



GORE PLACE

THE AGRARIAN

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SOCIAL MEDIA MOMENT



A "Super Fantastic" tomato
grown by Farmer Scott.

Share your memories and photos
with us. Tag @goreplace on
Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

**Sharing Robert Roberts' story
with audiences today has
become a key initiative of Gore
Place's interpretive plans.**

In 2018, Gore Place hired Diann Ralph Strausberg, historian, to conduct extensive research on the life and work of Mr. Roberts. In 2019, Diann developed a presentation focused on Mr. Roberts, entitled "To Do the Good I Expected," funded in part by a Mass Humanities grant. Diann is now writing a foreword for a republication of Mr. Roberts' *The House Servant's Directory*.



Photograph © 2021 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Henry Sargent's *The Dinner Party* (about 1821) portrays elite Bostonians at dinner. Following fashion, the tablecloth has been removed for dessert. Robert Roberts recommends a solution of milk, turpentine, and sweet oil to clean mahogany tables after a party.

Robert Roberts and the Fine Art of Dining

By Diann Ralph Strausberg

In Robert Roberts' book *The House Servant's Directory*—published in 1827, while Roberts worked as a servant for Christopher and Rebecca Gore—he tells us, "A good dinner is one of the greatest enjoyments of human life." But conducting a large dinner party is a trial for the untrained servant. In Roberts' experience, few could do it. It's "no easy thing," he said. They needed his *Directory*.

The Directory is a how-to manual for young men working as servants in elite households. In Boston, as in other cities, many young men had few job opportunities other than domestic service, especially in the free Black community, where prejudice limited opportunity. Many young men going into service, Roberts knew, "never had the experience or opportunity of knowing" how to do the work required in elite households. Without training, they might suffer the lowest-paying jobs and the worst working conditions. Roberts could put his mastery of the

profession to work; he could write a manual to train young men for a higher-level servant position, a "good position," he wrote, with "comforts, privileges, and pleasures."

Roberts hoped to do even more with his book. Many employers and others doubted the abilities of servants, believing they were incapable of learning and doing a good job. Roberts wanted to elevate the servant and the job of servant in the eyes of society, and elevate the servant's self-respect. He would show the skills, artistry, and intelligence the work required, and build servant confidence through training.

The ultimate example for Roberts' purposes is conducting a large dinner party. His *Directory* gives more space to this topic than to any other. With so much to know, Roberts said, conducting dinner is the part of "a servant's business wherein he can show more of his ability than in anything else he may have to encounter."

Robert Roberts and the Fine Art of Dining
is continued on page 4



GORE PLACE

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Letter from our Board President

Dear Friends of Gore Place,

The pandemic has given us multiple opportunities to stop, be still, take a deep breath, and appreciate the simple joys of everyday life here at Gore Place. It has also afforded the opportunity to look back at the lives of the Gores during the years 1825-1827 through the eyes of their dedicated servant, Robert Roberts.

It is a delightful coincidence that Roberts' great grandson, Jonathan Jackson, and I share the same alma mater, Amherst College. It has been a privilege over the past several years to work with him at Gore Place on his senior thesis about his ancestor and, last year, to welcome him as a member of our Board of Governors.

With a generous grant from Mass Humanities in 2019, we have been able to explore Robert Roberts and his book, *The House Servant's Directory*, published in 1827 while Roberts worked at Gore Place, made him one of the first commercially published Black American authors and the book is viewed as part of the Black "uplift" activism of his day.

Roberts wanted his book to elevate and professionalize the service occupation. He filled it with ways to achieve mastery as a gentleman's servant. He aimed to train young men for the job by sharing his own examples of caring diligently for households like the Gores'.

While writing, his thoughts turned to self-improvement in his own community in Boston and the combat against racism and discrimination. After the death of Christopher Gore, Robert Roberts left to become a successful entrepreneur and real estate investor in Boston.

The extensive work of Gore Place historian, Diann Ralph Strausberg, produced our latest presentation, "To Do the Good I Expected" presents Roberts as both author and abolitionist. Visitors experience his life, writing, and activism as a leader in Boston's free Black community. The tour emphasizes the value of labor and the many challenges of changing the world while living in it at that time. Come see this engaging and informative presentation!

With grateful thanks for your continuing support of Gore Place and best wishes for the coming year.

Sincerely,

Thomas Thaler

Our 50 beautiful acres are
open to the public, year-round.
Our members help us protect
this land.

**Become a Member.
Renew Your Membership.**

Online at goreplace.org

Rick Olney Joins Christopher and Rebecca Gore Legacy Society

Rick Olney first visited Gore Place more than twenty years ago with wife Kate and eldest daughter Charlotte, when they lived in Watertown. "We did not have a lot of room in our apartment and Charlotte was at an age where she needed room to run. The open space was of the property, the animals were so great and so close." He reconnected with Gore Place in 2017 through his friendship with Bill Diercks and joined the Board of Governors, where he serves on the Investment and Development Committees.

Rick and his wife Kate live in Concord with their three grown daughters. He attended Middlesex and holds a BA from Denison University and an MBA from Boston University.

Rick is a Vice President at Fiduciary Trust where he works with multi-generational families to help them manage their assets, plan for life events, and meet their goals and needs. He enjoys the long-term relationships

he forms with clients and the positive impacts he makes in their lives.

When Rick became a member of the Christopher and Rebecca Gore Legacy Society, he decided to support the program by reaching out to other Board and past Board members to join him.

"I feel a planned giving program is one way to ensure the long-term preservation of any organization. It's a practical way to give during your lifetime without giving up your resources immediately," says Rick.

You can learn more about the Christopher and Rebecca Gore Legacy Society on our website at goreplace.org or by contacting Diana Roberts in our Development office at 617-875-2670.



Rick Olney

Photo courtesy of Fiduciary Trust

The Campaign to Raise the Barn at Gore Place: An Update

With the Mansion and Carriage House capital improvement projects successfully completed, the third part of our current strategic vision is to provide better facilities for our rare breeds of farm animals and to improve the visitor experience with closer animal viewing and universal access.

The Raise the Barn project will build two barns, a one-and-a-half-story English-style threshing barn and a one-story pole barn as well as provide new utilities, security, fencing, a curb cut, a fire access roadway, and a new, accessible restroom. The curb cut has already been approved by the Town of Watertown. We will break ground in 2022.

Currently we have a flock of Leicester Longwool sheep. Visitors will be able to view the animals in the threshing barn and our staff will use the pole barn for behind-the-scenes work with lambs and ewes. The threshing barn will have an outdoor lean-to for seasonal swine as well as space for an additional rare breed of sheep and possibly a large animal such as a mule.

This project will rightfully restore the prominence of agrarian activity to what Governor Gore called "my Farm at Waltham" and will respond to public interest in faithfully-presented educational experiences.



A Leicester Longwool lamb on the Farm at Gore Place.

Photo by Eric Workman | TMP Images.

TO DATE, OUR DONORS HAVE HELPED US TO RAISE

\$633,000

of the \$1.1 million needed for the project

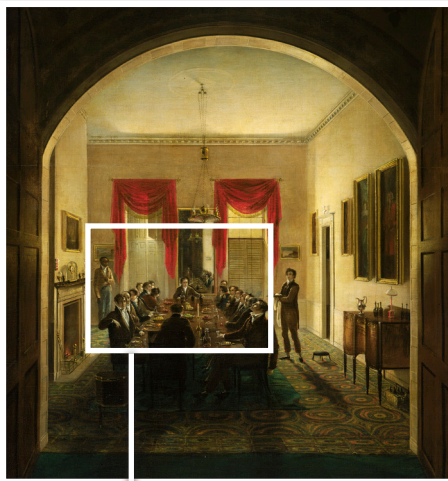
Join us as we preserve these unique animals and maintain a historic farm presence in an urban setting! Visit goreplace.org/raisethebarn

Reviewers praised the book. Publisher Munroe & Francis did three printings: 1827, 1828, and 1843. Americans showed interest in this genteel world of beautiful objects and refined behavior that Roberts wrote about.

Henry Sargent's Dinner Party

By the time Roberts' book came out, Henry Sargent's *The Dinner Party* had been touring America for several years. Thousands of Americans of all sorts had paid the 25-cent fee to view Sargent's painting: a large party of gentlemen seated at the dining table for the dessert course.

Sargent's painting was a sensation. "An optical delusion!" one newspaper exclaimed. "American genius," said others. The artist's



"powers of perception" astonished viewers. It was a five-by-four-foot canvas, and yet you saw a room of grand proportions. The light and shadow playing on the "multitude" of beautiful objects around the room made it all "so true to nature, that [its spectators were] perpetually mistaking it for the reality."¹

Visitors went to appreciate the art, and many went out of curiosity to see the elite interiors and table. As with Roberts' *Directory*, many were interested because they aspired to more of the genteel lifestyle for themselves, and wished to learn about the fine objects and elegant dining party.

Today the painting is valued as a rare historical source by curators, museums, and historians. Its acknowledged "admirable fidelity"² to reality gives us confidence that what we see in the painting represents the elite dining about which Roberts wrote. The painting and *The Directory* complement each other as historical source. Sargent's work puts us in Roberts' time and place. His book comes alive. We hear the buzz around the table at dessert, imagine the task of serving all those men, and almost feel the tension in the servants. No wonder Roberts warned, more than once, that whatever happens at dinner, a good servant must stay calm.

The dessert scene looks much like what Roberts described in his *Directory*: the highly polished mahogany table, the wine decanters, guests enjoying fruit, nuts, wine, and cake—the cake

placed in the middle of the table, just as Roberts suggests. And he supplies directions for removing any fruit and wine stains those gentlemen might leave behind on the mahogany.

When preparing for a dinner party, Roberts' instructions for "setting out tables and sideboards" insist on order and efficiency—everything needed for a dinner must be at hand. As the servant sets the stage for a seamless performance of dinner, Roberts asks him to think also about beauty. To efficiency and convenience, add elegance, he advises. "You must study neatness, convenience, and taste, as you must think that the ladies and gentlemen [your employers] that have splendid and costly articles, wish to have them seen and set out to the best advantage." You can achieve "a magnificent appearance, with such a degree of taste and neatness that they will strike the eyes of every person who enters the room with a pleasing sensation of elegance."

Sargent's Servants

In the *The Dinner Party*, we glimpse a rare image of men working as servants in elite early Boston. Amid so much to see in the painting, one's eyes are eventually drawn to the man standing quietly in the corner. He stands just as Roberts directs a manservant to stand, while waiting on dinner: "Take your station at the bottom of the table about a yard behind the person that sits at the foot of the table." At the opposite side of the table, one notices a footman, caught in motion and slightly askew, reminding us of the young men, mostly inexperienced and untrained, to whom Roberts addressed his how-to manual. Sargent illustrates what Roberts wrote. Perhaps these sorts of similarities, between the painting and *The Directory*, led to the rumor.

The Rumor

Rumor has it, the manservant standing quietly, waiting in the corner, is Robert Roberts. No one knows how this rumor started or when they first heard it, but it has been around for a while. No image or verbal description of Roberts exists to compare with the painting. Could it be, is it, Roberts?

Back in the 1820s, too, Americans wondered about the men in the painting. Many believed the images of men at the table to be portraits from "real life." One writer claimed to recognize some of the men as people he knew. Some



This close-up shows the head servant in Sargent's *The Dinner Party*; some have suggested the man may be Robert Roberts, author of *The House Servant's Directory*.

© 2021 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Robert Roberts and The Fine Art of Dining

Continued from page 4

named names: they thought they saw “a Webster, a Sargent, a Wallach, and a Duff” at the table. Then a Boston paper weighed in: “Not one individual delineated on the canvas was intended by the artist for portrait, much less the gentlemen . . . mentioned.” No one brought up the servants.⁴

Despite the Boston paper’s denial, at least one “real life” individual may be at the table. Experts today believe that Henry Sargent painted himself at dessert. Does that look like the artist seated on the right side of the table?¹ Does anyone else look like him?

We don’t know how Sargent created his servant images, whether or not he used Roberts as a model. If he wanted to paint a Black servant from life, he was not limited to Roberts. Black servants were not unusual in early Boston. The city’s free Black community averaged about 2,000 residents in Roberts’ time. As in most northern cities, about 70% of employed free Black residents worked in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations. In Boston most of those worked in domestic service or as laborers on the docks. Prejudice and discrimination kept them from more skilled occupations. Boston employment ads from the 1800s through the 1820s show employers looking for Black servants, white servants, or not specifying. Employers sought Black men for positions that included cook, coachman, manservant, and boy. Those viewing Sargent’s painting likely found nothing remarkable about a Black servant.

Robert Roberts and The Fine Art of Dining

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Diligence Alone Is A Good Patrimony



Dining table in the Peacock Parlor in the Gore Mansion.

Photo by Gore Place Society.

Robert Roberts wrote *The House Servant’s Directory* to “suit the manners and customs of families in the United States.” John Limbird published a similar guide entitled *The Servant’s Guide and Family Manual* in London in 1831, which details the roles of servants in an English country house.

Limbird’s three hundred-page guide goes into great detail regarding the duties and responsibilities of each servant. Limbird devotes sixty-eight pages organized into nineteen categories to the duties of the housekeeper and forty-five pages in fourteen categories to the work of the butler. Whereas the housekeeper’s responsibilities focus on doing all the purchasing of food and overseeing the upkeep of the house, the butler’s duties focus on the care of the wine and beer

cellars, service at meals, care of the silver, and the purchasing of coal.

In describing the role of the butler, the guide says, “he is not unfrequently received at the tables of highly respectable tradesmen, and thereby gains a station in society which is often advantageously employed in establishing himself as a member of the same class.” As Roberts points out, there are advantages to be gained in the higher ranks of domestic service.

A poem on the cover of the guide urges, “Seize the moments while they stay, Seize and use them, Lest you lose them, And lament the wasted day.” (from *Diligence Alone Is A Good Patrimony* by Isaac Watts)

Robert Roberts HIS LIFE, WRITING, AND ACTIVISM

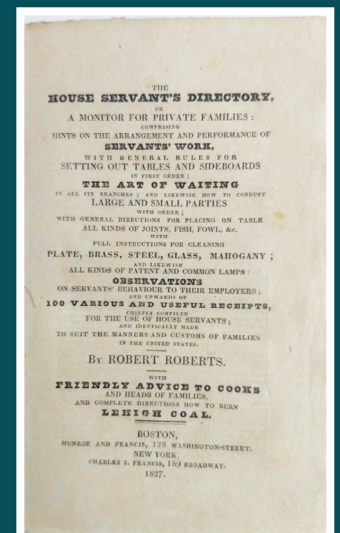
Robert Roberts is best known as a highly accomplished manservant and the author of *The House Servant’s Directory*, published in 1827, while he worked as a domestic servant for Christopher and Rebecca Gore. The book’s publication made Roberts one of the first Black authors commercially published in America.

Born about 1780 in Charleston, South Carolina, Roberts made Boston his home from 1805 to his death in 1860. A leader in Boston’s free Black community, Roberts was active in its civic and religious life. Inspired by American principles of freedom and equality, and by his deeply held religious beliefs, Roberts worked for the end of slavery and for full citizenship and equal rights for free Blacks. He was active in the anti-colonization movement, the National Free Colored

People’s Convention movement, and in the cause of abolition, including as a longtime member of the American Anti-slavery Society.

A businessman with an entrepreneurial spirit, Roberts worked as a domestic servant, a trader, and a stevedore. He invested in real estate and owned several properties in Boston’s West End, including his home and rental properties.

His story is one of self-making, of perseverance and optimism in the face of obstacles. He took action to improve his life and his community. His model of “quiet activism” flowed from deeply held values and personal choices about how to make a difference. His personal history engages us in themes of citizenship, civic action, self-determination, and ongoing efforts to achieve the American ideals of freedom and equality.



Interior title page of *The House Servant’s Directory*. From the Collection of Gore Place Society.

Photo by Gore Place Society

One similarity between Roberts' *Directory* and Sargent's *Dinner Party* is striking. Sargent's servant wears a yellow vest or jacket and blue trousers, very like the "genteel and becoming" suit Roberts recommends that servants wear when waiting on dinner: "a good superfine blue body coat, blue cassimere trousers, and a yellow cassimere vest." Recently we discovered an 1820s visitor to *The Dinner Party* who had commented on the light coming through the dining parlor window and decided that "by the color of the light is indicated a cold winter's afternoon."⁵ Roberts tells us the yellow and blue suit is his recommendation for winter! Even such a detailed match to Roberts is no support for the rumor. The blue and yellow suit may simply have been a popular fashion of the day, worn by many. We have found no evidence to link Roberts to Sargent's painting or to support the rumor.

The Art of Waiting

Sargent's manservant and footman are pictured waiting on dinner. In "The Art of Waiting" section of Roberts' *Directory*, he lays out a complicated and extensive set of procedures for serving and clearing, and resetting courses, and moving, always quietly, around the room during dinner. When not changing courses, the head servant stands where he can "command a full view of the table." From this position, Roberts explains, you "keep your eyes and ears open to see and hear what the company may want or ask for." And you "keep a sharp eye on the table" and anticipate what guests might need. "You will see many things wanted by persons who, perhaps, through being a little bashful, will not ask for themselves, as bread, vegetables or sauce." This is the perfect position, also, from which to communicate subtly with the host and hostess. "Keep your eye on the lady or gentleman of the family as they generally will give the signal to remove the

first course," or take other steps. This waiting is attentive, anticipating, and acting.

Roberts' Vision

Roberts intended that his *Directory* demonstrate the skill and knowledge required in a job like this. In doing so, he sought to raise the status of the job and the servant. He hoped to improve the lives of young men in domestic service. Roberts filled his book with instructions, guaranteed to work—rules, procedures, advice on dress and manners, recipes, and more—all that a head manservant needed to run an elite household. Preparing for a large dinner party would find him mixing cleaning solutions and choosing proper rags and methods of wiping and rubbing, to clean, polish, and make fine things sparkle; setting out the table and sideboards with efficiency, order, and elegance; and mastering the choreography and the attentiveness of the art of waiting. We can see what Roberts saw: the head servant's job and his dinner party are what one writer said of Sargent's *Dinner Party*: "a masterpiece of art and science."

MORE RESOURCES

For more on Boston's free Black community: Horton, James Oliver and Lois E. Horton. *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North*, Revised Edition. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1999. On refinement: Bushman, Richard Lyman. *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993. Sargent's paintings are in the MFA collection: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/31745>.

Newspapers: Boston Commercial Gazette; Boston Gazette; Columbian Centinel; National Gazette (Philadelphia); National Advocate, reprinted in *New York American for the Country*; Weekly Messenger (Boston).

ENDNOTES

1. *Weekly Messenger* (Boston), October 18, 1821, 2; *New York American for the Country*, October 5, 1821, 4.
2. *Weekly Messenger*.
3. *Weekly Messenger*. Boston Gazette, in *New York Daily Advertiser*, November 21, 1821, 3.
4. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/31745>.
5. *National Advocate*.

ADDITIONAL IMAGE CREDITS

Henry Sargent, American, 1770–1845. *The Dinner Party*, about 1821. Oil on canvas. 156.53 x 126.36 cm (61 5/8 x 49 3/4 in.). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Mrs. Horatio Appleton Lamb in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Winthrop Sargent. 19.13

Henry Sargent, American, 1770–1845. *Self Portrait*, about 1795. Oil on canvas. 86.68 x 69.53 cm (34 1/8 x 27 3/8 in.). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Miss Aimée Lamb in memory of Winthrop Sargent. 52.357

Sargent painted *The Dinner Party* in the 1820s, when, after experiencing increasing deafness over time, he left a military and political career to focus on his painting.



John Bachmann's image is the first known bird's eye view of Boston. He won praise for combining a breathtaking panorama with detailed drawings of the city.

Bird's eye view of Boston. Drawn from nature and on stone by John Bachmann c. 1850; lithography of Sarony & Major, New York. From the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Robert Roberts on the Docks

Before working for the Gores, Roberts lived and worked in Boston. His everyday life reached from the top of Beacon Hill, where he was a manservant for the wealthy industrialist Nathan Appleton, to the Roberts' family home on Second Street near Barton's Point, and down to the docks and the wharves of Boston Harbor, where he worked as a stevedore. Just as Roberts excelled in domestic service, he succeeded on the docks.

Stevedores loaded and unloaded ships, manually moving cargo, such as barrels of pork, heavy mahogany logs, and 1800-pound hogsheads of tobacco. It was physically demanding and dangerous. These men were sometimes crushed by cargo and injured, or even drowned, in falls from gangplanks.

Roberts likely worked as a head stevedore—an independent businessman, who contracted jobs with ship owners, hired crews to load and unload ships, and supervised the job at the dock. How Roberts gained the experience for such work is not known.

After he left the Gores' employment in 1827, Roberts never again worked as a domestic servant. He bought and sold real estate, worked in trade, and kept up his political activism, but up to his death at age 80, he always gave his occupation as "stevedore." An announcement of his death in Boston in 1860 remembered him as the city's "oldest stevedore."



Noteworthy shares news about Gore Place. While the pandemic continues, our Board, staff, and volunteers continue to produce many accomplishments for Gore Place, so we devote this page to these highlights!

JOIN US IN PERSON AND ONLINE

We're open and offering programs year-round

Tree Tours

Family Nature Walks

Indoor Mansion Tours

Virtual Santa Teas

Holiday Shopping

Details at goreplace.org

Around the Estate

Our sheep are enjoying *Cucurbita maxima* this fall. **Farmer Scott** grew 1,000 lbs of the brilliant red-orange Boston marrow squash that New Englanders in the early 19th century considered to be the best pie squash. The sheep agree!

Period varieties of apple trees are now planted along the north Perimeter Walk as part of our ongoing tree planting program. The varieties include Roxbury Russet, Baldwin, Tolman sweet, Esopus Spitzenburg, Hewe's Virginia crab apple, and Westfield Seek-no-Further.

Guide **Lorna Keith** is completing a Field Naturalist Certificate program at Massachusetts Audubon Society. As part of her study, she prepared a new outdoor tour for us on the trees at Gore Place. Don't miss her tour this fall and winter. Congratulations and thank you, Lorna!

Community Connections

We welcomed the governing board of **Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong** as they held strategic planning meetings on our beautiful estate this summer. Mass Advocates assists individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to become self-advocates. Some of their members helped us evaluate our new outdoor farm interpretation panels.

The **Waltham Garden Club** is now holding regular monthly meetings in our Coach House. This strong local organization tackles many civic projects around the city and we are pleased to be aligned with it.

People News

We're excited to welcome three new staff members! **Paul Fenton** is our new education specialist, focusing on creating brand-new outdoor education programs. Paul's background is in informal science education.

Tammi Kibler is our new development associate and will manage the membership and community partners programs. She is also the current president of the Waltham Rotary Club. **Alyssa Pelletier** joins us this fall as our new social media manager, bringing to Gore Place her experience in digital marketing, illustration, and accessibility.

We are very pleased to welcome back to Gore Place our former summer intern, **Hadeley Overaker**. Hadeley graduated from Illinois Wesleyan University and has returned to Boston for employment. She is assisting at Gore Place in a variety of ways. Huzzah, Hadeley!

Our volunteer coordinator, **Aaron Rawley**, will chair a New England Museum Association conference session this fall. He will share with other museum professionals how Gore Place uses universal design practices and involves visitors with disabilities in the planning of museum programs and exhibits.

Our marketing consultant, **Emily Robertson**, is an instructor this fall for *The Digital Empowerment Project*, a National Leadership Project funded by the Institute for Museum and Library Services. This project provides free programs and resources for small museums nationwide to improve their ability to achieve their missions through digital media and technology. She will share insights on how Gore Place successfully uses data analytics from digital media to reach its audiences.



Freshly-picked Boston marrow squash on the Farm at Gore Place.

Photo by Gore Place Society.



Bedstead attributed to Thomas Seymour, circa 1815.

Photo by Gore Place Society.

COLLECTIONS UPDATE

Making the Best Bed

Spectacular new bed hangings now grace the Seymour bedstead in the southeast Guest Chamber of the Mansion. They are the work of Natalie Larson, owner of Historic Textile Reproduction in Williamsburg, Virginia.

"The fabric is a dimity, a reverse twill weave cotton. It was a much-favored furnishing textile throughout the 18th and 19th centuries," says Natalie. Though simple in design, dimity sent the message, "We can afford to have someone wash and iron these elegant white curtains." Dimity curtains hung in the homes of Washington and Jefferson and in Dolley Madison's White House.

According to Natalie, one of the most important beds in America is in the historic Colonel Black home in Ellsworth, Maine.

That Boston-built, dimity bed and hangings are similar in design to the ones Natalie made for Gore Place.

The curtains are elegant, but what catches the eye is the green and gold silk, wood mold fringe. Natalie tells us silk fringes could exceed the value of the fabric on a bed.

"English upholsterers had a saying," says Natalie, "The bed is worth pence, the fabric shillings, and the trimmings pounds."

Research tells us there were no curtains on the windows, but there was a floor covering. Next, we'll install a reproduction wallpaper and a sisal rug and the Guest Chamber will be complete. Stay tuned!



GORE PLACE

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WALTHAM, MA 02453

