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Photos for publication available upon request

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Original ca. 1900 Dining Room Furniture Returns to Henry Flagler's Whitehall Estate in Palm Beach

Pottier and Stymus-designed French Renaissance-style table, chairs, sideboards on display at Flagler Museum



Now and Then: The original Dining Room furniture (left) is now on display at Whitehall, back in its proper place as shown in the historic photo at right, which was taken in 1902 by B. Frank Puffer for interior design firm Pottier and Stymus. © Flagler Museum

PALM BEACH, FL - The [Henry Morrison Flagler Museum](#), celebrating its 60th anniversary, is pleased to announce the return of the original ca. 1900 French Renaissance-style Dining Room furniture to Whitehall, the grand 100,000 square foot estate built by American businessman Henry Flagler in 1902. The dining table, 24 chairs, and two sideboards — the work of noted New York design firm Pottier and Stymus — are back on display in their original locations after a year-long conservation process, which began shortly after the furniture was purchased by the Museum in 2018.

The following statement is from Museum Trustee Thomas S. Kenan III, who worked behind the scenes for decades to see the Museum's dream come true — the return of the original Dining Room furniture:

"For over 60 years, since the Museum's founding, the Flagler Museum has been working to secure the return of the Dining Room Furniture. After the furniture was sold from the Whitehall estate in the 1920s, the furniture was in many different homes, leading to its ultimate purchase in the late 1950s by Old Republic Life Insurance Company of Chicago for their Boardroom suite. Jean Flagler Matthews, our Museum founder, and I tried valiantly together to orchestrate the return of the original Francis I Dining Room furniture back to Whitehall during the 1960s and 70s. It has truly been a decades-long journey, but we always remained hopeful. Thanks to all our Trustees, past and present, on this effort. We are also grateful to our staff and directors, particularly former Director John Blades, for his tireless work in securing the appropriate agreement with Old Republic. Now all our visitors from around the world can see it as the Flagler's saw it, in the glorious Dining Room at Whitehall."

"Visitors will now be able to see where Henry and Mary Lily Kenan Flagler dined with their guests, from business leaders to politicians to artists and actors, during the very first social seasons here in Palm Beach," said Erin Manning, Executive Director of the Flagler



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Museum. “The Museum is grateful to Thomas S. Kenan III and the Stockman Family Foundation for their generous donations toward the return and restoration of the furniture.”

Made in America of satinwood, a yellow-toned wood which mellows to a honey color over time, the set boasts elaborate carvings, the most intricate found on the sideboards. The 5-foot wide expandable dining table has four leaves with state-of-the-art telescoping mechanisms of that era, allowing it to go from 12 feet to 20 feet in length, which is how Museum visitors will view the table when walking through the Dining Room.



All 24 upholstered chairs are on display, including two armchairs at the table heads. While some of the original Aubusson tapestry chair backs and seat covers survive, they were deemed too delicate to be used for the conservation of the furniture. Instead, visitors will view modern reproductions of the fabric work, which closely mimic the original weave, colors and depictions of classical gods and goddesses as well as fruits and foliage.

F. Carey Howlett & Associates of Montross, VA, was hired by the Flagler Museum to research, examine and conserve the furniture. With 45 years of experience in the conservation of historic furniture and interiors, the firm has worked with the Flagler Museum in the past, including the conservation of the Music Room furniture. Agrell Architectural Carving, Eaton Hill Weavers, Period Upholstery Reproductions and fine artist Suzanne Collins also contributed their skills to the Dining Room project.

Carey Howlett spoke at the Flagler Museum in December 2019 about the massive, multi-faceted project by his team to conserve the furniture. The lecture, titled “Transformative Conservation: Returning the Whitehall Dining Room Furniture to its Original Grandeur,” is available for viewing online at www.FlaglerMuseum.us/watch-lectures.



Top: One chair was restored using the original Aubusson tapestry dating to ca. 1900.

Below: F. Carey Howlett, conservator, displays an intricately carved cabinet door from one of the sideboards.

History

“The buffets and china cabinets are similarly carved and regarded as the most artistic ever done in this country. Table and chairs are of satin wood, the latter upholstered with Aubusson tapestries, designed and woven especially for them; the table covered with green velour with a richly wrought border.” So wrote the *Tatler* in a March 1903 issue describing Whitehall’s Dining Room furniture, which was specifically designed for the home by Pottier and Stymus and installed in 1902.

Over the next 11 years, the Dining Room was the site of many meals, including dinners attended by such notable people as actor Joseph Jefferson, statesman Elihu Root, industrialist Henry C. Frick, and members of the Rockefeller and Vanderbilt families.

After the death of Henry Flagler in 1913, and his widow Mary Lily Kenan Flagler in 1917, Whitehall and its contents were inherited by Mary Lily’s niece, Louise Clisby Wise Lewis. In the early 1920s, the bulk of the contents of the home were sold, including the Dining Room suite.

Over the ensuing decades, the furniture changed hands several times. Due to consistent use by its owners, occasional repairs, refinishing and reupholstering occurred.

Shortly after the Flagler Museum acquired the furniture, it was sent to Virginia in November 2018 for the year-long conservation



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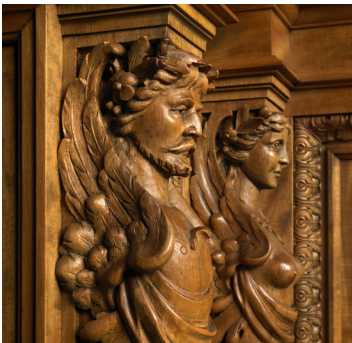
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process. The tapestries were replicated, damage to the wood repaired, lost details restored, and the finish brought back to its true tone. F. Carey Howlett & Associates delivered and installed the suite at Whitehall in November 2019, with the final installation of the sideboard cornices occurring in February 2020, crowning the suite's return to Whitehall.

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The Henry Morrison Flagler Museum

When it was completed in 1902, Whitehall, Henry Flagler's Gilded Age estate in Palm Beach, was hailed by the New York Herald as "more wonderful than any palace in Europe, grander and more magnificent than any other private dwelling in the world." Today, Whitehall is a National Historic Landmark and is open to the public as the Flagler Museum, featuring guided tours, changing exhibits, and special programs. The Museum is located at One Whitehall Way, Palm Beach, FL 33480.

The Museum is open from 10:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday, and noon until 5:00 p.m. on Sunday. Admission is \$18 for adults, \$10 for youth ages 13-17, \$3 for children ages 6-12, and children under six are free. Guided tours, audio tours, printed self-guide brochures and the Flagler Museum Audio Tour app are all complimentary with Museum admission. Audio tours and self-guide brochures are available in English, Spanish, French, German and Portuguese.

For more information, please call the Flagler Museum at (561) 655-2833 or visit www.flaglermuseum.us.



Winged male and female figures (top) are focal points in both of the sideboards' intricate carvings.