



THE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF NEWPORT COUNTY

Welcome to The Elms

This is your self-guided tour throughout the house. Your visit today helps us to carry out our mission of preserving Newport's architectural, landscape and social heritage. For the protection of the collections, please do not touch the architecture or objects in the house. Photography without flash is permitted, however selfie sticks and tripods are not allowed in the house. Food and drink are not allowed to be consumed in the house, except for water in a sealable container.

INTRODUCTION

The Elms was the summer residence of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Julius Berwind. Mr. Berwind, a coal magnate from Philadelphia, hired Horace Trumbauer to create his French-inspired cottage. Construction began in 1899 and was completed in 1901 at a cost of approximately 1.4 million dollars, the equivalent of 49.7 million dollars in 2023. Trumbauer's design brought 18th century France to Bellevue Avenue. The garden façade is modeled on the *Château d'Asnières*, an 18th century estate located just outside of Paris. Before viewing the library, stop at the easel to see a photo of the *Château d'Asnières*. The house's interiors were designed by Jules Allard of *Allard et Fils* (Allard and Sons) of Paris, who also worked on the interiors at The Breakers and Marble House.

When Mrs. Herminie Berwind died in 1922, Berwind invited his sister, Julia Berwind, to act as the hostess for both his New York and Newport homes. Mr. Berwind died in 1936 and Miss Julia continued to summer at The Elms until her death in 1961. The Preservation Society of Newport County purchased The Elms in 1962, when it was threatened by demolition, and opened the house to the public.

LIBRARY

Mr. Berwind's library, like most libraries in Gilded Age houses, was conceived of as a man's room, with a Renaissance style, very masculine with dark woods and dark reds. On the wall, you will see a portrait of Edward Julius Berwind. He began his career in the Navy and rose to be the Naval Aid to President Ulysses S. Grant. He then joined his brother, Charles and his business partner, Congressman Allison White in the Berwind & White Coal Company. Berwind worked to expand the company's production and amassed a coal and shipping empire. With his fortune growing, he built fashionable homes in both New York and Newport. The photo in the round frame is his wife Herminie.

Please continue your tour through the Drawing Room and into the Conservatory.

CONSERVATORY

This room was inspired by the orangeries, or greenhouses filled with oranges and tropical plants, popular in 18th century France, although the Berwinds filled it with palms and exotic plants. The harmonious relationship between house and garden was an integral part of life at The Elms. The main rooms of the house face the gardens and terraces, which served as open-air dining rooms furnished with carpets, rare plants, and colored lamps. The conservatory is decorated with four marble statues representing the seasons of the year. The Rouge Royal fountain continued the theme of bringing the garden inside. The trellised mirrors above the basin bring reflections of the garden into the room.

The stand with three photographs next to the Mah-jongg table shows Miss Julia Berwind. She hosted bridge parties in this room almost every afternoon during "the season," which lasted roughly from late May to early October.

DRAWING ROOM

Decorator Jules Allard designed this room around the ceiling painting. The 18th century painting depicts Dawn chasing away the Darkness of Night, attributed to Dutch artist Jacob de Witt. It is one of several 18th century paintings that remained in the house, even under threat of demolition in the 1960s, because it was cemented in place. Architect Horace Trumbauer drew from French and European traditions to create The Elms. Look down the hall to the open doors that create a corridor of rooms. This effect is called "enfilade," and can be found in many stately homes and palaces throughout Europe.

BALLROOM

The Louis XV style ballroom was bedecked with rose trees, palms, clusters of orchids, and lotus flowers during The Elms' housewarming party in August 1901. The festivities carried on outside, where trained monkeys entertained guests on the lawns.

Over the mirror is the portrait of Elizabeth Drexel Lehr, painted in 1905 by Italian artist Giovanni Boldini. Mrs. Lehr was a leader of Newport society whose house once stood across the street from The Elms. Many of the "cottages" that once lined Bellevue Avenue no longer exist. They either suffered fires or were torn down. The Elms almost met a similar fate. After Julia Berwind passed away in 1961, a nephew inherited the property. At the time, preserving these properties was not a priority. The expense of keeping estates like The Elms proved overwhelming for many owners, and in the case of this house, all the furnishings were sold at auction and the estate was sold to a developer. The Preservation Society intervened and raised funds to buy the house just days before demolition was scheduled. The Elms was opened to the public in 1962.

DINING ROOM

Breaking with the French design of the other rooms, the dining room displays the Berwinds' series of early 18th century Venetian paintings. Decorator Jules Allard designed the room around the cycle of paintings depicting Roman general Scipio Africanus and the prominent Corner family of Venice. However, the overdoor paintings in this room were part of the 1962 auction, along with the dining table. Since taking ownership of the house, the Preservation Society has worked diligently to reunite original objects with the property. The dining table returned to this room in 2007, and four of the overdoor panels were reinstalled in 2004. In 2012, the remaining two overdoors were purchased and reinstalled in the dining room, completing the room for the first time in 50 years.

The oak paneling in this room is reflected in the plastered ceiling, which is painted to look like oak, and bears the image of the winged lion of St. Mark, the patron saint of Venice. The ornate doors are of Santo Domingo mahogany and add to the richness of the room.

BREAKFAST ROOM

The breakfast room was designed around a set of three very fine 18th century K'ang Hsi lacquer panels and is an example of Chinoiserie, a western interpretation of Chinese decoration. Three of the wall panels are 18th century Chinese. One is a 20th century copy, created by the decorator Jules Allard. These monumental works of art are superb examples of lacquer and would have been destroyed when The Elms was threatened with demolition in the 1960s. Today, it is one of the few surviving lacquer rooms in the world.

BUTLER'S PANTRY

The butler's pantry was the final stop for meals before they were plated and warmed to be presented in the dining or breakfast rooms. There is an electric dumbwaiter in the glassed-in section near the sinks. The dumbwaiter connects to the kitchen below and the upper level of the butler's pantry above where dishes were stored and the silver safe was located. Across from the dumb waiter is the glass lined ice box where chilled desserts or champagne would be waiting to be served. Blocks of ice were stored in the top and would cool the items placed in the box.

The round wooden object is a knife cleaner. Before stainless steel, knives needed to be polished. The knives were inserted into one of the slots and the hand crank was turned. Brushes inside scrubbed off any rust.

Please exit into the hallway, turn right, and continue your tour upstairs on the second floor.

STAIR HALL

While the lavish rooms downstairs acted as the public rooms for the Berwinds, the family's private rooms were on the second floor. With seven bedrooms and a sitting room, this space could be closed off from the rest of the house with a series of sliding doors in the family sitting room.

The marble table in the center of the hall weighs two and a half tons. This table was sold during the 1962 auction, but was too heavy to move, so it has remained in place since the Preservation Society took ownership of the house.

Proceed to peek in the guestrooms on the left and right sides of the Stair Hall.

ROSE ROOM (LOCATED TO THE RIGHT AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS)

The French furniture is original to the room. Although Edward and Herminie Berwind did not have children, they hosted their nieces and nephews at The Elms during the summer. This room was the regular guest bedroom of Anita Strawbridge Grosvenor, the Berwinds' grandniece. Her portrait is hanging on the wall to your left.

LOUIS XV ROOM (LOCATED TO THE LEFT AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS)

The bedroom set in this room was made by *Allard et Fils* in Paris in the late 19th century for George Allard, Jules Allard's son. The furniture is in the Louis XV style, a popular furniture style at the end of the 1800s. On the wall is an 18th century portrait of Catherine the Great of Russia (1762 – 1796).

From the Louis XV room, proceed down to the end of the hallway and step into the room on the left.

VAN ALLEN MEMORIAL ROOM (BLUE BEDROOM)

For many years, this was Julia Berwind's bedroom. Today it is furnished with 18th and 19th century English furniture from Wakehurst, the Newport estate of Mr. and Mrs. James L. Van Alen, now owned by Salve Regina University. There is an adjoining bathroom which connects with the Louis XV bedroom on the other side and can act as a suite.

MRS. BERWIND'S BATHROOM & BEDROOM

The bathrooms at The Elms, with modern white tile, were the high point of luxury at their time. The vestibule before the room contains cupboards for the storage of linens.

Sarah Vesta Herminie Strawbridge Torrey married Edward Julius Berwind in Italy in 1887. Mrs. Berwind's father was the American Consul to Livorno, Italy and her mother was descended from the Strawbridges, one of Philadelphia's old Quaker families. Mrs. Berwind grew up in Italy, spoke several languages, and was a patron of art and music.

Mrs. Berwind's bedroom also acted as her office. As the lady of the house, she was responsible for managing the estate and the family's social standing. It was her job to organize the lavish entertainments and the inner workings of the house and household staff. If you are a fan of HBO's *The Gilded Age*, you may recognize this bedroom as Gladys Russell's bedroom in the show.

MR. BERWIND'S BEDROOM

You'll notice that Mr. Berwind's bedroom is much smaller than his wife's. The gentlemen of Newport's summer colony would work primarily in New York during the week and would come to Newport via boat or train on the weekends to join their families.

Edward J. Berwind was born in Philadelphia, the second of seven children. He entered the coal business with his brother, Charles, in 1875 and was appointed the head of the Berwind and White Coal Company's New York office in 1876. By 1904, the United States was producing two thirds of the world's coal, and the Berwinds' company was the largest owner of coal properties in the country, trading prominently throughout the United States and Europe. He was even named a *chevalier* or knight of the Legion of Honor in France for making coal available to the country during the First World War. Mr. Berwind was one of the most powerful men in the country, a member of the influential circle of industrialists, sharing mentions in newspapers with the likes of J.P. Morgan. Mr. Berwind worked at his office until the age of 85. He died in 1936 at the age of 88.

MR. BERWIND'S BATH AND WARDROBE

The sink in the bathroom is of white onyx. A caned chair is placed over the commode, which would have been movable. Continue into the connecting wardrobe. It's paneled in hand-rubbed sycamore. The sliding drawers held every kind of shirt for every occasion, each with its matching collar. Compared to the hundreds of changes of clothing a lady must endure for the season, Mr. Berwind had it easy.

Continue into the passageway and turn left. Proceed to the Second Floor Sitting Room.

SITTING ROOM

The sitting room was a private gathering place for the Berwinds and their guests. On the tables on either side of the main doorway are photos of the Berwinds' four nieces, who often summered at The Elms with their aunt and uncle. On the easel is a photo of Mrs. Berwind, dressed as Marie de Medici for a costume ball on New Years' Eve in 1905.

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