

H E N R Y M O R R I S O N
FLAGLER MUSEUM
— PALM BEACH, FLORIDA —

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**Flagler Museum Completes
Music Room Furniture Project**



A mid-nineteenth century Louis XV - style canapé made in France, with original pastoral-themed tapestry, on display in Whitehall's Music Room after extensive conservation.

Photo: Flagler Museum.

PALM BEACH, FL - The Henry Morrison Flagler Museum has just completed a year-long conservation project to restore an important suite of French Louis XV-style seating furniture that were owned by wealthy industrialist Henry Morrison Flagler and his wife Mary Lily, and made for the Music Room of

Whitehall, their 1902 Beaux-Arts mansion in Palm Beach, Florida. This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services and a private foundation.

Designed by architects Carrère and Hastings, Whitehall was the winter home of Henry Flagler, founding partner of Standard Oil, builder of the Florida East Coast Railway from Jacksonville to Key West, and the inventor of Modern Florida. Whitehall was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2000.

The suite of French-style furniture is now back on public display in Whitehall's Music Room, once again contributing to the overall interpretation of this important space. Designed by decorators Pottier and Stymus in the style of the French Second Empire, the Music Room served as an important social venue in Palm Beach for club meetings, academic lectures, and musicales during the social season. The room also doubled as an art salon and showcased paintings from Mr. Flagler's extensive art collection.

The twelve pieces of French Louis XV-style seating furniture that were conserved were made in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century and upholstered in tapestry with pastoral scenes. All retain their original water gilding, the most lavish and expensive of gilding techniques. In the years before the Flagler Museum installed its state of the art systems to provide a safe and controlled museum environment, the Florida climate took a toll on this elaborate French furniture. Textiles faded and became brittle and the water gilding began to flake off, eventually leading to the need for extensive conservation of the furniture.

Conservation of the furniture was carried out by F. Carey Howlett & Associates, led by Howlett, a conservator of furniture, decorative arts, and architectural materials, and former Director of Conservation for The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. For almost a year, the team of conservators worked tirelessly, consolidating areas of lost gesso and gilding, lightly cleaning surfaces, filling losses, and gilding and toning as needed. They also corrected structural problems and closed gaps in joinery. While most of the pieces retain their original upholstery, a few arm rests and seat cushions did not. After extensive research, a decision was made to replace the lost upholstery with a custom hand-painted fabric that matches the original designs.

The Flagler Museum's success in advancing its ambitious conservation program was recently recognized by the Museum's selection as recipient of the 2013 Ross Merrill Award for Outstanding Commitment to the Preservation and Care of Collections, which was presented jointly by the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works and Heritage Preservation. Only thirty-three organizations in the United States and Canada have received this award and the Flagler Museum is the first organization in the State of Florida to be selected. Since 2010, the Flagler Museum has received eight Federal Grant Awards for conservation and collections care - four from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and four from the National Endowment for Humanities.

Public Lecture

In conjunction with the debut of the newly conserved furniture, Conservator F.Carey Howlett will present a public lecture titled "*Whitehall and the Gilded Age Taste for French Furniture*" at the Flagler Museum at 6:00 pm on December 15, 2015. Presented in the French-style Grand Ballroom, Mr. Howlett's lecture will discuss Whitehall's French furnishings in the context of Gilded Age furniture collecting, review the recent conservation project, and present best practices in the care and preservation of antique furniture. Those unable to attend can listen to the lecture live on the Flagler Museum's website, with real-time access to images and audio and the opportunity to ask questions of the Speaker. The lecture will also be archived and will remain accessible at any time in the future.

For high-resolution images for publication, please contact David Carson

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About The 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. The Museum is open from 10:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday, and noon until 5:00 p.m., Sunday. Admission is \$18 for adults, \$10 for youth ages 13-17, \$3 for children ages 6-12, and children under six are free. For more information visit www.flaglERMuseum.us or call (561) 655-2833.

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