modern plumbing and electrical that either doesn’t interfere with historic fabric or could be removed to preserve integrity. In order for other historic house museums to follow Strawberry Banke’s model, they have to be willing to find that compromise.

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<sup>77</sup> Rowland, Rodney. Interview with Rodney Rowland . Recording, July 29, 2024.



*Figure 8: The Goodwin Mansion with an existing apartment in the rear of the home.*

There needs to be compromises in order to make apartments successful in a historic house museum, but they also come with their challenges. During my interview with Rowland, he told me the most difficult part of the Heritage House Program was, “how to be a historic preservation institution and add a modern apartment”.<sup>78</sup> Modern apartments are required to have sprinklers; bathrooms; and kitchens. So, the challenge for Rowland and his team is how to add these amenities that is as noninvasive as possible and doesn't change the interior or exterior of the structure. Finding this compromise has always been a battle for the program but it has only

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<sup>78</sup> Rowland, Rodney. Interview with Rodney Rowland . Recording, July 29, 2024.

gotten more difficult with the updating of the building codes. When I visited Strawberry Banke in July of 2024, I conducted the interview with Mr. Rowland's in his office in the Walsh House.<sup>79</sup> This building is currently in the process of phase three of the program. Once restoration is complete, they are going to have mixed uses in this building with two apartments and museum exhibit space.

The building code has changed dramatically since 2009 when they first implemented the program, so converting one building in order to have two uses is very difficult, especially when one of those uses is an apartment where people are going to eat, sleep, and live. The chapter 1, section 102.6 of the 2009 International building code stated that existing buildings that do not currently comply with the code, like historic structures within the museum, were not required to change with the code.<sup>80</sup> This was relevant for phase 1 of the program that already had some of the modern amenities needed for apartments, so they did not have to comply with the updated code. However, on October 31, 2019, there was a public hearing to update the Building Code and the Fire Codes to be similar to the International Building Code and Fire Codes and what they are today.<sup>81</sup> Chapter 12, section 1203.4 says there is a special zoning overlay that regulates all work done within the historic district that Strawberry Banke is a part of.<sup>82</sup> Design guidelines apply to changes to the exterior facades and must adhere to the design criteria in section 1203.5, however changes in the interior must comply with fire safety codes in sections 1203.6 through 1203.7.1.<sup>83</sup> The current phase 3 rehabilitations to add apartments are required to comply with these fire

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<sup>79</sup> Rowland, Rodney. Interview with Rodney Rowland . Recording, July 29, 2024.

<sup>80</sup> "CHAPTER 1 SCOPE AND ADMINISTRATION - 2009 INTERNATIONAL BUILDING CODE (IBC)." Accessed April 2, 2025. <https://codes.iccsafe.org/content/IBC2009P13/chapter-1-scope-and-administration>.

<sup>81</sup> City of Portsmouth. "Building and Fire Codes Update." Accessed April 2, 2025. <https://www.portsmouthnh.gov/inspection/building-and-fire-codes-update>.

<sup>82</sup> City of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Chapter 12: City of Portsmouth Building Code, 1201 City Building Code § 1203.4 (2019).

<sup>83</sup> City of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Chapter 12: City of Portsmouth Building Code, 1201 City Building Code § 1203.5, 1203.6 - 1203.7.1 (2019).

safety codes and building codes. The updates in building codes will be a challenge for any museum wanting to adopt the Heritage House Museum model, but it is a challenge that can be overcome.

When the program began, most of the conversions and renovations were done by Strawberry Banke's in-house historic carpenters that have been on staff at the museum for decades. They did all the work for phase one of the program, but phase two was done differently. Phase two had four historic buildings being rehabilitated into apartments and two of these buildings were finished by the in-house historic carpenters, but the other two were done by local contractors. According to Rowland, the museum prefers to use their historic carpenters whenever possible, because it is easier and the work quality is guaranteed.<sup>84</sup> However, sometimes that is not possible, so other contractors must be employed. This would be another decision any house museum that adopted this program would have to make. Not every house museum has the infrastructure to have historic craftsmen on staff to rehabilitate rooms into apartments. So, most likely, an outside contractor would have to be used. When applied to Georgia specifically, the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation has a list of preservation consultants that could be useful. According to the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation, there are nine preservation consulting companies within the state.<sup>85</sup> These would be the type of contractors that a Georgia house museum could contact in order to convert unused space in their historic building into rentable apartments.

The rehabilitation of these historic buildings would be a financial investment for the owners and managers of any house museum that would be willing to try this program. However,

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<sup>84</sup> Rowland, Rodney. Interview with Rodney Rowland . Recording, July 29, 2024.

<sup>85</sup> The Georgia Trust. "Preservation Consultants Archives." Accessed February 24, 2025.  
<https://www.georgiatrust.org/directories/preservation-consultants/>.

even though rehabilitation would be a large amount of money, the return would be extremely profitable and could create a cushion for the museum while also providing much needed housing. The Heritage House Program was and still is extremely important to Strawberry Banke's revenue every year. Before the program, their two main sources of income were tourism and events.<sup>86</sup> Those two sources are dependent on many factors like the weather. If the weather is too hot or cold or it rains, then the museum loses money. However, with the creation of the program, the museum's revenue consists of tourism, events, Heritage House Program, and the endowment fund.<sup>87</sup> 90% of the rental income from the Heritage House program goes into the operating budget for Strawberry Banke. Then, they take the remaining 10% of that rental income and put it into a restrictive fund as an endowment for maintenance of any houses that have an apartment in them<sup>88</sup>. This is for any emergency work or routine maintenance of the building and the apartment. However, this fund is only for those buildings used in the Heritage House Program. The rest of it is for general operation to balance out the budget of the museum.

Because the current housing shortage community and the deeply invested interest the community has in the museum and, they never run out of interest for the apartments being offered. This was one of the answers that surprised me from Rowland when we discussed the challenges of the museum. He told me that they currently had a waiting list of six individuals who are wanting one of their apartments, and the fact they have a wait list is very common.<sup>89</sup> However, there is a challenge of being a tenant and understanding that they live inside a museum. The tenants have certain regulations living within the museum that they agree to when

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<sup>86</sup> Rowland, Rodney. Interview with Rodney Rowland . Recording, July 29, 2024.

<sup>87</sup> Rowland, Rodney. Interview with Rodney Rowland . Recording, July 29, 2024.

<sup>88</sup> Rowland, Rodney. Interview with Rodney Rowland . Recording, July 29, 2024.

<sup>89</sup> Rowland, Rodney. Interview with Rodney Rowland . Recording, July 29, 2024.

they sign their lease.<sup>90</sup> They must be very respectful of the environment they live in. They must be very respectful of the visitor experience. They are not allowed to play loud music or put anything in their windows. They are entering into a partnership when they live at the museum. Even though they are paying rent to live at the museum, they must honor that partnership. Despite these restrictions on tenants, there is plenty of eagerness to acquire a lease for these apartments. Similar to Vognone's main idea in *Anarchist's Guide to House Museums*, finding a community's emotional connection to a house museum is one of the most crucial ways to save them.<sup>91</sup> If a house museum is beloved by its community, then interest in living in the historic house museum should not be a problem. Also, if the rent is at or a little below market rate, like at Strawberry Banke, then it can be within budget of a retiree or a young professional. These are the types of individuals that are most common apartment tenants at Strawberry Banke and their average rent is a little over \$2,000 a month which is based on the median rent in Portsmouth.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Rowland, Rodney. Interview with Rodney Rowland . Recording, July 29, 2024.

<sup>91</sup> Vagnone, Cothren, and Ryan, *Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums*, 33.

<sup>92</sup> Rowland, Rodney. Interview with Rodney Rowland . Recording, July 29, 2024.





*Figure 9: Private apartment entrance upper floor of the Shapley-Drisco-Pridham House*



*Figure 10: Private apartment entrance upper floor of the Winn House*



*Figure 11: Private apartment entrance upper floor of the Cotton Tenant house*

When I had my original hypothesis for this thesis, I was hoping to find evidence for the rehabilitation of apartments in house museums and come up with a solution to make it in the category low-income housing or affordable housing. However, housing costs have risen so high in the last two decades and what is deemed “affordable” by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, HUD, is no longer affordable. HUD defines affordable as, “housing on which the occupant is paying no more than 30 percent of gross income for housing costs,

including utilities”.<sup>93</sup> According to research done by United States Treasury in 2024, “almost 90 percent of families with annual incomes below \$20,000 spend more than 30 percent of their incomes on housing expenses”.<sup>94</sup> The only way for a museum to implement apartments and keep them at an “affordable” rate would be if the federal government redefined the word affordable.

In Georgia, the median rent at market rate for all bedrooms and all property types is \$1950 which is 2% lower than the average rent in New Hampshire.<sup>95</sup> However, this price varies by city to city so it could be less than \$1950. If a house museum rehabilitated two rooms in their upper floors of their house museums to be used as apartments and used the Strawberry Banke model then 10% of the each apartment rent, \$195, would go into an endowment fund for the apartments and the rest would go into the house museum budget. So, with two apartments that is \$390 every month and almost \$5,000 for the year. That would leave \$1,755 from each apartment to go into the overall budget every month. This would create an additional \$42,000 of revenue for the house museum with just two apartments. This additional revenue could be life saving for struggling house museums and with time the endowment fund will increase to be able to do further preservation work on the home.

Additionally, if a house museum wanted to adopt Strawberry Banke’s model they could receive federal aid or tax credits through the rehabilitation of their historic property. The National Historic Preservation Act was established in 1966 to protect historic resources. In order to add financial support to the NHPA, the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) was established in

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<sup>93</sup> “HUD Archives: Glossary of Terms to Affordable Housing - HUD.” Accessed April 2, 2025. <https://archives.hud.gov/local/nv/goodstories/2006-04-06glos.cfm>.

<sup>94</sup> U.S. Department of the Treasury. “Rent, House Prices, and Demographics,” February 8, 2025. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/featured-stories/rent-house-prices-and-demographics>.

<sup>95</sup> ZillowRentals. “Georgia Rental Market,” February 23, 2025. <https://www.zillow.com/rental-manager/market-trends/ga/>.

1977.<sup>96</sup> This fund was created to help carry out activities related to preservation in different states. Awards from the HPF were originally made to States but today it can be awarded to Tribes, Territories, local governments, and non-profits.<sup>97</sup> So, if the organization that runs the house museum is a nonprofit, then they may be eligible for this grant. In addition to these requirements, the IRS must also deem a site eligible to receive a tax credit. Under the Internal Revenue Code (IRC) section 47 that deals with historic preservation tax credits if your rehabilitation and expenses qualify you may claim a tax credit up to 20% of your qualified expenses.<sup>98</sup> The IRC also requires you to have qualified rehabilitation expenditures (QREs) which consists of structural components like walls, windows and doors, central air conditioning or heating systems, plumbing, electrical wiring, sprinkler systems, etc.<sup>99</sup> These are all needed in the rehabilitation of a historic building to include an apartment, so a house museum could receive a tax credit from the federal government.

Also, each state has their own individual grants that are geared toward preservation that may apply for the rehabilitation of a site. Georgia's Department of Community Affairs has the Georgia Heritage Grant that provides seed money for historic sites in the state.<sup>100</sup> This grant is funded by license plate sales and offers to match funds for any local government or nonprofit for the preservation of Georgia Register eligible sites. The rehabilitation must also meet the requirements of the Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation of historic places in order

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<sup>96</sup> "Historic Preservation Fund - Historic Preservation (U.S. National Park Service)." Accessed February 25, 2025. <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/historicpreservation/historic-preservation-fund.htm>.

<sup>97</sup> "Historic Preservation Fund - Historic Preservation (U.S. National Park Service)." Accessed February 25, 2025. <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/historicpreservation/historic-preservation-fund.htm>.

<sup>98</sup> "Rehabilitation Credit | Internal Revenue Service." Accessed April 2, 2025. <https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/rehabilitation-credit>.

<sup>99</sup> "Rehabilitation Credit | Internal Revenue Service." Accessed April 2, 2025. <https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/rehabilitation-credit>.

<sup>100</sup> "Georgia Heritage Grant | Georgia Department of Community Affairs." Accessed February 25, 2025. <https://dca.georgia.gov/community-assistance/historic-preservation/georgia-heritage-grant>.



to receive this grant money.<sup>101</sup> This grant expands the criteria to more than just nonprofits who manage a historic site, it also includes local governments who manage historic sites within their cities. It is another way to gain funds for the implementation of apartments in historic house museums.

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs is also a Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) allocating agency that has tax credits for the rehabilitation of buildings to create more housing. The state of Georgia provides a state income tax credit that equals 25% of QREs and has the same qualifications as the IRS tax credit but at a higher percentage.<sup>102</sup> House museums that qualify for the federal tax credit can also qualify for the state tax credit and combine the credits to have more incentive for rehabilitation. This combined with the Georgia Heritage Grant could provide enough funding to make this solution possible for struggling house museums.

The Heritage House Program provides more benefits as housing and revenue for the Strawberry Banke Museum than it provides challenges. With the right funding and support, It can be an ideal model for other struggling house museums to gain a new revenue source as well as provide a resource for their communities. In order to test these benefits and challenges on a smaller scale to see their impact, I looked at Heritage Hall in Madison, GA to see if the Strawberry Banke model will be successful in this house museum.

Heritage Hall is a two story Greek Revival home that was built in 1811 and was purchased in 1830 by Dr. Elijah Jones who was a prominent doctor in Madison. It was a family

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<sup>101</sup> “Georgia Heritage Grant | Georgia Department of Community Affairs.” Accessed February 25, 2025. <https://dca.georgia.gov/community-assistance/historic-preservation/georgia-heritage-grant>.

<sup>102</sup> “Georgia Heritage Grant | Georgia Department of Community Affairs.” Accessed February 25, 2025. <https://dca.georgia.gov/community-assistance/historic-preservation/georgia-heritage-grant>.

residence till 1977 when it was donated to the Morgan County Historical Society and became a house museum.<sup>103</sup>



*Figure 12: Heritage Hall Madison, GA.*<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *About | Morgan County Historical Society.* <https://mchistorical.com/about/>. Accessed 25 June. 2025.

<sup>104</sup> *Gallery | Morgan County Historical Society.* <https://mchistorical.com/gallery/>. Accessed 25 June. 2025.

Similar to Strawberry Banke, Heritage Hall's main forms of revenue are tours and events. These sources are all ran by the Historical Society who are also owners of other house museums in the area like the Rodgers House and Rose Cottage. Because the society has to maintain these buildings more consistent revenue is needed which is why the upper floors of Heritage Hall could be converted into apartments while leaving the downstairs spaces for museum exhibit space and interpretation. However, in order to implement these apartments, the society would have to take several steps. These steps would include finding the finances to renovate the upstairs spaces, hiring an architect to create a design that would create a modern apartment while also maintaining historic integrity, and making sure any improvements are up to current building code. These are all challenges that Strawberry Banke also had to face while converting their upper floors into apartments. However, when these are done they will provide new housing and consistent revenue with their rents.

The first challenge will be financing the renovation. In order to raise money for the project the Historical Society has a few options. They could do a fund raiser to contribute to the creation of these new apartments; they could apply for the Georgia Heritage Grant as previously mentioned; or they can receive a Community Home Investment Program Grant also known as CHIP. CHIP grants are a federal funded program designed to provide more housing for a community and offering money specifically to local governments or nonprofits which Heritage Hall is a part of.<sup>105</sup> It can be used to rehabilitate owner occupied homes or build new ones from the ground up. Housing Rehabilitation, which this would be described as, can offer as much as \$500,000 in grant money in order to complete the renovation and create these new apartments.

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<sup>105</sup> *Community HOME Investment Program (CHIP) | Georgia Department of Community Affairs.*  
<https://dca.georgia.gov/affordable-housing/housing-development/home-investment-partnership-program-home/community-home>. Accessed 9 Jul. 2025.



There are also other grant and loan opportunities listed by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources such as the Historic Preservation Funds Grant, OneGeorgia Authority Grants, Community Development Block Grant – Loan Guarantee Program, and many others that could be used to add more funds to this project.<sup>106</sup>

The next two challenges go together with the design aspect as well as the building aspect of the project. Fortunately, since Heritage Hall is used as an event space for weddings, there is already a modern bathroom on the second floor for a bridal suite it will make the renovations simpler than installing brand new plumbing and appliances. There is also already electrical lighting within the house to again make the transition easier. The upper floor of Heritage Hall has the area for bedrooms to be converted into two one-bedroom apartments. The house has 2,646 sq ft, so each apartment would be approximately 1,000 sq ft while leaving room for the upstairs landing and hallway.<sup>107</sup> There are not very many rental properties within the city of Madison which is one of the reasons these would be very helpful for the community, but it also does not leave many pieces of data to base rent on. Most apartments listed on Zillow and Apartments.com that are between 800-1,200 sq ft around the area Heritage Hall is located have a rent between \$1,800 and \$1,550 a month.<sup>108</sup> Based on this, the two apartments that could potentially be created on the upper floor of Heritage Hall could add to their revenue by about

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<sup>106</sup> Williams, Mark, and Davis Crass. *Funding Sources for Historic Preservation Projects*. Georgia Department of Natural Resources, 2023, <https://georgiawildlife.com/sites/default/files/hpd/doc/Grants/FundingSources.pdf>.

<sup>107</sup> The Morgan County Assessor. "Heritage Hall Tax Assessor Information." *QPublic*, 2025, <https://qpublic.schneidercorp.com/Application.aspx?AppID=697&LayerID=11400&PageTypeID=4&PageID=4848&Q=675032501&KeyValue=M09++++070>.

<sup>108</sup> "Zillow: 1000 Sq Ft Apartments Madison GA." *Zillow*, 2025, [https://www.zillow.com/homedetails/254-W-Washington-St-6-Madison-GA-30650/453579341\\_zpid/](https://www.zillow.com/homedetails/254-W-Washington-St-6-Madison-GA-30650/453579341_zpid/).

"Apartments.Com 1000 Sq Ft Apartments Madison GA." *Apartments.Com*, 2025, <https://www.apartments.com/202-202-w-jefferson-st-madison-ga-unit-202/wprjzek/>.

\$3,100 to \$3,600 a month. Then based on the Heritage House Program Model, they would be able to take 90% of that, between 2,790 and 3,240, and put that back into the house museum operation budget. Then the remaining 10%, between \$360 and \$310, would be used for any improvements to the apartments if needed. This 10% number may not sound like a lot the first few months, but after the first one year lease they could potentially have a fund between \$4,320 and \$3,720 exclusively for the maintenance of the upper floor.



*Figure 13: AI generated potential apartment for Heritage Hall.<sup>109</sup>*

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<sup>109</sup> “Historic Living Room with Natural Light.” *ChatGPT*, 9 Jul. 2025, [https://chatgpt.com/s/m\\_686eb541e394819192bd0b4169f62c5b](https://chatgpt.com/s/m_686eb541e394819192bd0b4169f62c5b).



*Figure 14: AI generated potential kitchenette within the one bedroom apartment at Heritage Hall.*<sup>110</sup>

This hypothetical scenario provides the Heritage Hall house museum more opportunities to not only generate more revenue, but also provide more housing for their community. It is within walking distance to churches, shops, and restaurants making it an ideal location as well as being located in the heart of the historic district. These apartments will come with their own challenges to develop, but there are many opportunities for financing and building for the

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<sup>110</sup> “Cozy Kitchen with Garden View.” *ChatGPT*, 9 Jul. 2025, [https://chatgpt.com/s/m\\_686eb642d2248191b8975c4b9a1a71af](https://chatgpt.com/s/m_686eb642d2248191b8975c4b9a1a71af).

Historic Society to consult in order to achieve this goal. This hypothetical also explains how the Heritage House Program employed by Strawberry Banke can be employed by other house museums and at a much smaller scale while still providing a prominent impact for the house museum and the community.

## Chapter 4

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### CONCLUSION

The current housing crisis in our country is affecting everyone, but the solution does not have to be limited to only developing new housing units. If existing resources already exist, then the rehabilitation of those structures can create new housing units. House Museums across the country have been struggling since the early 2000s to stay relevant to the current generation in order to increase visitors. They try a variety of methods such as living history, ghost tours, and historic movie nights, but these methods do not create long standing revenue. Using the Heritage House Program as a model, struggling house museums can utilize their otherwise useless space by creating an apartment unit which gives them consist revenue while also increasing housing stock in the community. It is killing two birds with one stone.

The purpose of this work was to explore the Heritage House Program at the Strawberry Banke museum in order to see if it is a successful model that can be replicated elsewhere and add to the literature of possible solutions for struggling house museums. After interviewing Mr. Rowland and learning more about Strawberry Banke and the Heritage House Program, I was able to see the full picture of what the program had to offer. The program has many benefits such as regular income, good preservation habits, and being a fundamental part of its community. The program also has many challenges such as the cost of installing modern amenities in a historic building as well as compromising some preservation initiatives for building and life safety codes. Overall, the choice for preservationists and owners of house museums is to compromise or lose their historic resource.

Based on this research, I would recommend that struggling house museums consider using the program as a model for the incorporation of a housing unit within their historic

resource but do so on a smaller scale. The Heritage House Program currently has 10 to 12 houses that include rental units, but most house museums do not have that many properties. Beginning the process in phases, how Strawberry Banke did, with one apartment and maybe adding a second further down the line would allow a transition period to get everyone in management and in the community on board with the project. Change can be scary for history lovers and preservationists who want to keep everything as perfect and accurate as possible. However, if our historic resources are to survive there needs to be a change.

Further research can be done on this topic of struggling house museums and new solutions can be invented by any academic. However, for this work specifically, the next phase of research would be implementing the program in another house museum and seeing the results. This may take time, but after about five years of data collection from the new apartments we would be able to see how it affected the house museum in a positive or negative way. Data can also be collected from the communities of these house museums in order to see the effect the program had on housing stock, community morale, or further investment in other historic properties that are not house museums. The implementation of this solution would be the best way to prove its efficiency as long as the owners and managers of house museums are willing to find that balance between preservation and updating.

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## Appendix A

### Interview with Rodney Rowland at Strawberry Banke Museum

July 29, 2024

L: What made you want to work in the Preservation field to begin with?

R: Oooo thats a little complicated, thats unique for me. Strawberry Banke was incorporated in 1958. It was one of the first museums created using a federal program called Urban Renewal. So, Urban Renewal typically would the federal government would seize the land tear everything down and build houses. A group of locals got together, a blue collar and a white collar group, following the same path but separate, got together and petitioned the government to say wait theres an incredible amount of history in this neighborhood you're going to bulldoze. What if you give it to us to create a museum? And it was the first time in the history of the nation that that was allowed to happen. That particular program was used for preservation and not destruction. It also meant that it needed a grassroots effort to make it work. We didn't have a Rockefeller or a Dupont or a Ford you know that kind of money behind the creation of Strawberry Banke it was literally done by the community. So that meant that my folks who moved here in 1960 um took an interest in this growing organization and dragged me along with them. I was actually involved with Strawberry Banke at the age of 10 as a volunteer. And then ended up going to college and getting a degree in American History and came back here as an intern my senior year and was hired 2 years later in the collections office. So I think it was my

exposure here lead me to see the value of what was being done and realize it was going to take all hands on deck to get it done.

L: That's interesting. I have never heard of Urban Renewal as being helpful to Preservation. It's interesting that something good came out of Urban Renewal that's the first time I have ever heard of that.

R: It's actually been um I have to remind people that if you look up Strawberry Banke you're going to see that Strawberry Banke saved this neighborhood from Urban Renewal, but I have been corrected more than once by people who were around when it was created that say no actually it was saved by Urban Renewal it was created because of Urban Renewal. That's an important difference.

L: And I learned when I was walking around reading the many stories in the homes that people lived here till the 1950s and Urban Renewal was around the 1950s/60s, so how did the community have to buy the homes from the people that still lived here? Were they allowed to stay in their homes after the museum was created?

R: That was very cantankerous. So basically what happened was Urban Renewal as a Federal Program gave the local um Portsmouth Housing Authority the jurisdiction over the property so they took everything by Eminent Domain. So everything was owned by the Portsmouth Housing Authority who then deeded it to Strawberry Banke with some money to create the museum. So, some people still lived here during the transfer. This building currently being worked on

Penhallow was being used as apartments and there were a couple others on the other side of the square. So, there were still people living here during the transfer from Portsmouth Housing Authority to Strawberry Banke, but most of the buildings were empty a lot of them had been boarded up and then in the process of the transfer and even after the transfer Portsmouth Housing Authority determined what buildings could stay and what had to be removed cause they only wanted us to have the Colonial houses which means we lost a lot of history in the process. Because we ended up interpreting the entire history of the site. So even if it was a 20th century building that would have been part of our interpretation we only have 1 left the little red shed behind us is from the 1920s.

L: That is very similar to Williamsburg and how they destroyed all those houses that were not Colonial period. It would have been interesting to see what it would have been like if they had kept some of those buildings, because of the interpretation of like the 1940s and stuff are in some of the houses if they had kept some of the buildings from that period.

R: Yeah, our executive director in 1985 I think is the one that went to the board and said that our interpretation currently ends in the Victorian era and that's a mistake and we really need to bring it up through 1955, so we can talk about the people the families and the culture that lived here until the museum was created. That was an important addition for us. That is where the Shapiro House came from, The Abbot grocery story came from, and the Pritum's 1950s and Cold War apartment, so that's a big piece of our history.

L: Because of the duplexes and apartments that many people lived in historically was that part of the inspiration for the Heritage House Program?

R: No, um it ended up being an interesting tie to our past. The institution from the very beginning had developed some apartments in spaces they thought would never be used by the museum. The Chase House which was restored in 1968 has always had an apartment on the third floor cause they just knew they would never use the third floor for anything but that. The Goodwin Mansion which was moved here in the early 1970s has always had an apartment in the back just because it was space they knew they wouldn't use. And as I said there were apartments that existed when the museum was being created that we kept as apartments for a while for the income. So although probably not recognized as a way to raise income they'd always kinda been here. And one of our donors to this day, he's a third generation of Strawberry Banke has said that his grandfather gave money to the institution to create more apartments for the next generation. So it has always kinda been there but then of course we took it to a whole new level 15 years ago when we started the Heritage House Program.

L: What would you say has been the most difficult part of running that program? Maintaining it? Keeping Interest? If you go on the website you can find information about the program, but there's nowhere to apply, so if you don't live here you don't know they exist. How do they deal with that?

R: So certainly the hardest thing about it and its only gotten harder is how to be a historic preservation institution and add a modern apartment. We have to have sprinklers, we have to



have a bathroom, we have to have kitchens. So, how to do that in a gentle, easy way that doesn't change the interior or exterior of the structure. That has always been a battle. And that's the problem we have in this building right here. We are going to have two apartments in this building and the building code has changed dramatically, so it's very hard to have one building with two uses when one of those uses is an apartment where people are going to sleep. It's just the whole fire code and life safety code makes it very hard to do Historic Preservation. The rental market in Portsmouth is insane and has been since we started this process. So renting is just word of mouth. I have 6 people currently on the waiting list for an apartment, so that's not been a problem at all. So the other challenge especially as the rent amount has increased is having people understand that when you live at a museum there's some things you can do and some things you can't. So it doesn't matter how much rent you're paying. They have to be very respectful of the environment they live in. They have to be very respectful of the visitor experience. No loud music don't put anything in your windows, and so it's a partnership when you live here. Even though you're paying significant rent to live here you have to honor that partnership.

L: Would you mind telling me what the average rent is?

R: I don't think I have ever figured out the average. It's probably about somewhere between 2,300 and 3,000 dollars a month and it's only going up.

L: And who usually rents them? Is it younger people? Older people? Do you have a wide age range of people?

R: We do have a range. It's retirees for sure. And lately young professionals. Whether they're a single or a couple they are usually up and coming in their particular field. And they're usually transitional which means they either had a home for years and didn't want the upkeep, so they didn't want to mow the lawn or anything, so we get a lot of those. Or it is young people who are not ready to buy a house yet, but they want to be close to downtown and experience all Portsmouth has to offer before they buy their first home.

L: It is a very walkable city I did it myself yesterday, so that is very convenient. You said you had about 6 people on the waitlist right now. How do you pick who gets an apartment and who does not?

R: It's first come first serve, and I don't make any promises because it is so aggressive.

L: So, you said word of mouth is how people hear about the apartments, is there an application process after that?

R: Yes, so once I decide who is going to get the apartment I pass you on to our realtor who does a credit check, a reference check, and you have to fill out a bunch of paperwork. So, she does all that and the showings and the lease. There is a tenant booklet that comes with it that talks about that relationship living in the museum and what you can and cannot do. Once you have signed the lease, I take over as the liaison.

L: How long are the leases?

R: They are all one year leases. We won't allow anything longer. You can request another 12 months after that but it comes with an automatic bump in rent, usually about a 7% increase. One year is typical unless they are our offices we rent out. We have twice as many offices to rent as we do apartments and those can be multi year.

L: Does all the rent money goes back into the apartments or just the museum general fund?

R: All the rental income from the Heritage House program goes into the operating budget. We then take 10% of that and put it into a restrictive fund called (forgot the name) the for the maintenance of any all houses that have an apartment in them, so its like a quasi endowment. So if a building needs some type of work we have got this great pot of money to do that work. Its a great thing to have, because if we have a furnace go down we have money to replace it. But it is just for those buildings. The rest of it is for general operation to balance our budget.

L: How helpful is the Heritage House program for the income of the museum?

R: Invaluable. I have been here over 30 years and if you look at our income on a chart it has only gone up. All of our income used to come from tourism, events, and membership. Tourism and events depend on the weather. If we have a rainy day we are in big trouble financially. Now, our income looks like tourism, events, the Heritage House Program, the endowment fund and we have this great array of sources that aren't impacted by the same things. If it rains it doesnt

matter to the Heritage House Program or the endowment fund. If there's a down turn in the economy it might effect the endowment fund but it doesn't effect tourism or events. So it's a beautiful balance. So it is hugely important and that was proven when COVID hit. Heritage House Program and the endowment fund were our only sources of income. So, it saved our bacon. It is hugely important.

L: When you have projects on the historic houses, do you have specific contractors that are preservation minded? Specifically in the units? Especially when you have to add amenities and appliances?

R: When we implemented the Heritage House Program we did it in 3 phases. The first phase was the easiest. Basically we used to have 5 office buildings for museum staff that were consolidated into one building and the other four were turned into apartments. That means the bathrooms were already there. All of them were very easy to do and got the money for the rent pool. Then phase 2 we identified 4 buildings we could convert to apartments pretty easily without huge changes or disturbance to the buildings. We did those next and those were more expensive with adding bathrooms and kitchens and sprinkler systems. Phase 3 is what we are in right now, which is where we take a building completely unrestored and determine what its uses are going to be, which is usually the Heritage House Program and museum function. So this building we are sitting in is going through that right now and it is going to be two apartments and a museum exhibit on the north end.

L: I noticed all the historic, small staircases in the buildings. When people move in do they bring their own furniture or are the units furnished?

R: The units are not furnished, everyone brings their own furniture and everyone notices the stairs immediately as well. Ikea is a fantastic place to get furniture for those types of stairs and others figure it out.

L: Most of the stairs don't look up to code is that a problem for the fire marshall or the life safety code?

R: That's what I was saying earlier about the code. Over the years it has been very simple because we are a museum with a historic preservation mission so we are entitled to not change things in order to accommodate a use. It was just a matter of that is what you do. However, now a days since the 2015 building code there is a section in there about preservation. So, basically what we are required to do now is a full report to the building inspector on what we are going to do and what we are not going to do when it comes to applying to building code. That is submitted to the city and the liability is on us. It basically says yes we know this staircase is not up to code but we choose to keep it there even though it is a liability and that is on us. That's how we can get away with it. There are some things we cannot get away with like sprinkler systems, we have to have fire rated walls. So that's where it has gotten much more difficult in this particular building. The basement obviously is museum use and exhibit and the first floor is apartment use. There has to be a fire rating between those two which we never had to do but now we do. So it is much much harder to do historic preservation and balance the building code. Back

to your previous question, we have had historic carpenters on staff for decades and they did all the work for phase 1 and they did 2 of the phase 2 buildings but we did start to bring in private contractors to do the other apartments. They do an okay job, but it takes longer and they're more expensive. So we try to do it in house when we can.

L: How comparable is the rent in the museum to rent in the rest of the city?

R: We do market rent which is the same as other places in the city typically. That's what we strive for, but it's a little harder right now. Our rent factors in utilities, property taxes, and parking. Parking in Portsmouth is so valuable. So our utilities are not separated because our buildings are museum use and apartments, so that makes it difficult. We do include parking. Our property taxes are different than other places because we are non profit, so we pay taxes on the part we rent only. So, in order for us to figure out rent some things make it higher and some make it lower, but we strive for market rent.

R: The Heritage House Program has really saved Strawberry Banke. It has made us financially viable and that was something that was very difficult for us to achieve. So I cannot underestimate how important that was for us. The flip side of that is that we are a non profit preservation museum and the two don't always fit perfectly together. If you talk to some of the more strict museums they would never adopt what we did. They are not going to put rental income before preservation and we are putting the two together and finding that compromise.

L: Are all the homes listed on the National Register?

R: Yes, as a museum site and within the historic district of Portsmouth.

L: And the apartments do not compromise that integrity?

R: No they do not. And most of our renovations within the units are things that can be removed in accordance with the standards of integrity.