

Notes for 2019 RI PowerPoint Presentation

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Sulgrave Manor is the longest continuously supported museum property by The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America (NSCDA). While individual Corporate Societies may have undertaken museum property preservation projects earlier, Sulgrave Manor was the first Nationally supported historic house. Built in 1539 by Lawrence Washington, fifth great grandfather of George Washington, it is the oldest property and only overseas (located in the U.K.) museum property supported by the NSCDA. It is currently owned and managed by the Sulgrave Manor Trust.

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This Tudor property was largely built in a 20-year period from 1539, with an 18th century wing. Lawrence Washington, builder of Sulgrave Manor House, was a wealthy wool merchant, Mayor of Northampton, and George Washington's fifth great grandfather. Four generations of Washingtons lived at Sulgrave Manor until the family was forced to sell during the English Civil War. They were Royalists in Cromwell's reign. In 1657 John Washington bought shares in a trading ship called The Sea Horse, becoming its second Master. The ship sank in the Potomac river in a winter storm. John remained in the Colonies, marrying wealthy landowner Nathaniel Pope's daughter. Her dowry launched him on a career as landowner, farmer and business man. Based at Pope's Creek in Tidewater Virginia, John Washington was George Washington's great grandfather.

Sulgrave Manor fell into disrepair in the 19th century, when it was occupied by a series of tenant farmers.

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The British Committee for the Celebration of the Hundred Years of Peace between England and the United States acquired Sulgrave Manor in 1914 to honor the one-hundredth anniversary of the Treaty of Ghent. The Committee presented the property jointly to the peoples of the United States and Great Britain as a permanent memorial of their common heritage and friendship. The NSCDA began to support Sulgrave Manor in 1914 by voting to commission a copy of a portrait of George Washington painted by Charles Willson Peale in 1772, and in 1915 the NSCDA sent its first donation to Sulgrave Manor for immediate repairs to the house. The \$1,000 gift was acknowledged as “the first contribution we have received from American sources”. The Sulgrave Manor Board ordered the letter framed and hung on the walls of the Manor.

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The NSCDA continued to support Sulgrave Manor and in 1923, it took on the great task of collecting a fund from the citizens of the United States for the preservation and maintenance of the house and grounds. At the time, the membership of the NSCDA was about 9,000 and at the Biennial Council meeting it was decided to create an endowment not less than \$100,000. Each member was asked to collect \$10 in subscriptions of \$1 or more from people of her State. Within the first year, \$112,000 was raised. From 1923 through present the NSCDA has managed this Fund and continues to support the Manor from its proceeds.

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The Friends of Sulgrave Manor, a separate 501(c)3 entity, was created by the NSCDA in 1978 to raise additional funds in the U.S. for preservation of the Manor. The Friends are NSCDA members dedicated to furthering the storied connection between the United Kingdom and the United States of America as exemplified by their guardianship of George Washington's ancestral home. The Friends of Sulgrave Manor raise funds in support of the operations and maintenance of this English manor house and landscape and its educational programs.

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In January, Sulgrave Manor Trust welcomed a new Chairman, Dr. Nigel Bowles, an expert on American political history and former Director of the Rothemere American Institute at Oxford. Norman Hudson, retiring Chairman who has also agreed to serve as Patron, pointed out that Nigel Bowles is ideally placed to put emphasis on the reason for which Sulgrave Manor was first rescued—to symbolize a shared cultural history, the bond of friendship and common values between the United States and Great Britain.

A new Business Plan (Strategic Plan in US Terms) was approved in May of 2018 and implementation is fully underway:

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Phase I external restoration work, funded by the Friends of Sulgrave Manor, as seen in January 2019.

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Phase I restoration is now complete with repaving of the courtyard and creation of a new entrance.

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Phase II internal restoration work, funded by the NSCDA Sulgrave Manor Fund for the Future, is underway and is expected to be completed in the Spring of 2020.

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Other projects completed or underway:

- Refurbishment of the Wool House, funded by the NSCDA Sulgrave Manor Fund for the Future and Friends is now completed and rented.
- New children's programs have been developed.
- The gardens are glorious.

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Of special interest is creation of a new space dedicated to sharing the story of George Washington's life and objects from the collection. This will be located in the old gift shop.

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We are pleased to report that Sulgrave Manor is now a member of the newly established NSCDA Museum Alliance, Great American Treasures.

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Between the early 1920's and the beginning of World War II, members of the NSCDA made "pilgrimages" to Sulgrave Manor on a regular basis.

In 1961, a group of members, led by Mrs. Stanton Brown of Waco, Texas, chartered a BOAC plane and left from New York for the first “Dames Day” at Sulgrave Manor. Mrs. Brown had hoped to have Claridge’s cater tea at the Manor; however, as the date coincided with a holiday in England (and Claridge’s probably didn’t want to come that far from London), it was not possible. Never to be daunted, Mrs. Brown packed her fine silver service and tea cakes, cookies and petit fours in a trunk and took them as luggage to Sulgrave Manor, and celebrated “Dames Day”. These “pilgrimages” to Sulgrave Manor to celebrate “Dames Day” continue to this day.

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2018 Dames Day at Sulgrave Manor

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We are excited about our 2021 trip, which marks the 100th Anniversary of the opening of Sulgrave Manor to the public. This will be an extraordinary trip to the UK. We are working with Connoisseur Tours, and they are planning an exciting trip with tours of individual collections and exhibitions in London and Oxfordshire with an emphasis on private visits including the Chelsea Flower Show on Members Day. Cumulating in our visit and celebration at Sulgrave Manor.

Possible activities during our stay in the Sulgrave area:

- Private visit to Althorp for a tour and lunch or cocktails and dinner
- Private visit to Broughton Grange Gardens for tour and lunch.
- Garsington Opera at Wormsley Estate.

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Patty Thompson (Oregon) and Marguerite Wyche (South Carolina) two Friends of Sulgrave Manor Associate Trustees visited recently and saw the new signage and entrance.

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And finally, on behalf of Sulgrave Manor Trust and the Friends of Sulgrave Manor, I wish to thank you for your continued support.