NEWSLETTER

1890 HOUSE MUSEUM

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Jane Hunter

Plus all of the dedicated, hard-working volunteers that make our tours and events happen!

A Word from Board of Trustees President and Executive Director, Jane Hunter

We are excited to be relaunching this newsletter, which had been dormant for several years. We plan to return to a regular schedule of newsletters from this point forward.

As we end 2026 and journey into 2027, changes are afoot around the museum's building and grounds. If you have visited recently, you may have noticed some improvements.

On the outside, we had the Master Gardener's Club assist us with landscaping and curb appeal, and our new sidewalk was overdue. Updates to the Carriage House out back are ongoing, making it a perfect gathering space for public and private events. And the 1890 House itself has seen a lot of TLC over the past year as well, such as newly repainted spaces, an updated, working kitchen, and newly-installed Art Nouveau wallpaper adorned with cranes in the library. We are busy refurbishing a bathroom in the basement now, and adding a family space for changing diapers and lactation, as well as rehabilitating the Servants' Staircase to provide access to these facilities for our guests. One of the main goals of the museum when we converted it into an all-volunteer operated museum a few years ago was to have all rooms completely open for tours. We believe it is important to show the servants' spaces as well as the family spaces, and we are proud to have finally achieved this goal.

Soon, you may see some scaffolding being erected on the back side of the house, as our south gable parapet is the next item that we have plans to update.

Being good stewards of the house and caring for the community is important to this team. While we have been busy with repairs, we have also hosted many fun and important groups and events on the grounds, while providing community outreach opportunities to the public and local students.

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And if all of the items mentioned above were not enough, we even had Waterloom Productions film crew here on location last summer making a movie—so be on the look out for a release soon that features our lovely local castle. The film is called *In Fading Light*.

Due to these economically-challenging times, please note that what is keeping us running is the fact that our work and events are shouldered solely by the Executive Director, Board of Trustees members, and volunteers. For this, we are so grateful for everyone who has graciously given their time, talents, and donations to us.

Last, but certainly not least, a very big thank you to our major donors: Nellie and Robert Gipson, Garry and Katia Marsted, Jeb Brooks, and Dorothea Fowler, and our grantors: The Preservation League of New York State, Ralph R. Wilkins Foundation, William G. Pomeroy Foundation, Yaman Foundation, J.M. McDonald Foundation, and the Cortland Community Foundation, who have made most of this possible.

We are proud to have hit so many milestones/benchmarks this year, and again, it is all thanks to the fantastic team effort by all involved.

If you have not done so recently *(or, even if you have!)* we encourage you to stop by, take a tour, attend an event, and/or sign up to be a volunteer. We would be delighted to meet you and/or host an event for you.

Sincerely,
Jane Hunter, *1890 House Museum Board President and Executive Director*

BECOME A MEMBER!

Basic Membership benefits include:

- Free, UNLIMITED admission to the 1890 House Museum
- Membership card, plus one complimentary admission pass for 2 guests
- 10% off discount on merchandise at the 1890 House Museum Gift Shop
- Subscription to 1890 House Museum newsletter

Please visit our web site for additional information, or to explore various levels of membership that are available:
https://the1890house.org/membership/

Photo by Chad Becker/CB Creative

YOU can help!

If you would like to volunteer or intern at the museum, we would love to meet you!

There are many opportunities to help and many ways in which you could contribute.

We will train you!

Sample areas of need:

- Tour guide
- Front desk staff
- Maintenance and repairs
- Gardening/Grounds work
- Snow removal
- Event Prep/Service/Cleanup
- General cleaning
- Website/Social Media
- Photography/Videography
- Other skills or interests

Availability:

Can be weekly, on a particular day or days, occasional, seasonal, or whatever you are able to offer.

For more information and/or to apply, visit:
https://the1890house.org/volunteer-intern/

INSIDE THE MUSEUM

Belcher Mosaic Stained Glass

By Timothy Johnson

There are many design features of the 1890 House that I love, but my favorite (by far) is the stained glass window over the fireplace in the Gold Parlor. The museum has one of the finest collections of Belcher mosaic stained glass in situ (in its original place) in the world. Most Belcher windows are available only from antique dealers. In a 1994 article in Stained Glass: Quarterly of the Stained Glass Association of America, Barbara E. Kreuger claimed, "Belcher seems to have been the only firm of its time to develop a substantially different, patented method of construction from that of traditional stained glass craft."

This stained glass is remarkably different from what we usually see in the U.S., which typically consist of larger pieces of glass connected with copper foil and solder, such as Tiffany style glass. Belcher's process was to lay out small pieces of cut glass on a sketched pattern on paper which he transferred to a gummy asbestos sheet held at an angle. He would place another sheet of asbestos over it to make a sort of sandwich, frame around it, heat it up, and pour molten metal into the mold that oozed around the tiny pieces of glass. When it cooled down, the process resulted in intricate mosaic patterns of art glass. The metal mostly consisted of lead and tin with smaller amounts of other metals. Belcher also included jewels (the small round pieces) in many of his designs. These three-dimensional pieces refract light dispersing beautiful little rainbow-colored circles across west-facing rooms in the afternoon sun.

Belcher's business folded in 1897, and Tiffany glass soon became the dominant style. Some people speculate that the factory closed due to worker poisoning from the process, but this theory has not been substantiated. According to Krueger, the more likely culprits were the high costs for both manufacturing the glass and repairing it, market changes based on shifting tastes, or other business-related factors.

The 1890 House Museum played an outsized role in the historical identification of Belcher Mosaic Stained Glass. According to Krueger, museum staff discovered several Belcher patents, the earliest of which is from 1884, and they also located a sales catalog, now in the Winterthur Museum Libraries, Winterthur, Delaware. Perhaps most notably, one of the mosaic windows at the 1890 House "literally fell out, exposing the Belcher Mosaic Glass Company signature." Notably, Krueger's article includes a photo of the orange-hued, semicircular transom over the front entrance, a spectacular window that many guests often fail to notice.

The transoms at the 1890 House are spectacular and sometimes design choices are quite unexpected. For example, in the East Parlor the pair of transoms facing the street are different from the set of transoms in the tower alcove which in turn are different from the single transom facing the driveway. Three different mosaic glass designs, all in the same room! I hope you will return to the museum to re-experience the beauty of Belcher's spectacular windows.

DONATIONS ARE APPRECIATED
https://the1890house.org/donate/

1890 House Museum dedicates a Historic Marker on April 25, 2026

On a rainy April day during National Historic Marker Weekend, the 1890 House Museum Board of Trustees welcomed New York State Senator Lea Webb, Cortland Mayor Scott Steve, Pomeroy Foundation Historian and Engagement Associate Emma MacDowell, plus other dignitaries, local press, and community members, for the unveiling of a new roadside historical marker.

Funded by a Willam G. Pomeroy Foundation grant, the historic marker honors the legacy of inventor and industrialist Chester F. Wickwire, and highlights his beautiful home as a local landmark.

After the unveiling of the sign by Board of Trustees President and Executive Director Jane Hunter, and speeches by Timothy Johnson, Lea Webb, Scott Steve, and Emma MacDowell, guests escaped the cold rain and gathered indoors for an elaborate Victorian afternoon tea.

Cortland Mayor Scott Steve, Board of Trustee Member Timothy Johnson, New York State Senator Lea Webb, and Board of Trustees President and Executive Director Jane Hunter. (Photos on this page are by Terry Mingle, unless otherwise indicated)

Cortland Mayor Scott Steve, Emma MacDowell from The Pomeroy Foundation, New York State Senator Lea Webb, and Board of Trustees President and Executive Director Jane Hunter. (Photo by Chad Becker/CB Creative)

Volunteer Profile: Lee Higginbotham

By Timothy Johnson

Lee Higginbotham first started volunteering at the 1890 House during the summer of 2025. He summers in the Cortland area from mid-May to mid-October each year. He took a tour of the house during the summer of 2024 and asked about volunteering opportunities. It was late in the season, and he would be leaving soon for Texas. He started volunteering the following summer, working at the desk and helping with events. He also polishes the furniture, and he donated a beautiful American Empire desk that he finished himself to replace the modern desk we had been using.

He especially enjoys working at the front desk and talking to the interesting people who come to the house for tours. His favorite design elements of the house are the Romanesque and Dutch influences and the rusticated stone on the exterior. Inside the house he especially is drawn to the inglenook at the end of the entry hall. He loves that when you sit inside the inglenook you can have a conversation even if there is a lot of noise in the background. To him it is the coziest place in the House. As an avid clock collector, he also loves the original tall-case clock in the foyer, as well as the wall clock in the kitchen and the crystal regulator on the mantle in the Gold Parlor.

He told me that two things happened in his very early years that shaped his interest in clocks and time. His earliest memory of being interested in clocks is the Grandfather Clock on the Captain Kangaroo TV show. The second was, of all things, Houston Methodist Hospital. Much later in life he would work for this hospital for 34 years! Around 1960, his mother and grandmother came to the hospital to visit a friend or relative, but at that time children were not allowed on patient floors. His grandmother sat with his sister and him in the lobby; there was a tall-case clock, and he was enthralled, watching the pendulum and listening to the quiet steady ticking of the clock. Years later as an adult and a new employee of the hospital, he saw the same clock in the executive offices and just imagine how delighted he was to see it again! He now has about 75 clocks, including key-wound, weight-driven, electric, and even quartz. He purchases distressed clocks that need attention and restores them. In the last few years he has been collecting clocks that have obvious moving parts, including a couple of anniversary clocks with a rotating pendulum, clocks with visible works, a cuckoo clock that has music and moving figures every hour, and one with a moving girl on a swing. But he says that they all bring him much joy.

I asked him what he enjoys most about volunteering at the house, and he said, “I feel great when we have a busy day and the time passes quickly, and the visitors enjoy their tours and the house. I enjoy knowing where they are from and what brought them to the house.”

Lee Higginbotham in period dress at the 2025 Wassail Party. (Photo by author)

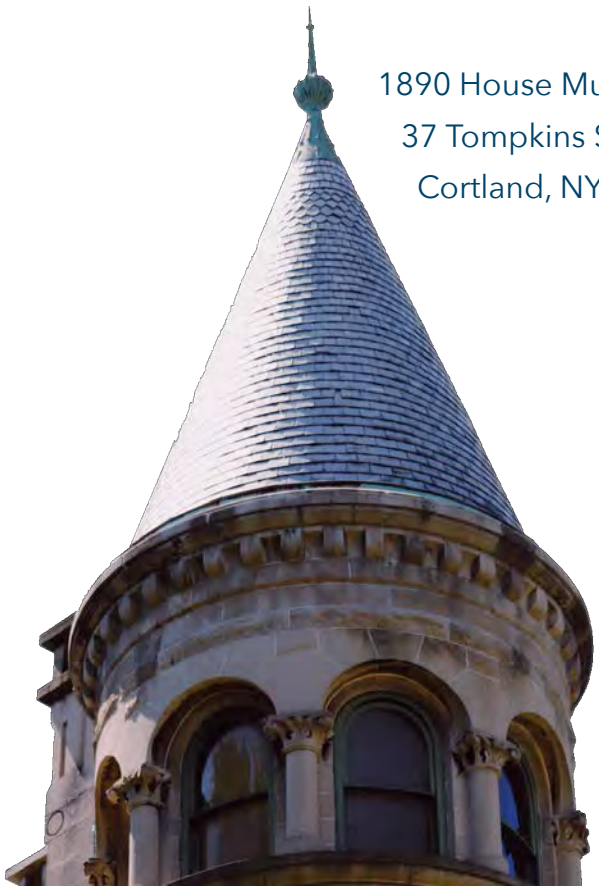
UPCOMING EVENTS

Mark your calendars now! Additional information can be found on our website's events page.

October 24 - Halloween Family Fun Event *(Afternoon)*
October 24 - Paranormal Lockdown 2026, featuring Empirical Paranormal & Local First Responders *(Evening)*
October 30 - Paranormal Investigation, Hosted by Lost Souls Paranormal
October 31 - Into the Mystic—An evening of Victorian Spirits
November 13 - A Murder Mystery—Death at the Wickwire Speakeasy *(with Cornell Cooperative Extension)*
November 21 - Annual "Deck Our Halls" Party
December 5 - Victorian Tea Party
December 10, 11, & 12 - Candlelight Evening Tours
December 13 - Annual Wassail Party/Holiday Open House

AND REMEMBER: *1890 House Members receive discounts on tours, and also on selected events! Be sure to join or renew your membership today!*

PS: We're on Social Media! Links are at the bottom of our web site: **https://the1890house.org/**



1890 House Museum
37 Tompkins Street
Cortland, NY 13045

(Stamp)

(ADDRESS LABEL HERE)

PHILANTROPY DAY DONATION FORM

We kindly ask you to support the 1890 House by making a donation via the Cortland Community Foundation for National Philanthropy Day, which is on November 15th. Full details can be found on their website: https://cortlandcf.org/philanthropy-day/

If you choose to donate, please note that you are donating to The 1890 House Museum. Doing so will also enter us into a chance to win an additional prize in two designated categories: Highest Total Dollar Amount Raised and/or Most Individual Donations Received, and each of those categories would result in a supplemental donation to the museum.

To make your donation, please fill out the form below, and send it to the following address:

Cortland Community Foundation
P.O. Box #466
Cortland, NY 13045

*(**IMPORTANT**: Please note that your donation **must be postmarked by November 15th** in order for the museum to be able to qualify for the additional monetary prizes associated with National Philanthropy Day!)*

Alternatively, you can donate online at: **https://cortlandcf.org/philanthropy-day/** (via Givelify).
And again, be sure to **note that your donation should be earmarked for The 1890 House Museum.**

First Name: _____ **Last Name:** _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Postal Code:** _____

Email Address: _____

NOTE: MY DONATION IS IN SUPPORT OF THE 1890 HOUSE MUSEUM

Is your gift in memory, or in honor, of someone? Or do you wish to donate anonymously? Let us know:

The 1890 House Museum is a 501c3 nonprofit organization, and your donations are tax-deductible.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!